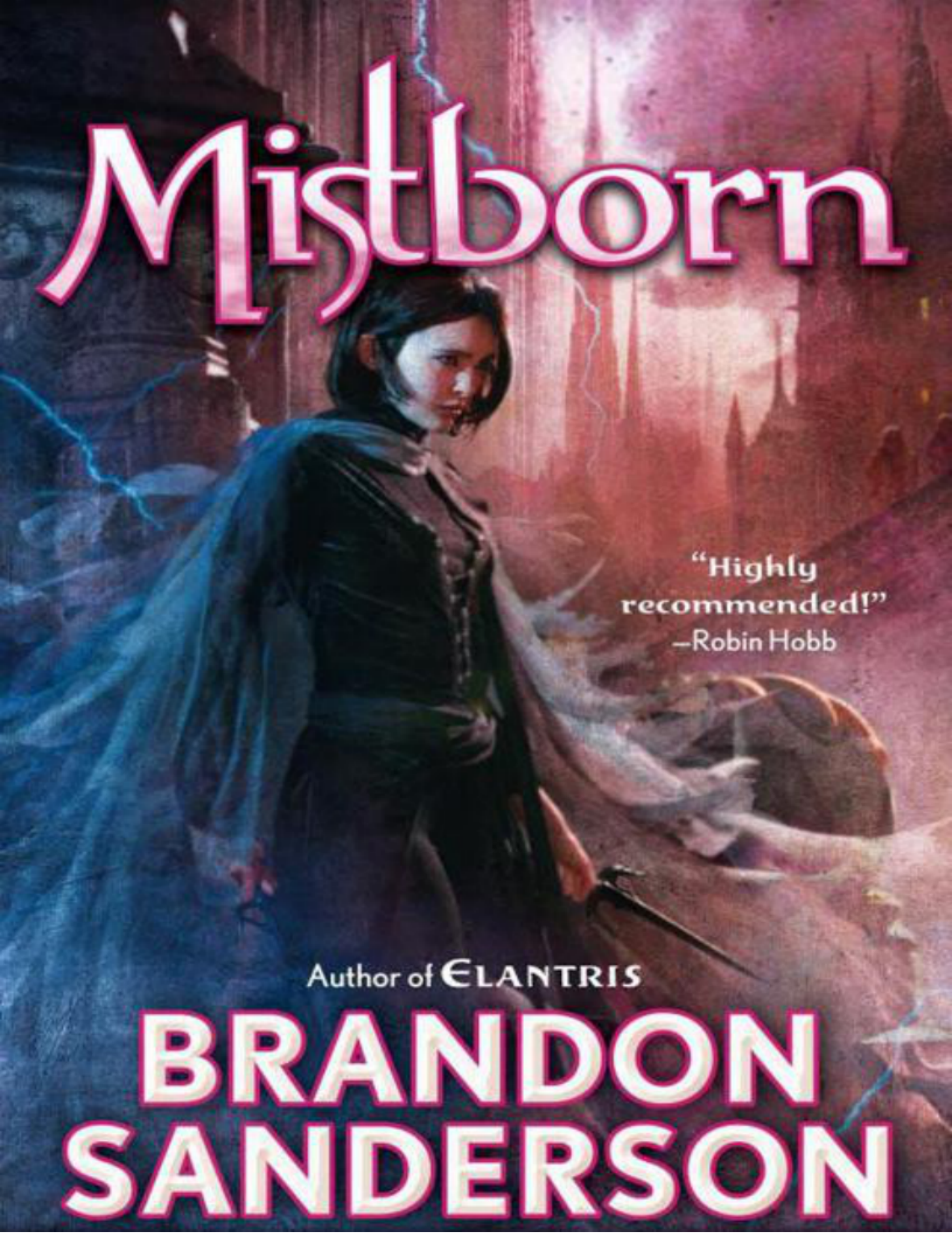

# Mistborn

"Highly recommended!"
—Robin Hobb

Author of ELANTRIS

BRANDON SANDERSON

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# MISTBORN

## THE FINAL EMPIRE

Brandon Sanderson

TOR
fantasy

**A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK NEW YORK**

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

MISTBORN: THE FINAL EMPIRE

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Edited by Moshe Feder

Maps by Isaac Stewart

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# FOR BETH SANDERSON,

*Who's been reading fantasy For longer than I've been alive, And fully deserves To have a grandson as loony as she is.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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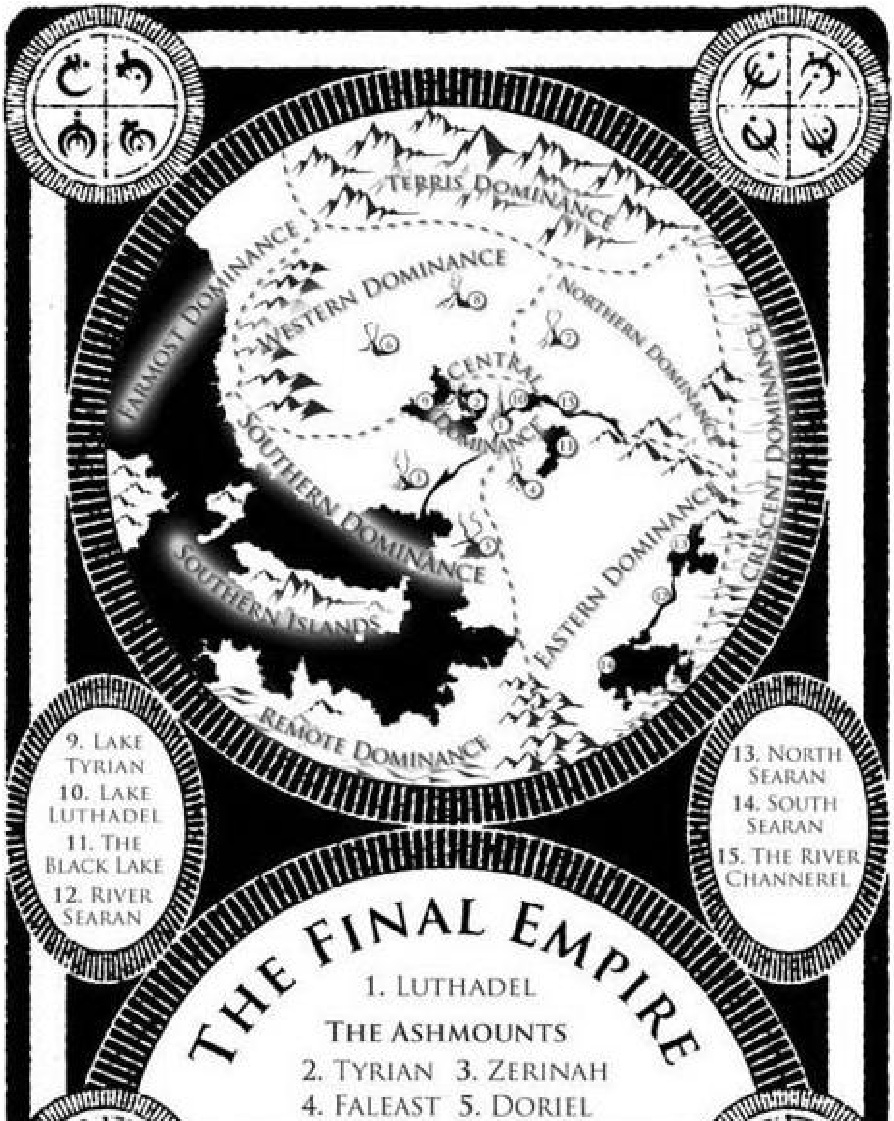
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Farmost Dominance
Western Dominance
Northern Dominance
Central Dominance
Crescent Dominance
Southern Dominance
Southern Islands
Eastern Dominance
Remote Dominance
9. Lake Tyrian
10. Lake Luthadel
11. The Black Lake
12. River Searan
13. North Searan
14. South Searan
15. The River Channerel
The Final Empire
1. Luthadel
The Ashmounts
2. Tyrian 3. Zerinah
4. Faleast 5. Doriel
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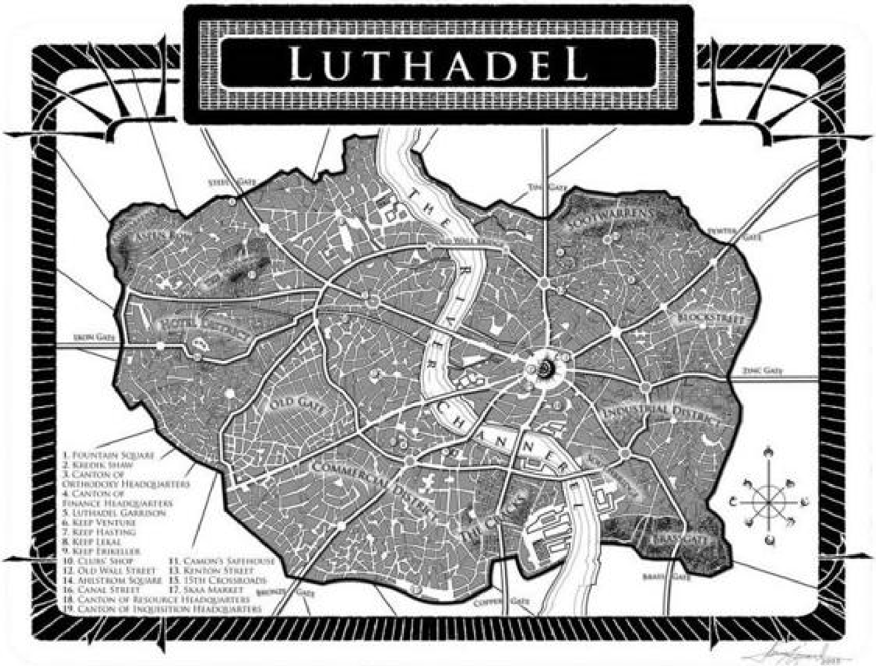
LUTHADEL
Steel Gate
Tin Gate
Pewter Gate
Iron Gate
Zinc Gate
Brass Gate
Copper Gate
Bronze Gate
Sootwarrens
Hotel District
Blockstreet
Old Gate
Industrial District
Commercial District
Old Wall Street
The River Channerel
1. Fountain Square
2. Kredik Shaw
3. Canton of Orthodoxy Headquarters
4. Canton of Finance Headquarters
5. Luthadel Garrison
6. Keep Venture
7. Keep Hasting
8. Keep Lekal
9. Keep Erikeller
10. Clubs' Shop
11. Camon's Safehouse
12. Old Wall Street
13. Kenton Street
14. Ahlstrom Square
15. 15th Crossroads
16. Canal Street
17. Skaa Market
18. Canton of Resource Headquarters
19. Canton of Inquisition Headquarters

# MISTBORN

*Sometimes, I worry that I'm not the hero everyone thinks I am.*

*The philosophers assure me that this is the time, that the signs have been met. But I still wonder if they have the wrong man. So many people depend on me. They say I will hold the future of the entire world on my arms.*

*What would they think if they knew that their champion—the Hero of Ages, their savior—doubted himself? Perhaps they wouldn't be shocked at all. In a way, this is what worries me most. Maybe, in their hearts, they wonder—just as I do.*

*When they see me, do they see a liar?*

# PROLOGUE

ASH FELL FROM THE SKY.

Lord Tresting frowned, glancing up at the ruddy midday sky as his servants scuttled forward, opening a parasol over Tresting and his distinguished guest. Ashfalls weren't that uncommon in the Final Empire, but Tresting had hoped to avoid getting soot stains on his fine new suit coat and red vest, which had just arrived via canal boat from Luthadel itself. Fortunately, there wasn't much wind; the parasol would likely be effective.

Tresting stood with his guest on a small hilltop patio that overlooked the fields. Hundreds of people in brown smocks worked in the falling ash, caring for the crops. There was a sluggishness to their efforts—but, of course, that was the way of the skaa. The peasants were an indolent, unproductive lot. They didn't complain, of course; they knew better than that. Instead, they simply worked with bowed heads, moving about their work with quiet apathy. The passing whip of a taskmaster would force them into dedicated motion for a few moments, but as soon as the taskmaster passed, they would return to their languor.

Tresting turned to the man standing beside him on the hill. "One would think," Tresting noted, "that a thousand years of working in fields would have bred them to be a little more effective at it."

The obligator turned, raising an eyebrow—the motion done as if to highlight his most distinctive feature, the intricate tattoos that laced the skin around his eyes. The tattoos were enormous, reaching all the way across his brow and up the sides of his nose. This was a full prelan—a very important obligator indeed. Tresting had his own, personal obligators back at the manor, but they were only minor functionaries, with barely a few marks around their eyes. This man had arrived from Luthadel with the same canal boat that had brought Tresting's new suit.

"You should see city skaa, Tresting," the obligator said, turning back to watch the skaa workers. "These are actually quite diligent compared to those inside Luthadel. You have more . . . direct control over your skaa here. How many would you say you lose a month?"

"Oh, a half dozen or so," Tresting said. "Some to beatings, some to exhaustion."

"Runaways?"

"Never!" Tresting said. "When I first inherited this land from my father, I had a few runaways—but I executed their families. The rest quickly lost heart. I've never understood men who have trouble with their skaa—I find the creatures easy to control, if you show a properly firm hand."

The obligator nodded, standing quietly in his gray robes. He seemed pleased—which was a good thing. The skaa weren't actually Tresting's property. Like all skaa, they belonged to the Lord Ruler; Tresting only leased the workers from his God, much in the same way he paid for the services of His obligators.

The obligator looked down, checking his pocket watch, then glanced up at the sun. Despite the ashfall, the sun was bright this day, shining a brilliant crimson red behind the smoky blackness of the upper sky. Tresting removed a handkerchief and wiped his brow, thankful for the parasol's shade against the midday heat.

"Very well, Tresting," the obligator said. "I will carry your proposal to Lord Venture, as requested. He will have a favorable report from me on your operations here."

Tresting held in a sigh of relief. An obligator was required to witness any contract or business deal between noblemen. True, even a lowly obligator like the ones Tresting employed could serve as such a witness—but it meant so much more to impress Straff Venture's own obligator.

The obligator turned toward him. "I will leave back down the canal this afternoon."

"So soon?" Tresting asked. "Wouldn't you care to stay for supper?"

"No," the obligator replied. "Though there is another matter I wish to discuss with you. I came not only at the behest of Lord Venture, but to . . . look in on some matters for the Canton of Inquisition. Rumors say that you like to dally with your skaa women."

Tresting felt a chill.

The obligator smiled; he likely meant it to be disarming, but Tresting only found it eerie. "Don't worry yourself, Tresting," the obligator said. "If there had been any *real* worries about your actions, a Steel Inquisitor would have been sent here in my place."

Tresting nodded slowly. Inquisitor. He'd never seen one of the inhuman creatures, but he had heard . . . stories.

"I have been satisfied regarding your actions with the skaa women," the obligator said, looking back over the fields. “What I’ve seen and heard here indicate that you always clean up your messes. A man such as yourself—efficient, productive—could go far in Luthadel. A few more years of work, some inspired mercantile deals, and who knows?”

The obligator turned away, and Tresting found himself smiling. It wasn’t a promise, or even an endorsement—for the most part, obligators were more bureaucrats and witnesses than they were priests—but to hear such praise from one of the Lord Ruler’s own servants . . . Tresting knew that some nobility considered the obligators to be unsettling—some men even considered them a bother—but at that moment, Testing could have kissed his distinguished guest.

Tresting turned back toward the skaa, who worked quietly beneath the bloody sun and the lazy flakes of ash. Tresting had always been a country nobleman, living on his plantation, dreaming of perhaps moving into Luthadel itself. He had heard of the balls and the parties, the glamour and the intrigue, and it excited him to no end.

*I’ll have to celebrate tonight,* he thought. There was that young girl in the fourteenth hovel that he’d been watching for some time. . . .

He smiled again. A few more years of work, the obligator had said. But could Tresting perhaps speed that up, if he worked a little harder? His skaa population had been growing lately. Perhaps if he pushed them a bit more, he could bring in an extra harvest this summer and fulfill his contract with Lord Venture in extra measure.

Tresting nodded as he watched the crowd of lazy skaa, some working with their hoes, others on hands and knees, pushing the ash away from the fledgling crops. They didn’t complain. They didn’t hope. They barely dared think. That was the way it should be, for they were skaa. They were—

Tresting froze as one of the skaa looked up. The man met Tresting’s eyes, a spark—no, a fire—of defiance showing in his expression. Tresting had never seen anything like it, not in the face of a skaa. Tresting stepped backward reflexively, a chill running through him as the strange, straight-backed skaa held his eyes.

And smiled.

Tresting looked away. “Kurdon!” he snapped.

The burly taskmaster rushed up the incline. “Yes, my lord?”

Tresting turned, pointing at . . .

He frowned. Where had that skaa been standing? Working with their heads bowed, bodies stained by soot and sweat, they were so hard to tell apart. Tresting paused, searching. He thought he knew the place . . . an empty spot, where nobody now stood.

But, no. That couldn't be it. The man couldn't have disappeared from the group so quickly. Where would he have gone? He must be in there, somewhere, working with his head now properly bowed. Still, his moment of apparent defiance was inexcusable.

"My lord?" Kurdon asked again.

The obligator stood at the side, watching curiously. It would not be wise to let the man know that one of the skaa had acted so brazenly.

"Work the skaa in that southern section a little harder," Tresting ordered, pointing. "I see them being sluggish, even for skaa. Beat a few of them."

Kurdon shrugged, but nodded. It wasn't much of a reason for a beating—but, then, he didn't need much of a reason to give the workers a beating.

They were, after all, only skaa.

Kelsier had heard stories.

He had heard whispers of times when once, long ago, the sun had not been red. Times when the sky hadn't been clogged by smoke and ash, when plants hadn't struggled to grow, and when skaa hadn't been slaves. Times before the Lord Ruler. Those days, however, were nearly forgotten. Even the legends were growing vague.

Kelsier watched the sun, his eyes following the giant red disk as it crept toward the western horizon. He stood quietly for a long moment, alone in the empty fields. The day's work was done; the skaa had been herded back to their hovels. Soon the mists would come.

Eventually, Kelsier sighed, then turned to pick his way across the furrows and pathways, weaving between large heaps of ash. He avoided stepping on the plants—though he wasn't sure why he bothered. The crops hardly seemed worth the effort. Wan, with wilted brown leaves, the plants seemed as depressed as the people who tended them.

The skaa hovels loomed in the waning light. Already, Kelsier could see the mists beginning to form, clouding the air, and giving the moundlike buildings a surreal, intangible look. The hovels stood unguarded; there was no need for watchers, for no skaa would venture outside once night arrived. Their fear of the mists was far too strong.

*I'll have to cure them of that someday,* Kelsier thought as he approached one of the larger buildings. *But, all things in their own time.* He pulled open the door and slipped inside.

Conversation stopped immediately. Kelsier closed the door, then turned with a smile to confront the room of about thirty skaa. A firepit burned weakly at the center, and the large cauldron beside it was filled with vegetable-dappled water—the beginnings of an evening meal. The soup would be bland, of course. Still, the smell was enticing.

“Good evening, everyone,” Kelsier said with a smile, resting his pack beside his feet and leaning against the door. “How was your day?”

His words broke the silence, and the women returned to their dinner preparations. A group of men sitting at a crude table, however, continued to regard Kelsier with dissatisfied expressions.

“Our day was filled with work, traveler,” said Tepper, one of the skaa elders. “Something you managed to avoid.”

“Fieldwork hasn’t ever really suited me,” Kelsier said. “It’s far too hard on my delicate skin.” He smiled, holding up hands and arms that were lined with layers and layers of thin scars. They covered his skin, running lengthwise, as if some beast had repeatedly raked its claws up and down his arms.

Tepper snorted. He was young to be an elder, probably barely into his forties—at most, he might be five years Kelsier’s senior. However, the scrawny man held himself with the air of one who liked to be in charge.

“This is no time for levity,” Tepper said sternly. “When we harbor a traveler, we expect him to behave himself and avoid suspicion. When you ducked away from the fields this morning, you could have earned a whipping for the men around you.”

“True,” Kelsier said. “But those men could also have been whipped for standing in the wrong place, for pausing too long, or for coughing when a taskmaster walked by. I once saw a man beaten because his master claimed that he had ‘blinked inappropriately.’ ”

Tepper sat with narrow eyes and a stiff posture, his arm resting on the table. His expression was unyielding.

Kelsier sighed, rolling his eyes. “Fine. If you want me to go, I’ll be off then.” He slung his pack up on his shoulder and nonchalantly pulled open the door.

Thick mist immediately began to pour through the portal, drifting lazily across Kelsier’s body, pooling on the floor and creeping across the dirt like a hesitant animal. Several people gasped in horror, though most of them were too stunned to make a sound. Kelsier stood for a moment, staring out into the dark mists, their shifting currents lit feebly by the cooking pit’s coals.

“Close the door.” Tepper’s words were a plea, not a command.

Kelsier did as requested, pushing the door closed and stemming the flood of white mist. “The mist is not what you think. You fear it far too much.”

“Men who venture into the mist lose their souls,” a woman whispered. Her words raised a question. Had Kelsier walked in the mists? What, then, had happened to his soul?

*If you only knew*, Kelsier thought. “Well, I guess this means I’m staying.” He waved for a boy to bring him a stool. “It’s a good thing, too—it would have been a shame for me to leave before I shared my news.”

More than one person perked up at the comment. This was the real reason they tolerated him—the reason even the timid peasants would harbor a man such as Kelsier, a skaa who defied the Lord Ruler’s will by traveling from plantation to plantation. A renegade he might be—a danger to the entire community—but he brought news from the outside world.

“I come from the north,” Kelsier said. “From lands where the Lord Ruler’s touch is less noticeable.” He spoke in a clear voice, and people leaned unconsciously toward him as they worked. On the next day, Kelsier’s words would be repeated to the several hundred people who lived in other hovels. The skaa might be subservient, but they were incurable gossips.

“Local lords rule in the West,” Kelsier said, “and they are far from the iron grip of the Lord Ruler and his obligators. Some of these distant noblemen are finding that happy skaa make better workers than mistreated skaa. One man, Lord Renoux, has even ordered his taskmasters to stop unauthorized beatings. There are whispers that he’s considering paying wages to his plantation skaa, like city craftsmen might earn.”

“Nonsense,” Tepper said.

“My apologies,” Kelsier said. “I didn’t realize that Goodman Tepper had been to Lord Renoux’s estates recently. When you dined with him last, did he tell you something that he did not tell me?”

Tepper blushed: Skaa did not travel, and they certainly didn’t dine with lords. “You think me a fool, traveler,” Tepper said, “but I know what you’re doing. You’re the one they call the Survivor; those scars on your arms give you away. You’re a troublemaker—you travel the plantations, stirring up discontent. You eat our food, telling your grand stories and your lies, then you disappear and leave people like me to deal with the false hopes you give our children.”

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. “Now, now, Goodman Tepper,” he said. “Your worries are completely unfounded. Why, I have no intention of eating your food. I brought my own." With that, Kelsier reached over and tossed his pack onto the earth before Tepper's table. The loose bag slumped to the side, dumping an array of foods to the ground. Fine breads, fruits, and even a few thick, cured sausages bounced free.

A summerfruit rolled across the packed earthen floor and bumped lightly against Tepper's foot. The middle-aged skaa regarded the fruit with stunned eyes. "That's nobleman's food!"

Kelsier snorted. "Barely. You know, for a man of renowned prestige and rank, your Lord Tresting has remarkably poor taste. His pantry is an embarrassment to his noble station."

Tepper paled even further. "That's where you went this afternoon," he whispered. "You went to the manor. You . . . *stole from the master!*"

"Indeed," Kelsier said. "And, might I add that while your lord's taste in food is deplorable, his eye for soldiers is far more impressive. Sneaking into his manor during the day was quite a challenge."

Tepper was still staring at the bag of food. "If the taskmasters find this here . . ."

"Well, I suggest you make it disappear then," Kelsier said. "I'd be willing to bet that it tastes a fair bit better than watered-down farlet soup."

Two dozen sets of hungry eyes studied the food. If Tepper intended further arguments, he didn't make them quickly enough, for his silent pause was taken as agreement. Within a few minutes, the bag's contents had been inspected and distributed, and the pot of soup sat bubbling and ignored as the skaa feasted on a meal far more exotic.

Kelsier settled back, leaning against the hovel's wooden wall and watching the people devour their food. He had spoken correctly: The pantry's offerings had been depressingly mundane. However, this was a people who had been fed on nothing but soup and gruel since they were children. To them, breads and fruits were rare delicacies—usually eaten only as aging discards brought down by the house servants.

"Your storytelling was cut short, young man," an elderly skaa noted, hobbling over to sit on a stool beside Kelsier.

"Oh, I suspect there will be time for more later," Kelsier said. "Once all evidence of my thievery has been properly devoured. Don't you want any of it?"

"No need," the old man said. "The last time I tried lords' food, I had stomach pains for three days. New tastes are like new ideas, young man—the older you get, the more difficult they are for you to stomach."

Kelsier paused. The old man was hardly an imposing sight. His leathered skin and bald scalp made him look more frail than they did wise. Yet, he had to be stronger than he looked; few plantation skaa lived to such ages. Many lords didn't allow the elderly to remain home from daily work, and the frequent beatings that made up a skaa's life took a terrible toll on the elderly.

"What was your name again?" Kelsier asked.

"Mennis."

Kelsier glanced back at Tepper. "So, Goodman Mennis, tell me something. Why do you let him lead?"

Mennis shrugged. "When you get to be my age, you have to be very careful where you waste your energy. Some battles just aren't worth fighting." There was an implication in Mennis's eyes; he was referring to things greater than his own struggle with Tepper.

"You're satisfied with this, then?" Kelsier asked, nodding toward the hovel and its half-starved, overworked occupants. "You're content with a life full of beatings and endless drudgery?"

"At least it's a life," Mennis said. "I know what wages malcontent and rebellion bring. The eye of the Lord Ruler, and the ire of the Steel Ministry, can be far more terrible than a few whippings. Men like you preach change, but I wonder. Is this a battle we can really fight?"

"You're fighting it already, Goodman Mennis. You're just losing horribly." Kelsier shrugged. "But, what do I know? I'm just a traveling miscreant, here to eat your food and impress your youths."

Mennis shook his head. "You jest, but Tepper might have been right. I fear your visit will bring us grief."

Kelsier smiled. "That's why I didn't contradict him—at least, not on the troublemaker point." He paused, then smiled more deeply. "In fact, I'd say calling me a troublemaker is probably the only accurate thing Tepper has said since I got here."

"How do you do that?" Mennis asked, frowning.

"What?"

"Smile so much."

"Oh, I'm just a happy person."

Mennis glanced down at Kelsier's hands. "You know, I've only seen scars like those on one other person—and he was dead. His body was returned to Lord Tresting as proof that his punishment had been carried out." Mennis looked up at Kelsier. "He'd been caught speaking of rebellion. Tresting sent him to the Pits of Hathsin, where he had worked until he died. The lad lasted less than a month."

Kelsier glanced down at his hands and forearms. They still burned sometimes, though he was certain the pain was only in his mind. He looked up at Mennis and smiled. “You ask why I smile, Goodman Mennis? Well, the Lord Ruler thinks he has claimed laughter and joy for himself. I’m disinclined to let him do so. This is one battle that doesn’t take very much effort to fight.”

Mennis stared at Kelsier, and for a moment Kelsier thought the old man might smile in return. However, Mennis eventually just shook his head. “I don’t know. I just don’t—”

The scream cut him off. It came from outside, perhaps to the north, though the mists distorted sounds. The people in the hovel fell silent, listening to the faint, high-pitched yells. Despite the distance and the mist, Kelsier could hear the pain contained in those screams.

Kelsier burned tin.

It was simple for him now, after years of practice. The tin sat with other Allomantic metals within his stomach, swallowed earlier, waiting for him to draw upon them. He reached inside with his mind and touched the tin, tapping powers he still barely understood. The tin flared to life within him, burning his stomach like the sensation of a hot drink swallowed too quickly.

Allomantic power surged through his body, enhancing his senses. The room around him became crisp, the dull firepit flaring to near blinding brightness. He could feel the grain in the wood of the stool beneath him. He could still taste the remnants of the loaf of bread he’d snacked on earlier. Most importantly, he could hear the screams with supernatural ears. Two separate people were yelling. One was an older woman, the other a younger woman—perhaps a child. The younger screams were getting farther and farther away.

“Poor Jess,” a nearby woman said, her voice booming in Kelsier’s enhanced ears. “That child of hers was a curse. It’s better for skaa not to have pretty daughters.”

Tepper nodded. “Lord Tresting was sure to send for the girl sooner or later. We all knew it. Jess knew it.”

“Still a shame, though,” another man said.

The screams continued in the distance. Burning tin, Kelsier was able to judge the direction accurately. Her voice was moving toward the lord’s manor. The sounds set something off within him, and he felt his face flush with anger.

Kelsier turned. “Does Lord Tresting ever return the girls after he’s finished with them?”

Old Mennis shook his head. “Lord Tresting is a law-abiding nobleman—he has the girls killed after a few weeks. He doesn’t want to catch the eye of the Inquisitors.”

That was the Lord Ruler's command. He couldn't afford to have half-breed children running around—children who might possess powers that skaa weren't even supposed to know existed. . . .

The screams waned, but Kelsier's anger only built. The yells reminded him of other screams. A woman's screams from the past. He stood abruptly, stool toppling to the ground behind him.

"Careful, lad," Mennis said apprehensively. "Remember what I said about wasting energy. You'll never raise that rebellion of yours if you get yourself killed tonight."

Kelsier glanced toward the old man. Then, through the screams and the pain, he forced himself to smile. "I'm not here to lead a rebellion among you, Goodman Mennis. I just want to stir up a little trouble."

"What good could that do?"

Kelsier's smile deepened. "New days are coming. Survive a little longer, and you just might see great happenings in the Final Empire. I bid you all thanks for your hospitality."

With that, he pulled open the door and strode out into the mist.

Mennis lay awake in the early hours of morning. It seemed that the older he became, the more difficult it was for him to sleep. This was particularly true when he was troubled about something, such as the traveler's failure to return to the hovel.

Mennis hoped that Kelsier had come to his senses and decided to move on. However, that prospect seemed unlikely; Mennis had seen the fire in Kelsier's eyes. It seemed such a shame that a man who had survived the Pits would instead find death here, on a random plantation, trying to protect a girl everyone else had given up for dead.

How would Lord Tresting react? He was said to be particularly harsh with anyone who interrupted his nighttime enjoyments. If Kelsier had managed to disturb the master's pleasures, Tresting might easily decide to punish the rest of his skaa by association.

Eventually, the other skaa began to awake. Mennis lay on the hard earth—bones aching, back complaining, muscles exhausted—trying to decide if it was worth rising. Each day, he nearly gave up. Each day, it was a little harder. One day, he would just stay in the hovel, waiting until the taskmasters came to kill those who were too sick or too elderly to work.

But not today. He could see too much fear in the eyes of the skaa—they knew that Kelsier's nighttime activities would bring trouble. They needed Mennis; they looked to him. He needed to get up.

And so he did. Once he started moving, the pains of age decreased slightly, and he was able to shuffle out of the hovel toward the fields, leaning on a younger man for support.

It was then that he caught a scent in the air. “What’s that?” he asked. “Do you smell smoke?”

Shum—the lad upon whom Mennis leaned—paused. The last remnants of the night’s mist had burned away, and the red sun was rising behind the sky’s usual haze of blackish clouds.

“I always smell smoke, lately,” Shum said. “The Ashmounts are violent this year.”

“No,” Mennis said, feeling increasingly apprehensive. “This is different.” He turned to the north, toward where a group of skaa were gathering. He let go of Shum, shuffling toward the group, feet kicking up dust and ash as he moved.

At the center of the group of people, he found Jess. Her daughter, the one they all assumed had been taken by Lord Tresting, stood beside her. The young girl’s eyes were red from lack of sleep, but she appeared unharmed.

“She came back not long after they took her,” the woman was explaining. “She came and pounded on the door, crying in the mist. Flen was sure it was just a mistwraith impersonating her, but I had to let her in! I don’t care what he says, I’m not giving her up. I brought her out in the sunlight, and she didn’t disappear. That proves she’s not a mistwraith!”

Mennis stumbled back from the growing crowd. Did none of them see it? No taskmasters came to break up the group. No soldiers came to make the morning population counts. Something was very wrong. Mennis continued to the north, moving frantically toward the manor house.

By the time he arrived, others had noticed the twisting line of smoke that was just barely visible in the morning light. Mennis wasn’t the first to arrive at the edge of the short hilltop plateau, but the group made way for him when he did.

The manor house was gone. Only a blackened, smoldering scar remained.

“By the Lord Ruler!” Mennis whispered. “What happened here?”

“He killed them all.”

Mennis turned. The speaker was Jess’s girl. She stood looking down at the fallen house, a satisfied expression on her youthful face.

“They were dead when he brought me out,” she said. “All of them—the soldiers, the taskmasters, the lords . . . dead. Even Lord Tresting and his obligators. The master had left me, going to investigate when the noises began. On the way out, I saw him lying in his own blood, stab wounds in his chest. The man who saved me threw a torch in the building as we left."

"This man," Mennis said. "He had scars on his hands and arms, reaching past the elbows?"

The girl nodded silently.

"What kind of demon was that man?" one of the skaa muttered uncomfortably.

"Mistwraith," another whispered, apparently forgetting that Kelsier had gone out during the day.

*But he did go out into the mist,* Mennis thought. *And, how did he accomplish a feat like this . . .? Lord Tresting kept over two dozen soldiers! Did Kelsier have a hidden band of rebels, perhaps?*

Kelsier's words from the night before sounded in his ears. *New days are coming. . . .*

"But, what of us?" Tepper asked, terrified. "What will happen when the Lord Ruler hears this? He'll think that we did it! He'll send us to the Pits, or maybe just send his koloss to slaughter us outright! Why would that troublemaker do something like this? Doesn't he understand the damage he's done?"

"He understands," Mennis said. "He warned us, Tepper. He came to stir up trouble."

"But, why?"

"Because he knew we'd never rebel on our own, so he gave us no choice."

Tepper paled.

*Lord Ruler,* Mennis thought. *I can't do this. I can barely get up in the mornings—I can't save this people.*

But what other choice was there?

Mennis turned. "Gather the people, Tepper. We must flee before word of this disaster reaches the Lord Ruler."

"Where will we go?"

"The caves to the east," Mennis said. "Travelers say there are rebel skaa hiding in them. Perhaps they'll take us in."

Tepper paled further. "But . . . we'd have to travel for days. Spend nights *in the mist.*"

"We can do that," Mennis said, "or we can stay here and die."

Tepper stood frozen for a moment, and Mennis thought the shock of it all might have overwhelmed him. Eventually, however, the younger man scurried off to gather the others, as commanded.

Mennis sighed, looking up toward the trailing line of smoke, cursing the man Kelsier quietly in his mind.

New days indeed.

# PART ONE

# THE SURVIVOR OF HATHSIN

*I consider myself to be a man of principle. But, what man does not? Even the cutthroat, I have noticed, considers his actions "moral" after a fashion.*

*Perhaps another person, reading of my life, would name me a religious tyrant. He could call me arrogant. What is to make that man's opinion any less valid than my own?*

*I guess it all comes down to one fact: In the end, I'm the one with the armies.*

# 1

ASH FELL FROM THE SKY.

Vin watched the downy flakes drift through the air. Leisurely. Careless. Free. The puffs of soot fell like black snowflakes, descending upon the dark city of Luthadel. They drifted in corners, blowing in the breeze and curling in tiny whirlwinds over the cobblestones. They seemed so uncaring. What would that be like?

Vin sat quietly in one of the crew's watch-holes—a hidden alcove built into the bricks on the side of the safe house. From within it, a crewmember could watch the street for signs of danger. Vin wasn't on duty; the watch-hole was simply one of the few places where she could find solitude.

And Vin liked solitude. *When you're alone, no one can betray you.* Reen's words. Her brother had taught her so many things, then had reinforced them by doing what he'd always promised he would—by betraying her himself. *It's the only way you'll learn. Anyone will betray you, Vin. Anyone.*

The ash continued to fall. Sometimes, Vin imagined she was like the ash, or the wind, or the mist itself. A thing without thought, capable of simply *being*, not thinking, caring, or hurting. Then she could be . . . free.

She heard shuffling a short distance away, then the trapdoor at the back of the small chamber snapped open.

"Vin!" Ulef said, sticking his head into the room. "There you are! Camon's been searching for you for a half hour."

*That's kind of why I hid in the first place.*

"You should get going," Ulef said. "The job's almost ready to begin."

Ulef was a gangly boy. Nice, after his own fashion—naive, if one who had grown up in the underworld could ever really be called "naive." Of course, that didn't mean he wouldn't betray her. Betrayal had nothing to do with friendship; it was a simple fact of survival. Life was harsh on the streets, and if a skaa thief wanted to keep from being caught and executed, he had to be practical.

And ruthlessness was the very most practical of emotions. Another of Reen's sayings.

"Well?" Ulef asked. "You should go. Camon's mad."

*When is he not?* However, Vin nodded, scrambling out of the cramped—yet comforting—confines of the watch-hole. She brushed past Ulef and hopped out of the trapdoor, moving into a hallway, then a run-down pantry. The room was one of many at the back of the store that served as a front for the safe house. The crew's lair itself was hidden in a tunneled stone cavern beneath the building.

She left the building through a back door, Ulef trailing behind her. The job would happen a few blocks away, in a richer section of town. It was an intricate job—one of the most complex Vin had ever seen. Assuming Camon wasn't caught, the payoff would be great indeed. If he was caught . . . Well, scamming noblemen and obligators was a very dangerous profession—but it certainly beat working in the forges or the textile mills.

Vin exited the alleyway, moving out onto a dark, tenement-lined street in one of the city's many skaa slums. Skaa too sick to work lay huddled in corners and gutters, ash drifting around them. Vin kept her head down and pulled up her cloak's hood against the still falling flakes.

*Free. No, I'll never be free. Reen made certain of that when he left.*

"There you are!" Camon lifted a squat, fat finger and jabbed it toward her face. "Where were you?"

Vin didn't let hatred or rebellion show in her eyes. She simply looked down, giving Camon what he expected to see. There were other ways to be strong. That lesson she had learned on her own.

Camon growled slightly, then raised his hand and backhanded her across the face. The force of the blow threw Vin back against the wall, and her cheek blazed with pain. She slumped against the wood, but bore the punishment silently. Just another bruise. She was strong enough to deal with it. She'd done so before.

"Listen," Camon hissed. "This is an important job. It's worth thousands of boxings—worth more than you a hundred times over. I won't have you fouling it up. Understand?"

Vin nodded.

Camon studied her for a moment, his pudgy face red with anger. Finally, he looked away, muttering to himself.

He was annoyed about something—something more than just Vin. Perhaps he had heard about the skaa rebellion several days to the north. One of the provincial lords, Themos Tresting, had apparently been murdered, his manor burned to the ground. Such disturbances were bad for business; they made the aristocracy more alert, and less gullible. That, in turn, could cut seriously into Camon's profits.

*He's looking for someone to punish,* Vin thought. *He always gets nervous before a job.* She looked up at Camon, tasting blood on her lip. She must have let some of her confidence show, because he glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, and his expression darkened. He raised his hand, as if to strike her again.

Vin used up a bit of her Luck.

She expended just a smidgen; she'd need the rest for the job. She directed the Luck at Camon, calming his nervousness. The crewleader paused—oblivious of Vin's touch, yet feeling its effects nonetheless. He stood for a moment; then he sighed, turning away and lowering his hand.

Vin wiped her lip as Camon waddled away. The thiefmaster looked very convincing in his nobleman's suit. It was as rich a costume as Vin had ever seen—it had a white shirt overlaid by a deep green vest with engraved gold buttons. The black suit coat was long, after the current fashion, and he wore a matching black hat. His fingers sparkled with rings, and he even carried a fine dueling cane. Indeed, Camon did an excellent job of imitating a nobleman; when it came to playing a role, there were few thieves more competent than Camon. Assuming he could keep his temper under control.

The room itself was less impressive. Vin pulled herself to her feet as Camon began to snap at some of the other crewmembers. They had rented one of the suites at the top of a local hotel. Not too lavish—but that was the idea. Camon was going to be playing the part of "Lord Jedue," a country nobleman who had hit upon hard financial times and come to Luthadel to get some final, desperate contracts.

The main room had been transformed into a sort of audience chamber, set with a large desk for Camon to sit behind, the walls decorated with cheap pieces of art. Two men stood beside the desk, dressed in formal stewards' clothing; they would play the part of Camon's manservants.

"What is this ruckus?" a man asked, entering the room. He was tall, dressed in a simple gray shirt and a pair of slacks, with a thin sword tied at his waist. Theron was the other crewleader—this particular scam was actually his. He'd brought in Camon as a partner; he'd needed someone to play Lord Jedue, and everyone knew that Camon was one of the best.

Camon looked up. "Hum? Ruckus? Oh, that was just a minor discipline problem. Don't bother yourself, Theron." Camon punctuated his remark with a dismissive wave of the hand—there was a reason he played such a good aristocrat. He was arrogant enough that he could have been from one of the Great Houses.

Theron's eyes narrowed. Vin knew what the man was probably thinking: He was deciding how risky it would be to put a knife in Camon's fat back once the scam was over. Eventually, the taller crewleader looked away from Camon, glancing at Vin. "Who's this?" he asked.

"Just a member of my crew," Camon said.

"I thought we didn't need anyone else."

"Well, we need her," Camon said. "Ignore her. My end of the operation is none of your concern."

Theron eyed Vin, obviously noting her bloodied lip. She glanced away. Theron's eyes lingered on her, however, running down the length of her body. She wore a simple white buttoned shirt and a pair of overalls. Indeed, she was hardly enticing; scrawny with a youthful face, she supposedly didn't even look her sixteen years. Some men preferred such women, however.

She considered using a bit of Luck on him, but eventually he turned away. "The obligator is nearly here," Theron said. "Are you ready?"

Camon rolled his eyes, settling his bulk down into the chair behind the desk. "Everything is perfect. Leave me be, Theron! Go back to your room and wait."

Theron frowned, then spun and walked from the room, muttering to himself.

Vin scanned the room, studying the decor, the servants, the atmosphere. Finally, she made her way to Camon's desk. The crewleader sat riffling through a stack of papers, apparently trying to decide which ones to put out on the desktop.

"Camon," Vin said quietly, "the servants are too fine."

Camon frowned, looking up. "What is that you're babbling?"

"The servants," Vin repeated, still speaking in a soft whisper. "Lord Jedue is supposed to be desperate. He'd have rich clothing left over from before, but he wouldn't be able to afford such rich servants. He'd use skaa."

Camon glared at her, but he paused. Physically, there was little difference between noblemen and skaa. The servants Camon had appointed, however, were dressed as minor noblemen—they were allowed to wear colorful vests, and they stood a little more confidently.

"The obligator has to think that you're nearly impoverished," Vin said. “Pack the room with a lot of skaa servants instead.”

“What do you know?” Camon said, scowling at her.

“Enough.” She immediately regretted the word; it sounded too rebellious. Camon raised a bejeweled hand, and Vin braced herself for another slap. She couldn’t afford to use up any more Luck. She had precious little remaining anyway.

However, Camon didn’t hit her. Instead, he sighed and rested a pudgy hand on her shoulder. “Why do you insist on provoking me, Vin? You know the debts your brother left when he ran away. Do you realize that a less merciful man than myself would have sold you to the whoremasters long ago? How would you like that, serving in some nobleman’s bed until he grew tired of you and had you executed?”

Vin looked down at her feet.

Camon’s grip grew tight, his fingers pinching her skin where neck met shoulder, and she gasped in pain despite herself. He grinned at the reaction.

“Honestly, I don’t know why I keep you, Vin,” he said, increasing the pressure of his grip. “I should have gotten rid of you months ago, when your brother betrayed me. I suppose I just have too kindly a heart.”

He finally released her, then pointed for her to stand over by the side of the room, next to a tall indoor plant. She did as ordered, orienting herself so she had a good view of the entire room. As soon as Camon looked away, she rubbed her shoulder. *Just another pain. I can deal with pain.*

Camon sat for a few moments. Then, as expected, he waved to the two “servants” at his side.

“You two!” he said. “You’re dressed too richly. Go put on something that makes you look like skaa servants instead—and bring back six more men with you when you come.”

Soon, the room was filled as Vin had suggested. The obligator arrived a short time later.

Vin watched Prelan Laird step haughtily into the room. Shaved bald like all obligators, he wore a set of dark gray robes. The Ministry tattoos around his eyes identified him as a prelan, a senior bureaucrat in the Ministry’s Canton of Finance. A set of lesser obligators trailed behind him, their eye tattoos far less intricate.

Camon rose as the prelan entered, a sign of respect—something even the highest of Great House noblemen would show to an obligator of Laird’s rank. Laird gave no bow or acknowledgment of his own, instead striding forward and taking the seat in front of Camon’s desk.

One of the crewmen impersonating a servant rushed forward, bringing chilled wine and fruit for the obligator.

Laird picked at the fruit, letting the servant stand obediently, holding the platter of food as if he were a piece of furniture. “Lord Jedue,” Laird finally said. “I am glad we finally have the opportunity to meet.”

“As am I, Your Grace,” Camon said.

“Why is it, again, that you were unable to come to the Canton building, instead requiring that I visit you here?”

“My knees, Your Grace,” Camon said. “My physicians recommend that I travel as little as possible.”

*And you were rightly apprehensive about being drawn into a Ministry stronghold,* Vin thought.

“I see,” Laird said. “Bad knees. An unfortunate attribute in a man who deals in transportation.”

“I don’t have to go on the trips, Your Grace,” Camon said, bowing his head. “Just organize them.”

*Good,* Vin thought. *Make sure you remain subservient, Camon. You need to seem desperate.*

Vin needed this scam to succeed. Camon threatened her and he beat her—but he considered her a good-luck charm. She wasn’t sure if he knew why his plans went better when she was in the room, but he had apparently made the connection. That made her valuable—and Reen had always said that the surest way to stay alive in the underworld was to make yourself indispensable.

“I see,” Laird said again. “Well, I fear that our meeting has come too late for your purposes. The Canton of Finance has already voted on your proposal.”

“So soon?” Camon asked with genuine surprise.

“Yes,” Laird replied, taking a sip of his wine, still not dismissing the servant. “We have decided not to accept your contract.”

Camon sat for a moment, stunned. “I’m sorry to hear that, Your Grace.”

*Laird came to meet you,* Vin thought. *That means he’s still in a position to negotiate.*

“Indeed,” Camon continued, seeing what Vin had. “That is especially unfortunate, as I was ready to make the Ministry an even better offer.”

Laird raised a tattooed eyebrow. “I doubt it will matter. There is an element of the Council who feels that the Canton would receive better service if we found a more stable house to transport our people.”

"That would be a grave mistake," Camon said smoothly. "Let us be frank, Your Grace. We both know that this contract is House Jedue's last chance. Now that we've lost the Farwan deal, we cannot afford to run our canal boats to Luthadel anymore. Without the Ministry's patronage, my house is financially doomed."

"This is doing very little to persuade me, Your Lordship," the obligator said.

"Isn't it?" Camon asked. "Ask yourself this, Your Grace—who will serve you better? Will it be the house that has dozens of contracts to divide its attention, or the house that views your contract as its last hope? The Canton of Finance will not find a more accommodating partner than a desperate one. Let my boats be the ones that bring your acolytes down from the north—let my soldiers escort them—and you will not be disappointed."

*Good,* Vin thought.

"I . . . see," the obligator said, now troubled.

"I would be willing to give you an extended contract, locked in at the price of fifty boxings a head per trip, Your Grace. Your acolytes would be able to travel our boats at their leisure, and would always have the escorts they need."

The obligator raised an eyebrow. "That's half the former fee."

"I told you," Camon said. "We're desperate. My house *needs* to keep its boats running. Fifty boxings will not make us a profit, but that doesn't matter. Once we have the Ministry contract to bring us stability, we can find other contracts to fill our coffers."

Laird looked thoughtful. It was a fabulous deal—one that might ordinarily have been suspicious. However, Camon's presentation created the image of a house on the brink of financial collapse. The other crewleader, Theron, had spent five years building, scamming, and finagling to create this moment. The Ministry would be remiss not to consider the opportunity.

Laird was realizing just that. The Steel Ministry was not just the force of bureaucracy and legal authority in the Final Empire—it was like a noble house unto itself. The more wealth it had, the better its own mercantile contracts, the more leverage the various Ministry Cantons had with each other—and with the noble houses.

Laird was still obviously hesitant, however. Vin could see the look in his eyes, the suspicion she knew well. He was not going to take the contract.

*Now,* Vin thought, *It's my turn.*

Vin used her Luck on Laird. She reached out tentatively—not even really sure what she was doing, or why she could even do it. Yet her touch was instinctive, trained through years of subtle practice. She'd been ten years old before she'd realized that other people couldn't do what she could.

She pressed against Laird's emotions, dampening them. He became less suspicious, less afraid. Docile. His worries melted away, and Vin could see a calm sense of control begin to assert itself in his eyes.

Yet, Laird still seemed slightly uncertain. Vin pushed harder. He cocked his head, looking thoughtful. He opened his mouth to speak, but she pushed against him again, desperately using up her last pinch of Luck.

He paused again. "Very well," he finally said. "I will take this new proposal to the Council. Perhaps an agreement can still be reached."

*If men read these words, let them know that power is a heavy burden. Seek not to be bound by its chains. The Terris prophecies say that I will have the power to save the world.*

*They hint, however, that I will have the power to destroy it as well.*

# 2

In Kelsier's opinion, the city of Luthadel—seat of the Lord Ruler—was a gloomy sight. Most of the buildings had been built from stone blocks, with tile roofs for the wealthy, and simple, peaked wooden roofs for the rest. The structures were packed closely together, making them seem squat despite the fact that they were generally three stories high.

The tenements and shops were uniform in appearance; this was not a place to draw attention to oneself. Unless, of course, you were a member of the high nobility.

Interspersed throughout the city were a dozen or so monolithic keeps. Intricate, with rows of spearlike spires or deep archways, these were the homes of the high nobility. In fact, they were the *mark* of a high noble family: Any family who could afford to build a keep and maintain a high-profile presence in Luthadel was considered to be a Great House.

Most of the open ground in the city was around these keeps. The patches of space amid the tenements were like clearings in a forest, the keeps themselves like solitary mounts rising above the rest of the landscape. Black mountains. Like the rest of the city, the keeps were stained by countless years of ashfalls.

Every structure in Luthadel—virtually every structure Kelsier had ever seen—had been blackened to some degree. Even the city wall, upon which Kelsier now stood, was blackened by a patina of soot. Structures were generally darkest at the top, where the ash gathered, but rainwaters and evening condensations had carried the stains over ledges and down walls. Like paint running down a canvas, the darkness seemed to creep down the sides of buildings in an uneven gradient.

The streets, of course, were completely black. Kelsier stood waiting, scanning the city as a group of skaa workers worked in the street below, clearing away the latest mounds of ash. They'd take it to the

River Channerel, which ran through the center of the city, sending the piles of ash to be washed away, lest it pile up and eventually bury the city. Sometimes, Kelsier wondered why the entire empire wasn't just one big mound of ash. He supposed the ash must break down into soil eventually. Yet, it took a ridiculous amount of effort to keep cities and fields clear enough to be used.

Fortunately, there were always enough skaa to do the work. The workers below him wore simple coats and trousers, ash-stained and worn. Like the plantation workers he had left behind several weeks before, they worked with beaten-down, despondent motions. Other groups of skaa passed the workers, responding to the bells in the distance, chiming the hour and calling them to their morning's work at the forges or mills. Luthadel's main export was metal; the city was home to hundreds of forges and refineries. However, the surgings of the river provided excellent locations for mills, both to grind grains and make textiles.

The skaa continued to work. Kelsier turned away from them, looking up into the distance, toward the city center, where the Lord Ruler's palace loomed like some kind of massive, multi-spined insect. Kredik Shaw, the Hill of a Thousand Spires. The palace was several times the size of any nobleman's keep, and was by far the largest building in the city.

Another ashfall began as Kelsier stood contemplating the city, the flakes falling lightly down upon the streets and buildings. *A lot of ashfalls, lately,* he thought, glad for the excuse to pull up the hood on his cloak. *The Ashmounts must be active.*

It was unlikely that anyone in Luthadel would recognize him—it had been three years since his capture. Still, the hood was reassuring. If all went well, there would come a time when Kelsier would want to be seen and recognized. For now, anonymity was probably better.

Eventually, a figure approached along the wall. The man, Dockson, was shorter than Kelsier, and he had a squarish face that seemed well suited to his moderately stocky build. A nondescript brown hooded cloak covered his black hair, and he wore the same short half beard that he'd sported since his face had first put forth whiskers some twenty years before.

He, like Kelsier, wore a nobleman's suit: colored vest, dark coat and trousers, and a thin cloak to keep off the ash. The clothing wasn't rich, but it was aristocratic—indicative of the Luthadel middle class. Most men of noble birth weren't wealthy enough to be considered part of a Great House—yet, in the Final Empire, nobility wasn't just about money. It was about lineage and history; the Lord Ruler was immortal, and he apparently still remembered the men who had supported him during the early years of his reign. The descendants of those men, no matter how poor they became, would always be favored.

The clothing would keep passing guard patrols from asking too many questions. In the cases of Kelsier and Dockson, of course, that clothing was a lie. Neither was actually noble—though, technically, Kelsier was a half-blood. In many ways, however, that was worse than being just a normal skaa.

Dockson strolled up next to Kelsier, then leaned against the battlement, resting a pair of stout arms on the stone. "You're a few days late, Kell."

"I decided to make a few extra stops in the plantations to the north."

"Ah," Dockson said. "So you *did* have something to do with Lord Tresting's death."

Kelsier smiled. "You could say that."

"His murder caused quite a stir among the local nobility."

"That was kind of the intention," Kelsier said. "Though, to be honest, I wasn't planning anything quite so dramatic. It was almost more of an accident than anything else."

Dockson raised an eyebrow. "How do you 'accidentally' kill a nobleman in his own mansion?"

"With a knife in the chest," Kelsier said lightly. "Or, rather, a pair of knives in the chest—it always pays to be careful."

Dockson rolled his eyes.

"His death isn't exactly a loss, Dox," Kelsier said. "Even among the nobility, Tresting had a reputation for cruelty."

"I don't care about Tresting," Dockson said. "I'm just considering the state of insanity that led me to plan another job with you. Attacking a provincial lord in his manor house, surrounded by guards . . . Honestly, Kell, I'd nearly forgotten how foolhardy you can be."

"Foolhardy?" Kelsier asked with a laugh. "That wasn't foolhardy—that was just a small diversion. You should see some of the things I'm *planning* to do!"

Dockson stood for a moment, then he laughed too. "By the Lord Ruler, it's good to have you back, Kell! I'm afraid I've grown rather boring during the last few years."

"We'll fix that," Kelsier promised. He took a deep breath, ash falling lightly around him. Skaa cleaning crews were already back at work on the streets below, brushing up the dark ash. Behind, a guard patrol passed, nodding to Kelsier and Dockson. They waited in silence for the men to pass.

"It's good to be back," Kelsier finally said. "There's something homey about Luthadel—even if it is a depressing, stark pit of a city. You have the meeting organized?"

Dockson nodded. "We can't start until this evening, though. How'd you get in, anyway? I had men watching the gates."

"Hmm? Oh, I snuck in last night."

"But how—" Dockson paused. "Oh, right. That's going to take some getting used to."

Kelsier shrugged. "I don't see why. You always work with Mistings."

"Yes, but this is different," Dockson said. He held up a hand to forestall further argument. "No need, Kell. I'm not hedging—I just said it would take some getting used to."

"Fine. Who's coming tonight?"

"Well, Breeze and Ham will be there, of course. They're very curious about this mystery job of ours—not to mention rather annoyed that I won't tell him what you've been up to these last few years."

"Good," Kelsier said with a smile. "Let them wonder. How about Trap?"

Dockson shook his head. "Trap's dead. The Ministry finally caught up with him a couple months ago. Didn't even bother sending him to the Pits—they beheaded him on the spot."

Kelsier closed his eyes, exhaling softly. It seemed that the Steel Ministry caught up with everyone eventually. Sometimes, Kelsier felt that a skaa Misting's life wasn't so much about surviving as it was about picking the right time to die.

"This leaves us without a Smoker," Kelsier finally said, opening his eyes. "You have any suggestions?"

"Ruddy," Dockson said.

Kelsier shook his head. "No. He's a good Smoker, but he's not a good enough man."

Dockson smiled. "Not a good enough man to be on a thieving crew . . . Kell, I *have* missed working with you. All right, who then?"

Kelsier thought for a moment. "Is Clubs still running that shop of his?"

"As far as I know," Dockson said slowly.

"He's supposed to be one of the best Smokers in the city."

"I suppose," Dockson said. "But . . . isn't he supposed to be kind of hard to work with?"

"He's not so bad," Kelsier said. "Not once you get used to him. Besides, I think he might be . . . amenable to this particular job."

"All right," Dockson said, shrugging. "I'll invite him. I think one of his relatives is a Tineye. Do you want me to invite him too?"

"Sounds good," Kelsier said.

"All right," Dockson said. "Well, beyond that, there's just Yeden. Assuming he's still interested . . ."

"He'll be there," Kelsier said.

"He'd better be," Dockson said. "He'll be the one paying us, after all."

Kelsier nodded, then frowned. "You didn't mention Marsh."

Dockson shrugged. "I warned you. Your brother never did approve of our methods, and now . . . well, you know Marsh. He won't even have anything to do with Yeden and the rebellion anymore, let alone with a bunch of criminals like us. I think we'll have to find someone else to infiltrate the obligators."

"No," Kelsier said. "He'll do it. I'll just have to stop by to persuade him."

"If you say so." Dockson fell silent then, and the two stood for a moment, leaning against the railing and looking out over the ash-stained city.

Dockson finally shook his head. "This is insane, eh?"

Kelsier smiled. "Feels good, doesn't it?"

Dockson nodded. "Fantastic."

"It will be a job like no other," Kelsier said, looking north—across the city and toward the twisted building at its center.

Dockson stepped away from the wall. "We have a few hours before the meeting. There's something I want to show you. I think there's still time—if we hurry."

Kelsier turned with curious eyes. "Well, I *was* going to go and chastise my prude of a brother. But . . ."

"This will be worth your time," Dockson promised.

Vin sat in the corner of the safe house's main lair. She kept to the shadows, as usual; the more she stayed out of sight, the more the others would ignore her. She couldn't afford to expend Luck keeping the men's hands off of her. She'd barely had time to regenerate what she'd used a few days before, during the meeting with the obligator.

The usual rabble lounged at tables in the room, playing at dice or discussing minor jobs. Smoke from a dozen different pipes pooled at the top of the chamber, and the walls were stained dark from countless years of similar treatment. The floor was darkened with patches of ash. Like most thieving crews, Camon's group wasn't known for its tidiness.

There was a door at the back of the room, and beyond it lay a twisting stone stairway that led up to a false rain grate in an alleyway. This room, like so many others hidden in the imperial capital of Luthadel, wasn't supposed to exist.

Rough laughter came from the front of the chamber, where Camon sat with a half-dozen cronies enjoying a typical afternoon of ale and crass jokes. Camon's table sat beside the bar, where the overpriced drinks were simply another way Camon exploited those who worked for him. The Luthadel criminal element had learned quite well from the lessons taught by the nobility.

Vin tried her best to remain invisible. Six months before, she wouldn't have believed that her life could actually get worse without Reen. Yet, despite her brother's abusive anger, he had kept the other crewmembers from having their way with Vin. There were relatively few women on thieving crews; generally, those women who got involved with the underworld ended up as whores. Reen had always told her that a girl needed to be tough—tougher, even, than a man—if she wanted to survive.

*You think some crewleader is going to want a liability like you on his team?* he had said. *I don't even want to have to work with you, and I'm your brother.*

Her back still throbbed; Camon had whipped her the day before. The blood would ruin her shirt, and she wouldn't be able to afford another one. Camon was already retaining her wages to pay the debts Reen had left behind.

*But, I am strong,* she thought.

That was the irony. The beatings almost didn't hurt anymore, for Reen's frequent abuses had left Vin resilient, while at the same time teaching her how to look pathetic and broken. In a way, the beatings were self-defeating. Bruises and welts mended, but each new lashing left Vin more hardened. Stronger.

Camon stood up. He reached into his vest pocket and pulled out his golden pocket watch. He nodded to one of his companions, then he scanned the room, searching for . . . her.

His eyes locked on Vin. "It's time."

Vin frowned. *Time for what?*

The Ministry's Canton of Finance was an imposing structure—but, then, *everything* about the Steel Ministry tended to be imposing.

Tall and blocky, the building had a massive rose window in the front, though the glass was dark from the outside. Two large banners hung down beside the window, the soot-stained red cloth proclaiming praises to the Lord Ruler.

Camon studied the building with a critical eye. Vin could sense his apprehension. The Canton of Finance was hardly the most threatening of Ministry offices—the Canton of Inquisition, or even the Canton of Orthodoxy, had a far more ominous reputation. However, voluntarily entering any Ministry office . . . putting yourself in the power of the obligators . . . well, it was a thing to do only after serious consideration.

Camon took a deep breath, then strode forward, his dueling cane tapping against the stones as he walked. He wore his rich nobleman's suit, and he was accompanied by a half-dozen crewmembers—including Vin—to act as his "servants."

Vin followed Camon up the steps, then waited as one of the crewmembers jumped forward to pull the door open for his "master." Of the six attendants, only Vin seemed to have been told nothing of Camon's plan. Suspiciously, Theron—Camon's supposed partner in the Ministry scam—was nowhere to be seen.

Vin entered the Canton building. Vibrant red light, sparkled with lines of blue, fell from the rose window. A single obligator, with midlevel tattoos around his eyes, sat behind a desk at the end of the extended entryway.

Camon approached, his cane thumping against the carpet as he walked. "I am Lord Jedue," he said.

*What are you doing, Camon?* Vin thought. *You insisted to Theron that you wouldn't meet with Prelan Laird in his Canton office. Yet, now you're here.*

The obligator nodded, making a notation in his ledger. He waved to the side. "You may take one attendant with you into the waiting chamber. The rest must remain here."

Camon's huff of disdain indicated what he thought of that prohibition. The obligator, however, didn't look up from his ledger. Camon stood for a moment, and Vin couldn't tell if he was genuinely angry or just playing the part of an arrogant nobleman. Finally, he jabbed a finger at Vin.

"Come," he said, turning and waddling toward the indicated door.

The room beyond was lavish and plush, and several noblemen lounged in various postures of waiting. Camon chose a chair and settled into it, then pointed toward a table set with wine and red-frosted cakes. Vin obediently fetched him a glass of wine and a plate of food, ignoring her own hunger.

Camon began to pick hungrily at the cakes, smacking quietly as he ate.

*He's nervous. More nervous, even, than before.*

"Once we get in, you will say nothing," Camon grumbled between bites.

"You're betraying Theron," Vin whispered.

Camon nodded.

"But, how? Why?" Theron's plan was complex in execution, but simple in concept. Every year, the Ministry transferred its new acolyte obligators from a northern training facility south to Luthadel for final instruction. Theron had discovered, however, that those acolytes and their overseers brought down with them large amounts of Ministry funds—disguised as baggage—to be strongholded in Luthadel.

Banditry was very difficult in the Final Empire, what with the constant patrols along canal routes. However, if one were running the very canal boats that the acolytes were sailing upon, a robbery could become possible. Arranged at just the right time . . . the guards turning on their passengers . . . a man could make quite a profit, then blame it all on banditry.

"Theron's crew is weak," Camon said quietly. "He expended too many resources on this job."

"But, the return he'll make—" Vin said.

"Will never happen if I take what I can now, then run," Camon said, smiling. "I'll talk the obligators into a down payment to get my caravan boats afloat, then disappear and leave Theron to deal with the disaster when the Ministry realizes that it's been scammed."

Vin stood back, slightly shocked. Setting up a scam like this would have cost Theron thousands upon thousands of boxings—if the deal fell through now, he would be ruined. And, with the Ministry hunting him, he wouldn't even have time to seek revenge. Camon would make a quick profit, as well as rid himself of one of his more powerful rivals.

*Theron was a fool to bring Camon into this,* she thought. But, then, the amount Theron had promised to pay Camon was great; he probably assumed that Camon's greed would keep him honest until Theron himself could pull a double cross. Camon had simply worked faster than anyone, even Vin, had expected. How could Theron have known that Camon would undermine the job itself, rather than wait and try and steal the entire haul from the caravan boats?

Vin's stomach twisted. *It's just another betrayal,* she thought sickly.

*Why does it still bother me so? Everyone betrays everyone else. That's the way life is. . . .*

She wanted to find a corner—someplace cramped and secluded—and hide. Alone.

*Anyone will betray you. Anyone.*

But there was no place to go. Eventually, a minor obligator entered and called for Lord Jedue. Vin followed Camon as they were ushered into an audience chamber.

The man who waited inside, sitting behind the audience desk, was not Prelan Laird.

Camon paused in the doorway. The room was austere, bearing only the desk and simple gray carpeting. The stone walls were unadorned, the only window barely a handspan wide. The obligator who waited for them had some of the most intricate tattoos around his eyes that Vin had ever seen. She wasn't even certain what rank they implied, but they extended all the way back to the obligator's ears and up over his forehead.

"Lord Jedue," the strange obligator said. Like Laird, he wore gray robes, but he was very different from the stern, bureaucratic men Camon had dealt with before. This man was lean in a muscular way, and his clean-shaven, triangular head gave him an almost predatory look.

"I was under the impression that I would be meeting with Prelan Laird," Camon said, still not moving into the room.

"Prelan Laird has been called away on other business. I am High Prelan Arriev—head of the board that was reviewing your proposal. You have a rare opportunity to address me directly. I normally don't hear cases in person, but Laird's absence has made it necessary for me to share in some of his work."

Vin's instincts made her tense. *We should go. Now.*

Camon stood for a long moment, and Vin could see him considering. Run now? Or, take a risk for the greater prize? Vin didn't care about prizes; she just wanted to live. Camon, however, had not become crewleader without the occasional gamble. He slowly moved into the room, eyes cautious as he took the seat opposite the obligator.

"Well, High Prelan Arriev," Camon said with a careful voice. "I assume that since I have been called back for another appointment, the board is considering my offer?"

"Indeed we are," the obligator said. "Though I must admit, there are some Council members who are apprehensive about dealing with a family that is so near to economic disaster. The Ministry generally prefers to be conservative in its financial operations."

"I see."

"But," Arriev said, "there are others on the board who are quite eager to take advantage of the savings you offered us."

"And with which group do you identify, Your Grace?"

"I, as of yet, have not made my decision." The obligator leaned forward. "Which is why I noted that you have a rare opportunity. Convince me, Lord Jedue, and you will have your contract."

"Surely Prelan Laird outlined the details of our offer," Camon said.

"Yes, but I would like to hear the arguments from you personally. Humor me."

Vin frowned. She remained near the back of the room, standing near the door, still half convinced she should run.

"Well?" Arriev asked.

"We need this contract, Your Grace," Camon said. "Without it we won't be able to continue our canal shipping operations. Your contract would give us a much needed period of stability—a chance to maintain our caravan boats for a time while we search for other contracts."

Arriev studied Camon for a moment. "Surely you can do better than that, Lord Jedue. Laird said that you were very persuasive—let me hear you *prove* that you deserve our patronage."

Vin prepared her Luck. She could make Arriev more inclined to believe . . . but something restrained her. The situation felt wrong.

"We are your best choice, Your Grace," Camon said. "You fear that my house will suffer economic failure? Well, if it does, what have you lost? At worst, my narrowboats would stop running, and you would have to find other merchants to deal with. Yet, if your patronage is enough to maintain my house, then you have found yourself an enviable long-term contract."

"I see," Arriev said lightly. "And why the Ministry? Why not make your deal with someone else? Surely there are other options for your boats—other groups who would jump at such rates."

Camon frowned. "This isn't about money, Your Grace, it is about the victory—the showing of confidence—that we would gain by having a Ministry contract. If you trust us, others will too. I *need* your support." Camon was sweating now. He was probably beginning to regret this gamble. Had he been betrayed? Was Theron behind the odd meeting?

The obligator waited quietly. He could destroy them, Vin knew. If he even suspected that they were scamming him, he could give them over to the Canton of Inquisition. More than one nobleman had entered a Canton building and never returned.

Gritting her teeth, Vin reached out and used her Luck on the obligator, making him less suspicious.

Arriev smiled. “Well, you have convinced me,” he suddenly declared.

Camon sighed in relief.

Arriev continued, “Your most recent letter suggested that you need three thousand boxings as an advance to refurbish your equipment and resume shipping operations. See the scribe in the main hallway to finish the paperwork so that you may requisition the necessary funds.”

The obligator pulled a sheet of thick bureaucratic paper from a stack, then stamped a seal at the bottom. He proffered it to Camon. “Your contract.”

Camon smiled deeply. “I knew coming to the Ministry was the wise choice,” he said, accepting the contract. He stood, nodding respectfully to the obligator, then motioned for Vin to open the door for him.

She did so. *Something is wrong. Something is* very *wrong.* She paused as Camon left, looking back at the obligator. He was still smiling.

A happy obligator was always a bad sign.

Yet, no one stopped them as they passed through the waiting room with its noble occupants. Camon sealed and delivered the contract to the appropriate scribe, and no soldiers appeared to arrest them. The scribe pulled out a small chest filled with coins, and then handed it to Camon with an indifferent hand.

Then, they simply left the Canton building, Camon gathering his other attendants with obvious relief. No cries of alarm. No tromping of soldiers. They were free. Camon had successfully scammed both the Ministry and another crew-leader.

Apparently.

Kelsier stuffed another one of the little red-frosted cakes into his mouth, chewing with satisfaction. The fat thief and his scrawny attendant passed through the waiting room, entering the entryway beyond. The obligator who had interviewed the two thieves remained in his office, apparently awaiting his next appointment

“Well?” Dockson asked. “What do you think?”

Kelsier glanced at the cakes. “They’re quite good,” he said, taking another one. “The Ministry has always had excellent taste—it makes sense that they would provide superior snacks.”

Dockson rolled his eyes. “About the girl, Kell.”

Kelsier smiled as he piled four of the cakes in his hand, then nodded toward the doorway. The Canton waiting room was growing too busy for the discussion of delicate matters. On the way out, he paused and told the obligator secretary in the corner that they needed to reschedule.

Then the two crossed through the entry chamber—passing the overweight crewleader, who stood speaking with a scribe. Kelsier stepped out onto the street, pulled his hood up against the still falling ash, then led the way across the street. He paused beside an alleyway, standing where he and Dockson could watch the Canton building's doors.

Kelsier munched contentedly on his cakes. "How'd you find out about her?" he asked between bites.

"Your brother," Dockson replied. "Camon tried to swindle Marsh a few months ago, and he brought the girl with him then, too. Actually, Camon's little good-luck charm is becoming moderately famous in the right circles. I'm still not sure if he knows what she is or not. You know how superstitious thieves can get."

Kelsier nodded, dusting off his hands. "How'd you know she'd be here today?"

Dockson shrugged. "A few bribes in the right place. I've been keeping an eye on the girl ever since Marsh pointed her out to me. I wanted to give you an opportunity to see her work for yourself."

Across the street, the Canton building's door finally opened, and Camon made his way down the steps surrounded by a group of "servants." The small, short-haired girl was with him. The sight of her made Kelsier frown. She had a nervous anxiety to her step, and she jumped slightly whenever someone made a quick move. The right side of her face was still slightly discolored from a partially healed bruise.

Kelsier eyed the self-important Camon. *I'll have to come up with something particularly suitable to do to that man.*

"Poor thing," Dockson muttered.

Kelsier nodded. "She'll be free of him soon enough. It's a wonder no one discovered her before this."

"Your brother was right then?"

Kelsier nodded. "She's at least a Misting, and if Marsh says she's more, I'm inclined to believe him. I'm a bit surprised to see her using Allomancy on a member of the Ministry, especially inside a Canton building. I'd guess that she doesn't know that she's even using her abilities."

"Is that possible?" Dockson asked.

Kelsier nodded. “Trace minerals in the water can be burned, if just for a tiny bit of power. That’s one of the reasons the Lord Ruler built his city here—lots of metals in the ground. I’d say that . . .”

Kelsier trailed off, frowning slightly. Something was wrong. He glanced toward Camon and his crew. They were still visible in the near distance, crossing the street and heading south.

A figure appeared in the Canton building’s doorway. Lean with a confident air, he bore the tattoos of a high prelan of the Canton of Finance around his eyes. Probably the very man Camon had met with shortly before. The obligator stepped out of the building, and a second man exited behind him.

Beside Kelsier, Dockson suddenly grew stiff.

The second man was tall with a strong build. As he turned, Kelsier was able to see that a thick metal spike had been pounded tip-first through each of the man’s eyes. With shafts as wide as an eye socket, the nail-like spikes were long enough that their sharp points jutted out about an inch from the back of the man’s clean-shaven skull. The flat spike ends shone like two silvery disks, sticking out of the sockets in the front, where the eyes should have been.

A Steel Inquisitor.

“What’s *that* doing here?” Dockson asked.

“Stay calm,” Kelsier said, trying to force himself to do the same. The Inquisitor looked toward them, spiked eyes regarding Kelsier, before turning in the direction that Camon and the girl had gone. Like all Inquisitors, he wore intricate eye tattoos—mostly black, with one stark red line—that marked him as a high-ranking member of the Canton of Inquisition.

“He’s not here for us,” Kelsier said. “I’m not burning anything—he’ll think that we’re just ordinary noblemen.”

“The girl,” Dockson said.

Kelsier nodded. “You say Camon’s been running this scam on the Ministry for a while. Well, the girl must have been detected by one of the obligators. They’re trained to recognize when an Allomancer tampers with their emotions.”

Dockson frowned thoughtfully. Across the street, the Inquisitor conferred with the other obligator, then the two of them turned to walk in the direction that Camon had gone. There was no urgency to their pace.

“They must have sent a tail to follow them,” Dockson said.

“This is the Ministry,” Kelsier said. “There’ll be two tails, at least.”

Dockson nodded. “Camon will lead them directly back to his safe house. Dozens of men will die. They're not all the most admirable people, but . . ."

"They fight the Final Empire, in their own way," Kelsier said. "Besides, I'm not about to let a possible Mistborn slip away from us—I want to talk to that girl. Can you deal with those tails?"

"I said I'd become boring, Kell," Dockson said. "Not sloppy. I can handle a couple of Ministry flunkies."

"Good," Kelsier said, reaching into his cloak pocket and pulling out a small vial. A collection of metal flakes floated in an alcohol solution within. Iron, steel, tin, pewter, copper, bronze, zinc, and brass—the eight basic Allomantic metals. Kelsier pulled off the stopper and downed the contents in a single swift gulp.

He pocketed the now empty vial, wiping his mouth. "I'll handle that Inquisitor."

Dockson looked apprehensive. "You're going to try and take him?"

Kelsier shook his head. "Too dangerous. I'll just divert him. Now, get going—we don't want those tails finding the safe house."

Dockson nodded. "Meet back at the fifteenth crossroad," he said before taking off down the alley and disappearing around a corner.

Kelsier gave his friend a count of ten before reaching within himself and burning his metals. His body came awash with strength, clarity, and power.

Kelsier smiled; then—burning zinc—he reached out and yanked firmly on the Inquisitor's emotions. The creature froze in place, then spun, looking back toward the Canton building.

*Let's have a chase now, you and I,* Kelsier thought.

*We arrived in Terris earlier this week, and, I have to say, I find the countryside beautiful. The great mountains to the north—with their bald snowcaps and forested mantles—stand like watchful gods over this land of green fertility. My own lands to the south are mostly flat; I think that they might look less dreary if there were a few mountains to vary the terrain.*

*The people here are mostly herdsmen—though timber harvesters and farmers are not uncommon. It is a pastoral land, certainly. It seems odd that a place so remarkably agrarian could have produced the prophecies and theologies upon which the entire world now relies.*

# 3

CAMON COUNTED HIS COINS, DROPPING THE golden boxings one by one into the small chest on his table. He still looked a bit stunned, as well he should have. Three thousand boxings was a fabulous amount of money—far more than Camon would earn in even a very good year. His closest cronies sat at the table with him, ale—and laughter—flowing freely.

Vin sat in her corner, trying to understand her feelings of dread. Three thousand boxings. The Ministry should never have let such a sum go so quickly. Prelan Arriev had seemed too cunning to be fooled with ease.

Camon dropped another coin into the chest. Vin couldn't decide if he was being foolish or clever by making such a display of wealth. Underworld crews worked under a strict agreement: Everyone received a cut of earnings in proportion to their status in the group. While it was sometimes tempting to kill the crewleader and take his money for yourself, a successful leader created more wealth for everyone. Kill him prematurely, and you would cut off future earnings—not to mention earn the wrath of the other crewmembers.

Still, three thousand boxings . . . that would be enough to tempt even the most logical thief. It was all wrong.

*I have to get out of here,* Vin decided. *Get away from Camon, and the lair, in case something happens.*

And yet . . . leave? By herself? She'd never been alone before; she'd always had Reen. He'd been the one to lead her from city to city, joining different thieving crews. She loved solitude. But the thought of being by herself, out in the city, horrified her. That was why she'd never run away from Reen; that was why she'd stayed with Camon.

She couldn't go. But she had to. She looked up from her corner, scanning the room. There weren't many people in the crew for whom she felt any sort of attachment. Yet, there were a couple that she would be sorry to see hurt, should the obligators actually move against the crew. A few men who hadn't tried to abuse her, or—in very rare cases—who had actually shown her some measure of kindness.

Ulef was at the top of that list. He wasn't a friend, but he was the closest thing she had now that Reen was gone. If he would go with her, then at least she wouldn't be alone. Cautiously, Vin stood and moved along the side of the room to where Ulef sat drinking with some of the other younger crewmembers.

She tugged on Ulef's sleeve. He turned toward her, only slightly drunk. "Vin?"

"Ulef," she whispered. "We need to go."

He frowned. "Go? Go where?"

"Away," Vin whispered. "Out of here."

"Now?"

Vin nodded urgently.

Ulef glanced back at his friends, who were chuckling among themselves, shooting suggestive looks at Vin and Ulef.

Ulef flushed. "You want to go somewhere, just you and I?"

"Not like that," Vin said. "Just . . . I need to leave the lair. And I don't want to be alone."

Ulef frowned. He leaned closer, a slight stink of ale on his breath. "What is this about, Vin?" he asked quietly.

Vin paused. "I . . . think something might happen, Ulef," she whispered. "Something with the obligators. I just don't want to be in the lair right now."

Ulef sat quietly for a moment. "All right," he finally said. "How long will this take?"

"I don't know," Vin said. "Until evening, at least. But we have to go. *Now.*"

He nodded slowly.

"Wait here for a moment," Vin whispered, turning. She shot a glance at Camon, who was laughing at one of his own jokes. Then she quietly moved through the ash-stained, smoky chamber into the lair's back room.

The crew's general sleeping quarters consisted of a simple, elongated corridor lined with bedrolls. It was crowded and uncomfortable, but it was far better than the cold alleyways she'd slept in during her years traveling with Reen.

*Alleyways that I might have to get used to again,* she thought. She had survived them before. She could do so again.

She moved to her pallet, the muffled sounds of men laughing and drinking sounding from the other room. Vin knelt down, regarding her few possessions. If something did happen to the crew, she wouldn't be able to come back to the lair. Ever. But, she couldn't take the bedroll with her now—it was far too obvious. That left only the small box that contained her personal effects: a pebble from each city she'd visited, the earring Reen said Vin's mother had given her, and a bit of obsidian the size of a large coin. It was chipped into an irregular pattern—Reen had carried it as some kind of good luck charm. It was the only thing he'd left behind when he'd snuck away from the crew half a year before. Abandoning her.

*Just like he always said he would,* Vin told herself sternly. *I never thought he'd actually go—and that's exactly why he had to leave.*

She gripped the bit of obsidian in her hand and pocketed the pebbles. The earring she put in her ear—it was a very simple thing. Little more than a stud, not even worth stealing, which was why she didn't fear leaving it in the back room. Still, Vin had rarely worn it, for fear that the ornamentation would make her look more feminine.

She had no money, but Reen had taught her how to scavenge and beg. Both were difficult in the Final Empire, especially in Luthadel, but she would find a way, if she had to.

Vin left her box and bedroll, slipping back out into the common room. Maybe she was overreacting; perhaps nothing would happen to the crew. But, if it did . . . well, if there was one thing Reen had taught her, it was how to protect her neck. Bringing Ulef was a good idea. He had contacts in Luthadel. If something happened to Camon's crew, Ulef could probably get her and him jobs on—

Vin froze just inside the main room. Ulef wasn't at the table where she had left him. Instead, he stood furtively near the front of the room. Near the bar. Near . . . Camon.

"What is this!" Camon stood, his face red as sunlight. He pushed his stool out of the way, then lurched toward her, half drunk. "Running away? Off to betray me to the Ministry, are you!"

Vin dashed toward the stairwell door, desperately scrambling around tables and past crewmembers.

Camon's hurled wooden stool hit her square in the back, throwing her to the ground. Pain flared between her shoulders; several crewmembers cried out as the stool bounced off of her and thumped against the floorboards nearby.

Vin lay in a daze. Then . . . something within her—something she knew of but didn't understand—gave her strength. Her head stopped swimming, her pain becoming a focus. She climbed awkwardly to her feet.

Camon was there. He backhanded her even as she stood. Her head snapped to the side from the blow, twisting her neck so painfully that she barely felt herself hit the floor again.

Camon bent over, grabbing her by the front of her shirt and pulling her up, raising his fist. Vin didn't pause to think or to speak; there was only one thing to do. She used up all of her Luck in a single furious effort, pushing against Camon, calming his fury.

Camon teetered. For a moment, his eyes softened. He lowered her slightly.

Then the anger returned to his eyes. Hard. Terrifying.

"Damn wench," Camon muttered, grabbing her by the shoulders and shaking her. "That backstabbing brother of yours never respected me, and you're the same. I was too easy on you both. Should have . . ."

Vin tried to twist free, but Camon's grip was firm. She searched desperately for aid from the other crewmembers—however, she knew what she would find. Indifference. They turned away, their faces embarrassed but not concerned. Ulef still stood near Camon's table, looking down guiltily.

In her mind, she thought she heard a voice whispering to her. Reen's voice. *Fool! Ruthlessness—it's the most logical of emotions. You don't have any friends in the underworld. You'll never have any friends in the underworld!*

She renewed her struggles, but Camon hit her again, knocking her to the ground. The blow stunned her, and she gasped, breath knocked from her lungs.

*Just endure,* she thought, mind muddled. *He won't kill me. He needs me.*

Yet, as she turned weakly, she saw Camon looming above her in the caliginous room, drunken fury showing in his face. She knew this time would be different; it would be no simple beating. He thought that she intended to betray him to the Ministry. He wasn't in control.

There was murder in his eyes.

*Please!* Vin thought with desperation, reaching for her Luck, trying to make it work. There was no response. Luck, such as it was, had failed her.

Camon bent down, muttering to himself as he grabbed her by the shoulder. He raised an arm—his meaty hand forming another fist, his muscles tensing, an angry bead of sweat slipping off his chin and hitting her on the cheek.

A few feet away, the stairwell door shook, then burst open. Camon paused, arm upraised as he glared toward the door and whatever unfortunate crewmember had chosen such an inopportune moment to return to the lair.

Vin seized the distraction. Ignoring the newcomer, she tried to shake herself free from Camon's grip, but she was too weak. Her face blazed from where he'd hit her, and she tasted blood on her lip. Her shoulder had been twisted awkwardly, and her side ached from where she'd fallen. She clawed at Camon's hand, but she suddenly felt weak, her inner strength failing her just as her Luck had. Her pains suddenly seemed greater, more daunting, more . . . demanding.

She turned toward the door desperately. She was close—painfully close. She had nearly escaped. Just a little farther . . .

Then she saw the man standing quietly in the stairwell doorway. He was unfamiliar to her. Tall and hawk-faced, he had light blond hair and wore a relaxed nobleman's suit, his cloak hanging free. He was, perhaps, in his mid-thirties. He wore no hat, nor did he carry a dueling cane.

And he looked very, very angry.

"What is this?" Camon demanded. "Who are you?"

*How did he get by the scouts . . .?* Vin thought, struggling to get her wits back. Pain. She could deal with pain. *The obligators . . . did they send him?*

The newcomer looked down at Vin, and his expression softened slightly. Then he looked up at Camon and his eyes grew dark.

Camon's angry demands were cut off as he was thrown backward as if had been punched by a powerful force. His arm was ripped free from Vin's shoulder, and he toppled to the ground, causing the floorboards to shake.

The room fell quiet.

*Have to get away,* Vin thought, forcing herself up to her knees. Camon groaned in pain from a few feet away, and Vin crawled away from him, slipping beneath an unoccupied table. The lair had a hidden exit, a trapdoor beside the far back wall. If she could crawl to it—

Suddenly, Vin felt an overwhelming peace. The emotion slammed into her like a sudden weight, her emotions squished silent, as if crushed by a forceful hand. Her fear puffed out like an extinguished candle, and even her pain seemed unimportant.

She slowed, wondering why she had been so worried. She stood up, pausing as she faced the trapdoor. She breathed heavily, still a little dazed.

*Camon just tried to kill me!* the logical part of her mind warned. *And someone else is attacking the lair. I have to get away!* However, her emotions didn't match the logic. She felt . . . serene. Unworried. And more than a little bit curious.

Someone had just used Luck on her.

She recognized it somehow, even though she'd never felt it upon her before. She paused beside the table, one hand on the wood, then slowly turned around. The newcomer still stood in the stairwell doorway. He studied her with a critical eye, then smiled in a disarming sort of way.

*What is going on?*

The newcomer finally stepped into the room. The rest of Camon's crew remained sitting at their tables. They looked surprised, but oddly unworried.

*He's using Luck on them all. But . . . how can he do it to so many at once?* Vin had never been able to store up enough Luck to do more than give the occasional, brief push.

As the newcomer entered the room, Vin could finally see that a second person stood in the stairwell behind him. This second man was less imposing. He was shorter, with a dark half beard and close-cropped straight hair. He also wore a nobleman's suit, though his was less sharply tailored.

On the other side of the room, Camon groaned and sat up, holding his head. He glanced at the newcomers. "Master Dockson! Why, uh, well, this is a surprise!"

"Indeed," said the shorter man—Dockson. Vin frowned, realizing she sensed a slight familiarity to these men. She recognized them from somewhere.

*The Canton of Finance. They were sitting in the waiting room when Camon and I left.*

Camon climbed to his feet, studying the blond newcomer. Camon looked down at the man's hands, both of which were lined with strange, overlapping scars. "By the Lord Ruler . . ." Camon whispered. "The Survivor of Hathsin!"

Vin frowned. The title was unfamiliar to her. Should she know this man? Her wounds still throbbed despite the peace she felt, and her head was dizzy. She leaned on the table for support, but did not sit.

Whoever this newcomer was, Camon obviously thought him important. “Why, Master Kelsier!” Camon sputtered. “This is a rare honor!”

The newcomer—Kelsier—shook his head. “You know, I’m not really interested in listening to you.”

Camon let out an “urk” of pain as he was thrown backward again. Kelsier made no obvious gesture to perform the feat. Yet, Camon collapsed to the ground, as if shoved by some unseen force.

Camon fell quiet, and Kelsier scanned the room. “The rest of you know who I am?”

Many of the crewmembers nodded.

“Good. I’ve come to your lair because you, my friends, owe me a great debt.”

The room was silent save for Camon’s groans. Finally, one of the crewmen spoke. “We . . . do, Master Kelsier?”

“Indeed you do. You see, Master Dockson and I just saved your lives. Your rather incompetent crewleader left the Ministry’s Canton of Finance about an hour ago, returning directly to this safe house. He was followed by two Ministry scouts, one high-ranking prelan . . . and a single Steel Inquisitor.”

No one spoke.

*Oh, Lord* . . . Vin thought. She’d been right—she just hadn’t been fast enough. If there was an Inquisitor—

“I dealt with the Inquisitor,” Kelsier said. He paused, letting the implication hang in the air. What kind of person could so lightly claim to have “dealt” with an Inquisitor? Rumors said the creatures were immortal, that they could see a man’s soul, and that they were unmatched warriors.

“I require payment for services rendered,” Kelsier said.

Camon didn’t get up this time; he had fallen hard, and he was obviously disoriented. The room remained still. Finally, Milev—the dark-skinned man who was Camon’s second—scooped up the coffer of Ministry boxings and dashed forward with it. He proffered it to Kelsier.

“The money Camon got from the Ministry,” Milev explained. “Three thousand boxings.”

*Milev is so eager to please him,* Vin thought. *This is more than just Luck—either that, or it’s some sort of Luck I’ve never been able to use.*

Kelsier paused, then accepted the coin chest. “And you are?”

“Milev, Master Kelsier.”

"Well, Crewleader Milev, I will consider this payment satisfactory—assuming you do one other thing for me."

Milev paused. "What would that be?"

Kelsier nodded toward the near-unconscious Camon. "Deal with him."

"Of course," Milev said.

"I want him to live, Milev," Kelsier said, holding up a finger. "But I don't want him to enjoy it."

Milev nodded. "We'll make him a beggar. The Lord Ruler disapproves of the profession—Camon won't have an easy time of it here in Luthadel."

*And Milev will dispose of him anyway as soon as he thinks this Kelsier isn't paying attention.*

"Good," Kelsier said. Then he opened the coin chest and began counting out some golden boxings. "You're a resourceful man, Milev. Quick on your feet, and not as easily intimidated as the others."

"I've had dealings with Mistings before, Master Kelsier," Milev said.

Kelsier nodded. "Dox," he said, addressing his companion, "where were we going to have our meeting tonight?"

"I was thinking that we should use Clubs's shop," said the second man.

"Hardly a neutral location," Kelsier said. "Especially if he decides not to join us."

"True."

Kelsier looked to Milev. "I'm planning a job in this area. It would be useful to have the support of some locals." He held out a pile of what looked like a hundred boxings. "We'll require use of your safe house for the evening. This can be arranged?"

"Of course," Milev said, taking the coins eagerly.

"Good," Kelsier said. "Now, get out."

"Out?" Milev asked hesitantly.

"Yes," Kelsier said. "Take your men—including your former leader—and leave. I want to have a private conversation with Mistress Vin."

The room grew silent again, and Vin knew she wasn't the only one wondering how Kelsier knew her name.

"Well, you heard him!" Milev snapped. He waved for a group of thugs to go grab Camon, then he shooed the rest of the crewmembers up the stairs. Vin watched them go, growing apprehensive. This Kelsier was a powerful man, and instinct told her that powerful men were dangerous. Did he know of her Luck? Obviously; what other reason would he have for singling her out?

*How is this Kelsier going to try and use me?* she thought, rubbing her arm where she'd hit the floor.

"By the way, Milev," Kelsier said idly. "When I say 'private,' I mean that I don't want to be spied on by the four men watching us through peek-holes behind the far wall. Kindly take them up into the alley with you."

Milev paled. "Of course, Master Kelsier."

"Good. And, in the alleyway you'll find the two dead Ministry spies. Kindly dispose of the corpses for us."

Milev nodded, turning.

"And Milev," Kelsier added.

Milev turned back again.

"See that none of your men betray us," Kelsier said quietly. And Vin felt it again—a renewed pressure on her emotions. "This crew already has the eye of the Steel Ministry—do not make an enemy of me as well."

Milev nodded sharply, then disappeared into the stairwell, pulling the door closed behind him. A few moments later, Vin heard footsteps from the peek room; then all was still. She was alone with a man who was—for some reason—so singularly impressive that he could intimidate an entire room full of cutthroats and thieves.

She eyed the bolt door. Kelsier was watching her. What would he do if she ran?

*He claims to have killed an Inquisitor,* Vin thought. *And . . . he used Luck. I have to stay, if just long enough to find out what he knows.*

Kelsier's smile deepened, then finally he laughed. "That was *far* too much fun, Dox."

The other man, the one Camon had called Dockson, snorted and walked toward the front of the room. Vin tensed, but he didn't move toward her, instead strolled to the bar.

"You were insufferable enough before, Kell," Dockson said. "I don't know how I'm going to handle this new reputation of yours. At least, I'm not sure how I'm going to handle it and maintain a straight face."

"You're jealous."

"Yes, that's it," Dockson said. "I'm terribly jealous of your ability to intimidate petty criminals. If it's of any note to you, I think you were too harsh on Camon."

Kelsier walked over and took a seat at one of the room's tables. His mirth darkened slightly as he spoke. "You saw what he was doing to the girl."

"Actually, I didn't," Dockson said dryly, rummaging through the bar's stores. "Someone was blocking the doorway."

Kelsier shrugged. "Look at her, Dox. The poor thing's been beaten nearly senseless. I don't feel any sympathy for the man."

Vin remained where she was, keeping watch on both men. As the tension of the moment grew weaker, her wounds began to throb again. The blow between her shoulder blades—that would be a large bruise—and the slap to her face burned as well. She was still a little dizzy.

Kelsier was watching her. Vin clinched her teeth. Pain. She could deal with pain.

"You need anything, child?" Dockson asked. "A wet handkerchief for that face, perhaps?"

She didn't respond, instead remaining focused on Kelsier. *Come on. Tell me what you want with me. Make your play.*

Dockson finally shrugged, then ducked beneath the bar for a moment. He eventually came up with a couple of bottles.

"Anything good?" Kelsier asked, turning.

"What do you think?" Dockson asked. "Even among thieves, Camon isn't exactly known for his refinement. I have socks worth more than this wine."

Kelsier sighed. "Give me a cup anyway." Then he glanced back at Vin. "You want anything?"

Vin didn't respond.

Kelsier smiled. "Don't worry—we're far less frightening than your friends think."

"I don't think they were her friends, Kell," Dockson said from behind the bar.

"Good point," Kelsier said. "Regardless, child, you don't have anything to fear from us. Other than Dox's breath."

Dockson rolled his eyes. "Or Kell's jokes."

Vin stood quietly. She could act weak, the way she had with Camon, but instincts told her that these men wouldn't respond well to that tactic. So, she remained where she was, assessing the situation.

The calmness fell upon her again. It encouraged her to be at ease, to be trusting, to simply do as the men were suggesting. . . .

*No!* She stayed where she was.

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "That's unexpected."

"What?" Dockson asked as he poured a cup of wine.

"Nothing," Kelsier said, studying Vin.

"You want a drink or not, lass?" Dockson asked.

Vin said nothing. All her life, as long as she could remember, she'd had her Luck. It made her strong, and it gave her an edge over other thieves. It was probably why she was still alive. Yet, all that time, she'd never really known what it was or why she could use it. Logic and instinct now told her the same thing—that she needed to find out what this man knew.

However he intended to use her, whatever his plans were, she needed to endure them. She had to find out how he'd grown so powerful.

"Ale," she finally said.

"Ale?" Kelsier asked. "That's it?"

Vin nodded, watching him carefully. "I like it."

Kelsier rubbed his chin. "We'll have to work on that," he said. "Anyway, have a seat."

Hesitant, Vin walked over and sat down opposite Kelsier at the small table. Her wounds throbbed, but she couldn't afford to show weakness. Weakness killed. She had to pretend to ignore the pain. At least, sitting as she was, her head cleared.

Dockson joined them a moment later, giving Kelsier a glass of wine and Vin her mug of ale. She didn't take a drink.

"Who are you?" she asked in a quiet voice.

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "You're a blunt one, eh?"

Vin didn't reply.

Kelsier sighed. "So much for my intriguing air of mystery."

Dockson snorted quietly.

Kelsier smiled. "My name is Kelsier. I'm what you might call a crewleader—but I run a crew that isn't like any you've probably known. Men like Camon, along with his crew, like to think of themselves as predators, feeding off of the nobility and the various organizations of the Ministry."

Vin shook her head. "Not predators. Scavengers." One would have thought, perhaps, that so close to the Lord Ruler, such things as thieving crews would not be able to exist. Yet, Reen had shown her that the opposite was true: Powerful, rich nobility congregated around the Lord Ruler. And, where power and riches existed, so did corruption—especially since the Lord Ruler tended to police his nobility far less than he did the skaa. It had to do, apparently, with his fondness for their ancestors.

Either way, thieving crews like Camon's were the rats who fed on the city's corruption. And, like rats, they were impossible to entirely exterminate—especially in a city with the population of Luthadel.

"Scavengers," Kelsier said, smiling; apparently he did that a lot. "That's an appropriate description, Vin. Well, Dox and I, we're scavengers too . . . we're just a higher quality of scavenger. We're more well-bred, you might say—or perhaps just more ambitious."

She frowned. "You're noblemen?"

"Lord, no," Dockson said.

"Or, at least," Kelsier said, "not full-blooded ones."

"Half-breeds aren't supposed to exist," Vin said carefully. "The Ministry hunts them."

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "Half-breeds like you?"

Vin felt a shock. *How . . .?*

"Even the Steel Ministry isn't infallible, Vin," Kelsier said. "If they can miss you, then they can miss others."

Vin paused thoughtfully. "Milev. He called you Mistings. Those are some kind of Allomancer, right?"

Dockson glanced at Kelsier. "She's observant," the shorter man said with an appreciative nod.

"Indeed," Kelsier agreed. "The man did call us Mistings, Vin—though the appellation was a bit hasty, since neither Dox nor I are technically Mistings. We do, however, associate with them quite a bit."

Vin sat quietly for a moment, sitting beneath the scrutiny of the two men. Allomancy. The mystical power held by the nobility, granted to them by the Lord Ruler some thousand years before as a reward for their loyalty. It was basic Ministry doctrine; even a skaa like Vin knew that much. The nobility had Allomancy and privilege because of their ancestors; the skaa were punished for the same reason.

The truth was, however, that she didn't really know what Allomancy was. It had something to do with fighting, she'd always assumed. One "Misting," as they were called, was said to be dangerous enough to kill an entire thieving team. Yet, the skaa she knew spoke of the power in whispered, uncertain tones. Before this moment, she'd never even paused to consider the possibility that it might simply be the same thing as her Luck.

"Tell me, Vin," Kelsier said, leaning forward with interest. "Do you realize what you did to that obligator in the Canton of Finance?"

"I used my Luck," Vin said quietly. "I use it to make people less angry."

"Or less suspicious," Kelsier said. "Easier to scam."

Vin nodded.

Kelsier held up a finger. "There are a lot of things you're going to have to learn. Techniques, rules, and exercises. One lesson, however, cannot wait. *Never* use emotional Allomancy on an obligator. They're all trained to recognize when their passions are being manipulated. Even the high nobility are forbidden from Pulling or Pushing the emotions of an obligator. You are what caused that obligator to send for an Inquisitor."

"Pray the creature never catches your trail again, lass," Dockson said quietly, sipping his wine.

Vin paled. "You didn't kill the Inquisitor?"

Kelsier shook his head. "I just distracted him for a bit—which was quite dangerous enough, I might add. Don't worry, many of the rumors about them aren't true. Now that he's lost your trail, he won't be able to find you again."

"Most likely," Dockson said.

Vin glanced at the shorter man apprehensively.

"Most likely," Kelsier agreed. "There are a lot of things we don't know about the Inquisitors—they don't seem to follow the normal rules. Those spikes through their eyes, for instance, should kill them. Nothing I've learned about Allomancy has ever provided an explanation for how those creatures keep living. If it were only a regular Misting Seeker on your trail, we wouldn't need to worry. An Inquistor . . . well, you'll want to keep your eyes open. Of course, you already seem pretty good at that."

Vin sat uncomfortably for a moment. Eventually, Kelsier nodded to her mug of ale. "You aren't drinking."

"You might have slipped something in it," Vin said.

"Oh, there was no need for me to sneak something into your drink," Kelsier said with a smile, pulling an object out of his suit coat pocket. "After all, you're going to drink this vial of mysterious liquid quite willingly."

He set a small glass vial on the tabletop. Vin frowned, regarding the liquid within. There was a dark residue at its bottom. "What is it?" she asked.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be mysterious," Kelsier said with a smile.

Dockson rolled his eyes. "The vial is filled with an alcohol solution and some flakes of metal, Vin."

"Metal?" she asked with a frown.

"Two of the eight basic Allomantic metals," Kelsier said. "We need to do some tests."

Vin eyed the vial.

Kelsier shrugged. "You'll have to drink it if you want to know any more about this Luck of yours."

"You drink half first," Vin said.

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "A bit on the paranoid side, I see."

Vin didn't respond.

Finally, he sighed, picking up the vial and pulling off the plug.

"Shake it up first," Vin said. "So you get some of the sediment."

Kelsier rolled his eyes, but did as requested, shaking the vial, then downing half of its contents. He set it back on the table with a click.

Vin frowned. Then she eyed Kelsier, who smiled. He knew that he had her. He had shown off his power, had tempted her with it. *The only reason to be subservient to those with power is so that you can learn to someday take what they have.*

Reen's words.

Vin reached out and took the vial, then she downed its contents. She sat, waiting for some magical transformation or surge of power—or even signs of poison. She felt nothing.

*How . . . anticlimactic.* She frowned, leaning back in her chair. Out of curiosity, she felt at her Luck.

And felt her eyes widen in shock.

It was there, like a massive golden hoard. A storage of power so incredible that it stretched her understanding. Always before, she had needed to be a scrimp with her Luck, holding it in reserve, using up morsels sparingly. Now she felt like a starving woman invited to a high nobleman's feast. She sat, stunned, regarding the enormous wealth within her.

"So," Kelsier said with a prodding voice. "Try it. Soothe me."

Vin reached out, tentatively touching her newfound mass of Luck. She took a bit, and directed it at Kelsier.

"Good." Kelsier leaned forward eagerly. "But we already knew you could do that. Now the real test, Vin. Can you go the other way? You can dampen my emotions, but can you enflame them too?"

Vin frowned. She'd never used her Luck in such a way; she hadn't even realized that she could. Why was he so eager?

Suspicious, Vin reached for her source of Luck. As she did so, she noticed something interesting. What she had first interpreted as one massive source of power was actually two different sources of power. There were different types of Luck.

*Eight. He'd said there were eight of them. But . . . what do the others do?*

Kelsier was still waiting. Vin reached to the second, unfamiliar source of Luck, doing as she'd done before and directing it at him.

Kelsier's smile deepened, and he sat back, glancing at Dockson. "That's it then. She did it."

Dockson shook his head. "To be honest, Kell, I'm not sure what to think. Having one of you around was unsettling enough. Two, though . . ."

Vin regarded them with narrowed, dubious eyes. "Two what?"

"Even among the nobility, Vin, Allomancy is modestly rare," Kelsier said. "True, it's a hereditary skill, with most of its powerful lines among the high nobility. However, breeding alone doesn't guarantee Allomantic strength.

"Many high noblemen only have access to a single Allomantic skill. People like that—those who can only perform Allomancy in one of its eight basic aspects—are called Mistings. Sometimes these abilities appear in skaa—but only if that skaa has noble blood in his or her near ancestry. You can usually find one Misting in . . . oh, about ten thousand mixed-breed skaa. The better, and closer, the noble ancestry, the more likely the skaa is to be a Misting."

"Who were your parents, Vin?" Dockson asked. "Do you remember them?"

"I was raised by my half brother, Reen," Vin said quietly, uncomfortable. These were not things she discussed with others.

"Did he speak of your mother and father?" Dockson asked.

"Occasionally," she admitted. "Reen said that our mother was a whore. Not out of choice, but the underworld . . ." She trailed off. Her mother had tried to kill her, once, when she was very young. She vaguely remembered the event. Reen had saved her.

"What about your father, Vin?" Dockson asked.

Vin looked up. "He is a high prelan in the Steel Ministry."

Kelsier whistled softly. "Now, *that's* a slightly ironic breach of duty."

Vin looked down at the table. Finally, she reached over and took a healthy pull on her mug of ale.

Kelsier smiled. "Most ranking obligators in the Ministry are high noblemen. Your father gave you a rare gift in that blood of yours."

"So . . . I'm one of these Mistings you mentioned?"

Kelsier shook his head. "Actually, no. You see, this is what made you so interesting to us, Vin. Mistings only have access to one Allomantic skill. You just proved you have two. And, if you have access to at least two of the eight, then you have access to the rest as well. That's the way it works—if you're an Allomancer, you either get one skill or you get them all."

Kelsier leaned forward. "You, Vin, are what is generally called a Mistborn. Even amongst the nobility, they're incredibly rare. Amongst skaa . . . well, let's just say I've only met one other skaa Mistborn in my entire life."

Somehow, the room seemed to grow more quiet. More still. Vin stared at her mug with distracted, uncomfortable eyes. *Mistborn*. She'd heard the stories, of course. The legends.

Kelsier and Dockson sat quietly, letting her think. Eventually, she spoke. "So . . . what does this all mean?"

Kelsier smiled. "It means that you, Vin, are a very special person. You have a power that most high noblemen envy. It is a power that, had you been born an aristocrat, would have made you one of the most deadly and influential people in all of the Final Empire."

Kelsier leaned forward again. "But, you weren't born an aristocrat. You're not noble, Vin. You don't have to play by their rules—and that makes you even *more* powerful."

*Apparently, the next stage of my quest will take us up into the highlands of Terris. This is said to be a cold, unforgiving place—a land where the mountains themselves are made of ice.*

*Our normal attendants will not do for such a trip. We should probably hire some Terris packmen to carry our gear.*

## 4

“YOU HEARD WHAT HE SAID! He’s planning a job.” Ulef’s eyes shone with excitement. “I wonder which of the Great Houses he’s going to strike.”

“It’ll be one of the most powerful ones,” said Disten, one of Camon’s head pointmen. He was missing a hand, but his eyes and ears were among the keenest in the crew. “Kelsier never bothers himself with small-time jobs.”

Vin sat quietly, her mug of ale—the same one Kelsier had given her—still sitting mostly full on the tabletop. Her table was crowded with people; Kelsier had let the thieves return to their home for a bit before his meeting began. Vin, however, would have preferred to remain by herself. Life with Reen had accustomed her to loneliness—if you let someone get too close, it would just give them better opportunities to betray you.

Even after Reen’s disappearance, Vin had kept to herself. She hadn’t been willing to leave; however, she also hadn’t felt the need to become familiar with the other crewmembers. They had, in turn, been perfectly willing to let her alone. Vin’s position had been precarious, and associating with her could have tainted them by association. Only Ulef had made any moves to befriend her.

*If you let someone get close to you, it will only hurt more when they betray you,* Reen seemed to whisper in her mind.

Had Ulef even really been her friend? He’d certainly sold her out quickly enough. In addition, the crewmembers had taken Vin’s beating and sudden rescue in stride, never mentioning their betrayal or refusal to help her. They’d only done what was expected.

“The Survivor hasn’t bothered himself with *any* jobs lately,” said Harmon, an older, scraggly-bearded burglar. “He’s barely been seen in Luthadel a handful of times during the last few years. In fact, he hasn’t pulled any jobs since . . .”

“This is the first one?” Ulef asked eagerly. “The first since he escaped the Pits? Then it's bound to be something spectacular!"

"Did he say anything about it, Vin?" Disten asked. "Vin?" He waved a stumpy arm in her direction, catching her attention.

"What?" she asked, looking up. She had cleaned herself slightly since her beating at Camon's hand, finally accepting a handkerchief from Dockson to wipe the blood from her face. There was little she could do about the bruises, however. Those still throbbed. Hopefully, nothing was broken.

"Kelsier," Disten repeated. "Did he say anything about the job he's planning?"

Vin shook her head. She glanced down at the bloodied handkerchief. Kelsier and Dockson had left a short time ago, promising to return after she'd had some time to think about the things they had told her. There was an implication in their words, however—an offer. Whatever job they were planning, she was invited to participate.

"Why'd he pick you to be his twixt, anyway, Vin?" Ulef asked. "Did he say anything about that?"

That's what the crew assumed—that Kelsier had chosen her to be his contact with Camon's . . . Milev's . . . crew.

There were two sides to the Luthadel underground. There were the regular crews, like Camon's. Then there were . . . the *special* ones. Groups composed of the extremely skillful, the extremely foolhardy, or the extremely talented. Allomancers.

The two sides of the underworld didn't mix; regular thieves left their betters alone. However, occasionally one of these Misting crews hired a regular team to do some of its more mundane work, and they would choose a twixt—a go-between—to work with both crews. Hence Ulef's assumption about Vin.

Milev's crewmembers noticed her unresponsiveness, and turned to another topic: Mistings. They spoke of Allomancy with uncertain, whispered tones, and she listened, uncomfortable. How could she be associated with something they held in such awe? Her Luck . . . her Allomancy . . . was something small, something she used to survive, but something really quite unimportant.

*But, such power* . . . she thought, looking in at her Luck reserve.

"What's Kelsier been doing these last few years, I wonder?" Ulef asked. He had seemed a bit uncomfortable around her at the beginning of the conversation, but that had passed quickly. He'd betrayed her, but this was the underworld. No friends.

*It didn't seem that way between Kelsier and Dockson. They appeared to* *trust each other.* A front? Or were they simply one of those rare teams that actually didn't worry about each other's betrayal?

The most unsettling thing about Kelsier and Dockson had been their openness with her. They seemed willing to trust, even accept, Vin after a relatively short time. It couldn't be genuine—no one could survive in the underworld following such tactics. Still, their friendliness was disconcerting.

"Two years . . ." said Hrud, a flat-faced, quiet thug. "He must have spent the entire time planning for this job."

"It must be some job indeed. . . ." Ulef said.

"Tell me about him," Vin said quietly.

"Kelsier?" Disten asked.

Vin nodded.

"They didn't talk about Kelsier down south?"

Vin shook her head.

"He was the best crewleader in Luthadel," Ulef explained. "A legend, even among the Mistings. He robbed some of the wealthiest Great Houses in the city."

"And?" Vin asked.

"Someone betrayed him," Harmon said in a quiet voice.

*Of course,* Vin thought.

"The Lord Ruler himself caught Kelsier," Ulef said. "Sent Kelsier and his wife to the Pits of Hathsin. But *he escaped.* He escaped from the Pits, Vin! He's the only one who ever has."

"And the wife?" Vin asked.

Ulef glanced at Harmon, who shook his head. "She didn't make it."

*So, he's lost someone too. How can he laugh so much? So honestly?*

"That's where he got those scars, you know," Disten said. "The ones on his arms. He got them at the Pits, from the rocks on a sheer wall he had to climb to escape."

Harmon snorted. "That's not how he got them. He killed an Inquisitor while escaping—that's where he got the scars."

"I heard he got them fighting one of the monsters that guard the Pits," Ulef said. "He reached into its mouth and strangled it *from the inside.* The teeth scraped his arms."

Disten frowned. "How do you strangle someone from the inside?"

Ulef shrugged. "That's just what I heard."

"The man isn't natural," Hrud muttered. "Something happened to him in the Pits, something bad. He wasn't an Allomancer before then, you know. He entered the Pits a regular skaa, and now . . . Well, he's a Misting for sure—if he's even human anymore. Been out in the mists a lot, that one has. Some say that the real Kelsier is dead, that the thing wearing his face is . . . something else."

Harmon shook his head. "Now, that's just plantation-skaa foolishness. We've all gone out in the mists."

"Not in the mists outside the city," Hrud insisted. "The mistwraiths are out there. They'll grab a man and take his face, sure as the Lord Ruler."

Harmon rolled his eyes.

"Hrud's right about one thing," Disten said. "That man isn't human. He might not be a mistwraith, but he's not skaa either. I've heard of him doing things, things like only *they* can do. The ones that come out at night. You saw what he did to Camon."

"Mistborn," Harmon muttered.

*Mistborn.* Vin had heard the term before Kelsier had mentioned it to her, of course. Who hadn't? Yet, the rumors about Mistborn made stories of Inquisitors and Mistings seem rational. It was said that Mistborn were heralds of the mists themselves, endowed with great powers by the Lord Ruler. Only high noblemen could be Mistborn; they were said to be a secret sect of assassins who served him, only going out at night. Reen had always taught her that they were a myth, and Vin had assumed he was right.

*And Kelsier says I—like he himself—am one of them.* How could she be what he said? Child of a prostitute, she was nobody. She was nothing.

*Never trust a man who tells you good news,* Reen had always said. *It's the oldest, but easiest, way to con someone.*

Yet, she did have her Luck. Her Allomancy. She could still sense the reserves Kelsier's vial had given her, and had tested her powers on the crewmembers. No longer limited to just a bit of Luck a day, she found she could produce far more striking effects.

Vin was coming to realize that her old goal in life—simply staying alive—was uninspired. There was so much more she could be doing. She had been a slave to Reen; she had been a slave to Camon. She would be a slave to this Kelsier too, if it would lead her to eventual freedom.

At his table, Milev looked at his pocket watch, then stood. "All right, everyone out."

The room began to clear in preparation for Kelsier's meeting. Vin remained where she was; Kelsier had made it quite clear to the others that she was invited. She sat quietly for a bit, the room feeling far more comfortable to her now that it was empty. Kelsier's friends began to arrive a short time later.

The first man down the steps had the build of a soldier. He wore a loose, sleeveless shirt that exposed a pair of well-sculpted arms. He was impressively muscular, but not massive, and had close-cropped hair that stuck up slightly on his head.

The soldier's companion was a sharply dressed man in a nobleman's suit—plum vest, gold buttons, black overcoat—complete with short-brimmed hat and dueling cane. He was older than the soldier, and was a bit portly. He removed his hat upon entering the room, revealing a head of well-styled black hair. The two men were chatting amiably as they walked, but they paused when they saw the empty room.

"Ah, this must be our twixt," said the man in the suit. "Has Kelsier arrived yet, my dear?" He spoke with a simple familiarity, as if they were longtime friends. Suddenly, despite herself, Vin found herself liking this well-dressed, articulate man.

"No," she said quietly. Though overalls and a work shirt had always suited her, she suddenly wished that she owned something nicer. This man's very bearing seemed to demand a more formal atmosphere.

"Should have known that Kell would be late to his own meeting," the soldier said, sitting down at one of the tables near the center of the room.

"Indeed," said the suited man. "I suppose his tardiness leaves us with a chance for some refreshment. I could so use something to drink. . . ."

"Let me get you something," Vin said quickly, jumping to her feet.

"How gracious of you," the suited man said, choosing a chair next to the soldier. He sat with one leg crossed over the other, his dueling cane held to the side, tip against the floor, one hand resting on the top.

Vin walked to the bar and began rummaging for drinks.

"Breeze . . ." the soldier said with a warning tone as Vin selected a bottle of Camon's most expensive wine and began pouring a cup.

"Hum . . .?" the suited man said, raising an eyebrow.

The soldier nodded toward Vin.

"Oh, very well," the suited man said with a sigh.

Vin paused, wine half poured, and frowned slightly. *What am I doing?*

"I swear, Ham," the suited man said, "you are dreadfully stiff sometimes."

"Just because you can Push someone around doesn't mean you should, Breeze."

Vin stood, dumbfounded. *He . . . used Luck on me.* When Kelsier had tried to manipulate her, she'd felt his touch and had been able to resist. This time, however, she hadn't even realized what she was doing.

She looked up at the man, thinning her eyes. "Mistborn."

The suited man, Breeze, chuckled. "Hardly. Kelsier's the only skaa Mistborn you're likely to ever meet, my dear—and pray you never are in a situation where you meet a noble one. No, I am just an ordinary, humble Misting."

"Humble?" Ham asked.

Breeze shrugged.

Vin looked down at the half-full cup of wine. "You Pulled on my emotions. With . . . Allomancy, I mean."

"I Pushed on them, actually," Breeze said. "Pulling makes a person less trusting and more determined. Pushing on emotions—Soothing them—makes a person more trusting."

"Regardless, you controlled me," Vin said. "You made me fetch you a drink."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that I *made* you do it," Breeze said. "I just altered your emotions slightly, putting you in a frame of mind where you'd be more likely to do as I wished."

Ham rubbed his chin. "I don't know, Breeze. It's an interesting question. By influencing her emotions, did you take away her ability to choose? If, for instance, she were to kill or steal while under your control, would the crime be hers or yours?"

Breeze rolled his eyes. "There's really no question to it at all. You shouldn't think about such things, Hammond—you'll hurt your brain. I offered her encouragement, I simply did it through an irregular means."

"But—"

"I'm not going to argue it with you, Ham."

The beefy man sighed, looking a little bit forlorn.

"Are you going to bring me the drink . . .?" Breeze asked hopefully, looking at Vin. "I mean, you're already up, and you're going to have to come back this direction to reach your seat anyway. . . ."

Vin examined her emotions. Did she feel irregularly drawn to do as the man asked? Was he manipulating her again? Finally, she simply walked away from the bar, leaving the drink where it was.

Breeze sighed. He didn't stand to go get the drink himself, however.

Vin walked tentatively toward the two men's table. She was accustomed to shadows and corners—close enough to eavesdrop, but far enough away to escape. Yet, she couldn't hide from these men—not while the room was so empty. So, she chose a chair at the table beside the one that the two men were using, then sat cautiously. She needed information—as long as she was ignorant, she was going to be at a severe disadvantage in this new world of Misting crews.

Breeze chuckled. "Nervous little thing, aren't you?"

Vin ignored the comment. "You," Vin said, nodding to Ham. "You're a . . . a Misting too?"

Ham nodded. "I'm a Thug."

Vin frowned in confusion.

"I burn pewter," Ham said.

Again, Vin looked at him questioningly.

"He can make himself stronger, my dear," Breeze said. "He hits things—particularly other people—who try to interfere with what the rest of us are doing."

"There's much more to it than that," Ham said. "I run general security for jobs, providing my crewleader with manpower and warriors, assuming such are necessary."

"And he'll try and bore you with random philosophy when it isn't," Breeze added.

Ham sighed. "Breeze, honestly, sometimes I don't know why I . . ." Ham trailed off as the door opened again, admitting another man.

The newcomer wore a dull tan overcoat, a pair of brown trousers, and a simple white shirt. However, his face was far more distinctive than his clothing. It was knotted and gnarled, like a twisted piece of wood, and his eyes shone with the level of disapproving dissatisfaction only the elderly can display. Vin couldn't quite place his age—he was young enough that he wasn't stooped over, yet he was old enough that he made even the middle-aged Breeze look youthful.

The newcomer looked over Vin and the others, huffed disdainfully, then walked to a table on the other side of the room and sat down. His steps were marked by a distinct limp.

Breeze sighed. "I'm going to miss Trap."

"We all will," Ham said quietly. "Clubs is very good, though. I've worked with him before."

Breeze studied the newcomer. "I wonder if I could get *him* to bring my drink over. . . ."

Ham chuckled. "I'd pay money to see you try it."

"I'm sure you would," Breeze said.

Vin eyed the newcomer, who seemed perfectly content to ignore her and the other two men. "What's he?"

"Clubs?" Breeze asked. "He, my dear, is a Smoker. He is what will keep the rest of us from being discovered by an Inquisitor."

Vin chewed on her lip, digesting the new information as she studied Clubs. The man shot her a glare, and she looked away. As she turned, she noticed that Ham was looking at her.

"I like you, kid," he said. "The other twixts I've worked with have either been too intimidated to talk to us, or they've been jealous of us for moving into their territory."

"Indeed," Breeze said. "You're not like most crumbs. Of course, I'd like you a great deal more if you'd go fetch me that glass of wine. . . ."

Vin ignored him, glancing at Ham. "Crumb?"

"That's what some of the more self-important members of our society call lesser thieves," Ham said. "They call you crumbs, since you tend to be involved with . . . less inspired projects."

"No offense intended, of course," Breeze said.

"Oh, I wouldn't ever take offense at—" Vin paused, feeling an irregular desire to please the well-dressed man. She glared at Breeze. "Stop that!"

"See, there," Breeze said, glancing at Ham. "She still retains her ability to choose."

"You're hopeless."

*They assume I'm a twixt,* Vin thought. *So Kelsier hasn't told them what I am. Why?* Time constraints? Or, was the secret too valuable to share? How trustworthy were these men? And, if they thought her a simple "crumb," why were they being so nice to her?

"Who else are we waiting upon?" Breeze asked, glancing at the doorway. "Besides Kell and Dox, I mean."

"Yeden," Ham said.

Breeze frowned with a sour expression. "Ah, yes."

"I agree," Ham said. "But, I'd be willing to bet that he feels the same way about us."

"I don't even see why he was invited," Breeze said.

Ham shrugged. "Something to do with Kell's plan, obviously."

"Ah, the infamous 'plan,' " Breeze said musingly. "What job could it be, what indeed . . .?"

Ham shook his head. "Kell and his cursed sense of drama."

"Indeed."

The door opened a few moments later, and the one they had spoken of, Yeden, entered. He turned out to be an unassuming man, and Vin had trouble understanding why the other two were so displeased about his attendance. Short with curly brown hair, Yeden was dressed in simple gray skaa clothing and a patched, soot-stained brown worker's coat. He regarded the surroundings with a look of disapproval, but he was nowhere near as openly hostile as Clubs, who still sat on the other side of the room scowling at anyone who looked in his direction.

*Not a very big crew,* Vin thought. *With Kelsier and Dockson, that makes six of them.* Of course, Ham had said that he led a group of "Thugs." Were the men at this meeting simply representatives? The leaders of smaller, more specialized groups? Some crews worked that way.

Breeze checked his pocket watch three more times before Kelsier finally arrived. The Mistborn crewleader burst through the door with his cheery enthusiasm, Dockson sauntering along behind. Ham stood immediately, smiling broadly and clasping hands with Kelsier. Breeze stood as well, and while his greeting was a bit more reserved, Vin had to admit that she had never seen any crewleader welcomed so happily by his men.

"Ah," Kelsier said, looking toward the other side of the room. "Clubs and Yeden too. So, everyone's here. Good—I absolutely loathe being made to wait."

Breeze raised an eyebrow as he and Ham settled back into their chairs, Dockson taking a seat at the same table. "Are we to receive any explanation for your tardiness?"

"Dockson and I were visiting my brother," Kelsier explained, walking toward the front of the lair. He turned and leaned back against the bar, scanning the room. When Kelsier's eyes fell on Vin, he winked.

"Your brother?" Ham said. "Is Marsh coming to the meeting?"

Kelsier and Dockson shared a look. "Not tonight," Kelsier said. "But he'll join the crew eventually."

Vin studied the others. They were skeptical. *Tension between Kelsier and his brother, perhaps?*

Breeze raised his dueling cane, pointing the tip at Kelsier. "All right, Kelsier, you've kept this 'job' secret from us for eight months now. We know it's big, we know you're excited, and we're all properly annoyed at you for being so secretive. So, why don't you just go ahead and tell us what it is?"

Kelsier smiled. Then he stood up straight, waving a hand toward the dirty, plain-looking Yeden. "Gentlemen, meet your new employer."

This was, apparently, quite a shocking statement.

"*Him?*" Ham asked.

"Him," Kelsier said with a nod.

"What?" Yeden asked, speaking for the first time. "You have trouble working with someone who actually has morals?"

"It's not that, my dear man," Breeze said, setting his dueling cane across his lap. "It's just that, well, I was under the strange impression that you didn't *like* our types very much."

"I don't," Yeden said flatly. "You're selfish, undisciplined, and you've turned your backs on the rest of the skaa. You dress nicely, but on the inside you're dirty as ash."

Ham snorted. "I can already see that this job is going to be *great* for crew morale."

Vin watched quietly, chewing on her lip. Yeden was obviously a skaa worker, probably a member of a forge or textile mill. What connection did he have with the underground? And . . . how would he be able to afford the services of a thieving crew, especially one as apparently specialized as Kelsier's team?

Perhaps Kelsier noticed her confusion, for she found him looking at her as the others continued to speak.

"I'm still a little confused," Ham said. "Yeden, we're all aware of how you regard thieves. So . . . why hire us?"

Yeden squirmed a bit. "Because," he finally said, "everyone knows how effective you are."

Breeze chuckled. "Disapproving of our morals doesn't make you unwilling to make use of our skills, I see. So, what is the job, then? What does the skaa rebellion wish of us?"

*Skaa rebellion?* Vin thought, a piece of the conversation falling into place. There were two sides to the underworld. The far larger portion was made up of the thieves, crews, whores, and beggars who tried to survive outside of mainstream skaa culture.

And then there were the rebels. The people who worked against the Final Empire. Reen had always called them fools—a sentiment shared by most of the people, both underworlders and regular skaa, that Vin had met.

All eyes slowly turned to Kelsier, who leaned back against the bar again. "The skaa rebellion, courtesy of its leader, Yeden, has hired us for something very specific."

"What?" Ham asked. "Robbery? Assassination?"

"A little of both," Kelsier said, "and, at the same time, neither one. Gentlemen, this isn't going to be a regular job. It's going to be different from anything any crew has ever tried to pull. We're going to help Yeden overthrow the Final Empire."

Silence.

"Excuse me?" Ham asked.

"You heard me right, Ham," Kelsier said. "That's the job I've been planning—the destruction of the Final Empire. Or, at least, its center of government. Yeden has hired us to supply him with an army, then provide him with a favorable opportunity to seize control of this city."

Ham sat back, then shared a glance with Breeze. Both men turned toward Dockson, who nodded solemnly. The room remained quiet for a moment longer; then the silence was broken as Yeden began to laugh ruefully to himself.

"I should never have agreed to this," Yeden said, shaking his head. "Now that you say it, I realize how ridiculous it all sounds."

"Trust me, Yeden," Kelsier said. "These men have made a habit of pulling off plans that seem ridiculous at first glance."

"That may be true, Kell," Breeze said. "But, in this case, I find myself agreeing with our disapproving friend. Overthrow the Final Empire . . . that is something that skaa rebels have been working toward for a thousand years! What makes you think that we can achieve anything where those men have failed?"

Kelsier smiled. "We'll succeed because we have vision, Breeze. That's something the rebellion has always lacked."

"Excuse me?" Yeden said indignantly.

"It's true, unfortunately," Kelsier said. "The rebellion condemns people like us because of our greed, but for all their high morals—which, by the way, I respect—they never get anything done. Yeden, your men hide in woods and in hills, plotting how they'll someday rise up and lead a glorious war against the Final Empire. But your kind has no idea how to develop and execute a proper plan."

Yeden's expression grew dark. "And *you* have no idea what you are talking about."

"Oh?" Kelsier said lightly. "Tell me, what has your rebellion accomplished during its thousand-year struggle? Where are your successes and your victories? The Massacre of Tougier three centuries ago, where seven thousand skaa rebels were slaughtered? The occasional raid of a traveling canal boat or the kidnapping of a minor noble official?"

Yeden flushed. "That's the best we can manage with the people we have! Don't blame my men for their failures—blame the rest of the skaa. We can't ever get them to help. They've been beaten down for a millennium; they haven't got any spirit left. It's difficult enough to get one in a thousand to listen to us, let alone rebel!"

"Peace, Yeden," Kelsier said, holding up a hand. "I'm not trying to insult your courage. We're on the same side, remember? You came to me specifically because you were having trouble recruiting people for your army."

"I'm regretting that decision more and more, thief," Yeden said.

"Well, you've already paid us," Kelsier said. "So it's a little late to back out now. But, we'll get you that army, Yeden. The men in this room are the most capable, most clever, and most skilled Allomancers in the city. You'll see."

The room grew quiet again. Vin sat at her table, watching the interaction with a frown. *What is your game, Kelsier?* His words about overthrowing the Final Empire were obviously a front. It seemed most likely to her that he intended to scam the skaa rebellion. But . . . if he'd already been paid, then why continue the charade?

Kelsier turned from Yeden to Breeze and Ham. "All right, gentlemen. What do you think?"

The two men shared a look. Finally Breeze spoke. "Lord Ruler knows, I've never been one to turn down a challenge. But, Kell, I do question your reasoning. Are you sure we can do this?"

"I'm positive," Kelsier said. "Previous attempts to overthrow the Lord Ruler have failed because they lacked proper organization and planning. We're thieves, gentlemen—and we're extraordinarily good ones. We can rob the unrobbable and fool the unfoolable. We know how to take an incredibly large task and break it down to manageable pieces, then deal with each of those pieces. We know how to get what we want. These things make us perfect for this particular task."

Breeze frowned. "And . . . how much are we getting paid for achieving the impossible?"

"Thirty thousand boxings," Yeden said. "Half now, half when you deliver the army."

"Thirty thousand?" Ham said. "For an operation this big? That will barely cover expenses. We'll need a spy among the nobility to watch for rumors, we'll need a couple of safe houses, not to mention someplace big enough to hide and train an entire army. . . ."

"No use haggling now, thief," Yeden snapped. "Thirty thousand may not sound like much to *your* type, but it's the result of decades of saving on our part. We can't pay you more because we don't have anything more."

"It's good work, gentlemen," Dockson noted, joining the conversation for the first time.

"Yes, well, that's all great," Breeze said. "I consider myself a nice enough fellow. But . . . this just seems a bit too altruistic. Not to mention stupid."

"Well . . ." Kelsier said, "there might be a little bit more in it for us. . . ."

Vin perked up, and Breeze smiled.

"The Lord Ruler's treasury," Kelsier said. "The plan, as it stands now, is to provide Yeden with an army and an opportunity to seize the city. Once he takes the palace, he'll capture the treasury and use its funds to secure power. And, central to that treasury . . ."

"Is the Lord Ruler's atium," Breeze said.

Kelsier nodded. "Our agreement with Yeden promises us half of the atium reserves we find in the palace, no matter how vast they may be."

Atium. Vin had heard of the metal, but she had never actually seen any. It was incredibly rare, supposedly used only by noblemen.

Ham was smiling. "Well, now," he said slowly, "that's almost a big enough prize to be tempting."

"That atium stockpile is supposed to be enormous," Kelsier said. "The Lord Ruler sells the metal only in small bits, charging outrageous sums to the nobility. He *has* to keep a huge reserve of it to make certain he controls the market, and to make certain he has enough wealth for emergencies."

"True . . ." Breeze said. "But, are you sure you want to try something like this so soon after . . . what happened the last time we tried getting into the palace?"

"We're going to do things differently this time," Kelsier said. "Gentlemen, I'll be frank with you. This isn't going to be an easy job, but it *can* work. The plan is simple. We're going to find a way to neutralize the Luthadel Garrison—leaving the area without a policing force. Then, we're going to throw the city into chaos."

"We've got a couple of options on how to do that," Dockson said. "But we can talk about that later."

Kelsier nodded. "Then, in that chaos, Yeden will march his army into Luthadel and seize the palace, taking the Lord Ruler prisoner. While Yeden secures the city, we'll pilfer the atium. We'll give half to him, then disappear with the other half. After that, it's his job to hang on to what he's grabbed."

"Sounds a little dangerous for you, Yeden," Ham noted, glancing at the rebel leader.

He shrugged. “Perhaps. But, if we do, by some miracle, end up in control of the palace, then we’ll have at least done something no skaa rebellion has ever achieved before. For my men, this isn’t just about riches—it isn’t even about surviving. It’s about doing something grand, something wonderful, to give the skaa hope. But, I don’t expect you people to understand things like that.”

Kelsier shot a quieting glance at Yeden, and the man sniffed and sat back. *Did he use Allomancy?* Vin wondered. She’d seen employer-crew relationships before, and it seemed that Yeden was much more in Kelsier’s pocket than the other way around.

Kelsier turned back to Ham and Breeze. “There’s more to all this than simply a show of daring. If we do manage to steal that atium, it will be a sound blow to the Lord Ruler’s financial foundation. He depends on the money that atium provides—without it, he could very well be left without the means to pay his armies.

“Even if he escapes our trap—or, if we decide to take the city when he’s gone to minimize having to deal with him—he’ll be financially ruined. He won’t be able to march soldiers in to take the city away from Yeden. If this works right, we’ll have the city in chaos anyway, and the nobility will be too weak to react against the rebel forces. The Lord Ruler will be left confused, and unable to mount a sizable army.”

“And the koloss?” Ham asked quietly.

Kelsier paused. “If he marches those creatures on his own capital city, the destruction it would cause could be even more dangerous than financial instability. In the chaos, the provincial noblemen will rebel and set themselves up as kings, and the Lord Ruler won’t have the troops to bring them into line. Yeden’s rebels will be able to hold Luthadel, and we, my friends, will be very, very rich. Everyone gets what they want.”

“You’re forgetting the Steel Ministry,” Clubs snapped, sitting almost forgotten at the side of the room. “Those Inquisitors won’t just let us throw their pretty theocracy into chaos.”

Kelsier paused, turning toward the gnarled man. “We will have to find a way to deal with the Ministry—I’ve got a few plans for that. Either way, problems like that are the things that we—as a crew—will have to work out. We have to get rid of the Luthadel Garrison—there’s no way we’ll be able to get anything done with them policing the streets. We’ll have to come up with an appropriate way to throw the city into chaos, and we’ll have to find a way to keep the obligators off our trail.

“But, if we play this right, we might be able to force the Lord Ruler to send the palace guard—maybe even the Inquisitors—into the city to restore order. That will leave the palace itself exposed, giving Yeden a perfect opportunity to strike. After that, it won't matter what happens with the Ministry or the Garrison—the Lord Ruler won't have the money to maintain control of his empire."

"I don't know, Kell," Breeze said, shaking his head. His flippancy was subdued; he seemed to be honestly considering the plan. "The Lord Ruler got that atium somewhere. What if he just goes and mines some more?"

Ham nodded. "No one even knows where the atium mine is."

"I wouldn't say *no one*," Kelsier said with a smile.

Breeze and Ham shared a look.

"You know?" Ham asked.

"Of course," Kelsier said. "I spent a year of my life working there."

"The Pits?" Ham asked with surprise.

Kelsier nodded. "That's why the Lord Ruler makes certain nobody survives working there—he can't afford to let his secret out. It's not just a penal colony, not just a hellhole where skaa are sent to die. It's a mine."

"Of course . . ." Breeze said.

Kelsier stood up straight, stepping away from the bar and walking toward Ham and Breeze's table. "We have a chance here, gentlemen. A chance to do something great—something no other thieving crew has ever done. We'll rob from the Lord Ruler himself!

"But, there's more. The Pits nearly killed me, and I've seen things . . . differently since I escaped. I see the skaa, working without hope. I see the thieving crews, trying to survive on aristocratic leavings, often getting themselves—and other skaa—killed in the process. I see the skaa rebellion trying so hard to resist the Lord Ruler, and never making any progress.

"The rebellion fails because it's too unwieldy and spread out. Anytime one of its many pieces gains momentum, the Steel Ministry crushes it. That's not the way to defeat the Final Empire, gentlemen. But, a small team—specialized and highly skilled—has a hope. We can work without great risk of exposure. We know how to avoid the Steel Ministry's tendrils. We understand how the high nobility thinks, and how to exploit its members. We can do this!"

He paused beside Breeze and Ham's table.

"I don't know, Kell," Ham said. "It's not that I'm disagreeing with your motives. It's just that . . . well, this seems a bit foolhardy."

Kelsier smiled. "I know it does. But you're going to go along with it anyway, aren't you?"

Ham paused, then nodded. "You know I'll join your crew no matter what the job. This sounds crazy, but so do most of your plans. Just . . . just tell me. Are you serious about overthrowing the Lord Ruler?"

Kelsier nodded. For some reason, Vin was almost tempted to believe him.

Ham nodded firmly. "All right, then. I'm in."

"Breeze?" Kelsier asked.

The well-dressed man shook his head. "I'm not sure, Kell. This is a bit extreme, even for you."

"We need you, Breeze," Kell said. "No one can Soothe a crowd like you can. If we're going to raise an army, we'll need your Allomancers—and your powers."

"Well, that much is true," Breeze said. "But, even still . . ."

Kelsier smiled, then he set something on the table—the cup of wine Vin had poured for Breeze. She hadn't even noticed that Kelsier had grabbed it off of the bar.

"Think of the challenge, Breeze," Kelsier said.

Breeze glanced at the cup, then looked up at Kelsier. Finally, he laughed, reaching for the wine. "Fine. I'm in."

"It's impossible," a gruff voice said from the back of the room. Clubs sat with folded arms, regarding Kelsier with a scowl. "What are you really planning, Kelsier?"

"I'm being honest," Kelsier replied. "I plan to take the Lord Ruler's atium and overthrow his empire."

"You can't," the man said. "It's idiocy. The Inquisitors will hang us all by hooks through our throats."

"Perhaps," Kelsier said. "But think of the reward if we succeed. Wealth, power, and a land where the skaa can live like men, rather than slaves."

Clubs snorted loudly. Then he stood, his chair toppling backward onto the floor behind him. "No reward would be enough. The Lord Ruler tried to have you killed once—I see that you won't be satisfied until he gets it right." With that, the older man turned and stalked in a limping gait from the room, slamming the door behind him.

The lair grew quiet.

"Well, guess we'll need a different Smoker," Dockson said.

"You're just going to let him go?" Yeden demanded. "He knows everything!"

Breeze chuckled. "Aren't you supposed to be the moral one in this little group?"

"Morals doesn't have anything to do with it," Yeden said. "Letting someone go like that is foolish! He could bring the obligators down on us in minutes."

Vin nodded in agreement, but Kelsier just shook his head. "I don't work that way, Yeden. I invited Clubs to a meeting where I outlined a dangerous plan—one some people might even call stupid. I'm not going to have him assassinated because he decided it was too dangerous. If you do things like that, pretty soon nobody will come listen to your plans in the first place."

"Besides," Dockson said. "We wouldn't invite someone to one of these meetings unless we trusted him not to betray us."

*Impossible,* Vin thought, frowning. He had to be bluffing to keep up crew morale; nobody was that trusting. After all, hadn't the others said that Kelsier's failure a few years before—the event that had sent him to the Pits of Hathsin—had come because of a betrayal? He probably had assassins following Clubs at that very moment, watching to make certain he didn't go to the authorities.

"All right, Yeden," Kelsier said, getting back to business. "They accepted. The plan is on. Are you still in?"

"Will you give the rebellion's money back if I say no?" Yeden asked.

The only response to that was a quiet chuckle from Ham. Yeden's expression darkened, but he just shook his head. "If I had any other option . . ."

"Oh, stop complaining," Kelsier said. "You're officially part of a thieving crew now, so you might as well come over here and sit with us."

Yeden paused for a moment, then sighed and walked over to sit at Breeze, Ham, and Dockson's table, beside which Kelsier was still standing. Vin still sat at the next table over.

Kelsier turned, looking over toward Vin. "What about you, Vin?"

She paused. *Why is he asking me? He already knows he has a hold over me. The job doesn't matter, as long as I learn what he knows.*

Kelsier waited expectantly.

"I'm in," Vin said, assuming that was what he wanted to hear.

She must have guessed correctly, for Kelsier smiled, then nodded to the last chair at the table.

Vin sighed, but did as he indicated, standing and walking over to take the last seat.

"Who is the child?" Yeden asked.

“Twixt,” Breeze said.

Kelsier cocked an eyebrow. “Actually, Vin is something of a new recruit. My brother caught her Soothing his emotions a few months back.”

“Soother, eh?” Ham asked. “Guess we can always use another of those.”

“Actually,” Kelsier noted, “it seems she can Riot people’s emotions as well.”

Breeze started.

“Really?” Ham asked.

Kelsier nodded. “Dox and I tested her just a few hours ago.”

Breeze chuckled. “And here I was telling her that she’d probably never meet another Mistborn besides yourself.”

“A second Mistborn on the team . . .” Ham said appreciatively. “Well, that increases our chances somewhat.”

“What are you saying?” Yeden sputtered. “Skaa can’t be Mistborn. I’m not even sure if Mistborn exist! *I’ve* certainly never met one.”

Breeze raised an eyebrow, then laid a hand on Yeden’s shoulder. “You should try not to talk so much, friend,” he suggested. “You’ll sound far less stupid that way.”

Yeden shook off Breeze’s hand, and Ham laughed. Vin, however, sat quietly, considering the implications of what Kelsier had said. The part about stealing the atium reserves was tempting, but seizing the city to do it? Were these men really that reckless?

Kelsier pulled a chair over to the table for himself and sat down on it the wrong way, resting his arms on the seatback. “All right,” he said. “We have a crew. We’ll plan specifics at the next meeting, but I want you all to be thinking about the job. I have some plans, but I want fresh minds to consider our task. We’ll need to discuss ways to get the Luthadel Garrison out of the city, and ways that we can throw this place into so much chaos that the Great Houses can’t mobilize their forces to stop Yeden’s army when it attacks.”

The members of the group, save Yeden, nodded.

“Before we end for the evening, however,” Kelsier continued, “there is one more part of the plan I want to warn you about.”

“More?” Breeze asked with a chuckle. “Stealing the Lord Ruler’s fortune and overthrowing his empire aren’t enough?”

“No,” Kelsier said. “If I can, I’m going to kill him too.”

Silence.

“Kelsier,” Ham said slowly. “The Lord Ruler is the Sliver of Infinity.

He's a piece of God Himself. You can't kill him. Even *capturing* him will probably prove impossible."

Kelsier didn't reply. His eyes, however, were determined.

*That's it,* Vin thought. *He has to be insane.*

"The Lord Ruler and I," Kelsier said quietly, "we have an unsettled debt. He took Mare from me, and he nearly took my own sanity as well. I'll admit to you all that part of my reason for this plan is to get revenge on him. We're going to take his government, his home, and his fortune from him.

"However, for that to work, we'll have to get rid of him. Perhaps imprison him in his own dungeons—at the very least, we'll have to get him out of the city. However, I can think of something far better than either option. Down those pits where he sent me, I Snapped and came to an awakening of my Allomantic powers. Now I intend to use them to kill him."

Kelsier reached into his suit pocket and pulled something out. He set it on the table.

"In the north, they have a legend," Kelsier said. "It teaches that the Lord Ruler isn't immortal—not completely. They say he can be killed with the right metal. The Eleventh Metal. That metal."

Eyes turned toward the object on the table. It was a thin bar of metal, perhaps as long and wide as Vin's small finger, with straight sides. It was silvery white in color.

"The Eleventh Metal?" Breeze asked uncertainly. "I've heard of no such legend."

"The Lord Ruler has suppressed it," Kelsier said. "But it can still be found, if you know where to look. Allomantic theory teaches of ten metals: the eight basic metals, and the two high metals. There is another one, however, unknown to most. One far more powerful, even, than the other ten."

Breeze frowned skeptically.

Yeden, however, appeared intrigued. "And, this metal can somehow kill the Lord Ruler?"

Kelsier nodded. "It's his weakness. The Steel Ministry wants you to believe that he's immortal, but even he can be killed—by an Allomancer burning this."

Ham reached out, picking up the thin bar of metal. "Where did you get it?"

"In the north," Kelsier said. "In a land near the Far Peninsula, a land where people still remember what their old kingdom was called in the days before the Ascension."

"How does it work?" Breeze asked.

"I'm not sure," Kelsier said frankly. "But I intend to find out."

Ham regarded the porcelain-colored metal, turning it over his fingers.

*Kill the Lord Ruler?* Vin thought. The Lord Ruler was a force, like the winds or the mists. One did not kill such things. They didn't live, really. They simply *were.*

"Regardless," Kelsier said, accepting the metal back from Ham, "you don't need to worry about this. Killing the Lord Ruler is my task. If it proves impossible, we'll settle for tricking him outside of the city, then robbing him silly. I just thought that you should know what I'm planning."

*I've bound myself to a madman,* Vin thought with resignation. But that didn't really matter—not as long as he taught her Allomancy.

*I don’t even understand what I’m supposed to do. The Terris philosophers claim that I’ll know my duty when the time comes, but that’s a small comfort.*

*The Deepness must be destroyed, and apparently I’m the only one who can do so. It ravages the world even now. If I don’t stop it soon, there will be nothing left of this land but bones and dust.*

# 5

“Aha!” Kelsier’s triumphant figure popped up from behind Camon’s bar, a look of satisfaction on his face. He brought his arm up and thunked a dusty wine bottle down on the countertop.

Dockson looked over with amusement. “Where’d you find it?”

“One of the secret drawers,” Kelsier said, dusting off the bottle.

“I thought I’d found all of those,” Dockson said.

“You did. One of them had a false back.”

Dockson chuckled. “Clever.”

Kelsier nodded, unstoppering the bottle and pouring out three cups. “The trick is to never stop looking. There’s *always* another secret.” He gathered up the three cups and walked over to join Vin and Dockson at the table.

Vin accepted her cup with a tentative hand. The meeting had ended a short time earlier, Breeze, Ham, and Yeden leaving to ponder the things Kelsier had told them. Vin felt that she should have left as well, but she had nowhere to go. Dockson and Kelsier seemed to take it for granted that she would remain with them.

Kelsier took a long sip of the rubicund wine, then smiled. “Ah, that’s *much* better.”

Dockson nodded in agreement, but Vin didn’t taste her own drink.

“We’re going to need another Smoker,” Dockson noted.

Kelsier nodded. “The others seemed to take it well, though.”

“Breeze is still uncertain,” Dockson said.

“He won’t back out. Breeze likes a challenge, and he’ll never find a challenge greater than this one.” Kelsier smiled. “Besides, it’d drive him insane to know that we were pulling a job that he wasn’t in on.”

“Still, he’s right to be apprehensive,” Dockson said. “I’m a little worried myself."

Kelsier nodded his agreement, and Vin frowned. *So, are they serious about the plan? Or is this still a show for my sake?* The two men seemed so competent. Yet, overthrowing the Final Empire? They'd sooner stop the mists from flowing or the sun from rising.

"When do your other friends get here?" Dockson asked.

"A couple days," Kelsier said. "We'll need to have another Smoker by then. I'm also going to need some more atium."

Dockson frowned. "Already?"

Kelsier nodded. "I spent most of it buying OreSeur's Contract, then used my last bit at Tresting's plantation."

*Tresting.* The nobleman who had been killed in his manor the week before. *How was Kelsier involved? And, what was it Kelsier said before about atium?* He'd claimed that the Lord Ruler kept control of the high nobility by maintaining a monopoly on the metal.

Dockson rubbed his bearded chin. "Atium's not easy to come by, Kell. It took nearly eight months of planning to steal you that last bit."

"That's because you had to be delicate," Kelsier said with a devious smile.

Dockson eyed Kelsier with a look of slight apprehension. Kelsier just smiled more broadly, and finally Dockson rolled his eyes, sighing. Then he glanced at Vin. "You haven't touched your drink."

Vin shook her head.

Dockson waited for an explanation, and eventually Vin was forced to respond. "I don't like to drink anything I didn't prepare myself."

Kelsier chuckled. "She reminds me of Vent."

"Vent?" Dockson said with a snort. "The lass is a bit paranoid, but she's not *that* bad. I swear, that man was so jumpy that his own heartbeat could startle him."

The two men shared a laugh. Vin, however, was only made more uncomfortable by the friendly air. *What do they expect from me? Am I to be an apprentice of some sort?*

"Well, then," Dockson said, "are you going to tell me how you plan on getting yourself some atium?"

Kelsier opened his mouth to respond, but the stairs clattered with the sound of someone coming down. Kelsier and Dockson turned; Vin, of course, had seated herself so she could see both entrances to the room without having to move.

Vin expected the newcomer to be one of Camon's crewmembers, sent to see if Kelsier was done with the lair yet. Therefore, she was completely surprised when the door swung open to reveal the surly, gnarled face of the man called Clubs.

Kelsier smiled, eyes twinkling.

*He's not surprised. Pleased, perhaps, but not surprised.*

"Clubs," Kelsier said.

Clubs stood in the doorway, giving the three of them an impressively disapproving stare. Finally, he hobbled into the room. A thin, awkward-looking teenage boy followed him.

The boy fetched Clubs a chair and put it by Kelsier's table. Clubs settled down, grumbling slightly to himself. Finally, he eyed Kelsier with a squinting, wrinkle-nosed expression. "The Soother is gone?"

"Breeze?" Kelsier asked. "Yes, he left."

Clubs grunted. Then he eyed the bottle of wine.

"Help yourself," Kelsier said.

Clubs waved for the boy to go fetch him a cup from the bar, then turned back to Kelsier. "I had to be sure," he said. "Never can trust yourself when a Soother is around—especially one like him."

"You're a Smoker, Clubs," Kelsier said. "He couldn't do much to you, not if you didn't want him to."

Clubs shrugged. "I don't like Soothers. It's not just Allomancy—men like that . . . well, you can't trust that you aren't being manipulated when they are around. Copper or no copper."

"I wouldn't rely on something like that to get your loyalty," Kelsier said.

"So I've heard," Clubs said as the boy poured him a cup of wine. "Had to be sure, though. Had to think about things without that Breeze around." He scowled, though Vin had trouble determining why, then took the cup and downed half of it in one gulp.

"Good wine," he said with a grunt. Then he looked over at Kelsier. "So, the Pits really did drive you insane, eh?"

"Completely," Kelsier said with a straight face.

Clubs smiled, though on his face the expression had a decidedly twisted look. "You mean to go through with this, then? This so-called job of yours?"

Kelsier nodded solemnly.

Clubs downed the rest of his wine. "You've got yourself a Smoker then. Not for the money, though. If you're really serious about toppling this government, then I'm in."

Kelsier smiled.

"And don't smile at me," Clubs snapped. "I hate that."

"I wouldn't dare."

"Well," Dockson said, pouring himself another drink, "that solves the Smoker problem."

"Won't matter much," Clubs said. "You're going to fail. I've spent my life trying to hide Mistings from the Lord Ruler and his obligators. He gets them all eventually anyway."

"Why bother helping us, then?" Dockson asked.

"Because," Clubs said, standing. "The Lord's going to get me sooner or later. At least this way, I'll be able to spit in his face as I go. Overthrowing the Final Empire . . ." He smiled. "It's got style. Let's go, kid. We've got to get the shop ready for visitors."

Vin watched them go, Clubs limping out the door, the boy pulling it closed behind them. Then she glanced at Kelsier. "You knew he'd come back."

He shrugged, standing and stretching. "I hoped. People are attracted to vision. The job I'm proposing . . . well, it just isn't the sort of thing you walk away from—at least, not if you're a bored old man who's generally annoyed at life. Now, Vin, I assume that your crew owns this entire building?"

Vin nodded. "The shop upstairs is a front."

"Good," Kelsier said, checking his pocket watch, then handing it to Dockson. "Tell your friends that they can have their lair back—the mists are probably already coming out."

"And us?" Dockson asked.

Kelsier smiled. "We're going to the roof. Like I told you, I have to fetch some atium."

By day, Luthadel was a blackened city, scorched by soot and red sunlight. It was hard, distinct, and oppressive.

At night, however, the mists came to blur and obscure. High noble keeps became ghostly, looming silhouettes. Streets seemed to grow more narrow in the fog, every thoroughfare becoming a lonely, dangerous alleyway. Even noblemen and thieves were apprehensive about going out at night—it took a strong heart to brave the foreboding, misty silence. The dark city at night was a place for the desperate and the foolhardy; it was a land of swirling mystery and strange creatures.

*Strange creatures like me,* Kelsier thought. He stood upon the ledge that ran around the lip of the flat-roofed lair. Shadowed buildings loomed in the night around him, and the mists made everything seem to shift and move in the darkness. Weak lights peeked from the occasional window, but the tiny beads of illumination were huddled, frightened things.

A cool breeze slipped across the rooftop, shifting the haze, brushing against Kelsier's mist-wetted cheek like an exhaled breath. In days past—back before everything had gone wrong—he had always sought out a rooftop on the evening before a job, wishing to overlook the city. He didn't realize he was observing his old custom this night until he glanced to the side, expecting Mare to be there next to him, as she always had been.

Instead, he found only the empty air. Lonely. Silent. The mists had replaced her. Poorly.

He sighed and turned. Vin and Dockson stood behind him on the rooftop. Both looked apprehensive to be out in the mists, but they dealt with their fear. One did not get far in the underworld without learning to stomach the mists.

Kelsier had learned to do far more than "stomach" them. He had gone among them so often during the last few years that he was beginning to feel more comfortable at night, within the mists' obscuring embrace, than he did at day.

"Kell," Dockson said, "do you *have* to stand on the ledge like that? Our plans may be a bit crazy, but I'd rather not have them end with you splattered across the cobblestones down there."

Kelsier smiled. *He still doesn't think of me as a Mistborn,* he thought. *It will take some getting used to for all of them.*

Years before, he had become the most infamous crewleader in Luthadel, and he had done it without even being an Allomancer. Mare had been a Tineye, but he and Dockson . . . they had just been regular men. One a half-breed with no powers, the other a runaway plantation skaa. Together, they had brought Great Houses to their knees, stealing brashly from the most powerful men in the Final Empire.

Now Kelsier was more, so much more. Once he had dreamed of Allomancy, wishing for a power like Mare's. She had been dead before he'd Snapped, coming to his powers. She would never see what he would do with them.

Before, the high nobility had feared him. It had taken a trap set by the Lord Ruler himself to capture Kelsier. Now . . . the Final Empire itself would shake before he was finished with it.

He scanned the city once more, breathing in the mists, then hopped down off the ledge and strolled over to join Dockson and Vin. They carried no lights; ambient starlight diffused by the mists was enough to see by in most cases.

Kelsier took off his jacket and vest, handing them to Dockson, then he untucked his shirt, letting the long garment hang loose. The fabric was dark enough that it wouldn't give him away in the night.

"All right," Kelsier said. "Who should I try?"

Dockson frowned. "You're sure you want to do this?"

Kelsier smiled.

Dockson sighed. "Houses Urbain and Teniert have been hit recently, though not for their atium."

"Which house is the strongest right now?" Kelsier asked, squatting down and undoing the ties on his pack, which rested by Dockson's feet. "Who would no one consider hitting?"

Dockson paused. "Venture," he finally said. "They've been on top for the last few years. They keep a standing force of several hundred men, and the local house nobility includes a good two dozen Mistings."

Kelsier nodded. "Well, that's where I'll go, then. They're certain to have some atium." He pulled open the pack, then whipped out a dark gray cloak. Large and enveloping, the cloak wasn't constructed from a single piece of cloth—rather, it was made up of hundreds of long, ribbonlike strips. They were sewn together at the shoulders and across the chest, but mostly they hung separate from one another, like overlapping streamers.

Kelsier threw on the garment, its strips of cloth twisting and curling, almost like the mists themselves.

Dockson exhaled softly. "I've never been so close to someone wearing one of those."

"What is it?" Vin asked, her quiet voice almost haunting in the night mists.

"A Mistborn cloak," Dockson said. "They all wear the things—it's kind of like a . . . sign of membership in their club."

"It's colored and constructed to hide you in the mist," Kelsier said. "And it warns city guards and other Mistborn not to bother you." He spun, letting the cloak flare dramatically. "I think it suits me."

Dockson rolled his eyes.

"All right," Kelsier said, bending down and pulling a cloth belt from his pack. "House Venture. Is there anything I need to know?"

"Lord Venture supposedly has a safe in his study," Dockson said. "That's where he'd probably keep his atium stash. You'll find the study on the third floor, three rooms in from the upper southern balcony. Be careful, House Venture keeps about a dozen hazekillers in addition to its regular troops and Mistings."

Kelsier nodded, tying on the belt—it had no buckle, but it did contain two small sheaths. He pulled a pair of glass daggers from the bag, checked them for nicks, and slid them into the sheaths. He kicked off his shoes and stripped off his stockings, leaving himself barefoot on the chill stones. With the shoes also went the last bit of metal on his person save for his coin pouch and the three vials of metals in his belt. He selected the largest one, downed its contents, then handed the empty vial to Dockson.

"That it?" Kelsier asked.

Dockson nodded. "Good luck."

Beside him, the girl Vin was watching Kelsier's preparations with intense curiosity. She was a quiet, small thing, but she hid an intensity that he found impressive. She was paranoid, true, but not timid.

*You'll get your chance, kid,* he thought. *Just not tonight.*

"Well," he said, pulling a coin from his pouch and tossing it off the side of the building. "Guess I'll be going. I'll meet you back at Clubs's shop in a bit."

Dockson nodded.

Kelsier turned and walked back up onto the roof's ledge. Then he jumped off the building.

Mist curled in the air around him. He burned steel, second of the basic Allomantic metals. Translucent blue lines sprang into existence around him, visible only to his eyes. Each one led from the center of his chest out to a nearby source of metal. The lines were all relatively faint—a sign that they pointed to metal sources that were small: door hinges, nails, and other bits. The type of source metal didn't matter. Burning iron or steel would point blue lines at all kinds of metal, assuming they were close enough and large enough to be noticeable.

Kelsier chose the line that pointed directly beneath him, toward his coin. Burning steel, he Pushed against the coin.

His descent immediately stopped, and he was thrown back up into the air in the opposite direction along the blue line. He reached out to the side, selected a passing window clasp, and Pushed against it, angling himself to the side. The careful nudge sent him up and over the lip of the building directly across the street from Vin's lair.

Kelsier landed with a lithe step, falling into a crouch and running across the building's peaked roof. He paused in the darkness at the other side, peering through the swirling air. He burned tin, and felt it flare to life in his chest, enhancing his senses. Suddenly the mists seemed less deep. It wasn't that the night around him grew any lighter; his ability to perceive simply increased. In the distance to the north, he could just barely make out a large structure. Keep Venture.

Kelsier left his tin on—it burned slowly, and he probably didn't need to worry about running out. As he stood, the mists curled slightly around his body. They twisted and spun, running in a slight, barely noticeable current beside him. The mists knew him; they claimed him. They could sense Allomancy.

He jumped, Pushing against a metal chimney behind him, sending himself in a wide horizontal leap. He tossed a coin even as he jumped, the tiny bit of metal flickering through the darkness and fog. He Pushed against the coin before it hit the ground, the force of his weight driving it downward in a sharp motion. As soon as it hit the cobblestones, Kelsier's Pushing forced him upward, turning the second half of his leap into a graceful arc.

Kelsier landed on another peaked wooden rooftop. Steel-pushing and Ironpulling were the first things that Gemmel had taught him. *When you Push on something, it's like you're throwing your weight against it,* the old lunatic had said. *And you can't change how much you weigh—you're an Allomancer, not some northern mystic. Don't Pull on something that weighs less than you unless you want it to come flying at you, and don't Push on something heavier than you unless you want to get tossed in the other direction.*

Kelsier scratched his scars, then pulled his mistcloak tight as he crouched on the roof, the wooden grain biting his unshod toes. He often wished that burning tin didn't enhance all of the senses—or, at least, not all of them at once. He needed the improved eyesight to see in the darkness, and he made good use of the improved hearing as well. However, burning tin made the night seem even more chilly to his overly sensitive skin, and his feet registered every pebble and wooden ripple they touched.

Keep Venture rose before him. Compared with the murky city, the keep seemed to blaze with light. High nobles kept different schedules from regular people; the ability to afford, even squander, lamp oil and candles meant that the wealthy didn't have to bow before the whims of season or sun.

The keep was majestic—that much was visible simply from the architecture. While it maintained a defensive wall around the grounds, the keep itself was more an artistic construction than a fortification. Sturdy buttressings arched out from the sides, allowing for intricate windows and delicate spires. Brilliant stained-glass windows stretched high along the sides of the rectangular building, and they shone with light from within, giving the surrounding mists a variegated glow.

Kelsier burned iron, flaring it strong and searching the night for large sources of metal. He was too far away from the keep to use small items like coins or hinges. He'd need a larger anchor to cover this distance.

Most of the blue lines were faint. Kelsier marked a couple of them moving in a slow pattern up ahead—probably a pair of guards standing on the rooftop. Kelsier would be sensing their breastplates and weapons. Despite Allomantic considerations, most noblemen still armed their soldiers with metal. Mistings who could Push or Pull metals were uncommon, and full Mistborn were even more so. Many lords thought it impractical to leave one's soldiers and guards relatively defenseless in order to counter such a small segment of the population.

No, most high noblemen relied on other means to deal with Allomancers. Kelsier smiled. Dockson had said that Lord Venture kept a squad of hazekillers; if that was true, Kelsier would probably meet them before the night was through. He ignored the soldiers for the moment, instead focusing on a solid line of blue pointing toward the keep's lofty top. It likely had bronze or copper sheeting on the roof. Kelsier flared his iron, took a deep breath, and Pulled on the line.

With a sudden jerk, he was yanked into the air.

Kelsier continued to burn iron, pulling himself toward the keep at a tremendous speed. Some rumors claimed that Mistborn could fly, but that was a wistful exaggeration. Pulling and Pushing against metals usually felt less like flying than it did like falling—only in the wrong direction. An Allomancer had to Pull hard in order to get the proper momentum, and this sent him hurtling toward his anchor at daunting speeds.

Kelsier shot toward the keep, mists curling around him. He easily cleared the protective wall surrounding the keep's grounds, but his body dropped slightly toward the ground as he moved. It was his pesky weight again; it tugged him down. Even the swiftest of arrows angled slightly toward the ground as it flew.

The drag of his weight meant that instead of shooting right up to the roof, he swung in an arc. He approached the keep wall several dozen feet below the rooftop, still traveling at a terrible speed.

Taking a deep breath, Kelsier burned pewter, using it to enhance his physical strength much in the same way that tin enhanced his senses. He turned himself in the air, hitting the stone wall feet-first. Even his strengthened muscles protested at the treatment, but he stopped without breaking any bones. He immediately released his hold on the roof, dropping a coin and Pushing against it even as he began to fall. He reached out, selecting a source of metal above him—one of the wire housings of a stained-glass window—and Pulled on it.

The coin hit the ground below and was suddenly able to support his weight. Kelsier launched himself upward, Pushing on the coin and Pulling on the window at the same time. Then, extinguishing both metals, he let momentum carry him the last few feet up through the dark mists. Cloak flapping quietly, he crested the lip of the keep's upper service walkway, flipped himself up over the stone railing, and landed quietly on the ledge.

A startled guard stood not three paces away. Kelsier was upon the man in a second, jumping into the air, Pulling slightly on the guard's steel breastplate and throwing the man off balance. Kelsier whipped out one of his glass daggers, allowing the strength of his Ironpull to bring him toward the guard. He landed with both feet against the man's chest, then crouched and sliced with a pewter-enhanced swing.

The guard collapsed with a slit throat. Kelsier landed lithely beside him, ears straining in the night, listening for sounds of alarm. There were none.

Kelsier left the guard to his gurgling demise. The man was likely a lesser nobleman. The enemy. If he were, instead, a skaa soldier—enticed into betraying his people in exchange for a few coins . . . Well, then, Kelsier was even happier to send such men into their eternity.

He Pushed off the dying man's breastplate, hopping up off the stone service walkway and onto the rooftop itself. The bronze roof was chill and slick beneath his feet. He scurried along it, heading toward the southern side of the building, looking for the balcony Dockson had mentioned. He wasn't too worried about being spotted; one purpose of this evening was to steal some atium, the tenth and most powerful of the generally known Allomantic metals. His other purpose, however, was to cause a commotion.

He found the balcony with ease. Wide and broad, it was probably a sitting balcony, used to entertain small groups. It was quiet at the moment, however—empty save for two guards. Kelsier crouched silently in the night mists above the balcony, furled gray cloak obscuring him, toes curling out over the side of the roof's metallic lip. The two guards chatted unwittingly below.

*Time to make a bit of noise.*

Kelsier dropped to the ledge directly between the guards. Burning pewter to strengthen his body, he reached out and fiercely Steelpushed against both men at the same time. Braced as he was at the center, his Push threw the guards away in opposite directions. The men cried out in surprise as the sudden force threw them backward, hurling them over the balcony railing into the darkness beyond.

The guards screamed as they fell. Kelsier threw open the balcony doors, letting a wall of mist fall inward around him, its tendrils creeping forward to claim the darkened room beyond.

*Third room in,* Kelsier thought, moving forward in a crouching run. The second room was a quiet, greenhouse-like conservatory. Low beds containing cultivated bushes and small trees ran through the room, and one wall was made up of enormous floor-to-ceiling windows to provide sunlight for the plants. Though it was dark, Kelsier knew that the plants would all be of slightly different colors than the typical brown—some would be white, others ruddy, and perhaps even a few light yellow. Plants that weren't brown were a rarity cultivated and kept by the nobility.

Kelsier moved quickly through the conservatory. He paused at the next doorway, noting its lighted outline. He extinguished his tin lest his enhanced eyes be blinded when he entered the lit room, and threw open the door.

He ducked inside, blinking against the light, a glass dagger in each hand. The room, however, was empty. It was obviously a study; a lantern burned on each wall beside bookcases, and it had a desk in the corner.

Kelsier replaced his knives, burning steel and searching for sources of metal. There was a large safe in the corner of the room, but it was too obvious. Sure enough, another strong source of metal shone from inside the eastern wall. Kelsier approached, running his fingers along the plaster. Like many walls in noble keeps, this one was painted with a soft mural. Foreign creatures lounged beneath a red sun. The false section of wall was under two feet square, and it had been placed so that its cracks were obscured by the mural.

*There's always another secret,* Kelsier thought. He didn't bother trying to figure out how to open the contraption. He simply burned steel, reaching in and tugging against the weak source of metal that he assumed was the trapdoor's locking mechanism. It resisted at first, pulling him against the wall, but he burned pewter and yanked harder. The lock snapped, and the panel swung open, revealing a small safe embedded in the wall.

Kelsier smiled. It looked small enough for a pewter-enhanced man to carry, assuming he could get it out of the wall.

He jumped up, Ironpulling against the safe, and landed with his feet against the wall, one foot on either side of the open panel. He continued to Pull, holding himself in place, and flared his pewter. Strength flooded his legs, and he flared his steel as well, Pulling against the safe.

He strained, grunting slightly at the exertion. It was a test to see which would give out first—the safe, or his legs.

The safe shifted in its mountings. Kelsier Pulled harder, muscles protesting. For an extended moment, nothing happened. Then the safe shook and ripped free of the wall. Kelsier fell backward, burning steel and Pushing against the safe to get out of the way. He landed maladroitly, sweat dripping from his brow as the safe crashed to the wooden floor, throwing up splinters.

A pair of startled guards burst into the room.

“About time,” Kelsier noted, raising a hand and Pulling on one of the soldier’s swords. It whipped out of the sheath, spinning in the air and streaking toward Kelsier point-first. He extinguished his iron, stepping to the side and catching the sword by its hilt as momentum carried it past.

“Mistborn!” the guard screamed.

Kelsier smiled and jumped forward.

The guard pulled out a dagger. Kelsier Pushed it, tearing the weapon out of the man’s hand, then swung, shearing the guard’s head from his body. The second guard cursed, tugging free the release tie on his breastplate.

Kelsier Pushed on his own sword even as he completed his swing. The sword ripped from his fingers and hissed directly toward the second guard. The man’s armor dropped free—preventing Kelsier from Pushing against it—just as the first guard’s corpse fell to the ground. A moment later, Kelsier’s sword planted itself in the second guard’s now unarmored chest. The man stumbled quietly, then collapsed.

Kelsier turned from the bodies, cloak rustling. His anger was quiet, not as fierce as it had been the night he’d killed Lord Tresting. But he felt it still, felt it in the itching of his scars and in the remembered screams of the woman he loved. As far as Kelsier was concerned, any man who upheld the Final Empire also forfeited his right to live.

He flared his pewter, strengthening his body, then squatted down and lifted the safe. He teetered for a second beneath its weight, then got his balance and began to shuffle back toward the balcony. Perhaps the safe held atium; perhaps it didn’t. However, he didn’t have time to search out other options.

He was halfway through the conservatory when he heard footsteps from behind. He turned to see the study flooding with figures. There were eight of them, each one wearing a loose gray robe and carrying a dueling cane and a shield instead of a sword. Hazekillers.

Kelsier let the safe drop to the ground. Hazekillers weren’t Allomancers, but they were trained to fight Mistings and Mistborn. There wouldn’t be a single bit of metal on their bodies, and they would be ready for his tricks.

Kelsier stepped back, stretching and smiling. The eight men fanned into the study, moving with quiet precision.

*This should be interesting.*

The hazekillers attacked, dashing by twos into the conservatory. Kelsier pulled out his daggers, ducking beneath the first attack and slicing at a man's chest. The hazekiller jumped back, however, and forced Kelsier away with a swing of his cane.

Kelsier flared his pewter, letting strengthened legs carry him back in a powerful jump. With one hand, he whipped out a handful of coins and Pushed them against his opponents. The metal disks shot forward, zipping through the air, but his enemies were ready for this: They raised their shields, and the coins bounced off the wood, throwing up splinters but leaving the men unharmed.

Kelsier eyed the other hazekillers as they filled the room, advancing on him. They couldn't hope to fight him in an extended battle—their tactic would be to rush him at once, hoping for a quick end to the fight, or to at least stall him until Allomancers could be awakened and brought to fight. He glanced at the safe as he landed.

He couldn't leave without it. He needed to end the fight quickly as well. Flaring pewter, he jumped forward, trying an experimental dagger swipe, but he couldn't get inside his opponent's defenses. Kelsier barely ducked away in time to avoid getting cracked on the head by the end of a cane.

Three of the hazekillers dashed behind him, cutting off his retreat into the balcony room. *Great*, Kelsier thought, trying to keep an eye on all eight men at once. They advanced on him with careful precision, working as a team.

Gritting his teeth, Kelsier flared his pewter again; it was running low, he noticed. Pewter was the fastest-burning of the basic eight metals.

*No time to worry about that now.* The men behind him attacked, and Kelsier jumped out of the way—Pulling on the safe to tug himself toward the center of the room. He Pushed as soon as he hit the ground near the safe, launching himself into the air at an angle. He tucked, flipping over the heads of two attackers, and landed on the ground beside a well-cultivated tree bed. He spun, flaring his pewter and raising his arm in defense against the swing he knew would come.

The dueling cane connected with his arm. A burst of pain ran down his forearm, but his pewter-enhanced bone held. Kelsier kept moving, driving his other hand forward and slamming a dagger into his opponent's chest.

The man stumbled back in surprise, the motion ripping away

Kelsier's dagger. A second hazekiller attacked, but Kelsier ducked, then reached down with his free hand, ripping his coin pouch off of his belt. The hazekiller prepared to block Kelsier's remaining dagger, but Kelsier raised his other hand instead, slamming the coin pouch into the man's shield.

Then he Pushed on the coins inside.

The hazekiller cried out, the force of the intense Steelpush throwing him backward. Kelsier flared his steel, Pushing so hard that he tossed himself backward as well—away from the pair of men who tried to attack him. Kelsier and his enemy flew away from each other, hurled in opposite directions. Kelsier collided with the far wall, but kept Pushing, smashing his opponent—pouch, shield, and all—against one of the massive conservatory windows.

Glass shattered, sparkles of lanternlight from the study playing across its shards. The hazekiller's desperate face disappeared into the darkness beyond, and mist—quiet, yet ominous—began to creep in through the shattered window.

The other six men advanced relentlessly, and Kelsier was forced to ignore the pain in his arm as he ducked two swings. He spun out of the way, brushing past a small tree, but a third hazekiller attacked, smashing his cane into Kelsier's side.

The attack threw Kelsier into the tree bed. He tripped, then collapsed near the entrance to the lit study, dropping his dagger. He gasped in pain, rolling to his knees and holding his side. The blow would have broken another man's ribs. Even Kelsier would have a massive bruise.

The six men moved forward, spreading to surround him again. Kelsier stumbled to his feet, vision growing dizzy from pain and exertion. He gritted his teeth, reaching down and pulling out one of his remaining vials of metal. He downed its contents in a single gulp, replenishing his pewter, then burned tin. The light nearly blinded him, and the pain in his arm and side suddenly seemed more acute, but the burst of enhanced senses cleared his head.

The six hazekillers advanced in a sudden, coordinated attack.

Kelsier whipped his hand to the side, burning iron and searching for metal. The closest source was a thick silvery paperweight on a desk just inside the study. Kelsier flipped it into his hand, then turned, arm held toward the advancing men, falling into an offensive stance.

"All right," he growled.

Kelsier burned steel with a flash of strength. The rectangular ingot ripped from his hand, streaking through the air. The foremost hazekiller raised his shield, but he moved too slowly. The ingot hit the man's shoulder with a crunch, and he dropped, crying out.

Kelsier spun to the side, ducking a staff swing and putting a hazekiller between himself and the fallen man. He burned iron, Pulling the ingot back toward him. It whipped through the air, cracking the second hazekiller in the side of the head. The man collapsed as the ingot flipped into the air.

One of the remaining men cursed, rushing forward to attack. Kelsier Pushed the still airborne ingot, flipping it away from him—and away from the attacking hazekiller, who had his shield raised. Kelsier heard the ingot hit the ground behind him, and he reached up—burning pewter—and caught the hazekiller's cane mid-swing.

The hazekiller grunted, struggling against Kelsier's enhanced strength. Kelsier didn't bother trying to pull the weapon free; instead he Pulled sharply on the ingot behind him, bringing it toward his own back at a deadly speed. He twisted at the last moment, using his momentum to spin the hazekiller around—right into the ingot's path.

The man dropped.

Kelsier flared pewter, steadying himself against attacks. Sure enough, a cane smashed against his shoulders. He stumbled to his knees as the wood cracked, but flared tin kept him conscious. Pain and lucidity flashed through his mind. He Pulled on the ingot—ripping it out of the dying man's back—and stepped to the side, letting the impromptu weapon shoot past him.

The two hazekillers nearest him crouched warily. The ingot snapped into one of the men's shields, but Kelsier didn't continue Pushing, lest he throw himself off balance. Instead, he burned iron, wrenching the ingot back toward himself. He ducked, extinguishing iron and feeling the ingot whoosh through the air above him. There was a crack as it collided with the man who had been sneaking up on him.

Kelsier spun, burning iron then steel to send the ingot soaring toward the final two men. They stepped out of the way, but Kelsier tugged on the ingot, dropping it to the ground directly in front of them. The men regarded it warily, distracted as Kelsier ran and jumped, Steelpushing himself against the ingot and flipping over the men's heads. The hazekillers cursed, spinning. As Kelsier landed, he Pulled the ingot again, bringing it up to smash into a man's skull from behind.

The hazekiller fell silently. The ingot flipped a few times in the darkness, and Kelsier snatched it from the air, its cool surface slick with blood. Mist from the shattered window flowed by his feet, curling up around his legs. He brought his hand down, pointing it directly at the last remaining hazekiller.

Somewhere in the room, a fallen man groaned.

The remaining hazekiller stepped back, then dropped his weapon and dashed away. Kelsier smiled, lowering his hand.

Suddenly, the ingot was Pushed from his fingers. It shot across the room, smashing through another window. Kelsier cursed, spinning to see another, larger group of men pouring into the study. They wore the clothing of noblemen. Allomancers.

Several of them raised hands, and a flurry of coins shot toward Kelsier. He flared steel, Pushing the coins out of the way. Windows shattered and wood splintered as the room was sprayed with coins. Kelsier felt a tug on his belt as his final vial of metal was ripped away, Pulled toward the other room. Several burly men ran forward in a crouch, staying beneath the shooting coins. Thugs—Mistings who, like Ham, could burn pewter.

*Time to go,* Kelsier thought, deflecting another wave of coins, gritting his teeth against the pain in his side and arm. He glanced behind him; he had a few moments, but he was never going to make it back to the balcony. As more Mistings advanced, Kelsier took a deep breath and dashed toward one of the broken, floor-to-ceiling windows. He leapt out into the mists, turning in the air as he fell, and reached out to Pull firmly on the fallen safe.

He jerked in midair, swinging down toward the side of the building as if tied to the safe by a tether. He felt the safe slide forward, grinding against the floor of the conservatory as Kelsier's weight pulled against it. He slammed against the side of the building, but continued to Pull, catching himself on the upper side of a windowsill. He strained, standing upside down in the window well, Pulling on the safe.

The safe appeared over the lip of the floor above. It teetered, then fell out the window and began to plummet directly toward Kelsier. He smiled, extinguishing his iron and pushing away from the building with his legs, throwing himself out into the mists like some insane diver. He fell backward through the darkness, barely catching sight of an angry face poking out of the broken window above.

Kelsier Pulled carefully against the safe, moving himself in the air. Mists curled around him, obscuring his vision, making him feel as if he weren't falling at all—but hanging in the middle of nothingness.

He reached the safe, then twisted in the air and Pushed against it, throwing himself upward.

The safe crashed into the cobblestones just below. Kelsier Pushed against the safe slightly, slowing himself until he eventually jerked to a halt in the air just a few feet above the ground. He hung in the mists for a moment, ribbons from his cloak curling and flapping in the wind, then let himself drop to the ground beside the safe.

The strongbox had been shattered by the fall. Kelsier pried open its mangled front, tin-enhanced ears listening to calls of alarm from the building above. Inside the safe, he found a small pouch of gemstones and a couple of ten-thousand boxing letters of credit, all of which he pocketed. He felt around inside, suddenly worried that the night's work had been for naught. Then his fingers found it—a small pouch at the very back.

He pulled it open, revealing a grouping of dark, beadlike bits of metal. Atium. His scars flared, memories of his time in the Pits returning to him.

He pulled the pouch tight and stood. With amusement, he noticed a twisted form lying on the cobblestones a short distance away—the mangled remains of the hazekiller he'd thrown out the window. Kelsier walked over, and retrieved his coin pouch with a tug of Ironpulling.

*No, this night was not a waste.* Even if he hadn't found the atium, any night that ended with a group of dead noblemen was a successful one, in Kelsier's opinion.

He gripped his pouch in one hand and the bag of atium in the other. He kept his pewter burning—without the strength it lent his body, he'd probably collapse from the pain of his wounds—and dashed off into the night, heading toward Clubs's shop.

*I never wanted this, true. But somebody has to stop the Deepness. And, apparently, Terris is the only place this can be done.*

*On this fact, however, I don't have to take the word of the philosophers. I can feel our goal now, can sense it, though the others cannot. It . . . pulses, in my mind, far off in the mountains.*

# 6

VIN AWOKE TO A QUIET room, red morning sunlight peeking through cracks in the shutters. She lay in bed for a moment, unsettled. Something felt wrong. It wasn't that she was waking up in an unfamiliar place—traveling with Reen had accustomed her to a nomadic lifestyle. It took her a moment to realize the source of her discomfort.

The room was empty.

Not only was it empty, it was open. Uncrowded. And it was . . . comfortable. She lay on an actual mattress, raised on posts, with sheets and a plush quilt. The room was decorated with a sturdy wooden armoire, and even had a circular rug. Perhaps another might have found the room cramped and spartan, but to Vin it seemed lavish.

She sat up, frowning. It felt wrong to have a room all to herself. She had always been crammed into tight bunkrooms filled with crewmembers. Even while traveling, she had slept in beggars' alleys or rebel caves, and Reen had been there with her. She had always been forced to fight to find privacy. Being given it so easily seemed to devalue the years she had spent relishing her brief moments of solitude.

She slipped out of bed, not bothering to open the shutters. The sunlight was faint, which meant it was still early morning, but she could already hear people moving in the hallway. She crept to the door, creaking it open and peeking out.

After leaving Kelsier the night before, Dockson had led Vin to Clubs's shop. Because of the late hour, Clubs had immediately led them to their separate rooms. Vin, however, had not gone to bed immediately. She had waited until everyone was asleep, then had snuck out to inspect her surroundings.

The residence was almost more of an inn than it was a shop. Though it had a showroom below and a large workshop in the back, the building's second floor was dominated by several long hallways lined with guestrooms. There was a third floor, and the doors were more widely spaced there, implying larger rooms. She hadn't tapped for trapdoors or false walls—the noise might have awakened someone—but experience told her that it wouldn't be a proper lair if it didn't have at least a secret basement and some bolt-holes.

Overall, she was impressed. The carpentry equipment and half-finished projects below indicated a reputable, working front. The lair was secure, well stocked, and well maintained. Watching through the crack in her door, Vin made out a group of about six groggy young men coming out of the hallway opposite her own. They wore simple clothing, and made their way down the stairs toward the workroom.

*Apprentice carpenters,* Vin thought. *That's Clubs's front—he's a skaa craftsman.* Most skaa lived lives of drudgery on the plantations; even those who lived in a city were generally forced to do menial labor. However, some talented few were allowed a trade. They were still skaa; they were paid poorly and were always subject to the whims of the nobility. However, they had a measure of freedom that most skaa would envy.

Clubs was probably a master carpenter. What would entice such a man—one who had, by skaa standards, an amazing life—to risk joining the underground?

*He is a Misting,* Vin thought. *Kelsier and Dockson called him a "Smoker."* She would probably have to figure out what that meant on her own; experience told her that a powerful man like Kelsier would withhold knowledge from her as long as he could, stringing her along with occasional tidbits. His knowledge was what bound her to him—it would be unwise to give away too much too quickly.

Footsteps sounded outside, and Vin continued to peek through the crack.

"You'll want to get ready, Vin," Dockson said as he passed her door. He wore a nobleman's dress shirt and slacks, and he already looked awake and trim. He paused, continuing. "There's a fresh bath for you in the room at the end of the hallway, and I had Clubs scrounge you up a few changes of clothing. They should fit well enough until we can get you something more appropriate. Take your time in the bath—Kell's planned a meeting for this afternoon, but we can't start until Breeze and Ham arrive."

Dockson smiled, eyeing her through the cracked door, then continued on down the hallway. Vin flushed at being caught. *These are observant men. I'm going to have to remember that.*

The hallway grew quiet. She slipped out her door and crept down to the indicated room, and was half surprised to find that there was indeed a warm bath waiting for her. She frowned, studying the tiled chamber and metal tub. The water smelled scented, after the fashion of noble ladies.

*These men are more like noblemen than skaa,* Vin thought. She wasn't certain what she thought of that. However, they obviously expected her to do as they did, so she closed and bolted the door, then disrobed and crawled into the tub.

She smelled funny.

Even though the scent was faint, Vin still caught whiffs of herself occasionally. It was the smell of a passing noblewoman, the scent of a perfumed drawer opened by her brother's burgling fingers. The smell grew less noticeable as the morning progressed, but it still worried her. It would distinguish her from other skaa. If this crew expected her to take those baths regularly, she would have to request that the perfumes be removed.

The morning meal was more up to her expectations. Several skaa women of various ages worked the shop's kitchen, preparing baywraps—rolls of thin, flat bread stuffed with boiled barley and vegetables. Vin stood by the kitchen doorway, watching the women work. None of them smelled like she did, though they were far more cleanly and well groomed than average skaa.

In fact, there was an odd sense of cleanliness to the entire building. She hadn't noticed it the night before, because of the darkness, but the floor was scrubbed clean. All of the workers—kitchen women or apprentices—had clean faces and hands. It felt odd to Vin. She was accustomed to her own fingers being black with ashstains; with Reen, if she'd ever washed her face, she had quickly rubbed it with ash again. A clean face stood out on the streets.

*No ash in the corners,* she thought, eyeing the floor. *The room is kept swept.* She'd never lived in such a place before. It was almost like living in some nobleman's house.

She glanced back at the kitchen women. They wore simple dresses of white and gray, with scarves around the tops of their heads and long tails of hair hanging out the back. Vin fingered her own hair. She kept it short, like a boy's—her current, ragged cut had been given by one of the other crewmembers. She wasn't like these women—she never had been. By Reen's command, Vin had lived so that other crewmembers would think of her as a thief first and a girl second.

*But, what am I now?* Perfumed by her bath, yet wearing the tan trousers and buttoning shirt of an apprentice craftsman, she felt distinctly out of place. And that was bad—if she felt awkward, then she undoubtedly looked awkward too. Something else to make her stand out.

Vin turned, eyeing the workroom. The apprentices were already about their morning labors, working on various bits of furniture. They stayed in the back while Clubs worked in the main showroom, putting detailed finishing touches on the pieces.

The back kitchen door suddenly slammed open. Vin slipped reflexively to the side, putting her back to a wall and peeking around into the kitchen.

Ham stood in the kitchen doorway, framed by red sunlight. He wore a loose shirt and vest, both sleeveless, and carried several large packs. He wasn't dirtied by soot—none of the crew had ever been, the few times Vin had seen them.

Ham walked through the kitchen and into the workroom. "So," he said, dropping his packs, "anyone know which room is mine?"

"I'll ask Master Cladent," one of the apprentices said, moving into the front room.

Ham smiled, stretching, then turned toward Vin. "Morning, Vin. You know, you don't have to hide from me. We're on the same team."

Vin relaxed but remained where she was, standing beside a line of mostly finished chairs. "You're going to live here too?"

"It always pays to stay near the Smoker," Ham said, turning and disappearing back into the kitchen. He returned a moment later with a stack of four large baywraps. "Anyone know where Kell is?"

"Sleeping," Vin said. "He came in late last night, and hasn't gotten up yet."

Ham grunted, taking a bite of a baywrap. "Dox?"

"In his room on the third floor," Vin said. "He got up early, came down to get something to eat, and went back upstairs." She didn't add that she knew, from peeking through the keyhole, that he was sitting at his desk scribbling on some papers.

Ham raised an eyebrow. "You always keep track of where everyone is like that?"

"Yes."

Ham paused, then chuckled. "You're an odd kid, Vin." He gathered up his packs as the apprentice returned, and the two moved up the stairs. Vin stood, listening to their footsteps. They stopped about halfway down the first hallway, perhaps a few doors from her room.

The scent of steamed barley enticed her. Vin eyed the kitchen. Ham had gone in and taken food. Was she allowed to do the same?

Trying to look confident, Vin strode into the kitchen. A pile of baywraps sat on a platter, probably to be delivered to the apprentices as they worked. Vin picked up two of them. None of the women objected; in fact, a few of them even nodded respectfully toward her.

*I'm an important person now,* she thought with a measure of discomfort. Did they know that she was . . . Mistborn? Or was she simply treated with respect because she was a guest?

Eventually, Vin took a third baywrap and fled to her room. It was more food than she could possibly eat; however, she intended to scrape out the barley and save the flatbread, which would keep well should she need it later.

A knock came at her door. Vin answered it, pulling the door open with a careful motion. A young man stood outside—the boy who had been with Clubs back at Camon's lair the night before.

Thin, tall, and awkward-looking, he was dressed in gray clothing. He was perhaps fourteen, though his height might have made him look older than he was. He seemed nervous for some reason.

"Yes?" Vin asked.

"Um . . ."

Vin frowned. "What?"

"You're wanted," he said in a thick Eastern accent. "Ups in the where above with the doing. With Master Jumps to the third floor. Uh, I've gotta go." The boy blushed, then turned and hurried away, scrambling up the stairs.

Vin stood in the doorway of her room, dumbfounded. *Was that supposed to make any sense?* she wondered.

She peeked into the hallway. The boy had seemed like he expected her to follow him. Finally, she decided to do so, carefully making her way up the steps.

Voices were coming from an open door at the end of the hallway. Vin approached and peeked around the corner to find a well-decorated room, set with a fine rug and comfortable-looking chairs. A hearth burned at the side of the room, and the chairs were arranged to point toward a large charcoal writing board set atop an easel.

Kelsier stood, leaning one elbow resting against the brick hearth, a cup of wine in his hand. Angling herself slightly, Vin could see that he was talking to Breeze. The Soother had arrived well into midday, and had appropriated half of Clubs's apprentices to unload his possessions. Vin had watched from her window as the apprentices had carried the luggage—disguised as boxes of lumber scraps—up to Breeze's room. Breeze himself hadn't bothered to help.

Ham was there, as was Dockson, and Clubs was settling himself into the large, overstuffed chair farthest from Breeze. The boy who had fetched Vin sat on a stool beside Clubs, and he was obviously making a point of trying not to look at her. The final occupied chair held the man Yeden, dressed—as before—in common skaa worker's clothing. He sat in his chair without resting against its back, as if he disapproved of its plushness. His face was darkened with soot, as Vin expected of a skaa worker.

There were two empty chairs. Kelsier noticed Vin standing by the doorway, and gave her one of his inviting smiles. "Well, there she is. Come in."

Vin scanned the room. There was a window, though its shutters were closed against approaching gloom. The only chairs were the ones in Kelsier's half circle. Resigned, she moved forward and took the empty chair beside Dockson. It was too big for her, and she settled into it with her knees folded beneath her.

"That's all of us," Kelsier said.

"Who's the last chair for?" Ham asked.

Kelsier smiled, winked, but ignored the question. "All right, let's talk. We've got something of a task ahead of ourselves, and the sooner we begin outlining a plan, the better."

"I thought you had a plan," Yeden said uncomfortably.

"I have a framework," Kelsier said. "I know what needs to happen, and I have a few ideas on how to do it. But, you don't gather a group like this and just tell them what to do. We need to work this out together, beginning with a list of problems we need to deal with if we want the plan to work."

"Well," Ham said, "let me get the framework straight first. The plan is to gather Yeden an army, cause chaos in Luthadel, secure the palace, steal the Lord Ruler's atium, then leave the government to collapse?"

"Essentially," Kelsier said.

"Then," Ham said, "our main problem is the Garrison. If we want chaos in Luthadel, then we can't have twenty thousand troops here to keep the peace. Not to mention the fact that Yeden's troops will never take the city while there is any sort of armed resistance on the walls."

Kelsier nodded. Picking up a piece of chalk, he wrote *Luthadel Garrison* up on the board. "What else?"

"We'll need a way to make said chaos in Luthadel," Breeze said, gesturing with a cup of wine. “Your instincts are right, my dear man. This city is where the Ministry makes its headquarters and the Great Houses run their mercantile empires. We’ll need to bring Luthadel down if we want to break the Lord Ruler’s ability to govern.”

“Mentioning the nobility brings up another point,” Dockson added. “The Great Houses all have guard forces in the city, not to mention their Allomancers. If we’re going to deliver the city to Yeden, we’ll have to deal with those noblemen.”

Kelsier nodded, writing *Chaos* and *Great Houses* beside *Luthadel Garrison* on his board.

“The Ministry,” Clubs said, leaning back in his plush chair so much that Vin almost couldn’t see his grumpy face. “There’ll be no change in government as long as the Steel Inquisitors have anything to say about it.”

Kelsier added *Ministry* to the board. “What else?”

“Atium,” Ham said. “You might as well write it up there—we’ll need to secure the palace quickly, once general mayhem starts, and make certain nobody else takes the opportunity to slip into the treasury.”

Kelsier nodded, writing *Atium: Secure Treasury* on the board.

“We will need to find a way to gather Yeden’s troops,” Breeze added. “We’ll have to be quiet, but quick, and train them somewhere that the Lord Ruler won’t find them.”

“We also might want to make certain that the skaa rebellion is ready to take control of Luthadel,” Dockson added. “Seizing the palace and digging in will make for a spectacular story, but it would be nice if Yeden and his people were actually ready to govern, once this is all over.”

*Troops* and *Skaa Rebellion* were added to the board. “And,” Kelsier said, “I’m going to add ‘Lord Ruler.’ We’ll at least want a plan to get him out of the city, should other options fail.” After writing *Lord Ruler* on the list, he turned back toward the group. “Did I forget anything?”

“Well,” Yeden said dryly, “if you’re listing problems we’ll have to overcome, you should write up there that we’re all bloody insane—though I doubt we can fix that fact.”

The group chuckled, and Kelsier wrote *Yeden’s Bad Attitude* on the board. Then he stepped back, looking over the list. “When you break it down like that, it doesn’t sound so bad, does it?”

Vin frowned, trying to decide if Kelsier was attempting a joke or not. The list wasn’t just daunting—it was disturbing. Twenty thousand imperial soldiers? The collected forces and power of the high nobility? The Ministry? One Steel Inquisitor was said to be more powerful than a thousand troops.

More discomforting, however, was how matter-of-factly they regarded the issues. How could they even think of resisting the Lord Ruler? He was . . . well, he was the *Lord.* He ruled all of the world. He was the creator, protector, and punisher of mankind. He had saved them from the Deepness, then had brought the ash and the mists as a punishment for the people's lack of faith. Vin wasn't particularly religious—intelligent thieves knew to avoid the Steel Ministry—but even she knew the legends.

And yet, the group regarded their list of "problems" with determination. There was a grim mirth about them—as if they understood that they had a better chance of making the sun rise at night than they did of overthrowing the Final Empire. Yet, they were still going to try.

"By the Lord Ruler," Vin whispered. "You're *serious*. You really mean to do this."

"Don't use his name as an oath, Vin," Kelsier said. "Even blasphemy honors him—when you curse by that creature's name, you acknowledge him as your god."

Vin fell silent, sitting back in her chair, a bit numb.

"Anyway," Kelsier said, smiling lightly. "Anyone have any ideas on how to overcome these problems? Besides Yeden's attitude, of course—we all know he's hopeless."

The room was quiet and thoughtful.

"Thoughts?" Kelsier asked. "Angles? Impressions?"

Breeze shook his head. "Now that it's all up there, I can't help wondering if the child has a point. This is a daunting task."

"But it *can* be done," Kelsier said. "Let's start by talking about how to break the city. What can we do that would be so threatening that it would throw the nobility into chaos, maybe even get the palace guard out into the city, exposing them to our troops? Something that would distract the Ministry, and the Lord Ruler himself, while we move our troops in to attack?"

"Well, a general revolution among the populace comes to mind," Ham said.

"Won't work," Yeden said firmly.

"Why not?" Ham asked. "You know how the people are treated. They live in slums, work in mills and smithies the entire day, and half of them *still* starve."

Yeden shook his head. "Don't you understand? The rebellion has been trying for a *thousand years* to get the skaa in this city to rise up.

It never works. They're too beaten down—they don't have the will or the hope to resist. That's why I had to come to you to get an army."

The room fell still. Vin, however, slowly nodded her head. She'd seen it—she'd *felt* it. One didn't fight the Lord Ruler. Even living as a thief, crouching at the edge of society, she knew that. There would be no rebellion.

"He's right, I'm afraid," Kelsier said. "The skaa won't rise up, not in their current state. If we're going to overthrow this government, we'll need to do it without the help of the masses. We can probably recruit our soldiers from among them, but we can't count on the general populace."

"Could we cause a disaster of some sort?" Ham asked. "A fire maybe?"

Kelsier shook his head. "It might disrupt trade for a while, but I doubt it would have the effect we want. Besides, the cost in skaa lives would be too high. The slums would burn, not stone nobleman keeps."

Breeze sighed. "What, then, would you have us do?"

Kelsier smiled, eyes twinkling. "What if we turned the Great Houses against each other?"

Breeze paused. "A house war . . ." he said, taking a speculative sip of his wine. "It's been a while since the city had one of those."

"Which means that tensions have had plenty of time to brew," Kelsier said. "The high nobility are growing increasingly powerful—the Lord Ruler barely has control over them anymore, which is why we have a chance of shattering his grip. Luthadel's Great Houses are the key—they control imperial trade, not to mention enslave the greatest majority of the skaa."

Kelsier pointed at the board, moving his finger between the line that said *Chaos* and the line that said *Great Houses.*

"If we can turn the houses inside Luthadel against each other, we can bring down the city. Mistborn will start assassinating house leaders. Fortunes will collapse. It won't take long before there is open warfare in the streets. Part of our contract with Yeden states that we'll give him an opening to seize the city for himself. Can you think of a better one than that?"

Breeze nodded with a smile. "It has flair—and I do like the idea of having the noblemen kill each other."

"You *always* like it better when someone else does the work, Breeze," Ham noted.

"My dear friend," Breeze replied, "the entire point of life is to find ways to get others to do your work for you. Don't you know anything about basic economics?”

Ham raised an eyebrow. “Actually, I—”

“It was a rhetorical question, Ham,” Breeze interrupted, rolling his eyes.

“Those are the best kind!” Ham replied.

“Philosophy later, Ham,” Kelsier said. “Stay on task. What do you think of my suggestion?”

“It could work,” Ham said, settling back. “But I can’t see the Lord Ruler letting things go that far.”

“It’s our job to see that he doesn’t have a choice,” Kelsier said. “He’s known to let his nobility squabble, probably to keep them off-balance. We fan those tensions, then we somehow force the Garrison to pull out. When the houses start fighting in earnest, the Lord Ruler won’t be able to do anything to stop them—except, perhaps, send his palace guard into the streets, which is exactly what we want him to do.”

“He could also send for a koloss army,” Ham noted.

“True,” Kelsier said. “But they’re stationed a moderate distance away. That’s a flaw we need to exploit. Koloss troops make wonderful grunts, but they have to be kept away from civilized cities. The very center of the Final Empire is exposed, yet the Lord Ruler is confident in his strength—and why shouldn’t he be? He hasn’t faced a serious threat in centuries. Most cities only need small policing forces.”

“Twenty thousand men is hardly a ‘small’ number,” Breeze said.

“It is on a national scale,” Kelsier said, holding up a finger. “The Lord Ruler keeps most of his troops on the edges of his empire, where the threat of rebellion is strongest. That’s why we’re going to strike him here, in Luthadel itself—and that’s why we’re going to succeed.”

“Assuming we can deal with that Garrison,” Dockson noted.

Kelsier nodded, turning to write *House War* underneath *Great Houses* and *Chaos*. “All right, then. Let’s talk about the Garrison. What are we going to do about it?”

“Well,” Ham said speculatively, “historically, the best way to deal with a large force of soldiers is to have your own large force of soldiers. We’re going to raise Yeden an army—why not let them attack the Garrison? Isn’t that kind of the point of raising the army in the first place?”

“That won’t work, Hammond,” Breeze said. He regarded his empty cup of wine, then held it up toward the boy sitting beside Clubs, who immediately scurried over to refill it.

“If we wanted to defeat the Garrison,” Breeze continued, “we’d need our own force of *at least* its same size. We’d probably want one much larger, since our men will be newly trained. We might be able to raise Yeden an army—we might even be able to get him one large enough to hold the city for a while. But, getting him one large enough to take on the Garrison inside its fortifications? We might as well give up now, if that's our plan."

The group fell silent. Vin squirmed in her chair, looking over each man in turn. Breeze's words had a profound effect. Ham opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again, sitting back to reconsider.

"All right," Kelsier finally said. "We'll get back to the Garrison in a moment. Let's look at our own army. How can we raise one of substantial size and hide it from the Lord Ruler?"

"Again, that will be difficult," Breeze said. "There is a very good reason why the Lord Ruler feels safe in the Central Dominance. There are constant patrols on the roadways and canals, and you can hardly spend a day traveling without running into a village or plantation. This isn't the sort of place where you can raise an army without attracting notice."

"The rebellion has those caves up to the north," Dockson said. "We might be able to hide some men there."

Yeden paled. "You *know* about the Arguois caverns?"

Kelsier rolled his eyes. "Even the Lord Ruler knows about them, Yeden. The rebels there just aren't dangerous enough to bother him yet."

"How many people do you have, Yeden?" Ham asked. "In Luthadel and around it, caves included? What do we have to start with?"

Yeden shrugged. "Maybe three hundred—including women and children."

"And how many do you think those caves could hide?" Ham asked.

Yeden shrugged again.

"The caves could support a larger group, for certain," Kelsier said. "Perhaps ten thousand. I've been there—the rebellion has been hiding people in them for years, and the Lord Ruler has never bothered to destroy them."

"I can imagine why," Ham said. "Cave fighting is nasty business, especially for the aggressor. The Lord Ruler likes to keep defeats to a minimum—he's nothing if not vain. Anyway, ten thousand. That's a decent number. It could hold the palace with ease—might even be able to hold the city, if it had the walls."

Dockson turned to Yeden. "When you asked for an army, what size were you thinking?"

"Ten thousand sounds like a good number, I suppose," Yeden said.

"Actually . . . it's a bit larger than I was thinking."

Breeze tipped his cup slightly, swirling the wine. "I hate to sound contrary again—that's usually Hammond's job—but I do have to return to our earlier problem. Ten thousand men. That won't even *frighten* the Garrison. We're talking about twenty thousand well-armed, well-trained troops."

"He has a point, Kell," Dockson said. He had found a small book somewhere, and had begun taking notes on the meeting.

Kelsier frowned.

Ham nodded. "Any way you look at it, Kell, that Garrison is going to be a tough stone to break. Perhaps we should just focus on the nobility. Maybe we can cause enough chaos that even the Garrison won't be able to suppress it."

Kelsier shook his head. "Doubtful. The Garrison's primary duty is to maintain order in the city. If we can't deal with those troops, we'll never pull this off." He paused, then eyed Vin. "What do you think, Vin? Any suggestions?"

She froze. Camon had never asked her opinion. What did Kelsier want from her? She pulled back into her chair slightly as she realized that the other members of the crew had turned, looking at her.

"I . . ." Vin said slowly.

"Oh, don't intimidate the poor thing, Kelsier," Breeze said with a wave of his hand.

Vin nodded, but Kelsier didn't turn away from her. "No, really. Tell me what you're thinking, Vin. You've got a much larger enemy threatening you. What do you do?"

"Well," she said slowly. "You don't fight him, that's for certain. Even if you won somehow, you'd be so hurt and broken that you couldn't fight off anyone else."

"Makes sense," Dockson said. "But we might not have a choice. We have to get rid of that army somehow."

"And if it just left the city?" she asked. "That would work too? If I had to deal with someone big, I'd try and distract him first, get him to leave me alone."

Ham chuckled. "Good luck getting the Garrison to leave Luthadel. The Lord Ruler sends squads out on patrol sometimes, but the only time I know of the entire Garrison leaving was when that skaa rebellion broke out down in Courteline a half century ago."

Dockson shook his head. "Vin's idea is too good to dismiss that easily, I think. Really, we can't fight the Garrison—at least, not while they're entrenched. So, we need to get them to leave the city somehow."

"Yes," Breeze said, "but it would take a particular crisis to require involving the Garrison. If the problem weren't threatening enough, the Lord Ruler wouldn't send the entire Garrison. If it were too dangerous, he'd hunker down and send for his koloss."

"A rebellion in one of the nearby cities?" Ham suggested.

"That leaves us with the same problem as before," Kelsier said, shaking his head. "If we can't get the skaa here to rebel, we'll never get ones outside the city to do so."

"What about a feint of some sort, then?" Ham asked. "We're assuming that we'll be able to raise a sizable group of soldiers. If they pretend to attack someplace nearby, perhaps the Lord Ruler would send the Garrison out to help."

"I doubt he'd send them away to protect another city," Breeze said. "Not if it left him exposed in Luthadel."

The group fell silent, thinking again. Vin glanced around, then found Kelsier's eyes on her.

"What?" he asked.

She squirmed a bit, glancing down. "How far away are the Pits of Hathsin?" she finally asked.

The crew paused.

Finally, Breeze laughed. "Oh, now *that's* devious. The nobility don't know that the Pits produce atium, so the Lord Ruler couldn't make much of a fuss—not without revealing that there's something very special about those Pits. That means no koloss."

"They wouldn't arrive in time anyway," Ham said. "The Pits are only a couple of days away. If they were threatened, the Lord Ruler would have to respond quickly. The Garrison would be the only force in striking distance."

Kelsier smiled, eyes alight. "And it wouldn't take much of an army to threaten the Pits, either. A thousand men could do it. We send them to attack, then when the Garrison leaves, we march our second, larger force in and seize Luthadel itself. By the time the Garrison realized that they'd been duped, they wouldn't be able to get back in time to stop us from taking the city walls."

"Could we keep them, though?" Yeden asked apprehensively.

Ham nodded eagerly. "With ten thousand skaa, I could hold this city against the Garrison. The Lord Ruler would have to send for his koloss."

"By then, we'd have the atium," Kelsier said. "And the Great Houses won't be in any position to stop us—they'll be weakened and frail because of their internal fighting."

Dockson was scribbling furiously on his pad. "We'll need to use Yeden's caves, then. They're within striking distance of both our targets, and they're closer to Luthadel than the Pits are. If our army left from there, it could get here before the Garrison could return from the Pits."

Kelsier nodded.

Dockson continued to scribble. "I'll have to start stockpiling supplies in those caves, maybe make a trip out to check conditions there."

"And, how are we going to get the soldiers there?" Yeden asked. "That's a week outside the city—and skaa aren't allowed to travel on their own."

"I've already got someone who can help us there," Kelsier said, writing *Attack Pits of Hathsin* beneath *Luthadel Garrison* on his board. "I have a friend that can give us a front to run canal boats to the north."

"Assuming," Yeden said, "you can even make good on your first and primary promise. I paid you to gather me an army. Ten thousand men is a great number, but I've still to see an adequate explanation of how you're going to raise them. I've already told you the kinds of problems we've had trying to recruit in Luthadel."

"We won't need the general population to support us," Kelsier said. "Just a small percentage of them—there are nearly a million workers in and around Luthadel. This should actually be the easiest part of the plan, since we happen to be in the presence of one of the world's greatest Soothers. Breeze, I'm counting on you and your Allomancers to force us up a nice selection of recruits."

Breeze sipped his wine. "Kelsier, my good man. I wish you wouldn't use words like 'force' in reference to my talents. I simply encourage people."

"Well, can you encourage us up an army?" Dockson asked.

"How much time do I have?" Breeze asked.

"A year," Kelsier said. "We'll plan this to go off next fall. Assuming the Lord Ruler does gather his forces to attack Yeden once we take the city, we might as well make him do it in the winter."

"Ten thousand men," Breeze said with a smile, "gathered from a resistant population in less than a year. It would certainly be a challenge."

Kelsier chuckled. "From you, that's as good as a yes. Start in Luthadel, then move to the surrounding cities. We need people who are close enough to gather at the caves."

Breeze nodded.

"We'll also need weapons and supplies," Ham said. "And we'll need to train the men."

"I've already got a plan to get weapons," Kelsier said. "Can you find some men to do the training?"

Ham paused thoughtfully. "Probably. I know some skaa soldiers who fought in one of the Lord Ruler's Suppression Campaigns."

Yeden paled. "Traitors!"

Ham shrugged. "Most of them aren't proud of what they did," he said. "But most of them also like to eat. It's a hard world, Yeden."

"My people will never work with such men," Yeden said.

"They'll have to," Kelsier said sternly. "A large number of skaa rebellions fail because their men are poorly trained. We're going to give you an army of well-equipped, well-fed men—and I'll be damned if I'm going to let you get them slaughtered because they were never taught which end of the sword to hold."

Kelsier paused, then eyed Ham. "However, I do suggest that you find men who are bitter against the Final Empire for what it forced them to do. I don't trust men whose loyalty only goes as far as the boxings in their pockets."

Ham nodded, and Yeden quieted. Kelsier turned, writing *Ham: Training* and *Breeze: Recruitment* beneath *Troops* on the board.

"I'm interested in your plan to get weapons," Breeze said. "How, exactly, do you intend to arm ten thousand men without making the Lord Ruler suspicious? He keeps a *very* careful eye on the armament flows."

"We could make the weapons," Clubs said. "I have enough extra wood that we could churn out a war staff or two every day. Could probably get you some arrows too."

"I appreciate the offer, Clubs," Kelsier said. "And I think that's a good idea. However, we're going to need more than staves. We'll need swords, shields, and armor—and we need them quickly enough to begin training."

"How, then, are you going to do it?" Breeze asked.

"The Great Houses can get weapons," Kelsier said. "They don't have any problems arming their personal retinues."

"You want us to steal from them?"

Kelsier shook his head. "No, for once we're going to do things somewhat legally—we're going to buy our weapons. Or, rather, we're going to have a sympathetic nobleman buy them for us."

Clubs laughed bluntly. “A nobleman sympathetic to the skaa? It will never happen.”

“Well, ‘never’ happened a short time ago, then,” Kelsier said lightly. “Because I’ve already found someone to help us.”

The room fell silent save for the crackling of the fireplace. Vin squirmed slightly in her chair, glancing at the others. They seemed shocked.

“Who?” Ham asked.

“His name is Lord Renoux,” Kelsier said. “He arrived in the area a few days back. He’s staying in Fellise—he doesn’t quite have enough influence to establish himself in Luthadel. Besides, I think it’s prudent to keep Renoux’s activities a bit removed from the Lord Ruler.”

Vin cocked her head. Fellise was a small, suburb-style city an hour outside of Luthadel; she and Reen had worked there before moving into the capital city. How had Kelsier recruited this Lord Renoux? Had he bribed the man, or was it some sort of scam?

“I know of Renoux,” Breeze said slowly. “He’s a Western lord; he has a great deal of power in the Farmost Dominance.”

Kelsier nodded. “Lord Renoux recently decided to try and elevate his family to high noble status. His official story is that he came south in order to expand his mercantile efforts. He hopes that by shipping fine Southern weaponry to the North, he can earn enough money—and make enough connections—to build himself a keep in Luthadel by the end of the decade.”

The room was quiet.

“But,” Ham said slowly, “those weapons will be coming to us instead.”

Kelsier nodded. “We’ll have to fake the shipping records, just in case.”

“That’s . . . quite an ambitious front, Kell,” Ham said. “A lord’s family working on our side.”

“But,” Breeze said, looking confused. “Kelsier, you *hate* noblemen.”

“This one’s different,” Kelsier said with a sly smile.

The crew studied Kelsier. They didn’t like working with a nobleman; Vin could tell that much easily. It probably didn’t help that Renoux was so powerful.

Suddenly, Breeze laughed. He leaned back in his chair, downing the last of his wine. “You blessed madman! You killed him, didn’t you? Renoux—you killed him and replaced him with an impostor.”

Kelsier’s smile broadened.

Yeden cursed, but Ham simply smiled. “Ah. Now *that* makes sense. Or, at least, it makes sense if you’re Kelsier the Foolhardy.”

“Renoux is going to take up permanent residence in Fellise,” Kelsier said. “He’ll be our front if we need to do anything official. I’ll use him to purchase armaments and supplies, for instance.”

Breeze nodded thoughtfully. “Efficient.”

“Efficient?” Yeden asked. “You’ve killed a nobleman! A very important one.”

“You’re planning to overthrow the entire empire, Yeden,” Kelsier noted. “Renoux isn’t going to be the last aristocratic casualty in this little endeavor.”

“Yes, but impersonating him?” Yeden asked. “That sounds a little risky to me.”

“You hired us because you wanted extraordinary results, my dear man,” Breeze said, sipping his wine. “In our line of work, extraordinary results usually require extraordinary risks.”

“We minimize them as best we can, Yeden,” Kelsier said. “My actor is *very* good. However, these are the sorts of things we’re going to be doing in this job.”

“And if I order you to stop a few of them?” Yeden asked.

“You can shut down the job at any time,” Dockson said, not looking up from his ledgers. “But as long as it is in motion, Kelsier has final say on plans, objectives, and procedures. That is how we work; you knew that when you hired us.”

Yeden shook his head ruefully.

“Well?” Kelsier asked. “Do we continue or not? The call is yours, Yeden.”

“Feel free to call an end to it, friend,” Breeze said with a helpful voice. “Don’t be afraid of offending us. I, for one, look favorably upon free money.”

Vin saw Yeden pale slightly. In Vin’s estimation, he was fortunate that Kelsier hadn’t simply taken his money and stabbed him in the chest. But, she was becoming increasingly convinced that wasn’t the way things worked around here.

“This is insane,” Yeden said.

“Trying to overthrow the Lord Ruler?” Breeze asked. “Why, yes, as a matter of fact, it is.”

“All right,” Yeden said, sighing. “We continue.”

“Good,” Kelsier said, writing *Kelsier: Equipment* under *Troops*. “The Renoux front will also give us an ‘in’ with Luthadel high society. This will be a very important advantage—we'll need to keep careful track of Great House politics if we're going to start a war."

"This house war might not be as easy to pull off as you think, Kelsier," Breeze warned. "The current lot of high noblemen is a careful, discriminating group."

Kelsier smiled. "Then it's good that you're here to help, Breeze. You're an expert at making people do what you want—together, you and I will plan how to make the high nobility turn on each other. Major house wars seem to happen every couple of centuries or so. The current group's competence will only make them more dangerous, so getting them riled up shouldn't be *that* hard. In fact, I've already started the process. . . ."

Breeze raised an eyebrow, then glanced at Ham. The Thug grumbled a bit, pulling out a golden ten-boxing coin and flipping it across the room to the self-satisfied Breeze.

"What was that about?" Dockson asked.

"We had a bet," Breeze said, "regarding whether or not Kelsier was involved in last night's disturbance."

"Disturbance?" Yeden asked. "What disturbance?"

"Someone attacked House Venture," Ham said. "The rumors claim that three full Mistborn were sent to assassinate Straff Venture himself."

Kelsier snorted. "Three? Straff certainly has an elevated opinion of himself. I didn't go anywhere near His Lordship. I was there for the atium—and to make certain that I was seen."

"Venture isn't sure who to blame," Breeze said. "But because Mistborn were involved, everyone assumes that it was one of the Great Houses."

"That was the idea," Kelsier said happily. "The high nobility take Mistborn attacks very seriously—they have an unspoken agreement that they won't use Mistborn to assassinate each other. A few more strikes like this, and I'll have them snapping at each other like frightened animals."

He turned, adding *Breeze: Planning* and *Kelsier: General Mayhem* beneath *Great Houses* on the board.

"Anyway," Kelsier continued, "we'll need to keep an eye on local politics to find out which Houses are making alliances. That means sending a spy to some of their functions."

"Is that really necessary?" Yeden asked uncomfortably.

Ham nodded. "It's standard procedure for *any* Luthadel job, actually. If there is information to be had, it will pass through the lips of the court's powerful. It always pays to keep an open set of ears moving through their circles."

"Well, that should be easy," Breeze said. "We just bring up your impostor and send him into the parties."

Kelsier shook his head. "Unfortunately, Lord Renoux himself won't be able to come to Luthadel."

Yeden frowned. "Why not? Won't your impostor hold up to close scrutiny?"

"Oh, he looks just like Lord Renoux," Kelsier said. "*Exactly* like Lord Renoux, actually. We just can't let him get near an Inquisitor. . . ."

"Ah," Breeze said, exchanging a glance with Ham. "One of *those*. Well, then."

"What?" Yeden asked. "What does he mean?"

"You don't want to know," Breeze said.

"I don't?"

Breeze shook his head. "You know how unsettled you just were when Kelsier said he'd replaced Lord Renoux with an impostor? Well, this is about a dozen times worse. Trust me—the less you know, the more comfortable you'll be."

Yeden looked toward Kelsier, who was smiling broadly. Yeden paled, then leaned back in his chair. "I think you're probably right."

Vin frowned, eying the others in the room. They seemed to know what Kelsier was talking about. She'd have to study this Lord Renoux sometime.

"Anyway," Kelsier said, "we have to send someone to the social functions. Dox, therefore, will be playing Renoux's nephew and heir, a scion of the family who has recently gained favor with Lord Renoux."

"Wait a moment, Kell," Dockson said. "You didn't tell me about this."

Kelsier shrugged. "We're going to need someone to be our dupe with the nobility. I assumed that you'd fit the role."

"Can't be me," Dockson said. "I got marked during the Eiser job just a couple months back."

Kelsier frowned.

"What?" Yeden asked. "Do I want to know what they're talking about this time?"

"He means that the Ministry is watching for him," Breeze said. "He pretended to be a nobleman, and they found out."

Dockson nodded. "The Lord Ruler himself saw me on one occasion, and he's got a flawless memory. Even if I managed to avoid him, someone's bound to recognize me eventually."

"So . . ." Yeden said.

"So," Kelsier said, "we'll need someone else to play Lord Renoux's heir."

"Don't look at me," Yeden said apprehensively.

"Trust me," Kelsier said flatly, "nobody was. Clubs is out too—he's far too prominent a local skaa craftsman."

"I'm out as well," Breeze said. "I already have several aliases among the nobility. I suppose I could use one of them, but I couldn't go to any major balls or parties—it would be rather embarrassing if I met someone who knew me by a different alias."

Kelsier frowned thoughtfully.

"I could do it," Ham said. "But you know I'm no good at acting."

"What about my nephew?" Clubs said, nodding to the young man at his side.

Kelsier studied the boy. "What's your name, son?"

"Lestibournes."

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "That's a mouthful. You don't have a nickname?"

"Not of the yetting yet."

"We'll have to work on that," Kelsier said. "Do you always speak in that Eastern street slang?"

The boy shrugged, obviously nervous at being such a center of attention. "Wasing the place when I was young."

Kelsier glanced at Dockson, who shook his head. "I don't think it's a good idea, Kell."

"Agreed." Kelsier turned to Vin, then smiled. "I guess that leaves you. How good are you at imitating a noblewoman?"

Vin paled slightly. "My brother gave me a few lessons. But, I've never actually tried to. . . ."

"You'll do fine," Kelsier said, writing *Vin: Infiltration* underneath *Great Houses*. "All right. Yeden, you should probably begin planning how you're to keep control of the empire once this is all through."

Yeden nodded. Vin felt a little sorry for the man, seeing how much the planning—the sheer outrageousness of it all—seemed to be overwhelming him. Still, it was hard to feel sympathy for him, considering what Kelsier had just said regarding *her* part in all this.

*Playing a noblewoman?* she thought. *Surely there's someone else who could do a better job. . . .*

Breeze's attention was still on Yeden and his obvious discomfort. "Don't look so solemn, my dear fellow," Breeze said. "Why, you'll probably never actually have to *rule* the city. Chances are, we'll all get caught and executed long before that happens."

Yeden smiled wanly. "And if we don't? What's to keep you all from just knifing me and taking the empire for yourselves?"

Breeze rolled his eyes. "We're thieves, my dear man, not politicians. A nation is far too unwieldy a commodity to be worth our time. Once we have our atium, we'll be happy."

"Not to mention rich," Ham added.

"The two words are synonyms, Hammond," Breeze said.

"Besides," Kelsier said to Yeden. "We won't be giving you the entire empire—hopefully, it will shatter once Luthadel destabilizes. You'll have this city, and probably a good piece of the Central Dominance—assuming you can bribe the local armies into supporting you."

"And . . . the Lord Ruler?" Yeden asked.

Kelsier smiled. "I'm still planning to deal with him personally—I just have to figure out how to make the Eleventh Metal work."

"And if you don't?"

"Well," Kelsier said, writing *Yeden: Preparation and Rule* beneath *Skaa Rebellion* on the board, "we'll try and find a way to trick him out of the city. Perhaps we can get him to go with his army to the Pits and secure things there."

"Then what?" Yeden asked.

"You find some way to deal with him," Kelsier said. "You didn't hire us to kill the Lord Ruler, Yeden—that's just a possible perk I intend to throw in if I can."

"I wouldn't worry *too* much, Yeden," Ham added. "He won't be able to do much without funds or armies. He's a powerful Allomancer, but by no means omnipotent."

Breeze smiled. "Though, if you think about it, hostile, dethroned pseudodeities probably make disagreeable neighbors. You'll have to figure out something to do with him."

Yeden didn't appear to like that idea much, but he didn't continue the argument.

Kelsier turned. "That should be it, then."

"Uh," Ham said, "what about the Ministry? Shouldn't we at least find a way to keep an eye on those Inquisitors?"

Kelsier smiled. "We'll let my brother deal with them."

"Like hell you will," a new voice said from the back of the room.

Vin jumped to her feet, spinning and glancing toward the room's shadowed doorway. A man stood there. Tall and broad-shouldered, he had a statuesque rigidity. He wore modest clothing—a simple shirt and trousers with a loose skaa jacket. His arms were folded in dissatisfaction, and he had a hard, square face that looked a bit familiar.

Vin glanced back at Kelsier. The similarity was obvious.

"Marsh?" Yeden said, standing. "Marsh, it *is* you! He promised you'd be joining the job, but I . . . well . . . welcome back!"

Marsh's face remained impassive. "I'm not certain if I'm 'back' or not, Yeden. If you all don't mind, I'd like to speak privately with my little brother."

Kelsier didn't seem intimidated by Marsh's harsh tone. He nodded to the group. "We're done for the evening, folks."

The others rose slowly, giving Marsh a wide berth as they left. Vin followed them, pulling the door shut and walking down the stairs to give the appearance of retiring to her room.

Less than three minutes later she was back at the door, listening carefully to the conversation going on inside.

*Rashek is a tall man—of course, most of these Terrismen are tall. He is young to receive so much respect from the other packmen. He has charisma, and the women of court would probably describe him as handsome, in a rugged sort of way.*

*Yet, it amazes me that anyone would give heed to a man who speaks such hatred. He has never seen Khlennium, yet he curses the city. He does not know me, yet I can already see the anger and hostility in his eyes.*

# 7

Three years hadn't changed Marsh's appearance much. He was still the stern, commanding person Kelsier had known since childhood. There was still that glint of disappointment in his eyes, and he spoke with the same air of disapproval.

Yet, if Dockson were to be believed, Marsh's attitudes had changed much since that day three years before. Kelsier still found it hard to believe that his brother had given up leadership of the skaa rebellion. He had always been so passionate about his work.

Apparently, that passion had dimmed. Marsh walked forward, regarding the charcoal writing board with a critical eye. His clothing was stained slightly by dark ash, though his face was relatively clean, for a skaa. He stood for a moment, looking over Kelsier's notes. Finally, Marsh turned and tossed a sheet of paper onto the chair beside Kelsier.

"What is this?" Kelsier asked, picking it up.

"The names of the eleven men you slaughtered last night," Marsh said. "I thought you might at least want to know."

Kelsier tossed the paper into the crackling hearth. "They served the Final Empire."

"They were *men*, Kelsier," Marsh snapped. "They had lives, families. Several of them were skaa."

"Traitors."

"People," Marsh said. "People who were just trying to do the best with what life gave them."

"Well, I'm just doing the same thing," Kelsier said. "And, fortunately, life gave *me* the ability to push men like them off the tops of buildings. If they want to stand against me like noblemen, then they can die like noblemen."

Marsh's expression darkened. "How can you be so flippant about something like this?"

"Because, Marsh," Kelsier said, "humor is the only thing I've got left. Humor and determination."

Marsh snorted quietly.

"You should be happy," Kelsier said. "After decades of listening to your lectures, I've finally decided to do something worthwhile with my talents. Now that you're here to help, I'm sure—"

"I'm not here to help," Marsh interrupted.

"Then why did you come?"

"To ask you a question." Marsh stepped forward, stopping right in front of Kelsier. They were about the same height, but Marsh's stern personality always made him seem to loom taller.

"How dare you do this?" Marsh asked quietly. "I dedicated my life to overthrowing the Final Empire. While you and your thieving friends partied, I hid runaways. While you planned petty burglaries, I organized raids. While you lived in luxury, I watched brave people die of starvation."

Marsh reached up, stabbing a finger at Kelsier's chest. "*How dare you?* How dare you try and hijack the rebellion for one of your little 'jobs'? How dare you use this dream as a way of enriching yourself?"

Kelsier pushed Marsh's finger away. "That's not what this is about."

"Oh?" Marsh asked, tapping the word *atium* on the board. "Why the games, Kelsier? Why lead Yeden along, pretending to accept him as your 'employer'? Why act like you care about the skaa? We both know what you're really after."

Kelsier clenched his jaw, a bit of his humor melting away. *He always could do that to me.* "You don't know me anymore, Marsh," Kelsier said quietly. "This isn't about money—I once had more wealth than any man could spend. This job is about something different."

Marsh stood close, studying Kelsier's eyes, as if searching for truth in them. "You always were a good liar," he finally said.

Kelsier rolled his eyes. "Fine, think what you want. But don't preach to me. Overthrowing the empire might have been your dream once—but now you've become a good little skaa, staying in your shop and fawning over noblemen when they visit."

"I've faced reality," Marsh said. "Something you've never been good at. Even if you're serious about this plan, you'll fail. Everything the rebellion has done—the raids, the thefts, the deaths—has accomplished nothing. Our best efforts were never even a mild annoyance for the Lord Ruler."

"Ah," Kelsier said, "but being an annoyance is something that *I* am very good at. In fact, I'm far more than just a 'mild' annoyance—people tell me I can be downright frustrating. Might as well use this talent for the cause of good, eh?"

Marsh sighed, turning away. "This isn't about a 'cause,' Kelsier. It's about revenge. It's about you, just like everything always is. I'll believe that you aren't after the money—I'll even believe that you intend to deliver Yeden this army he's apparently paying you for. But I won't believe that you care."

"That's where you are wrong, Marsh," Kelsier said quietly. "That's where you've always been wrong about me."

Marsh frowned. "Perhaps. How did this start, anyway? Did Yeden come to you, or did you go to him?"

"Does it matter?" Kelsier asked. "Look, Marsh. I need someone to infiltrate the Ministry. This plan won't go anywhere if we don't discover a way to keep an eye on those Inquisitors."

Marsh turned. "You actually expect me to help you?"

Kelsier nodded. "That's why you came here, no matter what you say. You once told me that you thought I could do great things if I ever applied myself to a worthy goal. Well, that's what I'm doing now—and you're going to help."

"It's not that easy anymore, Kell," Marsh said with a shake of his head. "Some people are different now. Others are . . . gone."

Kelsier let the room grow quiet. Even the hearth's fire was starting to die out. "I miss her too."

"I'm sure that you do—but I have to be honest with you, Kell. Despite what she did . . . sometimes I wish that you hadn't been the one to survive the Pits."

"I wish the same thing every day."

Marsh turned, studying Kelsier with his cold, discerning eyes. The eyes of a Seeker. Whatever he saw reflected inside of Kelsier must have finally met with his approval.

"I'm leaving," Marsh said. "But, for some reason you actually seem sincere this time. I'll come back and listen to whatever insane plan you've concocted. Then . . . well, we'll see."

Kelsier smiled. Beneath it all, Marsh was a good man—a better one than Kelsier had ever been. As Marsh turned toward the door, Kelsier caught a flicker of shadowed movement from beneath the doorway. He immediately burned iron, and the translucent blue lines shot out from his body, connecting him to nearby sources of metal. Marsh, of course, had none on his person—not even any coins. Traveling through skaa sectors of town could be very dangerous for a man who looked even marginally prosperous.

Someone else, however, hadn't yet learned not to carry metal on her person. The blue lines were thin and weak—they didn't do well penetrating wood—but they were just strong enough to let Kelsier locate the belt latch of a person out in the hallway, moving quickly away from the door on silent feet.

Kelsier smiled to himself. The girl was remarkably skilled. Her time on the streets, however, had also left her with remarkable scars. Hopefully, he would be able to encourage the skills while helping heal the scars.

"I'll return tomorrow," Marsh said as he reached the door.

"Just don't come by too early," Kelsier said with a wink. "I've got some things to do tonight."

Vin waited quietly in her darkened room, listening to footsteps clomp down the stairs to the ground floor. She crouched beside her door, trying to determine if both sets had continued down the steps or not. The hallway fell silent, and eventually she breathed a quiet sigh of relief.

A knock sounded on the door just inches from her head.

Her start of surprise nearly knocked her to the ground. *He's good!* she thought.

She quickly ruffled her hair and rubbed her eyes, trying to make it appear as if she had been sleeping. She untucked her shirt, and waited until the knock came again before pulling open the door.

Kelsier lounged against the doorframe, backlit by the hallway's single lantern. The tall man raised an eyebrow at her disheveled state.

"Yes?" Vin asked, trying to sound drowsy.

"So, what do you think of Marsh?"

"I don't know," Vin said, "I didn't see much of him before he kicked us out."

Kelsier smiled. "You're not going to admit that I caught you, are you?"

Vin almost smiled back. Reen's training came to her rescue. *The man who wants you to trust him is the one you must fear the most.* Her brother's voice almost seemed to whisper in her head. It had grown stronger since she'd met Kelsier, as if her instincts were on edge.

Kelsier studied her for a moment, then stepped back from the doorframe. "Tuck in that shirt and follow me."

Vin frowned. “Where are we going?”

“To begin your training.”

“Now?” Vin asked, glancing at the dark shutters to her room.

“Of course,” Kelsier said. “It’s a perfect night for a stroll.”

Vin straightened her clothing, joining him in the hallway. If he actually planned to begin teaching her, then she wasn’t going to complain, no matter what the hour. They walked down the steps to the first floor. The workroom was dark, furniture projects lying half finished in the shadows. The kitchen, however, was bright with light.

“Just a minute,” Kelsier said, walking toward the kitchen.

Vin paused just inside the shadows of the workroom, letting Kelsier enter the kitchen without her. She could just barely see inside. Dockson, Breeze, and Ham sat with Clubs and his apprentices around a wide table. Wine and ale were present, though in small amounts, and the men were munching on a simple evening snack of puffed barley cakes and battered vegetables.

Laughter trickled out into the workroom. Not raucous laughter, such as had often sounded from Camon’s table. This was something softer—something indicative of genuine mirth, of good-natured enjoyment.

Vin wasn’t certain what kept her out of the room. She hesitated—as if the light and the humor were a barrier—and she instead remained in the quiet, solemn workroom. She watched from the darkness, however, and wasn’t completely able to suppress her longing.

Kelsier returned a moment later, carrying his pack and a small cloth bundle. Vin regarded the bundle with curiosity, and he handed it to her with a smile. “A present.”

The cloth was slick and soft in Vin’s fingers, and she quickly realized what it was. She let the gray material unroll in her fingers, revealing a Mistborn cloak. Like the garment Kelsier had worn the night before, it was tailored completely from separate, ribbonlike strips of cloth.

“You look surprised,” Kelsier noted.

“I . . . assumed that I’d have to earn this somehow.”

“What’s there to earn?” Kelsier said, pulling out his own cloak. “This is who you are, Vin.”

She paused, then threw the cloak over her shoulders and tied it on. It felt . . . different. Thick and heavy on her shoulders, but light and unconstraining around her arms and legs. The ribbons were sewn together at the top, allowing her to pull it tight by the mantle if she wished. She felt . . . enveloped. Protected.

"How does it feel?" Kelsier asked.

"Good," Vin said simply.

Kelsier nodded, pulling out several glass vials. He handed two to her. "Drink one; keep the other in case you need it. I'll show you how to mix new vials later."

Vin nodded, downing the first vial and tucking the second into her belt.

"I'm having some new clothing tailored for you," Kelsier said. "You'll want to get into the habit of wearing things that don't have any metal on them: belts with no buckles, shoes that slip on and off, trousers without clasps. Perhaps later, if you're feeling daring, we'll get you some women's clothing."

Vin flushed slightly.

Kelsier laughed. "I'm just teasing you. However, you're entering a new world now—you may find that there are situations where it will be to your advantage to look less like a crew thief and more like a young lady."

Vin nodded, following Kelsier as he walked to the shop's front door. He pushed the portal open, revealing a wall of darkly shifting mists. He stepped out into them. Taking a deep breath, Vin followed.

Kelsier shut the door behind them. The cobbled street felt muffled to Vin, the shifting mists making everything just a bit damp. She couldn't see far in either direction, and the street ends seemed to fade into nothingness, paths into eternity. Above, there was no sky, just swirling currents of gray upon gray.

"All right, let's begin," Kelsier said. His voice felt loud in the quiet, empty street. There was a confidence to his tone, something that—confronted with the mists all around—Vin certainly didn't feel.

"Your first lesson," Kelsier said, strolling down the street, Vin trailing along beside him, "isn't about Allomancy, but attitude." He swept his hand forward. "This, Vin. This is *ours*. The night, the mists—they belong to us. Skaa avoid the mists as if they were death. Thieves and soldiers go out at night, but they fear it nonetheless. Noblemen feign nonchalance, but the mist makes them uncomfortable."

He turned, regarding her. "The mists are your friend, Vin. They hide you, they protect you . . . and they give you power. Ministry doctrine—something rarely shared with skaa—claims that the Mistborn are descendants of the only men who remained true to the Lord Ruler during the days before his Ascension. Other legends whisper that we are something beyond even the Lord Ruler's power, something that was born on that day when the mists first came upon the land."

Vin nodded slightly. It seemed odd to hear Kelsier speak so openly. Buildings filled with sleeping skaa loomed on either side of the street. And yet, the dark shutters and quiet air made Vin feel as if she and Kelsier were alone. Alone in the most densely populated, overcrowded city in all of the Final Empire.

Kelsier continued to walk, the spring in his step incongruent with the dark gloom.

"Shouldn't we be worried about soldiers?" Vin asked quietly. Her crews always had to be careful of nighttime Garrison patrols.

Kelsier shook his head. "Even if we were careless enough to be spotted, no imperial patrol would dare bother Mistborn. They'd see our cloaks and pretend not to see us. Remember, nearly all Mistborn are members of the Great Houses—and the rest are from lesser Luthadel houses. Either way, they're very important individuals."

Vin frowned. "So, the guards just ignore the Mistborn?"

Kelsier shrugged. "It's bad etiquette to acknowledge that the skulking rooftop figure you see is actually a very distinguished and proper high lord—or even high lady. Mistborn are so rare that houses can't afford to apply gender prejudices to them.

"Anyway, most Mistborn live two lives—the life of the courtgoing aristocrat, and the life of the sneaking, spying Allomancer. Mistborn identities are closely guarded house secrets—rumors regarding who is Mistborn are always a focus of high noble gossip."

Kelsier turned down another street, Vin following, still a bit nervous. She wasn't certain where he was taking her; it was easy to get lost in the night. Perhaps he didn't even have a destination, and was just accustoming her to the mists.

"All right," Kelsier said, "let's get you used to the basic metals. Can you feel your metal reserves?"

Vin paused. If she focused, she could distinguish eight sources of power within her—each one far larger, even, than her two had been on the day when Kelsier had tested her. She had been reticent to use her Luck much since then. She was coming to realize that she had been using a weapon she'd never really understood—a weapon that had accidentally drawn the attention of a Steel Inquisitor.

"Begin burning them, one at a time," Kelsier said.

"Burning?"

"That's what we call it when you activate an Allomantic ability," Kelsier said. "You 'burn' the metal associated with that power. You'll see what I mean. Start with the metals you don't know about yet—we'll work on Soothing and Raging emotions some other time."

Vin nodded, pausing in the middle of the street. Tentatively, she reached out to one of the new sources of power. One of them was slightly familiar to her. Had she used it before without realizing it? What would it do?

*Only one way to find out* . . . Uncertain what, exactly, she was supposed to do, Vin gripped the source of power and tried to use it.

Immediately, she felt a flare of heat from within her chest. It wasn't discomforting, but it was obvious and distinct. Along with the warmth came something else—a feeling of rejuvenation, and of power. She felt . . . more *solid,* somehow.

"What happened?" Kelsier asked.

"I feel different," Vin said. She held up her hand, and it seemed as if the limb reacted just a bit too quickly. The muscles were eager. "My body is strange. I don't feel tired anymore, and I feel alert."

"Ah," Kelsier said. "That's pewter. It enhances your physical abilities, making you stronger, more able to resist fatigue and pain. You'll react more quickly when you're burning it, and your body will be tougher."

Vin flexed experimentally. Her muscles didn't seem any bigger, yet she could feel their strength. It wasn't just in her muscles, however—it was everything about her. Her bones, her flesh, her skin. She reached out to her reserve, and could feel it shrinking.

"I'm running out," she said.

Kelsier nodded. "Pewter burns relatively quickly. The vial I gave you was measured to contain about ten minutes' worth of continuous burning—though it will go faster if you flare often and slower if you are careful about when you use it."

"Flare?"

"You can burn your metals a little more powerfully if you try," Kelsier said. "It makes them run out much faster, and it's difficult to maintain, but it can give you an extra boost."

Vin frowned, trying to do as he said. With a push of effort, she was able to stoke the flames within her chest, flaring the pewter.

It was like the inhaled breath before a daring leap. A sudden rush of strength and power. Her body grew tense with anticipation, and for just a moment she felt invincible. Then it passed, her body relaxing slowly.

*Interesting,* she thought, noting how quickly her pewter had burned during that brief moment.

"Now, there's something you need to know about Allomantic metals," Kelsier said as they strolled forward in the mists. "The more pure they are, the more effective they are. The vials we prepare contain absolutely pure metals, prepared and sold specifically for Allomancers.

"Alloys—like pewter—are even trickier, since the metal percentages have to be mixed just right, if you want maximum power. In fact, if you aren't careful when you buy your metals, you could end up with the wrong alloy entirely."

Vin frowned. "You mean, someone might scam me?"

"Not intentionally," Kelsier said. "The thing is, most of the terms that people use—words like 'brass,' 'pewter,' and 'bronze'—are really quite vague, when you get down to it. Pewter, for instance, is generally accepted as an alloy of tin mixed with lead, with perhaps some copper or silver, depending on the use and the circumstances. *Allomancer's pewter*, however, is an alloy of ninety-one percent tin, nine percent lead. If you want maximum strength from your metal, you have to use those percentages."

"And . . . if you burn the wrong percentage?" Vin asked.

"If the mixture is only off by a bit, you'll still get some power out of it," Kelsier said. "However, if it's too far off, burning it will make you sick."

Vin nodded slowly. "I . . . think I've burned this metal before. Once in a while, in very small amounts."

"Trace metals," Kelsier said. "From drinking water contaminated by metals, or by eating with pewter utensils."

Vin nodded. Some of the mugs in Camon's lair had been pewter.

"All right," Kelsier said. "Extinguish the pewter and let's move on to another metal."

Vin did as asked. The withdrawal of power left her feeling weak, tired, and exposed.

"Now," Kelsier said, "you should be able to notice a kind of pairing between your reserves of metal."

"Like the two emotion metals," Vin said.

"Exactly. Find the metal linked to pewter."

"I see it," Vin said.

"There are two metals for every power," Kelsier said. "One Pushes, one Pulls—the second is usually an alloy of the first. For emotions—the external mental powers—you Pull with zinc and Push with brass. You just used pewter to Push your body. That's one of the internal physical powers."

"Like Ham," Vin said. "He burns pewter."

Kelsier nodded. “Mistings who can burn pewter are called Thugs. A crude term, I suppose—but they tend to be rather crude people. Our dear Hammond is something of an exception to that rule.”

“So, what does the other internal physical metal do?”

“Try it and see.”

Vin did so eagerly, and the world suddenly became brighter around her. Or . . . well, that wasn’t quite right. She could see better, and she could see farther, but the mists were still there. They were just . . . more translucent. The ambient light around her seemed brighter, somehow.

There were other changes. She could feel her clothing. She realized that she had always been able to feel it, but she usually ignored it. Now, however, it felt closer. She could sense the textures, and was acutely aware of the places where the cloth was tight on her.

She was hungry. That, too, she had been ignoring—yet now her hunger seemed far more pressing. Her skin felt wetter, and she could smell the crisp air mixed with scents of dirt, soot, and refuse.

“Tin enhances your senses,” Kelsier said, his voice suddenly seeming quite loud. “And it’s one of the slowest-burning metals—the tin in that vial is enough to keep you going for hours. Most Mistborn leave their tin on whenever they’re out in the mists—I’ve had mine on since we left the shop.”

Vin nodded. The wealth of sensations was nearly overwhelming. She could hear creaks and scuffles in the darkness, and they made her want to jump in alarm, certain that someone was sneaking up behind her.

*This is going to take some getting used to.*

“Leave it burning,” Kelsier said, waving for her to walk beside him as he continued down the street. “You’ll want to accustom yourself to the enhanced senses. Just don’t flare it all the time. Not only would you run out of it very quickly, but perpetually flaring metals does . . . strange things to people.”

“Strange?” Vin asked.

“Metals—especially tin and pewter—stretch your body. Flaring the metals only pushes this stretching further. Stretch it too far for too long, and things start to break.”

Vin nodded uncomfortably. Kelsier fell quiet, and they continued to walk, letting Vin explore her new sensations and the detailed world that tin revealed. Before, her vision had been restricted to a tiny pocket within the night. Now, however, she saw an entire city enveloped by a blanket of shifting, swirling mist. She could make out keeps like small, dark mountains in the distance, and could see specks of light from windows, like pin-pricked holes in the night. And above . . . she saw lights in the sky.

She stopped, gazing up with wonder. They were faint, blurred to even her tin-enhanced eyes, but she could just barely make them out. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. So small, like the dying embers of candles recently extinguished.

"Stars," Kelsier said, strolling up beside her. "You can't see them very often, even with tin. It must be a particularly clear night. People used to be able to look up and see them every night—that was before the mists came, before the Ashmounts erupted ash and smoke into the sky."

Vin glanced at him. "How do you know?"

Kelsier smiled. "The Lord Ruler has tried very hard to crush memories of those days, but still some remain." He turned, not really having answered her question, and continued to walk. Vin joined him. Suddenly, with tin, the mists around her didn't seem so ominous. She was beginning to see how Kelsier could walk about at night with such confidence.

"All right," Kelsier eventually said. "Let's try another metal."

Vin nodded, leaving her tin on but picking another metal to burn as well. When she did so, a very strange thing happened—a multitude of faint blue lines sprung from her chest, streaking out into the spinning mists. She froze, gasping slightly and looking down at her chest. Most of the lines were thin, like translucent pieces of twine, though a couple were as thick as yarn.

Kelsier chuckled. "Leave that metal and its partner alone for the moment. They're a bit more complicated than the others."

"What . . .?" Vin asked, tracing the lines of blue light with her eyes. They pointed at random objects. Doors, windows—a couple even pointed at Kelsier.

"We'll get to it," he promised. "Extinguish that one and try one of the last two."

Vin extinguished the strange metal and ignored its companion, picking one of the last metals. Immediately, she felt a strange vibration. Vin paused. The pulses didn't make a sound that she could hear, yet she could feel them washing across her. They seemed to be coming from Kelsier. She looked at him, frowning.

"That's probably bronze," Kelsier said. "The internal mental Pulling metal. It lets you sense when someone is using Allomancy nearby. Seekers, like my brother, use it. Generally it's not that useful—unless you happen to be a Steel Inquisitor searching for skaa Mistings."

Vin paled. “Inquisitors can use Allomancy?”

Kelsier nodded. “They’re all Seekers—I’m not sure if that’s because Seekers are chosen to become Inquisitors, or if the process of becoming an Inquisitor grants the power. Either way, since their main duties are to find half-breed children and noblemen who use Allomancy improperly, it’s a useful skill for them to have. Unfortunately, ‘useful’ for them means ‘rather annoying’ for us.”

Vin began to nod, then froze. The pulsing had stopped.

“What happened?” she asked.

“I started burning copper,” Kelsier said, “the companion to bronze. When you burn copper, it hides your use of powers from other Allomancers. You can try burning it now, if you want, though you won’t sense much.”

Vin did so. The only change was a feeling of slight vibration within her.

“Copper is a vital metal to learn,” Kelsier said. “It will hide you from Inquisitors. We probably don’t have anything to worry about tonight—the Inquisitors would assume us to be regular noble Mistborn, out for training. However, if you’re ever in a skaa guise and need to burn metals, make sure you turn on your copper first.”

Vin nodded appreciatively.

“In fact,” Kelsier said, “many Mistborn keep their copper on all the time. It burns slowly, and it makes you invisible to other Allomancers. It hides you from bronze, and it also prevents others from manipulating your emotions.”

Vin perked up.

“I thought that might interest you,” Kelsier said. “Anyone burning copper is immune to emotional Allomancy. In addition, copper’s influence occurs in a bubble around you. This cloud—called a coppercloud—hides anyone inside of it from the senses of a Seeker, though it won’t make them immune to emotional Allomancy, like it will you.”

“Clubs,” Vin said. “That’s what a Smoker does.”

Kelsier nodded. “If one of our people is noticed by a Seeker, they can run back to the lair and disappear. They can also practice their abilities without fear of being discovered. Allomantic pulses coming from a shop in a skaa sector of town would be a quick giveaway to a passing Inquisitor.”

“But, you can burn copper,” Vin said. “Why were you so worried about finding a Smoker for the crew?”

“I can burn copper, true,” Kelsier said. “And so can you. We can use all of the powers, but we can't be everywhere. A successful crewleader needs to know how to divide labor, especially on a job as big as this one. Standard practice has a coppercloud going at all times in the lair. Clubs doesn't do it all himself—several of those apprentices are Smokers too. When you hire a man like Clubs, it's understood that he'll provide you with a base of operations and a team of Smokers competent enough to keep you hidden at all times."

Vin nodded. However, she was more interested in copper's ability to protect her emotions. She would need to locate enough of it to keep it burning all the time.

They started walking again, and Kelsier gave her more time to get used to burning tin. Vin's mind, however, began to wander. Something didn't feel . . . right to her. Why was Kelsier telling her all of these things? It seemed like he was giving away his secrets too easily.

*Except one*, she thought suspiciously. *The metal with the blue lines. He hasn't gone back to it yet.* Perhaps that was the thing he was going to keep from her, the power he would hold in reserve to maintain control over her.

*It must be strong. The most powerful of the eight.*

As they walked through the quiet streets, Vin reached tentatively inside. She eyed Kelsier, then carefully burned that unknown metal. Again, the lines sprang up around her, pointing in seemingly random directions.

The lines moved with her. One end of each thread stayed stuck to her chest, while the other end remained attached to a given place along the street. New lines appeared as she walked, and old ones faded, disappearing behind. The lines came in various widths, and some of them were brighter than others.

Curious, Vin tested the lines with her mind, trying to discover their secret. She focused on a particularly small and innocent-looking one, and found that she could feel it individually if she concentrated. She almost felt like she could touch it. She reached out with her mind and gave it a slight tug.

The line shook, and something immediately flew out of the darkness toward her. Vin yelped, trying to jump away, but the object—a rusty nail—shot directly toward her.

Suddenly, something grabbed the nail, ripping it away and throwing it back out into the darkness.

Vin came up from her roll in a tense crouch, mistcloak fluttering around her. She scanned the darkness, then glanced at Kelsier, who was chuckling softly.

"I should have known you'd try that," he said.

Vin flushed in embarrassment.

"Come on," he said, waving her over. "No harm done."

"The nail attacked me!" Did that metal bring objects to life? That would be an incredible power indeed.

"Actually, you kind of attacked yourself," Kelsier said.

Vin stood carefully, then joined him as he began to walk down the street again.

"I'll explain what you did in a moment," he promised. "First, there's something you have to understand about Allomancy."

"Another rule?"

"More a philosophy," Kelsier said. "It has to do with consequences."

Vin frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Every action we take has consequences, Vin," Kelsier said. "I've found that in both Allomancy and life, the person who can best judge the consequences of their actions will be the most successful. Take burning pewter, for instance. What are its consequences?"

Vin shrugged. "You get stronger."

"What happens if you're carrying something heavy when your pewter runs out?"

Vin paused. "I suppose you'd drop it."

"And, if it's too heavy, you could hurt yourself seriously. Many a Misting Thug has shrugged off a dire wound while fighting, only to die from that same wound once their pewter ran out."

"I see," Vin said quietly.

"*Ha!*"

Vin jumped in shock, throwing her hands up over her enhanced ears. "Ow!" she complained, glaring at Kelsier.

He smiled. "Burning tin has consequences too. If someone produces a sudden light or sound, you can be blinded or stunned."

"But, what does that have to do with those last two metals?"

"Iron and steel give you the ability to manipulate other metals around you," Kelsier explained. "With iron, you can Pull a metal source toward yourself. With steel, you can Push one away. Ah, here we are."

Kelsier stopped, looking up ahead.

Through the mist, Vin could see the massive city wall looming above them. "What are we doing here?"

"We're going to practice Ironpulling and Steelpushing," Kelsier said.

"But first, some basics." He pulled something out of his belt—a clip, the smallest denomination of coin. He held it up before her, standing to the side. "Burn steel, the opposite of the metal you burned a few moments ago."

Vin nodded. Again, the blue lines sprang up around her. One of them pointed directly at the coin in Kelsier's hand.

"All right," Kelsier said. "Push on it."

Vin reached toward the proper thread and Pushed slightly. The coin flipped out of Kelsier's fingers, traveling directly away from Vin. She continued to focus on it, Pushing the coin through the air until it snapped against the wall of a nearby house.

Vin was thrown violently backward in a sudden, jerking motion. Kelsier caught her and kept her from falling to the ground.

Vin stumbled and righted herself. Across the street, the coin—now released from her control—plinked to the ground.

"What happened?" Kelsier asked her.

She shook her head. "I don't know. I Pushed on the coin, and it flew away. But when it hit the wall, I was pushed away."

"Why?"

Vin frowned thoughtfully. "I guess . . . I guess the coin couldn't go anywhere, so I had to be the one that moved."

Kelsier nodded approvingly. "Consequences, Vin. You use your own weight when you Steelpush. If you're a lot heavier than your anchor, it will fly away from you like that coin did. However, if the object is heavier than you are—or if it runs into something that is—you'll be Pushed away. Ironpulling is similar—either you'll be Pulled toward the object or it will be Pulled toward you. If your weights are similar, then you'll both move.

"This is the great art of Allomancy, Vin. Knowing how much, or how little, you will move when you burn steel or iron will give you a major advantage over your opponents. You'll find that these two are the most versatile and useful of your abilities."

Vin nodded.

"Now, remember," he continued. "In both cases, the force of your Push or Pull is *directly* away from or toward you. You can't flip things around with your mind, controlling them to go wherever you want. That's not the way that Allomancy works, because that's not the way the physical world works. When you push against something—whether with Allomancy or with your hands—it goes directly in the opposite direction. Force, reactions, consequences. Understand?"

Vin nodded again.

"Good," Kelsier said happily. "Now, let's go jump over that wall."

"*What?*"

He left her standing dumbfounded in the street. She watched him approach the base of the wall, then scurried over to him.

"You're insane!" she said quietly.

Kelsier smiled. "I think that's the second time today you've said that to me. You need to pay better attention—if you'd been listening to everyone else, you'd know that my sanity departed long ago."

"Kelsier," she said, looking up at the wall. "I can't. . . . I mean, I've never really even used Allomancy before this evening!"

"Yes, but you're such a quick learner," Kelsier said, pulling something out from beneath his cloak. It appeared to be a belt. "Here, put this on. It's got metal weights strapped to it. If something goes wrong, I'll probably be able to catch you."

"Probably?" Vin asked nervously, strapping on the belt.

Kelsier smiled, then dropped a large metal ingot at his feet. "Put the ingot directly below you, and remember to Steel-push, not Ironpull. Don't stop Pushing until you reach the top of the wall."

Then he bent down and jumped.

Kelsier shot into the air, his dark form vanishing into the curling mists. Vin waited for a moment, but he didn't plummet back down to his doom.

All was still, even to her enhanced ears. The mists whirled playfully around her. Taunting her. Daring her.

She glanced down at the ingot, burning steel. The blue line glowed with a faint, ghostly light. She stepped over to the ingot, standing with one foot on either side of it. She glanced up at the mists, then down one last time.

Finally, she took a deep breath and Pushed against the ingot with all of her strength.

*"He shall defend their ways, yet shall violate them. He will be their savior, yet they shall call him heretic. His name shall be Discord, yet they shall love him for it."*

# 8

VIN SHOT INTO THE AIR. She suppressed a scream, remembering to continue Pushing despite her fear. The stone wall was a blur of motion just a few feet away from her. The ground disappeared below, and the line of blue pointing toward the ingot grew fainter and fainter.

*What happens if it disappears?*

She began to slow. The fainter the line grew, the more her speed decreased. After just a few moments of flight, she crept to a halt—and was left hanging in the air above a nearly invisible blue line.

"I've always liked the view from up here."

Vin glanced to the side. Kelsier stood a short distance away; she had been so focused that she hadn't noticed that she was hovering just a few feet from the top of the wall.

"Help!" she said, continuing to Push desperately, lest she fall. The mists below her shifted and spun, like some dark ocean of damned souls.

"You don't have to worry too much," Kelsier said. "It's easier to balance in the air if you have a tripod of anchors, but you can do fine with a single anchor. Your body is used to balancing itself. Part of what you've been doing since you learned to walk transfers to Allomancy. As long as you stay still, hanging at the very edge of your Pushing ability, you'll be pretty stable—your mind and body will correct any slight deviations from the base center of your anchor below, keeping you from falling to the sides.

"If you were to Push on something else, or move too much to one side, though . . . well, you'd lose your anchor below, and wouldn't be pushing directly up anymore. Then you'd have problems—you'd tip over like a lead weight on the top of a very tall pole."

"Kelsier . . ." Vin said.

"I hope you aren't afraid of heights, Vin," Kelsier said. "That's quite a disadvantage for a Mistborn."

"I'm . . . not . . . afraid . . . of . . . heights," Vin said through gritted teeth. "*But I'm also not accustomed to hanging in the air a hundred feet above the bloody street!*"

Kelsier chuckled, but Vin felt a force tug against her belt, pulling her through the air toward him. He grabbed her and pulled her up over the stone railing, then set her down beside him. He reached an arm over the side of the wall. A second later, the ingot shot up through the air, scraping along the side of the wall, until it flipped into his waiting hand.

"Good job," he said. "Now we go back down." He tossed the ingot over his shoulder, casting it into the dark mists on the other side of the wall.

"We're really going outside?" Vin asked. "Outside the city walls? *At night?*"

Kelsier smiled in that infuriating way of his. He walked over and climbed onto the battlements. "Varying the strength with which you Push or Pull is difficult, but possible. It's better to just fall a bit, then Push to slow yourself. Let go and fall some more, then Push again. If you get the rhythm right, you'll reach the ground just fine."

"Kelsier," Vin said, approaching the wall. "I don't . . ."

"You're at the top of the city wall now, Vin," he said, stepping out into the air. He hung, hovering, balanced as he'd explained to her before. "There are only two ways down. Either you jump off, or you try and explain to that guard patrol why a Mistborn needs to use their stairwell."

Vin turned with concern, noting an approaching bob of lanternlight in the dark mists.

She turned back to Kelsier, but he was gone. She cursed, bending over the side of the wall and looking down into the mists. She could hear the guards behind her, speaking softly to one another as they walked along the wall.

Kelsier was right: She didn't have many options. Angry, she climbed up onto the battlement. She wasn't afraid of heights in particular, but who wouldn't be apprehensive, standing atop the wall, looking down at her doom? Vin's heart fluttered, her stomach twisting.

*I hope Kelsier's out of the way,* she thought, checking the blue line to make certain she was above the ingot. Then, she stepped off.

She immediately began to plummet toward the ground. She Pushed reflexively with her steel, but her trajectory was off; she had fallen to the side of the ingot, not directly toward it. Consequently, her Push nudged her to the side even farther, and she began to tumble through the air.

Alarmed, she Pushed again—harder this time, flaring her steel. The sudden effort launched her back upward. She arced sideways through the air, popping up into the air alongside the walltop. The passing guards spun with surprise, but their faces soon became indistinct as Vin fell back down toward the ground.

Mind muddled by terror, she reflexively reached out and Pulled against the ingot, trying to yank herself toward it. And, of course, it obediently shot up toward her.

*I'm dead.*

Then her body lurched, pulled upward by the belt. Her descent slowed until she was drifting quietly through the air. Kelsier appeared in the mists, standing on the ground beneath her; he was—of course—smiling.

He let her drop the last few feet, catching her, then setting her upright on the soft earth. She stood quivering for a moment, breathing in terse, anxious breaths.

"Well, that was fun," Kelsier said lightly.

Vin didn't respond.

Kelsier sat down on a nearby rock, obviously giving her time to gather her wits. Eventually, she burned pewter, using the sensation of solidness it provided to steady her nerves.

"You did well," Kelsier said.

"I nearly died."

"Everybody does, their first time," Kelsier said. "Ironpulling and Steelpushing are dangerous skills. You can impale yourself with a bit of metal that you Pull into your own body, you can jump and leave your anchor too far behind, or you can make a dozen other mistakes.

"My experience—limited though it is—has been that it's better to get into those extreme circumstances early, when someone can watch over you. Anyway, I assume you can understand why it's important for an Allomancer to carry as little metal on their body as possible."

Vin nodded, then paused, reaching up to her ear. "My earring," she said. "I'll have to stop wearing it."

"Does it have a clip on the back?" Kelsier asked.

Vin shook her head. "It's just a small stud, and the pin on the back bends down."

"Then you'll be all right," Kelsier said. "Metal in your body—even if only a bit of it is in your body—can't be Pushed or Pulled. Otherwise another Allomancer could rip the metals out of your stomach while you were burning them."

*Good to know,* Vin thought.

"It's also why those Inquisitors can walk around so confidently with a pair of steel spikes sticking out of their heads. The metal pierces their bodies, so it can't be affected by another Allomancer. Keep the earring—it's small, so you won't be able to do much with it, but you could use it as a weapon in an emergency."

"All right."

"Now, you ready to go?"

She looked up at the wall, preparing to jump again, then nodded.

"We're not going back up," Kelsier said. "Come on."

Vin frowned as Kelsier began to walk out into the mists. *So, does he have a destination after all—or has he just decided to wander some more?* Oddly, his affable nonchalance made him very difficult to read.

Vin hurried to keep up, not wanting to be left alone in the mists. The landscape around Luthadel was barren save for scrub and weeds. Prickles and dried leaves—both dusted with ash from an earlier ashfall—rubbed against her legs as they walked. The underbrush crunched as they walked, quiet and a bit sodden with mist dew.

Occasionally, they passed heaps of ash that had been carted out of the city. Most of the time, however, ash was thrown into the River Channerel, which passed through the city. Water broke it down eventually—or, at least, that was what Vin assumed. Otherwise the entire continent would have been buried long ago.

Vin stayed close to Kelsier as they walked. Though she had traveled outside cities before, she had always moved as part of a group of boatmen—the skaa workers who ran narrow-boats and barges up and down the many canal routes in the Final Empire. It had been hard work—most noblemen used skaa instead of horses to pull the boats along the towpath—but there had been a certain freedom to knowing that she was traveling at all, for most skaa, even skaa thieves, never left their plantation or town.

The constant movement from city to city had been Reen's choice; he had been obsessive about never getting locked down. He usually got them places on canal boats run by underground crews, never staying in one place for more than a year. He had kept moving, always going. As if running from something.

They continued to walk. At night, even the barren hills and scrub-covered plains took on a forbidding air. Vin didn't speak, though she tried to make as little noise as possible. She had heard tales of what went abroad in the land at night, and the cover of the mists—even pierced by tin as it now was—made her feel as if she were being watched.

The sensation grew more unnerving as they traveled. Soon, she began to hear noises in the darkness. They were muffled and faint—crackles of weeds, shuffles in the echoing mist.

*You're just being paranoid!* she told herself as she jumped at some half-imagined sound. Eventually, however, she could stand it no more.

"Kelsier!" she said with an urgent whisper—one that sounded betrayingly loud to her enhanced ears. "I think there's something out there."

"Hum?" Kelsier asked. He looked lost in his thoughts.

"I think something is following us!"

"Oh," Kelsier said. "Yes, you're right. It's a mistwraith."

Vin stopped dead in her tracks. Kelsier, however, kept going.

"Kelsier!" she said, causing him to pause. "You mean *they're real?*"

"Of course they are," Kelsier said. "Where do you think all the stories came from?"

Vin stood in dumbfounded shock.

"You want to go look at it?" Kelsier asked.

"*Look at the mistwraith?"* Vin asked. "Are you—" She stopped.

Kelsier chuckled, strolling back to her. "Mistwraiths might be a bit disturbing to look at, but they're relatively harmless. They're scavengers, mostly. Come on."

He began to retrace their footsteps, waving her to follow. Reluctant—but morbidly curious—Vin followed. Kelsier walked at a brisk pace, leading her to the top of a relatively scrub-free hill. He crouched down, motioning for Vin to do likewise.

"Their hearing isn't very good," he said as she knelt in the rough, ashen dirt beside him. "But their sense of smell—or, rather, taste—is quite acute. It's probably following our trail, hoping that we'll discard something edible."

Vin squinted in the darkness. "I can't see it," she said, searching the mists for a shadowed figure.

"There," Kelsier said, pointing toward a squat hill.

Vin frowned, imagining a creature crouching atop the hill, watching her as she looked for it.

Then the hill moved.

Vin jumped slightly. The dark mound—perhaps ten feet tall and twice as long—lurched forward in a strange, shuffling gait, and Vin leaned forward, trying to get a better look.

"Flare your tin," Kelsier suggested.

Vin nodded, calling upon a burst of extra Allomantic power.

Everything immediately became lighter, the mists becoming even less of an obstruction.

What she saw caused her to shiver—fascinated, revolted, and more than a little disturbed. The creature had smoky, translucent skin, and Vin could see its bones. It had dozens upon dozens of limbs, and each one looked as if it had come from a different animal. There were human hands, bovine hooves, canine haunches, and others she couldn't identify.

The mismatched limbs let the creature walk—though it was more of a shamble. It crawled along slowly, moving like an awkward centipede. Many of the limbs, in fact, didn't even look functional—they jutted from the creature's flesh in a twisted, unnatural fashion.

Its body was bulbous and elongated. It wasn't just a blob, though . . . there was a strange logic to its form. It had a distinct skeletal structure, and—squinting through tin-enhanced eyes—she thought she could make out translucent muscles and sinew wrapping the bones. The creature flexed odd jumbles of muscles as it moved, and appeared to have a dozen different rib cages. Along the main body, arms and legs hung at unnerving angles.

And heads—she counted six. Despite the translucent skin, she could make out a horse head sitting beside that of a deer. Another head turned toward her, and she could see its human skull. The head sat atop a long spinal cord attached to some kind of animal torso, which was in turn attached to a jumble of strange bones.

Vin nearly retched. "What . . .? How . . .?"

"Mistwraiths have malleable bodies," Kelsier said. "They can shape their skin around any skeletal structure, and can even re-create muscles and organs if they have a model to mimic."

"You mean . . .?"

Kelsier nodded. "When they find a corpse, they envelop it and slowly digest the muscles and organs. Then, they use what they've eaten as a pattern, creating an exact duplicate of the dead creature. They rearrange the parts a little bit—excreting the bones they don't want, while adding the ones they do want to their body—forming a jumble like what you see out there."

Vin watched the creature shamble across the field, following her tracks. A flap of slimy skin drooped from its underbelly, trailing along the ground. *Tasting for scents,* Vin thought. *Following the smell of our passing.* She let her tin return to normal, and the mistwraith once again became a shadowed mound. The silhouette, however, only seemed to heighten its abnormality.

"Are they intelligent, then?" Vin asked. "If they can split up a . . .

body and put the pieces where they want?"

"Intelligent?" Kelsier asked. "No, not one this young. More instinctual than intelligent."

Vin shivered again. "Do people know about these things? I mean, other than the legends?"

"What do you mean by 'people'?" Kelsier asked. "A lot of Allomancers know about them, and I'm sure the Ministry does. Regular people . . . well, they just don't go out at night. Most skaa fear and curse mistwraiths, but go their entire lives without actually seeing one."

"Lucky for them," Vin muttered. "Why doesn't someone do something about these things?"

Kelsier shrugged. "They're not that dangerous."

"That one has a human head!"

"It probably found a corpse," Kelsier said. "I've never heard of a mistwraith attacking a full-grown, healthy adult. That's probably why everyone leaves them alone. And, of course, the high nobility have devised their own uses for the creatures."

Vin looked at him questioningly, but he said no more, rising and walking down the hillside. She shot one more glance at the unnatural creature, then took off, following Kelsier.

"Is that what you brought me out here to see?" Vin asked.

Kelsier chuckled. "Mistwraiths might look eerie, but they're hardly worth such a long trip. No, we're heading over there."

She followed his gesture, and was able to make out a change in the landscape ahead. "The imperial highroad? We've circled around to the front of the city."

Kelsier nodded. After a short walk—during which Vin glanced backward no less than three times to make certain the mistwraith hadn't gained on them—they left the scrub and stepped onto the flat, packed earth of the imperial highroad. Kelsier paused, scanning the road in either direction. Vin frowned, wondering what he was doing.

Then she saw the carriage. It was parked by the side of the highroad, and Vin could see that there was a man waiting beside it.

"Ho, Sazed," Kelsier said, walking forward.

The man bowed. "Master Kelsier," he said, his smooth voice carrying well in the night air. It had a higher pitch to it, and he spoke with an almost melodic accent. "I almost thought that you had decided not to come."

"You know me, Saze," Kelsier said, jovially slapping the man on the shoulder. "I'm the soul of punctuality." He turned and waved a hand toward Vin. "This apprehensive little creature is Vin."

"Ah, yes," Sazed said, speaking in a slow, well-enunciated way. There was something strange about his accent. Vin approached cautiously, studying the man. Sazed had a long, flat face and a willowy body. He was even taller than Kelsier—tall enough to be a bit abnormal—and his arms were unusually long.

"You're a Terrisman," Vin said. His earlobes had been stretched out, and the ears themselves contained studs that ran around their perimeter. He wore the lavish, colorful robes of a Terris steward—the garments were made of embroidered, overlapping V shapes, alternating among the three colors of his master's house.

"Yes, child," Sazed said, bowing. "Have you known many of my people?"

"None," Vin said. "But I know that the high nobility prefer Terrismen stewards and attendants."

"Indeed they do, child," Sazed said. He turned to Kelsier. "We should go, Master Kelsier. It is late, and we are still an hour away from Fellise."

*Fellise,* Vin thought. *So, we're going to see the impostor Lord Renoux.*

Sazed opened the carriage door for them, then closed it after they climbed in. Vin settled on one of the plush seats as she heard Sazed climb atop the vehicle and set the horses in motion.

Kelsier sat quietly in the carriage. The window shades were closed against the mist, and a small lantern, half shielded, hung in the corner. Vin rode on the seat directly across from him—her legs tucked up underneath her, her enveloping mistcloak pulled close, hiding her arms and legs.

*She always does that,* Kelsier thought. *Wherever she is, she tries to be as small and unnoticeable as possible. So tense.* Vin didn't sit, she crouched. She didn't walk, she prowled. Even when she was sitting in the open, she seemed to be trying to hide.

*She's a brave one, though.* During his own training, Kelsier hadn't been quite so willing to throw himself off of a city wall—old Gemmel had been forced to push him.

Vin watched him with those quiet, dark eyes of hers. When she noticed his attention, she glanced away, huddling down a little more within her cloak. Unexpectedly, however, she spoke.

"Your brother," she said in her soft near-whisper of a voice. "You two don't get along very well."

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "No. We never have, really. It's a shame.

We should, but we just . . . don't."

"He's older than you?"

Kelsier nodded.

"Did he beat you often?" Vin asked.

Kelsier frowned. "Beat me? No, he didn't beat me at all."

"You stopped him, then?" Vin said. "Maybe that's why he doesn't like you. How did you escape? Did you run, or were you just stronger than him?"

"Vin, Marsh never *tried* to beat me. We argued, true—but we never really wanted to hurt one another."

Vin didn't contradict him, but he could see in her eyes that she didn't believe him.

*What a life* . . . Kelsier thought, falling silent. There were so many children like Vin in the underground. Of course, most died before reaching her age. Kelsier had been one of the lucky ones: His mother had been a resourceful mistress of a high nobleman, a clever woman who had managed to hide the fact that she was skaa from her lord. Kelsier and Marsh had grown up privileged—considered illegitimate, but still noble—until their father had finally discovered the truth.

"Why did you teach me those things?" Vin asked, interrupting his thoughts. "About Allomancy, I mean."

Kelsier frowned. "I promised you that I would."

"Now that I know your secrets, what is to keep me from running away from you?"

"Nothing," Kelsier said.

Once again, her distrusting glare told him that she didn't believe his answer. "There are metals you didn't tell me about. Back in our meeting on the first day, you said there were ten."

Kelsier nodded, leaning forward. "There are. But I didn't leave the last two out because I wanted to keep things from you. They're just . . . difficult to get used to. It will be easier if you practice with the basic metals first. However, if you want to know about the last two, I can teach you once we arrive in Fellise."

Vin's eyes narrowed.

Kelsier rolled his eyes. "I'm not trying to trick you, Vin. People serve on my crews because they want to, and I'm effective because they can rely on one another. No distrust, no betrayals."

"Except one," Vin whispered. "The betrayal that sent you to the Pits."

Kelsier froze. "Where did you hear that?"

Vin shrugged.

Kelsier sighed, rubbing his forehead with one hand. That wasn't what he wanted to do—he wanted to scratch his scars, the ones that ran all along his fingers and hands, twisting up his arms toward his shoulders. He resisted.

"That isn't something worth talking about," he said.

"But there was a traitor," Vin said.

"We don't know for certain." That sounded weak, even to him. "Regardless, my crews rely on trust. That means no coercions. If you want out, we can go back to Luthadel right now. I'll show you the last two metals, then you can be on your way."

"I don't have enough money to survive on my own," Vin said.

Kelsier reached inside of his cloak and pulled out a bag of coins, then tossed it onto the seat beside her. "Three thousand boxings. The money I took from Camon."

Vin glanced at the bag distrustfully.

"Take it," Kelsier said. "You're the one who earned it—from what I've been able to gather, your Allomancy was behind most of Camon's recent successes, and you were the one who risked Pushing the emotions of an obligator."

Vin didn't move.

*Fine,* Kelsier thought, reaching up and knocking on the underside of the coachman's chair. The carriage stopped, and Sazed soon appeared at his window.

"Turn the carriage around please, Saze," Kelsier said. "Take us back to Luthadel."

"Yes, Master Kelsier."

Within moments, the carriage was rolling back in the direction it had come. Vin watched in silence, but she seemed a little less certain of herself. She eyed the bag of coins.

"I'm serious, Vin," Kelsier said. "I can't have someone on my team who doesn't want to work with me. Turning you away isn't a punishment; it's just the way things must be."

Vin didn't respond. Letting her go would be a gamble—but forcing her to stay would be a bigger one. Kelsier sat, trying to read her, trying to understand her. Would she betray them to the Final Empire if she left? He thought not. She wasn't a bad person.

She just thought that everybody else was.

"I think your plan is crazy," she said quietly.

"So do half the people on the crew."

"You can't defeat the Final Empire."

"We don't have to," Kelsier said. "We just have to get Yeden an army, then seize the palace."

"The Lord Ruler will stop you," Vin said. "You can't beat him—he's immortal."

"We have the Eleventh Metal," Kelsier said. "We'll find a way to kill him."

"The Ministry is too powerful. They'll find your army and destroy it."

Kelsier leaned forward, looking Vin in the eye. "You trusted me enough to jump off the top of the wall, and I caught you. You're going to have to trust me this time too."

She obviously didn't like the word "trust" very much. She studied him in the weak lanternlight, remaining quiet long enough that the silence grew uncomfortable.

Finally, she snatched the bag of coins, quickly hiding it beneath her cloak. "I'll stay," she said. "But not because I trust you."

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "Why, then?"

Vin shrugged, and she sounded perfectly honest when she spoke. "Because I want to see what happens."

Having a keep in Luthadel qualified a house for high noble status. However, having a keep didn't mean that one had to live in it, especially not all of the time. Many families also maintained a residence in one of Luthadel's outskirt cities.

Less crowded, cleaner, and less strict in its observance of imperial laws, Fellise was a rich town. Rather than containing imposing, buttressed keeps, it was filled with lavish manors and villas. Trees even lined some of the streets; most of them were aspens, whose bone-white bark was somehow resistant to the discoloring of the ash.

Vin watched the mist-cloaked city through her window, the carriage lantern extinguished at her request. Burning tin, she was able to study the neatly organized and well-groomed streets. This was a section of Fellise she had rarely seen; despite the town's opulence, its slums were remarkably similar to the ones in every other city.

Kelsier watched the city through his own window, frowning.

"You disapprove of the waste," Vin guessed, her voice a whisper. The sound would carry to Kelsier's enhanced ears. "You see the riches of this city and think of the skaa who worked to create it."

"That's part of it," Kelsier said, his own voice barely a whisper. "There's more, though. Considering the amount of money spent on it, this city should be beautiful."

Vin cocked her head. "It is."

Kelsier shook his head. "The homes are still stained black. The soil is still arid and lifeless. The trees still grow leaves of brown."

"Of course they're brown. What else would they be?"

"Green," Kelsier said. "Everything should be green."

*Green?* Vin thought. *What a strange thought.* She tried to imagine trees with green leaves, but the image seemed silly. Kelsier certainly had his quirks—though, anyone who had spent so long at the Pits of Hathsin was bound to be left a bit strange.

He turned back toward her. "Before I forget, there are a couple more things you should know about Allomancy."

Vin nodded.

"First," Kelsier said, "remember to burn away any unused metals you have inside of you at the end of the night. Some of the metals we use can be poisonous if digested; it's best not to sleep with them in your stomach."

"All right," Vin said.

"Also," Kelsier said, "never try to burn a metal that isn't one of the ten. I warned you that impure metals and alloys can make you sick. Well, if you try to burn a metal that isn't Allomantically sound at all, it could be deadly."

Vin nodded solemnly. *Good to know,* she thought.

"Ah," Kelsier said, turning back toward the window. "Here we are: the newly purchased Manor Renoux. You should probably take off your cloak—the people here are loyal to us, but it always pays to be careful."

Vin agreed completely. She pulled off the cloak, letting Kelsier tuck it in his pack. Then she peeked out the carriage window, peering through the mists at the approaching manor. The grounds had a low stone wall and an iron gate; a pair of guards opened the way as Sazed identified himself.

The roadway inside was lined with aspens, and atop the hill ahead Vin could see a large manor house, phantom light spilling from its windows.

Sazed pulled the carriage up before the manor, then handed the reins to a servant and climbed down. "Welcome to Manor Renoux, Mistress Vin," he said, opening the door and gesturing to help her down.

Vin eyed his hand, but didn't take it, instead scrambling down on her own. The Terrisman didn't seem offended by her refusal.

The steps to the manor house were lit by a double line of lantern poles. As Kelsier hopped from the carriage, Vin could see a group of men gathering at the top of the white marble stairs. Kelsier climbed the steps with a springy stride; Vin followed behind, noticing how clean the steps were. They would have to be scrubbed regularly to keep the ash from staining them. Did the skaa who maintained the building know that their master was an imposter? How was Kelsier's "benevolent" plan to overthrow the Final Empire helping the common people who cleaned these steps?

Thin and aging, "Lord Renoux" wore a rich suit and a pair of aristocratic spectacles. A sparse, gray mustache colored his lip, and—despite his age—he didn't carry a cane for support. He nodded respectfully to Kelsier, but maintained a dignified air. Immediately, Vin was struck by one obvious fact: *This man knows what he is doing.*

Camon had been skilled at impersonating noblemen, but his self-importance had always struck Vin as a bit juvenile. While there were noblemen like Camon, the more impressive ones were like this Lord Renoux: calm, and self-confident. Men whose nobility was in their bearing rather than their ability to speak scornfully to those around them. Vin had to resist cringing when the impostor's eyes fell on her—he seemed far too much a nobleman, and she had been trained to reflexively avoid their attention.

"The manor is looking much better," Kelsier said, shaking hands with Renoux.

"Yes, I'm impressed with its progress," Renoux said. "My cleaning crews are quite proficient—give us a bit more time, and the manor will be so grand that I wouldn't hesitate to host the Lord Ruler himself."

Kelsier chuckled. "Wouldn't *that* be an odd dinner party." He stepped back, gesturing toward Vin. "This is the young lady I spoke of."

Renoux studied her, and Vin glanced away. She didn't like it when people looked at her that way—it made her wonder how they were going to try and use her.

"We will need to speak further of this, Kelsier," Renoux said, nodding toward the mansion's entrance. "The hour is late, but . . ."

Kelsier stepped into the building. "Late? Why, it's barely midnight. Have your people prepare some food—Lady Vin and I missed dinner."

A missed meal was nothing new to Vin. However, Renoux immediately waved to some servants, and they leapt into motion. Renoux walked into the building, and Vin followed. She paused in the entryway, however, Sazed waiting patiently behind her.

Kelsier paused, turning when he noticed that she wasn't following. "Vin?"

"It's so . . . clean," Vin said, unable to think of any other description. On jobs, she'd occasionally seen the homes of noblemen. However, those times had happened at night, in dark gloom. She was unprepared for the well-lit sight before her.

The white marble floors of Manor Renoux seemed to glow, reflecting the light of a dozen lanterns. Everything was . . . pristine. The walls were white except where they had been wash-painted with traditional animal murals. A brilliant chandelier sparkled above a double staircase, and the room's other decorations—crystal sculptures, vases set with bundles of aspen branches—glistened, unmarred by soot, smudge, or fingerprint.

Kelsier chuckled. "Well, her reaction speaks highly of your efforts," he said to Lord Renoux.

Vin allowed herself to be led into the building. The group turned right, entering a room whose whites were muted slightly by the addition of maroon furnishings and drapes.

Renoux paused. "Perhaps the lady could enjoy some refreshment here for a moment," he said to Kelsier. "There are some matters of a . . . delicate nature that I would discuss with you."

Kelsier shrugged. "Fine with me," he said, following Renoux toward another doorway. "Saze, why don't you keep Vin company while Lord Renoux and I talk?"

"Of course, Master Kelsier."

Kelsier smiled, eyeing Vin, and somehow she knew that he was leaving Sazed behind to keep her from eavesdropping.

She shot the departing men an annoyed look. *What was that you said about "trust," Kelsier?* However, she was even more annoyed at herself for getting unsettled. Why should she care if Kelsier excluded her? She had spent her entire life being ignored and dismissed. It had never bothered her before when other crewleaders left her out of their planning sessions.

Vin took a seat in one of the stiffly upholstered maroon chairs, tucking her feet up beneath her. She knew what the problem was. Kelsier had been showing her too much respect, making her feel too important. She was beginning to think that she *deserved* to be part of his secret confidences. Reen's laughter in the back of her mind discredited those thoughts, and she sat, annoyed at both herself and Kelsier, feeling ashamed, but not exactly certain why.

Renoux's servants brought her a platter of fruits and breads. They set up a small stand beside her chair, and even gave her a crystalline cup filled with a glistening red liquid. She couldn't tell if it was wine or juice, and she didn't intend to find out. She did, however, pick at the food—her instincts wouldn't let her pass up a free meal, even if it was prepared by unfamiliar hands.

Sazed walked over and took a position standing just behind her chair to the right. He waited with a stiff posture, hands clasped in front of him, eyes forward. The stance was obviously intended to be respectful, but his looming posture didn't help her mood any.

Vin tried to focus on her surroundings, but this only reminded her of how rich the furnishings were. She was uncomfortable amid such finery; she felt as if she stood out like a black spot on a clean rug. She didn't eat the breads for fear that she would drop crumbs on the floor, and she worried at her feet and legs—which had been stained with ash while walking through the countryside—marring the furnishings.

*All of this cleanliness came at some skaa's expense,* Vin thought. *Why should I worry about disturbing it?* However, she had trouble feeling outraged, for she knew this was only a front. "Lord Renoux" had to maintain a certain level of finery. It would be suspicious to do otherwise.

In addition, something else kept her from resenting the waste. The servants were happy. They went about their duties with a businesslike professionalism, no sense of drudgery about their efforts. She heard laughter in the outer hallway. These were not mistreated skaa; whether they had been included in Kelsier's plans or not was irrelevant.

So, Vin sat and forced herself to eat fruit, yawning occasionally. It was turning out to be a long night indeed. The servants eventually left her alone, though Sazed continued to loom just behind her.

*I can't eat like this,* she finally thought with frustration. "Could you not stand over my shoulder like that?"

Sazed nodded. He took two steps forward so that he stood next to her chair, rather than behind it. He adopted the same stiff posture, looming above her just as he had before.

Vin frowned in annoyance, then noticed the smile on Sazed's lips. He glanced down at her, eyes twinkling at his joke, then walked over and seated himself in the chair beside hers.

"I've never known a Terrisman with a sense of humor before," Vin said dryly.

Sazed raised an eyebrow. "I was under the impression that you hadn't known any Terrismen at all, Mistress Vin."

Vin paused. "Well, I've never *heard* of one with a sense of humor. You're supposed to be completely rigid and formal."

"We're just subtle, Mistress," Sazed said. Though he sat with a stiff posture, there was still something . . . relaxed about him. It was as if he were as comfortable when sitting properly as other people were when lounging.

*That's how they're supposed to be. The perfect serving men, completely loyal to the Final Empire.*

"Is something troubling you, Mistress Vin?" Sazed asked as she studied him.

*How much does he know? Perhaps he doesn't even realize that Renoux is an imposter.* "I was just wondering how you . . . came here," she finally said.

"You mean, how did a Terrisman steward end up as part of a rebellion intending to overthrow the Final Empire?" Sazed asked in his soft voice.

Vin flushed. Apparently he was well versed indeed.

"That is an intriguing question, Mistress," Sazed said. "Certainly, my situation is not common. I would say that I arrived at it because of belief."

"Belief?"

"Yes," Sazed said. "Tell me, Mistress. What is it that you believe?"

Vin frowned. "What kind of question is that?"

"The most important kind, I think."

Vin sat for a moment, but he obviously expected a reply, so she finally shrugged. "I don't know."

"People often say that," Sazed said, "but I find that it is rarely true. Do you believe in the Final Empire?"

"I believe that it is strong," Vin said.

"Immortal?"

Vin shrugged. "It has been so far."

"And the Lord Ruler? Is he the Ascended Avatar of God? Do you believe that he, as the Ministry teaches, is a Sliver of Infinity?"

"I . . . I've never thought about it before."

"Perhaps you should," Sazed said. "If, upon examination, you find that the Ministry's teachings do not suit you, then I would be pleased to offer you an alternative."

"What alternative?"

Sazed smiled. "That depends. The right belief is like a good cloak, I think. If it fits you well, it keeps you warm and safe. The wrong fit, however, can suffocate."

Vin paused, frowning slightly, but Sazed just smiled. Eventually, she turned her attention back to her meal. After a short wait, the side door opened, and Kelsier and Renoux returned.

"Now," Renoux said as he and Kelsier seated themselves, a group of servants bringing another plate of food for Kelsier, "let us discuss this child. The man you were going to have play my heir will not do, you say?"

"Unfortunately," Kelsier said, making quick work of his food.

"That complicates things greatly," Renoux said.

Kelsier shrugged. "We'll just have Vin be your heir."

Renoux shook his head. "A girl her age *could* inherit, but it would be suspicious for me to pick her. There are any number of legitimate male cousins in the Renoux line who would be far more suitable choices. It was going to be difficult enough to get a middle-aged man past courtly scrutiny. A young girl . . . no, too many people would investigate her background. Our forged family lines will survive passing scrutiny, but if someone were to actually send messengers to search out her holdings . . ."

Kelsier frowned.

"Besides," Renoux added. "There is another issue. If I were to name a young, unmarried girl as my heir, hers would instantly become one of the most sought-after hands in Luthadel. It would be very difficult for her to spy if she were to receive that much attention."

Vin flushed at the thought. Surprisingly, she found her heart sinking as the old imposter spoke. *This was the only part Kelsier gave me in the plan. If I can't do it, what good am I to the crew?*

"So, what do you suggest?" Kelsier asked.

"Well, she doesn't *have* to be my heir," Renoux said. "What if, instead, she were simply a young scion I brought with me to Luthadel? Perhaps I promised her parents—distant but favored cousins—that I would introduce their daughter to the court? Everyone would assume that my ulterior motive is to marry her off to a high noble family, thereby gaining myself another connection to those in power. However, she wouldn't draw much attention—she would be of low status, not to mention somewhat rural."

"Which would explain why she's a bit less refined than other court members," Kelsier said. "No offense, Vin."

Vin looked up from hiding a piece of napkin-wrapped bread in her shirt pocket. "Why would I be offended?"

Kelsier smiled. "Never mind."

Renoux nodded to himself. "Yes, this will work much better.

Everyone assumes that House Renoux will eventually join the high nobility, so they'll accept Vin into their ranks out of courtesy. However, she herself will be unimportant enough that most people will ignore her. That is the ideal situation for what we will want her to do."

"I like it," Kelsier said. "Few people expect a man of your age and mercantile concerns to bother himself with balls and parties, but having a young socialite to send instead of a rejection note will serve as an advantage to your reputation."

"Indeed," Renoux said. "She'll need some refinement, however—and not just in appearance."

Vin squirmed a bit beneath their scrutiny. It looked as if her part in the plan would go forward, and she suddenly realized what that meant. Being around Renoux made her uncomfortable—and he was a *fake* nobleman. How would she react to an entire room full of real ones?

"I'm afraid I'll have to borrow Sazed from you for a while," Kelsier said.

"Quite all right," Renoux said. "He's really not my steward, but yours."

"Actually," Kelsier said, "I don't think he's *anybody's* steward anymore, eh Saze?"

Sazed cocked his head. "A Terrisman without a master is like a soldier with no weapon, Master Kelsier. I have enjoyed my time attending to Lord Renoux, as I am certain that I shall enjoy returning to your service."

"Oh, you won't be returning to my service," Kelsier said.

Sazed raised an eyebrow.

Kelsier nodded toward Vin. "Renoux is right, Saze. Vin needs some coaching, and I know plenty of high noblemen who are less refined than yourself. Do you think you could help the girl prepare?"

"I am certain that I could offer the young lady some aid," Sazed said.

"Good," Kelsier said, popping one last cake in his mouth, then rising. "I'm glad that's settled, because I'm starting to feel tired—and poor Vin looks like she's about to nod off in the middle of her fruit plate."

"I'm fine," Vin said immediately, the assertion weakened slightly by a stifled yawn.

"Sazed," Renoux said, "would you show them to the appropriate guest chambers?"

"Of course, Master Renoux," Sazed said, rising from his seat in a smooth motion.

Vin and Kelsier trailed the tall Terrisman from the room as a group of servants took away the remnants of the meal. *I left food behind,* Vin noticed, feeling a bit drowsy. She wasn't certain what to think of the occurrence.

As they crested the stairs and turned into a side hallway, Kelsier fell into place beside Vin. "I'm sorry for excluding you back there, Vin."

She shrugged. "There's no reason for me to know all of your plans."

"Nonsense," Kelsier said. "Your decision tonight makes you as much a part of this team as anyone else. Renoux's words in private, however, were of a personal nature. He is a marvelous actor, but he feels very uncomfortable with people knowing the specifics of how he took Lord Renoux's place. I promise you, nothing we discussed has any bearing on your part in the plan."

Vin continued walking. "I . . . believe you."

"Good," Kelsier said with a smile, clapping her on the shoulder. "Saze, I know my way to the men's guest quarters—I was, after all, the one who bought this place. I can make my way from here."

"Very well, Master Kelsier," Sazed said with a respectful nod. Kelsier shot Vin a smile, then turned down a hallway, walking with his characteristically lively step.

Vin watched him go, then followed Sazed down a different side passage, pondering the Allomancy training, her discussion with Kelsier in the carriage, and finally Kelsier's promise just a few moments before. The three thousand boxings—a fortune in coins—was a strange weight tied to her belt.

Eventually, Sazed opened a particular door for her, walking in to light the lanterns. "The linens are fresh, and I will send maids to prepare you a bath in the morning." He turned, handing her his candle. "Will you require anything else?"

Vin shook her head. Sazed smiled, bid her good evening, then walked back out in the hallway. Vin stood quietly for a short moment, studying the room. Then she turned, glancing once again in the direction Kelsier had gone.

"Sazed?" she said, peeking back out into the hallway.

The steward paused, turning back. "Yes, Mistress Vin?"

"Kelsier," Vin said quietly. "He's a good man, isn't he?"

Sazed smiled. "A very good man, Mistress. One of the best I've known."

Vin nodded slightly. "A good man . . ." she said softly. "I don't think

I’ve ever known one of those before.”

Sazed smiled, then bowed his head respectfully and turned to leave.

Vin let the door swing shut.

# THE END OF PART ONE

# PART TWO

# REBELS BENEATH
# A SKY OF ASH

*In the end, I worry that my arrogance shall destroy us all.*

# 9

VIN PUSHED AGAINST THE COIN and threw herself up into the mist. She flew away from earth and stone, soaring through the dark currents of the sky, wind fluttering her cloak.

*This is freedom,* she thought, breathing deeply of the cool, damp air. She closed her eyes, feeling the passing wind. *This was what I was always missing, yet never knew it.*

She opened her eyes as she began to descend. She waited until the last moment, then flicked a coin. It hit the cobblestones, and she Pushed against it lightly, slowing her descent. She burned pewter with a flash and hit the ground running, dashing along Fellise's quiet streets. The late-autumn air was cool, but winters were generally mild in the Central Dominance. Some years passed without even a flake of snow.

She tossed a coin backward, then used it to Push herself slightly up and to the right. She landed on a low stone wall, barely breaking stride as she ran spryly along the wall's top. Burning pewter enhanced more than muscles—it increased all the body's physical abilities. Keeping pewter at a low burn gave her a sense of balance that any night burglar would have envied.

The wall turned north, and Vin paused at the corner. She fell into a crouch, bare feet and sensitive fingers gripping the chill stone. Her copper on to hide her Allomancy, she flared tin to strain her senses.

Stillness. Aspens made insubstantial ranks in the mist, like emaciated skaa standing in their work lines. Estates rolled in the distance—each one walled, manicured, and well guarded. There were far fewer dots of light in the city than there were in Luthadel. Many of the homes were only part-time residences, their masters away visiting some other sliver of the Final Empire.

Blue lines suddenly appeared before her—one end of each pointing at her chest, the other disappearing into the mists. Vin immediately jumped to the side, dodging as a pair of coins shot past in the night air, leaving trails in the mist. She flared pewter, landing on the cobbled street beside the wall. Her tin-enhanced ears picked out a scraping sound; then a dark form shot into the sky, a few blue lines pointing to his coin pouch.

Vin dropped a coin and threw herself into the air after her opponent. They soared for a moment, flying over the grounds of some unsuspecting nobleman. Vin's opponent suddenly changed course in the air, jerking toward the mansion itself. Vin followed, letting go of the coin below her, instead burning iron and Pulling on one of the mansion's window latches.

Her opponent hit first, and she heard a thud as he ran into the side of the building. He was off a second later.

A light brightened, and a confused head poked out of a window as Vin spun in the air, landing feet-first against the mansion. She immediately kicked off of the vertical surface, angling herself slightly and Pushing against the same window latch. Glass cracked, and she shot away into the night before gravity could reclaim her.

Vin flew through the mists, eyes straining to keep track of her quarry. He shot a couple of coins back at her, but she Pushed them away with a dismissive thought. A hazy blue line fell downward—a dropped coin—and her opponent moved to the side again.

Vin dropped her own coin and Pushed. However, her coin suddenly jerked backward along the ground—the result of a Push from her opponent. The sudden move changed the trajectory of Vin's jump, throwing her sideways. She cursed, flicking another coin to the side, using it to Push herself back on track. By then, she'd lost her quarry.

*All right* . . . she thought, hitting the soft ground just inside the wall. She emptied a few coins into her hand, then tossed the mostly full pouch into the air, giving it a strong Push in the direction she had seen her quarry disappear. The pouch disappeared into the mists, trailing a faint blue Allomantic line.

A scattering of coins suddenly shot from the bushes ahead, streaking toward her bag. Vin smiled. Her opponent had assumed that the flying pouch was Vin herself. He was too far away to see the coins in her hand, just as he had been too far away for her to see the coins he carried.

A dark figure jumped out of the bushes, hopping up onto the stone wall. Vin waited quietly as the figure ran along the wall and slipped down onto the other side.

Vin launched herself straight up into the air, then threw her handful of coins at the figure passing below. He immediately Pushed, sending the coins streaking away—but they were only a distraction. Vin landed on the ground before him, twin glass knives whipping from her sheathes. She lunged, slashing, but her opponent jumped backward.

*Something's wrong.* Vin ducked and threw herself to the side as a handful of glittering coins—her coins, the ones her opponent had Pushed away—shot back down from the sky into her opponent's hand. He turned and sprayed them in her direction.

Vin dropped her daggers with a quiet yelp, thrusting her hands forward and Pushing on the coins. Immediately, she was thrown backward as her Push was matched by her opponent.

One of the coins lurched in the air, hanging directly between the two of them. The rest of the coins disappeared into the mists, pushed sideways by conflicting forces.

Vin flared her steel as she flew, and heard her opponent grunt as he was Pushed backward as well. Her opponent hit the wall. Vin slammed into a tree, but she flared pewter and ignored the pain. She used the wood to brace herself, continuing to Push.

The coin quivered in the air, trapped between the amplified strength of two Allomancers. The pressure increased. Vin gritted her teeth, feeling the small aspen bend behind her.

Her opponent's Pushing was relentless.

*Will . . . not . . . be beaten!* Vin thought, flaring both steel and pewter, grunting slightly as she threw the entire force of her strength at the coin.

There was a moment of silence. Then Vin lurched backward, the tree cracking with a loud snap in the night air.

Vin hit the ground in a tumble, splinters of wood scattering around her. Even tin and pewter weren't enough to keep her mind clear as she rolled across the cobblestones, eventually coming to a dizzy rest. A dark figure approached, mistcloak ribbons billowing around him. Vin lurched to her feet, grasping for knives she'd forgotten that she'd dropped.

Kelsier put down his hood and held her knives toward her. One was broken. "I know it's instinctual, Vin, but you don't have to put your hands forward when you Push—nor do you have to drop what you're holding."

Vin grimaced in the darkness, rubbing her shoulder and nodding as she accepted the daggers.

"Nice job with the pouch," Kelsier said. "You had me for a moment."

"For all the good it did," Vin grumbled.

"You've only been doing this for a few months, Vin," he said lightly. "All things considered, your progress is fantastic. I would, however, recommend that you avoid Push-matches with people who weigh more than you." He paused, eyeing Vin's short figure and thin frame. "Which probably means avoiding them with pretty much everybody."

Vin sighed, stretching slightly. She'd have more bruises. *At least they won't be visible.* Now that the bruises Camon had given her face were finally gone, Sazed had warned her to be careful. Makeup could only cover so much, and she would have to look like a "proper" young noblewoman if she were going to infiltrate the court.

"Here," Kelsier said, handing her something. "A souvenir."

Vin held up the object—the coin they had Pushed between them. It was bent and flattened from the pressure.

"I'll see you back at the mansion," Kelsier said.

Vin nodded, and Kelsier disappeared into the night. *He's right,* she thought. *I'm smaller, I weigh less, and I have a shorter reach than anyone I'm likely to fight. If I attack someone head on, I'll lose.*

The alternative had always been her method anyway—to struggle quietly, to stay unseen. She had to learn to use Allomancy the same way. Kelsier kept saying that she was developing amazingly fast as an Allomancer. He seemed to think it was his teaching, but Vin felt it was something else. The mists . . . the night prowling . . . it all felt *right* to her. She was not worried about mastering Allomancy in time to help Kelsier against other Mistborn.

It was her other part in the plan that worried her.

Sighing, Vin hopped over the wall to search for her coin pouch. Up at the mansion—not Renoux's home, but one owned by some other nobleman—lights were on and people milled about. None of them ventured deeply into the night. The skaa would fear mistwraiths; the nobility would have guessed that Mistborn had caused the disturbance. Neither one was something a sane person would want to confront.

Vin eventually traced her pouch by steel-line to the upper branches of a tree. She Pulled it slightly, tugging it down into her hand, then made her way back out to the street. Kelsier probably would have left the pouch behind—the two dozen or so clips it contained wouldn't have been worth his time. However, for most of her life Vin had scrounged and starved. She just couldn't force herself to be wasteful. Even tossing coins to jump with made her uncomfortable.

So, she used her coins sparingly as she traveled back toward Renoux's mansion, instead Pushing and Pulling off of buildings and discarded bits of metal. The half-jumping, half-running gait of a

Mistborn came naturally to her now, and she didn't have to think much about her movements.

How would she fare, trying to pretend to be a noblewoman? She couldn't hide her apprehensions, not from herself. Camon had been good at imitating noblemen because of his self-confidence, and that was one attribute Vin knew she didn't have. Her success with Allomancy only proved that her place was in corners and shadows, not striding around in pretty dresses at courtly balls.

Kelsier, however, refused to let her back out. Vin landed in a crouch just outside Mansion Renoux, puffing slightly from exertion. She regarded the lights with a slight feeling of apprehension.

*You've got to learn to do this, Vin,* Kelsier kept telling her. *You're a talented Allomancer, but you'll need more than Steel-pushes to succeed against the nobility. Until you can move in their society as easily as you do in the mists, you'll be at a disadvantage.*

Letting out a quiet sigh, Vin rose from her crouch, then took off her mistcloak and stuffed it away for later retrieval. Then she walked up the steps and into the building. When she asked after Sazed, the mansion servants directed her to the kitchens, so she made her way into the closed-off, hidden section of the mansion that was the servants' quarters.

Even these parts of the building were kept immaculately clean. Vin was beginning to understand why Renoux made such a convincing impostor: He didn't allow for imperfection. If he maintained his impersonation half as well as he maintained order in his mansion, then Vin doubted anyone would ever discover the ruse.

*But,* she thought, *he must have some flaw. Back in the meeting two months ago, Kelsier said that Renoux wouldn't be able to withstand scrutiny by an Inquisitor. Perhaps they'd be able to sense something about his emotions, something that gives him away?*

It was a small item, but Vin had not forgotten it. Despite Kelsier's words about honesty and trust, he still had his secrets. Everyone did.

Sazed was, indeed, to be found in the kitchens. He stood with a middle-aged servant. She was tall for a skaa woman—though standing next to Sazed made her look diminutive. Vin recognized her as a member of the mansion staff; Cosahn was her name. Vin had made an effort to memorize all of the names of the local staff, if only to keep tabs on them.

Sazed looked over as Vin entered. "Ah, Mistress Vin. Your return is quite timely." He gestured to his companion. "This is Cosahn."

Cosahn studied Vin with a businesslike air. Vin longed to return to the mists, where people couldn't look at her like that.

“It is long enough now, I think,” Sazed said.

“Probably,” Cosahn said. “But I cannot perform miracles, Master Vaht.”

Sazed nodded. “Vaht” was, apparently, the proper title for a Terrisman steward. Not quite skaa, but definitely not noblemen, the Terrismen held a very strange place in imperial society.

Vin studied the two of them suspiciously.

“Your hair, Mistress,” Sazed said with a calm tone. “Cosahn is going to cut it for you.”

“Oh,” Vin said, reaching up. Her hair was getting a bit long for her taste—though somehow she doubted that Sazed was going to let her have it cropped boyishly short.

Cosahn waved to a chair, and Vin reluctantly seated herself. She found it unnerving to sit docilely while someone worked with shears so close to her head, but there was no getting around it.

After a few moments of running her hands through Vin’s hair, “tisk”ing quietly, Cosahn began to snip. “Such beautiful hair,” she said, almost as if to herself, “thick, with a nice deep black color. It’s a shame to see it cared for so poorly, Master Vaht. Many courtly women would die for hair like this—it has just enough body to lie full, but is straight enough to work with easily.”

Sazed smiled. “We’ll have to see that it receives better care in the future,” he said.

Cosahn continued her work, nodding to herself. Eventually, Sazed walked over and took a seat just a few feet in front of Vin.

“Kelsier hasn’t returned yet, I assume?” Vin asked.

Sazed shook his head, and Vin sighed. Kelsier didn’t think she was practiced enough go with him on his nightly raids, many of which he went on directly following his training sessions with Vin. During the last two months, Kelsier had put in appearances on the properties of a dozen different noble houses, both in Luthadel and in Fellise. He varied his disguises and apparent motives, trying to create an air of confusion among the Great Houses.

“What?” Vin asked, eyeing Sazed, who was regarding her with a curious look.

The Terrisman nodded his head slightly with respect. “I was wondering if you might be willing to listen to another proposal.”

Vin sighed, rolling her eyes. “Fine.” *It isn’t like I can do anything else but sit here.*

“I think I have the perfect religion for you,” Sazed said, his normally stoic face revealing a glimmer of eagerness. “It is called ‘Trelagism,’ after the god Trell. Trell was worshipped by a group known as the Nelazan, a people who lived far to the north. In their land, the day and night cycle was very odd. During some months of the year, it was dark for most of the day. During the summer, however, it only grew dark for a few hours at a time.

"The Nelazan believed that there was beauty in darkness, and that the daylight was more profane. They saw the stars as the Thousand Eyes of Trell watching them. The sun was the single, jealous eye of Trell's brother, Nalt. Since Nalt only had one eye, he made it blaze brightly to outshine his brother. The Nelazan, however, were not impressed, and preferred to worship the quiet Trell, who watched over them even when Nalt obscured the sky."

Sazed fell silent. Vin wasn't sure how to respond, so she didn't say anything.

"It really is a good religion, Mistress Vin," Sazed said. "Very gentle, yet very powerful. The Nelazan were not an advanced people, but they were quite determined. They mapped the entire night sky, counting and placing every major star. Their ways suit you—especially their preference of the night. I can tell you more, if you wish."

Vin shook her head. "That's all right, Sazed."

"Not a good fit, then?" Sazed said, frowning slightly. "Ah, well. I shall have to consider it some more. Thank you, Mistress—you are very patient with me, I think."

"Consider it some more?" Vin asked. "That's the fifth religion you've tried to convert me to, Saze. How many more can there be?"

"Five hundred and sixty two," Sazed said. "Or, at least, that is the number of belief systems I know. There are, likely and unfortunately, others that have passed from this world without leaving traces for my people to collect."

Vin paused. "And you have all of these religions *memorized?*"

"As much as is possible," Sazed said. "Their prayers, their beliefs, their mythologies. Many are very similar—breakoffs or sects of one another."

"Even still, how can you remember all of that?"

"I have . . . methods," Sazed said.

"But, what's the point?"

Sazed frowned. "The answer should be obvious, I think. People are valuable, Mistress Vin, and so—therefore—are their beliefs. Since the Ascension a thousand years ago, so many beliefs have disappeared. The Steel Ministry forbids the worship of anyone but the Lord Ruler, and the Inquisitors have quite diligently destroyed hundreds of religions. If *someone* doesn't remember them, then they will simply disappear."

"You mean," Vin said incredulously, "you're trying to get me to believe in religions that have been dead for a thousand years?"

Sazed nodded.

*Is everyone involved with Kelsier insane?*

"The Final Empire cannot last forever," Sazed said quietly. "I do not know if Master Kelsier will be the one who finally brings its end, but that end *will* come. And when it does—when the Steel Ministry no longer holds sway—men will wish to return to the beliefs of their fathers. On that day they will look to the Keepers, and on that day we shall return to mankind his forgotten truths."

"Keepers?" Vin asked as Cosahn moved around to begin snipping at her bangs. "There are more like you?"

"Not many," Sazed said. "But some. Enough to pass the truths on to the next generation."

Vin sat thoughtfully, resisting the urge to squirm beneath Cosahn's ministrations. The woman certainly was taking her time—when Reen had cut Vin's hair, he had been finished after just a few quick hacks.

"Shall we go over your lessons while we wait, Mistress Vin?" Sazed asked.

Vin eyed the Terrisman, and he smiled just slightly. He knew that he had her captive; she couldn't hide, or even sit at the window, staring out into the mists. All she could do was sit and listen. "Fine."

"Can you name all ten Great Houses of Luthadel in order of power?"

"Venture, Hasting, Elariel, Tekiel, Lekal, Erikeller, Erikell, Haught, Urbain, and Buvidas."

"Good," Sazed said. "And you are?"

"I am the Lady Valette Renoux, fourth cousin to Lord Teven Renoux, who owns this mansion. My parents—Lord Hadren and Lady Fellette Renoux—live in Chakath, a city in the Western Dominance. Major export, wool. My family works in trading dyes, specifically blushdip red, from the snails that are common there, and callowfield yellow, made from tree bark. As part of a trade agreement with their distant cousin, my parents sent me down here to Luthadel, so I can spend some time at court."

Sazed nodded. "And how do you feel about this opportunity?"

"I am amazed and a little overwhelmed," Vin said. "People will pay attention to me because they wish to curry favor with Lord Renoux. Since I'm not familiar with the ways of court, I will be flattered by their attention. I will ingratiate myself to the court community, but I will stay quiet and out of trouble."

"Your memorization skills are admirable, Mistress," Sazed said. "This humble attendant wonders how much more successful might you be if you dedicated yourself to learning, rather than dedicating yourself to avoiding our lessons."

Vin eyed him. "Do all Terrisman 'humble attendants' give their masters as much lip as you do?"

"Only the successful ones."

Vin eyed him for a moment, then sighed. "I'm sorry, Saze. I don't mean to avoid your lessons. I just . . . the mists . . . I get distracted sometimes."

"Well, fortunately and honestly, you are very quick to learn. However, the people of the court have had their entire lives to study etiquette. Even as a rural noblewoman, there are certain things you would know."

"I know," Vin said. "I don't want to stand out."

"Oh, you can't avoid that, Mistress. A newcomer, from a distant part of the empire? Yes, they will notice you. We just don't want to make them suspicious. You must be considered, then dismissed. If you act too much like a fool, that will be suspect in and of itself."

*Great.*

Sazed paused, cocking his head slightly. A few seconds later, Vin heard footsteps in the hallway outside. Kelsier sauntered into the room, bearing a self-satisfied smile. He pulled off his mistcloak, then paused as he saw Vin.

"What?" she asked, sinking a little further into the chair.

"The haircut looks good," Kelsier said. "Nice job, Cosahn."

"It was nothing, Master Kelsier." Vin could hear the blush in her voice. "I just work with what I have."

"Mirror," Vin said, holding out her hand.

Cosahn handed her one. Vin held it up, and what she saw gave her pause. She looked . . . like a girl.

Cosahn had done a remarkable job of evening out the hair, and she had managed to get rid of the snags. Vin had always found that if her hair got too long, it had a tendency to stand up. Cosahn had done something about this too. Vin's hair still wasn't very long—it barely hung down over her ears—but at least it lay flat.

*You don't want them to think of you as a girl,* Reen's voice warned. Yet, for once, she found herself wanting to ignore that voice.

"We might actually turn you into a lady, Vin!" Kelsier said with a laugh, earning him a glare from Vin.

"First we'll have to persuade her not to scowl so often, Master Kelsier," Sazed noted.

"That's going to be hard," Kelsier said. "She's quite fond of making faces. Anyway, well done, Cosahn."

"I've still got a little bit of trimming to do, Master Kelsier," the woman said.

"By all means, continue," Kelsier said. "But I'm going to filch Sazed for a moment."

Kelsier winked at Vin, smiled at Cosahn, then he and Sazed retreated from the room—once again leaving Vin where she couldn't eavesdrop.

Kelsier peeked into the kitchen, watching Vin sit sullenly in her chair. The haircut really was good. However, his compliments had an ulterior motive—he suspected that Vin had spent far too much of her life being told that she was worthless. Perhaps if she had a bit more self-confidence, she wouldn't try to hide so much.

He let the door slide shut, turning to Sazed. The Terrisman waited, as always, with restful patience.

"How is the training going?" Kelsier asked.

"Very well, Master Kelsier," Sazed said. "She already knew some things from training she received at her brother's hands. Above that, however, she is an extremely intelligent girl—perceptive and quick to memorize. I didn't expect such skill from one who grew up in her circumstances."

"A lot of the street children are clever," Kelsier said. "The ones who aren't dead."

Sazed nodded solemnly. "She is extremely reserved, and I sense that she doesn't see the full value in my lessons. She is very obedient, but is quick to exploit mistakes or misunderstandings. If I don't tell her exactly when and where to meet, I often have to search the entire mansion for her."

Kelsier nodded. "I think it's her way of maintaining a bit of control in her life. Anyway, what I really wanted to know is whether she's ready or not."

"I'm not sure, Master Kelsier," Sazed replied. "Pure knowledge is not the equivalent of skill. I'm not certain if she has the . . . poise to imitate a noblewoman, even a young and inexperienced one. We've done practice dinners, gone over conversational etiquette, and memorized gossip. She seems skilled at it all, in a controlled situation. She's even done well sitting in on tea meetings when Renoux entertains noble guests. However, we won't really be able to tell if she can do this until we put her alone in a party full of aristocrats."

"I wish she could practice some more," Kelsier said with a shake of his head. "But every week we spend preparing increases the chances that the Ministry will discover our budding army in the caves."

"It is a test of balance, then," Sazed said. "We must wait long enough to gather the men we need, yet move soon enough to avoid discovery."

Kelsier nodded. "We can't pause for one crewmember—we'll have to find someone else to be our mole if Vin does badly. Poor girl—I wish I had time to train her better in Allomancy. We've barely covered the first four metals. I just don't have enough *time*!"

"If I might make a suggestion . . ."

"Of course, Saze."

"Send the child with some of the Misting crewmembers," Sazed said. "I hear that the man Breeze is a very accomplished Soother, and surely the others are equally skilled. Let them show Mistress Vin how to use her abilities."

Kelsier paused thoughtfully. "That's a good idea, Saze."

"But?"

Kelsier glanced back toward the door, beyond which Vin was still petulantly getting her haircut. "I'm not sure. Today, when we were training, we got into a Steelpush shoving match. The kid has to weigh less than half what I do, but she gave me a decent pummeling anyway."

"Different people have different strengths in Allomancy," Sazed said.

"Yes, but the variance isn't usually this great," Kelsier said. "Plus, it took me months and months to learn how to manipulate my Pushes and Pulls. It's not as easy as it sounds—even something as simple as Pushing yourself up onto a rooftop requires an understanding of weight, balance, and trajectory.

"But Vin . . . she seems to know all these things instinctively. True, she can only use the first four metals with any skill, but the progress she's made is amazing."

"She is a special girl."

Kelsier nodded. "She deserves more time to learn about her powers. I feel a little guilty about pulling her into our plans. She'll probably end up at a Ministry execution ceremony with the rest of us."

“But that guilt won’t stop you from using her to spy on the aristocracy.”

Kelsier shook his head. “No,” he said quietly. “It won’t. We’ll need every advantage we can get. Just . . . watch over her, Saze. From now on, you’ll act as Vin’s steward and guardian at the functions she attends—it won’t be odd for her to bring a Terrisman servant with her.”

“Not at all,” Sazed agreed. “In fact, it would be strange to send a girl her age to courtly functions without an escort.”

Kelsier nodded. “Protect her, Saze. She might be a powerful Allomancer, but she’s inexperienced. I’ll feel a lot less guilty about sending her into those aristocratic dens if I know you’re with her.”

“I will protect her with my life, Master Kelsier. I promise you this.”

Kelsier smiled, resting a thankful hand on Sazed’s shoulder. “I feel pity for the man who gets in your way.”

Sazed bowed his head humbly. He looked innocuous, but Kelsier knew the strength that Sazed hid. Few men, Allomancers or not, would fare well in a fight with a Keeper whose anger had been roused. That was probably why the Ministry had hunted the sect virtually to extinction.

“All right,” Kelsier said. “Get back to your teaching. Lord Venture is throwing a ball at the end of the week, and—ready or not—Vin is going to be there.”

*It amazes me how many nations have united behind our purpose. There are still dissenters, of course—and some kingdoms, regrettably, have fallen to wars that I could not stop.*

*Still, this general unity is glorious, even humbling, to contemplate. I wish that the nations of mankind hadn't required such a dire threat to make them see the value of peace and cooperation.*

# 10

VIN WALKED ALONG A STREET in the Cracks—one of Luthadel's many skaa slums—with her hood up. For some reason, she found the muffled heat of a hood preferable to the oppressive red sunlight.

She walked with a slouch, eyes down, sticking near to the side of the street. The skaa she passed had similar airs of dejection. No one looked up; no one walked with a straight back or an optimistic smile. In the slums, those things would make one look suspicious.

She'd almost forgotten how oppressive Luthadel could be. Her weeks in Fellise had accustomed her to trees and washed stone. Here, there was nothing white—no creeping aspens, no whitewashed granite. All was black.

Buildings were stained by countless, repetitive ashfalls. Air curled with smoke from the infamous Luthadel smithies and a thousand separate noble kitchens. Cobblestones, doorways, and corners were clogged with soot—the slums were rarely swept clean.

*It's like . . . things are actually brighter at night than they are during the day,* Vin thought, pulling her patched skaa cloak close, turning a corner. She passed beggars, huddled on corners, hands outstretched and hoping for an offering, their pleadings falling vainly on the ears of people who were themselves starving. She passed workers, walking with heads and shoulders bowed, caps or hoods pulled down to keep ash out of their eyes. Occasionally, she passed squads of Garrison town guards, walking with full armor—breastplate, cap, and black cloak—trying to look as intimidating as possible.

This last group moved through the slums, acting as the Lord Ruler's hands in an area most obligators found too distasteful to visit. The Garrisoners kicked at beggars to make certain they were truly invalids, stopped wandering workers to harass them about being on the streets instead of working, and made a general nuisance of themselves. Vin ducked down as a group passed, pulling her hood close. She was old enough that she should have been either bearing children or working in a mill, but her size often made her look younger in profile.

Either the ruse worked, or this particular squad wasn't interested in looking for ditchers, for they let her pass with barely a glance. She ducked around a corner, walking down an ash-drifted alley, and approached the soup kitchen at the end of the small street.

Like most of its kind, the kitchen was dingy and poorly maintained. In an economy where workers were rarely, if ever, given direct pay, kitchens had to be supported by the nobility. Some local lords—probably the owners of the mills and forges in the area—paid the kitchen owner to provide food for the local skaa. The workers would be given meal tokens for their time, and would be allowed a short break at midday to go eat. The central kitchen would allow the smaller businesses to avoid the costs of providing on-site meals.

Of course, since the kitchen owner was paid directly, he could pocket whatever he could save on ingredients. In Vin's experience, kitchen food was about as tasty as ashwater.

Fortunately, she hadn't come to eat. She joined the line at the door, waiting quietly as workers presented their meal chips. When her turn came, she pulled out a small wooden disk and passed it to the skaa man at the door. He accepted the chip with a smooth motion, nodding almost imperceptibly to his right.

Vin walked in the indicated direction, passing through a filthy dining room, floor scattered with tracked-in ash. As she approached the far wall, she could see a splintery wooden door set in the room's corner. A man seated by the door caught her eyes, nodded slightly, and pushed the door open. Vin passed quickly into the small room beyond.

"Vin, my dear!" Breeze said, lounging at a table near the center of the room. "Welcome! How was Fellise?"

Vin shrugged, taking a seat at the table.

"Ah," Breeze said. "I'd almost forgotten what a fascinating conversationalist you are. Wine?"

Vin shook her head.

"Well, I would certainly like some." Breeze wore one of his extravagant suits, dueling cane resting across his lap. The chamber was only lit by a single lantern, but it was far cleaner than the room outside. Of the four other men in the room, Vin recognized only one—an apprentice from Clubs's shop. The two by the door were obviously guards. The last man appeared to be a regular skaa worker—complete with blackened jacket and ashen face. His self-confident air, however, proved that he was a member of the underground. Probably one of Yeden's rebels.

Breeze held up his cup, tapping its side with his fingernail. The rebel regarded it darkly.

"Right now," Breeze said, "you're wondering if I'm using Allomancy on you. Perhaps I am, perhaps I am not. Does it matter? I'm here by your leader's invitation, and he ordered you to see that I was made comfortable. And, I assure you, a cup of wine in my hand is *absolutely* necessary for my comfort."

The skaa man waited for a moment, then snatched the cup and stalked away, grumbling under his breath about foolish costs and wasted resources.

Breeze raised an eyebrow, turning to Vin. He seemed quite pleased with himself.

"So, did you Push him?" she asked.

Breeze shook his head. "Waste of brass. Did Kelsier tell you why he asked you to come here today?"

"He told me to watch you," Vin said, a bit annoyed at being handed off to Breeze. "He said he didn't have time to train me in all the metals."

"Well," Breeze said, "let us begin, then. First, you must understand that Soothing is about more than just Allomancy. It's about the delicate and noble art of manipulation."

"Noble indeed," Vin said.

"Ah, you sound like one of *them,*" Breeze said.

"Them who?"

"Them everyone else," Breeze said. "You saw how that skaa gentleman treated me? People don't like us, my dear. The idea of someone who can play with their emotions, who can 'mystically' get them to do certain things, makes them uncomfortable. What they do not realize—and what you *must* realize—is that manipulating others is something that all people do. In fact, manipulation is at the core of our social interaction."

He settled back, raising his dueling cane and gesturing with it slightly as he spoke. "Think about it. What is a man doing when he seeks the affection of a young lady? Why, he is trying to manipulate her to regard him favorably. What happens when old two friends sit down for a drink? They tell stories, trying to impress each other. Life as a human being is about posturing and influence. This isn't a bad thing—in fact, we depend upon it. These interactions teach us how to respond to others."

He paused, pointing at Vin with the cane. "The difference between Soothers and regular people is that we are aware of what we're doing. We also have a slight . . . advantage. But, is it really that much more 'powerful' than having a charismatic personality or a fine set of teeth? I think not."

Vin paused.

"Besides," Breeze added, "as I mentioned, a good Soother must be skilled far beyond his ability to use Allomancy. Allomancy can't let you read minds or even emotions—in a way, you're as blind as anyone else. You fire off pulses of emotions, targeted at a single person or in an area, and your subjects will have their emotions altered—hopefully producing the effect that you wished. However, great Soothers are those who can successfully use their eyes and instincts to know how a person is feeling *before* they get Soothed."

"What does it matter how they're feeling?" Vin said, trying to cover her annoyance. "You're just going to Soothe them anyway, right? So, when you're done, they'll feel how you want them to."

Breeze sighed, shaking his head. "What would you say if you knew I'd Soothed you on three separate occasions during our conversation?"

Vin paused. "When?" she demanded.

"Does it matter?" Breeze asked. "This is the lesson you must learn, my dear. If you can't read how someone is feeling, then you'll never have a subtle touch with emotional Allomancy. Push someone too hard, and even the most blind of skaa will realize that they're being manipulated somehow. Touch too softly, and you won't produce a noticeable effect—other, more powerful emotions will still rule your subject."

Breeze shook his head. "It's all about understanding people," he continued. "You have to read how someone is feeling, change that feeling by nudging it in the proper direction, then channel their newfound emotional state to your advantage. That, my dear, is the challenge in what we do! It is difficult, but for those who can do it well . . ."

The door opened, and the sullen skaa man returned, bearing an entire bottle of wine. He put it and a cup on the table before Breeze, then went over to stand on the other side of the room, beside peepholes looking into the dining room.

"There are vast rewards," Breeze said with a quiet smile. He winked at her, then poured some wine.

Vin wasn't certain what to think. Breeze's opinion seemed cruel. Yet, Reen had trained her well. If she didn't have power over this thing, others would gain power over her through it. She started burning copper—as Kelsier had taught her—to shield herself from further manipulations on Breeze's part.

The door opened again, and a familiar vest-wearing form tromped in. "Hey, Vin," Ham said with a friendly wave. He walked over to the table, eyeing the wine. "Breeze, you know that the rebellion doesn't have the money for that kind of thing."

"Kelsier will reimburse them," Breeze said with a dismissive wave. "I simply cannot work with a dry throat. How is the area?"

"Secure," Ham said. "But I've got Tineyes on the corners just in case. Your bolt-exit is behind that hatch in the corner."

Breeze nodded, and Ham turned, looking at Clubs's apprentice. "You Smoking back there, Cobble?"

The boy nodded.

"Good lad," Ham said. "That's everything, then. Now we just have to wait for Kell's speech."

Breeze checked his pocket watch. "He's not scheduled for another few minutes. Shall I have someone fetch you a cup?"

"I'll pass," Ham said.

Breeze shrugged, sipping his wine.

There was a moment of silence. Finally, Ham spoke. "So . . ."

"No," Breeze interrupted.

"But—"

"Whatever it is, we don't want to hear about it."

Ham gave the Soother a flat stare. "You can't Push me into complacence, Breeze."

Breeze rolled his eyes, taking a drink.

"What?" Vin asked. "What were you going to say?"

"Don't encourage him, my dear," Breeze said.

Vin frowned. She glanced at Ham, who smiled.

Breeze sighed. "Just leave me out of it. I'm not in the mood for one of Ham's inane debates."

"Ignore him," Ham said eagerly, pulling his chair a little bit closer to Vin. "So, I've been wondering. By overthrowing the Final Empire are we doing something good, or are we doing something bad?"

Vin paused. "Does it matter?"

Ham looked taken aback, but Breeze chuckled. "Well answered," the Soother said.

Ham glared at Breeze, then turned back to Vin. "Of course it matters."

"Well," Vin said, "I guess we're doing something good. The Final Empire has oppressed the skaa for centuries."

"Right," Ham said. "But, there's a problem. The Lord Ruler is God, right?"

Vin shrugged. "Does it matter?"

Ham glared at her.

She rolled her eyes. "All right. The Ministry claims that he is God."

"Actually," Breeze noted, "the Lord Ruler is only a *piece* of God. He is the Sliver of Infinity—not omniscient or omnipresent, but an independent section of a consciousness that *is*."

Ham sighed. "I thought you didn't want to be involved."

"Just making certain everyone has their facts correct," Breeze said lightly.

"Anyway," Ham said. "God is the creator of all things, right? He is the force that dictates the laws of the universe, and is therefore the ultimate source of ethics. He is absolute morality."

Vin blinked.

"You see the dilemma?" Ham asked.

"I see an idiot," Breeze mumbled.

"I'm confused," Vin said. "What's the problem?"

"We claim to be doing good," Ham said. "But, the Lord Ruler—as God—*defines* what is good. So, by opposing him we're actually evil. But, since he's doing the wrong thing, does evil actually count as good in this case?"

Vin frowned.

"Well?" Ham asked.

"I think you gave me a headache," Vin said.

"I warned you," Breeze noted.

Ham sighed. "But, don't you think it's worth thinking about?"

"I'm not sure."

"I am," Breeze said.

Ham shook his head. "No one around here likes to have decent, intelligent discussions."

The skaa rebel in the corner suddenly perked up. "Kelsier's here!"

Ham raised an eyebrow, then stood. "I should go watch the perimeter. Think about that question, Vin."

"All right . . ." Vin said as Ham left.

"Over here, Vin," Breeze said, rising. "There are peepholes on the wall for us. Be a dear and bring my chair over, would you?"

Breeze didn't look back to see if she did as requested. She paused, uncertain. With her copper on, he couldn't Soothe her, but . . . Eventually, she sighed and carried both chairs over to the side of the room. Breeze slid back a long, thin slat in the wall, revealing a view of the dining room.

A group of dirtied skaa men sat around tables, wearing brown work coats or ragged cloaks. They were a dark group, with ash-stained skin and slumped postures. However, their presence at the meeting meant that they were willing to listen. Yeden sat at a table near the front of the room, wearing his usual patched worker's coat, his curly hair cut short during Vin's absence.

Vin had expected some kind of grand entrance from Kelsier. Instead, however, he simply walked quietly out of the kitchen. He paused by Yeden's table, smiling and speaking quietly with the man for a moment, then he stepped up before the seated workers.

Vin had never seen him in such mundane clothing before. He wore a brown skaa coat and tan trousers, like many of the audience. Kelsier's outfit, however, was clean. No soot stained the cloth, and while it was of the same rough material that skaa commonly used, it bore no patches or tears. The difference was stark enough, Vin decided—if he'd come in a suit, it would have been too much.

He put his arms behind his back, and slowly the crowd of workers quieted. Vin frowned, watching through the peep slit, wondering at Kelsier's ability to quiet a room of hungry men by simply standing before them. Was he using Allomancy, perhaps? Yet, even with her copper on, she felt a . . . presence from him.

Once the room fell quiet, Kelsier began to speak. "You've probably all heard of me, by now," he said. "And, you wouldn't be here if you weren't at least a little bit sympathetic to my cause."

Beside Vin, Breeze sipped his drink. "Soothing and Rioting aren't like other kinds of Allomancy," he said quietly. "With most metals, Pushing and Pulling have opposite effects. With emotions, however, you can often produce the same result regardless of whether you Soothe or Riot.

"This doesn't hold for extreme emotional states—complete emotionlessness or utter passion. However, in most cases, it doesn't matter which power you use. People are not like solid bricks of metal—at any given time, they will have a dozen different emotions churning within them. An experienced Soother can dampen everything but the emotion he wants to remain dominant."

Breeze turned slightly. "Rudd, send in the blue server, please."

One of the guards nodded, cracking the door and whispering something to the man outside. A moment later, Vin saw a serving girl wearing a faded blue dress move through the crowd, filling drinks.

"My Soothers are mixed with the crowd," Breeze said, his voice growing distracted. "The serving girls are a sign, telling my men which emotions to Soothe away. They will work, just as I do. . . ." He trailed off, concentrating as he looked into the crowd.

"Fatigue . . ." he whispered. "That's not a necessary emotion right now. Hunger . . . distracting. Suspicion . . . definitely not helpful. Yes, and as the Soothers work, the Rioters enflame the emotions we want the crowd to be feeling. Curiosity . . . that's what they need now. Yes, listen to Kelsier. You've heard legends and stories. See the man for yourself, and be impressed."

"I know why you came today," Kelsier said quietly. He spoke without much of the flamboyance Vin associated with the man, his tone quiet, but direct. "Twelve-hour days in a mill, mine, or forge. Beatings, lack of pay, poor food. And, for what? So that you can return to your tenements at the day's end to find another tragedy? A friend, slain by an uncaring taskmaster. A daughter, taken to be some nobleman's plaything. A brother, dead at the hand of a passing lord who was having an unpleasant day."

"Yes," Breeze whispered. "Good. Red, Rudd. Send in the girl in light red."

Another serving girl entered the room.

"Passion and anger," Breeze said, his voice almost a mumble. "But just a bit. Just a nudge—a reminder."

Curious, Vin extinguished her copper for a moment, burning bronze instead, trying to sense Breeze's use of Allomancy. No pulses came from him.

*Of course,* she thought. *I forgot about Clubs's apprentice—he'd keep me from sensing any Allomantic pulses.* She turned her copper back on.

Kelsier continued to speak. "My friends, you're not alone in your tragedy. There are millions, just like you. And they need you. I've not come to beg—we've had enough of that in our lives. I simply ask you to think. Where would you rather your energy be spent? On forging the Lord Ruler's weapons? Or, on something more valuable?"

*He's not mentioning our troops,* Vin thought. *Or even what those who join with him are going to do. He doesn't want the workers to know details. Probably a good idea—those he recruits can be sent to the army, and the rest won't be able to give away specific information.*

"You know why I am here," Kelsier said. "You know my friend, Yeden, and what he represents. Every skaa in the city knows about the rebellion. Perhaps you've considered joining it. Most of you will not—

most of you will go back to your soot-stained mills, to your burning forges, to your dying homes. You'll go because this terrible life is familiar. But some of you . . . some of you will come with me. And those are the men who will be remembered in the years to come. Remembered for having done something grand."

Many of the workers shared glances, though some just stared at their half-empty soup bowls. Finally, someone near the back of the room spoke. "You're a fool," the man said. "The Lord Ruler will kill you. You don't rebel against God in his *own city*."

The room fell silent. Tense. Vin sat up as Breeze whispered to himself.

In the room, Kelsier stood quietly for a moment. Finally, he reached up and pulled back the sleeves on his jacket, revealing the crisscrossed scars on his arms. "The Lord Ruler is not our god," he said quietly. "And he cannot kill me. He tried, but he failed. For I am the thing that he can never kill."

With that, Kelsier turned, walking from the room the way he had come.

"Hum," Breeze said, "well, that was a little dramatic. Rudd, bring back the red and send out the brown."

A serving woman in brown walked into the crowd.

"Amazement," Breeze said. "And, yes, pride. Soothe the anger, for now. . . ."

The crowd sat quietly for a moment, the dining room eerily motionless. Finally, Yeden stood up to speak and give some further encouragement, as well as an explanation of what the men should do, should they wish to hear more. As he talked, the men returned to their meals.

"Green, Rudd," Breeze said. "Hum, yes. Let's make you all thoughtful, and give you a nudge of loyalty. We wouldn't want anyone to run to the obligators, would we? Kell's covered his tracks quite well, but the less the authorities hear, the better, eh? Oh, and what about you, Yeden? You're a bit too nervous. Let's Soothe that, take away your worries. Leave only that passion of yours—hopefully, it will be enough to cover up that stupid tone in your voice."

Vin continued to watch. Now that Kelsier had gone, she found it easier to focus on the crowd's reactions, and on Breeze's work. As Yeden spoke, the workers outside seemed to react exactly according to Breeze's mumbled instructions. Yeden, too, showed effects of the Soothing: He grew more comfortable, his voice more confident, as he spoke.

Curious, Vin let her copper drop again. She concentrated, seeing if she could sense Breeze's touch on her emotions; she would be included in his general Allomantic projections. He didn't have time to pick and choose individuals, except maybe Yeden. It was very, very difficult to sense. Yet, as Breeze sat mumbling to himself, she began to feel the exact emotions he described.

Vin couldn't help but be impressed. The few times that Kelsier had used Allomancy on her emotions, his touch has been like a sudden, blunt punch to the face. He had strength, but very little subtlety.

Breeze's touch was incredibly delicate. He Soothed certain emotions, dampening them while leaving others unaffected. Vin thought she could sense his men Rioting on her emotions, too, but these touches weren't nearly as subtle as Breeze's. She left her copper off, watching for touches on her emotions as Yeden continued his speech. He explained that the men who joined with them would have to leave family and friends for a time—as long as a year—but would be fed well during that time.

Vin felt her respect for Breeze continue to rise. Suddenly, she didn't feel so annoyed with Kelsier for handing her off. Breeze could only do one thing, but he obviously had a great deal of practice at it. Kelsier, as a Mistborn, had to learn all of the Allomantic skills; it made sense that he wouldn't be as focused in any one power.

*I need to make certain he sends me to learn from the others,* Vin thought. *They'll be masters at their own powers.*

Vin turned her attention back to the dining room as Yeden wrapped up. "You heard Kelsier, the Survivor of Hathsin," he said. "The rumors about him are true—he's given up his thieving ways, and turned his considerable attention toward working for the skaa rebellion! Men, we are preparing for something grand. Something that may, indeed, end up being our last struggle against the Final Empire. Join with us. Join with your brothers. Join with the Survivor himself!"

The dining room fell silent.

"Bright red," Breeze said. "I want those men to leave feeling passionate about what they've heard."

"The emotions will fade, won't they?" Vin said as a red-clothed serving girl entered the crowd.

"Yes," Breeze said, sitting back and sliding the panel closed. "But memories stay. If people associate strong emotion with an event, they'll remember it better."

A few moments later, Ham entered through the back door. "That went well. The men are leaving invigorated, and a number of them are staying behind. We'll have a good set of volunteers to send off to the caves."

Breeze shook his head. “It’s not enough. Dox takes a few days to organize each of these meetings, and we only get about twenty men from each one. At this rate, we’ll never hit ten thousand in time.”

“You think we need more meetings?” Ham asked. “That’s going to be tough—we have to be very careful with these things, so only those who can be reasonably trusted are invited.”

Breeze sat for a moment. Finally, he downed the rest of his wine. “I don’t know—but we’ll have to think of something. For now, let’s return to the shop. I believe Kelsier wishes to hold a progress meeting this evening.”

Kelsier looked to the west. The afternoon sun was a poisonous red, shining angrily through a sky of smoke. Just below it, Kelsier could see the silhouetted tip of a dark peak. Tyrian, closest of the Ashmounts.

He stood atop Clubs’s flat-roofed shop, listening to workers returning home on the streets below. A flat roof meant having to shovel off ash occasionally, which was why most skaa buildings were peaked, but in Kelsier’s opinion the view was often worth a bit of trouble.

Below him, the skaa workers trudged in despondent ranks, their passing kicking up a small cloud of ash. Kelsier turned away from them, looking toward the northern horizon . . . toward the Pits of Hathsin.

*Where does it go?* he thought. *The atium reaches the city, but then disappears. It isn’t the Ministry—we’ve watched them—and no skaa hands touch the metal. We assume it goes into the treasury. We hope it does, at least.*

While burning atium, a Mistborn was virtually unstoppable, which was part of why it was so valuable. But, his plan was about more than just wealth. He knew how much atium was harvested at the pits, and Dockson had researched the amounts that the Lord Ruler doled out—at exorbitant prices—to the nobility. Barely a tenth of what was mined eventually found its way into noble hands.

Ninety percent of the atium produced in the world had been stockpiled, year after year, for a thousand years. With that much of the metal, Kelsier’s team could intimidate even the most powerful of the noble houses. Yeden’s plan to hold the palace probably seemed futile to many—indeed, on its own, it was doomed to fail. However, Kelsier’s other plans . . .

Kelsier glanced down at the small, whitish bar in his hand. The Eleventh Metal. He knew the rumors about it—he’d started them.

Now, he just had to make good on them.

He sighed, turning eyes east, toward Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's palace. The name was Terris; it meant "The Hill of a Thousand Spires." Appropriate, since the imperial palace resembled a patch of enormous black spears thrust into the ground. Some of the spires twisted, others were straight. Some were thick towers, others were thin and needlelike. They varied in height, but each one was tall. And each one ended in a point.

Kredik Shaw. That's where it had ended three years before. And he needed to go back.

The trapdoor opened, and a figure climbed onto the roof. Kelsier turned with a raised eyebrow as Sazed brushed off his robe, then approached in his characteristically respectful posture. Even a rebellious Terrisman maintained the form of his training.

"Master Kelsier," Sazed said with a bow.

Kelsier nodded, and Sazed stepped up beside him, looking toward the imperial palace. "Ah," he said to himself, as if understanding Kelsier's thoughts.

Kelsier smiled. Sazed had been a valuable find indeed. Keepers were necessarily secretive, for the Lord Ruler had hunted them practically since the Day of Ascension itself. Some legends claimed that the Ruler's complete subjugation of the Terris people—including the breeding and stewardship programs—was simply an outgrowth of his hatred for Keepers.

"I wonder what he would think if he knew a Keeper was in Luthadel," Kelsier said, "barely a short walk from the palace itself."

"Let us hope we never find out, Master Kelsier," Sazed said.

"I appreciate your willingness to come here to the city, Saze. I know it's a risk."

"This is a good work," Sazed said. "And this plan is dangerous for all involved. Indeed, simply living is dangerous for me, I think. It is not healthy to belong to a sect that the Lord Ruler himself fears."

"Fears?" Kelsier asked, turning to look up at Sazed. Despite Kelsier's above-average height, the Terrisman was still a good head taller. "I'm not sure if he fears anything, Saze."

"He fears the Keepers," Sazed said. "Definitely and inexplicably. Perhaps it is because of our powers. We are not Allomancers, but . . . something else. Something unknown to him."

Kelsier nodded, turning back toward the city. He had so many plans, so much work to do—and at the core of it all were the skaa. The poor, humble, defeated skaa.

"Tell me about another one, Saze," Kelsier said. "One with power."

"Power?" Sazed asked. "That is a relative term when applied to religion, I think. Perhaps you would like to hear of Jaism. Its followers were quite faithful and devout."

"Tell me about them."

"Jaism was founded by a single man," Sazed said. "His true name is lost, though his followers simply called him 'the Ja.' He was murdered by a local king for preaching discord—something he was apparently very good at—but that only made his following larger.

"The Jaists thought that they earned happiness proportional to their overt devotion, and were known for frequent and fervent professions of faith. Apparently, speaking with a Jaist could be frustrating, since they tended to end nearly every sentence with 'Praise the Ja.' "

"That's nice, Saze," Kelsier said. "But power is more than just words."

"Oh, quite indeed," Sazed agreed. "The Jaists were strong in their faith. Legends say that the Ministry had to wipe them out completely, since not one Jaist would accept the Lord Ruler as God. They didn't last long past the Ascension, but only because they were so blatant that they were easy to hunt down and kill."

Kelsier nodded, then he smiled, eyeing Sazed. "You didn't ask me if I wanted to convert."

"My apologies, Master Kelsier," Sazed said, "but the religion does not suit you, I think. It has a level of brashness that you might find appealing, but you would find the theology simplistic."

"You're getting to know me too well," Kelsier said, still regarding the city. "In the end, after kingdoms and armies had fallen, the religions were still fighting, weren't they?"

"Indeed," Sazed said. "Some of the more resilient religions lasted all the way until the fifth century."

"What made them so strong?" Kelsier said. "How did they do it, Saze? What gave these theologies such power over people?"

"It wasn't any one thing, I think," Sazed said. "Some were strong through honest faith, others because of the hope they promised. Others were coercive."

"But they all had passion," Kelsier said.

"Yes, Master Kelsier," Sazed said with a nod. "That is a quite true statement."

"That's what we've lost," Kelsier said, looking over the city with its hundreds of thousands, barely a handful of whom would dare fight. "They don't have faith in the Lord Ruler, they simply fear him. They don't have anything left to believe in."

"What do *you* believe in, if I may ask, Master Kelsier?"

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "I'm not exactly sure yet," he admitted. "But overthrowing the Final Empire seems like a good start. Are there any religions on your list that include the slaughter of noblemen as a holy duty?"

Sazed frowned disapprovingly. "I do not believe so, Master Kelsier."

"Maybe I should found one," Kelsier said with an idle smile. "Anyway, have Breeze and Vin returned yet?"

"They arrived just before I came up here."

"Good," Kelsier said with a nod. "Tell them I'll be down in a moment."

Vin sat in her overstuffed chair in the conference room, legs tucked beneath her, trying to study Marsh out of the corner of her eye.

He looked so much like Kelsier. He was just . . . stern. He wasn't angry, nor was he grumpy like Clubs. He just wasn't happy. He sat in his chair, a neutral expression on his face.

The others had all arrived except for Kelsier, and they were chatting quietly amongst themselves. Vin caught Lestibournes's eye and waved him over. The teenage boy approached and crouched beside her chair.

"Marsh," Vin whispered beneath the general hum of the room. "Is that a nickname?"

"Notting without the call of his parents."

Vin paused, trying to decipher the boy's eastern dialect. "Not a nickname, then?"

Lestibournes shook his head. "He wasing one though."

"What was it?"

"Ironeyes. Others stopped using it. Too calling close to an iron in the real eyes, eh? Inquisitor."

Vin glanced at Marsh again. His expression was hard, his eyes unwavering, almost like they *were* made of iron. She could see why people would stop using the nickname; even referring to a Steel Inquisitor made her shiver.

"Thanks."

Lestibournes smiled. He was an earnest boy. Strange, intense, and jumpy—but earnest. He retreated to his stool as Kelsier finally arrived.

"All right, crew," he said. "What've we got?"

"Besides the bad news?" Breeze asked.

"Let's hear it."

"It's been twelve weeks, and we've gathered under two thousand men," Ham said. "Even with the numbers the rebellion already has, we're going to fall short."

"Dox?" Kelsier asked. "Can we get more meetings?"

"Probably," Dockson said from his seat beside a table stacked with ledgers.

"Are you sure you want to take that risk, Kelsier?" Yeden asked. His attitude had improved during the last few weeks—especially once Kelsier's recruits had begun to file in. As Reen had always said, results made quick friends.

"We're already in danger," Yeden continued. "Rumors are all over the underground. If we make any more of a stir, the Ministry is going to realize that something major is happening."

"He's probably right, Kell," Dockson said. "Besides, there are only so many skaa willing to listen. Luthadel is big, true, but our movement here is limited."

"All right," Kelsier said. "So, we'll start working the other towns in the area. Breeze, can you split your crew into two effective groups?"

"I suppose," Breeze said hesitantly.

"We can have one team work in Luthadel and the other work in surrounding towns. I can probably make it to all of the meetings, assuming we organize them so they don't happen at the same time."

"That many meetings will expose us even more," Yeden said.

"And that, by the way, brings up another problem," Ham said. "Weren't we supposed to be working on infiltrating the Ministry's ranks?"

"Well?" Kelsier asked, turning to Marsh.

Marsh shook his head. "The Ministry is tight—I need more time."

"It's not going to happen," Clubs grumbled. "Rebellion's already tried it."

Yeden nodded. "We've tried to get spies into the Inner Ministries a dozen times. It's impossible."

The room fell silent.

"I have an idea," Vin said quietly.

Kelsier raised an eyebrow.

"Camon," she said. "He was working on a job before you recruited me. Actually, it was the job that got us spotted by the obligators. The core of that plan was organized by another thief, a crewleader named Theron. He was setting up a fake canal convoy to carry Ministry funds to Luthadel."

"And?" Breeze asked.

"Those same canal boats would have brought new Ministry acolytes to Luthadel for the final part of their training. Theron has a contact along the route, a lesser obligator who was open to bribes. Maybe we could get him to add an 'acolyte' to the group from his local chapter."

Kelsier nodded thoughtfully. "It's worth looking into."

Dockson scribbled something on a sheet with his fountain pen. "I'll contact Theron and see if his informant is still viable."

"How are our resources coming?" Kelsier asked.

Dockson shrugged. "Ham found us two ex-soldier instructors. The weapons, however . . . well, Renoux and I are making contacts and initiating deals, but we can't move very quickly. Fortunately, when the weapons come, they should come in bulk."

Kelsier nodded. "That's everything, right?"

Breeze cleared his throat. "I've . . . been hearing a lot of rumors on the streets, Kelsier," he said. "The people are talking about this Eleventh Metal of yours."

"Good," Kelsier said.

"Aren't you worried that the Lord Ruler will hear? If he has forewarning of what you're going to do, it will be much more difficult to . . . resist him."

*He didn't say "kill,"* Vin thought. *They don't think that Kelsier can do it.*

Kelsier just smiled. "Don't worry about the Lord Ruler—I've got things under control. In fact, I intend to pay the Lord Ruler a personal visit sometime during the next few days."

"*Visit?*" Yeden asked uncomfortably. "You're going to visit the Lord Ruler? Are you insa . . ." Yeden trailed off, then glanced at the rest of the room. "Right. I forgot."

"He's catching on," Dockson noted.

Heavy footsteps sounded in the hallway, and one of Ham's guards entered a moment later. He made his way to Ham's chair and whispered a brief message.

Ham frowned.

"What?" Kelsier asked.

"An incident," Ham said.

"Incident?" Dockson asked. "What kind of incident?"

"You know that lair we met in a few weeks back?" Ham said. "The one where Kell first introduced his plan?"

*Camon's lair,* Vin thought, growing apprehensive.

"Well," Ham said, "apparently the Ministry found it."

*It seems Rashek represents a growing faction in Terris culture. A large number of the youths think that their unusual powers should be used for more than just fieldwork, husbandry, and stonecarving. They are rowdy, even violent—far different from the quiet, discerning Terris philosophers and holy men that I have known.*

*They will have to be watched carefully, these Terrismen. They could be very dangerous, if given the opportunity and the motivation.*

# 11

KELSIER PAUSED IN THE DOORWAY, blocking Vin's view. She stooped down, trying to peek past him into the lair, but too many people were in the way. She could only tell that the door hung at an angle, splintered, the upper hinge torn free.

Kelsier stood for a long moment. Finally, he turned, looking past Dockson toward her. "Ham is right, Vin. You may not want to see this."

Vin stood where she was, looking at him resolutely. Finally, Kelsier sighed, stepping into the room. Dockson followed, and Vin could finally see what they had been blocking.

The floor was scattered with corpses, their twisted limbs shadowed and haunting in the light of Dockson's solitary lantern. They weren't rotting yet—the attack had happened only that morning—but there was still a smell of death about the room. The scent of blood drying slowly, the scent of misery and of terror.

Vin remained in the doorway. She'd seen death before—seen it often, on the streets. Knifings in alleys. Beatings in lairs. Children dead of starvation. She had once seen an old woman's neck snapped by the backhand of an annoyed lord. The body had lain in the street for three days before a skaa corpse crew had finally come for it.

Yet, none of those incidents had the same air of intentional butchery that she saw in Camon's lair. These men hadn't simply been killed, they had been torn apart. Limbs lay separated from torsos. Broken chairs and tables impaled chests. There were only a few patches of floor that were not covered in sticky, dark blood.

Kelsier glanced at her, obviously expecting some sort of reaction. She stood, looking over the death, feeling . . . numb. What should her reaction be? These were the men who had mistreated her, stolen from her, beaten her. And yet, these were the men who had sheltered her, included her, and fed her when others might have simply given her to the whoremasters.

Reen probably would have berated her for the traitorous sadness she felt at the sight. Of course, he had always been angry when—as a child—she'd cried as they left one town for another, not wanting to leave the people she'd grown to know, no matter how cruel or indifferent they were. Apparently, she hadn't quite gotten over that weakness. She stepped into the room, not shedding any tears for these men, yet at the same time wishing that they had not come to such an end.

In addition, the gore itself was disturbing. She tried to force herself to maintain a stiff face in front of the others, but she found herself cringing occasionally, glancing away from mangled corpses. The ones who had performed the attack had been quite . . . thorough.

*This seems extreme, even for the Ministry,* she thought. *What kind of person would do something like this?*

"Inquisitor," Dockson said quietly, kneeling by a corpse.

Kelsier nodded. Behind Vin, Sazed stepped into the room, careful to keep his robes clear of the blood. Vin turned toward the Terrisman, letting his actions distract her from a particularly grisly corpse. Kelsier was a Mistborn, and Dockson was supposedly a capable warrior. Ham and his men were securing the area. However, others—Breeze, Yeden, and Clubs—had stayed behind. The area was too dangerous. Kelsier had even resisted Vin's desire to come.

Yet, he had brought Sazed without apparent hesitation. The move, subtle though it was, made Vin regard the steward with a new curiosity. Why would it be too dangerous for Mistings, yet safe enough for a Terrisman steward? Was Sazed a warrior? How would he have learned to fight? Terrismen were supposedly raised from birth by very careful trainers.

Sazed's smooth step and calm face gave her few clues. He didn't appear shocked by the carnage, however.

*Interesting,* Vin thought, picking her way through shattered furniture, stepping clear of blood pools, making her way to Kelsier's side. He crouched beside a pair of corpses. One, Vin noticed in a moment of shock, had been Ulef. The boy's face was contorted and pained, the front of his chest a mass of broken bones and ripped flesh—as if someone had forcibly torn the rib cage apart with his hands. Vin shivered, looking away.

"This isn't good," Kelsier said quietly. "Steel Inquisitors don't generally bother with simple thieving crews. Usually, the obligators would just come down with their troops and take everyone captive, then use them to make a good show on an execution day. An Inquisitor would only get involved if it had a special interest in the crew."

"You think . . ." Vin said. "You think it might be the same one as before?"

Kelsier nodded. "There are only about twenty Steel Inquisitors in the whole of the Final Empire, and half of them are out of Luthadel at any given time. I find it too much of a coincidence that you would catch one's interest, escape, and then have your old lair get hit."

Vin stood quietly, forcing herself to look down at Ulef's body and confront her sorrow. He had betrayed her in the end, but for a time he had almost been a friend.

"So," she said quietly, "the Inquisitor still has my scent?"

Kelsier nodded, standing.

"Then this is my fault," Vin said. "Ulef and the others . . ."

"It was Camon's fault," Kelsier said firmly. "He's the one who tried to scam an obligator." He paused, then looked over at her. "You going to be all right?"

Vin looked up from Ulef's mangled corpse, trying to remain strong. She shrugged. "None of them were my friends."

"That's kind of coldhearted, Vin."

"I know," she said with a quiet nod.

Kelsier regarded her for a moment, then crossed the room to speak with Dockson.

Vin looked back at Ulef's wounds. They looked like the work of some crazed animal, not a single man.

*The Inquisitor must have had help,* Vin told herself. *There is no way one person, even an Inquisitor, could have done all this.* There was a pileup of bodies near the bolt exit, but a quick count told her that most—if not all—of the crew was accounted for. One man couldn't have gotten to all of them quickly enough . . . could he have?

*There are a lot of things we don't know about the Inquisitors,* Kelsier had told her. *They don't quite follow the normal rules.*

Vin shivered again.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, and Vin grew tense, crouching and preparing to run.

Ham's familiar figure appeared in the stairwell. "Area's secure," he said, holding up a second lantern. "No sign of obligators or Garrisoners."

"That's their style," Kelsier said. "They want the massacre to be discovered—they left the dead as a sign."

The room fell silent save for a low mumbling from Sazed, who stood at the far left side of the room. Vin picked her way over to him, listening to the rhythmic cadence of his voice. Eventually, he stopped speaking, then bowed his head and closed his eyes.

"What was that?" Vin asked as he looked up again.

"A prayer," Sazed said. "A death chant of the Cazzi. It is meant to awaken the spirits of the dead and entice them free from their flesh so that they may return to the mountain of souls." He glanced at her. "I can teach you of the religion, if you wish, Mistress. The Cazzi were an interesting people—very familiar with death."

Vin shook her head. "Not right now. You said their prayer—is this the religion you believe in, then?"

"I believe in them all."

Vin frowned. "None of them contradict each other?"

Sazed smiled. "Oh, often and frequently they do. But, I respect the truths behind them all—and I believe in the need for each one to be remembered."

"Then, how did you decide which religion's prayer to use?" Vin asked.

"It just seemed . . . appropriate," Sazed said quietly, regarding the scene of shadowed death.

"Kell," Dockson called from the back of the room. "Come look at this."

Kelsier moved to join him, as did Vin. Dockson stood by the long corridor-like chamber that had been her crew's sleeping quarters. Vin poked her head inside, expecting to find a scene similar to the one in the common room. Instead, there was only a single corpse tied to a chair. In the weak light she could barely make out that his eyes had been gouged out.

Kelsier stood quietly for a moment. "That's the man I put in charge."

"Milev," Vin said with a nod. "What about him?"

"He was killed slowly," Kelsier said. "Look at the amount of blood on the floor, the way his limbs are twisted. He had time to scream and struggle."

"Torture," Dockson said, nodding.

Vin felt a chill. She glanced up at Kelsier.

"Shall we move our base?" Ham asked.

Kelsier slowly shook his head. “When Clubs came to this lair, he would have worn a disguise to and from the meeting, hiding his limp. It’s his job as a Smoker to make certain that you can’t find him just by asking around on the street. None of the people in this crew could have betrayed us—we should still be safe.”

No one spoke the obvious. *The Inquisitor shouldn’t have been able to find this lair either.*

Kelsier stepped back into the main room, pulling Dockson aside and speaking to him in a quiet voice. Vin edged closer, trying to hear what they were saying, but Sazed placed a restraining hand on her shoulder.

“Mistress Vin,” he said disapprovingly, “if Master Kelsier wanted us to hear what he was saying, would he not speak in a louder voice?”

Vin shot the Terrisman an angry glance. Then she reached inside and burned tin.

The sudden stench of blood almost staggered her. She could hear Sazed’s breathing. The room was no longer dark—in fact, the brilliant light of two lanterns made her eyes water. She became aware of the stuffy, unventilated air.

And she could hear, quite distinctly, Dockson’s voice.

“ . . . went to check on him a couple times, like you asked. You’ll find him three streets west of the Fourwell Crossroads.”

Kelsier nodded. “Ham,” he said in a loud voice, causing Vin to jump.

Sazed looked down at her with disapproving eyes.

*He knows something of Allomancy,* Vin thought, reading the man’s expression. *He guessed what I was doing.*

“Yes, Kell?” Ham said, peeking out of the back room.

“Take the others back to the shop,” Kelsier said. “And be careful.”

“Of course,” Ham promised.

Vin eyed Kelsier, then resentfully allowed herself to be ushered from the lair with Sazed and Dockson.

*I should have taken the carriage,* Kelsier thought, frustrated by his slow pace. *The others could have walked back from Camon’s lair.*

He itched to burn steel and begin jumping toward his destination. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to remain inconspicuous when flying through the city during the full light of day.

Kelsier adjusted his hat and continued walking. A nobleman pedestrian was not an irregular sight, especially in the commercial district, where more fortunate skaa and less fortunate noblemen mixed on the streets—though each group did its best to ignore the other.

*Patience. Speed doesn't matter. If they know about him, he's already dead.*

Kelsier entered a large crossroad square. Four wells sat in its corners, and a massive copper fountain—its green skin caked and blackened by soot—dominated the square's center. The statue depicted the Lord Ruler, standing dramatically in cloak and armor, a formless representation of the Deepness dead in the water at his feet.

Kelsier passed the fountain, its waters flaked from a recent ashfall. Skaa beggars called out from the streetsides, their pitiful voices walking a fine line between audibility and annoyance. The Lord Ruler barely suffered them; only skaa with severe disfigurements were allowed to beg. Their pitiful life, however, was not something even plantation skaa would envy.

Kelsier tossed them a few clips, not caring that doing so made him stand out, and continued to walk. Three streets over, he found a much smaller crossroads. It was also rimmed by beggars, but no fine fountain splashed the center of this intersection, nor did the corners contain wells to draw traffic.

The beggars here were even more pathetic—these were the sorry individuals who were too wretched to fight themselves a spot in a major square. Malnourished children and age-withered adults called out with apprehensive voices; men missing two or more limbs huddled in corners, their soot-stained forms almost invisible in the shadows.

Kelsier reached reflexively for his coin purse. *Stay on track,* he told himself. *You can't save them all, not with coins. There will be time for these once the Final Empire is gone.*

Ignoring the piteous cries—which became louder once the beggars realized he was watching them—Kelsier studied each face in turn. He had only seen Camon briefly, but he thought that he'd recognize the man. However, none of the faces looked right, and none of the beggars had Camon's girth, which should have still been noticeable despite weeks of starvation.

*He's not here,* Kelsier thought with dissatisfaction. Kelsier's order—given to Milev, the new crewleader—that Camon be made a beggar had been carried out. Dockson had checked on Camon to make certain.

Camon's absence in the square could simply mean that he'd gained a better spot. It could also mean that the Ministry had found him. Kelsier stood quietly for a moment, listening to the beggars' haunted moanings. A few flakes of ash began to float down from the sky.

Something was wrong. There weren't any beggars near the north corner of the intersection. Kelsier burned tin, and smelled blood on the air.

He kicked off his shoes, then pulled his belt free. His cloak clasp went next, the fine garment dropping to the cobblestones. That done, the only metal remaining on his body was in his coin pouch. He dumped a few coins into his hand, then carefully made his way forward, leaving his discarded garments for the beggars.

The smell of death grew stronger, but he didn't hear anything except scrambling beggars behind him. He edged onto the northern street, immediately noticing a thin alleyway to his left. Taking a breath, he flared pewter and ducked inside.

The thin, dark alley was clogged with refuse and ash. No one waited for him—at least, no one living.

Camon, crewleader turned beggar, hung quietly from a rope tied far above. His corpse spun leisurely in the breeze, ash falling lightly around it. He hadn't been hanged in the conventional fashion—the rope had been tied to a hook, then rammed down his throat. The bloodied end of the hook jutted from his skin below the chin, and he swung with head tipped back, rope running out of his mouth. His hands were tied, his still plump body showing signs of torture.

*This isn't good.*

A foot scraped the cobblestones behind, and Kelsier spun, flaring steel and spraying forth a handful of coins.

With a girlish yelp, a small figure ducked to the ground, coins deflected as she burned steel.

"*Vin?"* Kelsier said. He cursed, reaching out and yanking her into the alleyway. He glanced around the corner, watching the beggars perk up as they heard coins hit the cobblestones.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, turning back. Vin wore the same brown overalls and gray shirt she had before, though she at least had the sense to wear a nondescript cloak with the hood up.

"I wanted to see what you were doing," she said, cringing slightly before his anger.

"This could have been dangerous!" Kelsier said. "What were you thinking?"

Vin cowered further.

Kelsier calmed himself. *You can't blame her for being curious,* he thought as a few brave beggars scuttled in the street after the coins. *She's just—*

Kelsier froze. It was so subtle he almost missed it. Vin was Soothing his emotions.

He glanced down. The girl was obviously trying to make herself invisible against the corner of the wall. She seemed so timid, yet he caught a hidden glimmer of determination in her eyes. This child had made an art of making herself seem harmless.

*So subtle!* Kelsier thought. *How did she get so good so quickly?*

"You don't have to use Allomancy, Vin," Kelsier said softly. "I'm not going to hurt you. You know that."

She flushed. "I didn't mean it . . . it's just habit. Even still."

"It's all right," Kelsier said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Just remember—no matter what Breeze says, it's bad manners to touch the emotions of your friends. Plus, the noblemen consider it an insult to use Allomancy in formal settings. Those reflexes will get you into trouble if you don't learn to control them."

She nodded, rising to study Camon. Kelsier expected her to turn away in disgust, but she just stood quietly, a look of grim satisfaction on her face.

*No, this one isn't weak,* Kelsier thought. *No matter what she'd have you believe.*

"They tortured him here?" she asked. "Out in the open?"

Kelsier nodded, imagining the screams reverberating out to the uncomfortable beggars. The Ministry liked to be very visible with its punishments.

"Why the hook?" Vin asked.

"It's a ritual killing reserved for the most reprehensible of sinners: people who misuse Allomancy."

Vin frowned. "Camon was an Allomancer?"

Kelsier shook his head. "He must have admitted to something heinous during his torture." Kelsier glanced at Vin. "He must have known what you were, Vin. He used you intentionally."

She paled slightly. "Then . . . the Ministry knows that I'm a Mistborn?"

"Perhaps. It depends on whether Camon knew or not. He could have assumed you were just a Misting."

She stood quietly for a moment. "What does this mean for my part in the job, then?"

"We'll continue as planned," Kelsier said. "Only a couple of obligators saw you at the Canton building, and it takes a very rare man to connect the skaa servant and the well-dressed noblewoman as the same person."

“And the Inquisitor?” Vin asked softly.

Kelsier didn’t have an answer to that one. “Come on,” he finally said. “We’ve already attracted too much attention.”

*What would it be like if every nation—from the isles in the South to the Terris hills in the North—were united under a single government? What wonders could be achieved, what progress could be made, if mankind were to permanently set aside its squabblings and join together?*

*It is too much, I suppose, to even hope for. A single, unified empire of man? It could never happen.*

# 12

VIN RESISTED THE URGE TO pick at her noblewoman's dress. Even after a half week of being forced to wear one—Sazed's suggestion—she found the bulky garment uncomfortable. It pulled tightly at her waist and chest, then fell to the floor with several layers of ruffled fabric, making it difficult to walk. She kept feeling as if she were going to trip—and, despite the gown's bulk, she felt as if she were somehow exposed by how tight it was through the chest, not to mention the neckline's low curve. Though she had exposed nearly as much skin when wearing normal, buttoning shirts, this seemed different somehow.

Still, she had to admit that the gown made quite a difference. The girl who stood in the mirror before her was a strange, foreign creature. The light blue dress, with its white ruffles and lace, matched the sapphire barrettes in her hair. Sazed claimed he wouldn't be happy until her hair was at least shoulder-length, but he had still suggested that she purchase the broochlike barrettes and put them just above each ear.

"Often, aristocrats don't hide their deficiencies," he had explained. "Instead, they highlight them. Draw attention to your short hair, and instead of thinking you're unfashionable, they might be impressed by the statement you are making."

She also wore a sapphire necklace—modest by noble standards, but still worth more than two hundred boxings. It was complemented by a single ruby bracelet for accentuation. Apparently, the current fashion dictated a single splash of a different color to provide contrast.

And it was all hers, paid for by crew funds. If she ran, taking the jewelry and her three thousand boxings, she could live for decades. It was more tempting than she wanted to admit. Images of Camon's men, their corpses twisted and dead in the quiet lair, kept returning to her. That was probably what waited for her if she remained.

Why, then, didn't she go?

She turned from the mirror, putting on a light blue silken shawl, the female aristocrat's version of a cloak. Why didn't she leave? Perhaps it was her promise to Kelsier. He had given her the gift of Allomancy, and he depended on her. Perhaps it was her duty to the others. In order to survive, crews needed each person to do their separate job.

Reen's training told her that these men were fools, but she was tempted, enticed, by the possibility that Kelsier and the others offered. In the end, it wasn't the wealth or the job's thrill that made her stay. It was the shadowed prospect—unlikely and unreasonable, but still seductive—of a group whose members actually trusted one another. She had to stay. She *had* to know if it lasted, or if it was—as Reen's growing whispers promised—all a lie.

She turned and left her room, walking toward the front of Mansion Renoux, where Sazed waited with a carriage. She had decided to stay, and that meant she had to do her part.

It was time to make her first appearance as a noblewoman.

The carriage shook suddenly, and Vin jumped in surprise. The vehicle continued normally, however, and Sazed didn't move from his place in the driver's seat.

A sound came from above. Vin flared her metals, tensing, as a figure dropped down off the top of the carriage and landed on the footman's rest just outside her door. Kelsier smiled as he peeked his head in the window.

Vin let out a relieved breath, settling back into her seat. "You could have just asked us to pick you up."

"No need," Kelsier said, pulling open the carriage door and swinging inside. It was already dark outside, and he wore his mistcloak. "I warned Sazed I'd be dropping by sometime during the trip."

"And you didn't tell me?"

Kelsier winked, pulling the door shut. "I figured I still owed you for surprising me in that alleyway last week."

"How very adult of you," Vin said flatly.

"I've always been very confident in my immaturity. So, are you ready for this evening?"

Vin shrugged, trying to hide her nervousness. She glanced down. "How . . . uh, do I look?"

"Splendid," Kelsier said. "Just like a noble young lady. Don't be nervous, Vin—the disguise is perfect."

For some reason, that didn't feel like the answer she'd wanted to hear. "Kelsier?"

"Yes?"

"I've been meaning to ask this for a while," she said, glancing out the window, though all she could see is mist. "I understand that you think this is important—having a spy among the nobility. But . . . well, do we really have to do it this way? Couldn't we get street informants to tell us what we need to know about house politics?"

"Perhaps," Kelsier said. "But those men are called 'informants' for a reason, Vin. Every question you ask them gives a clue about your true motives—even meeting with them reveals a bit of information that they could sell to someone else. It's better to rely on them as little as possible."

Vin sighed.

"I don't send you into danger heedlessly, Vin," Kelsier said, leaning forward. "We do need a spy among the nobility. Informants generally get their information from servants, but most aristocrats are not fools. Important meetings go on where no servant can overhear them."

"And you expect me to be able to get into such meetings?"

"Perhaps," Kelsier said. "Perhaps not. Either way, I've learned that it's always useful to have someone infiltrate the nobility. You and Sazed will overhear vital items that street informants wouldn't think important. In fact, just by being at these parties—even if you don't overhear anything—you will get us information."

"How so?" Vin asked, frowning.

"Make note of the people who seem interested in you," Kelsier said. "Those will be of the houses we want to watch. If they pay attention to you, they're probably paying attention to Lord Renoux—and there's one good reason why they would be doing that."

"Weapons," Vin said.

Kelsier nodded. "Renoux's position as a weapons merchant will make him valuable to those who are planning military action. These are the houses on which I'll need to focus my attention. There should already be a sense of tension among the nobility—hopefully, they're starting to wonder which houses are turning against the others. There hasn't been an all-out war among the Great Houses for over a century, but the last one was devastating. We need to replicate it."

"That could mean the deaths of a lot of noblemen," Vin said.

Kelsier smiled. "I can live with that. How about you?"

Vin smiled despite her tension.

"There's another reason for you to do this," Kelsier said. "Sometime during this fiasco of a plan of mine, we might need to face the Lord Ruler. I have a feeling that the fewer people we need to sneak into his presence, the better. Having a skaa Mistborn hiding among the nobility . . . well, it could be a powerful advantage."

Vin felt a slight chill. "The Lord Ruler . . . will he be there tonight?"

"No. There will be obligators in attendance, but probably no Inquisitors—and certainly not the Lord Ruler himself. A party like this is far beneath his attention."

Vin nodded. She'd never seen the Lord Ruler before—she'd never wanted to.

"Don't worry so much," Kelsier said. "Even if you were to meet him, you'd be safe. He can't read minds."

"Are you sure?"

Kelsier paused. "Well, no. But, if he *can* read minds, he doesn't do it to everyone he meets. I've known several skaa who pretended to be noblemen in his presence—I did it several times myself, before . . ." He trailed off, glancing down toward his scar-covered hands.

"He caught you eventually," Vin said quietly.

"And he'll probably do so again," Kelsier said with a wink. "But, don't worry about him for now—our goal this evening is to establish Lady Valette Renoux. You won't need to do anything dangerous or unusual. Just make an appearance, then leave when Sazed tells you. We'll worry about building confidences later."

Vin nodded.

"Good girl," Kelsier said, reaching out and pushing open the door. "I'll be hiding near the keep, watching and listening."

Vin nodded gratefully, and Kelsier jumped out of the carriage door, disappearing into the dark mists.

Vin was unprepared for how bright Keep Venture would be in the darkness. The massive building was enveloped in an aura of misty light. As the carriage approached, Vin could see that eight enormous lights blazed along the outside of the rectangular building. They were as bright as bonfires, yet far more steady, and they had mirrors arranged behind them to make them shine directly on the keep. Vin had trouble determining their purpose. The ball would happen indoors—why light the outside of the building?

"Head inside, please, Mistress Vin," Sazed said from his position above. "Proper young ladies do not gawk."

Vin shot him a glare he couldn't see, but ducked her head back inside, waiting with impatient nervousness as the carriage pulled up to the massive keep. It eventually rolled to a stop, and a Venture footman immediately opened her door. A second footman approached and held out a hand to help her down.

Vin accepted his hand, trying with as much grace as possible to pull the frilled, bulky bottom of her dress out of the carriage. As she carefully descended—trying not to trip—she was grateful for the footman's steadying hand, and she finally realized why men were expected to help a lady out of her carriage. It wasn't a silly custom after all—the clothing was the silly part.

Sazed surrendered the carriage and took his place a few steps behind her. He wore robes even more fine than his standard fare; though they still maintained the same V-like pattern, they had a belted waist and wide, enveloping sleeves.

"Forward, Mistress," Sazed coached quietly from behind. "Up the carpet, so that your dress doesn't rub on the cobbles, and in through the main doors."

Vin nodded, trying to swallow her discomfort. She walked forward, passing noblemen and ladies in various suits and gowns. Though they weren't looking at her, she felt exposed. Her steps were nowhere near as graceful as those of the other ladies, who looked beautiful and comfortable in their gowns. Her hands began to sweat inside her silky, blue-white gloves.

She forced herself to continue. Sazed introduced her at the door, presenting her invitation to the attendants. The two men, dressed in black and red servant's suits, bowed and waved her in. A crowd of aristocrats was pooling slightly in the foyer, waiting to enter the main hall.

*What am I doing?* she thought frantically. She could challenge mist and Allomancy, thieves and burglaries, mist-wraiths and beatings. Yet, facing these noblemen and their ladies . . . going amongst them in the light, visible, unable to hide . . . this terrified her.

"Forward, Mistress," Sazed said in a soothing voice. "Remember your lessons."

*Hide! Find a corner! Shadows, mists, anything!*

Vin kept her hands clasped rigidly before her, walking forward. Sazed walked beside her. Out of the corner of her eyes, she could see concern on his normally calm face.

*And well he should worry!* Everything he had taught her seemed fleeting—vaporous, like the mists themselves. She couldn't remember names, customs, anything.

She stopped just inside the foyer, and an imperious-looking nobleman in a black suit turned to regard her. Vin froze.

The man looked her over with a dismissive glance, then turned away. She distinctly heard the word “Renoux” whispered, and she glanced apprehensively to the side. Several women were looking at her.

And yet, it didn’t feel like they were seeing her at all. They were studying the gown, the hair, and the jewelry. Vin glanced to the other side, where a group of younger men were watching her. They saw the neckline, the pretty dress and the makeup, but they didn’t see *her*.

None of them could see Vin, they could only see the face she had put on—the face she wanted them to see. They saw Lady Valette. It was as if Vin weren’t there.

As if . . . she were hiding, hiding right in front of their eyes.

And suddenly, her tension began to retreat. She let out a long, calming breath, anxiety flowing away. Sazed’s training returned, and she adopted the look of a girl amazed by her first formal ball. She stepped to the side, handing her shawl to an attendant, and Sazed relaxed beside her. Vin shot him a smile, then swept forward into the main hall.

She could *do* this. She was still nervous, but the moment of panic was over. She didn’t need shadows or corners—she just needed a mask of sapphires, makeup, and blue fabric.

The Venture main hall was a grand and imposing sight. Four or five daunting stories high, the hall was several times as long as it was wide. Enormous, rectangular stained-glass windows ran in rows along the hall, and the strange, powerful lights outside shone on them directly, throwing a cascade of colors across the room. Massive, ornate stone pillars were set into the walls, running between the windows. Just before the pillars met the floor, the wall fell away, indenting and creating a single-story gallery beneath the windows themselves. Dozens of white-clothed tables sat in this area, shadowed behind the pillars and beneath the overhang. In the distance, at the far end of the hallway, Vin could make out a low balcony set into the wall, and this held a smaller group of tables.

“The dining table of Lord Straff Venture,” Sazed whispered, gesturing toward the far balcony.

Vin nodded. “And those lights outside?”

“Limelights, Mistress,” Sazed explained. “I’m not certain the process used—somehow, the quicklime stones can be heated to brilliance without melting them.”

A string orchestra played on a platform to her left, providing music for the couples who danced in the very center of the hall. To her right, serving tables held platter upon platter of foods being attended by scurrying serving men in white.

Sazed approached an attendant and presented Vin's invitation. The man nodded, then whispered something in a younger servant's ear. The young man bowed to Vin, then led the way into the room.

"I asked for a small, solitary table," Sazed said. "You won't need to mingle during this visit, I think. Just be seen."

Vin nodded gratefully.

"The solitary table will mark you as single," Sazed warned. "Eat slowly—once your meal is through, men will come to ask you to dance."

"You didn't teach me to dance!" Vin said in an urgent whisper.

"There wasn't time, Mistress," Sazed said. "Worry not—respectfully and rightly, you can refuse these men. They will assume that you are simply flustered by your first ball, and no harm will be done."

Vin nodded, and the serving man led them to a small table near the center of the hallway. Vin seated herself in the only chair while Sazed ordered her meal. He then stepped up to stand behind her chair.

Vin sat primly, waiting. Most of the tables lay just beneath the overhang of the gallery—up close to the dancing—and that left a corridorlike walkway behind them, near the wall. Couples and groups passed along this, speaking quietly. Occasionally someone gestured or nodded toward Vin.

*Well, that part of Kelsier's plan is working.* She was getting noticed. She had to force herself not to cringe or sink down in her chair, however, as a high prelan strolled along the pathway behind her. He wasn't the one she had met, fortunately, though he had the same gray robes and dark tattoos around his eyes.

Actually, there were a fair number of obligators at the party. They strolled about, mingling with the partygoers. And yet, there was an . . . aloofness to them. A division. They hovered about, almost like chaperones.

*The Garrison watches the skaa,* Vin thought. *Apparently, the obligators perform a similar function for the nobility.* It was an odd sight—she'd always thought of the noblemen as being free. And, truthfully, they were far more confident than the skaa. Many seemed to be enjoying themselves, and the obligators didn't seem to be acting really as police, or even specifically as spies. And yet, they were there. Hovering about, joining in conversations. A constant reminder of the Lord Ruler and his empire.

Vin turned her attention away from the obligators—their presence still made her a bit uncomfortable—and instead focused on something else: the beautiful windows. Sitting where she was, she could see some of the ones directly across and up from where she sat.

They were religious, like many scenes preferred by the aristocracy. Perhaps it was to show devotion, or perhaps it was required. Vin didn't know enough—but, likely, that was something Valette wouldn't know either, so it was all right.

She did, fortunately, recognize some of the scenes—mostly because of Sazed's teachings. He seemed to know as much about the Lord Ruler's mythology as he did about other religions, though it seemed odd to her that he would study the very religion he found so oppressive.

Central to many of the windows was the Deepness. Dark black—or, in window terms, violet—it was formless, with vengeful, tentaclelike masses creeping across several windows. Vin looked up at it, along with the brilliantly colored depictions of the Lord Ruler, and found herself a little bit transfixed by the backlit scenes.

*What was it?* she wondered. *The Deepness? Why depict it so formlessly—why not show what it really was?*

She'd never really wondered about the Deepness before, but Sazed's lessons left her wondering. Her instincts whispered scam. The Lord Ruler had invented some terrible menace that he'd been able to destroy in the past, therefore "earning" his place as emperor. And yet, staring up at the horrible, twisting thing, Vin could almost believe.

What if something like that *had* existed? And, if it had, how had the Lord Ruler managed to defeat it?

She sighed, shaking her head at the thoughts. Already, she was beginning to think too much like a noblewoman. She was admiring the beauty of the decorations—thinking about what they meant—without giving more than a passing thought to the wealth that had created them. It was just that everything here was so wondrous and ornate.

The pillars in the hall weren't just normal columns, they were carved masterpieces. Wide banners hung from the ceiling just above the windows, and the arching, lofty ceiling was crisscrossed by structural buttressings and dotted with capstones. Somehow she knew each of those capstones was intricately carved, despite the fact that they were too far away to be seen from below.

And the dancers matched, perhaps even outshone, the exquisite setting. Couples moved gracefully, stepping to the soft music with seemingly effortless motions. Many were even chatting with one another while they danced. The ladies moved freely in their dresses—many of which, Vin noticed, made her own frilly garment look plain by comparison. Sazed was right: Long hair was certainly the fashion, though an equal number kept their hair up as left it down.

Surrounded by the majestic hall, the sharp-suited noblemen looked different, somehow. Distinguished. Were these the same creatures that beat her friends and enslaved the skaa? They seemed too . . . perfect, too well-mannered, for such horrible acts.

*I wonder if they even notice the outside world,* she thought, crossing her arms on the table as she watched the dancing. *Perhaps they can't see beyond their keeps and their balls—just like they can't see past my dress and makeup.*

Sazed tapped her shoulder, and Vin sighed, adopting a more ladylike posture. The meal arrived a few moments later—a feast of such strange flavors that she would have been daunted, had she not eaten similar fare often during the last few months. Sazed's lessons might have omitted dancing, but they had been quite extensive regarding dining etiquette, for which Vin was grateful. As Kelsier had said, her main purpose of the evening was to make an appearance—and so it was important that she make a proper one.

She ate delicately, as instructed, and that allowed her to be slow and meticulous. She didn't relish the idea of being asked to dance; she was half afraid she'd panic again if anyone actually spoke to her. However, a meal could only be extended so long—especially one with a lady's small portions. She soon finished, and set her fork across the plate, indicating that she was done.

The first suitor approached not two minutes later. "Lady Valette Renoux?" the young man asked, bowing just slightly. He wore a green vest beneath his long, dark suit coat. "I am Lord Rian Strobe. Would you care to dance?"

"My lord," Vin said, glancing down demurely. "You are kind, but this is my first ball, and everything here is so grand! I fear that I'll stumble from nervousness on the dance floor. Perhaps, next time . . .?"

"Of course, my lady," he said with a courteous nod, then withdrew.

"Very well done, Mistress," Sazed said quietly. "Your accent was masterful. You will, of course, have to dance with him at the next ball. We shall surely have you trained by then, I think."

Vin flushed slightly. "Maybe he won't attend."

"Perhaps," Sazed said. "But not likely. The young nobility are quite fond of their nightly diversions."

"They do this every night?"

"Nearly," Sazed said. "The balls are, after all, a prime reason people come to Luthadel. If one is in town and there is a ball—and there almost always is—one generally attends, especially if one is young and unmarried. You won't be expected to attend quite so frequently, but we should probably get you up to attending two or three a week."

"Two or three . . ." Vin said. "I'm going to need more gowns!"

Sazed smiled. "Ah, thinking like a noblewoman already. Now, Mistress, if you will excuse me . . ."

"Excuse you?" Vin asked, turning.

"To the steward's dinner," Sazed said. "A servant of my rank is generally dismissed once my master's meal is finished. I hesitate to go and leave you, but that room will be filled with the self-important servants of the high nobility. There will be conversations there that Master Kelsier wishes me to overhear."

"You're leaving me by myself?"

"You've done well so far, Mistress," Sazed said. "No major mistakes—or, at least, none that wouldn't be expected of a lady new to court."

"Like what?" Vin asked apprehensively.

"We shall discuss them later. Just remain at your table, sipping your wine—try not to get it refilled too often—and wait for my return. If other young men approach, turn them away as delicately as you did the first."

Vin nodded hesitantly.

"I shall return in about an hour," Sazed promised. He remained, however, as if waiting for something.

"Um, you are dismissed," Vin said.

"Thank you, Mistress," he said, bowing and withdrawing. Leaving her alone.

*Not alone*, she thought. *Kelsier's out there somewhere, watching in the night.* The thought comforted her, though she wished she didn't feel the empty space beside her chair quite so keenly.

Three more young men approached her for dances, but each one accepted her polite rejection. No others came after them; word had probably gotten around that she wasn't interested in dancing. She memorized the names of the four men who had approached her—Kelsier would want to know them—and began to wait.

Oddly, she soon found herself growing bored. The room was well ventilated, but she still felt hot beneath the layers of fabric. Her legs were especially bad, since they had to deal with her ankle-long undergarments. The long sleeves didn't help either, though the silky material was soft against her skin. The dancing continued, and she watched with interest for a time. However, her attention soon turned to the obligators.

Interestingly, they did seem to serve some sort of function at the party. Though they often stood apart from the groups of chatting nobility, occasionally they would join in. And, every so often, a group would pause and seek out an obligator, waving one over with a respectful gesture.

Vin frowned, trying to decide what she was missing. Eventually, a group at a nearby table waved to a passing obligator. The table was too far away to hear unaided, but with tin . . .

She reached inside to burn the metal, but then paused. *Copper first,* she thought, turning the metal on. She would have to grow accustomed to leaving it on almost all the time, so that she wouldn't expose herself.

Her Allomancy hidden, she burned tin. Immediately, the light in the room became blinding, and she had to close her eyes. The band's music became louder, and a dozen conversations around her turned from buzzes to audible voices. She had to try hard to focus on the one she was interested in, but the table was the one closest to her, so she eventually singled out the appropriate voices.

" . . . swear that I'll share news of my engagement with him before anyone else," one of the people said. Vin opened her eyes a slit—it was one of the noblemen at the table.

"Very well," said the obligator. "I witness and record this."

The nobleman reached out a hand, and coins clinked. Vin extinguished her tin, opening her eyes all the way in time to see the obligator wandering away from the table, slipping something—likely the coins—into a pocket of his robes.

*Interesting,* Vin thought.

Unfortunately, the people at that table soon rose and went their separate ways, leaving Vin without anyone close enough to eavesdrop upon. Her boredom returned as she watched the obligator stroll across the room toward one of his companions. She began to tap on the table, idly watching the two obligators until she realized something.

She recognized one of them. Not the one who had taken the money earlier, but his companion, an older man. Short and firm-featured, he stood with an imperious air. Even the other obligator seemed deferential to him.

At first, Vin thought her familiarity came from her visit to the Canton of Finance with Camon, and she felt a stab of panic. Then, however, she realized that this wasn't the same man. She'd seen him before, but not there. He was . . .

*My father,* she realized with stupefaction.

Reen had pointed him out once, when they had first come to Luthadel, a year ago; he had been inspecting the workers at a local forge. Reen had taken Vin, sneaking her in, insisting that she at least see her father once—though she still didn't understand why. She had memorized the face anyway.

She resisted the urge to shrink down in her chair. There was no way the man would be able to recognize her—he didn't even know she existed. She forcibly turned her attention away from him, looking up at the windows instead. She couldn't get that good a look at them, however, because the pillars and overhang restricted her view.

As she sat, she noticed something she hadn't seen before—a lofty, inset balcony that ran just above the entire far wall. It was like a counterpart to the alcove beneath the windows, except it ran at the top of the wall, between the stained-glass windows and the ceiling. She could see movement upon it, couples and singles strolling along, looking down upon the party below.

Her instincts drew her toward the balcony, from where she could watch the party without being seen herself. It would also give her a wonderful view of the banners and the windows directly above her table, not to mention let her study the stonework without seeming to gawk.

Sazed had told her to stay, but the more she sat, the more she found her eyes drawn toward the hidden balcony. She itched to stand up and move, to stretch her legs and perhaps air them out a bit. The presence of her father—oblivious of her or not—served only as another motivation for her to leave the main floor.

*It isn't like anyone else is asking me to dance,* she thought. *And I've done what Kelsier wanted, I've been seen by the nobility.*

She paused, then waved for a serving boy.

He approached with alacrity. "Yes, Lady Renoux?"

"How do I get up there?" Vin asked, pointing toward the balcony.

"There are stairs just to the side of the orchestra, my lady," the boy said. "Climb them to the top landing."

Vin nodded her thanks. Then, determined, she stood and made her way to the front of the room. No one gave her passing more than a glance, and she walked with more confidence as she crossed the hallway to the stairwell.

The stone corridor twisted upward, curling upon itself, its steps short but steep. Little stained glass windows, no wider than her hand, ran up the outside wall—though they were dark in color, lacking backlight. Vin climbed eagerly, working away her restless energy, but she soon began to puff from the weight of the dress and the difficulty of holding it up so that she didn't trip. A spark of burned pewter, however, made the climb effortless enough that she didn't sweat and ruin her makeup.

The climb proved to be worth the effort. The upper balcony was dark—lit only by several small blue-glassed lanterns on the walls—and it gave an amazing view of the stained-glass windows. The area was quiet, and Vin felt practically alone as she approached the iron railing between two pillars, looking down. The stone tiles of the floor below formed a pattern she hadn't noticed, a kind of freeform curving of gray upon white.

*Mists?* she wondered idly, leaning against the railing. It, like the lantern bracket behind her, was intricate and detailed—both had been wrought in the form of thick, curving vines. To her sides, the tops of the pillars were carved into stone animals that appeared frozen in the motion of jumping off of the balcony.

"Now, see, here's the problem with going to refill your cup of wine."

The sudden voice made Vin jump, and she spun. A young man stood behind her. His suit wasn't the finest she had seen, nor was his vest as bright as most. Both coat and shirt seemed to fit too loosely, and his hair was just a bit disheveled. He carried a cup of wine, and the outer pocket of his suit coat bulged with the shape of a book that was just a bit too big for its confines.

"The problem is," the young man said, "you return to find that your favorite spot has been stolen by a pretty girl. Now, a gentleman would move on to another place, leaving the lady to her contemplations. However, this *is* the best spot on the balcony—it's the only place close enough to a lantern to have good reading light."

Vin flushed. "I'm sorry, my lord."

"Ah, see, now I feel guilty. All for a cup of wine. Look, there's plenty of room for two people here—just scoot over a bit."

Vin paused. Could she politely refuse? He obviously wanted her to stay near him—did he know who she was? Should she try to find out his name, so she could tell Kelsier?

She stepped a bit to the side, and the man took a place next to her. He leaned back against the side pillar, and, surprisingly, took out his book and began to read. He was right: The lantern shined directly on the pages. Vin stood for a moment, watching him, but he seemed completely absorbed. He didn't even pause to look up at her.

*Isn't he going to pay me any attention at all?* Vin thought, puzzled at her own annoyance. *Maybe I should have worn a fancier dress.*

The man sipped at his wine, focused on the book.

“Do you always read at balls?” she asked.

The young man looked up. “Whenever I can get away with it.”

“Doesn’t that kind of defeat the purpose of coming?” Vin asked. “Why attend if you’re just going to avoid socializing?”

“You’re up here too,” he pointed out.

Vin flushed. “I just wanted to get a brief view of the hall.”

“Oh? And why did you refuse all three men who asked you to dance?”

Vin paused. The man smiled, then turned back to his book.

“There were four,” Vin said with a huff. “And I refused them because I don’t know how to dance very well.”

The man lowered his book slightly, eyeing her. “You know, you’re a lot less timid than you look.”

“Timid?” Vin asked. “I’m not the one staring at his book when there’s a young lady standing by him, never having properly introduced himself.”

The man raised a speculative eyebrow. “Now, see, you sound like my father. Far better looking, but just as grumpy.”

Vin glared at him. Finally, he rolled his eyes. “Very well, let me be a gentleman, then.” He bowed to her with a refined, formal step. “I am Lord Elend. Lady Valette Renoux, might I have the pleasure of sharing this balcony with you whilst I read?”

Vin folded her arms. *Elend? Family name or given name? Should I even care? He just wanted his spot back. But . . . how did he know that I’d refused dancing partners?* Somehow, she had a suspicion that Kelsier would want to hear about this particular conversation.

Oddly, she didn’t feel a desire to shrug this man away as she had the others. Instead, she felt another stab of annoyance as he again raised his book.

“You still haven’t told me why you would rather read than participate,” she said.

The man sighed, lowering the book again. “Well, see, I’m not exactly the best dancer either.”

“Ah,” Vin said.

“But,” he said, raising a finger, “that’s only part of it. You may not realize this yet, but it’s not that hard to get overpartied. Once you attend five or six hundred of these balls, they start to feel a bit repetitive.”

Vin shrugged. “You’d probably learn to dance better if you practiced.”

Elend raised an eyebrow. “You’re not going to let me get back to my book, are you?”

“I wasn’t intending to.”

He sighed, tucking the book back into his jacket pocket—which was beginning to show signs of book-shaped wear. “Well, then. Do you want to go dance instead?”

Vin froze. Elend smiled nonchalantly.

*Lord! He’s either incredibly smooth or socially incompetent.* It was disturbing that she couldn’t determine which.

“That’s a no, I assume?” Elend said. “Good—I thought I should offer, since we’ve established that I’m a gentleman. However, I doubt the couples below would appreciate us trampling their toes.”

“Agreed. What were you reading?”

“Dilisteni,” Elend said. “*Trials of Monument.* Heard of it?”

Vin shook her head.

“Ah, well. Not many have.” He leaned over the railing, looking below. “So, what do you think of your first experience at court?”

“It’s very . . . overwhelming.”

Elend chuckled. “Say what you will about House Venture—they know how to throw a party.”

Vin nodded. “You don’t like House Venture, then?” she said. Perhaps this was one of the rivalries Kelsier was watching for.

“Not particularly, no,” Elend said. “They’re an ostentatious lot, even for high nobility. They can’t just have a party, they have to throw the *best* party. Never mind that they run their servants ragged setting it up, then beat the poor things in retribution when the hall isn’t perfectly clean the very next morning.”

Vin cocked her head. *Not words I’d expect to hear from a nobleman.*

Elend paused, looking a little embarrassed. “But, well, never mind that. I think your Terrisman is looking for you.”

Vin started, glancing over the side of the balcony. Sure enough, Sazed’s tall form stood by her now-empty table, speaking to a serving boy.

Vin yelped quietly. “I’ve got to go,” she said, turning toward the stairwell.

“Ah, well then,” Elend said, “back to reading it is.” He gave her a half wave of farewell, but he had his book open before she passed the first step.

Vin reached the bottom out of breath. Sazed saw her immediately.

"I'm sorry," she said, chagrined as she approached.

"Do not apologize to me, Mistress," Sazed said quietly. "It is both unseemly and unnecessary. Moving about a bit was a good idea, I think. I would have suggested it, had you not seemed so nervous."

Vin nodded. "Is it time for us to go, then?"

"It is a proper time to withdraw, if you wish," he said, glancing up at the balcony. "May I ask what you were doing up there, Mistress?"

"I wanted to get a better look at the windows," Vin said. "But I ended up talking to someone. He seemed interested in me at first, but now I don't think he ever intended to pay me much attention. It doesn't matter—he didn't seem important enough to bother Kelsier with his name."

Sazed paused. "Who was it you were speaking to?"

"The man in the corner there, on the balcony," Vin said.

"One of Lord Venture's friends?"

Vin froze. "Is one of them named Elend?"

Sazed paled visibly. "You were chatting with Lord *Elend Venture?*"

"Um . . . yes?"

"Did he ask you to dance?"

Vin nodded. "But I don't think he meant it."

"Oh, dear," Sazed said. "So much for controlled anonymity."

"Venture?" Vin asked, frowning. "Like, Keep Venture?"

"Heir to the house title," Sazed said.

"Hum," Vin said, realizing that she should probably be a bit more intimidated than she felt. "He was a bit annoying—in a pleasant sort of way."

"We shouldn't be discussing this here," Sazed said. "You're far, far below his station. Come, let us retire. I shouldn't have gone away to the dinner. . . ."

He trailed off, mumbling to himself as he led Vin to the entryway. She got one more glimpse into the main chamber as she retrieved her shawl, and she burned tin, squinting against the light and seeking the balcony above.

He held the book, closed, in one hand—and she could have sworn that he was looking down in her direction. She smiled, and let Sazed usher her to their carriage.

*I know that I shouldn't let a simple packman perturb me. However, he is from Terris, where the prophecies originated. If anyone could spot a fraud, would it not be he?*

*Nevertheless, I continue my trek, going where the scribbled auguries proclaim that I will meet my destiny—walking, feeling Rashek's eyes on my back. Jealous. Mocking. Hating.*

# 13

VIN SAT WITH HER LEGS crossed beneath her on one of Lord Renoux's fine easy chairs. It felt good to be rid of the bulky dress, instead getting back to a more familiar shirt and trousers.

However, Sazed's calm displeasure made her want to squirm. He stood on the other side of the room, and Vin got the distinct impression that she was in trouble. Sazed had questioned her in depth, seeking out every detail of her conversation with Lord Elend. Sazed's inquiries had been respectful, of course, but they had also been forceful.

The Terrisman seemed, in Vin's opinion, unduly worried about her exchange with the young nobleman. They hadn't really talked about anything important, and Elend himself was decidedly unspectacular for a Great House lord.

But, there *had* been something odd about him—something Vin hadn't admitted to Sazed. She'd felt . . . comfortable with Elend. Looking back on the experience, she realized that for those few moments, she hadn't really been Lady Valette. Nor had she been Vin, for that part of her—the timid crewmember—was almost as fake as Valette was.

No, she'd simply been . . . whoever she was. It was a strange experience. She had occasionally felt the same way during her time with Kelsier and the others, but in a more limited manner. How had Elend been able to evoke her true self so quickly and so thoroughly?

*Maybe he used Allomancy on me!* she thought with a start. Elend was a high nobleman; perhaps he was a Soother. Maybe there was more to the conversation than she had thought.

Vin sat back in her chair, frowning to herself. She'd had copper on, and that meant he *couldn't* have used emotional Allomancy on her. Somehow, he had simply gotten her to let her guard down. Vin thought back to the experience, thinking about how oddly comfortable she'd felt. In retrospect, it was clear that she hadn't been careful enough.

*I'll be more cautious next time.* She assumed that they would meet again. They'd better.

A servant entered and whispered quietly to Sazed. A quick burn of tin let Vin hear the conversation—Kelsier had finally returned.

"Please send word to Lord Renoux," Sazed said. The white-clothed servant nodded, leaving the room with a quick step.

"The rest of you may leave," Sazed said calmly, and the room's attendants scampered away. Sazed's quiet vigil had forced them to stand, waiting in the tense room, not speaking or moving.

Kelsier and Lord Renoux arrived together, chatting quietly. As always, Renoux wore a rich suit cut in the unfamiliar Western style. The aging man kept his gray mustache trimmed thin and neat, and he walked with a confident air. Even after spending an entire evening among the nobility, Vin was again struck by his aristocratic bearing.

Kelsier still wore his mistcloak. "Saze?" he said as he entered. "You have news?"

"I am afraid so, Master Kelsier," Sazed said. "It appears that Mistress Vin caught the attention of Lord Elend Venture at the ball tonight."

"Elend?" Kelsier asked, folding his arms. "Isn't he the heir?"

"He is indeed," Renoux said. "I met the lad perhaps four years ago, when his father visited the West. He struck me as a bit undignified for one of his station."

*Four years?* Vin thought. *There's no way he's been imitating Lord Renoux for that long. Kelsier only escaped the Pits two years ago!* She eyed the impostor, but—as always—was unable to detect a flaw in his bearing.

"How attentive was the boy?" Kelsier asked.

"He asked her to dance," Sazed said. "But Mistress Vin was wise enough to decline. Apparently, their meeting was a matter of idle happenstance—but I fear she may have caught his eye."

Kelsier chuckled. "You taught her too well, Saze. In the future, Vin, perhaps you should try to be a little less charming."

"Why?" Vin asked, trying to mask her annoyance. "I thought we *wanted* me to be well liked."

"Not by a man as important as Elend Venture, child," Lord Renoux said. "We sent you to court so you could make alliances—not scandals."

Kelsier nodded. "Venture is young, eligible, and heir to a powerful house. Your having a relationship with him could make serious problems for us. The women of the court would be jealous of you, and the older men would disapprove of the rank difference. You'd alienate yourself from large sections of the court. To get the information we need, we need the aristocracy to see you as uncertain, unimportant, and—most importantly—unthreatening."

"Besides, child," Lord Renoux said. "It is unlikely that Elend Venture has any real interest in you. He is known to be a court eccentric—he is probably just trying to heighten his reputation by doing the unexpected."

Vin felt her face flush. *He's probably right,* she told herself sternly. Still, she couldn't help feeling annoyed at the three of them—especially Kelsier, with his flippant, unconcerned attitude.

"Yes," Kelsier said, "it's probably best that you avoid Venture completely. Try to offend him or something. Give him a couple of those glares you do."

Vin regarded Kelsier with a flat look.

"That's the one!" Kelsier said with a laugh.

Vin clinched her teeth, then forced herself to relax. "I saw my father at the ball tonight," she said, hoping to distract Kelsier and the others away from Lord Venture.

"Really?" Kelsier asked with interest.

Vin nodded. "I recognized him from a time my brother pointed him out to me."

"What is this?" Renoux asked.

"Vin's father is an obligator," Kelsier said. "And, apparently an important one if he has enough pull to go to a ball like this. Do you know what his name is?"

Vin shook her head.

"Description?" Kelsier asked.

"Uh . . . bald, eye tattoos . . ."

Kelsier chuckled. "Just point him out to me sometime, all right?"

Vin nodded, and Kelsier turned to Sazed. "Now, did you bring me the names of which noblemen asked Vin to dance?"

Sazed nodded. "She gave me a list, Master Kelsier. I also have several interesting tidbits to share from the stewards' meal."

"Good," Kelsier said, glancing at the grandfather clock in the corner. "You'll have to save them for tomorrow morning, though. I've got to be going."

"Going?" Vin asked, perking up. "But you just got in!"

"That's the funny thing about arriving somewhere, Vin," he said with a wink. "Once you're there, the only thing you can really do is leave again. Get some sleep—you're looking a bit ragged."

Kelsier waved a farewell to the group, then ducked out of the room, whistling amiably to himself.

*Too nonchalant,* Vin thought. *And too secretive. He usually tells us which families he plans to hit.*

"I think I *will* retire," Vin said, yawning.

Sazed eyed her suspiciously, but let her go as Renoux began speaking quietly to him. Vin scrambled up the stairs to her room, threw on her mistcloak, and pushed open her balcony doors.

Mist poured into the room. She flared iron, and was rewarded with the sight of a fading blue metal line, pointing into the distance.

*Let's see where you're going, Master Kelsier.*

Vin burned steel, Pushing herself into the cold, humid autumn night. Tin enhanced her eyes, making the wet air tickle her throat as she breathed. She Pushed hard behind her, then Pulled slightly on the gates below. The maneuver swung her in a soaring arc over the steel gates, which she then Pushed against to throw herself farther into the air.

She kept an eye on the trail of blue that pointed toward Kelsier, following him at enough of a distance to remain unseen. She wasn't carrying any metal—not even coins—and she kept her copper burning to hide her use of Allomancy. Theoretically, only sound could alert Kelsier of her presence, and so she moved as quietly as possible.

Surprisingly, Kelsier didn't head into town. After passing the mansion's gates, he turned north out of the city. Vin followed, landing and running quietly on the rough ground.

*Where is he going?* she thought with confusion. *Is he circling Fellise? Heading for one of the peripheral mansions?*

Kelsier continued northward for a short time, then his metal line suddenly began to grow dim. Vin paused, stopping beside a group of stumpy trees. The line faded at a rapid rate: Kelsier had suddenly sped up. She cursed to herself, breaking into a dash.

Ahead, Kelsier's line vanished into the night. Vin sighed, slowing. She flared her iron, but it was barely enough to catch a glimpse of him disappearing again in the distance. She'd never keep up.

Her flared iron, however, showed her something else. She frowned, continuing forward until she reached a stationary source of metal—two small bronze bars stuck into the ground a couple feet from each other. She flipped one up into her hand, then looked into the swirling mists to the north.

*He's jumping,* she thought. *But why?* Jumping *was* faster than walking, but there didn't seem much point to it in the empty wilderness.

*Unless . . .*

She walked forward, and she soon found two more bronze bars embedded in the earth. Vin glanced backward. It was hard to tell in the night, but it seemed that the four bars made a line that pointed directly toward Luthadel.

*So that's how he does it,* she thought. Kelsier had an uncanny ability to move between Luthadel and Fellise with remarkable speed. She'd assumed that he was using horses, but it appeared that there was a better way. He—or perhaps someone before him—had laid down an Allomantic road between the two cities.

She gripped the first bar in her palm—she'd need it to soften her landing if she was wrong—then stepped up in front of the second pair of bars and launched herself into the air.

She Pushed hard, flaring her steel, throwing herself as far up into the sky as she could. As she flew, she flared her iron, searching for other sources of metal. They soon appeared—two directly north, and two more in the distance to either side of her.

*The ones on the sides are for course corrections,* she realized. She'd have to keep moving directly north if she wanted to stay on the bronze highway. She nudged herself slightly to the left—moving so that she passed directly between the two adjacent bars of the main path—then hurled herself forward again in an arcing leap.

She got the hang of it quickly, hopping from point to point, never dropping even close to the ground. In just a few minutes, she had the rhythm down so well that she barely had to do any corrections from the sides.

Her progress across the scraggly landscape was incredibly swift. The mists blew by, her mistcloak whipping and flapping behind her. Still, she forced herself to speed up. She'd spent too long studying the bronze bars. She had to catch up to Kelsier; otherwise she'd arrive in Luthadel, but not know where to go from there.

She began to throw herself from point to point at an almost reckless speed, watching desperately for some sign of Allomantic motion. After about ten minutes of leaping, a line of blue finally appeared ahead of her—one pointing up, rather than down toward bars in the ground. She breathed in relief.

Then a second line appeared, and a third.

Vin frowned, letting herself drop to the ground with a muted thump. She flared tin, and a massive shadow appeared in the night before her, its top sparkling with balls of light.

*The city wall,* she thought with amazement. *So soon? I made the trip twice as fast as a man on horseback!*

However, that meant she'd lost Kelsier. Frowning to herself, she used the bar she'd been carrying to throw herself up onto the battlements. Once she landed on the damp stone, she reached behind and Pulled the bar up into her hand. Then she approached the other side of the wall, hopping up and crouching on the stone railing as she scanned the city.

*What now?* she thought with annoyance. *Head back to Fellise? Stop by Clubs's shop and see if he went there?*

She sat uncertainly for a moment, then threw herself off the wall and began making her way across the rooftops. She wandered randomly, pushing off of window clasps and bits of metal, using the bronze bar—then pulling it back into her hand—when long jumps were necessary. It wasn't until she arrived that she realized she'd unconsciously gone to a specific destination.

Keep Venture rose before her in the night. The limelights had been extinguished, and only a few phantom torches burned near guard posts.

Vin crouched on the lip on a rooftop, trying to decide what had led her back to the massive keep. The cool wind ruffled her hair and cloak, and she thought she felt a few tiny raindrops on her cheek. She sat for a long moment, her toes growing cold.

Then she noticed motion to her right. She crouched immediately, flaring her tin.

Kelsier sat on a rooftop not three houses away, just barely lit by ambient light. He didn't seem to have noticed her. He was watching the keep, his face too distant for her to read his expression.

Vin watched him with suspicious eyes. He'd dismissed her meeting with Elend, but perhaps it worried him more than he'd admitted. A sudden spike of fear made her tense.

*Could he be here to kill Elend?* The assassination of a high noble heir would certainly create tension amongst the nobility.

Vin waited apprehensively. Eventually, however, Kelsier stood and walked away, Pushing himself off the rooftop and into the air.

Vin dropped her bronze bar—it would give her away—and dashed after him. Her iron showed blue lines moving in the distance, and she hurriedly jumped out over the street and Pushed herself off a sewer grate below, determined not to lose him again.

He moved toward the center of the city. Vin frowned, trying to guess his destination. Keep Erikeller was in that direction, and it was a major supplier of armaments. Perhaps Kelsier planned to do something to interrupt its supplies, making House Renoux more vital to the local nobility.

Vin landed on a rooftop and paused, watching Kelsier shoot off into the night. *He's moving fast again. I—*

A hand fell on her shoulder.

Vin yelped, jumping back, flaring pewter.

Kelsier regarded her with a cocked eyebrow. "You're supposed to be in bed, young lady."

Vin glanced to the side, toward the line of metal. "But—"

"My coin pouch," Kelsier said, smiling. "A good thief can steal clever tricks as easily as he steals boxings. I've started being more careful since you tailed me last week—at first, I assumed you were a Venture Mistborn."

"They have some?"

"I'm sure they do," Kelsier said. "Most of the Great Houses do—but your friend Elend isn't one of them. He's not even a Misting."

"How do you know? He could be hiding it."

Kelsier shook his head. "He nearly died in a raid a couple of years ago—if there were ever a time to show your powers, it would have been then."

Vin nodded, still looking down, not meeting Kelsier's eyes.

He sighed, sitting down on the slanted rooftop, one leg hanging over the side. "Have a seat."

Vin settled herself on the tile roof across from him. Above, the cool mists continued to churn, and it had begun to drizzle slightly—but that wasn't much different from the regular nightly humidity.

"I can't have you tailing me like this, Vin," Kelsier said. "Do you remember our discussion about trust?"

"If you trusted me, you'd tell me where you were going."

"Not necessarily," Kelsier said. "Maybe I just don't want you and the others to worry about me."

"Everything you do is dangerous," Vin said. "Why would we worry any more if you told us specifics?"

"Some tasks are even more dangerous than others," Kelsier said quietly.

Vin paused, then glanced to the side, in the direction Kelsier had been going. Toward the center of the city.

Toward Kredik Shaw, the Hill of a Thousand Spires. The Lord Ruler's palace.

"You're going to confront the Lord Ruler!" Vin said quietly. "You said last week that you were going to pay him a visit."

" 'Visit' is, perhaps, too strong a word," Kelsier said. "I *am* going to the palace, but I sincerely hope I don't run into the Lord Ruler himself. I'm not ready for him yet. Regardless, *you* are going straight to Clubs's shop."

Vin nodded.

Kelsier frowned. "You're just going to try and follow me again, aren't you?"

Vin paused, then she nodded again.

"Why?"

"Because I want to help," Vin said quietly. "So far, my part in this all has essentially boiled down to going to a party. But, I'm Mistborn—you've trained me yourself. I'm not going to sit back and let everyone else do dangerous work while I sit, eat dinner, and watch people dance."

"What you're doing at those balls is important," Kelsier said.

Vin nodded, glancing down. She'd just let him go, then she'd follow him. Part of her reasoning was what she'd said before: She was beginning to feel a camaraderie for this crew, and it was like nothing she had ever known. She wanted to be part of what it was doing; she wanted to help.

However, another part of her whispered that Kelsier wasn't telling her everything. He might trust her; he might not. However, he certainly had secrets. The Eleventh Metal, and therefore the Lord Ruler, were involved in those secrets.

Kelsier caught her eyes, and he must have seen her intention to follow in them. He sighed, leaning back. "I'm serious, Vin! You can't go with me."

"Why not?" she asked, abandoning pretense. "If what you're doing is so dangerous, wouldn't it be safer if you had another Mistborn watching your back?"

"You still don't know all of the metals," Kelsier said.

"Only because you haven't taught me."

"You need more practice."

"The best practice is doing," Vin said. "My brother trained me to steal by taking me on burglaries."

Kelsier shook his head. “It’s too dangerous.”

“Kelsier,” she said in a serious tone. “We’re planning to *overthrow the Final Empire.* I don’t really expect to live until the end of the year anyway.

“You keep telling the others what an advantage it is to have two Mistborn on the team. Well, it’s not going to be much of an advantage unless you actually let me *be* a Mistborn. How long are you going to wait? Until I’m ‘ready’? I don’t think that will ever happen.”

Kelsier eyed her for a moment, then he smiled. “When we first met, half the time I couldn’t get you to say a word. Now you’re lecturing me.”

Vin blushed. Finally, Kelsier sighed, reaching beneath his cloak to pull something out. “I can’t believe I’m considering this,” he muttered, handing her the bit of metal.

Vin studied the tiny, silvery ball of metal. It was so reflective and bright that it almost seemed to be a drop of liquid, yet it was solid to the touch.

“Atium,” Kelsier said. “Tenth, and most powerful, of the known Allomantic metals. That bead is worth more than the entire bag of boxings I gave you before.”

“This little bit?” she asked with surprise.

Kelsier nodded. “Atium only comes from one place—the Pits of Hathsin—where the Lord Ruler controls its production and distribution. The Great Houses get to buy a monthly stipend of atium, which is one of the main ways the Lord Ruler controls them. Go ahead and swallow it.”

Vin eyed the bit of metal, uncertain she wanted to waste something so valuable.

“You can’t sell it,” Kelsier said. “Thieving crews try, but they get tracked down and executed. The Lord Ruler is very protective of his atium supply.”

Vin nodded, then swallowed the metal. Immediately, she felt a new well of power appear within her, waiting to be burned.

“All right,” Kelsier said, standing. “Burn it as soon as I start walking.”

Vin nodded. As he began to walk forward, she drew upon her new well of strength and burned atium.

Kelsier seemed to fuzz slightly to her eyes; then a translucent, wraithlike image shot out into the mists in front of him. The image looked just like Kelsier, and it walked just a few steps in front of him. A very faint, trailing after-image extended from the duplicate back to

Kelsier himself.

It was like . . . a reverse shadow. The duplicate did everything Kelsier did—except, the image moved *first*. It turned, and then Kelsier followed its same path.

The image's mouth began moving. A second later, Kelsier spoke. "Atium lets you see just a bit into the future. Or, at least, it lets you see what people are going to do a little bit in the future. In addition, it enhances your mind, allowing you to deal with the new information, allowing you to react more quickly and collectedly."

The shadow stopped, then Kelsier walked up to it, stopping as well. Suddenly, the shadow reached out and slapped her, and Vin moved reflexively, putting her hand up just as Kelsier's real hand began to move. She caught his arm midswing.

"While you're burning atium," he said, "nothing can surprise you. You can swing a dagger, knowing confidently that your enemies will run right into it. You can dodge attacks with ease because you'll be able to see where every blow will fall. Atium makes you quite nearly invincible. It enhances your mind, making you able to make use of all the new information."

Suddenly, dozens of other images shot from Kelsier's body. Each one sprang in a different direction, some striding across the roof, others jumping into the air. Vin released his arm, rising and backing away in confusion.

"I just burned atium too," Kelsier said. "I can see what you're going to do, and that changes what I'm going to do—which in turn changes what you're going to do. The images reflect each of the possible actions we might take."

"It's confusing," Vin said, watching the insane jumble of images, old ones constantly fading, new ones constantly appearing.

Kelsier nodded. "The only way to defeat someone who is burning atium is to burn it yourself—that way, neither of you has an advantage."

The images vanished.

"What did you do?" Vin asked with a start.

"Nothing," Kelsier said. "Your atium probably ran out."

Vin realized with surprise that he was right—the atium was gone. "It burns so quickly!"

Kelsier nodded, sitting down again. "That's probably the fastest fortune you've ever blown, eh?"

Vin nodded, stunned. "It seems like such a waste."

Kelsier shrugged. "Atium is only valuable because of Allomancy. So, if we didn't burn it, it wouldn't be worth the fortune that it is. Of course, if we do burn it, we make it even more rare. It's kind of an interesting relationship—ask Ham about it sometimes. He loves talking about atium economics.

"Anyway, any Mistborn you face will probably have atium. However, they'll be reluctant to use it. In addition, they won't have swallowed it yet—atium is fragile, and your digestive juices will ruin it in a matter of hours. So, you have to walk a line between conservation and effectiveness. If it looks like your opponent is using atium, then you'd better use yours too—however, make sure he doesn't lure you into using up your reserve before he does."

Vin nodded. "Does this mean you're taking me tonight?"

"I'll probably regret it," Kelsier said, sighing. "But I don't see any way to make you stay behind—short of tying you up, perhaps. But, I warn you Vin. This could be dangerous. *Very* dangerous. I don't intend to meet the Lord Ruler, but I do intend to sneak into his stronghold. I think I know where we might find a clue on how to defeat him."

Vin smiled, stepping forward as Kelsier waved her toward him. He reached into his pouch and pulled out a vial, which he handed to her. It was like regular Allomantic vials, except the liquid inside held only a single drop of metal. The atium bead was several times larger than the one he had given her to practice on.

"Don't use it unless you have to," Kelsier warned. "You need any other metals?"

Vin nodded. "I burned up most of my steel getting here."

Kelsier handed her another vial. "First, let's go retrieve my coin pouch."

*Sometimes I wonder if I'm going mad.*

*Perhaps it is due to the pressure of knowing that I must somehow bear the burden of an entire world. Perhaps it is caused by the death I have seen, the friends I have lost. The friends I have been forced to kill.*

*Either way, I sometimes see shadows following me. Dark creatures that I don't understand, nor wish to understand. Are they, perhaps, some figment of my overtaxed mind?*

# 14

IT STARTED RAINING JUST AFTER they located the coin pouch. It wasn't a hard rain, but it seemed to clear the mist slightly. Vin shivered, pulling up her hood, crouching beside Kelsier on a rooftop. He didn't pay the weather much heed, so neither did she. A little dampness wouldn't hurt—in fact, it would probably help, as the rainfall would cover the sounds of their approach.

Kredik Shaw lay before them. The peaked spires and sheer towers rose like dark talons in the night. They varied greatly in thickness—some were wide enough to house stairwells and large rooms, but others were simply thin rods of steel jutting up into the sky. The variety gave the mass a twisted, off-center symmetry—an almost-balance.

The spikes and towers had a foreboding cast in the damp, misty night—like the ash-blackened bones of a long-weathered carcass. Looking at them, Vin thought she felt something . . . a *depression*, as if simply being close to the building was enough to suck away her hope.

"Our target is a tunnel complex at the base of one of the far right spires," Kelsier said, his voice barely carrying over the quiet hush of the falling rain. "We're heading for a room at the very center of that complex."

"What's inside?"

"I don't know," Kelsier said. "That's what we're going to find out. Once every three days—and today isn't one of them—the Lord Ruler visits this chamber. He stays for three hours, then leaves. I tried to get in once before. Three years ago."

"The job," Vin whispered. "The one that . . ."

"Got me captured," Kelsier said with a nod. "Yes. At the time, we thought that the Lord Ruler stored riches in the room. I don't think that's true, now, but I'm still curious. The way he visits is so regular, so . . . odd. Something's in that room, Vin. Something important. Maybe it holds the secret to his power and immortality."

"Why do we need to worry about that?" Vin asked. "You have the Eleventh Metal to defeat him, right?"

Kelsier frowned slightly. Vin waited for an answer, but he didn't ever give one. "I failed to get in last time, Vin," he said instead. "We got close, but we got there too easily. When we arrived, there were Inquisitors outside the room. Waiting for us."

"Someone told them you were coming?"

Kelsier nodded. "We planned that job for months. We were overconfident, but we had reason to be. Mare and I were the best—the job should have gone flawlessly." Kelsier paused, then he turned to Vin. "Tonight, I didn't plan at all. We're just going in—we'll quiet anyone who tries to stop us, then break into that room."

Vin sat quietly, feeling the chill rainwater on her wet hands and damp arms. Then she nodded.

Kelsier smiled slightly. "No objections?"

Vin shook her head. "I made you take me with you. It's not my place to object now."

Kelsier chuckled. "Guess I've been hanging out with Breeze too long. I just don't feel right unless someone tells me I'm crazy."

Vin shrugged. However, as she moved on the rooftop, she felt it again—the sense of depression coming from Kredik Shaw.

"There is something, Kelsier," she said. "The palace feels . . . wrong, somehow."

"That's the Lord Ruler," Kelsier said. "He radiates like an incredibly powerful Soother, smothering the emotions of everyone who gets close to him. Turn on your copper; that will make you immune."

Vin nodded, burning copper. Immediately, the sensation went away.

"Good?" Kelsier asked.

She nodded again.

"All right, then," he said, giving her a handful of coins. "Stay close to me, and keep your atium handy—just in case."

With that, he threw himself off the roof. Vin followed, her cloak tassels spraying rainwater. She burned pewter as she fell, and hit the ground with Allomantically strengthened legs.

Kelsier took off at a dash, and she followed. Her speed on the wet cobblestones would have been reckless, but her pewter-fueled muscles reacted with precision, strength, and balance. She ran in the wet, misty night, burning tin and copper—one to let her see, the other to let her hide.

Kelsier rounded the palace complex. Oddly, the grounds had no outer wall. *Of course they don't. Who would dare attack the Lord Ruler?*

Flat space, covered in cobblestones, was all that surrounded the Hill of a Thousand Spires. No tree, foliage, or structure stood to distract one's eye from the disturbing, asymmetric collection of wings, towers, and spires that was Kredik Shaw.

"Here we go," Kelsier whispered, his voice carrying to her tin-enhanced ears. He turned, dashing directly toward a squat, bunkerlike section of the palace. As they approached, Vin saw a pair of guards standing by an ornate, gatelike door.

Kelsier was on the men in a flash, cutting one down with slashing knives. The second man tried to cry out, but Kelsier jumped, slamming both feet into the man's chest. Thrown to the side by the inhumanly strong kick, the guard crashed into the wall, then slumped to the ground. Kelsier was on his feet a second later, slamming his weight against the door and pushing it open.

Weak lanternlight spilled out of a stone corridor within. Kelsier ducked through the door. Vin dimmed her tin, then followed in a crouching dash, her heart pounding. Never, in all her time as a thief, had she done something like this. Hers had been a life of sneaky burgling and scamming, not raids or muggings. As she followed Kelsier down the corridor—their feet and cloaks leaving a wet trail on the smooth stonework—she nervously pulled out a glass dagger, gripping the leather-wrapped handle in a sweaty palm.

A man stepped into the hallway just ahead, exiting what appeared to be some sort of guard chamber. Kelsier jumped forward and elbowed the soldier in the stomach, then slammed him against the wall. Even as the guard collapsed, Kelsier ducked into the room.

Vin followed, stepping into chaos. Kelsier Pulled a metal candelabrum from the corner up into his hands, then began to spin with it, striking down soldier after soldier. Guards cried out, scrambling and grabbing staves from the side of the room. A table covered in half-eaten meals was thrown to the side as men tried to make room.

A soldier turned toward Vin, and she reacted without thinking. She burned steel and threw out a handful of coins. She Pushed, and the missiles shot forward, tearing through the guard's flesh and dropping him.

She burned iron, Pulling the coins back to her hand. She turned with a bloodied fist, spraying the room with metal, dropping three soldiers. Kelsier felled the last with his impromptu staff.

*I just killed four men,* Vin thought, stunned. Before, Reen had always done the killing.

There was rustling behind. Vin spun to see another squadron of soldiers enter through a door opposite her. To the side, Kelsier dropped his candelabrum and stepped forward. The room's four lanterns suddenly ripped from their mountings, slamming directly toward him. He ducked to the side, letting the lanterns crash together.

The room fell dark. Vin burned tin, her eyes adapting to light from the corridor outside. The guards, however, stumbled to a halt.

Kelsier was amidst them a second later. Daggers flashing in the darkness. Men screaming. Then all was silent.

Vin stood surrounded by death, bloodied coins dribbling from her stunned fingers. She kept a tight grip on her dagger, however—if only to steady her quivering arm.

Kelsier lay a hand on her shoulder, and she jumped.

"These were evil men, Vin," he said. "Every skaa knows in his heart that it is the greatest of crimes to take up arms in defense of the Final Empire."

Vin nodded numbly. She felt . . . wrong. Maybe it was the death, but now that she was actually within the building, she swore that she could still feel the Lord Ruler's power. Something seemed to Push her emotions, making her more depressed despite her copper.

"Come. Time is short." Kelsier took off again, hopping lithely over corpses, and Vin felt herself following.

*I made him bring me,* she thought. *I wanted to fight, like him. I'm going to have to get used to this.*

They dashed into a second corridor, and Kelsier jumped into the air. He lurched, then shot forward. Vin did the same, leaping and seeking an anchor far down the corridor, then using it to Pull herself through the air.

Side corridors whipped past, the air a rushing howl in her tin-enhanced ears. Ahead, two soldiers stepped into the corridor. Kelsier slammed feet-first into one, then flipped up and rammed a dagger into the other's neck. Both men fell.

*No metal,* Vin thought, dropping to the ground. *None of the guards in this place wear metal.* Hazekillers, they were called. Men trained to fight Allomancers.

Kelsier ducked down a side corridor, and Vin had to sprint to keep up with him. She flared pewter, willing her legs to move faster.

Ahead, Kelsier paused, and Vin lurched to a stop beside him. To their right was an open, arching doorway, and it shone with a light far brighter than that of the small corridor lanterns. Vin extinguished her tin, following Kelsier through the archway and into the room.

Six braziers burned with open flames at the corners of the large, dome-roofed chamber. In contrast to the simple corridors, this room was covered with silver-inlayed murals. Each obviously represented the Lord Ruler; they were like the windows she had seen earlier, except less abstract. She saw a mountain. A large cavern. A pool of light.

And something very dark.

Kelsier strode forward, and Vin turned. The center of the room was dominated by a small structure—a building within the building. Ornate, with carved stone and flowing patterns, the single-story building stood reverently before them. All in all, the quiet, empty chamber gave Vin a strange feeling of solemnity.

Kelsier walked forward, bare feet falling on smooth black marble. Vin followed in a nervous crouch; the room seemed empty, but there had to be other guards. Kelsier walked up to a large oaken door set into the inner building, its surface carved with letterings Vin didn't recognize. He reached out and pulled open the door.

A Steel Inquisitor stood inside. The creature smiled, lips curling in an eerie expression beneath the two massive spikes that had been pounded point-first through its eyes.

Kelsier paused for just a moment. Then he yelled, "*Vin, run!*" as the Inquisitor's hand snapped forward, grabbing him by the throat.

Vin froze. To the sides, she saw two other black-robed Inquisitors stride through open archways. Tall, lean, and bald, they were also marked by their spikes and intricate Ministry eye tattoos.

The closest Inquisitor lifted Kelsier up into the air by his neck. "Kelsier, the Survivor of Hathsin," the creature said in a grinding voice. Then he turned toward Vin. "And . . . you. I've been looking for you. I'll let this one die quickly if you'll tell me which nobleman spawned you, half-breed."

Kelsier coughed, struggling for breath as he pried at the creature's grip. The Inquisitor turned, regarding Kelsier with spike-end eyes. Kelsier coughed again, as if trying to say something, and the Inquisitor curiously pulled Kelsier a bit closer.

Kelsier's hand whipped out, ramming a dagger into the creature's neck. As the Inquisitor stumbled, Kelsier slammed his fist into the creature's forearm, shattering the bone with a snap. The Inquisitor dropped him, and Kelsier fell to the reflective marble floor, coughing.

Gasping for breath, Kelsier looked up at Vin with intense eyes. "I said *run!*" he croaked, tossing something to her.

Vin paused, reaching out to catch the coin pouch. However, it lurched suddenly in the air, shooting forward. Abruptly, she realized Kelsier wasn't throwing it to her, but *at* her.

The bag hit her in the chest. Pushed by Kelsier's Allomancy, it hurled her across the room—past the two surprised Inquisitors—until she finally dropped awkwardly to the floor, skidding on the marble.

Vin looked up, slightly dazed. In the distance, Kelsier regained his feet. The main Inquisitor, however, didn't seem very concerned about the dagger in his neck. The other two Inquisitors stood between her and Kelsier. One turned toward her, and Vin felt chilled by its horrifying, unnatural gaze.

"*RUN!*" The word echoed in the domed chamber. And this time, finally, it struck home.

Vin scrambled to her feet—fear shocking her, screaming at her, making her move. She dashed toward the nearest archway, uncertain if it was the one she had come in through. She clutched Kelsier's coin pouch and burned iron, frantically seeking an anchor down the corridor.

*Must get away!*

She grabbed the first bit of metal she saw and yanked, tearing herself off the ground. She shot down the corridor at an uncontrolled speed, terror flaring her iron.

She lurched suddenly, and everything spun. She hit the ground at an awkward angle—her head slamming against the rough stone—then lay dizzily, wondering what had happened. The coin pouch . . . someone had Pulled on it, using its metal to yank her backward.

Vin rolled over and saw a dark form shooting down the corridor. The Inquisitor's robes fluttered as he dropped lightly to his feet a short distance from Vin. He strode forward, his face impassive.

Vin flared tin and pewter, clearing her mind and pushing away the pain. She whipped out a few coins, Pushing them at the Inquisitor.

He raised a hand, and both coins froze in the air. Vin's own Push suddenly threw her backward, and she tumbled across the stones, skidding and sliding.

She heard the coins pling against the floor as she came to a rest. She shook her head, a dozen new bruises flaring angrily across her body. The Inquisitor stepped over the discarded coins, walking toward her with a smooth gait.

*I have to get away!* Even Kelsier had been afraid to face an

Inquisitor. If he couldn't fight one, what chance did she have?

None. She dropped the pouch and jumped to her feet, then she ran, ducking through the first doorway she saw. The room beyond was empty of people, but a golden altar stood at its center. Between the altar, the four candelabra at the corners, and the cluttering of other religious paraphernalia, the space was cramped.

Vin turned, Pulling a candelabrum into her hands, remembering Kelsier's trick from before. The Inquisitor stepped into the room, then raised an almost amused hand, ripping the candelabra from her hands in an easy Allomantic Pull.

*He's so strong!* Vin thought with horror. He was probably steadying himself by Pulling against the lantern brackets behind. However, the force of his Ironpulls was far more powerful than Kelsier's had ever been.

Vin jumped, Pulling herself slightly up and over the altar. At the doorway, the Inquisitor reached over to a bowl that sat atop a short pillar, pulling out what appeared to be a handful of small metal triangles. They were sharp on all sides, and they cut the creature's hand in a dozen different places. He ignored the wounds, raising a bloody hand toward her.

Vin yelped, ducking behind the altar as pieces of metal sprayed against the back wall.

"You are trapped," the Inquisitor said in a scratchy voice. "Come with me."

Vin glanced to the side. There weren't any other doors in the room. She peeked up, glancing at the Inquisitor, and a piece of metal shot at her face. She Pushed against it, but the Inquisitor was too strong. She had to duck and let the metal go, lest his power pin her back against the wall.

*I'll need something to block with. Something that isn't made of metal.*

As she heard the Inquisitor step into the room, she found what she needed—a large, leather-bound book sitting beside the altar. She grabbed it, then paused. There was no use in being rich if she died. She pulled out Kelsier's vial and downed the atium, then burned it.

The Inquisitor's shadow stepped around the side of the altar, then the actual Inquisitor followed a second later. The atium-shadow opened its hand, and a spray of tiny, translucent daggers shot at her.

Vin raised her book as the real daggers followed. She swung the book through the shadow trails just as the real daggers shot toward her. She caught every one, their sharp, jagged edges digging deeply into the book's leather cover.

The Inquisitor paused, and she was rewarded by what seemed to be a look of confusion on its twisted face. Then a hundred shadow images shot from his body.

*Lord Ruler!* Vin thought. He had atium too.

Not pausing to worry about what that meant, Vin hopped over the altar, carrying the book with her as protection against further missiles. The Inquisitor spun, spike-eyes following her as she ducked back into the hallway.

A squad of soldiers stood waiting for her. However, each one bore a future-shadow. Vin ducked between them, barely watching where their weapons would fall, somehow avoiding the attacks of twelve different men. And, for a moment, she almost forgot the pain and fear—and they were replaced by an incredible sense of power. She dodged effortlessly, staves swinging above and beside her, each one missing by just inches. She was invincible.

She spun through the ranks of the men, not bothering to kill or hurt them—she only wanted to escape. As she passed the last one, she turned around a corner.

And a second Inquisitor, his body springing with shadow images, stepped up and slammed something sharp into her lower side.

Vin gasped in pain. There was a sickening sound as the creature pulled his weapon free of her body; it was a length of wood affixed with sharp obsidian blades. Vin grasped her side, stumbling backward, feeling a terrifying amount of warm blood seeping from the wound.

The Inquisitor looked familiar. *The first one, from the other room,* she thought through the pain. *Does . . . that mean that Kelsier is dead?*

"Who is your father?" the Inquisitor asked.

Vin kept her hand at her side, trying to stop the blood. It was a large wound. A bad wound. She had seen such wounds before. They always killed.

Yet, she still stood. *Pewter,* her confused mind thought. *Flare pewter!*

She did so, the metal giving her body strength, letting her stay on her feet. The soldiers stepped back to let the second Inquisitor approach her from the side. Vin looked in horror from one Inquisitor to the other, both descending upon her, blood pouring between her fingers and down her side. The lead Inquisitor still carried the axelike weapon, its edge coated with blood. Her blood.

*I'm going to die,* she thought with terror.

And then she heard it. Rain. It was faint, but her tin-ears picked it out behind her. She spun, lurching through a door, and was rewarded by the sight of a large archway on the other side of the room. Mist pooled at the room's floor, and rain slapped the stones outside.

*Must have been where the guards came from,* she thought. She kept her pewter flared, amazed at how well her body still worked, and stumbled out into the rain, reflexively clutching the leather book to her chest.

"You think to escape?" the lead Inquisitor asked from behind, his voice amused.

Numbly, Vin reached into the sky and Pulled against one of the palace's many spires. She heard the Inquisitor curse as she pitched into the air, hurling up into the dark night.

The thousand spires rose around her. She Pulled against one, then switched to another. The rain was strong now, and it made the night black. There was no mist to reflect ambient light, and the stars were hidden by clouds above. Vin couldn't see where she was going; she had to use Allomancy to sense the metallic tips of the spires, and hope there was nothing in between.

She hit a spire, catching hold of it in the night and pulling to a stop. *Have to bandage the wound . . .* she thought weakly. She was beginning to grow numb, her head cloudy despite her pewter and tin.

Something slammed against the spire above her, and she heard a low growl. Vin Pushed off even as she felt the Inquisitor slash the air beside her.

She had one chance. Midjump, she Pulled herself sideways, toward a different spire. At the same time, she Pushed against the book in her hands—it still had bits of metal embedded into its cover. The book continued in the direction she had been going, metal lines glowing weakly in the night. It was the only metal she had on her.

Vin caught the next spire lightly, trying to make as little sound as possible. She strained in the night, burning tin, the rainfall becoming a thunder in her ears. Over it, she thought she heard the distinct sound of something hitting a spire in the direction she had Pushed the book.

The Inquisitor had fallen for her ruse. Vin sighed, hanging from the spire, rain splattering her body. She made sure her copper was still burning, Pulled lightly against the spire to hold herself in place, and ripped off a piece of her shirt to bandage the wound. Despite her numb mind, she couldn't help noticing how big the gash was.

*Oh, Lord,* she thought. Without pewter, she would have fallen unconscious long ago. She should be dead.

Something sounded in the darkness. Vin felt a chill, looking up. All was black around her.

*It can't be. He can't—*

Something slammed into her spire. Vin cried out, jumping away. She Pulled herself toward another spire, caught it weakly, then immediately Pushed off again. The Inquisitor followed, thuds sounding as he jumped from spire to spire behind her.

*He found me. He couldn't see me, hear me, or sense me. But he found me.*

Vin hit a spire, holding it by one hand, limply hanging in the night. Her strength was nearly gone. *I . . . have to get away . . . hide. . . .*

Her hands were numb, and her mind felt nearly the same. Her fingers slipped from the cold, wet metal of the spire, and she felt herself drop free into the darkness.

She fell with the rain.

However, she went only a short distance before thudding against something hard—the roof of a particularly tall bit of the palace. Dazed, she climbed to her knees, crawling away from the spire, seeking a corner.

*Hide . . . hide . . . hide . . .*

She crawled weakly to the nook formed by another tower. She huddled against the dark corner, lying in a deep puddle of ashy rainwater, arms wrapped around herself. Her body was wet with rain and blood.

She thought, for just a moment, that she might have escaped.

A dark form thumped to the rooftop. The rain was letting up, and her tin revealed a head set with two spikes, a body cloaked in a dark robe.

She was too weak to move, too weak to do more than shiver in the puddle of water, clothing plastered to her skin. The Inquisitor turned toward her.

"Such a small, troubling thing you are," he said. He stepped forward, but Vin could barely hear his words.

It was growing dark again . . . no, it was just her mind. Her vision grew dark, her eyes closing. Her wound didn't hurt anymore. She couldn't . . . even . . . think. . . .

A sound, like shattering branches.

Then arms gripped her. Warm arms, not the arms of death. She forced her eyes open.

"Kelsier?" she whispered.

But it wasn't Kelsier's face that looked back at her, streaked with concern. It was a different, kinder face. She sighed in relief, drifting away as the strong arms pulled her close, making her feel oddly safe in the terrible storms of night.

*I don't know why Kwaan betrayed me. Even still, this event haunts my thoughts. He was the one who discovered me; he was the Terris philosopher who first called me the Hero of Ages. It seems ironically surreal that now—after his long struggle to convince his colleagues—he is the only major Terris holy man to preach against my reign.*

# 15

"*YOU TOOK HER WITH YOU?*" Dockson demanded, bursting into the room. "You took Vin into Kredik Shaw? Are you *bloody insane*?"

"Yes," Kelsier snapped. "You've been right all along. I'm a madman. A lunatic. Perhaps I should have just died in the Pits and never come back to bother any of you!"

Dockson paused, taken aback by the force in Kelsier's words. Kelsier pounded the table in frustration, and the wood splintered from the force of the blow. He still burned pewter, the metal helping him resist his several wounds. His mistcloak lay in tatters, his body sliced by a half-dozen different small cuts. His entire right side burned with pain. He'd have a massive bruise there, and he'd be lucky if none of his ribs were cracked.

Kelsier flared the pewter. The fire within felt good—it gave him a focus for his anger and self-loathing. One of the apprentices worked quickly, tying a bandage around Kelsier's largest gash. Clubs sat with Ham at the side of the kitchen; Breeze was away visiting a suburb.

"By the Lord Ruler, Kelsier," Dockson said quietly.

*Even Dockson,* Kelsier thought. *Even my oldest friend swears by the Lord Ruler's name. What are we doing? How can we face this?*

"There were three Inquisitors waiting for us, Dox," Kelsier said.

Dockson paled. "And you *left* her there?"

"She got out before I did. I tried to distract the Inquisitors as long as I could, but . . ."

"But?"

"One of the three followed her. I couldn't get to it—maybe the other two Inquisitors were simply trying to keep me busy so that their companion could find her."

"Three Inquisitors," Dockson said, accepting a small cup of brandy from one of the apprentices. He downed it.

"We must have made too much noise going in," Kelsier said. "Either that, or they were already there for some reason. And we *still* don't know what's in that room!"

The kitchen fell silent. The rain outside picked up again, assaulting the building with a reproachful fury.

"So . . ." Ham said, "what of Vin?"

Kelsier glanced at Dockson, and saw pessimism in his eyes. Kelsier had barely escaped, and he had years of training. If Vin was still in Kredik Shaw . . .

Kelsier felt a sharp, twisting pain in his chest. *You let her die too. First Mare, then Vin. How many more will you lead to slaughter before this is through?*

"She might be hiding somewhere in the city," Kelsier said. "Afraid to come to the shop because the Inquisitors are looking for her. Or . . . perhaps for some reason she went back to Fellise."

*Maybe she's out there somewhere, dying alone in the rain.*

"Ham," Kelsier said, "you and I are heading back to the palace. Dox, take Lestibournes and visit other thieving crews. Maybe one of their scouts saw something. Clubs, send an apprentice to Renoux's mansion to see if she went there."

The solemn group started to move, but Kelsier didn't need to state the obvious. He and Ham wouldn't be able to get close to Kredik Shaw without running afoul of guard patrols. Even if Vin was hiding in the city somewhere, the Inquisitors would probably find her first. They would have—

Kelsier froze, his sudden jerk causing the others to pause. He'd heard something.

Hurried footsteps sounded as Lestibournes rushed down the stairs and into the room, his lanky form wet with rain. "Someone's coming! Out the night with the calling!"

"Vin?" Ham asked hopefully.

Lestibournes shook his head. "Big man. Robe."

*This is it, then. I've brought death to the crew—I've led the Inquisitors right to them.*

Ham stood, picking up a wooden stave. Dockson pulled out a pair of daggers, and Clubs's six apprentices moved to the back of the room, eyes wide with fright.

Kelsier flared his metals.

The back door to the kitchen slammed open. A tall, dark form in wet robes stood in the rain. And he carried a cloth-wrapped figure in his arms.

"Sazed!" Kelsier said.

"She is badly wounded," Sazed said, stepping quickly into the room, his fine robes streaming with rainwater. "Master Hammond, I require some pewter. Her supply is exhausted, I think."

Ham rushed forward as Sazed set Vin on the kitchen table. Her skin was clammy and pale, her thin frame soaked and wet.

*She's so small,* Kelsier thought. *Barely more than a child. How could I have thought to take her with me?*

She bore a massive, bloody wound in her side. Sazed set something aside—a large book he'd been carrying in his arms beneath Vin—and accepted a vial from Hammond, then bent down and poured the liquid down the unconscious girl's throat. The room fell silent, the sound of pounding rain coming through the still open door.

Vin's face flushed slightly with color, and her breathing seemed to steady. To Kelsier's Allomantic bronze senses, she began to pulse softly with a rhythm not unlike a second heartbeat.

"Ah, good," Sazed said, undoing Vin's makeshift bandage. "I feared that her body was too unfamiliar with Allomancy to burn metals unconsciously. There is hope for her, I think. Master Cladent, I shall require a pot of boiled water, some bandages, and the medical bag from my rooms. Quickly, now!"

Clubs nodded, waving for his apprentices to do as instructed. Kelsier cringed as he watched Sazed's work. The wound was bad—worse than any he himself had survived. The cut went deeply into her gut; it was the type of wound that killed slowly, but consistently.

Vin, however, was no ordinary person—pewter would keep an Allomancer alive long after their body should have given out. In addition, Sazed was no ordinary healer. Religious rites were not the only things that Keepers stored in their uncanny memories; their metalminds contained vast wealths of information on culture, philosophy, and science.

Clubs ushered his apprentices from the room as the surgery began. The procedure took an alarming amount of time, Ham applying pressure to the wound as Sazed slowly stitched Vin's insides back together. Finally, Sazed closed the outer wound and applied a clean bandage, then asked Ham to carefully carry the girl up to her bed.

Kelsier stood, watching Ham carry Vin's weak, limp form out of the kitchen. Then, he turned to Sazed questioningly. Dockson sat in the corner, the only other one still in the room.

Sazed shook his head gravely. “I do not know, Master Kelsier. She could survive. We will need to keep her supplied with pewter—it will help her body make new blood. Even still, I have seen many strong men die from wounds smaller than this one.”

Kelsier nodded.

“I arrived too late, I think,” Sazed said. “When I found her gone from Renoux’s mansion, I came to Luthadel as quickly as I could. I used up an entire metalmind to make the trip with haste. I was still too late. . . .”

“No, my friend,” Kelsier said. “You’ve done well this night. Far better than I.”

Sazed sighed, then reached over and fingered the large book he’d set aside before beginning the surgery. The tome was wet with rainwater and blood. Kelsier regarded it, frowning. “What is that, anyway?”

“I don’t know,” Sazed said. “I found it at the palace, while I was searching for the child. It is written in Khlenni.”

Khlenni, the language of Khlennium—the ancient, pre-Ascension homeland of the Lord Ruler. Kelsier perked up a bit. “Can you translate it?”

“Perhaps,” Sazed said, suddenly sounding very tired. “But . . . not for a time, I think. After this evening, I shall need to rest.”

Kelsier nodded, calling for one of the apprentices to prepare Sazed a room. The Terrisman nodded thankfully, then walked wearily up the stairs.

“He saved more than Vin’s life tonight,” Dockson said, approaching quietly from behind. “What you did was stupid, even for you.”

“I had to know, Dox,” he said. “I had to go back. What if the atium really is in there?”

“You said that it isn’t.”

“I said that,” Kelsier said with a nod, “and I’m mostly sure. But what if I’m wrong?”

“That’s no excuse,” Dockson said angrily. “Now Vin is dying and the Lord Ruler is alerted to us. Wasn’t it enough that you got Mare killed trying to get into that room?”

Kelsier paused, but he was too drained to feel any anger. He sighed, sitting down. “There’s more, Dox.”

Dockson frowned.

“I’ve avoided talking about the Lord Ruler to the others,” Kelsier said, “but . . . I’m worried. The plan is good, but I have this terrible, haunting feeling that we’ll never succeed as long as he’s alive. We can take his money, we can take his armies, we can trick him out of the city . . . but I still worry that we won't be able to stop him."

Dockson frowned. "You're serious about this Eleventh Metal business, then?"

Kelsier nodded. "I searched for two years to find a way to kill him. Men have tried everything—he ignores normal wounds, and decapitation only annoys him. A group of soldiers burned down his inn during one of the early wars. The Lord Ruler walked out as barely more than a skeleton, then healed in a matter of seconds.

"Only the stories of the Eleventh Metal offered any hope. But I can't make it work! That's why I had to go back to the palace. The Lord Ruler's hiding *something* in that room—I can feel it. I can't help thinking that if we knew what it was, we'd be able to stop him."

"You didn't have to take Vin with you."

"She followed me," Kelsier said. "I worried that she'd try to get in on her own if I left her. The girl has a headstrong streak, Dox—she hides it well, but she's blasted stubborn when she wants to be."

Dockson sighed, then nodded quietly. "And we *still* don't know what's in that room."

Kelsier eyed the book Sazed had set on the table. The rainwater had marked it, but the tome was obviously designed to endure. It was strapped tightly to prevent water from seeping in, and the cover was of well-cured leather.

"No," Kelsier finally said. "We don't." *But we do have that, whatever it is.*

"Was it worth it, Kell?" Dockson asked. "Was this insane stunt really worth nearly getting yourself—and the child—killed?"

"I don't know," Kelsier said honestly. He turned to Dockson, meeting his friend's eyes. "Ask me once we know whether or not Vin will live."

# THE END OF PART TWO

# PART THREE

# CHILDREN OF
# A BLEEDING SUN

*Many think that my journey started in Khlennium, that great city of wonder. They forget that I was no king when my quest began. Far from it.*

*I think it would do men well to remember that this task was not begun by emperors, priests, prophets, or generals. It didn't start in Khlennium or Kordel, nor did it come from the great nations to the east or the fiery empire of the West.*

*It began in a small, unimportant town whose name would mean nothing to you. It began with a youth, the son of a blacksmith, who was unremarkable in every way—except, perhaps, in his ability to get into trouble.*

*It began with me.*

# 16

WHEN VIN AWOKE, THE PAIN told her that Reen had beaten her again. What had she done? Had she been too friendly to one of the other crewmembers? Had she made a foolish comment, drawing the crewleader's ire? She was to remain quiet, always quiet, staying away from the others, never calling attention to herself. Otherwise he would beat her. She had to learn, he said. She had to learn. . . .

But, her pain seemed too strong for that. It had been a long time since she could remember hurting this much.

She coughed slightly, opening her eyes. She lay in a bed that was far too comfortable, and a lanky teenage boy sat in a chair beside her bed.

*Lestibournes,* she thought. *That's his name. I'm in Clubs's shop.*

Lestibournes jumped to his feet. "You're awaking!"

She tried to speak, but just coughed again, and the boy hurriedly gave her a cup of water. Vin sipped it thankfully, grimacing at the pain in her side. In fact, her entire body felt like it had been pummeled soundly.

"Lestibournes," she finally croaked.

"Notting as the now," he said. "Kelsier wasing the hit with my name; changed it to Spook."

"Spook?" Vin asked. "It fits. How long have I been asleep?"

"Two weeks," the boy said. "Wait here." He scrambled away, and she could hear him calling out in the distance.

*Two weeks?* She sipped at the cup, trying to organize her muddled memories. Reddish afternoon sunlight shone through the window, lighting the room. She set the cup aside, checking her side, where she found a large white bandage.

*That's where the Inquisitor hit me,* she thought. *I should be dead.*

Her side was bruised and discolored from where she'd hit the roof after falling, and her body bore a dozen other nicks, bruises, and scrapes. All in all, she felt absolutely terrible.

"Vin!" Dockson said, stepping into the room. "You're awake!"

"Barely," Vin said with a groan, lying back against her pillow.

Dockson chuckled, walking over and sitting on Lestibournes's stool. "How much do you remember?"

"Most everything, I think," she said. "We fought our way into the palace, but there were Inquisitors. They chased us, and Kelsier fought—" She stopped, looking at Dockson. "Kelsier? Is he—"

"Kell's fine," Breeze said. "He came out of the incident in far better shape than you did. He knows the palace fairly well, from the plans we made three years ago, and he . . ."

Vin frowned as Dockson trailed off. "What?"

"He said the Inquisitors didn't seem very focused on killing him. They left one to chase him, and sent two after you."

*Why?* Vin thought. *Did they simply want to concentrate their energy on the weakest enemy first? Or, is there another reason?* She sat back thoughtfully, working through the events of that night.

"Sazed," Vin she finally said. "He saved me. The Inquisitor was about to kill me, but . . . Dox, what *is* he?"

"Sazed?" Dockson asked. "That's probably a question I should let him answer."

"Is he here?"

Dockson shook his head. "He had to return to Fellise. Breeze and Kell are out recruiting, and Ham left last week to inspect our army. He won't be back for another month at least."

Vin nodded, feeling drowsy.

"Drink the rest of your water," Dockson suggested. "There's something in it to help with the pain."

Vin downed the rest of the drink, then rolled over and let sleep take her again.

Kelsier was there when she awoke. He sat on the stool by her bed, hands clasped with his elbows on his knees, watching her by the faint light of a lantern. He smiled when she opened her eyes. “Welcome back.”

She immediately reached for the cup of water on the bed-stand. “How’s the job going?”

He shrugged. “The army is growing, and Renoux has begun to purchase weapons and supplies. Your suggestion regarding the Ministry turned out to be a good one—we found Theron’s contact, and we’ve nearly negotiated a deal that will let us place someone as a Ministry acolyte.”

“Marsh?” Vin asked. “Will he do it himself?”

Kelsier nodded. “He’s always had a . . . certain fascination with the Ministry. If any skaa can pull off imitating an obligator, it will be Marsh.”

Vin nodded, sipping her drink. There was something different about Kelsier. It was subtle—a slight alteration in his air and attitude. Things had changed during her sickness.

“Vin,” Kelsier said hesitantly. “I owe you an apology. I nearly got you killed.”

Vin snorted quietly. “It’s not your fault. I made you take me.”

“You shouldn’t have been able to make me,” Kelsier said. “My original decision to send you away was the right one. Please accept the apology.”

Vin nodded quietly. “What do you need me to do now? The job has to go forward, right?”

Kelsier smiled. “Indeed it does. As soon as you’re up to it, I’d like you to move back to Fellise. We created a cover story saying that Lady Valette has taken sick, but rumors are starting to appear. The sooner you can be seen in the flesh by visitors, the better.”

“I can go tomorrow,” Vin said.

Kelsier chuckled. “I doubt it, but you can go soon. For now, just rest.” He stood, moving to leave.

“Kelsier?” Vin asked, causing him to pause. He turned, looking at her.

Vin struggled to formulate what she wanted to say. “The palace . . . the Inquisitors . . . We’re not invincible, are we?” She flushed; it sounded stupid when she said it that way.

Kelsier, however, just smiled. He seemed to understand what she meant. “No, Vin,” he said quietly. “We’re far from it.”

Vin watched the landscape pass outside her carriage window. The vehicle, sent from Mansion Renoux, had supposedly taken Lady

Valette for a ride through Luthadel. In reality, it hadn't picked up Vin until it had stopped briefly by Clubs's street. Now, however, her window shades were open, showing her again to the world—assuming anyone cared.

The carriage made its way back toward Fellise. Kelsier had been right: She'd had to rest three more days in Clubs's shop before feeling strong enough to make the trip. In part, she'd waited simply because she had dreaded struggling into a noblewoman's dresses with her bruised arms and wounded side.

Still, it felt good to be up again. There had been something . . . wrong about simply recovering in bed. Such a lengthy period of rest wouldn't have been given to a regular thief; thieves either got back to work quickly or were abandoned for dead. Those who couldn't bring in money for food couldn't be allowed to take up space in the lair.

*But, that isn't the only way people live,* Vin thought. She was still uncomfortable with that knowledge. It hadn't mattered to Kelsier and the others that she drained their resources—they hadn't exploited her weakened state, but had cared for her, each one spending time at her bedside. Most notable among the vigilists had been the young Lestibournes. Vin didn't even feel that she knew him very well, yet Kelsier said that the boy had spent hours watching over her during her coma.

What did one make of a world where a crewleader agonized over his people? In the underground, each person bore responsibility for what happened to them—the weaker segment of a crew had to be allowed to die, lest they keep everyone else from earning enough to survive. If a person got captured by the Ministry, you left them to their fate and hoped that they didn't betray too much. You didn't worry about your own guilt at putting them in danger.

*They're fools,* Reen's voice whispered. *This entire plan will end in disaster—and your death will be your own fault for not leaving when you could.*

Reen had left when he could. Perhaps he'd known that the Inquisitors would eventually hunt her down for the powers she unwittingly possessed. He always had known when to leave—it was no accident, she thought, that he hadn't ended up slaughtered with the rest of Camon's crew.

And yet, she ignored Reen's promptings in her head, instead letting the carriage pull her toward Fellise. It wasn't that she felt completely secure in her place with Kelsier's crew—indeed, in a way, her place with these people was making her even more apprehensive. What if they stopped needing her? What if she became useless to them?

She had to prove to them that she could do what they needed her to. There were functions to attend, a society to infiltrate. She had so much work to do; she couldn't afford to spend any more of it sleeping.

In addition, she needed to return to her Allomantic practice sessions. It had only taken a few short months for her to grow dependent upon her powers, and she longed for the freedom of leaping through the mists, of Pulling and Pushing her way through the skies. Kredik Shaw had taught her that she wasn't invincible—but Kelsier's survival with barely a scratch proved that it was possible to be much better than she was. Vin needed to practice, to grow in strength, until she too could escape Inquisitors like Kelsier had.

The carriage turned a bend and rolled into Fellise. The familiar, pastoral suburb made Vin smile to herself, and she leaned against the open carriage window, feeling the breeze. With luck, some streetgoers would gossip that Lady Valette had been seen riding through the city. She arrived at Mansion Renoux a few short turns later. A footman opened the door, and Vin was surprised to see Lord Renoux himself waiting outside the carriage to help her down.

"My lord?" she said, giving him her hand. "Surely you have more important things to attend to."

"Nonsense," he said. "A lord must be allowed time to dote upon his favored niece. How was your ride?"

*Does he ever break character?* He didn't ask after the others in Luthadel, or give any indication that he knew of her wound.

"It was refreshing, Uncle," she said as they walked up the steps to the mansion doors. Vin was thankful for the pewter burning lightly in her stomach to give strength to her still weak legs. Kelsier had warned against using it too much, lest she grow dependent upon its power, but she saw little alternative until she was healed.

"That is wonderful," Renoux said. "Perhaps, once you are feeling better, we should take lunch together on the garden balcony. It has been warm lately, despite the coming winter."

"That would be very pleasant," Vin said. Before, she'd found the impostor's noble bearing intimidating. Yet, as she slipped into the persona of Lady Valette, she experienced the same calmness as before. Vin the thief was nothing to a man such as Renoux, but Valette the socialite was another matter.

"Very good," Renoux said, pausing inside the entryway. "However, let us attend to that on another day—for now, you would likely prefer to rest from your journey."

"Actually, my lord, I'd like to visit Sazed. I have some matters I must discuss with the steward."

"Ah," Renoux said. "You will find him in the library, working on one of my projects."

"Thank you," Vin said.

Renoux nodded, then walked away, his dueling cane clicking against the white marble floor. Vin frowned, trying to decide if he was completely sane. Could someone really adopt a persona that wholly?

*You do it,* Vin reminded herself. *When you become Lady Valette, you show a completely different side of yourself.*

She turned, flaring pewter to help her climb the northern set of stairs. She let her flare lapse as she reached the top, returning to a normal burn. As Kelsier said, it was dangerous to flare metals for too extended a period; an Allomancer could quickly make their body dependent.

She took a few breaths—climbing the stairs had been difficult, even with pewter—then walked down the corridor to the library. Sazed sat at a desk beside a small coal stove on the far side of the small room, writing on a pad of paper. He wore his standard steward's robes, and a pair of thin spectacles sat at the end of his nose.

Vin paused in the doorway, regarding the man who had saved her life. *Why is he wearing spectacles? I've seen him read before without them.* He seemed completely absorbed by his work, periodically studying a large tome on the desk, then turning to scribble notes on his pad.

"You're an Allomancer," Vin said quietly.

Sazed paused, then set down his pen and turned. "What makes you say that, Mistress Vin?"

"You got to Luthadel too quickly."

"Lord Renoux keeps several swift messenger horses in his stables. I could have taken one of those."

"You found me at the palace," Vin said.

"Kelsier told me of his plans, and I correctly assumed that you had followed him. Locating you was a stroke of luck, one that nearly took me too long to achieve."

Vin frowned. "You killed the Inquisitor."

"Killed?" Sazed asked. "No, Mistress. It takes far more power than I possess to kill one of those monstrosities. I simply . . . distracted him."

Vin stood in the doorway for a moment longer, trying to figure out why Sazed was being so ambiguous. "So, are you an Allomancer or not?"

He smiled, then he pulled a stool out from beside the desk. "Please, sit down."

Vin did as requested, crossing the room and sitting on the stool, her back to a massive bookshelf.

"What would you think if I told you that I wasn't an Allomancer?" Sazed asked.

"I'd think that you were lying," Vin said.

"Have you known me to lie before?"

"The best liars are those who tell the truth most of the time."

Sazed smiled, regarding her through bespectacled eyes. "That is true, I think. Still, what proof have you that I am an Allomancer?"

"You did things that couldn't have been done without Allomancy."

"Oh? A Mistborn for two months, and already you know all that is possible in the world?"

Vin paused. Up until just recently, she hadn't even known much about Allomancy. Perhaps there was more to the world than she had assumed.

*There's always another secret.* Kelsier's words.

"So," she said slowly, "what exactly *is* a 'Keeper'?"

Sazed smiled. "Now, *that* is a far more clever question, Mistress. Keepers are . . . storehouses. We remember things, so that they can be used in the future."

"Like religions," Vin said.

Sazed nodded. "Religious truths are my particular specialty."

"But, you remember other things too?"

Sazed nodded.

"Like what?"

"Well," Sazed said, closing the tome he had been studying. "Languages, for instance."

Vin immediately recognized the glyph-covered cover. "The book I found in the palace! How did you get it?"

"I happened across it while searching for you," the Terrisman said. "It is written in a very old language, one that hasn't been spoken regularly in nearly a millennium."

"But you speak it?" Vin asked.

Sazed nodded. "Enough to translate this, I think."

"And . . . how many languages do you know?"

"A hundred and seventy-two," Sazed said. "Most of them, such as Khlenni, are no longer spoken. The Lord Ruler's unity movement of the fifth century made certain of that. The language people now speak is actually a distant dialect of Terris, the language of my homeland."

*A hundred and seventy-two,* Vin thought with amazement. “That . . . sounds impossible. One man couldn’t remember that much.”

“Not one man,” Sazed said. “One Keeper. What I do is similar to Allomancy, but not the same. You draw power from metals. I . . . use them to create memories.”

“How?” Vin asked.

Sazed shook his head. “Perhaps another time, Mistress. My kind . . . we prefer to maintain our secrets. The Lord Ruler hunts us with a remarkable, confusing passion. We are far less threatening than Mistborn—yet, he ignores Allomancers and seeks to destroy us, hating the Terris people because of us.”

“Hating?” Vin asked. “You’re treated better than regular skaa. You’re given positions of respect.”

“That is true, Mistress,” Sazed said. “But, in a way, the skaa are more free. Most Terrismen are raised from birth to be stewards. There are very few of us left, and the Lord Ruler’s breeders control our reproduction. No Terrisman steward is allowed to have a family, or even to bear children.”

Vin snorted. “That seems like it would be hard to enforce.”

Sazed paused, hand laying on the cover of the large book. “Why, not at all,” he said with a frown. “All Terrisman stewards are eunuchs, child. I assumed you knew that.”

Vin froze, then she blushed furiously. “I . . . I’m . . . sorry. . . .”

“Truly and surely, no apology is required. I was castrated soon after my birth, as is standard for those who will be stewards. Often, I think I would have easily traded my life for that of a common skaa. My people are less than slaves . . . they’re fabricated automatons, created by breeding programs, trained from birth to fulfill the Lord Ruler’s wishes.”

Vin continued to blush, cursing her lack of tact. Why hadn’t anyone told her? Sazed, however, didn’t seem offended—he never seemed to get angry about anything.

*Probably a function of his . . . condition,* Vin thought. *That’s what the breeders must want. Docile, even-tempered stewards.*

“But,” Vin said, frowning, “you’re a rebel, Sazed. You’re fighting the Lord Ruler.”

“I am something of a deviant,” Sazed said. “And, my people are not as completely subjugated as the Lord Ruler would believe, I think. We hide Keepers beneath his very eyes, and some of us even gather the courage to break our training.”

He paused, then shook his head. “It is not an easy thing, however.

We are a weak people, Mistress. We are eager to do as we are told, quick to seek subjugation. Even I, whom you dub a rebel, immediately sought out a position of stewardship and subservience. We are not so brave as we would wish, I think."

"You were brave enough to save me," Vin said.

Sazed smiled. "Ah, but there was an element of obedience in that too. I promised Master Kelsier that I would see to your safety."

*Ah,* she thought. She had wondered if he'd had a reason for his actions. After all, who would risk their life simply to save Vin? She sat for a moment in thought, and Sazed turned back to his book. Finally, she spoke again, drawing the Terrisman's attention. "Sazed?"

"Yes, Mistress?"

"Who betrayed Kelsier three years ago?"

Sazed paused, then set down his fountain pen. "The facts are unclear, Mistress. Most of the crew assumes it was Mare, I think."

"Mare?" Vin asked. "Kelsier's wife?"

Sazed nodded. "Apparently, she was one of the only people who could have done it. In addition, the Lord Ruler himself implicated her."

"But, wasn't she sent to the Pits too?"

"She died there," Sazed said. "Master Kelsier is reticent about the Pits, but I sense that the scars he bears from that horrid place go much deeper than the ones you see on his arms. I don't think he ever knew if she was the traitor or not."

"My brother said that anyone would betray you, if they had the right chance and a good enough motive."

Sazed frowned. "Even if such a thing were true, I would not want to live believing it."

*It seems better than what happened to Kelsier: being turned over to the Lord Ruler by one you thought you loved.*

"Kelsier is different lately," Vin said. "He seems more reserved. Is that because he feels guilty for what happened to me?"

"I suspect that is part of it," Sazed said. "However, he is also coming to realize that there is a large difference between heading a small crew of thieves and organizing a large rebellion. He can't take the risks he once did. The process is changing him for the better, I think."

Vin wasn't so certain. However, she remained silent, realizing with frustration how tired she was. Even sitting on a stool seemed strenuous to her now.

"Go and sleep, Mistress," Sazed said, picking up his pen and relocating his place in the tome with his finger. “You survived something that probably should have killed you. Give your body the thanks it deserves; let it rest.”

Vin nodded tiredly, then climbed to her feet and left him scribbling quietly in the afternoon light.

*Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I'd remained there, in that lazy village of my birth. I'd have become a smith, like my father. Perhaps I'd have a family, sons of my own.*

*Perhaps someone else would have come to carry this terrible burden. Someone who could bear it far better than I. Someone who deserved to be a hero.*

# 17

Before coming to Mansion Renoux, Vin had never seen a cultivated garden. On burglaries or scouting missions, she had occasionally seen ornamental plants, but she'd never given them much heed—they, like many noble interests, had seemed frivolous to her.

She hadn't realized how beautiful the plants could be when arranged carefully. Mansion Renoux's garden balcony was a thin, oval structure that overlooked the grounds below. The gardens weren't large—they required too much water and attention to form more than a thin perimeter around the back of the building.

Still, they were marvelous. Instead of mundane browns and whites, the cultivated plants were of deeper, more vibrant colors—shades of red, orange, and yellow, with the colors concentrated in their leaves. The groundskeepers had planted them to make intricate, beautiful patterns. Closer to the balcony, exotic trees with colorful yellow leaves gave shade and protected from ashfalls. It was a very mild winter, and most of the trees still held their leaves. The air felt cool, and the rustling of branches in the wind was soothing.

Almost soothing enough, in fact, to make Vin forget how annoyed she was.

"Would you like more tea, child?" Lord Renoux asked. He didn't wait for an answer; he simply waved for a servant to rush forward and refill her cup.

Vin sat on a plush cushion, her wicker chair designed for comfort. During the last four weeks, her every whim and desire had been met. Servants cleaned up after her, primped her, fed her, and even helped bathe her. Renoux saw that anything she asked for was given her, and she certainly wasn't expected to do anything strenuous, dangerous, or even slightly inconvenient.

In other words, her life was maddeningly boring. Before, her time at

Mansion Renoux had been monopolized by Sazed's lessons and Kelsier's training. She'd slept during the days, having only minimal contact with the mansion staff.

Now, however, Allomancy—at least, the nighttime jumping kind—was forbidden her. Her wound was only partially healed, and too much motion reopened it. Sazed still gave her occasional lessons, but his time was dominated by translating the book. He spent long hours in the library, poring over its pages with an uncharacteristically excited air.

*He's found a new bit of lore,* Vin thought. *To a Keeper, that's probably as intoxicating as streetspice.*

She sipped at her tea with repressed petulance, eyeing the nearby servants. They seemed like scavenger birds, roosting and waiting for any opportunity to make Vin as comfortable—and as frustrated—as possible.

Renoux wasn't much help either. His idea of "taking lunch" with Vin was to sit and attend to his own duties—making notes on ledgers or dictating letters—while eating. Her attendance seemed important to him, but he rarely paid much attention to her other than to ask how her day had been.

Yet, she forced herself to act the part of a prim noblewoman. Lord Renoux had hired some new servants that didn't know about the job—not house staff, but gardeners and workmen. Kelsier and Renoux had worried that the other houses would grow suspicious if they couldn't get at least a few servant-spies onto the Renoux grounds. Kelsier didn't see it as a danger to the job, but it did mean that Vin had to maintain her persona whenever possible.

*I can't believe that people live like this,* Vin thought as some servants began clearing away the meal. *How can noblewomen fill their days with so much nothing? No wonder everyone's eager to attend those balls!*

"Is your respite pleasant, dear?" Renoux asked, pouring over another ledger.

"Yes, Uncle," Vin said through tight lips. "Quite."

"You should be up to a shopping trip soon," Renoux said, looking up at her. "Perhaps you would like to visit Kenton Street? Get some new earrings to replace that pedestrian stud you wear?"

Vin reached a hand to her ear, where her mother's earring still sat. "No," she said. "I'll keep this."

Renoux frowned, but said no more, for a servant approached and drew his attention. "My lord," the servant said to Renoux. "A carriage just arrived from Luthadel."

Vin perked up. That was the servants' way of saying that a member of the crew had arrived.

"Ah, very good," Renoux said. "Show them up, Tawnson."

"Yes, my lord."

A few minutes later, Kelsier, Breeze, Yeden, and Dockson walked out onto the balcony. Renoux discreetly waved to the servants, who closed the glass balcony doors and left the crew in privacy. Several men took up position just inside, watching to make certain that the wrong people didn't have an opportunity to eavesdrop.

"Are we interrupting your meal?" Dockson asked.

"No!" Vin said quickly, cutting off Lord Renoux's reply. "Sit, please."

Kelsier strolled over to the balcony's ledge, looking out over the garden and grounds. "Nice view you have here."

"Kelsier, is that wise?" Renoux asked. "Some of the gardeners are men for whom I cannot vouch."

Kelsier chuckled. "If they can recognize me from this distance, they deserve more than the Great Houses are paying them." However, he did leave the balcony edge, walking over to the table and spinning a chair, then sitting down on it the wrong way. Over the last few weeks, he had mostly returned to his old, familiar self. Yet, there were still changes. He held meetings more often, discussed more of his plans with the crew. He also still seemed different, more . . . thoughtful.

*Sazed was right,* Vin thought. *Our attack on the palace might have been near-deadly for me, but it has changed Kelsier for the better.*

"We thought we'd have our meeting here this week," Dockson said, "since you two rarely get to participate."

"That was most thoughtful of you, Master Dockson," Lord Renoux said. "But your concern is unnecessary. We are doing just fine—"

"No," Vin interrupted. "No, *we* aren't. Some of us need information. What's happening with the crew? How is the recruitment going?"

Renoux eyed her with dissatisfaction. Vin, however, ignored him. *He's not really a lord,* she told herself. *He's just another crewmember. My opinion counts as much as his! Now that the servants are gone, I can speak how I want.*

Kelsier chuckled. "Well, captivity's made her a bit more outspoken, if nothing else."

"I don't have anything to *do,*" Vin said. "It's driving me insane."

Breeze set his cup of wine on the table. "Some would find your state quite enviable, Vin."

"Then they must *already* be insane."

"Oh, they're mostly noblemen," Kelsier said. "So, yes, they're quite mad."

"The job," Vin reminded. "What's happening?"

"Recruitment is still too slow," Dockson said. "But we're improving."

"We may have to sacrifice further security for numbers, Kelsier," Yeden said.

*That's a change too,* she thought, impressed as she noted Yeden's civility. He had taken to wearing nicer clothing—not quite a full gentlemen's suit like Dockson or Breeze, but at least a well-cut jacket and trousers, with a buttoning shirt beneath, all kept clean of soot.

"That can't be helped, Yeden," Kelsier said. "Fortunately, Ham's doing well with the troops. I had a message from him just a few days ago. He's impressed with their progress."

Breeze snorted. "Be warned—Hammond does tend to be a bit optimistic about these kinds of things. If the army were made up of one-legged mutes, he would praise their balance and their listening skills."

"I should like to see the army," Yeden said eagerly.

"Soon," Kelsier promised.

"We should be able to get Marsh into the Ministry within the month," Dockson said, nodding to Sazed as the Terrisman passed their sentries and entered the balcony. "Hopefully, Marsh will be able to give some insight as to how to deal with the Steel Inquisitors."

Vin shivered.

"They are a concern," Breeze agreed. "Considering what a couple of them did to you two, I don't envy capturing the palace with them in there. They are as dangerous as Mistborn."

"More," Vin said quietly.

"Can the army really fight them?" Yeden asked uncomfortably. "I mean, they're supposed to be immortal, aren't they?"

"Marsh will find the answer," Kelsier promised.

Yeden paused, then nodded, accepting Kelsier's word.

*Yes, changed indeed,* Vin thought. It appeared that not even Yeden could resist Kelsier's charisma for an extended period of time.

"In the meantime," Kelsier said, "I'm hoping to hear what Sazed has learned about the Lord Ruler."

Sazed sat, laying his tome on the tabletop. "I will tell you what I can, though this is not the book that I first assumed it to be. I thought that Mistress Vin had recovered some ancient religious text—but it is of a far more mundane nature."

"Mundane?" Dockson asked. "How?"

"It is a journal, Master Dockson," Sazed said. "A record that appears to have been penned by the Lord Ruler himself—or, rather, the man who became the Lord Ruler. Even Ministry teachings agree that before the Ascension, he was a mortal man.

"This book tells of his life just prior to his final battle at the Well of Ascension a thousand years ago. Mostly, it is a record of his travels—a narration of the people he met, the places he visited, and the trials he faced during his quest."

"Interesting," Breeze said, "but how does it help us?"

"I am not certain, Master Ladrian," Sazed said. "However, understanding the real history behind the Ascension will be of use, I think. At the very least, it will give us some insight to the Lord Ruler's mind."

Kelsier shrugged. "The Ministry thinks it's important—Vin said she found it in some kind of shrine in the central palace complex."

"Which, of course," Breeze noted, "doesn't at *all* raise any questions regarding its authenticity."

"I do not believe it to be a fabrication, Master Ladrian," Sazed said. "It contains a remarkable level of detail, especially regarding unimportant issues—like packmen and supplies. In addition, the Lord Ruler it depicts is very conflicted. If the Ministry were going to devise a book for worship, they would present their god with more . . . divinity, I think."

"I'll want to read it when you are done, Saze," Dockson said.

"And I," Breeze said.

"Some of Clubs's apprentices occasionally work as scribes," Kelsier said. "We'll have them make a copy for each of you."

"Handy lot, those," Dockson noted.

Kelsier nodded. "So, where does that leave us?"

The group paused, then Dockson nodded to Vin. "With the nobility."

Kelsier frowned slightly.

"I can go back to work," Vin said quickly. "I'm mostly healed, now."

Kelsier shot a look at Sazed, who raised an eyebrow. He checked on her wound periodically. Apparently, he didn't like what he saw.

"Kell," Vin said. "I'm going *insane*. I grew up as a thief, scrambling for food and space—I can't just sit around and let these servants pamper me." *Besides, I have to prove that I can still be useful to this crew.*

"Well," Kelsier said. "You're one of the reasons we came here today. There's a ball this weekend that—"

"I'll go," Vin said.

Kelsier held up a finger. "Hear me out, Vin. You've been through a lot lately, and this infiltration could get dangerous."

"Kelsier," Vin said flatly. "My whole *life* has been dangerous. I'm going."

Kelsier didn't look convinced.

"She has to do it, Kell," Dockson said. "For one thing, the nobility is going to get suspicious if she doesn't start going to parties again. For another, we need to know what she sees. Having servant spies on the staff isn't the same as having a spy listening to local plots. You know that."

"All right, then," Kelsier finally said. "But you have to promise not to use physical Allomancy until Sazed says otherwise."

Later that evening, Vin still couldn't believe how eager she was to go the ball. She stood in her room, looking over the different gown ensembles that Dockson had found for her. Since she had been forced to wear noblewoman's attire for a good month straight, she was beginning to find dresses just a shade more comfortable than she once had.

*Not that they aren't frivolous, of course,* she thought, inspecting the four gowns. *All of that lace, the layers of material . . . a simple shirt and trousers are so much more practical.*

Yet, there *was* something special about the gowns—something in their beauty, like the gardens outside. When regarded as static items, like a solitary plant, the dresses were only mildly impressive. However, when she considered attending the ball, the gowns took on a new meaning. They were beautiful, and they would make her beautiful. They were the face she would show to the court, and she wanted to choose the right one.

*I wonder if Elend Venture will be there. . . .* Didn't Sazed say that most of the younger aristocrats attended every ball?

She lay a hand on one dress, black with silver embroiderings. It would match her hair, but was it too dark? Most of the other women wore colorful dresses; muted colors seemed reserved for men's suits. She eyed a yellow gown, but it just seemed a little too . . . perky. And the white one was too ornate.

That left the red. The neckline was lower—not that she had a lot to show—but it was beautiful. A bit gossamer, with full sleeves that were made of translucent mesh in places, it enticed her. But it seemed so . . . blatant. She picked it up, feeling the soft material in her fingers, imagining herself wearing it.

*How did I get to this?* Vin thought. *This thing would be impossible to hide in! These frilly creations, these aren't me.*

And yet . . . part of her longed to be back at the ball again. The daily life of a noblewoman frustrated her, but her memories of that one night were alluring. The beautiful couples dancing, the perfect atmosphere and music, the marvelous crystalline windows . . .

*I don't even realize when I'm wearing perfume anymore,* she realized with shock. She found it preferable to bathe in scented water each day, and the servants even perfumed her clothing. It was all subtle, of course, but it would be enough to give her away while sneaking.

Her hair had grown longer, and had been carefully cut by Renoux's stylist so that it fell around her ears, curling just slightly. She no longer looked quite so scrawny in the mirror, despite her lengthy sickness; regular meals had filled her out.

*I'm becoming* . . . Vin paused. She didn't know what she was becoming. Certainly not a noblewoman. Noblewomen didn't get annoyed when they couldn't to go out stalking at night. Yet, she wasn't really Vin the urchin anymore. She was . . .

*Mistborn.*

Vin carefully laid the beautiful red dress back on her bed, then crossed the room to look out the window. The sun was close to setting; soon, the mists would come—though, as usual, Sazed would have guards posted to make certain that she didn't go on any unauthorized Allomantic romps. She hadn't complained at the precautions. He was right. Unwatched, she probably would have broken her promise long ago.

She caught a glimpse of motion to her right, and could just barely make out a figure standing out on the garden balcony. Kelsier. Vin stood for a moment, then left her rooms.

Kelsier turned as she walked onto the balcony. She paused, not wanting to interrupt, but he gave her one of his characteristic smiles. She walked forward, joining him at the carved stone balcony railing.

He turned and looked westward—not at the grounds, but beyond them. Toward the wilderness, lit by a setting sun, outside of town. "Does it ever look wrong to you, Vin?"

"Wrong?" she asked.

Kelsier nodded. "The dry plants, the angry sun, the smoky-black sky."

Vin shrugged. "How can those things be right or wrong? That's just the way things are."

"I suppose," Kelsier said. "But, I think your mind-set is part of the wrongness. The world shouldn't look like this."

Vin frowned. "How do you know that?"

Kelsier reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. He unfolded it with a gentle touch, then handed it to Vin.

She accepted the sheet, holding it carefully; it was so old and worn that it seemed close to breaking at the creases. It didn't contain any words, just an old, faded picture. It depicted a strange shape—something like a plant, though not one Vin had ever seen. It was too . . . flimsy. It didn't have a thick stalk, and its leaves were far too delicate. At its top, it had a strange collection of leaves that were a different color from the rest.

"It's called a flower," Kelsier said. "They used to grow on plants, before the Ascension. Descriptions of them appear in the old poems and stories—things that only Keepers and rebel sages know about anymore. Apparently, these plants were beautiful, and they had a pleasant smell."

"Plants that smell?" Vin asked. "Like fruit?"

"Something like that, I think. Some of the reports even claim that these flowers *grew into* fruit, in the days before the Ascension."

Vin stood quietly, frowning, trying to imagine such a thing.

"That picture belonged to my wife, Mare," Kelsier said quietly. "Dockson found it in her things after we were taken. He kept it, hoping that we would return. He gave it to me after I escaped."

Vin looked down at the picture again.

"Mare was fascinated by pre-Ascension times," Kelsier said, still staring out over the gardens. In the distance, the sun touched the horizon, and grew an even deeper red. "She collected things like that paper: pictures and descriptions of the old times. I think that fascination—along with the fact that she was a Tineye—is part of what led her to the underground, and to me. She's the one who first introduced me to Sazed, though I didn't use him in my crew at the time. He wasn't interested in thieving."

Vin folded up the paper. "And you keep this picture still? After . . . what she did to you?"

Kelsier fell silent for a moment. Then he eyed her. "Been listening at doors again, have we? Oh, don't worry. I suppose it's common enough knowledge." In the distance, the setting sun became a blaze, its ruddy light illuminating clouds and smoke alike.

"Yes, I keep the flower," Kelsier said. "I'm not really sure why. But . . . do you stop loving someone just because they betray you? I don't think so. That's what makes the betrayal hurt so much—pain, frustration, anger . . . and I still loved her. I still do."

"How?" Vin asked. "How can you? And, how can you possibly trust people? Didn't you learn from what she did to you?"

Kelsier shrugged. "I think . . . I think given the choice between loving Mare—betrayal included—and never knowing her, I'd choose love. I risked, and I lost, but the risk was still worth it. It's the same with my friends. Suspicion is healthy in our profession—but only to an extent. I'd rather trust my men than worry about what will happen if they turn on me."

"That sounds foolish," Vin said.

"Is happiness foolish?" Kelsier asked, turning toward her. "Where have you been happier, Vin? On my crew, or back with Camon?"

Vin paused.

"I don't know for sure if Mare betrayed me," Kelsier said, looking back at the sunset. "She always claimed that she didn't."

"And she was sent to the Pits, right?" Vin said. "That doesn't make sense, if she sided with the Lord Ruler."

Kelsier shook his head, still staring into the distance. "She showed up at the Pits a few weeks after I was sent there—we were separated, after we were caught. I don't know what happened during that time, or why she was eventually sent to Hathsin. The fact that she *was* sent to die hints that maybe she really didn't betray me, but . . ."

He turned toward Vin. "You didn't hear him when he caught us, Vin. The Lord Ruler . . . he thanked her. Thanked her for betraying me. His words—spoken with such an eerie sense of honesty—mixed with the way that the plan was set up . . . well, it was hard to believe Mare. That didn't change my love, though—not deep down. I nearly died when she did a year later, beaten before the slavemasters at the Pits. That night, after her corpse was taken away, I Snapped."

"You went mad?" Vin asked.

"No," Kelsier said. "Snapping is an Allomantic term. Our powers are latent at first—they only come out after some traumatic event. Something intense—something almost deadly. The philosophers say that a man can't command the metals until he has seen death and rejected it."

"So . . . when did it happen to me?" Vin asked.

Kelsier shrugged. "It's hard to tell. Growing up as you did, there were probably ample opportunities for you to Snap."

He nodded as if to himself. “For me,” he said, “it was that night. Alone in the Pits, my arms bleeding from the day’s work. Mare was dead, and I feared that I was responsible—that my lack of faith took away her strength and will. She died knowing that I questioned her loyalty. Maybe, if I’d really loved her, I wouldn’t have ever questioned. I don’t know.”

“But, you didn’t die,” Vin said.

Kelsier shook his head. “I decided that I’d see her dream fulfilled. I’d make a world where flowers returned, a world with green plants, a world where no soot fell from the sky. . . .” He trailed off, then sighed. “I know. I’m insane.”

“Actually,” Vin said quietly, “it kind of makes sense. Finally.”

Kelsier smiled. The sun sank beneath the horizon, and while its light was still a flare in the west, the mists began to appear. They didn’t come from one specific place, they just sort of . . . grew. They extended like translucent, twisting vines in the sky—curling back and forth, lengthening, dancing, melding.

“Mare wanted children,” Kelsier said suddenly. “Back when we were first married, a decade and a half ago. I . . . didn’t agree with her. I wanted to become the most famous skaa thief of all time, and didn’t have time for things that would slow me down.

“It’s probably a good thing that we didn’t have children. The Lord Ruler might have found and killed them. But, he might not have—Dox and the others survived. Now, sometimes, I wish that I had a piece of her with me. A child. A daughter, perhaps, with Mare’s same dark hair and resilient stubbornness.”

He paused, then looked down at Vin. “I don’t want to be responsible for something happening to you, Vin. Not again.”

Vin frowned. “I’m not spending any more time locked in this mansion.”

“No, I don’t suppose you will. If we try and keep you in much longer, you’ll probably just show up at Clubs’s shop one night having done something very foolish. We’re a bit too much alike that way, you and I. Just . . . be careful.”

Vin nodded. “I will.”

They stood for a few more minutes, watching the mists gather. Finally, Kelsier stood up straight, stretching. “Well, for what it’s worth, I’m glad you decided to join us, Vin.”

Vin shrugged. “To tell you the truth, I’d kind of like to see one of those flowers for myself.”

*You could say that circumstances forced me to leave my home behind—certainly, if I had stayed, I would now be dead. During those days—running without knowing why, carrying a burden I didn't understand—I assumed that I would lose myself in Khlennium and seek a life of indistinction.*

*I am slowly coming to understand that anonymity, like so many other things, has already been lost to me forever.*

# 18

SHE DECIDED TO WEAR THE red dress. It was definitely the boldest choice, but that felt right. After all, she hid her true self behind an aristocratic appearance; the more visible that appearance was, the easier it should be for her to hide.

A footman opened the carriage door. Vin took a deep breath—chest a little confined by the special corset she was wearing to hide her bandages—then accepted the footman's hand and climbed down. She straightened her dress, nodded to Sazed, then joined the other aristocrats making their way up the steps to Keep Elariel. It was a bit smaller than the keep of House Venture. However, Keep Elariel apparently had a separate party ballroom, while House Venture had its gatherings in the enormous main hall.

Vin eyed the other noblewomen, and felt a bit of her confidence vanish. Her dress was beautiful, but the other women had so much more than just gowns. Their long, flowing hair and self-assured airs matched their bejeweled figures. They filled out the upper portions of their dresses with voluptuous curves, and moved elegantly in the frilled splendor of the lower folds. Vin occasionally caught glimpses of the women's feet, and they didn't wear simple slippers like her own, but rather high-heeled shoes.

"Why don't I have shoes like that?" she asked quietly as they climbed the carpet-covered stairs.

"Heels take practice to walk in, Mistress," Sazed replied. "Since you've only just learned to dance, it might be best if you wore regular shoes for a time."

Vin frowned, but accepted the explanation. Sazed's mention of dancing, however, increased her discomfort. She remembered the flowing poise of the dancers at her last ball. She certainly wouldn't be able to imitate that—she barely even knew the basic steps.

*That won't matter,* she thought. *They won't see me—they'll see Lady Valette. She's supposed to be new and uncertain, and everyone thinks she's been ill lately. It will make sense for her to be a poor dancer.*

That thought in mind, Vin reached the top of the stairs feeling a bit more secure.

"I must say, Mistress," Sazed said. "You seem far less nervous this time—in fact, you even seem excited. This is the proper attitude for Valette to display, I think."

"Thank you," she said, smiling. He was right: She *was* excited. Excited to be part of the job again—excited, even, to be back among the nobility, with their splendor and grace.

They stepped up to the squat ballroom building—one of several low wings extending from the main keep—and a servant took her shawl. Vin paused a moment just inside the doorway, waiting as Sazed arranged her table and meal.

The Elariel ballroom was very different from the majestic Venture grand hall. The dim room was only a single story high, and while it had a lot of stained-glass windows, they were all in the ceiling. Circular rose-window skylights shone from above, lit by small limelights on the roof. Each table was set with candles, and despite the light from above, there was a reserved darkness about the room. It seemed . . . private, despite the numerous people in attendance.

This room had obviously been designed to accommodate parties. A sunken dancing floor lay at its center, and this was better lit than the rest of the room. There were two tiers of tables circling the dancing floor: The first tier was only a few feet above, the other was farther back and about twice as high.

A servant led her to a table at the rim of the room. She sat, Sazed taking his customary place beside her, and began to wait for her meal to arrive.

"How exactly am I supposed to get the information Kelsier wants?" she asked quietly, scanning the dark room. The deep, crystalline colors from above projected patterns across tables and people, creating an impressive atmosphere, yet making it difficult to distinguish faces. Was Elend here somewhere amidst the ball-goers?

"Tonight, some men should ask you to dance," Sazed said. "Accept their invitations—this will give you an excuse to seek them out later and mingle in their groups. You don't need to participate in conversations—you just have to listen. At future balls, perhaps some of the young men will begin to ask you to accompany them. Then you'll be able to sit at their table and listen to all of their discussions."

"You mean, sit with one man the entire time?"

Sazed nodded. "It's not uncommon. You would dance only with him that night as well."

Vin frowned. However, she let the matter drop, turning to inspect the room again. *He's probably not even here—he said he avoided balls when possible. Even if he were here, he'd be off on his own. You won't even* —

A muted thump sounded as someone dropped a stack of books onto her table. Vin jumped in startlement, turning as Elend Venture pulled over a chair, then sat down with a relaxed posture. He leaned back in the chair, angling toward a candelabrum beside her table, and opened a book to begin reading.

Sazed frowned. Vin hid a smile, eyeing Elend. He still didn't look as if he had bothered to brush his hair, and again wore his suit without the buttons done up. The garment wasn't shabby, but nor was it as rich as others at the party. It seemed to have been tailored to be loose and relaxed, defying the traditional sharp, well-cut fashion.

Elend flipped through his book. Vin waited patiently for him to acknowledge her, but he just continued to read. Finally, Vin raised an eyebrow. "I don't remember giving you permission to sit at my table, Lord Venture," she said.

"Don't mind me," Elend said, not looking up. "You've got a big table —there's plenty of room for both of us."

"Both of us, perhaps," Vin said. "But I'm not sure about those books. Where are the servers going to put my meal?"

"There's a bit of space to your left," Elend said offhandedly.

Sazed's frown deepened. He stepped forward, gathering up the books and setting them on the floor beside Elend's chair.

Elend continued to read. He did, however, raise a hand to gesture. "See, now, that's why I don't ever use Terrismen servants. They're an insufferably efficient lot, I must say."

"Sazed is hardly insufferable," Vin said coolly. "He is a good friend, and is probably a better man than you will ever be, Lord Venture."

Elend finally looked up. "I'm . . . sorry," he said in a frank tone. "I apologize."

Vin nodded. Elend, however, opened his book and began reading again.

*Why sit with me if he's just going to read?* "What did you do at these parties before you had me to pester?" she asked in an annoyed tone.

"See, now, how can I be pestering you?" he asked. "I mean, really, Valette. I'm just sitting here, reading quietly to myself."

"At *my* table. I'm certain you could get your own—you're the Venture heir. Not that you were forthcoming about that fact during our last meeting."

"True," Elend said. "I *do,* however, recall telling you that the Ventures were an annoying lot. I'm just trying to live up to the description."

"You're the one that made up the description!"

"Convenient, that," Elend said, smiling slightly as he read.

Vin sighed in frustration, scowling.

Elend peeked up over his book. "That's a stunning dress. It's almost as beautiful as you are."

Vin froze, jaw hanging open slightly. Elend smiled mischievously, then turned back to his book, eyes sparkling as if to indicate that he'd made the comment simply because he knew the reaction he'd get.

Sazed loomed over the table, not bothering to mask his disapproval. Yet, he said nothing. Elend was obviously too important to be chastised by a simple steward.

Vin finally found her tongue. "How is it, Lord Venture, that an eligible man like yourself comes to these balls alone?"

"Oh, I don't," Elend said. "My family usually has one girl or another lined up to accompany me. Tonight's fare is the Lady Stase Blanches—she's the one in the green dress sitting on the lower tier across from us."

Vin glanced across the room. Lady Blanches was a gorgeous blond woman. She kept glancing up at Vin's table, covering a scowl.

Vin flushed, turning away. "Um, shouldn't you be down there with her?"

"Probably," Elend said. "But, see, I'll tell you a secret. The truth is, I'm not really much of a gentleman. Besides, *I* didn't invite her—it wasn't until I got into the carriage that I was informed regarding my accompaniment."

"I see," Vin said with a frown.

"My behavior is, nonetheless, deplorable. Unfortunately, I'm quite prone to such bouts of deplorability—take, for instance, my fondness for reading books at the dinner table. Excuse me for a moment; I'm going to go get something to drink."

He stood, tucking the book into his pocket, and walked toward one of the room's bar tables. Vin watched him go, both annoyed and bemused.

"This is not good, Mistress," Sazed said in a low tone.

"He's not *that* bad."

"He's using you, Mistress," Sazed said. "Lord Venture is infamous for his unconventional, disobedient attitude. Many people dislike him—precisely because he does things like this."

"Like this?"

"He is sitting with you because he knows that it will annoy his family," Sazed said. "Oh, child—I do not wish to bring you pain, but you must understand the ways of the court. This young man is not romantically interested in you. He is a young, arrogant lord who chafes at his father's restrictions—so he rebels, acting rude and offensive. He knows that his father will relent if he acts spoiled enough for long enough."

Vin felt her stomach twist. *Sazed's probably right, of course. Why else would Elend seek me out? I'm exactly what he needs—someone lowborn enough to annoy his father, but inexperienced enough not to see the truth.*

Her meal arrived, but Vin didn't have much of an appetite anymore. She began to pick at the food as Elend returned, settling down with a large goblet filled with some mixed drink. He sipped as he read.

*Let's see how he reacts if I don't interrupt his reading,* Vin thought in annoyance, remembering her lessons, and eating her food with a lady's grace. It wasn't a large meal—mostly some rich, buttered vegetables—and the sooner she finished, the sooner she could get to dancing. At least then she wouldn't have to sit with Elend Venture.

The young lord paused several times as she ate, peeking at her over the top of his book. He obviously expected her to say something, but she never did. As she ate, however, her anger faded. She glanced at Elend, studying his slightly disheveled appearance, watching the earnestness with which he read his book. Could this man really hide the twisted sense of manipulation Sazed implied? Was he really just using her?

*Anyone will betray you,* Reen whispered. *Everyone will betray you.*

Elend just seemed so . . . genuine. He felt like a real person, not a front or a face. And it did seem like he wanted her to talk to him. It felt like a personal victory to Vin when he finally sat the book down and looked at her.

"Why are you here, Valette?" he asked.

"Here at the party?"

"No, here in Luthadel."

"Because it's the center of everything," Vin said.

Elend frowned. "I suppose it is. But, the empire is a big place to have such a small center. I don't think we really understand how large it is. How long did it take you to get here?"

Vin felt a moment of panic, but Sazed's lessons snapped quickly into her mind. "Almost two months by canal, with some stops."

"Such a long time," Elend said. "They say it can take half a year to travel from one end of the empire to the other, yet most of us ignore everything but this little bit at the center."

"I . . ." Vin trailed off. With Reen, she'd been all across the Central Dominance. It was the smallest of the dominances, however, and she'd never visited the more exotic places in the empire. This central area was good for thieves; oddly, the place closest to the Lord Ruler was also the one with the most corruption, not to mention the most riches.

"What do you think of the city, then?" Elend asked.

Vin paused. "It's . . . dirty," she said honestly. In the dim light, a servant arrived to remove her empty plate. "It's dirty, and it's full. The skaa are treated terribly, but I guess that's true everywhere."

Elend cocked his head, giving her a strange look.

*I shouldn't have mentioned the skaa. That wasn't very noble-like.*

He leaned forward. "You think the skaa here are treated worse than the ones on your plantation? I always thought they would be better off in the city."

"Um . . . I'm not sure. I didn't go to the fields very often."

"So, you didn't interact with them very much?"

Vin shrugged. "Why does it matter? They're just skaa."

"See, now, that's what we always say," Elend said. "But I don't know. Maybe I'm too curious, but they interest me. Did you ever hear them talk to one another? Did they sound like regular people?"

"What?" Vin asked. "Of course they did. What else would they sound like?"

"Well, you know what the Ministry teaches."

She didn't. However, if it was regarding the skaa, it probably wasn't flattering. "I make it a rule to never completely believe anything the Ministry says."

Elend paused again, cocking his head. "You're . . . not what I expected, Lady Valette."

"People rarely are."

"So, tell me about the plantation skaa. What are they like?"

Vin shrugged. "Like skaa everywhere else."

"Are they intelligent?"

"Some are."

"But, not like you and me, right?" Elend asked.

Vin paused. *How would a noblewoman respond?* "No, of course not. They're just skaa. Why are you so interested in them?"

Elend seemed . . . disappointed. "No reason," he said, sitting back in his chair and opening his book. "I think some of those men over there want to ask you to dance."

Vin turned, noticing that there was indeed a group of young men standing a short distance from her table. They looked away as soon as she turned. After a few moments, one of the men pointed at another table; then he walked over and asked a young lady to dance.

"Several people have noticed you, my lady," Sazed said. "However, they never approach. Lord Venture's presence intimidates them, I think."

Elend snorted. "They should know that I am anything but intimidating."

Vin frowned, but Elend just continued to read. *Fine!* she thought, turning back toward the young men. She caught one man's eye, smiling slightly.

A few moments later, the young man approached. He spoke to her in a stiff, formal tone. "Lady Renoux, I am Lord Melend Liese. Would you care to dance?"

Vin shot a glance at Elend, but he didn't look up from his book.

"I would love to, Lord Liese," Vin said, taking the young man's hand and rising.

He led her down to the dance floor, and as they approached, Vin's nervousness returned. Suddenly, one week of practice didn't seem like enough. The music stopped, allowing for couples to leave or enter the floor, and Lord Liese led her forward.

Vin fought down her paranoia, reminding herself that everyone saw the dress and the rank, not Vin herself. She looked up into Lord Liese's eyes and saw, surprisingly, apprehension.

The music began, as did the dancing. Lord Liese's face took on a look of consternation. She could feel his palm sweating in her hands. *Why, he's just as nervous as I am! Perhaps even more.*

Liese was younger than Elend, closer to her own age. He probably wasn't very experienced with balls—he certainly didn't look like he'd danced much. He focused so much on the steps that his motions felt rigid.

*It makes sense,* Vin realized, relaxing and letting her body move in the motions Sazed had taught. *The experienced ones wouldn't ask me to dance, not when I'm so new. I'm beneath their notice.*

*But, why is Elend paying attention to me? Is it simply what Sazed said—a ploy to annoy his father? Why, then, does he seem interested in what I have to say?*

"Lord Liese," Vin said. "Do you know much of Elend Venture?"

Liese looked up. "Um, I . . ."

"Don't focus so much on the dancing," Vin said. "My instructor says that it will flow more naturally if you don't try too hard."

He blushed.

*Lord Ruler!* Vin thought. *How fresh* is *this boy?*

"Um, Lord Venture . . ." Liese said. "I don't know. He's a very important person. Far more important than I am."

"Don't let his lineage intimidate you," Vin said. "From what I've seen, he's pretty harmless."

"I don't know, my lady," Liese said. "Venture is a very influential house."

"Yes, well, Elend doesn't live up to that reputation. He seems very fond of ignoring those in his company—does he do that to everyone?"

Liese shrugged, dancing more naturally now that they were talking. "I don't know. You . . . seem to know him better than I, my lady."

"I . . ." Vin trailed off. She *felt* as if she knew him well—far better than she should know a man after two brief encounters. She couldn't very well explain that to Liese, however.

*But, maybe . . . Didn't Renoux say that he'd met Elend once?*

"Oh, Elend is a friend of the family," Vin said as they spun beneath a crystalline skylight.

"He is?"

"Yes," Vin said. "It was very kind of my uncle to ask Elend to watch over me at these parties, and so far he's been quite a dear. I do wish that he'd pay less attention to those books of his and more attention to introducing me, though."

Liese perked up, and he seemed to grow a little less insecure. "Oh. Why, that makes sense."

"Yes," Vin said, "Elend has been like an older brother to me during my time here in Luthadel."

Liese smiled.

"I ask you about him because he doesn't speak much of himself," Vin said.

"The Ventures have all been quiet lately," Liese said. "Ever since the attack on their keep several months back."

Vin nodded. “You know much about that?”

Liese shook his head. “No one tells me anything.” He glanced down, watching their feet. “You’re very good at dancing, Lady Renoux. You must have attended many balls back in your home city.”

“You flatter me, my lord,” Vin said.

“No, really. You’re so . . . graceful.”

Vin smiled, feeling a slight surge of confidence.

“Yes,” Liese said, almost to himself. “You’re not at all like Lady Shan said—” He stopped, jerking slightly, as if realizing what he was saying.

“What?” Vin said.

“Nothing,” Liese said, his blush rising. “I’m sorry. It was nothing.”

*Lady Shan,* Vin thought. *Remember that name.*

She prodded Liese further as the dance progressed, but he was obviously too inexperienced to know much. He did feel that there was a tension rising between the houses; though the balls continued, there were more and more absences as people didn’t attend parties thrown by their political rivals.

When the dance ended, Vin felt good about her efforts. She probably hadn’t discovered much of value to Kelsier—however, Liese was only the beginning. She’d work up to more important people.

*Which means,* Vin thought as Liese led her back to her table, *I’m going to have to attend a lot more of these balls.* It wasn’t that the balls themselves were unpleasant—especially now that she was more confident in her dancing. However, more balls meant fewer chances to be out in the mists.

*Not that Sazed would let me go anyway,* she thought with an inward sigh, smiling politely as Liese bowed and retreated.

Elend had spread his books across the table, and her alcove was lit by several more candelabra—apparently filched from other tables.

*Well,* Vin thought, *we’ve at least got thieving in common.*

Elend hunched over the table, making notations in a small, pocket-sized book. He didn’t look up as she sat. Sazed, she noticed, was nowhere to be seen.

“I sent the Terrisman to dinner,” Elend said distractedly as he scribbled. “No need for him to go hungry while you twirled down below.”

Vin raised an eyebrow, regarding the books that dominated her tabletop. Even as she watched, Elend pushed one tome aside—leaving it open to a specific page—and pulled over another. “So, how was the aforementioned twirling, anyway?" he said.

"It was actually kind of fun."

"I thought you weren't very good at it."

"I wasn't," Vin said. "I practiced. You may find this information surprising, but sitting in the back of a room reading books in the dark doesn't exactly help one become a better dancer."

"Is that a proposition?" Elend asked, pushing aside his book and selecting another. "It's unladylike to ask a man to dance, you know."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to take you away from your reading," Vin said, turning a book toward her. She grimaced—the text was written in a small, cramped hand. "Besides, dancing with you would undermine all of the work I just did."

Elend paused. Then he finally looked up. "Work?"

"Yes," Vin said. "Sazed was right—Lord Liese finds you intimidating, and he found me intimidating by association. It could be quite disastrous to a young lady's social life if all of the young men assumed her unavailable simply because an annoying lord decided to study at her table."

"So . . ." Elend said.

"So I told him that you were simply showing me the ways of court. Kind of like an . . . older brother."

"Older brother?" Elend asked, frowning.

"*Much* older," Vin said, smiling. "I mean, you've got to be at least twice my age."

"Twice your . . . Valette, I'm *twenty-one*. Unless you're a *very* mature ten-year-old, I'm nowhere near 'twice your age!'"

"I've never been good with math," Vin said offhandedly.

Elend sighed, rolling his eyes. Nearby, Lord Liese was speaking quietly with his group of friends, gesturing toward Vin and Elend. Hopefully, one would come ask her to dance soon.

"Do you know a Lady Shan?" Vin asked idly as she waited.

Surprisingly, Elend looked up. "Shan Elariel?"

"I assume so," Vin said. "Who is she?"

Elend turned back to his book. "Nobody important."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "Elend, I've only been doing this for a few months, but even *I* know not to trust a comment like that."

"Well . . ." Elend said. "I might be engaged to her."

"You have a fiancée?" Vin asked with exasperation.

"I'm not exactly sure. We haven't really done anything about the situation for a year or so. Everyone's likely forgotten the matter by now."

*Great,* Vin thought.

A moment later, one of Liese's friends approached. Glad to be rid of the frustrating Venture heir, Vin stood, accepting the young lord's hand. As she walked to the dance floor, she glanced at Elend, and caught him peeking over the book at her. He immediately turned back to his research with an overtly indifferent air.

Vin sat down at her table, feeling a remarkable level of exhaustion. She resisted the urge to pull off her shoes and massage her feet; she suspected that wouldn't be very ladylike. She quietly turned on her copper, then burned pewter, strengthening her body and washing away a bit of her fatigue.

She let her pewter, then her copper, lapse. Kelsier had assured her that with copper on, she couldn't be spotted as an Allomancer. Vin wasn't so certain. With pewter burning, her reactions were too fast, her body too strong. It seemed to her that an observant person would be able to notice such inconsistencies, whether or not they themselves were an Allomancer.

With the pewter off, her fatigue returned. She'd been trying to wean herself off constant pewter lately. Her wound was to the point that it only hurt badly if she twisted the wrong way, and she wanted to recover her strength on her own, if she could.

In a way, her fatigue this evening was a good thing—it was a result of an extended period of dancing. Now that the young men regarded Elend as a guardian, rather than a romantic interest, they had no qualms about asking Vin to dance. And, worried that she would make an unintended political statement by refusing, Vin had agreed to each request. A few months ago, she would have laughed at the idea of exhaustion from dancing. However, her sore feet, aching side, and tired legs were only part of it. The effort of memorizing names and houses—not to mention putting up with her dancing partners' fluffy conversation—left her mentally drained.

*It's a good thing Sazed had me wear slippers instead of heels,* Vin thought with a sigh, sipping her chilled juice. The Terrisman hadn't returned from his dinner yet. Notably, Elend wasn't at the table either—though his books still lay scattered across its top.

Vin eyed the tomes. Perhaps if she appeared to be reading, the young men would leave her alone for a bit. She reached over, riffling through the books for a likely candidate. The one she was most interested in—Elend's small, leather-bound notebook—was missing.

Instead, she picked a large, blue tome and hefted it over to her side of the table. She had picked it for its large lettering—was paper really so expensive that scribes needed to cram as many lines to a page as possible? Vin sighed, leafing through the volume.

*I can't believe people read books this big,* she thought. Despite the large lettering, each page was filled with words. It would take days and days to read the entire thing. Reen had taught her reading so that she would be able to decipher contracts, write notes, and perhaps play a noblewoman. However, her training hadn't extended to texts this massive.

*Historical Practices in Imperial Political Rule,* the first page read. The chapters had titles like "The Fifth Century Governorship Program" and "The Rise of Skaa Plantations." She flipped through to the end of the book, figuring it would probably be the most interesting. The final chapter was titled "Current Political Structure."

*So far,* she read, *the plantation system has produced a far more stable government than previous methodologies. The structure of Dominances with each provincial lord taking command of—and responsibility for—his skaa has fostered a competitive environment where discipline is harshly enforced.*

*The Lord Ruler apparently finds this system troubling because of the freedom it allows the aristocracy. However, the relative lack of organized rebellion is undoubtedly enticing; during the two hundred years that the system has been in place, there hasn't been a major uprising in the Five Inner Dominances.*

*Of course, this political system is only an extension of the greater theocratic rulership. The aristocracy's independence has been tempered by a renewed vigor in obligator enforcement. No lord, no matter how lofty, would be advised to think himself above their law. The call from an Inquisitor can come to anyone.*

Vin frowned. While the text itself was dry, she was surprised that the Lord Ruler allowed such analytical discussions of his empire. She settled back in her chair, holding up the book, but she didn't read any more. She was too exhausted from the hours she had spent covertly trying to wiggle information out of her dancing partners.

Unfortunately, politics didn't pay heed to Vin's state of exhaustion. Though she did her best to appear absorbed in Elend's book, a figure soon approached her table.

Vin sighed, preparing herself for another dance. She soon realized, however, that the newcomer wasn't a nobleman, but a Terrisman steward. Like Sazed, he wore robes with overlapping V designs, and was very fond of jewelry.

"Lady Valette Renoux?" the tall man asked in a faintly accented voice.

"Yes," Vin said hesitantly.

"My mistress, Lady Shan Elariel, requires your presence at her table."

*Requires?* Vin thought. She already didn't like that tone, and she had little desire to meet with Elend's former betrothed. Unfortunately, House Elariel was one of the more powerful Great Houses—probably not someone to dismiss offhandedly.

The Terrisman waited expectantly.

"Very well," Vin said, rising with as much grace as she could muster.

The Terrisman led Vin toward a table a short distance from her own. The table was well attended, with five women seated around it, and Vin picked out Shan immediately. Lady Elariel was obviously the statuesque woman with long dark hair. She wasn't participating in the conversation, but seemed to dominate it nonetheless. Her arms sparkled with lavender bracelets that matched her dress, and she turned dismissive eyes toward Vin as she approached.

Those dark eyes, however, were keen. Vin felt exposed before them —stripped of her fine dress, reduced to a dirty urchin once again.

"Excuse us, ladies," Shan said. The women immediately did as ordered, departing the table in a stately flurry.

Shan picked up a fork and began to meticulously dissect and devour a small piece of dessert cake. Vin stood uncertainly, the Terrisman steward taking up a position behind Shan's chair.

"You may sit," Shan said.

*I feel like a skaa again,* Vin thought, sitting. *Noblemen treat each other this way too?*

"You are in an enviable position, child," Shan said.

"How is that?" Vin asked.

"Address me as 'Lady Shan,' " Shan said, her tone unchanged. "Or, perhaps, 'Your Ladyship.' "

Shan waited expectantly, taking petite bites of the cake. Finally, Vin said, "Why is that, Your Ladyship?"

"Because young Lord Venture has decided to use you in his games. That means you have the opportunity to be used by me as well."

Vin frowned. *Remember to stay in character. You're the easily intimidated Valette.*

"Wouldn't it be better to not be used at all, Your Ladyship?" Vin said carefully.

“Nonsense,” Shan replied. “Even an uncultured simpleton like yourself must see the importance of being useful to your betters.” Shan said the words, even the insult, without vehemence; she simply seemed to take it for granted that Vin would agree.

Vin sat, dumbfounded. None of the other nobility had treated her in such a manner. Of course, the only member of a Great House she’d met so far was Elend.

“I trust from your vapid look that you accept your place,” Shan said. “Do well, child, and perhaps I will let you join my retinue. You could learn much from the ladies here in Luthadel.”

“Such as?” Vin asked, trying to keep the snappishness out of her voice.

“Look at yourself sometime, child. Hair like you’ve undergone some terrible disease, so scrawny that your dress hangs like a bag. Being a noblewoman in Luthadel requires . . . perfection. Not *that*.” She said the last word while waving her hand dismissively toward Vin.

Vin flushed. There was a strange power to this woman’s demeaning attitude. With a start, Vin realized that Shan reminded her of some crewleaders she had known, Camon the latest of them—men who would hit a person, fully expecting no resistance. Everyone knew that resisting such men only made the beating worse.

“What do you want from me?” Vin asked.

Shan raised an eyebrow as she set aside her fork, the cake only half-eaten. The Terrisman took the plate and walked off with it. “You really are a dull-minded thing, aren’t you?” Shan asked.

Vin paused. “What does *Her Ladyship* want from me?”

“I’ll tell you eventually—assuming Lord Venture decides to keep playing with you.” Vin caught just the barest flash of hatred in her eyes when she said Elend’s name.

“For now,” Shan continued, “tell me of your conversation with him this evening.”

Vin opened her mouth to respond. But . . . something felt wrong. She only caught the barest flicker of it—she wouldn’t have even noticed that much without Breeze’s training.

*A Soother? Interesting.*

Shan was trying to make Vin complacent. So that she would talk, perhaps? Vin began to relate her conversation with Elend, staying away from anything interesting. However, something still felt odd to her—something about the way that Shan was playing with her emotions. From the corner of her eye, Vin saw Shan’s Terrisman return from the kitchens. However, he didn't walk back toward Shan's table—he headed in the other direction.

Toward Vin's own table. He paused beside it, and began to poke through Elend's books.

*Whatever he wants, I can't let him find it.*

Vin stood suddenly, finally provoking an overt reaction in Shan as the woman looked up with surprise.

"I just remembered that I told my Terrisman to find me at my table!" Vin said. "He'll be worried if I'm not sitting there!"

"Oh, for the Lord Ruler's sake," Shan muttered under her breath. "Child, there is no need—"

"I'm sorry, Your Ladyship," Vin said. "I've got to go."

It was a bit obvious, but it was the best she could manage. Vin curtsied and withdrew from Shan's table, leaving the displeased woman behind. The Terrisman was good—by the time Vin was a few steps away from Shan's table, he had noticed Vin and continued on his way, his motions impressively smooth.

Vin arrived back at her table, wondering if she'd made a blunder by leaving Shan so rudely. However, she was growing too tired to care. As she noticed another group of young men eyeing her, she hurriedly sat, plopping open one of Elend's books.

Fortunately, the ploy worked better this time. The young men eventually trailed away, leaving Vin in peace, and she sat back, relaxing slightly with the book open before her. The evening was growing late, and the ballroom was slowly beginning to empty.

*The books,* she thought with a frown, picking up her cup of juice to take a sip. *What did the Terrisman want with them?*

She scanned the table, trying to notice if anything had been disturbed, but Elend had left the books in such a state of disarray that it was hard to tell. However, a small book sitting beneath another tome caught her eye. Most of the other texts lay open to a specific page, and she had seen Elend perusing them. This particular book, however, was closed—and she couldn't remember him ever opening it. It had been there before—she recognized it because it was so much thinner than the others—so the Terrisman hadn't left it behind.

Curious, Vin reached over and slid the book out from underneath the larger book. It had had a black leather cover, and the spine read *Weather Patterns of the Northern Dominance.* Vin frowned, turning the book over in her hands. There was no title page, nor was an author listed. It launched directly into text.

> When regarding the Final Empire in its entirety, one certain fact is unmistakable. For a

> nation ruled by a self-proclaimed divinity, the empire has experienced a frightening number of colossal leadership errors. Most of these have been successfully covered up, and can only be found in the metalminds of Feruchemists or on the pages of banned texts. However, one only need look to the near past to note such blunders as the Massacre at Devanex, the revision of the Deepness Doctrine, and the relocation of the Renates peoples.
>
> The Lord Ruler does not age. That much, at least, is undeniable. This text, however, purports to prove that he is by no means infallible. During the days before the Ascension, mankind suffered chaos and uncertainty caused by an endless cycle of kings, emperors, and other monarchs. One would think that now, with a single, immortal governor, society would finally have an opportunity to find stability and enlightenment. It is the remarkable lack of either attribute in the Final Empire that is the Lord Ruler's most grievous oversight.

Vin stared at the page. Some of the words were beyond her skill, but she was able to grasp the author's meaning. He was saying . . .

She snapped the book closed and hurriedly put it back in its place. What would happen if the obligators discovered that Elend owned such a text? She glanced to the sides. They were there, of course, mingling with the crowds like at the other ball, marked by their gray robes and tattooed faces. Many sat at tables with noblemen. Friends? Or spies for the Lord Ruler? Nobody seemed quite as comfortable when an obligator was nearby.

*What is Elend doing with a book like that? A powerful nobleman like himself? Why would he read texts that malign the Lord Ruler?*

A hand fell on her shoulder, and Vin spun reflexively, pewter and copper flaring in her stomach.

"Whoa," Elend said, stepping back and raising his hand. "Has anyone ever told you how jumpy you are, Valette?"

Vin relaxed, sitting back in her chair and extinguishing her metals. Elend sauntered over to his place and sat down. "Enjoying Heberen?"

Vin frowned, and Elend nodded to the larger, thick book that still sat before her.

"No," Vin said. "It's boring. I was just pretending to read so that the men would leave me alone for a bit."

Elend chuckled. "Now, see, your cleverness is coming back to snap at you."

Vin raised an eyebrow as Elend began to gather up his books, stacking them on the table. He didn't appear to notice that she'd moved the "weather" book, but he did carefully slide it into the middle of the stack.

Vin turned her eyes from the book. *I probably shouldn't tell him about Shan—not until I talk to Sazed.* "I think my cleverness did its job well," she said instead. "After all, *I* came to the ball to dance."

"I find dancing overrated."

"You can't remain aloof from the court forever, Lord Venture—you're the heir of a very important house."

He sighed, stretching and leaning back in his chair. "I suppose you're right," he said with surprising frankness. "But the longer I hold out, the more annoyed my father will become. That, in itself, is a worthy goal."

"He's not the only one you hurt," Vin said. "What of the girls that never get asked to dance because you're too busy rummaging through your books?"

"As I recall," Elend said, setting the last book on the top of his pile, "someone was just pretending to read in order to *avoid* dancing. I don't think the ladies have any trouble finding more amicable partners than myself."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "I didn't have trouble because I'm new and I'm low-ranked. I suspect that the ladies closer to your station have trouble finding partners, amicable or not. As I understand it, noblemen are uncomfortable dancing with women above their station."

Elend paused, obviously searching for a comeback.

Vin leaned forward. "What is it, Elend Venture? Why are you so intent on avoiding your duty?"

"Duty?" Elend asked, leaning toward her, his posture earnest. "Valette, this isn't duty. This ball . . . this is fluff and distraction. A waste of time."

"And women?" Vin asked. "Are they a waste too?"

"Women?" Elend asked. "Women are like . . . thunderstorms. They're beautiful to look at, and sometimes they're nice to listen to—but most of the time they're just plain inconvenient."

Vin felt her jaw drop slightly. Then she noticed the twinkle in his eye, the smile at the edges of his lips, and she found herself smiling as well. "You say these things just to provoke me!"

His smile deepened. "I'm charming that way." He stood, looking at her fondly. "Ah, Valette. Don't let them trick you into taking yourself too seriously. It's not worth the effort. But, I must bid you a good evening. Try not to let months pass between balls you attend in the future."

Vin smiled. "I'll think about it."

"Please do," Elend said, bending down and scooting the tall stack of books off the table and into his arms. He teetered for a moment, then steadied himself and peeked to the side. "Who knows—maybe one of these days you'll actually get me to dance."

Vin smiled, nodding as the nobleman turned and walked off, circling the perimeter of the ballroom's second tier. He was soon met by two other young men. Vin watched curiously as one of the men clapped Elend on the shoulder in a friendly way, then took half of the books. The three began to walk together, chatting.

Vin didn't recognize the newcomers. She sat thoughtfully as Sazed finally appeared out of a side hallway, and Vin eagerly waved him forward. He approached with a hurried step.

"Who are those men with Lord Venture?" Vin asked, pointing toward Elend.

Sazed squinted behind his spectacles. "Why . . . one of them is Lord Jastes Lekal. The other is a Hasting, though I don't know his given name."

"You sound surprised."

"Houses Lekal and Hasting are both political rivals of House Venture, Mistress. Noblemen often visit with each other in smaller, after-ball parties, making alliances. . . ." The Terrisman paused, turning back to her. "Master Kelsier will wish to hear of this, I think. It is time we retire."

"I agree," Vin said, rising. "And so do my feet. Let's go."

Sazed nodded, and the two of them made their way to the front doors. "What took you so long?" Vin asked as they waited for an attendant to fetch her shawl.

"I came back several times, Mistress," Sazed said. "But you were always dancing. I decided I would be of far more use speaking with the servants than I would be standing beside your table."

Vin nodded, accepting her shawl, then walked out the front steps and down the carpeted stairs, Sazed just behind her. Her step was quick—she wanted to get back and tell Kelsier the names she'd memorized before she forgot the whole list. She paused at the landing, waiting for a servant to fetch her carriage. As she did, she noticed something odd. A small disturbance was going on a short distance away in the mists. She stepped forward, but Sazed put a hand on her shoulder, holding her back. A lady wouldn't wander off into the mists.

She reached to burn copper and tin, but waited—the disturbance was getting closer. It resolved as a guard appeared from the mists, pulling a small, struggling form: a skaa boy in dirty clothing, face soot-stained. The soldier gave Vin a wide berth, nodding apologetically to her as he approached one of the guard captains. Vin burned tin to hear what was said.

"Kitchen boy," the soldier said quietly. "Tried to beg from one of the noblemen inside a carriage when they stopped for the gates to open."

The captain simply nodded. The soldier pulled his captive back out into the mists, walking toward the far courtyard. The boy struggled, and the soldier grunted with annoyance, keeping a tight grip. Vin watched him go, Sazed's hand on her shoulder, as if to hold her back. Of course she couldn't help the boy. He shouldn't have—

In the mists, beyond the eyesight of regular people, the soldier drew out a dagger and slit the boy's throat. Vin jumped, shocked, as the sounds of the boy's struggling tapered off. The guard dropped the body, then grabbed it by a leg and began to drag it away.

Vin stood, stunned, as her carriage pulled up.

"Mistress," Sazed prompted, but she simply stood there.

*They killed him,* she thought. *Right here, just a few paces away from where noblemen wait for their carriages. As if . . . the death were nothing out of the ordinary. Just another skaa, slaughtered. Like an animal.*

Or less than an animal. Nobody would slaughter pigs in a keep courtyard. The guard's posture as he'd performed the murder indicated that he'd simply been too annoyed with the struggling boy to wait for a more appropriate location. If any of the other nobility around Vin had noticed the event, they paid it no heed, continuing their chatting as they waited. Actually, they seemed a little more chatty, now that the screams had stopped.

"Mistress," Sazed said again, pushing her forward.

She allowed herself to be led into the carriage, her mind still distracted. It seemed such an impossible contrast to her. The pleasant nobility, dancing, just inside a room sparkling with light and dresses. Death in the courtyard. Didn't they care? Didn't they know?

*This is the Final Empire, Vin,* she told herself as the carriage rolled away. *Don't forget the ash because you see a little silk. If those people in there knew you were skaa, they'd have you slaughtered just as easily as they did that poor boy.*

It was a sobering thought—one that absorbed her during the entire trip back to Fellise.

*Kwaan and I met by happenstance—though, I suppose, he would use the word "providence."*

*I have met many other Terris philosophers since that day. They are, every one, men of great wisdom and ponderous sagaciousness. Men with an almost palpable importance.*

*Not so Kwaan. In a way, he is as unlikely a prophet as I am a hero. He never had an air of ceremonious wisdom—nor was he even a religious scholar. When we first met, he was studying one of his ridiculous interests in the great Khlenni library—I believe he was trying to determine whether or not trees could think.*

*That he should be the one who finally discovered the great Hero of Terris prophecy is a matter that would cause me to laugh, had events turned out just a little differently.*

# 19

KELSIER COULD FEEL ANOTHER ALLOMANCER pulsing in the mists. The vibrations washed over him like rhythmic waves brushing up against a tranquil shore. They were faint, but unmistakable.

He crouched atop a low garden wall, listening to the vibrations. The curling white mist continued its normal, placid wafting—indifferent, save for the bit closest to his body, which curled in the normal Allomantic current around his limbs.

Kelsier squinted in the night, flaring tin and seeking out the other Allomancer. He thought he saw a figure crouching atop a wall in the distance, but he couldn't be certain. He recognized the Allomantic vibrations, however. Each metal, when burned, gave off a distinct signal, recognizable to one who was well practiced with bronze. The man in the distance burned tin, as did the four others Kelsier had sensed hiding around Keep Tekiel. The five Tineyes formed a perimeter, watching the night, searching for intruders.

Kelsier smiled. The Great Houses were growing nervous. Keeping five Tineyes on watch wouldn't be that hard for a house like Tekiel, but the noblemen Allomancers would resent being forced into simple guard duty. And if there were five Tineyes on watch, chances were good that a number of Thugs, Coinshots, and Lurchers were on call as well. Luthadel was quietly in a state of alert.

The Great Houses were growing so wary, in fact, that Kelsier had trouble finding cracks in their defenses. He was only one man, and even Mistborn had limits. His success so far had been achieved through surprise. However, with five Tineyes on watch, Kelsier wouldn't be able to get very close to the keep without serious risk of being spotted.

Fortunately, Kelsier didn't need to test Tekiel's defenses this night. Instead, he crept along the wall toward the outer grounds. He paused near the garden well, and—burning bronze to make certain no Allomancers were near—reached into a stand of bushes to retrieve a large sack. It was heavy enough that he had to burn pewter to pull it free and throw it over his shoulder. He paused in the night for a moment, straining for sounds in the mist, then hauled the sack back toward the keep.

He stopped near a large, whitewashed garden veranda that sat beside a small reflecting pool. Then, he heaved the sack off his shoulder and dumped its contents—a freshly killed corpse—onto the ground.

The body—which had belonged to one Lord Charrs Entrone—rolled to a stop with its face in the dirt, twin dagger wounds glistening in its back. Kelsier had ambushed the half-drunken man on a street just outside of a skaa slum, ridding the world of another nobleman. Lord Entrone, in particular, would not be missed—he was infamous for his twisted sense of pleasure. Skaa bloodfights, for instance, were a particular enjoyment of his. That was where he had spent this evening.

Entrone had, not coincidentally, been a major political ally of House Tekiel. Kelsier left the corpse sitting in its own blood. The gardeners would locate it first—and once the servants knew about the death, no amount of noble obstinacy would keep it quiet. The murder would cause an outcry, and immediate blame would probably be placed upon House Izenry, House Tekiel's rival. However, Entrone's suspiciously unexpected death might make House Tekiel wary. If they began poking around, they would find that Entrone's gambling opponent at the night's bloodfight had been Crews Geffenry—a man whose house had been petitioning the Tekiels for a stronger alliance. Crews was a known Mistborn, and a very competent knife-fighter.

And so, the intrigue would begin. Had House Izenry done the murder? Or, perhaps, had the death been an attempt by House Geffenry to push Tekiel into a higher state of alarm—thereby encouraging them to seek allies among the lesser nobility? Or, was there a third answer—a house that wanted to strengthen the rivalry between Tekiel and Izenry?

Kelsier hopped off the garden wall, scratching at the fake beard he wore. It didn't really matter whom House Tekiel decided to blame; Kelsier's real purpose was to make them question and worry, to make them mistrust and misunderstand. Chaos was his strongest ally in fostering a house war. When that war finally came, each noblemen killed would be one less person that the skaa would have to face in their rebellion.

As soon as Kelsier got a short distance from Keep Tekiel, he flipped a coin and went to the rooftops. Occasionally, he wondered what the people in the houses beneath him thought, hearing footsteps from above. Did they know that Mistborn found their homes a convenient highway, a place where they could move without being bothered by guards or thieves? Or, did the people attribute the knockings to the ever-blamable mistwraiths?

*They probably don't even notice. Sane people are asleep when the mists come out.* He landed on a peaked roof, retrieved his pocket watch from a nook to check the time, then stowed it—and the dangerous metal from which it was made—away again. Many nobility blatantly wore metal, a foolish form of bravado. The habit had been inherited directly from the Lord Ruler. Kelsier, however, didn't like carrying any metal—watch, ring, or bracelet—on him that he didn't have to.

He launched himself into the air again, making his way toward the Sootwarrens, a skaa slum on the far northern side of town. Luthadel was an enormous, sprawling city; every few decades or so, new sections were added, the city wall expanded through the sweat and effort of skaa labor. With the advent of the modern canal era, stone was growing relatively cheap and easy to move.

*I wonder why he even bothers with the wall,* Kelsier thought, moving along rooftops parallel to the massive structure. *Who would attack? The Lord Ruler controls everything. Not even the western isles resist anymore.*

There hadn't been a true war in the Final Empire for centuries. The occasional "rebellion" consisted of nothing more than a few thousand men hiding in hills or caves, coming out for periodic raids. Even Yeden's rebellion wouldn't rely much on force—they were counting on the chaos of a house war, mixed with the strategic misdirection of the Luthadel Garrison, to give them an opening. If it came down to an extended campaign, Kelsier would lose. The Lord Ruler and the Steel Ministry could marshal literally millions of troops if the need arose.

Of course, there was his other plan. Kelsier didn't speak of it, he barely even dared consider it. He probably wouldn't even have an opportunity to implement it. But, if the opportunity did arrive . . .

He dropped to the ground just outside of the Sootwarrens, then pulled his mistcloak tight and walked along the street with a confident step. His contact sat in the doorway of a closed shop, puffing quietly on a pipe. Kelsier raised an eyebrow; tobacco was an expensive luxury. Hoid was either very wasteful, or he was just as successful as

Dockson implied.

Hoid calmly put away the pipe, then climbed to his feet—though that didn't make him much taller. The scrawny bald man bowed deeply in the misty night. "Greetings, my lord."

Kelsier paused in front of the man, arms tucked carefully inside his mistcloak. It wouldn't do for a street informant to realize that the unidentified "nobleman" he was meeting with had the scars of Hathsin on his arms.

"You come highly recommended," Kelsier said, mimicking the haughty accent of a nobleman.

"I am one of the best, my lord."

*Anyone who can survive as long as you have must be good,* Kelsier thought. Lords didn't like the idea of other men knowing their secrets. Informants generally didn't live very long.

"I need to know something, informant," Kelsier said. "But first you must vow never to speak of this meeting to anyone."

"Of course, my lord," Hoid said. He'd likely break the promise before the night was out—another reason informants didn't tend to live very long. "There is, however, the matter of payment. . . ."

"You'll have your money, skaa," Kelsier snapped.

"Of course, my lord," Hoid said with a quick bob of the head. "You requested information regarding House Renoux, I believe. . . ."

"Yes. What is known about it? Which houses is it aligned with? I must know these things."

"There isn't really much to know, my lord," Hoid said. "Lord Renoux is very new to the area, and he is a careful man. He's making neither allies nor enemies at the moment—he's buying a large number of weapons and armor, but is probably just purchasing from a wide variety of houses and merchants, thereby ingratiating himself to them all. A wise tactic. He will, perhaps, have an excess of merchandise, but he will also have an excess of friends, yes?"

Kelsier snorted. "I don't see why I should pay you for that."

"He'll have too much merchandise, my lord," Hoid said quickly. "You could make a clever profit, knowing that Renoux is shipping at a loss."

"I'm no merchant, skaa," Kelsier said. "I don't care about profits and shipping!" *Let him chew on that. Now he thinks I'm of a Great House—of course, if he hadn't suspected that because of the mistcloak, then he doesn't deserve his reputation.*

"Of course, my lord," Hoid said quickly. "There is more, of course. . . ."

*Ah, and here we see it. Does the street know that House Renoux is connected to the rumblings of rebellion?* If anyone had discovered that secret, then Kelsier's crew was in serious jeopardy.

Hoid coughed quietly, holding out his hand.

"Insufferable man!" Kelsier snapped, tossing a pouch at Hoid's feet.

"Yes, my lord," Hoid said, falling to his knees and searching about with his hand. "I apologize, my lord. My eyesight is weak, you know. I can barely see my own fingers held in front of my face."

*Clever,* Kelsier thought as Hoid found the pouch and tucked it away. The comment about eyesight was, of course, a lie—no man would get far in the underground with such an impediment. However, a nobleman who thought his informant to be half blind would be far less paranoid about being identified. Not that Kelsier himself was worried—he wore one of Dockson's best disguises. Beside the beard, he had a fake, but realistic, nose, along with platforms in the shoes and makeup to lighten his skin.

"You said there was more?" Kelsier said. "I swear, skaa, if it isn't good . . ."

"It is," Hoid said quickly. "Lord Renoux is considering a union between his niece, the Lady Valette, and Lord Elend Venture."

Kelsier paused. *Wasn't expecting that . . .* "That's silly. Venture is *far* above Renoux."

"The two youths were seen speaking—at length—at the Venture ball a month ago."

Kelsier laughed derisively. "Everyone knows about that. It meant nothing."

"Did it?" Hoid asked. "Does everyone know that Lord Elend Venture spoke very highly of the girl to his friends, the group of nobleling philosophers that lounge at the Broken Quill?"

"Young men speak of girls," Kelsier said. "It means nothing. You will be returning those coins."

"Wait!" Hoid said, sounding apprehensive for the first time. "There is more. Lord Renoux and Lord Venture have had secret dealings."

*What?*

"It is true," Hoid continued. "This is fresh news—I heard it barely an hour ago myself. There is a connection between Renoux and Venture. And, for some reason, Lord Renoux was able to demand that Elend Venture be assigned to watch over Lady Valette at balls." He lowered his voice. "It is even whispered that Lord Renoux has some kind of . . . leverage over House Venture."

*What happened at that ball tonight?* Kelsier thought. Out loud, however, he said, “This all sounds very weak, skaa. You have nothing more than idle speculations?”

“Not about House Renoux, my lord,” Hoid said. “I tried, but your worry over this house is meaningless! You should pick a house more central to politics. Like, say, House Elariel . . .”

Kelsier frowned. By mentioning Elariel, Hoid was implying that he had some important tidbit that would be worth Kelsier’s payment. It seemed that House Renoux’s secrets were safe. It was time to move the discussion along to other houses, so that Hoid wouldn’t get suspicious of Kelsier’s interest in Renoux.

“Very well,” Kelsier said. “But if this isn’t worth my time . . .”

“It is, my lord. Lady Shan Elariel is a Soother.”

“Proof?”

“I felt her touch on my emotions, my lord,” Hoid said. “During a fire at Keep Elariel a week ago, she was there calming the emotions of the servants.”

Kelsier had started that fire. Unfortunately, it hadn’t spread beyond the guardhouses. “What else?”

“House Elariel has recently given her leave to use her powers more at court functions,” Hoid said. “They fear a house war, and wish her to make whatever allegiances possible. She always carries a thin envelope of shaved brass in her right glove. Get a Seeker close to her at a ball, and you shall see. My lord, I do not lie! My life as an informant depends solely upon my reputation. Shan Elariel *is* a Soother.”

Kelsier paused, as if musing. The information was useless to him, but his true purpose—finding out about House Renoux—had already been fulfilled. Hoid had earned his coins, whether he realized it or not.

Kelsier smiled. *Now to sow a little more chaos.*

“What of Shan’s covert relationship with Salmen Tekiel?” Kelsier said, picking the name of a likely young nobleman. “Do you think that she used her powers to gain his favor?”

“Oh, most certainly, my lord,” Hoid said quickly. Kelsier could see the glimmer of excitement in his eyes; he assumed that Kelsier had given him a luscious bit of political gossip free of charge.

“Perhaps she was the one who secured Elariel the deal with House Hasting last week,” Kelsier said musingly. There had been no such deal.

“Most likely, my lord.”

“Very well, skaa,” Kelsier said. “You have earned your coins.

Perhaps I shall call upon you another time."

"Thank you, my lord," Hoid said, bowing very low.

Kelsier dropped a coin and launched himself into the air. As he landed on a rooftop, he caught a glimpse of Hoid scuttling over to pluck the coin off the ground. Hoid didn't have any trouble locating it, despite his "weak eyesight." Kelsier smiled, then kept moving. Hoid hadn't mentioned Kelsier's tardiness, but Kelsier's next appointment would not be so forgiving.

He made his way eastward, toward Ahlstrom Square. He pulled off his mistcloak as he moved, then ripped off his vest, revealing the tattered shirt hidden beneath. He dropped to an alleyway, discarding cloak and vest, then grabbed a double handful of ash from the corner. He rubbed the crusty, dark flakes on his arms, masking his scars, then ground them onto his face and false beard.

The man who stumbled out of the alleyway seconds later was very different from the nobleman who had met with Hoid. The beard, once neat, now jutted out in an unkempt frazzle. A few, select bits had been removed, making it look patchy and sickly. Kelsier stumbled, pretending to have a lame leg, and called out to a shadowed figure standing near the square's quiet fountain.

"My lord?" Kelsier asked in a raspy voice. "My lord, is that you?"

Lord Straff Venture, leader of House Venture, was a domineering man, even for a nobleman. Kelsier could make out a pair of guards standing at his side; the lord himself didn't seem the least bit bothered by the mists—it was openly known that he was a Tineye. Venture stepped forward firmly, dueling cane tapping the ground beside him.

"You are late, skaa!" he snapped.

"My lord, I . . . I . . . I was waiting in the alley, my lord, like we agreed!"

"We agreed to no such thing!"

"I'm sorry, my lord," Kelsier said again, bowing—then stumbling because of his "lame" leg. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was just in the alley. I didn't mean to make you wait."

"Couldn't you see us, man?"

"I'm sorry, my lord," Kelsier said. "My eyesight . . . it isn't very good, you know. I can barely see my own hands in front of my face." *Thanks for the tip, Hoid.*

Venture snorted, handing his dueling cane to a guard, then slapped Kelsier smartly across the face.

Kelsier stumbled to the ground, holding his cheek. "I'm sorry, my lord," he mumbled again.

"Next time you make me wait, it will be the cane," Venture said curtly.

*Well, I know where to go next time I need a corpse to dump on someone's lawn,* Kelsier thought, stumbling to his feet.

"Now," Venture said. "Let us get down to business. What is this important news you promised to deliver?"

"It's about House Erikell, my lord," Kelsier said. "I know Your Lordship has had dealings with them in the past."

"And?"

"Well, my lord, they are cheating you dearly. They have been selling their swords and canes to House Tekiel for half the price you've been paying!"

"Proof?"

"You need only look to Tekiel's new armaments, my lord," Kelsier said. "My word is true. I have nothing but my reputation! If I have not that, I have not my life."

And he wasn't lying. Or, at least, not completely. It would be useless of Kelsier to spread information that Venture could corroborate or dismiss with ease. Some of what he said was true—Tekiel was giving a slight advantage to Erikell. Kelsier was overstating it, of course. If he played the game well, he could start a rift between Erikell and Venture, while at the same time making Venture jealous of Tekiel. And, if Venture came to Renoux for weapons instead of Erikell . . . well, that would just be a side benefit.

Straff Venture snorted. His house was powerful—incredibly powerful—and relied on no specific industry or enterprise to fuel its wealth. That was a very difficult position to achieve in the Final Empire, considering the Lord Ruler's taxes and atium costs. It also made Venture a powerful tool to Kelsier. If he could give this man the right mixture of truth and fiction . . .

"This is of little use to me," Venture said suddenly. "Let's see how much you *really* know, informant. Tell me about the Survivor of Hathsin."

Kelsier froze. "Excuse me, my lord?"

"You want to get paid?" Venture asked. "Well, tell me about the Survivor. Rumors say he's returned to Luthadel."

"Rumors only, my lord," Kelsier said quickly. "I have never met this Survivor, but I doubt he is in Luthadel—if, indeed, he even lives."

"I've heard that he's gathering a skaa rebellion."

"There are always fools whispering rebellion to the skaa, my lord," Kelsier said. "And there are always those who try to use the name of the Survivor, but I do not believe that any man could have lived through the Pits. I could seek more information on this, if you wish, but I worry you will be disappointed in what I find. The Survivor is dead—the Lord Ruler . . . he does not allow such oversights."

"True," Venture said contemplatively. "But the skaa seem convinced about this rumor of an 'Eleventh Metal.' Have you heard of it, informant?"

"Ah, yes," Kelsier said, covering his shock. "A legend, my lord."

"One I've never heard of," Venture said. "And I pay *very* close attention to such things. This is no 'legend.' Someone very clever is manipulating the skaa."

"An . . . interesting conclusion, my lord," Kelsier said.

"Indeed," Venture said. "And, assuming the Survivor *did* die in the Pits, and if someone had gotten ahold of his corpse . . . his bones . . . there are ways to imitate a man's appearance. You know of what I speak?"

"Yes, my lord," Kelsier said.

"Watch for this," Venture said. "I don't care about your gossip—bring me something about this man, or whatever he is, that leads the skaa. *Then* you'll get some coin of me."

Venture spun in the darkness, waving to his men and leaving a thoughtful Kelsier behind.

Kelsier arrived at Mansion Renoux a short time later; the spikeway between Fellise and Luthadel made for quick travel between the cities. He hadn't placed the spikes himself; he didn't know who had. He often wondered what he would do if, while traveling the spikeway, he met another Mistborn traveling in the opposite direction.

*We'd probably just ignore each other,* Kelsier thought as he landed in Mansion Renoux's courtyard. *We're pretty good at doing that.*

He peered through the mists at the lantern-lit mansion, his recovered mistcloak flapping slightly in the calm wind. The empty carriage indicated that Vin and Sazed had returned from House Elariel. Kelsier found them inside, waiting in the sitting room and speaking quietly with Lord Renoux.

"That's a new look for you," Vin noted as Kelsier walked into the room. She still wore her dress—a beautiful red gown—though she sat in an unladylike position, legs tucked beneath her.

Kelsier smiled to himself. *A few weeks ago she would have changed out of that gown as soon as she got back. We'll turn her into a lady yet.* He found a seat, picking at the fake, soot-stained beard. "You mean this? I hear beards are going to make a return soon. I'm just trying to stay on the edge of fashionability."

Vin snorted. "The edge of beggar fashion, maybe."

"How did the evening go, Kelsier?" Lord Renoux asked.

Kelsier shrugged. "Like most others. Fortunately, it appears that House Renoux remains free of suspicion—though I myself am something of a concern to some of the nobility."

"You?" Renoux asked.

Kelsier nodded as a servant brought him a warm, damp cloth to clean his face and arms—though Kelsier wasn't certain if the servants were worried about his comfort or the ash he might get on the furniture. He wiped off his arms, exposing the pale white scratch scars, then began to pick off the beard.

"It seems that the general skaa have gotten wind of the Eleventh Metal," he continued. "Some of the nobility have heard the building rumors, and the more intelligent ones are growing worried."

"How does this affect us?" Renoux asked.

Kelsier shrugged. "We'll spread opposite rumors to make the nobility focus more on each other and less on me. Though, amusingly, Lord Venture encouraged me to search out information about myself. A man could get very confused from this kind of playacting—I don't know how you do it, Renoux."

"It is who I am," the kandra said simply.

Kelsier shrugged again, turning to Vin and Sazed. "So, how did your evening go?"

"Frustratingly," Vin said with a surly tone.

"Mistress Vin is a tad annoyed," Sazed said. "On the way back from Luthadel, she told me the secrets she'd gathered while dancing."

Kelsier chuckled. "Not much of interest?"

"Sazed already knew it all!" Vin snapped. "I spent hours twirling and twittering for those men, and it was all worthless!"

"Hardly worthless, Vin," Kelsier said, pulling off the last bit of false beard. "You made some contacts, you were seen, and you practiced your twittering. As for information—well, nobody's going to tell you anything important yet. Give it some time."

"How much time?"

"Now that you're feeling better, we can have you start attending the balls regularly. After a few months, you should have gathered enough contacts to begin finding the kind of information we need."

Vin nodded, sighing. She didn't seem quite as opposed to the idea of regularly attending balls as she once had, however.

Sazed cleared his throat. “Master Kelsier, I feel that I must mention something. Our table was attended by Lord Elend Venture for most of the evening, though Mistress Vin did find a way to make his attentions less threatening to the court.”

“Yes,” Kelsier said, “so I understand. What did you tell those people, Vin? That Renoux and Venture are friends?”

Vin paled slightly. “How do you know?”

“I’m mysteriously powerful,” Kelsier said with a wave of his hand. “Anyway, everyone thinks that House Renoux and House Venture have had secret business dealings. They probably assume that Venture has been stockpiling weapons.”

Vin frowned. “I didn’t mean it to go that far. . . .”

Kelsier nodded, rubbing the glue from his chin. “That’s the way court is, Vin. Things can get out of hand quickly. However, this isn’t much of a problem—though it does mean that you’re going to have to be very careful when dealing with House Venture, Lord Renoux. We’ll want to see what kind of reaction they have to Vin’s comments.”

Lord Renoux nodded. “Agreed.”

Kelsier yawned. “Now, if there isn’t anything else, playing both nobleman and beggar in one evening has made me dreadfully tired. . . .”

“There is one other thing, Master Kelsier,” Sazed said. “At the end of the evening, Mistress Vin saw Lord Elend Venture leaving the ball with young lords of Houses Lekal and Hasting.”

Kelsier paused, frowning. “That’s an odd combination.”

“So I thought,” Sazed said.

“He’s probably just trying to annoy his father,” Kelsier said musingly. “Fraternizing with the enemy in public . . .”

“Perhaps,” Sazed said. “But the three did seem to be good friends.”

Kelsier nodded, standing. “Investigate this further, Saze. There’s a chance that Lord Venture and his son are playing us all for fools.”

“Yes, Master Kelsier,” Sazed said.

Kelsier left the room, stretching and handing his mistcloak to a servant. As he walked up the eastern stairway, he heard quick footsteps. He turned to find Vin scooting up behind him, shimmering red dress held up as she climbed the steps.

“Kelsier,” she said quietly. “There was something else. Something I’d like to talk about.”

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. *Something she doesn’t even want Sazed to* *hear?* “My room,” he said, and she followed him up the stairs and into the chamber.

“What is this about?” he asked as she shut the door behind her.

“Lord Elend,” Vin said, looking down, seeming a bit embarrassed. “Sazed already doesn’t like him, so I didn’t want to mention this in front of the others. But, I found something strange tonight.”

“What?” Kelsier asked curiously, leaning back against his bureau.

“Elend had a stack of books with him,” Vin said.

*First name,* Kelsier thought with disapproval. *She* is *falling for the boy.*

“He’s known to read a lot,” Vin continued, “but some of these books . . . well, when he was gone, I picked through them.”

*Good girl. The streets gave you at least a few good instincts.*

“One of them drew my attention,” she said. “The title said something about the weather, but the words inside spoke about the Final Empire and its flaws.”

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. “What exactly did it say?”

Vin shrugged. “Something about how since the Lord Ruler is immortal, his empire should be more advanced and peaceful.”

Kelsier smiled. “*Book of the False Dawn*—any Keeper can quote the entire thing to you. I didn’t think there were any physical copies left. Its author—Deluse Couvre—went on to write some books that were even more damning. Though he didn’t blaspheme against Allomancy, the obligators made an exception in his case and strung him up on a hook anyway.”

“Well,” Vin said, “Elend has a copy. I think one of the other noblewomen was trying to find the book. I saw one of her servants rifling through them.”

“Which noblewoman?”

“Shan Elariel.”

Kelsier nodded. “Former fiancée. She’s probably searching for something to blackmail the Venture boy with.”

“I think she’s an Allomancer, Kelsier.”

Kelsier nodded distractedly, thinking about the information. “She’s a Soother. She probably had the right idea with those books—if the Venture heir is reading a book like *False Dawn*, not to mention foolish enough to carry it around with him . . .”

“Is it that dangerous?” Vin asked.

Kelsier shrugged. “Moderately. It’s an older book, and it didn’t actually encourage rebellion, so it might slide.”

Vin frowned. “The book sounded pretty critical of the Lord Ruler. He allows the nobility to read things like that?”

“He doesn’t really ‘allow’ them to do such things,” Kelsier said. “More, he sometimes ignores it when they do. Banning books is tricky business, Vin—the more stink the Ministry makes about a text, the more attention it will draw, and the more people will be tempted to read it. *False Dawn* is a stuffy volume, and by *not* forbidding it, the Ministry doomed it to obscurity.”

Vin nodded slowly.

“Besides,” Kelsier said, “the Lord Ruler is far more lenient with the nobility than he is with skaa. He sees them as the children of his long-dead friends and allies, the men who supposedly helped him defeat the Deepness. He occasionally lets them get away with things like reading edgy texts or assassinating family members.”

“So . . . the book is nothing to worry about?” Vin asked.

Kelsier shrugged. “I wouldn’t say that either. If young Elend has *False Dawn,* he might also have other books that *are* explicitly forbidden. If obligators had proof of that, they’d hand young Elend over to the Inquisitors—nobleman or not. The question is, how do we make certain that happens? If the Venture heir were to be executed, it would certainly add to Luthadel’s political turmoil.”

Vin paled visibly.

*Yes,* Kelsier thought with an internal sigh. *She’s definitely falling for him. I should have foreseen this. Sending a young, pretty girl into noble society? One vulture or another was bound to latch on to her.*

“I didn’t tell you this so we could get him killed, Kelsier!” she said. “I thought, maybe . . . well, he’s reading forbidden books, and he seems like a good man. Maybe we can use him as an ally or something.”

*Oh, child,* Kelsier thought. *I hope he doesn’t hurt you too much when he discards you. You should know better than this.*

“Don’t count on it,” he said out loud. “Lord Elend might be reading a forbidden book, but that doesn’t make him our friend. There have always been noblemen like him—young philosophers and dreamers who think that their ideas are new. They like to drink with their friends and grumble about the Lord Ruler; but, in their hearts, they’re still noblemen. They’ll never overthrow the establishment.”

“But—”

“No, Vin,” Kelsier said. “You have to trust me. Elend Venture doesn’t care about us or the skaa. He’s a gentleman anarchist because it’s fashionable and exciting.”

“He talked to me about the skaa,” Vin said. “He wanted to know if they were intelligent, and if they acted like real people.”

“And was his interest compassionate or intellectual?”

She paused.

“See,” Kelsier said. “Vin, that man is *not* our ally—in fact, I distinctly recall telling you to stay away from him. When you spend time with Elend Venture, you put the operation—and your fellow crewmembers—in jeopardy. Understand?”

Vin looked down, nodding.

Kelsier sighed. *Why do I suspect that staying away from him is the last thing she intends to do? Bloody hell—I don’t have time to deal with this right now.*

“Go get some sleep,” Kelsier said. “We can talk more about this later.”

*It isn't a shadow.*

*This dark thing that follows me, the thing that only I can see—It isn't really a shadow. It's blackish and translucent, but it doesn't have a shadowlike solid outline. It's insubstantial—wispy and formless. Like it's made out of a dark fog.*

*Or mist, perhaps.*

# 20

VIN WAS GROWING VERY TIRED of the scenery between Luthadel and Fellise. She'd made the same trip at least a dozen times during the last few weeks—watching the same brown hills, scraggly trees, and rug of weedy underbrush. She was beginning to feel as if she could individually identify each and every bump in the road.

She attended numerous balls—but they were only the beginning. Luncheons, sitting parties, and other forms of daily entertainment were just as popular. Often, Vin traveled between the cities two or even three times a day. Apparently, young noblewomen didn't have anything better to do than sit in carriages for six hours a day.

Vin sighed. In the near distance, a group of skaa trudged along the towpath beside a canal, pulling a barge toward Luthadel. Her life could be much worse.

Still, she felt frustration. It was still midday, but there weren't any important events happening until the evening, so she had nowhere to go but back to Fellise. She kept thinking about how much faster she could make the trip if she used the spikeway. She longed to leap through the mists again, but Kelsier had been reluctant to continue her training. He allowed her out for a short time each night to maintain her skills, but she wasn't allowed any extreme, exciting leaps. Just some basic moves—mostly Pushing and Pulling small objects while standing on the ground.

She was beginning to grow frustrated with her continued weakness. It had been over three months since her encounter with the Inquisitor; the worst of winter had passed without even a flake of snow. How long was it going to take her to recover?

*At least I can still go to balls,* she thought. Despite her annoyance at the constant traveling, Vin was coming to enjoy her duties. Pretending to be a noblewoman was actually far less tense than regular thieving work. True, her life would be forfeit if her secret were ever discovered, but for now the nobility seemed willing to accept her—to dance with her, dine with her, and chat with her. It was a good life—a bit unexciting, but her eventual return to Allomancy would fix that.

That left her with two frustrations. The first was her inability to gather useful information; she was getting increasingly annoyed at having her questions avoided. She was growing experienced enough to tell that there was a great deal of intrigue going on, yet she was still too new to be allowed a part in it.

Still, while her outsider status was annoying, Kelsier was confident that it would eventually change. Vin's second major annoyance wasn't so easily dealt with. Lord Elend Venture had been notably absent from several balls during the last few weeks, and he had yet to repeat his act of spending the entire evening with her. While she rarely had to sit alone anymore, she was quickly coming to realize that none of the other noblemen had the same . . . depth as Elend. None of them had his droll wit, or his honest, earnest eyes. The others didn't feel *real.* Not like he did.

He didn't seem to be avoiding her. However, he also didn't seem to be making much of an effort to spend time with her.

*Did I misread him?* she wondered as the carriage reached Fellise. Elend was so hard to understand sometimes. Unfortunately, his apparent indecision hadn't changed his former fiancée's temperament. Vin was beginning to realize why Kelsier had warned her to avoid catching the attention of anyone too important. She didn't run into Shan Elariel often, thankfully—but when they did meet, Shan took every occasion to deride, insult, and demean Vin. She did it with a calm, aristocratic manner, even her bearing reminding Vin just how inferior she was.

*Perhaps I'm just becoming too attached to my Valette persona,* Vin thought. Valette was just a front; she was supposed to be all the things Shan said. However, the insults still stung.

Vin shook her head, putting both Shan and Elend out of her mind. Ash had fallen during her trip to the city, and though it was done now, its aftermath was visible in small drifts and flurries of black blowing across the town's streets. Skaa workers moved about, sweeping the soot into bins and carrying it out of the city. They occasionally had to hurry to get out of the way of a passing noble carriage, none of which bothered to slow for the workers.

*Poor things,* Vin thought, passing a group of ragged children who were shaking aspen trees to get the ash out so that it could be swept up—it wouldn't do for a passing nobleman to get an unexpected dump of tree-borne ash on his head. The children shook, two to a tree, bringing furious black showers down on their heads. Careful, cane-wielding taskmasters walked up and down the street, making certain the work continued.

*Elend and the others,* she thought. *They must not understand how bad life is for the skaa. They live in their pretty keeps, dancing, never really understanding the extent of the Lord Ruler's oppression.*

She could see beauty in the nobility—she wasn't like Kelsier, hating them outright. Some of them seemed quite kind, in their own way, and she was beginning to think some of the stories skaa told about their cruelty must be exaggerated. And yet, when she saw events like that poor boy's execution or the skaa children, she had to wonder. How could the nobility not see? How could they not understand?

She sighed, looking away from the skaa as the carriage finally rolled up to Mansion Renoux. She immediately noticed a large gathering in the inner courtyard, and she grabbed a fresh vial of metals, worrying that the Lord Ruler had sent soldiers to arrest Lord Renoux. However, she quickly realized that the crowd wasn't made up of soldiers, but of skaa in simple worker's clothing.

The carriage rolled through the gates, and Vin's confusion deepened. Boxes and sacks lay in heaps among the skaa—many of them dusted with soot from the recent ashfall. The workers themselves bustled with activity, loading a series of carts. Vin's carriage pulled to a stop in front of the mansion, and she didn't wait for Sazed to open the door. She hopped out on her own, holding up her dress and stalking over to Kelsier and Renoux, who stood surveying the operation.

"You're running goods to the caves out of *here*?" Vin asked under her breath as she reached the two men.

"Curtsey to me, child," Lord Renoux said. "Maintain appearances while we can be seen."

Vin did as ordered, containing her annoyance.

"Of course we are, Vin," Kelsier said. "Renoux has to do *something* with all of the weapons and supplies he's been gathering. People would start getting suspicious if they didn't see him sending them away."

Renoux nodded. "Ostensibly, we're sending this all via canal barges to my plantation in the west. However, the barges will stop to drop off supplies—and many of the canalmen—at the rebellion caverns. The barges and a few men will continue on to keep up appearances."

"Our soldiers don't even know that Renoux is in on the plan," Kelsier said, smiling. "They think he's a nobleman that I'm scamming.

Besides, this will be a great opportunity for us to go and inspect the army. After a week or so at the caves, we can return to Luthadel on one of Renoux's barges coming east."

Vin paused. " 'We'?" she asked, suddenly imagining weeks spent on the barge, watching the same, dull scenery day, after day, after day as they traveled. That would be even worse than traveling back and forth between Luthadel and Fellise.

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. "You sound worried. Apparently, someone's coming to enjoy her balls and parties."

Vin flushed. "I just thought that I should be here. I mean, after all the time I missed by being sick, I—"

Kelsier held up his hand, chuckling. "You're staying; Yeden and I are the ones going. I need to inspect the troops, and Yeden is going to take a turn watching over the army so that Ham can come back to Luthadel. We'll also take my brother with us, then drop him at his insertion point with the Ministry acolytes up in Vennias. It's a good thing you're back—I want you to spend a little time with him before we leave."

Vin frowned. "With Marsh?"

Kelsier nodded. "He's a Misting Seeker. Bronze is one of the less useful metals, especially for a full Mistborn, but Marsh claims he can show you a few tricks. This will probably be your last chance to train with him."

Vin glanced toward the gathering caravan. "Where is he?"

Kelsier frowned. "He's late."

*Runs in the family, I guess.*

"He should be here soon, child," Lord Renoux said. "Perhaps you'd like to go take some refreshment inside?"

*I've had plenty of refreshment lately,* she thought, controlling her annoyance. Instead of going into the mansion, she wandered across the courtyard, studying the goods and workers, who were packing the supplies onto carts for transport to the local canal docks. The grounds were kept well maintained, and though the ash hadn't been cleaned up yet, the low-cut grass meant that she didn't have to hold her dress up much to keep it from dragging.

Beyond that, ash was surprisingly easy to get out of clothing. With proper washing, and some expensive soaps, even a white garment could be rendered clean of ash. That was why the nobility could always have new-looking clothing. It was such an easy, simple thing to divide the skaa and the aristocracy.

*Kelsier's right,* Vin thought. *I am coming to enjoy being a noblewoman.*

And she was concerned about the changes her new lifestyle was encouraging inside of her. Once, her problems had been things like starvation and beatings—now they were things like extended carriage rides and companions who arrived late for appointments. What did a transformation like that do to a person?

She sighed to herself, walking amidst the supplies. Some of the boxes would be filled with weapons—swords, war staves, bows—but the bulk of the material was sacked foodstuffs. Kelsier said that forming an army required far more grain than it did steel.

She trailed her fingers along one stack of boxes, careful not to brush the ash that was on top of them. She'd known that they'd be sending out a barge this day, but she hadn't expected Kelsier to go with it. Of course, he probably hadn't made the decision to go until a short time before—even the new, more responsible Kelsier was an impulsive man. Perhaps that was a good attribute in a leader. He wasn't afraid to incorporate new ideas, no matter when they occurred to him.

*Maybe I should ask to go with him,* Vin thought idly. *I've been playing the noblewoman far too much lately.* The other day, she'd caught herself sitting straight-backed in her carriage with a prim posture, despite the fact that she was alone. She feared that she was losing her instincts—being Valette was almost more natural to her now than being Vin was.

But of course she couldn't leave. She had a lunch appointment with Lady Flavine to attend, not to mention the Hasting ball—it was going to be the social event of the month. If Valette was absent, it would take weeks to repair the damage. Besides, there was always Elend. He'd probably forget about her if she disappeared again.

*He's already forgotten you,* she told herself. *He's barely spoken to you during the last three parties. Keep your head on, Vin. This is all just another scam—a game, like the ones you pulled before. You're building your reputation to gain information, not so that you can flirt and play.*

She nodded to herself, resolute. To her side, a few skaa men loaded one of the carts. Vin paused, standing beside a large stack of boxes and watching the men work. According to Dockson, the army's recruitment was picking up.

*We're gaining momentum,* Vin thought. *I guess word is spreading.* That was good—assuming it didn't spread *too* far.

She watched the packmen for a moment, sensing something . . . odd. They seemed unfocused. After a few moments, she was able to determine the source of their distraction. They kept shooting looks at Kelsier, whispering as they worked. Vin inched closer—keeping to the side of the boxes—and burned tin.

". . . no, that's him for certain," one of the men whispered. "I saw the scars."

"He's tall," another said.

"Of course he is. What did you expect?"

"He spoke at the meeting where I was recruited," another said. "The Survivor of Hathsin." There was awe in his tone.

The men moved on, walking over to gather more boxes. Vin cocked her head, then began to move among the workers, listening. Not all of them were discussing Kelsier, but a surprising number were. She also heard a number of references to the "Eleventh Metal."

*So that's why,* Vin thought. *The rebellion's momentum isn't gathering—Kelsier's is.* The men spoke of him in quiet, almost reverent, tones. For some reason, that made Vin uncomfortable. She would never have been able to stand hearing similar things said about her. Yet, Kelsier took them in stride; his charismatic ego probably just fueled the rumors even more.

*I wonder if he'll be able to let it go when this is all through.* The other crewmembers obviously had no interest in leadership, but Kelsier seemed to thrive on it. Would he really let the skaa rebellion take over? Would any man be able to relinquish that kind of power?

Vin frowned. Kelsier was a good man; he'd probably make a good ruler. However, if he did try to take control, it would smell of betrayal—a reneging on the promises that he had made to Yeden. She didn't want to see that from Kelsier.

"Valette," Kelsier called.

Vin jumped slightly, feeling a bit guilty. Kelsier pointed toward a carriage that was pulling onto the mansion grounds. Marsh had arrived. She walked back as the carriage pulled up, and she reached Kelsier about the same time that Marsh did.

Kelsier smiled, nodding toward Vin. "We won't be ready to leave for a while yet," he said to Marsh. "If you have time, could you show the kid a few things?"

Marsh turned toward her. He shared Kelsier's lanky build and blond hair, but he wasn't as handsome. Maybe it was the lack of a smile.

He pointed up, toward the mansion's fore-balcony. "Wait for me up there."

Vin opened her mouth to reply, but something about Marsh's expression made her shut it again. He reminded her of the old times, several months ago, when she had not questioned her superiors. She turned, leaving the three, and made her way into the mansion.

It was a short trip up the stairs to the fore-balcony. When she arrived, she pulled over a chair and seated herself beside the whitewashed wooden railing. The balcony had, of course, already been scrubbed clean of ash. Below, Marsh was still speaking with Kelsier and Renoux. Beyond them, beyond even the sprawling caravan, Vin could see the barren hills outside of the city, lit by red sunlight.

*Only a few months playing noblewoman, and I already find anything that isn't cultivated to be inferior.* She'd never thought of the landscape as "barren" during the years she'd traveled with Reen. *And Kelsier says the entire land used to be even more fertile than a nobleman's garden.*

Did he think to reclaim such things? Keepers could, perhaps, memorize languages and religions, but they couldn't create seeds for plants that had long been extinct. They couldn't make the ash stop falling or the mists go away. Would the world really change that much if the Final Empire were gone?

Besides, didn't the Lord Ruler have *some* right to his place? He'd defeated the Deepness, or so he claimed. He'd saved the world, which—in a twisted sort of way—made it his. What right did they have to try and take it from him?

She wondered about such things often, though she didn't express her worries to the others. They all seemed committed to Kelsier's plan; some even seemed to share his vision. But Vin was more hesitant. She had learned, as Reen had taught, to be skeptical of optimism.

And if there were ever a plan to be hesitant about, this was the one.

However, she was getting past the point where she questioned herself. She knew the reason she stayed in the crew. It wasn't the plan; it was the people. She liked Kelsier. She liked Dockson, Breeze, and Ham. She even liked the strange little Spook and his crotchety uncle. This was a crew unlike any other she'd worked with.

*Is that a good enough reason to let them get you killed?* Reen's voice asked.

Vin paused. She had been hearing his whispers in her mind less frequently lately, but they were still there. Reen's teachings, drilled into her over sixteen years of life, could not be idly discarded.

Marsh arrived on the balcony a few moments later. He glanced at her with those hard eyes of his, then spoke. "Kelsier apparently expects me to spend the evening training you in Allomancy. Let us get started."

Vin nodded.

Marsh eyed her, obviously expecting more of a response. Vin sat quietly. *You're not the only one who can be terse, friend.*

"Very well," Marsh said, sitting beside her, resting one arm on the balcony railing. His voice sounded a little less annoyed when he continued."Kelsier says that you have spent very little time training with the internal mental abilities. Correct?"

Vin nodded again.

"I suspect that many full Mistborn neglect these powers," Marsh said. "And that is a mistake. Bronze and copper may not be as flashy as other metals, but they can be very powerful in the hands of someone properly trained. The Inquisitors work through their manipulation of bronze, and the Misting underground survives because of its reliance upon copper.

"Of the two powers, bronze is by far the more subtle. I can teach you how to use it properly—if you practice what I show you, then you will have an advantage that many Mistborn dismiss."

"But, don't other Mistborn know to burn copper?" Vin asked. "What is the use of learning bronze if everyone you fight is immune to its powers?"

"I see that you already think like one of them," Marsh said. "Not everyone is Mistborn, girl—in fact, very, very few people are. And, despite what your kind likes to think, normal Mistings can kill people too. Knowing that the man attacking you is a Thug rather than a Coinshot could very easily save your life."

"All right," Vin said.

"Bronze will also help you identify Mistborn," Marsh said. "If you see someone using Allomancy when there is no Smoker nearby, and yet don't sense them giving off Allomantic pulses, then you know that they are Mistborn—either that, or they're an Inquisitor. In either case, you should run."

Vin nodded silently, the wound in her side throbbing slightly.

"There are great advantages to burning bronze, rather than just running around with your copper on. True, you Smoke yourself by using copper—but in a way you also blind yourself. Copper makes you immune to having your emotions Pushed or Pulled."

"But that's a good thing."

Marsh cocked his head slightly. "Oh? And what would be the greater advantage? Being immune to—but ignorant of—some Soother's attentions? Or instead knowing—from your bronze—exactly which emotions he is trying to suppress?"

Vin paused. "You can see something that specific?"

Marsh nodded. "With care and practice, you can recognize very minute changes in your opponents' Allomantic burnings. You can identify precisely which parts of a person's emotions a Soother or

Rioter intends to influence. You'll also be able to tell when someone is flaring their metal. If you grow very skilled, you might even be able to tell when they're running low on metals."

Vin paused in thought.

"You begin to see the advantage," Marsh said. "Good. Now burn bronze."

Vin did so. Immediately, she felt two rhythmic thumpings in the air. The soundless pulses washed over her, like the beating of drums or the washings of ocean waves. They were mixed and muddled.

"What do you sense?" Marsh asked.

"I . . . think there are two different metals being burned. One's coming from Kelsier down below; the other is coming from you."

"Good," Marsh said appreciatively. "You've practiced."

"Not much," Vin admitted.

He cocked an eyebrow. "Not much? You can already determine pulse origins. That takes practice."

Vin shrugged. "It seems natural to me."

Marsh was still for a moment. "Very well," he eventually said. "Are the two pulses different?"

Vin concentrated, frowning.

"Close your eyes," Marsh said. "Remove other distractions. Focus only on the Allomantic pulses."

Vin did so. It wasn't like hearing—not really. She had to concentrate to distinguish anything specific about the pulses. One felt . . . like it was beating against her. The other, in a strange sensation, felt like it was actually pulling her toward it with each beat.

"One's a Pulling metal, isn't it?" Vin asked, opening her eyes. "That one's Kelsier. You're Pushing."

"Very good," Marsh said. "He is burning iron, as I asked him to so that you could practice. I—of course—am burning bronze."

"Do they all do that?" Vin asked. "Feel distinct, I mean?"

Marsh nodded. "You can tell a Pulling metal from a Pushing metal by the Allomantic signature. Actually, that's how some of the metals were originally divided into their categories. It isn't intuitive, for instance, that tin Pulls while pewter Pushes. I didn't tell you to open your eyes."

Vin shut them.

"Focus on the pulses," Marsh said. "Try and distinguish their lengths. Can you tell the difference between them?"

Vin frowned. She focused as hard as she could, but her sense of the metals seemed . . . muddled. Fuzzy. After a few minutes, the lengths of the separate pulses still seemed the same to her.

"I can't sense anything," she said, dejected.

"Good," Marsh said flatly. "It took me six months of practice to distinguish pulse lengths—if you'd done it on the first try, I'd have felt incompetent."

Vin opened her eyes. "Why ask me to do it, then?"

"Because you need to practice. If you can tell Pulling metals from Pushing metals already . . . well, you apparently have talent. Perhaps as much talent as Kelsier has been bragging about."

"What was I supposed to see, then?" Vin asked.

"Eventually, you'll be able to sense two different pulse lengths. Internal metals, like bronze and copper, give off longer pulses than external metals, like iron and steel. Practice will also let you sense the three patterns within the pulses: one for the physical metals, one for the mental metals, and one for the two greater metals.

"Pulse length, metal group, and Push-Pull variance—once you know these three things, you will be able to tell exactly which metals your opponent is burning. A long pulse that beats against you and has a quick pattern will be pewter—the internal Pushing physical metal."

"Why the names?" Vin asked. "External and internal?"

"Metals come in groups of four—or, at least, the lower eight do. Two external metals, two internal metals—one each that Pushes, one each that Pulls. With iron, you Pull on something outside of yourself, with steel you Push on something outside of yourself. With tin you Pull on something inside of yourself, with pewter you Push on something inside of yourself."

"But, bronze and copper," Vin said. "Kelsier called them internal metals, but it seems like they affect external things. Copper keeps people from sensing when you use Allomancy."

Marsh shook his head. "Copper doesn't change your opponents, it changes something within yourself that has an effect on your opponents. That's why it is an internal metal. Brass, however, alters another person's emotions directly—and is an external metal."

Vin nodded thoughtfully. Then she turned, glancing toward Kelsier. "You know a lot about all the metals, but you're just a Misting, right?"

Marsh nodded. He didn't look like he intended to respond, though.

*Let's try something, then,* Vin thought, extinguishing her bronze. She lightly began burning copper to mask her Allomancy. Marsh didn't react, instead continuing to look down at Kelsier and the caravan.

*I should be invisible to his senses,* she thought, carefully burning both zinc and brass. She reached, just as Breeze had been training her to do, and subtly touched Marsh's emotions. She suppressed his suspicions and inhibitions, while at the same time bringing out his sense of wistfulness. Theoretically, that would make him more likely to talk.

"You must have learned somewhere?" Vin asked carefully.

*He'll see what I did for sure. He's going to get angry and—*

"I Snapped when I was very young," Marsh said. "I've had a long time to practice."

"So have a lot of people," Vin said.

"I . . . had reasons. They're hard to explain."

"They always are," Vin said, slightly increasing her Allomantic pressure.

"You know how Kelsier feels about the nobility?" Marsh asked, turning toward her, his eyes like ice.

*Ironeyes,* she thought. *Like they said.* She nodded to his question.

"Well, I feel the same way about the obligators," he said, turning away. "I'll do anything to hurt them. They took our mother—that's when I Snapped, and that's when I vowed to destroy them. So, I joined the rebellion and started learning all I could about Allomancy. Inquisitors use it, so I had to understand it—understand everything I could, be as *good* as I could, and are you Soothing me?"

Vin started, abruptly extinguishing her metals. Marsh turned back toward her again, his expression cold.

*Run!* Vin thought. She almost did. It was nice to know that the old instincts were still there, if buried just a bit.

"Yes," she said meekly.

"You *are* good," Marsh said. "I'd have never known if I hadn't started rambling. Stop it."

"I already have."

"Good," Marsh said. "That's the second time you've altered my emotions. Never do it again."

Vin nodded. "Second time?"

"The first was in my shop, eight months ago."

*That's right. Why don't I remember him?* "I'm sorry."

Marsh shook his head, finally turning away. "You're Mistborn—that's what you do. He does the same thing." He was looking down at Kelsier.

They sat quietly for a few moments.

"Marsh?" Vin asked. "How did you know I was Mistborn? I only knew how to Soothe back then."

Marsh shook his head. "You knew the other metals instinctively. You were burning pewter and tin that day—just a tiny bit, barely noticeable. You probably got the metals from water and dining utensils. Did you ever wonder why you survived when so many others died?"

Vin paused. *I did live through a lot of beatings. A lot of days with no food, nights spent in alleys during rain or ashfalls . . .*

Marsh nodded. "Very few people, even Mistborn, are so attuned to Allomancy that they burn metals instinctively. That's what interested me in you—that's why I kept track of you and told Dockson where to find you. And, are you Pushing my emotions again?"

Vin shook her head. "I promise."

Marsh frowned, studying her with one of his stony gazes.

"So stern," Vin said quietly. "Like my brother."

"Were you close?"

"I hated him," Vin whispered.

Marsh paused, then turned away. "I see."

"Do you hate Kelsier?"

Marsh shook his head. "No, I don't hate him. He's frivolous and self-important, but he's my brother."

"And that's enough?" Vin asked.

Marsh nodded.

"I . . . have trouble understanding that," Vin said honestly, looking out over the field of skaa, boxes, and sacks.

"Your brother didn't treat you well, I presume?"

Vin shook her head.

"What about your parents?" Marsh said. "One was a nobleman. The other?"

"Mad," Vin said. "She heard voices. It got so bad that my brother was afraid to leave us alone with her. But, of course, he didn't have a choice. . . ."

Marsh sat quietly, not speaking. *How did this get turned back to me?* Vin thought. *He's no Soother, yet he's getting as much out of me as I'm getting out of him.*

Still, it was good to speak it finally. She reached up, idly fingering her earring. "I don't remember it," she said, "but Reen said that he came home one day and found my mother covered in blood. She'd killed my baby sister. Messily. Me, however, she hadn't touched—

except to give me an earring. Reen said . . . He said she was holding me on her lap, babbling and proclaiming me a queen, my sister's corpse at our feet. He took me from my mother, and she fled. He saved my life, probably. That's part of why I stayed with him, I guess. Even when it was bad."

She shook her head, glancing at Marsh. "Still, you don't know how lucky you are, having Kelsier as a brother."

"I suppose," Marsh said. "I just . . . wish he wouldn't treat people like playthings. I've been known to kill obligators, but murdering men just because they're noble . . ." Marsh shook his head. "It's not just that, either. He likes people to fawn over him."

He had a point. However, Vin also detected something in his voice. Jealousy? *You're the older brother, Marsh. You were the responsible one—you joined the rebellion instead of working with thieves. It must have hurt that Kelsier was the one everybody liked.*

"Still," Marsh said, "he's getting better. The Pits changed him. Her . . . death changed him."

*What's this?* Vin thought, perking up slightly. There was definitely something here, too. Hurt. Deep hurt, more than a man should feel for a sister-in-law.

*So that's it. It wasn't just "everyone" who liked Kelsier more, it was one person in particular. Someone you loved.*

"Anyway," Marsh said, his voice growing more firm. "The arrogance of the past is behind him. This plan of his is insane, and I'm sure he's partially doing it just so he can enrich himself, but . . . well, he didn't have to go to the rebellion. He's trying to do something good—though it will probably get him killed."

"Why go along if you're so sure he'll fail?"

"Because he's going to get me into the Ministry," Marsh said. "The information I gather there will help the rebellion for centuries after Kelsier and I are dead."

Vin nodded, glancing down at the courtyard. She spoke hesitantly. "Marsh, I don't think it's *all* behind him. The way he's setting himself up with the skaa . . . the way they're starting to look at him . . ."

"I know," Marsh said. "It started with that 'Eleventh Metal' scheme of his. I don't know that we have to worry—this is just Kell playing his usual games."

"It makes me wonder why he's leaving on this trip," Vin said. "He'll be away from the action for a good month."

Marsh shook his head. "He'll have an entire army full of men to perform for. Besides, he needs to get out of the city. His reputation is growing too unwieldy, and the nobility is becoming too interested in the Survivor. If rumors got out that a man with scars on his arms is staying with Lord Renoux . . .”

Vin nodded, understanding.

“Right now,” Marsh said, “he’s playing the part of one of Renoux’s distant relatives. That man has to leave before someone connects him to the Survivor. When Kell gets back, he’ll have to keep a low profile—sneaking into the mansion instead of walking up the steps, keeping his hood up when he’s in Luthadel.”

Marsh trailed off, then stood. “Anyway, I’ve given you the basics. Now you just need to practice. Whenever you’re with Mistings, have them burn for you and focus on their Allomantic pulses. If we meet again, I’ll show you more, but there’s nothing else I can do until you’ve practiced.”

Vin nodded, and Marsh walked out the door without any other farewell. A few moments later, she saw him approach Kelsier and Renoux again.

*They really don’t hate each other,* Vin thought, resting with both arms crossed atop the railing. *What would that be like?* After some thought, she decided that the concept of loving siblings was a little like the Allomantic pulse lengths she was supposed to be looking for—they were just too unfamiliar for her to understand at the moment.

*“The Hero of Ages shall be not a man, but a force. No nation may claim him, no woman shall keep him, and no king may slay him. He shall belong to none, not even himself.”*

## 21

KELSIER SAT QUIETLY, READING AS his boat moved slowly along the canal to the north. *Sometimes, I worry that I’m not the hero everyone thinks I am,* the text said.

> What proof do we have? The words of men long dead, only now deemed divinatory? Even if we accept the prophecies, only tenuous interpretation links them to me. Is my defense of the Summer Hill really the “Burden by which the Hero shall be dubbed”? My several marriages could give me a “Bloodless bond to the world’s kings,” if you look at it the right way. There are dozens of similar phrases that could refer to events in my life. But, then again, they could all just be coincidences.
>
> The philosophers assure me that this is the time, that the signs have been met. But I still wonder if they have the wrong man. So many people depend on me. They say I will hold the future of the entire world on my arms. What would they think if they knew that their champion—the Hero of Ages, their savior—doubted himself?
>
> Perhaps they wouldn’t be shocked at all. In a way, this is what worries me most. Maybe, in their hearts, they wonder—just like I do. When they see me, do they see a liar?
>
> Rashek seems to think so. I know that I shouldn’t let a simple packman perturb me. However, he is from Terris, where the prophecies originated. If anyone could spot a fraud, would it not be he?
>
> Nevertheless, I continue my trek, going where the scribbled auguries proclaim that I will meet my destiny—walking, feeling Rashek’s eyes on my back. Jealous. Mocking. Hating.
>
> In the end, I worry that my arrogance shall destroy us all.

Kelsier lowered the booklet, his cabin shaking slightly from the efforts of the pullers outside. He was glad that Sazed had provided him with a copy of the translated portions of the Lord Ruler’s logbook before the caravan boats’ departure. There was blessed little else to do during the trip.

Fortunately, the logbook was fascinating. Fascinating, and eerie. It was disturbing to read words that had originally been written by the Lord Ruler himself. To Kelsier the Lord Ruler was less a man, and more a . . . creature. An evil force that needed to be destroyed.

Yet, the person presented in the logbook seemed all too mortal. He questioned and pondered—he seemed a man of depth, and even of character.

*Though, it would be best not to trust his narrative too closely,* Kelsier thought, running his fingers across the page. *Men rarely see their own actions as unjustified.*

Still, the Lord Ruler's story reminded Kelsier of the legends he had heard—stories whispered by skaa, discussed by noblemen, and memorized by Keepers. They claimed that once, before the Ascension, the Lord Ruler had been the greatest of men. A beloved leader, a man entrusted with the fate of all mankind.

Unfortunately, Kelsier knew how the story ended. The Final Empire itself was the logbook's legacy. The Lord Ruler hadn't saved mankind; he had enslaved it instead. Reading a firsthand account, seeing the Lord Ruler's self-doubt and internal struggles, only made the story that much more tragic.

Kelsier raised the booklet to continue; however, his boat began to slow. He glanced out the window of his cabin, looking up the canal. Dozens of men trudged along the towpath—a small road alongside the canal—pulling the four barges and two narrowboats that made up their convoy. It was an efficient, if labor-intensive, way to travel; men pulling a barge across a canal could move hundreds more pounds of weight than they could if forced to carry packs.

The men had pulled to a stop, however. Ahead, Kelsier could make out a lock mechanism, beyond which the canal split into two sections. A kind of crossroads of waterways. *Finally,* Kelsier thought. His weeks of travel were over.

Kelsier didn't wait for a messenger. He simply stepped out onto the deck of his narrowboat and slipped a few coins from his pouch into his hand. *Time to be a bit ostentatious,* he thought, dropping a coin to the wood. He burned steel and Pushed himself into the air.

He lurched upward at an angle, quickly gaining a height where he could see the entire line of men—half pulling the boats, half walking and waiting for their shifts. Kelsier flew in an arc, dropping another coin as he passed over one of the supply-laden barges, then Pushing against it when he began to descend. Would-be soldiers looked up, pointing in awe as Kelsier soared above the canal.

Kelsier burned pewter, strengthening his body as he thumped to the deck of the narrowboat leading the caravan.

Yeden stepped out of his cabin, surprised. "Lord Kelsier! We've, uh, arrived at the crossroads."

"I can see that," Kelsier said, glancing back along the line of boats. The men on the towpath spoke excitedly, pointing. It felt strange to use Allomancy so obviously in the daylight, and before so many people.

*There's no help for it,* he thought. *This visit is the last chance the men will have to see me for months. I need to make an impression, give them something they can hold on to, if this is all going to work. . . .*

"Shall we go see if the group from the caves has arrived to meet us?" Kelsier asked, turning back to Yeden.

"Of course," Yeden said, waving for a servant to pull his narrowboat up to the side of the canal and throw out the plank. Yeden looked excited; he really was an earnest man, and that much Kelsier could respect, even if he was a bit lacking in presence.

*Most of my life, I've had the opposite problem,* Kelsier thought with amusement, walking with Yeden off of the boat.

*Too much presence, not enough earnestness.*

The two of them walked up the line of canal workers. Near the front of the men, one of Ham's Thugs—playing the part of Kelsier's guard captain—saluted. "We've reached the crossroads, Lord Kelsier."

"I can see that," Kelsier repeated. A dense stand of birch trees grew ahead, running up a slope into the hills. The canals ran away from the woods—there were better sources of wood in other parts of the Final Empire. The forest stood alone and ignored by most.

Kelsier burned tin, wincing slightly at the suddenly blinding sunlight. His eyes adjusted, however, and he was able to pick out detail—and a slight bit of motion—in the forest.

"There," he said, flipping a coin into the air, then Pushing it. The coin zipped forward and thocked against a tree. The prearranged sign given, a small group of camouflaged men left the tree line, crossing the ash-stained earth toward the canal.

"Lord Kelsier," the foremost man said, saluting. "My name is Captain Demoux. Please, gather the recruits and come with me—General Hammond is eager to meet with you."

"Captain" Demoux was a young man to be so disciplined. Barely into his twenties, he led his small squad of men with a level of solemnity that might have seemed self-important had he been any less competent.

*Younger men than he have led soldiers into battle,* Kelsier thought. *Just because I was a fop when I was that age doesn't mean that everyone is. Look at poor Vin—only sixteen, already a match for Marsh in seriousness.*

They took a roundabout passage through the forest—by Ham's order, each troop took a different path to avoid wearing a trail. Kelsier glanced back at the two hundred or so men behind, frowning slightly.

Their trail would probably still be visible, but there was little he could do about that—the movements of so many men would be nearly impossible to mask.

Demoux slowed, waving, and several members of his squad scrambled forward; they didn't have half their leader's sense of military decorum. Still, Kelsier was impressed. The last time he'd visited, the men had been typically ragtag and uncoordinated, like most skaa outcasts. Ham and his officers had done their work well.

The soldiers pulled away some false underbrush, revealing a crack in the ground. It was dark within, the sides jutting with crystalline granite. It wasn't a regular hillside cavern, but instead a simple rend in the ground leading directly down.

Kelsier stood quietly, looking down at the black, stone-laced rift. He shivered slightly.

"Kelsier?" Yeden asked, frowning. "What is it?"

"It reminds me of the Pits. They looked like this—cracks in the ground."

Yeden paled slightly. "Oh. I, uh . . ."

Kelsier waved dismissively. "I knew this was coming. I climbed down inside those caves every day for a year, and I always came back out. I beat them. They have no power over me."

To prove his words, he stepped forward and climbed down into the thin crack. It was just wide enough for a large man to slip through. As Kelsier descended, he saw the soldiers—both Demoux's squad and the new recruits—watching quietly. He had intentionally spoken loud enough for them to hear.

*Let them see my weakness, and let them see me overcome it.*

They were brave thoughts. However, once he passed beneath the surface, it was as if he were back again. Smashed between two walls of stone, questing downward with shaking fingers. Cold, damp, dark. Slaves had to be the ones who recovered the atium. Allomancers might have been more effective, but using Allomancy near atium crystals shattered them. So, the Lord Ruler used condemned men. Forcing them into the pits. Forcing them to crawl downward, ever downward . . .

Kelsier forced himself onward. This wasn't Hathsin. The crack wouldn't go down for hours, and there would be no crystal-lined holes to reach through with torn, bleeding arms—stretching, seeking the atium geode hidden within. One geode; that bought one more week of life. Life beneath the taskmasters' lashes. Life beneath the rule of a sadistic god. Life beneath the sun gone red.

*I will change things for the others*, Kelsier thought. *I will make it better!*

The climb was difficult for him, more difficult than he ever would have admitted. Fortunately, the crack soon opened up to a larger cavern beneath, and Kelsier caught a glimpse of light from below. He let himself drop the rest of the way, landing on the uneven stone floor, and smiled at the man who stood waiting.

"Hell of an entryway you've got there, Ham," Kelsier said, dusting off his hands.

Ham smiled. "You should see the bathroom."

Kelsier laughed, moving to make way for the others. Several natural tunnels led off of the chamber, and a small rope ladder hung from the bottom of the rift to facilitate going back up. Yeden and Demoux soon climbed down the ladder into the cavern, their clothing scraped and dirtied from the descent. It wasn't an easy entrance to get through. That, however, was the idea.

"It's good to see you, Kell," Ham said. It was odd to see him in clothing that wasn't missing the sleeves. In fact, his militaristic outfit looked rather formal, with square-cut lines and buttons down the front. "How many have you brought me?"

"Just over two hundred and forty."

Ham raised his eyebrows. "Recruitment has picked up, then?"

"Finally," Kelsier said with a nod. Soldiers began to drop into the cavern, and several of Ham's aides moved forward, helping the newcomers and directing them down a side tunnel.

Yeden moved over to join Kelsier and Ham. "This cavern is amazing, Lord Kelsier! I've never actually been to the caves myself. No wonder the Lord Ruler hasn't found the men down here!"

"The complex is completely secure," Ham said proudly. "There are only three entrances, all of them cracks like this one. With proper supplies, we could hold this place indefinitely against an invading force."

"Plus," Kelsier said,"this isn't the only cave complex beneath these hills. Even if the Lord Ruler were determined to destroy us, his army could spend weeks searching and still not find us."

"Amazing," Yeden said. He turned, eyeing Kelsier. "I was wrong about you, Lord Kelsier. This operation . . . this army . . . well, you've done something impressive here."

Kelsier smiled. "Actually, you were right about me. You believed in me when this started—we're only here because of you."

"I . . . guess I did, didn't I?" Yeden said, smiling.

"Either way," Kelsier said, "I appreciate the vote of confidence. It's probably going to take some time to get all these men down the crack—would you mind directing things here? I'd like to talk to Hammond for a bit."

"Of course, Lord Kelsier." There was respect—even a growing bit of adulation—in his voice.

Kelsier nodded to the side. Ham frowned slightly, picking up a lantern, then followed Kelsier from the first chamber. They entered a side tunnel, and once they were out of earshot, Ham paused, glancing backward.

Kelsier stopped, raising an eyebrow.

Ham nodded back toward the entry chamber. "Yeden certainly has changed."

"I have that effect on people."

"Must be your awe-inspiring humility," Ham said. "I'm serious, Kell. How do you do it? That man practically hated you; now he looks at you like a kid idolizing his big brother."

Kelsier shrugged. "Yeden's never been part of an effective team before—I think he's started to realize that we might actually have a chance. In little over half a year, we've gathered a rebellion larger than he's ever seen. Those kind of results can convert even the stubborn."

Ham didn't look convinced. Finally, he just shrugged, beginning to walk again. "What was it you wanted to talk about?"

"Actually, I'd like to visit the other two entrances, if we could," Kelsier said.

Ham nodded, pointing to a side tunnel and leading the way. The tunnel, like most of the others, hadn't been hollowed by human hands; it was a natural growth of the cave complex. There were hundreds of similar cave systems in the Central Dominance, though most weren't as extensive. And only one—the Pits of Hathsin—grew atium geodes.

"Anyway, Yeden's right," Ham said, twisting his way through a narrow place in the tunnel. "You picked a great place to hide these people."

Kelsier nodded. "Various rebel groups have been using the cavern complexes in these hills for centuries. They're frighteningly close to Luthadel, but the Lord Ruler has never led a successful raid against anyone here. He just ignores the place now—one too many failures, probably."

"I don't doubt it," Ham said. "With all the nooks and bottlenecks down here, this would be a nasty place to have a battle." He stepped out of the passageway, entering another small cavern. This one also had a rift in the ceiling, and faint sunlight trickled down. A squad of ten soldiers stood guard in the room, and they snapped to attention as soon as Ham entered.

Kelsier nodded approvingly. “Ten men at all times?”

“At each of the three entrances,” Ham said.

“Good,” Kelsier said. He walked forward, inspecting the soldiers. He wore his sleeves up, his scars showing, and he could see the men eyeing them. He didn’t really know what to inspect, but he tried to look discriminating. He examined their weapons—staves for eight of the men, swords for two—and dusted off a few shoulders, though none of the men wore uniforms.

Finally, he turned to a soldier who bore an insignia on his shoulder. “Who do you let out of the caverns, soldier?”

“Only men bearing a letter sealed by General Hammond himself, sir!”

“No exceptions?” Kelsier asked.

“No, sir!”

“And if I wanted to leave right now?”

The man paused. “Uh . . .”

“You’d stop me!” Kelsier said. “No one is exempt, soldier. Not me, not your bunkmate, not an officer—no one. If they don’t have that seal, they don’t leave!”

“Yes, sir!” the soldier said.

“Good man,” Kelsier said. “If all of your soldiers are this fine, General, then the Lord Ruler has good reason to be afraid.”

The soldiers puffed up slightly at the words.

“Carry on, men,” Kelsier said, waving for Ham to follow as he left the room.

“That was kind of you,” Ham said softly. “They’ve been anticipating your visit for weeks.”

Kelsier shrugged. “I just wanted to see that they were guarding the crack properly. Now that you have more men, I want you to post guards at any tunnels leading to these exit caverns.”

Ham nodded. “Seems a bit extreme, though.”

“Humor me,” Kelsier said. “A single runaway or malcontent could betray us all to the Lord Ruler. It’s nice that you feel that you could defend this place, but if there’s an army camped outside trapping you in, this army will effectively become useless to us.”

“All right,” Ham said. “You want to see the third entrance?”

“Please,” Kelsier said.

Ham nodded, leading him down another tunnel.

“Oh, one other thing,” Kelsier said after a bit of walking. “Get together groups of a hundred men—all ones you trust—to go tromp around up in the forest. If someone comes looking for us, we won’t be able to hide the fact that lots of people have passed through the area. However, we might be able to muddle the tracks so much that the trails all lead nowhere.”

“Good idea.”

“I’m full of ’em,” Kelsier said as they stepped into another cave chamber, this one far larger than the previous two. It wasn’t an entrance rift, but instead a practice room. Groups of men stood with swords or staves, sparring beneath the eye of uniformed instructors. Uniforms for the officers had been Dockson’s idea. They couldn’t afford to outfit all the men—it would be too expensive, and obtaining that many uniforms would look suspicious. However, maybe seeing their leaders in uniform would help give the men a sense of cohesion.

Ham paused at the edge of the room rather than continuing onward. He eyed the soldiers, speaking softly. “We need to talk about this sometime, Kell. The men are starting to feel like soldiers, but . . . Well, they’re skaa. They’ve spent their lives working in mills or fields. I don’t know how well they’ll do when we actually get them onto a battlefield.”

“If we do everything right, they won’t have to do much fighting,” Kelsier said. “The Pits are only guarded by a couple hundred soldiers—the Lord Ruler can’t have too many men there, lest he hint at the location’s importance. Our thousand men can take the Pits with ease, then retreat as soon as the Garrison arrives. The other nine thousand might have to face a few Great House guard squads and the palace soldiers, but our men should have the upper hand in numbers.”

Ham nodded, though his eyes still seemed uncertain.

“What?” Kelsier asked, leaning against the smooth, crystalline mouth of the cavern juncture.

“And when we’re done with them, Kell?” Ham asked. “Once we have our atium, we give the city—and the army—over to Yeden. Then what?”

“That’s up to Yeden,” Kelsier said.

“They’ll be slaughtered,” Ham said very softly. “Ten thousand men can’t hold Luthadel against the entire Final Empire.”

“I intend to give them a better chance than you think, Ham,” Kelsier said. “If we can turn the nobility against each other and destabilize the government . . .”

"Maybe," Ham said, still not convinced.

"You agreed to the plan, Ham," Kelsier said. "This was what we were intending all along. Raise an army, deliver it to Yeden."

"I know," Ham said, sighing and leaning back against the cavern wall. "I guess . . . Well, it's different, now that I've been leading them. Maybe I'm just not meant to be in charge like this. I'm a bodyguard, not a general."

*I know how you feel, my friend,* Kelsier thought. *I'm a thief, not a prophet. Sometimes, we just have to be what the job requires.*

Kelsier laid a hand on Ham's shoulder. "You did a fine job here."

Ham paused. " 'Did' fine?"

"I brought Yeden to replace you. Dox and I decided it would be better to rotate him in as the army's commander—that way, the troops get used to him as their leader. Besides, we need you back in Luthadel. Someone has to visit the Garrison and gather intelligence, and you're the only one with any military contacts."

"So, I'm going back with you?" Ham asked.

Kelsier nodded.

Ham looked crestfallen for just a moment, then he relaxed, smiling. "I'll finally be able get out of this uniform! But, do you think Yeden can handle it?"

"You said yourself, he's changed a lot during the last few months. And, he really is an excellent administrator—he's done a fine job with the rebellion since my brother left."

"I suppose. . . ."

Kelsier shook his head ruefully. "We're spread thin, Ham. You and Breeze are two of the only men I know I can trust, and I need you back in Luthadel. Yeden's not perfect for the job here, but the army is going to be his, eventually. Might as well let him lead it for a time. Besides, it will give him something to do; he's growing a bit touchy about his place in the crew." Kelsier paused, then smiled in amusement. "I think he's jealous of the attention I pay the others."

Ham smiled. "That *is* a change."

They began to walk again, leaving the practice chamber behind. They entered another twisting stone tunnel, this one leading slightly downward, Ham's lantern providing their only light.

"You know," Ham said after a few minutes of walking, "there's something else nice about this place. You've probably noticed this before, but it certainly is beautiful down here sometimes."

Kelsier hadn't noticed. He glanced to the side as they walked. One edge of the chamber had been formed of dripping minerals from the ceiling, thin stalactites and stalagmites—like dirty icicles—melding together to form a kind of banister. Minerals twinkled in Ham's light, and the path in front of them seemed to be frozen in the form of a tumbling molten river.

*No,* Kelsier thought. *No, I don't see its beauty, Ham.* Other men might see art in the layers of color and melted rock. Kelsier only saw the Pits. Endless caves, most of them going straight down. He'd been forced to wiggle through cracks, plunging downward in the darkness, not even given a light to brighten his way.

Often, he'd considered not climbing back up. But, then he would find a corpse in the caves—the body of another prisoner, a man who had gotten lost, or who had perhaps just given up. Kelsier would feel their bones and promise himself more. Each week, he'd found an atium geode. Each week he'd avoided execution by brutal beating.

Except that last time. He didn't deserve to be alive—he should have been killed. But, Mare had given him an atium geode, promising him that she'd found two that week. It wasn't until after he'd turned it in that he'd discovered her lie. She'd been beaten to death the next day. Beaten to death right in front of him.

That night, Kelsier had Snapped, coming into his powers as a Mistborn. The next night, men had died.

Many men.

*Survivor of Hathsin. A man who shouldn't live. Even after watching her die, I couldn't decide if she'd betrayed me or not. Did she give me that geode out of love? Or did she do it out of guilt?*

No, he couldn't see beauty in the caverns. Other men had been driven mad by the Pits, becoming terrified of small, enclosed spaces. That hadn't happened to Kelsier. However, he knew that no matter what wonders the labyrinths held—no matter how amazing the views or delicate the beauties—he would never acknowledge them. Not with Mare dead.

*I can't think about this anymore,* Kelsier decided, the cavern seeming to grow darker around him. He glanced to the side. "All right, Ham. Go ahead. Tell me what you're thinking about."

"Really?" Ham said eagerly.

"Yes," Kelsier said with a sense of resignation.

"All right," Ham said. "So, here's what I've been worried about lately: Are skaa different from noblemen?"

"Of course they are," Kelsier said. "The aristocracy has the money and the land; the skaa don't have anything."

"I don't mean economics—I'm talking about physical differences.

You know what the obligators say, right?”

Kelsier nodded.

“Well, is it true? I mean, skaa really do have a lot of children, and I’ve heard that aristocrats have trouble reproducing.”

The Balance, it was called. It was supposedly the way that the Lord Ruler ensured that there weren’t too many noblemen for the skaa to support, and the way he made certain that—despite beatings and random killings—there were always enough skaa to grow food and work in mills.

“I’ve always just assumed it to be Ministry rhetoric,” Kelsier said honestly.

“I’ve known skaa women to have as many as a dozen children,” Ham said. “But I can’t name a single major noble family with more than three.”

“It’s just cultural.”

“And the height difference? They say you used to be able to tell skaa and noblemen apart by sight alone. That’s changed, probably through interbreeding, but most skaa are still kind of short.”

“That’s nutritional. Skaa don’t get enough to eat.”

“What about Allomancy?”

Kelsier frowned.

“You have to admit that there’s a physical difference there,” Ham said. “Skaa never become Mistings unless they have aristocratic blood somewhere in their last five generations.”

That much, at least, was true.

“Skaa think differently from noblemen, Kell,” Ham said. “Even these soldiers are kind of timid, and they’re the brave ones! Yeden’s right about the general skaa population—it will never rebel. What if . . . what if there really is something physically different about us? What if the noblemen are *right* to rule over us?”

Kelsier froze in the hallway. “You don’t really mean that.”

Ham stopped as well. “I guess . . . no, I don’t. But I do wonder sometimes. The noblemen have Allomancy, right? Maybe they’re meant to be in charge.”

“Meant by who? The Lord Ruler?”

Ham shrugged.

“No, Ham,” Kelsier said. “It isn’t right. *This* isn’t right. I know it’s hard to see—things have been this way for so long—but something very serious is wrong with the way skaa live. You *have* to believe that.”

Ham paused, then nodded. "Let's go," Kelsier said. "I want to visit that other entrance."

The week passed slowly. Kelsier inspected the troops, the training, the food, the weapons, the supplies, the scouts, the guards, and just about everything else he could think of. More important, he visited the men. He complimented and encouraged them—and he made certain to use Allomancy frequently in front of them.

While many skaa had heard of "Allomancy," very few knew specifically what it could do. Nobleman Mistings rarely used their powers in front of other people, and half-breeds had to be even more careful. Ordinary skaa, even city skaa, didn't know of things like Steelpushing or Pewter-burning. When they saw Kelsier flying through the air or sparring with supernatural strength, they would just attribute it to formless "Allomancy Magics." Kelsier didn't mind the misunderstanding at all.

Despite all of the week's activities, however, he never forgot his conversation with Ham.

*How could he even wonder if skaa are inferior?* Kelsier thought, poking at his meal as he sat at the high table in the central meeting cavern. The massive "room" was large enough to hold the entire army of seven thousand men, though many sat in side chambers or halfway out into tunnels. The high table sat on a raised rock formation at the far end of the chamber.

*I'm probably worrying too much.* Ham was prone to think about things that no sane man would consider; this was just another of his philosophical dilemmas. In fact, he already seemed to have forgotten his earlier concerns. He laughed with Yeden, enjoying his meal.

As for Yeden, the gangly rebel leader looked quite satisfied with his general's uniform, and had spent the week taking very serious notes from Ham regarding the army's operation. He seemed to be falling quite naturally into his duties.

In fact, Kelsier seemed to be the only one who wasn't enjoying the feast. The evening's foods—brought on the barges especially for the occasion—were humble by aristocratic standards, but were much finer than what the soldiers were used to. The men relished the meal with a joyful boisterousness, drinking their small allotment of ale and celebrating the moment.

And still, Kelsier worried. What did these men think they were fighting for? They seemed enthusiastic about their training, but that might have just been due to the regular meals. Did they actually believe that they deserved to overthrow the Final Empire? Did they think that skaa were inferior to noblemen?

Kelsier could sense their reservations. Many of the men realized the impending danger, and only the strict exit rules kept them from fleeing. While they were eager to speak of their training, they avoided talking about their final task—that of seizing the palace and city walls, then holding off the Luthadel Garrison.

*They don't think they can succeed,* Kelsier guessed. *They need confidence. The rumors about me are a start, but . . .*

He nudged Ham, getting the man's attention.

"Are there any men who have given you discipline problems?" Kelsier asked quietly.

Ham frowned at the odd question. "There are a couple, of course. I'd think there are always dissidents in a group this large."

"Anyone in particular?" Kelsier asked. "Men who have wanted to leave? I need someone outspoken in their opposition to what we're doing."

"There are a couple in the brig right now," Ham said.

"Anyone here?" Kelsier asked. "Preferably someone sitting at a table we can see?"

Ham thought for a moment, scanning the crowd. "The man sitting at the second table with the red cloak. He was caught trying to escape a couple weeks ago."

The man in question was scrawny and twitchy; he sat at his table with a hunched, solitary posture.

Kelsier shook his head. "I need someone a bit more charismatic."

Ham rubbed his chin in thought. Then he paused, and nodded toward another table. "Bilg. The big guy sitting at the fourth table over on the right."

"I see him," Kelsier said. Bilg was a brawny man wearing a vest and a full beard.

"He's too clever to be insubordinate," Ham said, "but he's been making trouble quietly. He doesn't think we have a chance against the Final Empire. I'd lock him up, but I can't really punish a man for expressing fear—or, at least, if I did, I'd have to do the same for half the army. Besides, he's too good a warrior to discard idly."

"He's perfect," Kelsier said. He burned zinc, then looked toward Bilg. While zinc wouldn't let him read the man's emotions, it was possible—when burning the metal—to isolate just a single individual for Soothing or Rioting, much as one was able to isolate a single bit of metal from hundreds to Pull on.

Even still, it was difficult to single Bilg out from such a large crowd, so Kelsier just focused on the entire tableful of men, keeping their emotions "in hand" for later use. Then he stood. Slowly, the cavern quieted.

"Men, before I leave, I wish to express one last time how much I was impressed by this visit." His words rang through the room, amplified by the cavern's natural acoustics.

"You are becoming a fine army," Kelsier said. "I apologize for stealing General Hammond, but I leave a very competent man in his place. Many of you know General Yeden—you know of his many years serving as rebellion leader. I have confidence in his ability to train you even further in the ways of soldiers."

He began to Riot Bilg and his companions, enflaming their emotions, counting on the fact that they'd be feeling disagreeable.

"It is a great task I ask of you," Kelsier said, not looking at Bilg. "Those skaa outside of Luthadel—indeed, most skaa everywhere—have no idea what you are about to do for them. They aren't aware of the training you endure or the battles you prepare to fight. However, they will reap the rewards. Someday, they will call you heroes."

He Rioted Bilg's emotions even harder.

"The Garrison of Luthadel is strong," Kelsier said, "but we can defeat it—especially if we take the city walls quickly. Do not forget why you came here. This isn't simply about learning to swing a sword or wear a helm. This is about a revolution such as the world has never seen—it is about taking the government for ourselves, about ousting the Lord Ruler. Do not lose sight of your goal."

Kelsier paused. From the corner of his eye, he could see dark expressions from the men at Bilg's table. Finally, in the silence, Kelsier heard a muttered comment from the table—carried by cavern acoustics to many ears.

Kelsier frowned, turning toward Bilg. The entire cavern seemed to grow even more still. "Did you say something?" Kelsier asked. *Now, the moment of decision. Will he resist, or will he be cowed?*

Bilg looked back. Kelsier hit the man with a flared Riot. His reward came as Bilg stood from his table, face red.

"Yes, *sir*," the brawny man snapped. "I did say something. I said that some of us haven't lost sight of our 'goal.' We think about it every day."

"And why is that?" Kelsier asked. Rumbling whispers began to sound at the back of the cavern as soldiers passed the news to those too far away to hear.

Bilg took a deep breath. "Because, *sir*, we think that this is suicide you're sending us to. The Final Empire's armies are bigger than just one garrison. It won't matter if we take the walls—we'll get slaughtered eventually anyway. You don't overthrow an empire with a couple thousand soldiers."

*Perfect,* Kelsier thought. *I'm sorry, Bilg. But someone needed to say it, and it certainly couldn't be me.*

"I see we have a disagreement," Kelsier said loudly. "*I* believe in these men, and in their purpose."

"I believe that you are a deluded fool," Bilg bellowed. "And I was a bigger fool for coming to these bloody caves. If you're so certain about our chances, then why can't anyone leave? We're trapped here until you send us to die!"

"You insult me," Kelsier snapped. "You know very well why men aren't allowed to leave. Why do you want to go, soldier? Are you that eager to sell out your companions to the Lord Ruler? A few quick boxings in exchange for four thousand lives?"

Bilg's face grew redder. "I would never do such a thing, but I'm certainly not going to let you send me to my death, either! This army is a waste."

"You speak treason," Kelsier said. He turned, scanning the crowd. "It is not fitting for a general to fight a man beneath his command. Is there a soldier here who is willing to defend the honor of this rebellion?"

Immediately, a couple dozen men stood up. Kelsier noticed one in particular. He was smaller than the rest, but he had the simple earnestness that Kelsier had noticed earlier. "Captain Demoux."

Immediately, the young captain jumped forward.

Kelsier reached over, grabbing his own sword and tossing it down to the man. "You can use a sword, lad?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Someone fetch a weapon for Bilg and a pair of studded vests." Kelsier turned toward Bilg. "Noblemen have a tradition. When two men have a dispute, they settle it with a duel. Defeat my champion, and you are free to leave."

"And if he defeats me?" Bilg asked.

"Then you'll be dead," Kelsier said.

"I'm dead if I stay," Bilg said, accepting a sword from a nearby soldier. "I accept the terms."

Kelsier nodded, waving for some men to pull aside tables and make an open space before the high table. Men began to stand, crowding around to watch the contest.

“Kell, what are you doing!” Ham hissed at his side.

“Something that needs to be done.”

“Needs to be . . . Kelsier, that boy is no match for Bilg! I trust Demoux—that’s why I promoted him—but he’s not that great a warrior. Bilg’s one of the finest swordsmen in the army!”

“The men know this?” Kelsier asked.

“Of course,” Ham said. “Call this off. Demoux is nearly half Bilg’s size—he’s at a disadvantage in reach, strength, and skill. He’ll get slaughtered!”

Kelsier ignored the request. He sat quietly as Bilg and Demoux hefted their weapons, a pair of soldiers tying on their leather cuirasses. When they were done, Kelsier waved a hand, motioning for the battle to begin.

Ham groaned.

It would be a short fight. Both men had longswords and little armor. Bilg stepped forward with confidence, making a few testing swings toward Demoux. The boy was at least competent—he blocked the blows, but he revealed a great deal about his abilities as he did so.

Taking a deep breath, Kelsier burned steel and iron.

Bilg swung, and Kelsier nudged the blade to the side, giving Demoux room to escape. The boy tried a thrust, but Bilg easily knocked it away. The larger warrior then attacked with a barrage, sending Demoux stumbling backward. Demoux tried to jump out of the way of the last swing, but he was too slow. The blade fell with awful inevitability.

Kelsier flared iron—stabilizing himself by Pulling against a lantern bracket behind—then grabbed the iron studs on Demoux’s vest. Kelsier Pulled as Demoux jumped, yanking the boy backward in a small arc away from Bilg.

Demoux landed with a maladroit stumble as Bilg’s sword smashed into the stone ground. Bilg looked up with surprise, and a low rumble of amazement moved through the crowd.

Bilg growled, running forward with weapon held high. Demoux blocked the powerful swing, but Bilg knocked the boy’s weapon aside with a careless sweep. Bilg struck again, and Demoux raised a hand in reflexive defense.

Kelsier Pushed, freezing Bilg’s sword in midswing. Demoux stood, hand forward, as if he had stopped the attacking weapon with a thought. The two stood like that for a moment, Bilg trying to force the sword forward, Demoux staring in awe at his hand. Standing up a bit straighter, Demoux tentatively forced his hand forward.

Kelsier Pushed, throwing Bilg backward. The large warrior tumbled to the ground with a cry of surprise. When he rose a moment later, Kelsier didn't have to Riot his emotions to make him angry. He bellowed in rage, grabbing his sword in two hands and rushing toward Demoux.

*Some men don't know when to quit,* Kelsier thought as Bilg swung.

Demoux began to dodge. Kelsier shoved the boy to the side, getting him out of the way. Then Demoux turned, gripping his own weapon in two hands and swinging at Bilg. Kelsier grabbed Demoux's weapon in mid-arc and Pulled against it forcefully, ripping the steel forward with a mighty flare of iron.

The swords smashed together, and Demoux's Kelsier enhanced blow knocked Bilg's weapon out of his hands. There was a loud snap, and the large miscreant fell to the floor—thrown completely off balance by the force of Demoux's blow. Bilg's weapon bounced to the stone floor a distance away.

Demoux stepped forward, raising his weapon over the stunned Bilg. And then, he stopped. Kelsier burned iron, reaching out to grab the weapon and Pull it down, to force the killing blow, but Demoux resisted.

Kelsier paused. *This man should die,* he thought angrily. On the ground, Bilg groaned quietly. Kelsier could just barely see his twisted arm, its bone shattered by the powerful strike. It was bleeding.

*No,* Kelsier thought. *This is enough.*

He released Demoux's weapon. Demoux lowered his sword, staring down at Bilg. Then, Demoux raised his hands, regarding them with wonder, his arms quivering slightly.

Kelsier stood, and the crowd fell to a hush once again.

"Do you think I would send you against the Lord Ruler unprepared?" Kelsier demanded in a loud voice. "Do you think I would just send you off to die? You fight for what is just, men! You fight for *me*. I will not leave you unaided when you go against the soldiers of the Final Empire."

Kelsier thrust his hand into the air, holding aloft a tiny bar of metal. "You've heard of this, haven't you? You know the rumors of the Eleventh Metal? Well, I have it—and I will use it. The Lord Ruler will die!"

The men began to cheer.

"This is not our only tool!" Kelsier bellowed. "You soldiers have power untold inside of you! You have heard of the arcane magics that the Lord Ruler uses? Well, we have some of our own! Feast, my soldiers, and don't fear the battle to come. Look forward to it!"

The room erupted in a riot of cheers, and Kelsier waved for more ale to be delivered. A couple of servants rushed forward to help Bilg from the room.

When Kelsier sat, Ham was frowning deeply. "I don't like this, Kell," he said.

"I know," Kelsier said quietly.

Ham was about to speak further, but Yeden leaned across him. "That was amazing! I . . . Kelsier, I didn't know! You should have told me you could pass your powers to others. Why, with these abilities, how can we possibly lose?"

Ham laid a hand on Yeden's shoulder, pushing the man back into his seat. "Eat," he ordered. Then, he turned to Kelsier, pulling his chair closer and speaking in a low voice. "You just lied to my entire army, Kell."

"No, Ham," Kelsier said quietly. "I lied to *my* army."

Ham paused. Then his face darkened.

Kelsier sighed. "It was only a partial lie. They don't need to be warriors, they just have to look threatening long enough for us to grab the atium. With it, we can bribe the Garrison, and our men won't even have to fight. That's virtually the same thing as what I promised them."

Ham didn't respond.

"Before we leave," Kelsier said, "I want you to select a few dozen of our most trustworthy and devoted soldiers. We'll send them back to Luthadel—with vows that they can't reveal where the army is—so that word of this evening can spread amongst the skaa."

"So this is about your ego?" Ham snapped.

Kelsier shook his head. "Sometimes we need to do things that we find distasteful, Ham. My ego may be considerable, but this is about something else entirely."

Ham sat for a moment, then turned back to his meal. He didn't eat, however—he just sat staring at the blood on the ground before the high table.

*Ah, Ham,* Kelsier thought. *I wish I could explain everything to you.*

Plots behind plots, plans beyond plans.

There was always another secret.

*At first, there were those who didn't think the Deepness was a serious danger, at least not to them. However, it brought with it a blight that I have seen infect nearly every part of the land. Armies are useless before it. Great cities are laid low by its power. Crops fail, and the land dies.*

*This is the thing I fight. This is the monster I must defeat. I fear that I have taken too long. Already, so much destruction has occurred that I fear for mankind's survival.*

*Is this truly the end of the world, as many of the philosophers predict?*

# 22

> We arrived in Terris earlier this week, *Vin read,* and, I have to say, I find the countryside beautiful. The great mountains to the north—with their bald snowcaps and forested mantles—stand like watchful gods over this land of green fertility. My own lands to the south are mostly flat; I think that they might look less dreary if there were a few mountains to vary the terrain.
>
> The people here are mostly herdsmen—though timber harvesters and farmers are not uncommon. It is a pastoral land, certainly. It seems odd that a place so remarkably agrarian could have produced the prophecies and theologies upon which the entire world now relies.
>
> We picked up a group of Terris packmen to guide us through the difficult mountain passages. Yet, these are no ordinary men. The stories are apparently true—some Terrismen have a remarkable ability that is most intriguing.
>
> Somehow, they can store up their strength for use on the next day. Before they sleep at night, they spend an hour lying in their bedrolls, during which time they suddenly grow very frail in appearance—almost as if they had aged by half a century. Yet, when they wake the next morning, they become quite muscular. Apparently, their powers have something to do with the metal bracelets and earrings that they always wear.
>
> The leader of the packmen is named Rashek, and he is rather taciturn. Nevertheless, Braches—inquisitive, as always—has promised to interrogate him in the hopes of discovering exactly how this wondrous strength-storing is achieved.
>
> Tomorrow, we begin the final stage of our pilgrimage—the Far Mountains of Terris. There, hopefully, I will find peace—both for myself, and for our poor land.

AS SHE READ HER COPY of the logbook, Vin was quickly coming to several decisions. First was the firm belief that she did *not* like reading. Sazed didn't listen to her complaints; he just claimed that she hadn't practiced enough. Couldn't he see that reading was hardly as practical a skill as being able to handle a dagger or use Allomancy?

Still, she continued to read as per his orders—if only to stubbornly prove that she could. Many of the logbook's words were difficult to her, and she had to read in a secluded part of Renoux's mansion where she could sound out the words to herself, trying to decipher the

Lord Ruler's odd style of writing.

The continued reading led to her second conclusion: The Lord Ruler was far more whiny than any god had a right to be. When pages of the logbook weren't filled with boring notes about the Lord Ruler's travels, they were instead packed with internal contemplations and lengthy moralistic ramblings. Vin was beginning to wish that she'd never found the book in the first place.

She sighed, settling back into her wicker chair. A cool early-spring breeze blew through the lower gardens, passing over the petite fountain brook to her left. The air was comfortably moist, and the trees overhead shaded her from the afternoon sun. Being nobility—even fake nobility—certainly did have its perks.

A quiet footfall sounded behind her. It was distant, but Vin had grown into the habit of burning a little bit of tin at all times. She turned, shooting a covert glance over her shoulder.

"Spook?" she said with surprise as young Lestibournes walked down the garden path. "What are you doing here?"

Spook froze, blushing. "Wasing with the Dox to come and be without the stay."

"Dockson?" Vin said. "He's here too?" *Maybe he has news of Kelsier!*

Spook nodded, approaching. "Weapons for the getting, giving for the time to be."

Vin paused. "You lost me on that one."

"We needed the drop off some more weapons," Spook said, struggling to speak without his dialect. "Storing them here for a while."

"Ah," Vin said, rising and brushing off her dress. "I should go see him."

Spook looked suddenly apprehensive, flushing again, and Vin cocked her head. "Was there something else?"

With a sudden movement, Spook reached into his vest and pulled something out. Vin flared pewter in response, but the item was simply a pink-and-white handkerchief. Spook thrust it toward her.

Vin took it hesitantly. "What's this for?"

Spook flushed again, then turned and dashed away.

Vin watched him go, dumbfounded. She looked down at the handkerchief. It was made of soft lace, but there didn't seem to be anything unusual about it.

*That is one strange boy,* she thought, tucking the handkerchief inside her sleeve. She picked up her copy of the logbook, then began to work her way up the garden path. She was growing so accustomed to wearing a dress that she barely had to pay attention to keep the gown's lower layers from brushing against underbrush or stones.

*I guess that in itself is a valuable skill,* Vin thought as she reached the mansion's garden entrance without having snagged her dress on a single branch. She pushed open the many-paned glass door and stopped the first servant she saw.

"Master Delton has arrived?" she asked, using Dockson's fake name. He played the part of one of Renoux's merchant contacts inside Luthadel.

"Yes, my lady," the servant said. "He's in conference with Lord Renoux."

Vin let the servant go. She could probably force her way into the conference, but it would look bad. Lady Valette had no reason to attend a mercantile meeting between Renoux and Delton.

Vin chewed her lower lip in thought. Sazed was always telling her she had to keep up appearances. *Fine,* she thought. *I'll wait. Maybe Sazed can tell me what that crazy boy expects me to do with this handkerchief.*

She sought out the upper library, maintaining a pleasant ladylike smile, inwardly trying to guess what Renoux and Dockson were talking about. Dropping off the weapons was an excuse; Dockson wouldn't have come personally to do something so mundane. Perhaps Kelsier had been delayed. Or, maybe Dockson had finally gotten a communication from Marsh—Kelsier's brother, along with the other new obligator initiates, should be arriving back in Luthadel soon.

*Dockson and Renoux could have sent for me,* she thought with annoyance. Valette often entertained guests with her uncle.

She shook her head. Even though Kelsier had named her a full member of the crew, the others obviously still regarded her as something of a child. They were friendly and accepting, but they didn't think to include her. It was probably unintentional, but that didn't make it any less frustrating.

Light shone from the library ahead. Sure enough, Sazed sat inside, translating the last group of pages from the logbook. He looked up as Vin entered, smiling and nodding respectfully.

*No spectacles this time either,* Vin noted. *Why did he wear them for that short time before?*

"Mistress Vin," he said, rising and fetching her a chair. "How are your studies of the logbook going?"

Vin looked down at the loosely bound pages in her hand. "All right, I suppose. I don't see why I have to bother reading them—you gave copies to Kell and Breeze too, didn't you?"

"Of course," Sazed said, setting the chair down beside his desk. "However, Master Kelsier asked every member of the crew to read the pages. He is correct to do so, I think. The more eyes that read those words, the more likely we will be to discover the secrets hidden within them."

Vin sighed slightly, smoothing her dress and seating herself. The white and blue dress was beautiful—though intended for daily use, it was only slightly less luxurious than one of her ball gowns.

"You must admit, Mistress," Sazed said as he sat, "the text is amazing. This work is a Keeper's dream. Why, I'm discovering things about my culture that even I did not know!"

Vin nodded. "I just got to the part where they reach Terris." *Hopefully, the next part will contain fewer supply lists. Honestly, for an evil god of darkness, he certainly can be dull.*

"Yes, yes," Sazed said, speaking with uncharacteristic enthusiasm. "Did you see what he said, how he described Terris as a place of 'green fertility'? Keeper legends speak of this. Terris is now a tundra of frozen dirt—why, almost no plants can survive there. But, once it was green and beautiful, like the text says."

*Green and beautiful,* Vin thought. *Why would green be beautiful? That would be like having blue or purple plants—it would just be weird.*

However, there was something about the logbook that made her curious—something that both Sazed and Kelsier had been strangely closemouthed about. "I just read the part where the Lord Ruler gets some Terris packmen," Vin said carefully. "He talked about how they grow stronger during the day because they let themselves be weak at night."

Sazed suddenly grew more subdued. "Yes, indeed."

"You know something about this? Does it have to do with being a Keeper?"

"It does," Sazed said. "But, this should remain a secret, I think. Not that you aren't worthy of trust, Mistress Vin. However, if fewer people know about Keepers, then fewer rumors will be told of us. It would be best if the Lord Ruler began to believe that he had destroyed us completely, as has been his goal for the last thousand years."

Vin shrugged. "Fine. Hopefully, none of the secrets Kelsier wants us to discover in this text are related to the Terrisman powers—if they are, I'll miss them completely."

Sazed paused.

"Ah, well," Vin said nonchalantly, flipping through the pages she hadn't read. "Looks like he spends a lot of time talking about the Terrismen. Guess I won't be able to give much input when Kelsier gets back."

"You make a good point," Sazed said slowly. "Even if you make it a bit melodramatically."

Vin smiled pertly.

"Very well," Sazed said with a sigh. "We should not have let you spend so much time with Master Breeze, I think."

"The men in the logbook," Vin said. "They're Keepers?"

Sazed nodded. "What we now call Keepers were far more common back then—perhaps even more common than Mistings are among modern nobility. Our art is called 'Feruchemy,' and it grants the ability to store certain physical attributes inside bits of metal."

Vin frowned. "You burn metals too?"

"No, Mistress," Sazed said with a shake of his head. "Feruchemists aren't like Allomancers—we don't 'burn' away our metals. We use them as storage. Each piece of metal, dependent upon size and alloy, can store a certain physical quality. The Feruchemist saves up an attribute, then draws upon that reserve at a later time."

"Attribute?" Vin asked. "Like strength?"

Sazed nodded. "In the text, the Terris packmen make themselves weaker during the evening, storing up strength in their bracelets for use on the next day."

Vin studied Sazed's face. "That's why you wear so many earrings!"

"Yes, Mistress," he said, reaching over to pull up his sleeves. Underneath his robe, he wore thick iron bracers around his upper arms. "I keep some of my reserves hidden—but wearing many rings, earrings, and other items of jewelry has always been a part of Terris culture. The Lord Ruler once tried to enforce a ban upon Terrismen touching or owning any metal—in fact, he tried to make wearing metal a noble privilege, rather than a skaa one."

Vin frowned. "That's odd," she said. "One would think that the nobility *wouldn't* want to wear metal, because that would make them vulnerable to Allomancy."

"Indeed," Sazed said. "However, it has long been imperial fashion to accent one's wardrobe with metal. It began, I suspect, with the Lord Ruler's desire to deny the Terrismen the right to touch metal. He himself began wearing metal rings and bracelets, and the nobility always follows him in fashion. Nowadays, the most wealthy often wear metal as a symbol of power and pride."

"Sounds foolish," Vin said.

"Fashion often is, Mistress," Sazed said. "Regardless, the ploy failed—many of the nobility only wear wood painted to look like metal, and the Terris managed to weather the Lord Ruler's discontent in this area. It was simply too impractical to never let stewards handle metal. That hasn't stopped the Lord Ruler from trying to exterminate the Keepers, however."

"He fears you."

"And hates us. Not just Feruchemists, but all Terrismen." Sazed laid a hand on the still untranslated portion of the text. "I hope to find that secret in here as well. No one remembers why the Lord Ruler persecutes the Terris people, but I suspect that it has something to do with those packmen—their leader, Rashek, appears to be a very contrary man. The Lord Ruler often speaks of him in the narrative."

"He mentioned religion," Vin said. "The Terris religion. Something about prophecies?"

Sazed shook his head. "I cannot answer that question, Mistress, for I don't know any more of the Terris religion than you do."

"But, you collect religions," Vin said. "You don't know about your own?"

"I do not," Sazed said solemnly. "You see, Mistress, this was why the Keepers were formed. Centuries ago, my people hid away the last few Terris Feruchemists. The Lord Ruler's purges of the Terris people were growing quite violent—this was before he began the breeding program. Back then, we weren't stewards or servants—we weren't even skaa. We were something to be destroyed.

"Yet, something kept the Lord Ruler from wiping us out completely. I don't know why—perhaps he thought genocide too kind a punishment. Anyway, he successfully destroyed our religion during the first two centuries of his rule. The organization of Keepers was formed during the next century, its members intent upon discovering that which had been lost, then remembering for the future."

"With Feruchemy?"

Sazed nodded, rubbing his fingers across the bracer on his right arm. "This one is made of copper; it allows for the storage of memories and thoughts. Each Keeper carries several bracers like this, filled with knowledge—songs, stories, prayers, histories, and languages. Many Keepers have a particular area of interest—mine is religion—but we all remember the entire collection. If just one of us survives until the death of the Lord Ruler, then the world's people will be able to recover all that they have lost."

He paused, then pulled down his sleeve. "Well, not *all* that was lost. There are still things we are missing."

"Your own religion," Vin said quietly. "You never found it, did you?"

Sazed shook his head. "The Lord Ruler implies in this logbook that it was our prophets that led him to the Well of Ascension, but even this is new information for us. What did we believe? What, or whom, did we worship? Where did these Terris prophets come from, and how did they predict the future?"

"I'm . . . sorry."

"We continue to look, Mistress. We will find our answers eventually, I think. Even if we do not, we will still have provided an invaluable service for mankind. Other people call us docile and servile, but we have fought him, in our own way."

Vin nodded. "So, what other things can you store? Strength and memories. Anything else?"

Sazed eyed her. "I have said too much already, I think. You understand the mechanics of what we do—if the Lord Ruler mentions these things in his text, you will not be confused."

"Sight," Vin said, perking up. "That's why you wore glasses for a few weeks after you rescued me. You needed to be able to see better that night when you saved me, so you used up your storage. Then you spent a few weeks with weak vision so that you could refill it."

Sazed didn't respond to the comment. He picked up his pen, obviously intending to turn back to his translation. "Was there anything else, Mistress?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact," Vin said, pulling the handkerchief from her sleeve. "Do you have any idea what this is?"

"It appears to be a handkerchief, Mistress."

Vin raised a droll eyebrow. "Very funny. You've spent far too long around Kelsier, Sazed."

"I know," he said with a quiet sigh. "He has corrupted me, I think. Regardless, I do not understand your question. What is distinctive about that particular handkerchief?"

"That's what *I* want to know," Vin said. "Spook gave it to me just a little bit ago."

"Ah. That makes sense, then."

"What?" Vin demanded.

"In noble society, Mistress, a handkerchief is the traditional gift a young man gives a lady that he wishes to seriously court."

Vin paused, regarding the handkerchief with shock. "*What?* Is that boy crazy?"

"Most young men his age are somewhat crazy, I think," Sazed said with a smile. "However, this is hardly unexpected. Haven't you noticed how he stares at you when you enter the room?"

"I just thought he was creepy. What is he thinking? He's so much younger than me."

"The boy is fifteen, Mistress. That only makes him one year your junior."

"Two," Vin said. "I turned seventeen last week."

"Still, he isn't really that much younger than you."

Vin rolled her eyes. "I don't have time for his attentions."

"One would think, Mistress, that you would appreciate the opportunities you have. Not everyone is so fortunate."

Vin paused. *He's a eunuch, you fool.* "Sazed, I'm sorry. I . . ."

Sazed waved a hand. "It is something I have never known enough of to miss, Mistress. Perhaps I am fortunate—a life in the underground does not make it easy to raise a family. Why, poor Master Hammond has been away from his wife for months."

"Ham's *married?*"

"Of course," Sazed said. "So is Master Yeden, I believe. They protect their families by separating them from underground activities, but this necessitates spending large periods of time apart."

"Who else?" Vin asked. "Breeze? Dockson?"

"Master Breeze is a bit too . . . self-motivated for a family, I think. Master Dockson hasn't spoken of his romantic life, but I suspect that there is something painful in his past. That is not uncommon for plantation skaa, as you might expect."

"Dockson is from a plantation?" Vin asked with surprise.

"Of course. Don't you ever spend time talking with your friends, Mistress?"

*Friends. I have friends.* It was an odd realization.

"Anyway," Sazed said, "I should continue my work. I am sorry to be so dismissive, but I am nearly finished with the translation. . . ."

"Of course," Vin said, standing and smoothing her dress. "Thank you."

She found Dockson sitting in the guest study, writing quietly on a piece of paper, a pile of documents organized neatly on the desktop. He wore a standard nobleman's suit, and always looked more comfortable in the clothing than the others did. Kelsier was dashing, Breeze immaculate and lavish, but Dockson . . . he simply looked natural in the outfit.

He looked up as she entered. “Vin? I’m sorry—I should have sent for you. For some reason I assumed you were out.”

“I often am, these days,” she said, closing the door behind her. “I stayed home today; listening to noblewomen prattle over their lunches can get a bit annoying.”

“I can imagine,” Dockson said, smiling. “Have a seat.”

Vin nodded, strolling into the room. It was a quiet place, decorated in warm colors and deep woods. It was still somewhat light outside, but Dockson already had the evening drapes drawn and was working by candlelight.

“Any news from Kelsier?” Vin asked as she sat.

“No,” Dockson said, setting aside his document. “But that’s not unexpected. He wasn’t going to stay at the caves for long, so sending a messenger back would have been a bit silly—as an Allomancer, he might even be able to get back before a man on horseback. Either way, I suspect he’ll be a few days late. This is Kell we’re talking about, after all.”

Vin nodded, then sat quietly for a moment. She hadn’t spent as much time with Dockson as she had with Kelsier and Sazed—or even Ham and Breeze. He seemed like a kind man, however. Very stable, and very clever. While most of the others contributed some kind of Allomantic power to the crew, Dockson was valuable because of his simple ability to organize.

When something needed to be purchased—such as Vin’s dresses—Dockson saw that it got done. When a building needed to be rented, supplies procured, or a permit secured, Dockson made it happen. He wasn’t out front, scamming noblemen, fighting in the mists, or recruiting soldiers. Without him, however, Vin suspected that the entire crew would fall apart.

*He’s a nice man,* she told herself. *He won’t mind if I ask him.* “Dox, what was it like living on a plantation?”

“Hmm? The plantation?”

Vin nodded. “You grew up on one, right? You’re a plantation skaa?”

“Yes,” Dockson said. “Or, at least, I was. What was it like? I’m not sure how to answer, Vin. It was a hard life, but most skaa live hard lives. I wasn’t allowed to leave the plantation—or even go outside of the hovel community—without permission. We ate more regularly than a lot of the street skaa, but we were worked as hard as any millworker. Perhaps more.

“The plantations are different from the cities. Out there, every lord is his own master. Technically, the Lord Ruler owns the skaa, but the noblemen rent them, and are allowed to kill as many as they want. Each lord just has to make certain that his crops come in."

"You seem so . . . unemotional about it," Vin said.

Dockson shrugged. "It's been a while since I lived there, Vin. I don't know that the plantation was overly traumatic. It was just life—we didn't know anything better. In fact, I now know that amongst plantation lords, mine was actually rather lenient."

"Why did you leave, then?"

Dockson paused. "An event," he said his voice growing almost wistful. "You know that the law says that a lord can bed any skaa woman that he wishes?"

Vin nodded. "He just has to kill her when he's done."

"Or soon thereafter," Dockson said. "Quickly enough that she can't birth any half-breed children."

"The lord took a woman you loved, then?"

Dockson nodded. "I don't talk about it much. Not because I can't, but because I think it would be pointless. I'm not the only skaa to lose a loved one to a lord's passion, or even to a lord's indifference. In fact, I'll bet you'd have trouble finding a skaa who *hasn't* had someone they love murdered by the aristocracy. That's just . . . the way it is."

"Who was she?" Vin asked.

"A girl from the plantation. Like I said, my story isn't that original. I remember . . . sneaking between the hovels at night to spend time with her. The entire community played along, hiding us from the taskmasters—I wasn't supposed to be out after dark, you see. I braved the mists for the first time for her, and while many thought me foolish to go out at night, others got over their superstition and encouraged me. I think the romance inspired them; Kareien and I reminded everyone that there was something to live for.

"When Kareien was taken by Lord Devinshae—her corpse returned the next morning for burial—something just . . . died in the skaa hovels. I left that next evening. I didn't know there was a better life, but I just couldn't stay, not with Kareien's family there, not with Lord Devinshae watching us work. . . ."

Dockson sighed, shaking his head. Vin could finally see some emotion in his face. "You know," he said, "it amazes me sometimes that we even try. With everything they've done to us—the deaths, the tortures, the agonies—you'd think that we would just give up on things like hope and love. But we don't. Skaa still fall in love. They still try to have families, and they still struggle. I mean, here we are . .

. fighting Kell's insane little war, resisting a god we know is just going to slaughter us all."

Vin sat quietly, trying to comprehend the horror of what he described. "I . . . thought you said that your lord was a kind one."

"Oh, he was," Dockson said. "Lord Devinshae rarely beat his skaa to death, and he only purged the elderly when the population got completely out of control. He has an impeccable reputation among the nobility. You've probably seen him at some of the balls—he's been in Luthadel lately, over the winter, between planting seasons."

Vin felt cold. "Dockson, that's horrible! How could they let a monster like that among them?"

Dockson frowned, then he leaned forward slightly, resting his arms on the desktop. "Vin, they're *all* like that."

"I know that's what some of the skaa say, Dox," Vin said. "But, the people at the balls, they aren't like that. I've met them, danced with them. Dox, a lot of them are good people. I don't think they realize how terrible things are for the skaa."

Dockson looked at her with a strange expression. "Am I really hearing this from you, Vin? Why do you think we're fighting against them? Don't you realize the things those people—all of those people—are capable of?"

"Cruelty, perhaps," Vin said. "And indifference. But they aren't monsters, not all of them—not like your former plantation lord."

Dockson shook his head. "You just aren't seeing well enough, Vin. A nobleman can rape and murder a skaa woman one night, then be praised for his morality and virtue the next day. Skaa just aren't people to them. Noblewomen don't even consider it cheating when their lord sleeps with a skaa woman."

"I . . ." Vin trailed off, growing uncertain. This was the one area of noble culture she hadn't wanted to confront. Beatings, she could perhaps forgive, but this . . .

Dockson shook his head. "You're letting them dupe you, Vin. Things like this are less visible in the cities because of whorehouses, but the murders still happen. Some brothels use women of very poor—but noble—birth. Most, however, just kill off their skaa whores periodically to keep the Inquisitors placated."

Vin felt a little weak. "I . . . know about the brothels, Dox. My brother always threatened to sell me to one. But, just because brothels exist doesn't mean that all the men go to them. There are lots of workers who don't visit the skaa whorehouses."

"Noblemen are different, Vin," Dockson said sternly. "They're horrible creatures. Why do you think I don't complain when Kelsier kills them? Why do you think I'm working with him to overthrow their government? You should ask some of those pretty boys you dance with how often they've slept with a skaa woman they knew would be killed a short time later. They've all done it, at one point or another."

Vin looked down.

"They can't be redeemed, Vin," Dockson said. He didn't seem as passionate about the topic as Kelsier, he just seemed . . . resigned. "I don't think that Kell will be happy until they're all dead. I doubt we have to go that far—or even that we can—but I, for one, would be more than happy to see their society collapse."

Vin sat quietly. *They can't* all *be like that,* she thought. *They're so beautiful, so distinguished. Elend has never taken and murdered a skaa woman . . . has he?*

*I sleep but a few hours each night. We must press forward, traveling as much as we can each day—but when I finally lie down, I find sleep elusive. The same thoughts that trouble me during the day are only compounded by the stillness of night.*

*And, above it all, I hear the thumping sounds from above, the pulsings from the mountains. Drawing me closer with each beat.*

# 23

“They say that the deaths of the Geffenry brothers were a retaliation for the murder of Lord Entrone,” Lady Kliss said quietly. Behind Vin’s group, the musicians played upon their stage, but the evening was growing late, and few people danced.

Lady Kliss’s circle of partygoers frowned at the news. There were about six of them, including Vin and her companion—one Milen Davenpleu, a young heir to a minor house title.

“Kliss, really,” Milen said. “Houses Geffenry and Tekiel are allies. Why would Tekiel assassinate two Geffenry noblemen?”

“Why indeed?” Kliss said, leaning forward conspiratorially, her massive blond bun wobbling slightly. Kliss had never displayed much fashion sense. She was an excellent source of gossip, however.

“You remember when Lord Entrone was found dead in the Tekiel gardens?” Kliss asked. “Well, it *seemed* obvious that one of House Tekiel’s enemies had killed him. But, House Geffenry has been petitioning Tekiel for an alliance—apparently, a faction within the house thought that if something happened to enflame the Tekiels, they would be more willing to seek allies.”

“You’re saying that Geffenry *purposely* killed a Tekiel ally?” asked Rene, Kliss’s date. He scrunched up his ample brow in thought.

Kliss patted Rene’s arm. “Don’t worry about it too much, dear,” she advised, then turned eagerly back to the conversation. “Don’t you see? By secretly killing Lord Entrone, Geffenry hoped to get the allegiance it needs. *That* would give it access to those Tekiel canal routes through the eastern plains.”

“But it backfired,” Milen said thoughtfully. “Tekiel discovered the ruse, and killed Ardous and Callins.”

“I danced with Ardous a couple of times at the last ball,” Vin said.

*Now he's dead, his corpse left on the streets outside a skaa slum.*

"Oh?" Milen asked. "Was he any good?"

Vin shrugged. "Not very." *That's all you can ask, Milen? A man is dead, and you just want to know if I liked him more than you?*

"Well, now he's dancing with the worms," said Tyden, the final man in the group.

Milen gave the quip a pity laugh, which was more than it deserved. Tyden's attempts at humor generally left something to be desired. He seemed like the type who would have been more at home with the ruffians of Camon's crew than the noblemen of the dance hall.

*Of course, Dox says they're all like that, underneath.*

Vin's conversation with Dockson still dominated her thoughts. When she'd started coming to the noblemen's balls back on that first night—the night she'd nearly been killed—she'd thought about how fake everything seemed. How had she forgotten that original impression? How had she let herself get taken in, to begin admiring their poise and their splendor?

Now, every nobleman's arm around her waist made her cringe—as if she could feel the rot within their hearts. How many skaa had Milen killed? What about Tyden? He seemed like the type who would enjoy a night with the whores.

But, still she played along. She had finally worn her black gown this evening, somehow feeling the need to set herself apart from the other women with their bright colors and often brighter smiles. However, she couldn't avoid the others' company; Vin had finally begun to gain the confidences her crew needed. Kelsier would be delighted to know that his plan for House Tekiel was working, and that wasn't the only thing she had been able to discover. She had dozens of little tidbits that would be of vital use to the crew's efforts.

One such tidbit was about House Venture. The family was bunkering up for what it expected to be an extended house war; one evidence of this was the fact that Elend attended far fewer balls than he once had. Not that Vin minded. When he did come, he generally avoided her, and she didn't really want to talk to him anyway. Memories of what Dockson had said made her think that she might have trouble remaining civil toward Elend.

"Milen?" Lord Rene asked. "Are you still planning on joining us for a game of shelldry tomorrow?"

"Of course, Rene," Milen said.

"Didn't you promise that last time?" Tyden asked.

"I'll be there," Milen said. "Something came up last time."

"And it won't come up again?" Tyden asked. "You know we can't play unless we have a fourth man. If you're not going to be there, we could ask someone else. . . ."

Milen sighed, then held up a hand, sharply gesturing to the side. The motion caught Vin's attention—she had only been half listening to the conversation. She looked to the side, and nearly jumped in shock as she saw an obligator approaching the group.

So far she'd managed to avoid obligators at the balls. After her first run-in with a high prelan, some months ago—and the subsequent alerting of an Inquisitor—she'd been apprehensive to even go near one.

The obligator approached, smiling in a creepy sort of way. Perhaps it was the arms clasped before him, hands hidden inside the gray sleeves. Perhaps it was the tattoos around the eyes, wrinkled with the aging skin. Perhaps it was the way his eyes regarded her; it seemed like they could see through her guise. This wasn't just a nobleman, this was an *obligator*—eyes of the Lord Ruler, enforcer of His law.

The obligator stopped at the group. His tattoos marked him as a member of the Canton of Orthodoxy, the primary bureaucratic arm of the Ministry. He eyed the group, speaking in a smooth voice. "Yes?"

Milen pulled out a few coins. "I promise to meet these two for shelldry tomorrow," he said, handing the coins to the aging obligator.

It seemed like such a silly reason to call over an obligator—or, at least, so Vin thought. The obligator, however, didn't laugh or point out the frivolity of the demand. He simply smiled, palming the coins as deftly as any thief. "I witness this, Lord Milen," he said.

"Satisfied?" Milen asked of the other two.

They nodded.

The obligator turned, not giving Vin a second glance, and strolled away. She released a quiet breath, watching his shuffing form.

*They must know everything that happens in court,* she realized. *If nobility call them over to witness things this simple* . . . The more she knew about the Ministry, the more she realized how clever the Lord Ruler had been in organizing them. They witnessed every mercantile contract; Dockson and Renoux had to deal with obligators nearly every day. Only they could authorize weddings, divorces, land purchases, or ratify inheritance of titles. If an obligator hadn't witnessed an event, it hadn't happened, and if one hadn't sealed a document, then it might as well not have been written.

Vin shook her head as the conversation turned to other topics. It had been a long night, and her mind was full of information to scribble down on her way back to Fellise.

"Excuse me, Lord Milen," she said, laying a hand on his arm—though touching him made her shiver slightly. "I think perhaps it is time for me to retire."

"I'll walk you to your carriage," he said.

"That won't be necessary," she said sweetly. "I want to refresh myself, and then I have to wait for my Terrisman anyway. I'll just go sit down at our table."

"Very well," he said, nodding respectfully.

"Go if you must, Valette," Kliss said. "But you'll never know the news I have about the Ministry. . . ."

Vin paused. "What news?"

Kliss's eyes twinkled, and she glanced at the disappearing obligator. "The Inquisitors are buzzing like insects. They've hit *twice* as many skaa thieving bands these last few months as usual. They don't even take prisoners for executions—they just leave them all dead."

"How do you know this?" Milen asked skeptically. He seemed so straight-backed and noble. You would never know what he really was.

"I have my sources," Kliss said with a smile. "Why, the Inquisitors found another band just this afternoon. One headquartered not far from here."

Vin felt a chill. They weren't *that* far from Clubs's shop. . . . *No, it couldn't be them. Dockson and the rest are too clever. Even without Kelsier in town, they'll be safe.*

"Cursed thieves," Tyden spat. "Damn skaa don't know their place. Isn't the food and clothing we give enough of a theft from our pockets?"

"It's amazing the creatures can even survive as thieves," said Carlee, Tyden's young wife, in her normal purring voice. "I can't imagine what kind of incompetent would let himself get robbed by skaa."

Tyden flushed, and Vin eyed him with curiosity. Carlee rarely spoke except to make some jab against her husband.

*He must have been robbed himself. A scam, perhaps?*

Filing away the information for later investigation, Vin turned to go—a motion that put her face-to-face with a newcomer to the group: Shan Elariel.

Elend's former betrothed was immaculate, as always. Her long auburn hair had an almost luminous sheen, and her beautiful figure only reminded Vin how scrawny she herself was. Self-important in a way that could make even a confident person uncertain, Shan was—as Vin was beginning to realize—exactly what most of the aristocracy thought was the perfect woman.

The men in Vin's group nodded their heads in respect, and the women curtsied, honored to have their conversation joined by one so important. Vin glanced to the side, trying to escape, but Shan was standing right before her.

Shan smiled. "Ah, Lord Milen," she said to Vin's companion, "it's a pity that your original date this evening took sick. It appears you were left with few other options."

Milen flushed, Shan's comment expertly placing him in a difficult position. Did he defend Vin, possibly earning the ire of a very powerful woman? Or, did he instead agree with Shan, thereby insulting his date?

He took the coward's way out: He ignored the comment. "Lady Shan, it is a pleasure to have you join us."

"Indeed," Shan said smoothly, eyes glittering with pleasure as she regarded Vin's discomfort.

*Cursed woman!* Vin thought. It seemed that whenever Shan grew bored, she would seek out Vin and embarrass her for sport.

"However," Shan said, "I am afraid I didn't come to chat. Unpleasant though it may be, I have business with the Renoux child. Will you excuse us?"

"Of course, my lady," Milen said, backing away. "Lady Valette, thank you for your company this evening."

Vin nodded to him and the others, feeling a little like a wounded animal being abandoned by the herd. She *really* didn't want to deal with Shan this evening.

"Lady Shan," Vin said once they were alone. "I think your interest in me is unfounded. I haven't really been spending much time with Elend lately."

"I know," Shan said. "It appears I overestimated your competence, child. One would think that once you'd gained favor with a man so much more important than yourself, you wouldn't have let him slip away so easily."

*Shouldn't she be jealous?* Vin thought, suppressing a cringe as she felt the inevitable touch of Shan's Allomancy on her emotions. *Shouldn't she hate me for taking her place?*

But, that wasn't the noble way. Vin was nothing—a momentary diversion. Shan wasn't interested in recapturing Elend's affection; she just wanted a way to strike back at the man who had slighted her.

"A wise girl would put herself in a position where she could make use of the only advantage she has," Shan said. "If you think any other important nobleman will ever pay any attention to you, then you are mistaken. Elend likes to shock the court—and so, naturally, he chose to do so with the most homely and lumpish woman he could find. Take this opportunity; you shall not soon find another."

Vin gritted her teeth against the insults and the Allomancy; Shan had obviously made an art out of forcing people to take whatever abuse she sought fit to deliver.

"Now," Shan said, "I require information regarding certain texts Elend has in his possession. You *can* read, can't you?"

Vin nodded curtly.

"Good," Shan said. "All you need to do is memorize the titles of his books—don't look on the outside covers, they can be misleading. Read the first few pages, then report back to me."

"And if I should instead tell Elend what you're planning?"

Shan laughed. "My dear, you don't *know* what I'm planning. Besides, you seem to be making some headway in court. Surely you realize that betraying *me* is not something you want to even contemplate."

With that, Shan walked off, immediately gathering a collection of hangers-on from the surrounding nobility. Shan's Soothing weakened, and Vin felt her frustration and anger rise. There had been a time when she would have simply scampered away, ego already too beaten down to be bothered by Shan's insults. This night, however, she found herself wishing for a way to strike back.

*Calm yourself. This is a good thing. You've become a pawn in Great House plans—most lesser nobility probably dream of such an opportunity.*

She sighed, retreating toward the now empty table she had shared with Milen. The ball this evening was being held at the marvelous Keep Hasting. Its tall, round central keep was attended by six auxiliary towers, each set off from the main building a short distance and connected to it by walltop walkways. All seven towers were set with winding, curving patterns of stained glass.

The ballroom was at the top of the wide central tower. Fortunately, a system of skaa-powered pulley platforms kept noble guests from having to walk all the way to the top. The ballroom itself wasn't as spectacular as some Vin had visited—just a squarish chamber with vaulted ceilings and colored glass running around the perimeter.

*Funny, how easily one can become jaded,* Vin thought. *Perhaps that's how the noblemen can do such terrible things. They've been killing for so long that it doesn't unsettle them anymore.*

She asked a servant to go fetch Sazed, then sat down to rest her feet. *I wish Kelsier would hurry up and get back,* she thought. The crew, Vin included, seemed less motivated without him around. It wasn't that she didn't want to work; Kelsier's snappy wit and optimism just helped keep her moving.

Vin looked up idly, and her eyes caught sight of Elend Venture standing just a short distance away, chatting with a small group of young noblemen. She froze. Part of her—the Vin part—wanted to scurry away and hide. She'd fit beneath a table, dress and all.

Oddly, however, she found her Valette side stronger. *I have to talk to him,* she thought. *Not because of Shan, but because I have to find out the truth. Dockson was exaggerating. He* had *to be.*

When had she grown so confrontational? Even as she stood, Vin was amazed at her firm resolve. She crossed the ballroom—checking her black dress briefly as she walked. One of Elend's companions tapped him on the shoulder, nodding toward Vin. Elend turned, and the other two men withdrew.

"Why, Valette," he said as she paused in front of him. "I arrived late. I didn't even know you were here."

*Liar. Of course you knew. Valette wouldn't miss the Hasting Ball.* How to broach it? How to ask? "You've been avoiding me," she said.

"Now, I wouldn't say that. I've just been busy. House issues, you know. Besides, I warned you that I was rude, and . . ." he trailed off. "Valette? Is everything all right?"

Vin realized she was sniffling slightly, and she felt a tear on her cheek. *Idiot!* she thought, dabbing her eyes with Lestibournes's handkerchief. *You'll ruin your makeup!*

"Valette, you're shaking!" Elend said with concern. "Here, let's go to the balcony and get you some fresh air."

She let him lead her away from the sounds of music and chattering people, and they stepped into the quiet, dark air. The balcony—one of many jutting from the top of the central Hasting tower—was empty. A single stone lantern stood as part of the railing, and some tastefully placed plants lined the corners.

Mist floated in the air, prevalent as ever, though the balcony was close enough to the keep's warmth that the mist was weak. Elend didn't pay any attention to it. He, like most noblemen, considered fear of the mist to be a foolish skaa superstition—which, Vin supposed, was right.

"Now, what is this about?" Elend asked. "I'll admit, I have been ignoring you. I'm sorry. You didn't deserve it, I just . . . well, it seemed like you were fitting in so well that you didn't need a troublemaker like me being—"

"Have you ever slept with a skaa woman?" Vin asked.

Elend paused, taken aback. "Is *that* what this is all about? Who told you this?"

"Have you?" Vin demanded.

Elend paused.

*Lord Ruler. It's true.*

"Sit down," Elend said, fetching her a chair.

"It's true, isn't it?" Vin said, sitting. "You've done it. He was right, you're *all* monsters."

"I . . ." He laid a hand on Vin's arm, but she pulled it away, only to feel a teardrop drip down her face and stain her dress. She reached up, wiping her eyes, the handkerchief coming back colored with makeup.

"It happened when I was thirteen," Elend said quietly. "My father thought it was time that I became 'a man.' I didn't even know they were going to kill the girl afterward, Valette. Honestly, I didn't."

"And after that?" she demanded, growing angry. "How many girls have you murdered, Elend Venture?"

"None! Never again, Valette. Not after I found out what had happened that first time."

"You expect me to believe you?"

"I don't know," Elend said. "Look, I know that it's fashionable for the women of court to label all men brutes, but you have to believe me. We're not all like that."

"I was told that you are," Vin said.

"By whom? Country nobility? Valette, they don't know us. They're jealous because we control most of the canal systems—and they might just have a right to be. Their envy doesn't make us terrible people, however."

"What percentage?" Vin asked. "How many noblemen do these things?"

"Maybe a third," Elend said. "I'm not sure. They aren't the types I spend my time with."

She wanted to believe him, and that desire should have made her more skeptical. But, looking into those eyes—eyes she had always found so honest—she found herself swayed. For the first time she could remember, she completely pushed aside Reen's whispers, and simply believed.

"A third," she whispered. *So many. But, that's better than all of them.* She reached up to dab her eyes, and Elend eyed her handkerchief.

"Who gave you that?" he asked curiously.

"A suitor," Vin said.

"Is he the one who's been telling you these things about me?"

"No, that was another," Vin said. "He . . . said that all noblemen—or, rather, all Luthadel noblemen—were terrible people. He said that court women don't even consider it cheating when their men sleep with skaa whores."

Elend snorted. "Your informant doesn't know women very well, then. I dare you to find me one lady who isn't bothered when her husband dallies with another—skaa or noble."

Vin nodded, taking a deep breath, calming herself. She felt ridiculous . . . but she also felt at peace. Elend knelt beside her chair, still obviously concerned.

"So," she said, "your father is one of the third?"

Elend flushed in the wan light, looking down. "He likes all kinds of mistresses—skaa, noble, it doesn't matter to him. I still think about that night, Valette. I wish . . . I don't know."

"It wasn't your fault, Elend," she said. "You were just a thirteen-year-old boy who was doing what his father told him."

Elend looked away, but she had already seen the anger and guilt in his eyes. "Someone needs to stop these kinds of things from happening," he said quietly, and Vin was struck by the intensity in his voice.

*This is a man who cares,* she thought. *A man like Kelsier, or like Dockson. A good man. Why can't they see that?*

Finally, Elend sighed, standing and pulling over a chair for himself. He sat down, elbow resting against the railing, running his hand through his messy hair. "Well," he noted, "you probably aren't the first lady I've made cry at a ball, but you *are* the first one I've made cry that I sincerely care about. My gentlemanly prowess has reached new depths."

Vin smiled. "It's not you," she said, leaning back. "It's just been . . . a very draining few months. When I found out about these things, I just couldn't handle it all."

"The corruption in Luthadel needs to be dealt with," Elend said. "The Lord Ruler doesn't even see it—he doesn't want to."

Vin nodded, then she eyed Elend. "Why exactly *have* you been avoiding me lately, anyway?"

Elend flushed again. "I just figured you had enough new friends to keep you occupied."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I don't like a lot of the people you've been spending your time with, Valette," Elend said. "You've managed to fit very well into Luthadel society, and I generally find that playing politics changes people."

"That's easy to say," Vin snapped. "Especially when you're at the very *top* of the political structure. You can afford to ignore politics—some of us aren't so fortunate."

"I suppose."

"Besides," Vin said, "you play politics just as well as the rest. Or, are you going to try and tell me that your initial interest in me wasn't sparked by a desire to spite your father?"

Elend held up his hands. "All right, consider me suitably chastised. I was a fool and a twit. It runs in the family."

Vin sighed, sitting back and feeling the cool whisper of the mists on her tear-wetted cheeks. Elend wasn't a monster; she believed him on that count. Perhaps she was a fool, but Kelsier was having an effect on her. She was beginning to trust those around her, and there was no one she wanted to let herself trust more than Elend Venture.

And, when it wasn't connected directly to Elend, she found the horrors of the noble-skaa relationship easier to deal with. Even if a third of the noblemen were murdering skaa women, something was probably salvageable of the society. The nobility wouldn't have to be purged—that was *their* tactic. Vin would have to make certain that sort of thing didn't happen, no matter what bloodline one had.

*Lord Ruler,* Vin thought. *I'm starting to think like the others—it's almost like I think that we can change things.*

She glanced across at Elend, who sat with his back to the curling mists beyond. He looked morose.

*I brought out bad memories,* Vin thought guiltily. *No wonder he hates his father so much.* She longed to do something to make him feel better.

"Elend," she said, drawing his attention. "They're just like us."

He paused. "What?"

"The plantation skaa," Vin said. "You asked me about them once. I was afraid, so I acted like a proper noblewoman—but you seemed disappointed when I didn't have more to say."

He leaned forward. "So, you *did* spend time with the skaa?"

Vin nodded. "A lot of time. Too much, if you ask my family. That might be why they sent me out here. I knew some of the skaa very well—one older man, in particular. He lost someone, a woman he loved, to a nobleman who wanted a pretty thing for the evening's entertainment."

“At your plantation?”

Vin shook her head quickly. “He ran away and came to my father’s lands.”

“And you hid him?” Elend asked with surprise. “Runaway skaa are supposed to be executed!”

“I kept his secret,” Vin said. “I didn’t know him for very long, but . . . well, I can promise you this, Elend: His love was as strong as that of any nobleman. Stronger than most of them here in Luthadel, certainly.”

“And intelligence?” Elend asked eagerly. “Did they seem . . . slow?”

“Of course not,” Vin snapped. “I should think, Elend Venture, that I knew several skaa more clever than yourself. They may not have education, but they’re still intelligent. And they’re angry.”

“Angry?” he asked.

“Some of them,” Vin said. “About the way they’re treated.”

“They know, then? About the disparities between us and them?”

“How could they not?” Vin said, reaching up to wipe her nose with the handkerchief. She paused, however, noting just how much makeup she had rubbed across it.

“Here,” Elend said, handing her his own handkerchief. “Tell me more. How do you know these things?”

“They told me,” Vin said. “They trusted me. I know that they’re angry because they would complain about their lives. I know they’re intelligent because of the things they keep hidden from the nobility.”

“Like what?”

“Like, the underground movement network,” Vin said. “Skaa help runaways travel the canals from plantation to plantation. The noblemen don’t notice because they never pay attention to skaa faces.”

“Interesting.”

“Plus,” Vin said, “there are the thieving crews. I figure that those skaa must be fairly clever if they’re able to hide from the obligators and the nobility, stealing from the Great Houses right beneath the Lord Ruler’s nose.”

“Yes, I know,” Elend said. “I wish I could meet one of them, to ask them how they hide so well. They must be fascinating people.”

Vin almost spoke further, but she held her tongue. *I’ve probably said too much already.*

Elend looked over at her. “You’re fascinating too, Valette. I should have known better than to assume you’d been corrupted by the rest of them. Perhaps you'll be able to corrupt them instead."

Vin smiled.

"But," Elend said, rising. "I need to be leaving. I actually came to the party tonight for a specific purpose—some friends of mine are meeting together."

*That's right!* Vin thought. *One of the men Elend met with before—the ones that Kelsier and Sazed thought it was strange that he would associate with—was a Hasting.*

Vin stood as well, handing Elend back his handkerchief.

He didn't take it. "You might want to keep that. It wasn't intended to be simply functional."

Vin looked down at the handkerchief. *When a nobleman wants to court a lady seriously, he gives her a handkerchief.*

"Oh!" she said, pulling the handkerchief back. "Thank you."

Elend smiled, stepping close to her. "That other man, whoever he is, might have a lead on me because of my foolishness. However, I am not so foolish that I would pass up the chance to give him a little competition." He winked, bowed slightly, and walked back toward the central ballroom.

Vin waited a moment, then walked forward and slipped through the balcony doorway. Elend met up with the same two as before—a Lekal and a Hasting, political enemies of the Venture. They paused for a moment, then all three walked toward a stairwell at the side of the room.

*Those stairwells only lead to one place,* Vin thought, slipping back into the room. *The auxiliary towers.*

"Mistress Valette?"

Vin jumped, turning to find Sazed approaching. "Are we ready to go?" he asked.

Vin moved over to him quickly. "Lord Elend Venture just disappeared down that stairwell with his Hasting and Lekal friends."

"Interesting," Sazed said. "And why would . . . Mistress, what happened to your makeup!"

"Never mind," Vin said. "I think I should follow them."

"Is that *another* handkerchief, Mistress?" Sazed asked. "You have been busy."

"Sazed, are you listening to me?"

"Yes, Mistress. I suppose you could follow them if you wish, but you would be fairly obvious. I don't know that it would be the best method of gaining information."

“I wouldn’t follow them overtly,” Vin said quietly. “I’d use Allomancy. But, I need your permission for that.”

Sazed paused. “I see. How is your side?”

“It’s been healed for ages,” Vin said. “I don’t even notice it anymore.”

Sazed sighed. “Very well. Master Kelsier intended to begin your training in earnest again when he returned, anyway. Just . . . be careful. This is a ridiculous thing to say to a Mistborn, I think, but I ask anyway.”

“I will,” Vin said. “I’ll meet you on that balcony over there in an hour.”

“Good luck, Mistress,” Sazed said.

Vin was already rushing back toward the balcony. She stepped around the corner, then stood before the stone railing and the mists beyond. The beautiful, swirling void. *It’s been far too long,* she thought, reaching into her sleeve and pulling out a vial of metals. She downed it eagerly and got out a small handful of coins.

Then, blissfully, she hopped up onto the railing and threw herself out into the dark mists.

Tin gave her sight as the wind flapped at her dress. Pewter gave her strength as she turned her eyes toward the buttresslike wall running between the tower and the main keep. Steel gave her power as she threw a coin downward, sending it into the darkness.

She lurched in the air. The air resistance fluttered her dress, and she felt like she was trying to pull a bale of cloth behind her, but her Allomancy was strong enough to deal with that. Elend’s tower was the next one over; she needed to get onto the walltop walkway that ran between it and the central tower. Vin flared steel, Pushing herself up a bit higher, then flung another coin into the mists behind her. When it hit the wall, she used it to shoot herself forward.

She slammed into her target wall just a bit too low—folds of cloth cushioning the blow—but she managed to grab the lip of the walkway above. An unenhanced Vin would have had trouble pulling herself up onto the wall, but Vin the Allomancer easily scrambled over the side.

She crouched in her black dress, moving quietly across the walltop pathway. There were no guards, but the tower ahead of her had a lit sentrypost at its base.

*Can’t go that way,* she thought, glancing upward instead. The tower appeared to have several rooms, and a couple of them were lit. Vin dropped a coin and catapulted herself upward, then Pulled against a window mounting and yanked herself over to land lightly on the stone window ledge. The shutters were closed against the night, and she had to lean close, flaring tin, to hear what was going on inside.

". . . balls always last well into the night. We'll probably have to pull double duty."

*Guards,* Vin thought, jumping and Pushing against the top of the window. It rattled as she shot up the side of the tower. She caught the base of the next window ledge and pulled herself up.

". . . don't regret my tardiness," a familiar voice said from inside. Elend. "She happens to be far more attractive than you are, Telden."

A masculine voice laughed. "The mighty Elend Venture, finally captured by a pretty face."

"She's more than that, Jastes," Elend said. "She's kindhearted—she helped skaa runaways on her plantation. I think we should bring her in to talk with us."

"Not a chance," said a deep-voiced man. "Look, Elend, I don't mind if you want to talk philosophy. Hell, I'll even share a few drinks with you when you do. But I'm not going to let random people come join us."

"I agree with Telden," Jastes said. "Five people is enough."

"See, now," Elend's voice said. "I don't think you're being fair."

"Elend . . ." another voice said sufferingly.

"All right," Elend said. "Telden, did you read the book I gave you?"

"I tried," Telden said. "It's a bit thick."

"But it's good, right?" Elend said.

"Good enough," Telden said. "I can see why the Lord Ruler hates it so much."

"Redalevin's works are better," Jastes said. "More concise."

"I don't mean to be contrary," said a fifth voice. "But, is this all we're going to do? Read?"

"What's wrong with reading?" Elend asked.

"It's a bit boring," the fifth voice said.

*Good man,* Vin thought.

"Boring?" Elend asked. "Gentlemen, these ideas—these words—they're *everything*. These men knew that they'd be executed for their words. Can you not sense their passion?"

"Passion, yes," the fifth voice said. "Usefulness, no."

"We can change the world," Jastes said. "Two of us are house heirs, the other three are second heirs."

"Someday, we'll be the ones in charge," Elend said. "If we put these ideas into effect—fairness, diplomacy, moderation—we can exert pressure even on the Lord Ruler!”

The fifth voice snorted. “You might be heir to a powerful house, Elend, but the rest of us aren’t as important. Telden and Jastes will probably never inherit, and Kevoux—no offense—is hardly that influential. We can’t change the world.”

“We can change the way our houses work,” Elend said. “If the houses would stop squabbling, we might be able to gain some real power in the government—rather than just bow to the whims of the Lord Ruler.”

“Every year, the nobility grows weaker,” Jastes said in agreement. “Our skaa belong to the Lord Ruler, as does our land. His obligators determine who we can marry and what we can believe. Our canals, even, are officially ‘his’ property. Ministry assassins kill men who speak out too openly, or who are too successful. This is no way to live.”

“I agree with you there,” Telden said. “Elend’s prattling about class imbalance seems like silliness to me, but I can see the importance of presenting a unified front before the Lord Ruler.”

“Exactly,” Elend said. “This is what we have to—”

“Vin!” a voice whispered.

Vin jumped, nearly falling off the window ledge in shock. She glanced around in alarm.

“Above you,” the voice whispered.

She glanced up. Kelsier hung from another window ledge just above. He smiled, winked, then nodded down toward the wall-walkway below.

Vin glanced back at Elend’s room as Kelsier dropped through the mists beside her. Finally, she pushed herself off and followed Kelsier down, using her same coin to slow her descent.

“You’re back!” she said eagerly as she landed.

“Got back this afternoon.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Checking up on our friend in there,” Kelsier said. “Doesn’t seem like much has changed since the last time.”

“Last time?”

Kelsier nodded. “I’ve spied on that little group a couple of times since you told me about them. I shouldn’t have bothered—they’re not a threat. Just a bunch of noblelings getting together to drink and debate.”

"But, they want to overthrow the Lord Ruler!"

"Hardly," Kelsier said with a snort. "They're just doing what noblemen do—planning alliances. It's not that unusual for the next generation to start organizing their house coalitions before they come to power."

"This is different," Vin said.

"Oh?" Kelsier asked with amusement. "You've been a noble so long that you can tell that already?"

She flushed, and he laughed, putting a friendly arm around her shoulders. "Oh, don't get like that. They seem like nice enough lads, for noblemen. I promise not to kill any of them, all right?"

Vin nodded.

"Perhaps we can find a way to use them—they do seem more open-minded than most. I just don't want you to be disappointed, Vin. They're still noblemen. Perhaps they can't help what they are, but that doesn't change their nature."

*Just like Dockson,* Vin thought. *Kelsier assumes the worst about Elend.* But, did she really have any reason to expect otherwise? To fight a battle like Kelsier and Dockson were, it was probably more effective—and better for the psyche—to assume that all of their enemies were evil.

"What happened to your makeup, by the way?" Kelsier asked.

"I don't want to talk about it," Vin said, thinking back to her conversation with Elend. *Why did I have to cry? I'm such an idiot! And, the way I blurted out that question about him sleeping with skaa.*

Kelsier shrugged. "Okay, then. We should get going—I doubt young Venture and his comrades will discuss anything relevant."

Vin paused.

"I've listened to them on three separate occasions, Vin," Kelsier said. "I'll summarize for you, if you want."

"All right," she said with a sigh. "But I told Sazed I'd meet him back up at the party."

"Off you go, then," Kelsier said. "I promise not to tell him you were sneaking around and using Allomancy."

"He told me I could," Vin said defensively.

"He did?"

Vin nodded.

"My mistake," Kelsier said. "You should probably have Saze fetch you a cloak before you leave the party—you've got ash all over the front of your dress. I'll meet you back at Clubs's shop—have the carriage drop you and Sazed off there, then continue on out of the city. That'll keep up appearances."

Vin nodded again, and Kelsier winked and jumped off the wall into the mists.

*In the end, I must trust in myself. I have seen men who have beaten from themselves the ability to recognize truth and goodness, and I do not think I am one of them. I can still see the tears in a young child's eyes and feel pain at his suffering.*

*If I ever lose this, then I will know that I've passed beyond hope of redemption.*

# 24

KELSIER WAS ALREADY AT THE shop when Vin and Sazed arrived. He sat with Ham, Clubs, and Spook in the kitchen, enjoying a late-night drink.

"Ham!" Vin said eagerly as she came in the back door. "You're back!"

"Yup," he said happily, raising his cup.

"It seems like you've been gone forever!"

"You're telling me," Ham said, his voice earnest.

Kelsier chuckled, rising to refill his drink. "Ham's a bit tired of playing general."

"I had to wear a uniform," Ham complained, stretching. He now wore his customary vest and trousers. "Even plantation skaa don't have to deal with that kind of torture."

"Try wearing a formal gown sometime," Vin said, seating herself. She'd brushed off the front of her dress, and it didn't look half as bad as she'd feared. The blackish gray ash still showed up a bit against the dark fabric, and the fibers were rough where she'd rubbed against stone, but both were barely noticeable.

Ham laughed. "It seems that you've turned into a proper young lady while I was gone."

"Hardly," Vin said as Kelsier handed her a cup of wine. She paused briefly, then took a sip.

"Mistress Vin is being modest, Master Hammond," Sazed said, taking a seat. "She's growing quite proficient at courtly arts—better than many actual nobles that I have known."

Vin flushed, and Ham laughed again. "Humility, Vin? Where'd you ever learn a bad habit like that?"

"Not from me, certainly," Kelsier said, offering Sazed a cup of wine.

The Terrisman raised his hand in a respectful refusal.

"Of course she didn't get it from *you,* Kell," Ham said. "Maybe Spook taught her. He seems to be the only one in this crew who knows how to keep his mouth shut, eh, kid?"

Spook flushed, obviously trying to avoid looking at Vin.

*I'll have to deal with him sometime,* she thought. *But . . . not tonight. Kelsier's back and Elend's not a murderer—this is a night to relax.*

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, and a moment later Dockson strolled into the room. "A party? And no one sent for me?"

"You seemed busy," Kelsier said.

"Besides," Ham added, "we know you're too responsible to sit around and get drunk with a bunch of miscreants like us."

"*Someone* has to keep this crew running," Dockson said lightheartedly, pouring himself a drink. He paused, frowning at Ham. "That vest looks familiar. . . ."

Ham smiled. "I ripped the arms off of my uniform coat."

"You didn't!" Vin said with a smile.

Ham nodded, looking self-satisfied.

Dockson sighed, continuing to fill his cup. "Ham, those things cost money."

"Everything costs money," Ham said. "But, what *is* money? A physical representation of the abstract concept of effort. Well, wearing that uniform for so long was a pretty mean effort. I'd say that this vest and I are even now."

Dockson just rolled his eyes. In the main room, the shop's front door opened and closed, and Vin heard Breeze bid hello to the apprentice on watch.

"By the way, Dox," Kelsier said, leaning with his back against a cupboard. "I'm going to need a few 'physical representations of the concept of effort' myself. I'd like to rent a small warehouse to conduct some of my informant meetings."

"That can probably be arranged," Dockson said. "Assuming we keep Vin's wardrobe budget under control, I—" He broke off, glancing at Vin. "What did you do to that gown, young lady!"

Vin flushed, scrunching down in her chair. *Perhaps it's a bit more noticeable than I thought. . . .*

Kelsier chuckled. "You may have to get used to dirtied clothing, Dox. Vin's back on Mistborn duty as of this evening."

"Interesting," Breeze said, entering the kitchen. "Might I suggest that she avoid fighting three Steel Inquisitors at once this time?"

"I'll do my best," Vin said.

Breeze strolled over to the table and chose a seat with his characteristic decorum. The portly man raised his dueling cane, pointing it at Ham. "I see that my period of intellectual respite has come to an end."

Ham smiled. "I thought up a couple beastly questions while I was gone, and I've been saving them just for you, Breeze."

"I'm dying of anticipation," Breeze said. He turned his cane toward Lestibournes. "Spook, drink."

Spook rushed over and fetched Breeze a cup of wine.

"He's such a fine lad," Breeze noted, accepting the drink. "I barely even have to nudge him Allomantically. If only the rest of you ruffians were so accommodating."

Spook frowned. "Niceing the not on the playing without."

"I have no idea what you just said, child," Breeze said. "So I'm simply going to pretend it was coherent, then move on."

Kelsier rolled his eyes. "Losing the stress on the nip," he said. "Notting without the needing of care."

"Riding the rile of the rids to the right," Spook said with a nod.

"What are you two babbling about?" Breeze said testily.

"Wasing the was of brightness," Spook said. "Nip the having of wishing of this."

"Ever wasing the doing of this," Kelsier agreed.

"Ever wasing the wish of having the have," Ham added with a smile. "Brighting the wish of wasing the not."

Breeze turned to Dockson with exasperation. "I believe our companions have finally lost their minds, dear friend."

Dockson shrugged. Then, with a perfectly straight face, he said, "Wasing not of wasing is."

Breeze sat, dumbfounded, and the room burst into laughter. Breeze rolled his eyes indignantly, shaking his head and muttering about the crew's gross childishness.

Vin nearly choked on her wine as she laughed. "What did you even say?" she asked of Dockson as he sat down beside her.

"I'm not sure," he confessed. "It just sounded right."

"I don't think you said anything, Dox," Kelsier said.

"Oh, he said something," Spook said. "It just didn't *mean* anything."

Kelsier laughed. "That's true pretty much all the time. I've found you can ignore half of what Dox tells you and not miss much—except for maybe the occasional complaint that you're spending too much."

"Hey!" Dockson said. "Once again, must I point out that *someone* has to be responsible? Honestly, the way you people go through boxings . . ."

Vin smiled. Even Dockson's complaints seemed good-natured. Clubs sat quietly by the side wall, looking as curmudgeonly as ever, but Vin caught sight of a slight smile on his lips. Kelsier rose and opened another bottle of wine, refilling cups as he told the crew about the skaa army's preparations.

Vin felt . . . contented. As she sipped at her wine, she caught sight of the open doorway leading into the darkened workshop. She imagined, just for a moment, that she could see a figure out in the shadows—a frightened wisp of a girl, untrusting, suspicious. The girl's hair was ragged and short, and she wore a simple, untucked dirty shirt and a pair of brown trousers.

Vin remembered that second night in Clubs's shop, when she had stood out in the dark workroom, watching the others share late-night conversation. Had she really been that girl—one who would hide in the cold darkness, watching the laughter and friendship with a hidden envy, but never daring to join it?

Kelsier made some particularly witty comment, drawing laughter from the entire room.

*You're right, Kelsier,* Vin thought with a smile. *This* is *better.*

She wasn't like them yet—not completely. Six months couldn't silence Reen's whispers, and she couldn't see herself ever being as trusting as Kelsier was. But . . . she could finally understand, at least a little bit, why he worked the way he did.

"All right," Kelsier said, pulling over a chair and sitting on it the wrong way. "It looks like the army will be ready on schedule, and Marsh is in place. We need to get this plan moving. Vin, news from the ball?"

"House Tekiel is vulnerable," she said. "Its allies are scattering, and the vultures are moving in. Some whisper that debts and lost business will force the Tekiel to sell off their keep by the end of the month. There's no way they can afford to continue paying the Lord Ruler's keep tax."

"Which effectively eliminates one entire Great House from the city," Dockson said. "Most of the Tekiel nobility—including Mistings and Mistborn—will have to move to outer plantations to try and recoup losses."

"Nice," Ham noted. Any noble houses they could frighten out of the city would make seizing it that much easier.

“That still leaves nine Great Houses in the city,” Breeze noted.

“But they’ve started killing each other at night,” Kelsier said. “That’s only one step away from open war. I suspect we’ll see an exodus start here pretty soon—anyone who isn’t willing to risk assassination to maintain dominance in Luthadel will leave town for a couple of years.”

“The strong houses don’t seem very afraid, though,” Vin said. “They’re still throwing balls, anyway.”

“Oh, they’ll keep doing that right up until the end,” Kelsier said. “Balls make great excuses to meet with allies and keep an eye on enemies. House wars are primarily political, and so they demand political battlefields.”

Vin nodded.

“Ham,” Kelsier said, “we need to keep an eye on the Luthadel Garrison. You’re still planning to visit your soldier contacts tomorrow?”

Ham nodded. “I can’t promise anything, but I should be able to reestablish some connections. Give me a bit of time, and I’ll find out what the military is up to.”

“Good,” Kelsier said.

“I’d like to go with him,” Vin said.

Kelsier paused. “With Ham?”

Vin nodded. “I haven’t trained with a Thug yet. Ham could probably show me a few things.”

“You already know how to burn pewter,” Kelsier said. “We’ve practiced that.”

“I know,” Vin said. How could she explain? Ham had practiced with pewter exclusively—he was bound to be better at it than Kelsier.

“Oh, stop pestering the child,” Breeze said. “She’s probably just tired of balls and parties. Let her go be a normal street urchin again for a bit.”

“Fine,” Kelsier said, rolling his eyes. He poured himself another drink. “Breeze, how well could your Soothers manage if you were gone for a little while?”

Breeze shrugged. “I am, of course, the most effective member of the team. But, I *did* train the others—they’ll recruit effectively without me, especially now that stories about the Survivor are getting so popular.”

“We need to talk about that by the way, Kell,” Dockson said, frowning. “I’m not sure if I like all this mysticism about you and the Eleventh Metal.”

"We can discuss it later," Kelsier said.

"Why ask about my men?" Breeze said. "Have you finally grown so jealous of my impeccable fashion sense that you've decided to have me disposed of?"

"You might say that," Kelsier said. "I was thinking of sending you to replace Yeden in a few months."

"Replace Yeden?" Breeze asked with surprise. "You mean for *me* to lead the army?"

"Why not?" Kelsier asked. "You're great at giving orders."

"From the background, my dear man," Breeze said. "I don't stand out in front. Why, I'd be a *general.* Do you have any idea how ludicrous that sounds?"

"Just consider it," Kelsier said. "Our recruitment should be mostly done by then, so you might be most effective if you were to go to the caves and let Yeden come back to prepare his contacts here."

Breeze frowned. "I suppose."

"Regardless," Kelsier said, rising. "I don't think I've had *nearly* enough wine. Spook, be a good lad and run down to the cellar for another bottle, eh?"

The boy nodded, and the conversation turned back to lighter topics. Vin settled back in her chair, feeling the warmth of the coal stove at the side of the room, content for the moment to simply enjoy the peace of not having to worry, fight, or plan.

*If only Reen could have known something like this,* she thought, idly fingering her earring. *Perhaps then, things would have been different for him. For us.*

Ham and Vin left the next day to visit the Luthadel Garrison.

After so many months of playing a noblewoman, Vin had thought that it would feel strange to wear street clothing again. Yet, it really didn't. True, it was a bit *different*—she didn't have to worry about sitting properly or walking so that her dress didn't brush against dirty walls or floors. Yet, the mundane clothing still felt natural to her.

She wore a simple pair of brown trousers and a loose white shirt, tucked in at the waist, then overlaid by a leather vest. Her still lengthening hair was pulled up under a cap. Casual passersby might think her a boy, though Ham didn't seem to think it mattered.

And it really didn't. Vin had grown accustomed to having people study and evaluate her, but no one on the street even bothered to give her a glance. Shuffling skaa workers, unconcerned low noblemen, even high-placed skaa like Clubs—they all ignored her.

*I'd almost forgotten what it was like to be invisible,* Vin thought. Fortunately, the old attitudes—looking down when she walked, stepping out of people's way, slouching to make herself inconspicuous—returned to her easily. Becoming Vin the street skaa felt as simple as remembering an old, familiar melody she used to hum.

*This really is just another disguise,* Vin thought as she walked beside Ham. *My makeup is a light coat of ash, carefully rubbed on my cheeks. My gown is a pair of trousers, rubbed to make them seem old and well used.*

Who, then, was she really? Vin the urchin? Valette the lady? Neither? Did any of her friends really know her? Did she even really know herself?

"Ah, I've missed this place," Ham said, walking happily beside her. Ham always seemed happy; she couldn't imagine him dissatisfied, despite what he'd said about his time leading the army.

"It's kind of strange," he said, turning to Vin. He didn't walk with the same careful air of despondence that Vin had cultivated; he didn't even seem to care that he stood out from other skaa. "I probably shouldn't miss this place—I mean, Luthadel is the dirtiest, most crowded city in the Final Empire. But, there's also something about it. . . ."

"Is this where your family lives?" Vin asked.

Ham shook his head. "They live in a smaller city outside of town. My wife is a seamstress there; she tells people I'm in the Luthadel Garrison."

"Don't you miss them?"

"Of course I do," Ham said. "It's hard—I only get to spend a few months at a time with them—but it's better this way. If I were to get killed on a job, the Inquisitors would have a tough time tracking my family. I haven't even told Kell which city they live in."

"You think the Ministry would go to that much trouble?" Vin asked. "I mean, you'd already be dead."

"I'm a Misting, Vin—that means that all of my descendants will have some noble blood. My children might turn out to be Allomancers, as might their children. No, when the Inquisitors kill a Misting, they make certain to wipe out his children too. The only way to keep my family safe is to stay away from them."

"You could just not use your Allomancy," Vin said.

Ham shook his head. "I don't know if I could do that."

"Because of the power?"

"No, because of the money," Ham said frankly. "Thugs—or, Pewterarms, as the nobility prefer to call them—are the most sought-after Mistings. A competent Thug can stand against a half-dozen regular men, and he can lift more, endure more, and move faster than any other hired muscle. Those things mean a lot when you have to keep your crews small. Mix a couple of Coinshots with five or so Thugs, and you've got yourself a small, mobile army. Men will pay a lot for protection like that."

Vin nodded. "I can see how the money would be tempting."

"It's more than tempting, Vin. My family doesn't have to live in packed skaa tenements, nor do they have to worry about starving. My wife only works to keep up appearances—they have a good life, for skaa. Once I have enough, we'll move away from the Central Dominance. There are places in the Final Empire that a lot of people don't know about—places where a man with enough money can live the life of a nobleman. Places where you can stop worrying and just live."

"That sounds . . . appealing."

Ham nodded, turning and leading them down a larger thoroughfare toward the main city gates. "I got the dream from Kell, actually. That's what he always said he wanted to do. I just hope I have more luck than he did. . . ."

Vin frowned. "Everyone says he was rich. Why didn't he leave?"

"I don't know," Ham said. "There was always another job—each one bigger than the last. I guess when you're a crewleader like him, the game can get addicting. Soon, money didn't even seem to matter to him. Eventually, he heard that the Lord Ruler was storing some incalculable secret in that hidden sanctum of his. If he and Mare had walked away before that job . . . But, well, they didn't. I don't know—maybe they wouldn't have been happy living lives where they *didn't* have to worry."

The concept seemed to intrigue him, and Vin could see another of his "questions" working within his mind.

*I guess when you're a crewleader like him, the game can get addicting. . . .*

Her earlier apprehensions returned. What would happen if Kelsier seized the imperial throne for himself? He couldn't possibly be as bad as the Lord Ruler, but . . . she was reading more and more of the logbook. The Lord Ruler hadn't always been a tyrant. He'd been a good man, once. A good man whose life had gone wrong.

*Kelsier's different*, Vin told herself forcefully. *He'll do the right thing.*

Still, she wondered. Ham might not understand, but Vin could see the enticement. Despite noble depravity, there was something intoxicating about high society. Vin was captivated by the beauty, the music, and the dancing. Her fascination wasn't the same as Kelsier's—she wasn't as interested in political games or even scams—but she could understand why he would have been reluctant to leave Luthadel behind.

That reluctance had destroyed the old Kelsier. But, it had produced something better—a more determined, less self-serving Kelsier. Hopefully.

*Of course, his plans before also cost him the woman he loved. Is that why he hates the nobility so much?*

"Ham?" she asked. "Has Kelsier always hated the nobility?"

Ham nodded. "It's worse now, though."

"He frightens me sometimes. It seems like he wants to kill *all* of them, no matter who they are."

"I'm concerned about him too," Ham said. "This Eleventh Metal business . . . it's almost like he's making himself out to be some kind of holy man." He paused, then he looked toward her. "Don't worry too much. Breeze, Dox, and I have already talked about this. We're going to confront Kell, see if we can rein him in a bit. He means well, but he has a tendency to go a little overboard sometimes."

Vin nodded. Ahead, the customary crowded lines of people waited for permission to pass through the city gates. She and Ham walked quietly past the solemn group—workers being sent out to the docks, men off to work one of the outer mills alongside the river or lake, lesser noblemen wishing to travel. All had to have a good reason to leave the city; the Lord Ruler strictly controlled travel inside his realm.

*Poor things,* Vin thought as she passed a ragged band of children carrying pails and brushes—probably on duty to climb the wall and scrub mist-grown lichen off the parapets. Ahead, up near the gates, an official cursed and shoved a man out of the line. The skaa worker fell hard, but eventually picked himself back up and shuffled to the end of the line. It was likely that if he wasn't let out of the city, he wouldn't be able to do his day's work—and no work meant no food tokens for his family.

Vin followed Ham past the gates, heading down a street parallel to the city wall, at the end of which Vin could see a large building complex. Vin had never studied the Garrison headquarters before; most crewmembers tended to stay a good distance away from it. However, as they approached, she was impressed by its defensive appearance. Large spikes were mounted on the wall that ran around the entire complex. The buildings within were bulky and fortified.

Soldiers stood at the gates, eyeing passersby with hostility.

Vin paused. "Ham, how are we going to get in *there*?"

"Don't worry," he said, stopping beside her. "I'm known to the Garrison. Besides, it's not as bad as it looks—the Garrison members just put on an intimidating face. As you can imagine, they aren't very well liked. Most of the soldiers in there are skaa—men who have, in exchange for a better life, sold out to the Lord Ruler. Whenever there are skaa riots in a city, the local garrison is usually hit pretty hard by malcontents. Hence the fortifications."

"So . . . you know these men?"

Ham nodded. "I'm not like Breeze or Kell, Vin—I can't put on faces and pretend. I'm just who I am. Those soldiers don't know I'm a Misting, but they know I work in the underground. I've known many of these guys for years; they've consistently tried to recruit me. They generally have better luck getting people like me, who are already outside mainstream society, to join their ranks."

"But, you're going to betray them," Vin said quietly, pulling Ham to the side of the road.

"Betray?" he asked. "No, it won't be a betrayal. Those men are mercenaries, Vin. They've been hired to fight, and they'll attack friends—even relatives—in a riot or rebellion. Soldiers learn to understand these kinds of things. We may be friends, but when it comes to fighting, none of us would hesitate to kill the others."

Vin nodded slowly. It seemed . . . harsh. *But, that's what life is. Harsh. That part of Reen's teaching wasn't a lie.*

"Poor lads," Ham said, looking at the Garrison. "We could have used men like them. Before I left for the caves, I managed to recruit the few that I thought would be receptive. The rest . . . well, they picked their path. Like me, they're just trying to give their kids a better life—the difference is, they're willing to work for *him* in order to do it."

Ham turned back to her. "All right, you wanted some tips on burning pewter?"

Vin nodded eagerly.

"The soldiers usually let me spar with them," Ham said. "You can watch me fight—burn bronze to see when I'm using Allomancy. The first, most important thing you'll learn about Pewterarming is when to use your metal. I've noticed that young Allomancers tend to always flare their pewter, thinking that the stronger they are, the better. However, you don't always want to hit as hard as you can with each blow.

"Strength is a big part of fighting, but it's not the only part. If you always hit your hardest, you'll tire faster and you'll give your opponent information about your limitations. A smart man hits his hardest at the *end* of a battle, when his opponent is weakest. And, in an extended battle—like a war—the smart soldier is the one who survives the longest. He'll be the man who paces himself."

Vin nodded. "But, don't you tire slower when you're using Allomancy?"

"Yes," Ham said. "In fact, a man with enough pewter can keep fighting at near-peak efficiency for hours. But pewter dragging like that takes practice, and you'll run out of metals eventually. When you do, the fatigue could kill you.

"Anyway, what I'm trying to explain is that it's usually best to vary your pewter burning. If you use more strength than you need, you could knock yourself off balance. Also, I've seen Thugs who rely on their pewter so much that they disregard training and practice. Pewter enhances your physical abilities, but not your innate skill. If you don't know how to use a weapon—or if you aren't practiced at thinking quickly in a fight—you'll lose no matter how strong you are.

"I'll have to be extra careful with the Garrison, since I don't want them to know I'm an Allomancer. You'll be surprised at how often that's important. Watch how I use pewter. I won't just flare it for strength—if I stumble, I'll burn it to give me an instant sense of balance. When I dodge, I might burn it to help me duck out of the way a little faster. There are dozens of little tricks you can do if you know when to give yourself a boost."

Vin nodded.

"Okay," Ham said. "Let's go, then. I'll tell the garrisoners that you're the daughter of a relative. You look young enough for your age that they won't even think twice. Watch me fight, and we'll talk afterward."

Vin nodded again, and the two of them approached the Garrison. Ham waved to one of the guards. "Hey, Bevidon. I've got the day off. Is Sertes around?"

"He's here, Ham," Bevidon said. "But I don't know that this is the best day for sparring. . . ."

Ham raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

Bevidon shared a glance with one of the other soldiers. "Go fetch the captain," he said to the man.

A few moments later, a busy-looking soldier approached from a side building, waving as soon as he saw Ham. His uniform bore a few extra stripes of color and a few gold-colored bits of metal on the shoulder.

"Ham," the newcomer said, stepping through the gate.

"Sertes," Ham said with a smile, clasping hands with the man. "Captain now, eh?"

"Happened last month," Sertes said with a nod. He paused, then eyed Vin.

"She's my niece," Ham said. "Good lass."

Sertes nodded. "Could we speak alone for a moment, Ham?"

Ham shrugged and let himself get pulled to a more secluded place beside the complex gates. Vin's Allomancy let her make out what they were saying. *What did I ever do without tin?*

"Look, Ham," Sertes said. "You won't be able to come spar for a while. The Garrison is going to be . . . occupied."

"Occupied?" Ham asked. "How?"

"I can't say," Sertes said. "But . . . well, we could really use a soldier like you right now."

"Fighting?"

"Yeah."

"Must be something serious if it's taking the attention of the entire Garrison."

Sertes grew quiet for a moment, and then he spoke again in a hushed tone—so quiet that Vin had to strain to hear. "A rebellion," Sertes whispered, "right here in the Central Dominance. We just got word. An army of skaa rebels appeared and attacked the Holstep Garrison to the north."

Vin felt a sudden chill.

"*What?*" Ham said.

"They must have come from the caves up there," the soldier said. "Last word was that the Holstep fortifications are holding—but Ham, they're only a thousand men strong. They need reinforcements desperately, and the koloss will never get there in time. The Valtroux Garrison sent five thousand soldiers, but we're not going to leave it to them. This is apparently a very big force of rebels, and the Lord Ruler gave us permission to go help."

Ham nodded.

"So, what about it?" Sertes asked. "Real fighting, Ham. Real battle pay. We could really use a man of your skill—I'll make you an officer right off, give you your own squad."

"I . . . I'll have to think about it," Ham said. He wasn't good at hiding his emotions, and his surprise sounded suspicious to Vin. Sertes, however, didn't appear to notice.

"Don't take too long," Sertes said. "We plan to march out in two hours."

"I'll do it," Ham said, sounding stunned. "Let me go drop off my niece and get some things. I'll be back before you leave."

"Good man," Sertes said, and Vin could see him clap Ham on the shoulder.

*Our army is exposed,* Vin thought in horror. *They're not ready! They were supposed to take Luthadel quietly, quickly—not face the Garrison straight out.*

*Those men are going to get massacred! What happened?*

*No man dies by my hand or command except that I wish there had been another way. Still, I kill them. Sometimes, I wish that I weren't such a cursed realist.*

# 25

Kelsier tossed another water jug into his pack. "Breeze, make a list of all the hideouts where you and I recruited. Go warn them that the Ministry might soon have prisoners who could give them away."

Breeze nodded, for once refraining from making any witty remarks. Behind him, apprentices scrambled through Clubs's shop, gathering and preparing the supplies that Kelsier had ordered.

"Dox, this shop should be secure unless they capture Yeden. Keep all three of Clubs's Tineyes on watch. If there's trouble, head for the bolt-lair."

Dockson nodded in acknowledgment as he hurriedly gave orders to the apprentices. One had already left, bearing a warning to Renoux. Kelsier thought that the mansion would be safe—only that one group of barges had left from Fellise, and its men had thought that Renoux wasn't in on the plan. Renoux wouldn't pull out unless absolutely necessary; his disappearance would require removing both himself and Valette from their carefully prepared positions.

Kelsier stuffed a handful of rations into his pack, then swung it onto his back.

"What about me, Kell?" Ham asked.

"You're going back to the Garrison, like you promised. That was clever thinking—we need an informant in there."

Ham frowned apprehensively.

"I don't have time to deal with your nerves right now, Ham," Kelsier said. "You don't have to scam, just be yourself and listen."

"I won't turn against the Garrison if I go with them," he said. "I'll listen, but I'm not going to attack men who think I'm their ally."

"Fine," Kelsier said curtly. "But I sincerely hope you can find a way not to kill any of our soldiers, either. Sazed!"

"Yes, Master Kelsier?"

"How much speed do you have stored up?"

Sazed flushed slightly, glancing at the numerous people scurrying around. "Perhaps two, three hours. It is a very difficult attribute to collect."

"Not long enough," Kelsier said. "I'll go alone. Dox is in charge until I get back."

Kelsier spun, then paused. Vin stood behind him in the same trousers, cap, and shirt she had worn to the Garrison. She had a pack like his slung over her shoulder, and she looked up at him defiantly.

"This is going to be a difficult trip, Vin," he said. "You've never done anything like this before."

"That's fine."

Kelsier nodded. He pulled his trunk out from beneath the table, then opened it and poured Vin a small pouch of pewter beads. She accepted it without comment.

"Swallow five of those beads."

"*Five?*"

"For now," Kelsier said. "If you need to take some more, call to me so we can stop running."

"Running?" the girl asked. "We're not taking a canal boat?"

Kelsier frowned. "Why would *we* need a boat?"

Vin glanced down at the pouch, then grabbed a cup of water and began to swallow beads.

"Make sure you have enough water in that pack," Kelsier said. "Take as much as you can carry." He left her, walking over to lay a hand on Dockson's shoulder. "It's about three hours before sunset. If we push hard, we can be there by noon tomorrow."

Dockson nodded. "That might be early enough."

*Maybe,* Kelsier thought. *The Valtroux Garrison is only three days' march from Holstep. Even riding all night, a messenger couldn't have gotten to Luthadel in under two days. By the time I get to the army . . .*

Dockson could obviously read the worry in Kelsier's eyes. "Either way, the army is useless to us now," he said.

"I know," Kelsier said. "This is just about saving those men's lives. I'll get word to you as soon as I can."

Dockson nodded.

Kelsier turned, flaring his pewter. His pack suddenly became as light as if it had been empty. "Burn your pewter, Vin. We're leaving."

She nodded, and Kelsier felt a pulsing come from her. "Flare it," he ordered, pulling two mistcloaks from his trunk and tossing one to her.

He put on the other, then walked forward, throwing open the back door to the kitchen. The red sun was bright overhead. Frantic crewmembers paused for a moment, turning to watch as Kelsier and Vin left the building.

The girl hurried forward to walk at Kelsier's side. "Ham told me that I should learn to use pewter only when I need it—he said it's better to be subtle."

Kelsier turned to face the girl. "This is not a time for subtlety. Stay close to me, try to keep up, and make absolutely certain you don't run out of pewter."

Vin nodded, suddenly looking a bit apprehensive.

"All right," Kelsier said, taking a deep breath. "Let's go."

Kelsier took off down the alleyway in a superhuman dash. Vin jumped into motion, following him out of the alley and onto the street. Pewter was a blazing fire within her. Flared as it was, she would probably go through all five beads in barely an hour.

The street was busy with skaa workers and noble carriages. Kelsier ignored the traffic, bolting out into the very center of the street, maintaining his ridiculous speed. Vin followed, growing increasingly worried about what she had gotten herself into.

*I can't let him go alone,* she thought. Of course, the last time she'd forced Kelsier to take her with him, she'd ended up half dead in a sickbed for a month.

Kelsier wove between carriages, brushing past pedestrians, charging down the street as if it were meant only for him. Vin followed as best as she could, the ground a blur beneath her feet, people passing too quickly to see their faces. Some of them called out after her, their voices annoyed. A couple of these, however, choked off immediately, falling silent.

*The cloaks,* Vin thought. *That's why we're wearing them—that's why we always wear them. Noblemen who see the mistcloaks will know to stay out of our way.*

Kelsier turned, running directly toward the northern city gates. Vin followed. Kelsier didn't slow as he approached the gates, and the lines of people began to point. Checkpoint guards turned with surprised faces.

Kelsier jumped.

One of the armored guards crumpled to the ground with a cry, smashed down by Kelsier's Allomantic weight as the crewleader passed overhead. Vin took a breath, dropped a coin to give herself a bit of lift, and jumped. She easily cleared a second guard, who looked up with surprise as his companion squirmed on the ground.

Vin Pushed against the soldier's armor, throwing herself higher into the air. The man staggered, but stayed on his feet—Vin was nowhere near as heavy as Kelsier.

She shot over the wall, hearing cries of surprise from the soldiers on top of it. She could only hope that nobody recognized her. It wasn't likely. Though her cap flew free as she soared through the air, those who were familiar with Valette the courtgoing lady would probably never connect her to a Mistborn in dirty trousers.

Vin's cloak whipped angrily in the passing air. Kelsier completed his arc before her and began to descend, and Vin soon followed. It felt very strange to use Allomancy in the sunlight. Unnatural, even. Vin made the mistake of looking down as she fell. Instead of comfortable swirling mists, she saw the ground far below.

*So high!* Vin thought with horror. Fortunately, she wasn't too disoriented to Push against the coin Kelsier had used to land. She slowed her descent to a manageable level before thumping against the ashen earth.

Kelsier immediately took off down the highway. Vin followed him, ignoring merchants and travelers. Now that they were out of the city, she had thought Kelsier might slow down. He didn't. He sped up.

And, suddenly, she understood. Kelsier didn't intend to walk, or even jog, to the caves.

He planned to dash all the way there.

It was a two-week trip by canal. How long would it take them? They were moving fast, horribly fast. Slower than a galloping horse, certainly, but surely a horse couldn't maintain such a gallop for very long.

Vin didn't feel fatigue as she ran. She relied on the pewter, only passing a little of the strain onto her body. She could barely feel her footsteps hitting the ground beneath her, and with such a large reserve of pewter, she felt that she could maintain the speed for a decent length of time.

She caught up to Kelsier, falling into place beside him. "This is easier than I thought it would be."

"Pewter enhances your balance," Kelsier said. "Otherwise you'd be tripping over yourself right now."

"What do you think we'll find? At the caves, I mean."

Kelsier shook his head. "No use talking. Save your strength."

"But, I'm not feeling weary at all!"

"We'll see what you say in sixteen hours," Kelsier said, speeding up even more as they turned off the highway, running onto the wide towpath beside the Luth-Davn Canal.

*Sixteen hours!*

Vin fell behind Kelsier slightly, giving herself plenty of space to run. Kelsier increased their speed until they were going at a maddening pace. He was right: In any other context, she would have quickly missed her step on the uneven road. Yet, with pewter and tin guiding her, she managed to stay on her feet—though doing so required increasing attention as the evening grew dark and the mists came out.

Occasionally, Kelsier threw down a coin and launched himself from one hilltop to another. However, he mostly kept them running at an even pace, sticking to the canal. Hours passed, and Vin began to feel the fatigue that he had implied would come. She maintained her speed, but she could feel something underneath it—a resistance within, a longing to stop and rest. Despite pewter's power, her body was running out of strength.

She made certain to never let her pewter run low. She feared that if it ever went out, the fatigue would come upon her so powerfully that she wouldn't be able to get started again. Kelsier also ordered her to drink a ridiculous amount of water, though she wasn't that thirsty.

The night grew dark and silent, no travelers daring to brave the mists. They passed canal boats and barges tied up for the night, as well as the occasional camp of canalmen, their tents huddled closely against the mists. Twice they saw mistwraiths on the road, the first one giving Vin a terrible start. Kelsier just passed it by—completely ignoring the terrible, translucent remnants of the people and animals who had been ingested, their bones now forming the mistwraith's own skeleton.

Still he kept running. Time became a blur, and the running came to dominate all that Vin was and did. Moving demanded so much attention that she could barely even focus on Kelsier ahead of her in the mists. She kept putting one foot ahead of the other, her body remaining strong—yet, at the same time, feeling terribly exhausted. Every step, quick though it was, became a chore. She began to yearn for rest.

Kelsier didn't give it to her. He kept running, forcing her on, maintaining the incredible speed. Vin's world became a timeless thing of forced pain and burgeoning enervation. They slowed occasionally to drink water or swallow more pewter beads—but she never stopped running. It was like . . . like she *couldn't* stop. Vin let the exhaustion overwhelm her mind. Flared pewter was everything. She was nothing else.

Light surprised her. The sun began to rise, the mists vanishing. But Kelsier didn't let the illumination stop them. How could he? They had to run. They had to just . . . had . . . to . . . keep . . . running. . . .

*I'm going to die.*

It wasn't the first time the thought had occurred to Vin during the run. In fact, the idea kept circling in her mind, picking at her brain like a carrion bird. She kept moving. Running.

*I hate running,* she thought. *That's why I've always lived in a city, not out on the countryside. So I wouldn't have to run.*

Something within her knew that the thought didn't make any kind of sense. However, lucidity was not currently one of her virtues.

*I hate Kelsier too. He just keeps on going. How long has it been since the sun rose? Minutes? Hours? Weeks? Years? I swear, I don't think—*

Kelsier slowed to a stop on the road ahead of her.

Vin was so stunned that she nearly collided with him. She stumbled, slowing herself maladroitly, as if she had forgotten how to do anything other than run. She stopped, then stared down at her feet, dumbfounded.

*This is wrong,* she thought. *I can't just stand here. I have to be moving.*

She felt herself begin to move again, but Kelsier grabbed her. She struggled in his grip, resisting weakly.

*Rest,* something within her said. *Relax. You've forgotten what that is, but it's so nice. . . .*

"Vin!" Kelsier said. "Don't extinguish your pewter. Keep burning it or you'll fall unconscious!"

Vin shook her head, disoriented, trying to make out his words.

"Tin!" he said. "Flare it. Now!"

She did so. Her head blazed with a sudden headache that she had almost forgotten, and she had to close her eyes against the blinding sunlight. Her legs ached, and her feet felt even worse. The sudden wash of senses restored her sanity, however, and she blinked, looking up at Kelsier.

"Better?" he asked.

She nodded.

"You've just done something incredibly unfair to your body," Kelsier said. "It should have shut down hours ago, but you have pewter to make it keep going. You'll recover—you'll even get better at pushing yourself like this—but right now you just have to keep burning the pewter and stay awake. We can sleep later."

Vin nodded again. “Why . . .” Her voice croaked as she spoke. “Why did we stop?”

“Listen.”

She did. She heard . . . voices. Yelling.

She looked up at him. “A battle?”

Kelsier nodded. “The city of Holstep is about an hour more to the north, but I think we’ve found what we came for. Come on.”

He released her, dropping a coin and jumping over the canal. Vin followed, following him as he rushed up a nearby hill. Kelsier crested it, peeking over the top. Then he stood up, staring at something to the east. Vin crested the hill, and easily saw the battle—such as it was—in the distance. A shift in the wind brought scents to her nose.

Blood. The valley beyond was speckled with corpses. Men still fought on the far side of the valley—a small, ragged group in unmatched clothing was surrounded by a much larger, uniformed army.

“We’re too late,” Kelsier said. “Our men must have finished off the Holstep Garrison, then tried to march back to the caves. But Valtroux City is only a few days away, and its garrison is five thousand strong. Those soldiers got here before we did.”

Squinting, using tin despite the light, Vin could see that he was right. The larger army wore imperial uniforms, and if the line of corpses was any indication, it had ambushed the skaa soldiers as it passed. Their army didn’t have a chance. As she watched, the skaa began to throw up their hands, but the soldiers just kept on killing them. Some of the remaining peasants fought desperately, but they were falling almost as quickly.

“It’s a slaughter,” Kelsier said angrily. “The Valtroux Garrison must have orders to wipe out the entire group.” He stepped forward.

“Kelsier!” Vin said, grabbing his arm. “What are you doing?”

He turned back to her. “There are still men down there. My men.”

“What are you going to do—attack an entire army by yourself? For what purpose? Your rebels don’t have Allomancy—they won’t be able to run away on swift feet and escape. You can’t stop an entire army, Kelsier.”

He shook himself free of her grip; she didn’t have the strength to hold on. She stumbled, falling to the rough black dirt, throwing up a puff of ash. Kelsier began to stalk down the hill toward the battlefield.

Vin climbed to her knees. “Kelsier,” she said, shaking quietly with fatigue. “We aren’t invincible, remember?”

He paused.

"*You're* not invincible," she whispered. "You can't stop them all. You can't save those men."

Kelsier stood quietly, his fists clenched. Then, slowly, he bowed his head. In the distance, the massacre continued, though there weren't many rebels left.

"The caves," Vin whispered. "Our force would have left men behind, right? Maybe they can tell us why the army exposed itself. Maybe you can save the ones who stayed behind. The Lord Ruler's men will certainly search out the army's headquarters—if they aren't trying already."

Kelsier nodded. "All right. Let's go."

Kelsier dropped down into the cavern. He had to flare tin to see anything in the deep darkness, lit only by a bit of reflected sunlight from far above. Vin's scraping in the crack above sounded thunderous to his overenhanced ears. In the cavern itself . . . nothing. No sound, no light.

*So she was wrong,* Kelsier thought. *No one stayed behind.*

Kelsier breathed out slowly, trying to find an outlet for his frustration and anger. He'd abandoned the men on the battlefield. He shook his head, ignoring what logic told him at the moment. His anger was still too fresh.

Vin dropped to the ground beside him, her figure no more than a shadow to his straining eyes.

"Empty," he declared, his voice echoing hollowly in the cavern. "You were wrong."

"No," Vin whispered. "There."

Suddenly, she was off, scrambling across the floor with a catlike litheness. Kelsier called after her in the darkness, gritted his teeth, then followed her by sound down one of the corridors.

"Vin, get back here! There's nothing—"

Kelsier paused. He could just barely make out a flicker of light ahead of him in the corridor. *Bloody hell! How did she see it from so far away?*

He could still hear Vin ahead of him. Kelsier made his way more carefully, checking his metal reserves, worried about a trap left by Ministry agents. As he drew nearer to the light, a voice called out ahead. "Who's there? Say the password!"

Kelsier continued walking, the light growing bright enough for him to see a spear-holding figure backlit in the corridor ahead. Vin waited in the darkness, crouching. She looked up questioningly as Kelsier passed. She seemed to have gotten over the drain of the pewter drag, for the moment. When they finally stopped to rest, however, she'd feel it.

"I can hear you!" the guard said anxiously. His voice sounded slightly familiar. "Identify yourself."

*Captain Demoux,* Kelsier realized. *One of ours. It's not a trap.*

"Say the password!" Demoux commanded.

"I need no password," Kelsier said, stepping into the light.

Demoux lowered his spear. "Lord Kelsier? You've come . . . does that mean the army succeeded?"

Kelsier ignored the question. "Why aren't you guarding the entrance back there?"

"We . . . thought it would be more defensible to retreat to the inner complex, my lord. There aren't a lot of us left."

Kelsier glanced back toward the entrance corridor. *How long until the Lord Ruler's men find a captive willing to talk? Vin was right after all—we need to get these men to safety.*

Vin stood and approached, studying the young soldier with those quiet eyes of hers. "How many of you are there?"

"About two thousand," Demoux said. "We . . . were wrong, my lord. I'm sorry."

Kelsier looked back at him. "Wrong?"

"We thought that General Yeden was acting rashly," Demoux said, blushing in shame. "We stayed behind. We . . . thought we were being loyal to you, rather than him. But we should have gone with the rest of the army."

"The army is dead," Kelsier said curtly. "Gather your men, Demoux. We need to leave *now*."

That night, sitting on a tree stump with the mists gathering around him, Kelsier finally forced himself to confront the day's events.

He sat with his hands clasped before him, listening to the last, faint sounds of the army's men bedding down. Fortunately, someone had thought to prepare the group for quick departure. Each man had a bedroll, a weapon, and enough food for two weeks. As soon as Kelsier discovered who had been so foresighted, he intended to give the man a hefty promotion.

Not that there was much to command anymore. The remaining two thousand men included a depressingly large number of soldiers who were past or before their prime—men wise enough to see that Yeden's plan had been insane, or men young enough to be frightened.

Kelsier shook his head. *So many dead.* They'd gathered nearly seven thousand troops before this fiasco, but now most of them lay dead. Yeden had apparently decided to "test" the army by striking at night against the Holstep Garrison. What had led him to such a foolish decision?

*Me,* Kelsier thought. *This is my fault.* He'd promised them supernatural aid. He'd set himself up, had made Yeden a part of the crew, and had talked so casually about doing the impossible. Was it any wonder that Yeden had thought he could attack the Final Empire head on, considering the confidence Kelsier had given him? Was it any wonder the soldiers would go with the man, considering the promises Kelsier had made?

Now men were dead, and Kelsier was responsible. Death wasn't new to him. Neither was failure—not anymore. But, he couldn't get over the twisting in his gut. True, the men had died fighting the Final Empire, which was as good a death as any skaa could hope for—however, the fact that they'd likely died expecting some sort of divine protection from Kelsier . . . that was disturbing.

*You knew this would be hard,* he told himself. *You understood the burden you were taking upon yourself.*

But, what right had he? Even members of his own crew—Ham, Breeze, and the others—assumed that the Final Empire was invincible. They followed because of their faith in Kelsier, and because he had couched his plans in the form of a thieving job. Well, now that job's patron was dead; a scout sent to check the battlefield had, for better or worse, been able to confirm Yeden's death. The soldiers had put his head on a spear beside the road, along with several of Ham's officers.

The job was dead. They had failed. The army was gone. There would be no rebellion, no seizing of the city.

Footsteps approached. Kelsier looked up, wondering if he even had the strength to stand. Vin lay curled up beside his stump, asleep on the hard ground, only her mistcloak for a cushion. Their extended pewter drag had taken a lot out of the girl, and she had collapsed virtually the moment Kelsier had called a halt for the night. He wished he could do the same. However, he was far more experienced with pewter dragging than she was. His body would give out eventually, but he could keep going for a bit longer.

A figure appeared from the mists, hobbling in Kelsier's direction. The man was old, older than any that Kelsier had recruited. He must have been part of the rebellion from earlier—one of the skaa who had been living in the caves before Kelsier hijacked them.

The man chose a large stone beside Kelsier's stump, sitting with a sigh. It was amazing that one so old had even been able to keep up. Kelsier had moved the group at a fast pace, seeking to distance them as much as possible from the cave complex.

"The men will sleep fitfully," the old man said. "They aren't accustomed to being out in the mists."

"They don't have much choice," Kelsier said.

The old man shook his head. "I suppose they don't." He sat for a moment, aged eyes unreadable. "You don't recognize me, do you?"

Kelsier paused, then shook his head. "I'm sorry. Did I recruit you?"

"After a fashion. I was one of the skaa at Lord Tresting's plantation."

Kelsier opened his mouth slightly in surprise, finally recognizing a slight familiarity to the man's bald head and tired, yet somehow strong, posture. "The old man I sat with that night. Your name was . . ."

"Mennis. After you killed Tresting, we retreated up to the caves, where the rebels there took us in. A lot of the others left eventually, off to find other plantations to join. Some of us stayed."

Kelsier nodded. "You're behind this, aren't you?" he said, gesturing toward the camp. "The preparations?"

Mennis shrugged. "Some of us can't fight, so we do other things."

Kelsier leaned forward. "What happened, Mennis? Why did Yeden do this?"

Mennis just shook his head. "Though most expect young men to be fools, I've noticed that just a little bit of age can make a man far more foolish than he was as a child. Yeden . . . well, he was the type who was too easily impressed—both by you and by the reputation you left for him. Some of his generals thought it might be a good idea to give the men some practical battle experience, and they figured a night raid on the Holstep Garrison would be a clever move. Apparently, it was more difficult than they assumed."

Kelsier shook his head. "Even if they'd been successful, exposing the army would have made it useless to us."

"They believed in you," Mennis said quietly. "They thought that they couldn't fail."

Kelsier sighed, resting his head back, staring up into the shifting mists. He slowly let his breath exhale, its air mingling with the currents overhead.

"So, what becomes of us?" Mennis asked.

"We'll split you up," Kelsier said, "get you back into Luthadel in small groups, lose you among the skaa population."

Mennis nodded. He seemed tired—exhausted—yet he didn't retire. Kelsier could understand that feeling.

"Do you remember our conversation back on Tresting's plantation?" Mennis asked.

"A bit," Kelsier said. "You tried to dissuade me from making trouble."

"But it didn't stop you."

"Troublemaking is just about the only thing I'm good at, Mennis. Do you resent what I did there, what I forced you to become?"

Mennis paused, then nodded. "But, in a way, I'm thankful for that resentment. I believed that my life was over—I awoke each day expecting that I wouldn't have the strength to rise. But . . . well, I found purpose again in the caves. For that, I'm grateful."

"Even after what I did to the army?"

Mennis snorted. "Don't think quite so highly of yourself, young man. Those soldiers got *themselves* killed. You might have been their motivation, but you didn't make the choice for them.

"Regardless, this isn't the first skaa rebellion to get slaughtered. Not by far. In a way, you've accomplished a lot—you gathered an army of considerable size, and then you armed and trained it beyond what anyone had a right to expect. Things went a little more quickly than you anticipated, but you should be proud of yourself."

"Proud?" Kelsier asked, standing to work off some of his agitation. "This army was supposed to help overthrow the Final Empire, not get itself killed fighting a meaningless battle in a valley weeks outside of Luthadel."

"Overthrow the . . ." Mennis looked up, frowning. "You really expected to do something like that?"

"Of course," Kelsier said. "Why else would I gather an army like this?"

"To resist," Mennis said. "To fight. That's why those lads came to the caves. It wasn't a matter of winning or losing, it was a matter of doing something—anything—to struggle against the Lord Ruler."

Kelsier turned, frowning. "You expected the army to lose from the beginning?"

"What other end was there?" Mennis asked. He stood, shaking his head. "Some may have begun to dream otherwise, lad, but the Lord Ruler can't be defeated. Once, I gave you some advice—I told you to be careful which battles you chose to fight. Well, I've realized that this battle *was* worth fighting.

"Now, let me give you another piece of advice, Kelsier, Survivor of

Hathsin. Know when to quit. You've done well, better than any would have expected. Those skaa of yours killed an entire garrison's worth of soldiers before they were caught and destroyed. This is the greatest victory the skaa have known in decades, perhaps centuries. Now it's time to walk away."

With that, the old man nodded his head in respect, then began to shuffle back toward the center of the camp.

Kelsier stood, dumbfounded. *The greatest victory the skaa have known in decades* . . .

That was what he fought against. Not just the Lord Ruler, not just the nobility. He fought against a thousand years of conditioning, a thousand years of life in a society that would label the deaths of five thousand men as a "great victory." Life was so hopeless for the skaa that they'd been reduced to finding comfort in expected defeats.

"That wasn't a victory, Mennis," Kelsier whispered. "I'll *show* you a victory."

He forced himself to smile—not out of pleasure, and not out of satisfaction. He smiled despite the grief he felt at the deaths of his men; he smiled because that was what he did. That was how he proved to the Lord Ruler—and to himself—that he wasn't beaten.

No, he wasn't going to walk away. He wasn't finished yet. Not by far.

# THE END OF PART THREE

# PART FOUR

# DANCERS IN
# A SEA OF MIST

*I am growing so very tired.*

# 26

VIN LAY IN HER BED at Clubs's shop, feeling her head throb.

Fortunately, the headache was growing weaker. She could still remember waking up on that first horrible morning; the pain had been so strong she'd barely been able to think, let alone move. She didn't know how Kelsier had kept going, leading the remnants of their army to a safe location.

That had been over two weeks ago. Fifteen full days, and her head *still* hurt. Kelsier said it was good for her. He claimed that she needed to practice "pewter dragging," training her body to function beyond what it thought possible. Despite what he said, however, she doubted something that hurt so much could possibly be "good" for her.

Of course, it might well be a useful skill to have. She could acknowledge this, now that her head wasn't pounding quite so much. She and Kelsier had been able to run to the battlefield in under a single day. The return trip had taken two weeks.

Vin rose, stretching tiredly. They'd been back for less than a day, in fact. Kelsier had probably stayed up half the night explaining events to the other crewmembers. Vin, however, had been happy to go straight to bed. The nights spent sleeping on the hard earth had reminded her that a comfortable bed was a luxury she'd started to take for granted.

She yawned, rubbed her temples again, then threw on a robe and made her way to the bathroom. She was pleased to see that Clubs's apprentices had remembered to draw her a bath. She locked the door, disrobed, and settled into the warm, lightly scented bathwater. Had she ever really found those scents obnoxious? The smell would make her less inconspicuous, true, but that seemed a slim price for ridding herself of the dirt and grime she'd picked up while traveling.

She still found longer hair an annoyance, however. She washed it, combing out the tangles and knots, wondering how the court women could stand hair that went all the way down their backs. How long must they spend combing and primping beneath a servant's care? Vin's hair hadn't even reached her shoulders yet, and she was already loath to let it get longer. It would fly about and whip her face when she jumped, not to mention provide her foes with something to grab on to.

Once finished bathing, she returned to her room, dressed in something practical, and made her way downstairs. Apprentices bustled in the workroom and housekeepers worked upstairs, but the kitchen was quiet. Clubs, Dockson, Ham, and Breeze sat at the morning meal. They looked up as Vin entered.

"What?" Vin asked grumpily, pausing in the doorway. The bath had soothed her headache somewhat, but it still pulsed slightly in the back of her head.

The four men exchanged glances. Ham spoke first. "We were just discussing the status of the plan, now that both our employer and our army are gone."

Breeze raised an eyebrow. "Status? That's an interesting way of putting it, Hammond. I would have said 'unfeasibility' instead."

Clubs grunted his assent, and the four turned to her, apparently waiting to see her reaction.

*Why do they care so much what I think?* she thought, walking into the room and taking a chair.

"You want something to eat?" Dockson said, rising. "Clubs's housekeepers fixed some baywraps for us to—"

"Ale," Vin said.

Dockson paused. "It's not even noon."

"Ale. Now. Please." She leaned forward, folding her arms on the table and resting her head on them.

Ham had the nerve to chuckle. "Pewter drag?"

Vin nodded.

"It'll pass," he said.

"If I don't die first," Vin grumbled.

Ham chuckled again, but the levity seemed forced. Dox handed her a mug, then sat, glancing at the others. "So, Vin. What *do* you think?"

"I don't know," she said with a sigh. "The army was pretty much the center of everything, right? Breeze, Ham, and Yeden spent all their time recruiting; Dockson and Renoux worked on supplies. Now that the soldiers are gone . . . well, that only leaves Marsh's work with the Ministry and Kell's attacks on the nobility—and neither are things he needs us for. The crew is redundant."

The room fell silent.

"She has a depressingly blunt way of putting it," Dockson said.

"Pewter drag will do that to you," Ham noted.

"When did *you* get back, anyway?" Vin asked.

"Last night, after you were asleep," Ham said. "The Garrison sent us part-time soldiers back early, so they wouldn't have to pay us."

"They're still out there, then?" Dockson asked.

Ham nodded. "Hunting down the rest of our army. The Luthadel Garrison relieved the Valtroux troops, who were actually pretty beat up from the fighting. The majority of the Luthadel troops should be out for a long while yet, searching for rebels—apparently, several very large groups broke off of our main army and fled before the battle started."

The conversation lulled into another period of silence. Vin sipped at her ale, drinking it more out of spite than any belief that it would make her feel better. A few minutes later, footsteps sounded on the stairs.

Kelsier swept into the kitchen. "Good morning, all," he said with customary cheerfulness. "Baywraps again, I see. Clubs, you really need to hire more imaginative housemaids." Despite the comment, he grabbed a cylindrical baywrap and took a large bite, then smiled pleasantly as he poured himself something to drink.

The crew remained quiet. The men exchanged glances. Kelsier remained standing, leaning back against the cupboard as he ate.

"Kell, we need to talk," Dockson finally said. "The army is gone."

"Yes," Kelsier said between bites. "I noticed."

"The job is dead, Kelsier," Breeze said. "It was a good try, but we failed."

Kelsier paused. He frowned, lowering his baywrap. "Failed? What makes you say that?"

"The army is gone, Kell," Ham said.

"The army was only one piece of our plans. We've had a setback, true—but we're hardly finished."

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, man!" Breeze said. "How can you stand there so cheerfully? Our men are *dead*. Don't you even care?"

"I care, Breeze," Kelsier said in a solemn voice. "But what is done is done. We need to move on."

"Exactly!" Breeze said. "Move on from this insane 'job' of yours. It's time to quit. I know you don't like that, but it's the simple truth!"

Kelsier set his plate on the counter. "Don't Soothe me, Breeze. *Never*

Soothe me.”

Breeze paused, mouth open slightly. “Fine,” he finally said. “I won’t use Allomancy; I’ll just use truth. Do you know what I think? I think you never intended to grab that atium.

“You’ve been using us. You promised us wealth so we’d join you, but you never had any intention of making us rich. This is all about your ego—it’s about becoming the most famous crewleader that ever lived. *That’s* why you’re spreading all these rumors, doing all this recruitment. You’ve known wealth—now you want to become a legend.”

Breeze fell quiet, eyes hard. Kelsier stood with his arms folded, regarding the crew. Several glanced aside, shamed eyes proving that they had considered what Breeze was saying. Vin was one of those. The silence persisted, all of them waiting for a rebuttal.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs again, and Spook burst into the kitchen. “Willing the care and upping to see! A gathering, in the fountain square!”

Kelsier didn’t look surprised by the boy’s announcement.

“A gathering in the fountain square?” Ham said slowly. “That means . . .”

“Come on,” Kelsier said, standing up straight. “We’re going to watch.”

“I’d rather not do this, Kell,” Ham said. “I avoid these things for a reason.”

Kelsier ignored him. He walked at the head of the crew, who all—even Breeze—wore mundane skaa clothing and cloaks. A light ashfall had begun, and careless flakes floated down from the sky, like leaves dropped from some unseen tree.

Large clusters of skaa clogged the street, most of them workers from factories or mills. Vin knew of only one reason why the workers would be released and sent to gather in the city’s central square.

Executions.

She’d never gone to them before. Supposedly, all the men in the city—skaa or noble—were required to attend execution ceremonies, but thieving crews knew how to remain hidden. Bells rang in the distance, announcing the event, and obligators watched at the sides of the streets. They would go into mills, forges, and random houses searching for those who disobeyed the call, meting out death as a punishment. Gathering this many people was an enormous undertaking—but, in a way, doing things like this simply worked to prove how powerful the Lord Ruler was.

The streets grew even more crowded as Vin's crew approached the fountain square. Building roofs were packed, and people filled the streets, pressing forward. *There's no way they'll all fit*. Luthadel wasn't like most other cities; its population was enormous. Even with only the men in attendance, there was no way everyone would have a view of the executions.

Yet, they came anyway. Partially because they were required, partially because they wouldn't have to work while they watched, and partially—Vin suspected—because they had the same morbid curiosity that all men possessed.

As the crowds grew thicker, Kelsier, Dockson, and Ham began to shove the crew a path through the onlookers. Some of the skaa gave the crew looks of resentment, though many were just dull-eyed and compliant. Some appeared surprised, even excited, when they saw Kelsier, though his scars were not showing. These people moved aside eagerly.

Eventually, the crew reached the outer row of buildings surrounding the square. Kelsier picked one, nodding toward it, and Dockson moved forward. A man at the doorway tried to bar his entrance, but Dox pointed toward the roof, then hefted his coinpouch suggestively. A few minutes later, the crew had the entire rooftop to themselves.

"Smoke us please, Clubs," Kelsier said quietly.

The gnarled craftsman nodded, making the crew invisible to Allomantic bronze senses. Vin walked over and crouched beside the roof's lip, hands on the short stone railing as she scanned the square down below. "So many people . . ."

"You've lived in cities all your life, Vin," Ham said, standing next to her. "Surely you've seen crowds before."

"Yes, but . . ." How could she explain? The shifting, overpacked mass was unlike anything she'd seen. It was expansive, almost endless, its trails filling every street leading away from the central square. The skaa were packed so closely, she wondered how they even had room to breathe.

The noblemen were at the center of the square, separated from the skaa by soldiers. They were close to the central fountain patio, which stood about five feet above the rest of the square. Someone had constructed seating for the nobility, and they lounged, as if they were visiting some show or horse race. Many had servants holding up parasols against the ash, but it was falling lightly enough that some just ignored it.

Standing beside the noblemen were the obligators—regular ones in gray, Inquisitors in black. Vin shivered. There were eight Inquisitors, their lanky forms standing a head above the obligators. But, it wasn't just height that separated the dark creatures from their cousins. There was an air, a distinctive posture, about the Steel Inquisitors.

Vin turned, studying the regular obligators instead. Most of them held themselves proudly in their administrative robes—the higher their position, the finer the robes. Vin squinted, burning tin, and recognized a moderately familiar face.

"There," she said, pointing. "That one's my father."

Kelsier perked up. "Where?"

"At the front of the obligators," Vin said. "The shorter one with the golden robe-scarf."

Kelsier fell silent. "*That's* your father?" he finally asked.

"Who?" Dockson asked, squinting. "I can't make out their faces."

"Tevidian," Kelsier said.

"The *lord prelan?*" Dockson asked with shock.

"What?" Vin asked. "Who's that?"

Breeze chuckled. "The lord prelan is the leader of the Ministry, my dear. He's the most important of the Lord Ruler's obligators—technically, he's even higher ranked than the Inquisitors."

Vin sat, dumbfounded.

"The lord prelan," Dockson mumbled, shaking his head. "This just keeps getting better."

"Look!" Spook suddenly said, pointing.

The crowd of skaa began to shuffle. Vin had assumed that they were too packed to move, but apparently she was wrong. The people began to pull back, making a large corridor leading to the central platform.

*What could make them*—

Then she felt it. The oppressive numbness, like a massive blanket pressing down, choking away her air, stealing her will. She immediately burned copper. Yet, like before, she swore that she could feel the Lord Ruler's Soothing despite the metal. She sensed him coming closer, trying to make her lose all will, all desire, all strength of emotion.

"He's coming," Spook whispered, crouching down beside her.

A black carriage drawn by a pair of massive white stallions appeared down a side street. It rolled down the corridor of skaa, moving with a sense of . . . inevitability. Vin saw several people get clipped by its passing, and suspected that if a man were to fall into the carriage's path, the vehicle wouldn't even slow as it crushed him to death.

The skaa sagged a bit more as the Lord Ruler arrived, a visible ripple washing across the crowd, their postures drooping as they felt his powerful Soothing. The background roar of whispers and chatting dampened, an unreal silence falling over the enormous square.

"He's so *powerful,*" Breeze said. "Even at my best, I can only Soothe a couple hundred men. There have to be tens of thousands of people here!"

Spook looked over the rim of the rooftop. "It makes me want to fall. To just let go . . ."

Then, he paused. He shook his head, as if waking up. Vin frowned. Something felt different. Tentatively, she extinguished her copper, and realized that she could no longer feel the Lord Ruler's Soothing. The feeling of awful depression—of soullessness and emptiness—had strangely disappeared. Spook looked up, and the rest of the crewmembers stood just a little straighter.

Vin glanced around. The skaa below looked unchanged. Yet, her friends—

Her eyes found Kelsier. The crewleader stood straight-backed, staring resolutely at the approaching carriage, a look of concentration on his face.

*He's Rioting our emotions,* Vin realized. *He's counteracting the Lord Ruler's power.* It was obviously a struggle for Kelsier to protect even their small group.

*Breeze is right,* Vin thought. *How can we fight something like this? The Lord Ruler is Soothing a hundred thousand people at once!*

But, Kelsier fought on. Just in case, Vin turned on her copper. Then she burned zinc and reached out to help Kelsier, Rioting the emotions of those around her. It felt like she was Pulling against some massive, immobile wall. Yet, it must have helped, for Kelsier relaxed slightly, shooting her a grateful look.

"Look," Dockson said, probably unaware of the unseen battle that occurred around him. "The prisoner carts." He pointed toward a set of ten large, bar-lined carts traveling down the corridor behind the Lord Ruler.

"Do you recognize anyone in them?" Ham said, leaning forward.

"I'm not of the seeing," Spook said, looking uncomfortable. "Uncle, you really the burn, right?"

"Yes, my copper is on," Clubs said testily. "You're safe. We're far enough away from the Lord Ruler that it wouldn't matter anyway—that plaza is enormous."

Spook nodded, then obviously began burning tin. A moment later, he shook his head. "Notting of the recognizing anyone."

"You weren't there for a lot of the recruiting, though, Spook," Ham said, squinting.

"True," Spook replied. Though his accent remained, he was obviously making an effort to speak normally.

Kelsier stepped up to the ledge, holding a hand up to shade his eyes. "I can see the prisoners. No, I don't recognize any of the faces. They aren't captive soldiers."

"Who, then?" Ham asked.

"Mostly women and children, it appears," Kelsier said.

"The families of the soldiers?" Ham asked, horrified.

Kelsier shook his head. "I doubt it. They wouldn't have taken the time to identify dead skaa."

Ham frowned, looking confused.

"Random people, Hammond," Breeze said with a quiet sigh. "Examples—casual executions made in order to punish the skaa for harboring rebels."

"No, not even that," Kelsier said. "I doubt the Lord Ruler even knows, or cares, that most of those men were recruited from Luthadel. He probably just assumes that it was another countryside rebellion. This . . . this is just a way of reminding everyone who is in control."

The Lord Ruler's carriage rolled up a platform onto the central patio. The ominous vehicle pulled to a stop in the exact center of the square, but the Lord Ruler himself remained inside.

The prisoner carts pulled to a stop, and a group of obligators and soldiers began to unload them. Black ash continued to fall as the first group of prisoners—most struggling only weakly—were dragged up onto the raised central platform. An Inquisitor directed the work, gesturing for prisoners to be gathered beside each of the platform's four bowl-like fountains.

Four prisoners were forced to their knees—one beside each running fountain—and four Inquisitors raised obsidian axes. Four axes fell, and four heads were sheared free. The bodies, still held by soldiers, were allowed to spurt their last lifeblood into the fountain basins.

The fountains began to glisten red as they sprayed into the air. The soldiers tossed the bodies aside, then brought four more people forward.

Spook looked away sickly. "Why . . . why doesn't Kelsier do something? To saving them, I mean?"

"Don't be foolish," Vin said. "There are *eight* Inquisitors down there—not to mention the Lord Ruler himself. Kelsier would be an idiot to try something."

*Though I wouldn't be surprised if he considered it,* she thought, remembering when Kelsier had been ready to rush down and take on an entire army by himself. She glanced to the side. Kelsier looked like he was forcibly holding himself back—white-knuckled hands gripping the chimney beside him—to keep himself from rushing down to stop the executions.

Spook stumbled over to another part of the rooftop where he could retch without spilling bile onto the people below. Ham groaned slightly, and even Clubs looked saddened. Dockson watched solemnly, as if witnessing the deaths were some sort of vigil. Breeze just shook his head.

Kelsier, however . . . Kelsier was angry. His face red, his muscles tense, his eyes ablaze.

Four more deaths, one of them a child.

"This," Kelsier said, angrily waving his hand toward the central square. "*This* is our enemy. There is no quarter here, no walking away. This is no simple job, to be thrown aside when we encounter a few unexpected twists."

Four more deaths.

"Look at them!" Kelsier demanded, pointing at the bleachers full of nobility. Most of them appeared bored—and a few even seemed to be enjoying themselves, turning and joking with one another as the beheadings continued.

"I know you question me," Kelsier said, turning to the crew. "You think that I've been too hard on the nobility, think that I relish killing them too much. But, can you honestly see those men laughing and tell me that they don't *deserve* to die by my blade? I only bring them justice."

Four more deaths.

Vin searched the bleachers with urgent, tin-enhanced eyes. She found Elend sitting amid a group of younger men. None of them were laughing, and they weren't the only ones. True, many of the nobility made light of the experience, but there were some small minority who looked horrified.

Kelsier continued. "Breeze, you asked about the atium. I'll be honest. It was never my main goal—I gathered this crew because I wanted to change things. We'll grab the atium—we'll need it to support a new government—but this job isn't about making me, or any of you, wealthy.

"Yeden is dead. He was our excuse—a way that we could do something good while still pretending to just be thieves. Now that he's gone, you can give up, if you want. Quit. But, that won't change anything. The struggle will go on. Men will still die. You'll just be ignoring it."

Four more deaths.

"It's time to stop the charade," Kelsier said, staring at them each in turn. "If we're going to do this now, we have to be up-front and honest with ourselves. We have to admit that it isn't about money. It's about stopping *that.*" He pointed at the courtyard with its red fountains—a visible sign of death for the thousands of skaa too far away to even tell what was happening.

"I intend to continue my fight," Kelsier said quietly. "I realize that some of you question my leadership. You think I've been building myself up too much with the skaa. You whisper that I'm making myself into another Lord Ruler—you think that my ego is more important to me than overthrowing the empire."

He paused, and Vin saw guilt in the eyes of Dockson and the others. Spook rejoined the group, still looking a bit sick.

Four more deaths.

"You're wrong," Kelsier said quietly. "You have to trust me. You gave me your confidence when we began this plan, despite how dangerous things seemed. I still need that confidence! No matter how things appear, no matter how terrible the odds, we have to keep fighting!"

Four more deaths.

The crew slowly turned toward Kelsier. Resisting the Lord Ruler's Pushing on their emotions didn't seem like half as much a struggle for Kelsier anymore, though Vin had let her zinc lapse.

*Maybe . . . maybe he* can *do it,* Vin thought, despite herself. If there was ever a man who could defeat the Lord Ruler, it would be Kelsier.

"I didn't choose you men because of your competence," Kelsier said, "though you are certainly skilled. I chose each of you specifically because I knew you to be men of conscience. Ham, Breeze, Dox, Clubs . . . you are men with reputations for honesty, even charity. I knew that if I were going to succeed at this plan, I would need men who actually *cared.*

"No, Breeze, this isn't about boxings or about glory. This is about war—a war we have been fighting for a thousand years, a war I intend to end. You may go, if you wish. You know I'll let any of you out—no questions asked, no repercussions exacted—if you wish to go.

"However," he said, eyes growing hard, "if you stay, you have to promise to stop questioning my authority. You can voice concerns about the job itself, but there will be no more whispered conferences about my leadership. If you stay, you follow me. Understood?"

One by one, he locked eyes with the crewmembers. Each one gave him a nod.

"I don't think we ever really questioned you, Kell," Dockson said. "We just . . . we're worried, and I think rightly so. The army was a big part of our plans."

Kelsier nodded to the north, toward the main city gates. "What do you see up in the distance, Dox?"

"The city gates?"

"And what is different about them recently?"

Dockson shrugged. "Nothing unusual. They're a bit understaffed, but—"

"Why?" Kelsier interjected. "Why are they understaffed?"

Dockson paused. "Because the Garrison is gone?"

"Exactly," Kelsier said. "Ham says that the Garrison could be out chasing remnants of our army for months, and only about ten percent of its men stayed behind. That makes sense—stopping rebels is the sort of thing the Garrison was created to do. Luthadel might be exposed, but no one ever attacks Luthadel. No one ever has."

A quiet understanding passed between the members of the crew.

"Part one of our plan to take the city has been accomplished," Kelsier said. "We got the Garrison out of Luthadel. It cost us far more than we expected—far more than it should have. I wish to the Forgotten Gods that those boys hadn't died. Unfortunately, we can't change that now—we can only use the opening they gave us.

"The plan is still in motion—the main peacekeeping force in the city is gone. If a house war starts in earnest, the Lord Ruler will have a difficult time stopping it. Assuming he wants to. For some reason, he tends to step back and let the nobility fight each other every hundred years or so. Perhaps he finds that letting them at each other's throats keeps them away from his own."

"But, what if the Garrison comes back?" Ham asked.

"If I'm right," Kelsier said, "the Lord Ruler will let them chase stragglers from our army for several months, giving the nobility a chance to blow off a little steam. Except, he's going to get a lot more than he expected. When that house war starts, we're going to use the chaos to seize the palace."

"With what army, my dear man?" Breeze said.

"We still have some troops left," Kelsier said. "Plus, we have time to recruit more. We'll have to be careful—we can't use the caves, so we'll have to hide our troops in the city. That will probably mean smaller numbers. However, that won't be an issue—you see, that garrison is going to return eventually."

The members of the group shared a look as the executions proceeded below. Vin sat quietly, trying to decide what Kelsier meant by that statement.

"Exactly, Kell," Ham said slowly. "The Garrison will return, and we won't have a big enough army to fight them."

"But we *will* have the Lord Ruler's treasury," Kelsier said, smiling. "What is it you always say about those Garrisoners, Ham?"

The Thug paused, then smiled too. "That they're mercenaries."

"We seize the Lord Ruler's money," Kelsier said, "and it means we get his army too. This can still work, gentlemen. We can *make* it work."

The crew seemed to grow more confident. Vin, however, turned her eyes back toward the square. The fountains ran so red that they seemed completely filled with blood. Over it all, the Lord Ruler watched from within his jet-black carriage. The windows were open, and—with tin—Vin could just barely see a silhouetted figure sitting within.

*That's our real foe,* she thought. *Not the missing garrison, not the Inquisitors with their axes. That man. The one from the logbook.*

*We'll have to find a way to defeat him, otherwise everything else we do will be pointless.*

*I think I've finally discovered why Rashek resents me so very much. He does not believe that an outsider such as myself—a foreigner—could possibly be the Hero of Ages. He believes that I have somehow tricked the philosophers, that I wear the piercings of the Hero unjustly.*

*According to Rashek, only a Terrisman of pure blood should have been chosen as the Hero. Oddly, I find myself even more determined because of his hatred. I must prove to him that I can perform this task.*

# 27

IT WAS A SUBDUED GROUP that returned to Clubs's shop that evening. The executions had stretched for hours. There had been no denunciations, no explanations by the Ministry or the Lord Ruler—just execution, after execution, after execution. Once the captives were gone, the Lord Ruler and his obligators had ridden away, leaving a pile of corpses on the platform and bloodied water running in the fountains.

As Kelsier's crew returned to the kitchen, Vin realized that her headache no longer bothered her. Her pain now seemed . . . insignificant. The baywraps remained on the table, thoughtfully covered by one of the house maids. No one reached for them.

"All right," Kelsier said, taking his customary place leaning against the cupboard. "Let's plan this out. How should we proceed?"

Dockson recovered a stack of papers from the side of the room as he walked over to seat himself. "With the Garrison gone, our main focus becomes the nobility."

"Indeed," Breeze said. "If we truly intend to seize the treasury with only a few thousand soldiers, then we're certainly going to need something to distract the palace guard and keep the nobility from taking the city away from us. The house war, therefore, becomes of paramount importance."

Kelsier nodded. "My thoughts exactly."

"But, what happens when the house war is over?" Vin said. "Some houses will come out on top, and then we'll have to deal with them."

Kelsier shook his head. "I don't intend for the house war to ever end, Vin—or, at least, not for a long while. The Lord Ruler makes dictates, and the Ministry polices his followers, but the nobility are the ones who actually force the skaa to work. So, if we bring down enough noble houses, the government may just collapse on its own. We can't fight the entire Final Empire as a whole—it's too big. But, we might be able to shatter it, then make the pieces fight each other."

"We need to put financial strain on the Great Houses," Dockson said, flipping through his papers. "The aristocracy is primarily a financial institution, and lack of funds will bring *any* house down."

"Breeze, we might need to use some of your aliases," Kelsier said. "So far, I've really been the only one in the crew working on the house war—but if we're going to make this city snap before the Garrison returns, we'll need to step up our efforts."

Breeze sighed. "Very well. We'll just have to be very careful to make certain no one accidentally recognizes me as someone I shouldn't be. I can't go to parties or functions—but I can probably do solitary house visits."

"Same for you, Dox," Kelsier said.

"I figured as much," Dockson said.

"It will be dangerous for both of you," Kelsier said. "But speed will be essential. Vin will remain our main spy—and we'll probably want her to start spreading some bad information. Anything to make the nobility uncertain."

Ham nodded. "We should probably focus our attentions on the top, then."

"Indeed," Breeze said. "If we can make the most powerful houses look vulnerable, then their enemies will be quick to strike. Only after the powerful houses are gone will people realize that *they* were the ones really supporting the economy."

The room fell quiet for a second, then several heads turned toward Vin.

"What?" she asked.

"They're talking about House Venture, Vin," Dockson said. "It's the most powerful of the Great Houses."

Breeze nodded. "If Venture falls, the entire Final Empire would feel the tremors."

Vin sat quietly for a moment. "They're not all bad people," she finally said.

"Perhaps," Kelsier said. "But Lord Straff Venture certainly is, and his family sits at the very head of the Final Empire. House Venture needs to go—and you already have an in with one of its most important members."

*I thought you wanted me to stay* away *from Elend,* she thought with annoyance.

"Just keep your ears open, child," Breeze said. "See if you can get the lad to talk about his house's finances. Find us a bit of leverage, and we'll do the rest."

*Just like the games Elend hates so much.* However, the executions were still fresh in her mind. That sort of thing had to be stopped. Besides—even Elend said he didn't like his father, or his house, very much. Maybe . . . maybe she could find something. "I'll see what I can do," she said.

A knock came at the front door, answered by one of the apprentices. A few moments later, Sazed—clad in a skaa cloak to hide his features—entered the kitchen.

Kelsier checked the clock. "You're early, Saze."

"I try to make it a habit, Master Kelsier," the Terrisman replied.

Dockson raised an eyebrow. "That's a habit someone else could afford to pick up."

Kelsier snorted. "If you're always on time, it implies that you never have anything better you should be doing. Saze, how are the men?"

"As good as can be expected, Master Kelsier," Sazed replied. "But they can't hide in the Renoux warehouses forever."

"I know," Kelsier said. "Dox, Ham, I'll need you to work on this problem. There are two thousand men left from our army; I want you to get them into Luthadel."

Dockson nodded thoughtfully. "We'll find a way."

"You want us to keep training them?" Ham asked.

Kelsier nodded.

"Then we'll have to hide them in squads," he said. "We don't have the resources to train men individually. Say . . . a couple hundred men per team? Hidden in slums near one another?"

"Make sure none of the teams know about the others," Dockson said. "Or even that we still intend to strike at the palace. With that many men in town, there's a chance some of them will eventually get taken by the obligators for one reason or another."

Kelsier nodded. "Tell each group that it's the only one that didn't get disbanded, and that it's being retained just in case it's needed at some point in the future."

"You also said that recruitment needed to be continued," Ham said.

Kelsier nodded. "I'd like at least twice as many troops before we try and pull this off."

"That's going to be tough," Ham said, "considering our army's failure."

"What failure?" Kelsier asked. "Tell them the truth—that our army successfully neutralized the Garrison."

"Though most of them died doing it," Ham said.

"We can gloss over that part," Breeze said. "The people will be angry at the executions—that should make them more willing to listen to us."

"Gathering more troops is going to be your main task over the next few months, Ham," Kelsier said.

"That's not much time," Ham said. "But, I'll see what I can do."

"Good," Kelsier said. "Saze, did the note come?"

"It did, Master Kelsier," Sazed said, pulling a letter from beneath his cloak and handing it to Kelsier.

"And what would that be?" Breeze asked curiously.

"A message from Marsh," Kelsier said, opening the letter and scanning its contents. "He's in the city, and he has news."

"What news?" Ham asked.

"He doesn't say," Kelsier said, grabbing a baywrap. "But he gave instructions on where to meet him tonight." He walked over, picking up a regular skaa cloak. "I'm going to go scout the location before it gets dark. Coming, Vin?"

She nodded, standing.

"The rest of you keep working on the plan," Kelsier said. "In two months' time, I want this city to be so tense that when it finally breaks, even the Lord Ruler won't be able to hold it together."

"There's something you're not telling us, isn't there?" Vin said, looking away from the window, turning toward Kelsier. "A part of the plan."

Kelsier glanced over at her in the darkness. Marsh's chosen meeting place was an abandoned building within the Twists, one of the most impoverished skaa slums. Kelsier had located a second abandoned building across from the one they would meet in, and he and Vin waited on the top floor, watching the street for signs of Marsh.

"Why do you ask me that?" Kelsier finally said.

"Because of the Lord Ruler," Vin said, picking at the rotting wood of her windowsill. "I felt his power today. I don't think the others could sense it, not like a Mistborn can. But I know you must have." She looked up again, meeting Kelsier's eyes. "You're still planning to get him out of the city before we try to take the palace, right?"

"Don't worry about the Lord Ruler," Kelsier said. "The Eleventh Metal will take care of him."

Vin frowned. Outside, the sun was setting in a fiery blaze of frustration. The mists would come soon, and supposedly Marsh would arrive a short time later.

*The Eleventh Metal,* she thought, remembering the skepticism with which the other crewmembers regarded it. “Is it real?” Vin asked.

“The Eleventh Metal? Of course it is—I showed it to you, remember?”

“That’s not what I mean,” she said. “Are the legends real? Are you lying?”

Kelsier turned toward her, frowning slightly. Then he smirked. “You’re a very blunt girl, Vin.”

“I know.”

Kelsier’s smile deepened. “The answer is no. I’m not lying. The legends are real, though it took some time for me to find them.”

“And that bit of metal you showed us really is the Eleventh Metal?”

“I think so,” Kelsier said.

“But you don’t know how to use it.”

Kelsier paused, then shook his head. “No. I don’t.”

“That’s not very comforting.”

Kelsier shrugged, turning to look out the window. “Even if I don’t discover the secret in time, I doubt the Lord Ruler will be as big a problem as you think. He’s a powerful Allomancer, but he doesn’t know everything—if he did, we’d be dead right now. He’s not omnipotent, either—if he were, he wouldn’t have needed to execute all of those skaa to try and frighten the city into submission.

“I don’t know what he is—but I think he’s more like a man than he is a god. The words in that logbook . . . they’re the words of a regular person. His real power comes from his armies and his wealth. If we remove them, he won’t be able to do anything to stop his empire from collapsing.”

Vin frowned. “He might not be a god, but . . . he’s something, Kelsier. Something different. Today, when he was in the square, I could feel his touch on my emotions even when I was burning copper.”

“That’s not possible, Vin,” Kelsier said with a shake of his head. “If it were, Inquisitors would be able to sense Allomancy even when there was a Smoker nearby. If that were the case, don’t you think they’d hunt down all of the skaa Mistings and kill them?”

Vin shrugged.

“You know the Lord Ruler is strong,” Kelsier said, “and you feel like you *should* still be able to sense him. So you do."

*Maybe he's right,* she thought, picking off another bit of the windowsill. *He's been an Allomancer for far longer than I have, after all.*

*But . . . I felt something, didn't I? And the Inquisitor that nearly killed me—somehow, he found me in the darkness and rain. He must have sensed something.*

She let the matter drop, however. "The Eleventh Metal. Couldn't we just try it and see what it does?"

"It's not that simple," Kelsier said. "You remember how I told you never to burn a metal that wasn't one of the ten?"

Vin nodded.

"Burning another metal can be deadly," Kelsier said. "Even getting the wrong mixture in an alloy metal can make you sick. If I'm wrong about the Eleventh Metal . . ."

"It will kill you," Vin said quietly.

Kelsier nodded.

*So, you're not quite as certain as you pretend,* she decided. *Otherwise, you'd have tried it by now.*

"That's what you want to find in the logbook," Vin said. "A clue about how to use the Eleventh Metal."

Kelsier nodded. "I'm afraid we weren't very lucky in that respect. So far, the logbook hasn't even mentioned Allomancy."

"Though it does talk about Feruchemy," Vin said.

Kelsier eyed her as he stood by his window, one shoulder leaning against the wall. "So Sazed told you about that?"

Vin glanced down. "I . . . kind of forced him to."

Kelsier chuckled. "I wonder what I've unleashed upon the world by teaching you Allomancy. Of course, my trainer said the same thing about me."

"He was right to worry."

"Of course he was."

Vin smiled. Outside, the sunlight was nearly gone, and diaphanous patches of mist were beginning to form in the air. They hung like ghosts, slowly growing larger, extending their influence as night approached.

"Sazed didn't have time to tell me much about Feruchemy," Vin said carefully. "What kind of things can it do?" She waited in trepidation, assuming that Kelsier would see through her lie.

"Feruchemy is completely internal," Kelsier said in an offhand voice. "It can provide some of the same things we get from pewter and tin—strength, endurance, eyesight—but each attribute has to be stored separately. It can enhance a lot of other things too—things that Allomancy can't do. Memory, physical speed, clarity of thought . . . even some strange things, like physical weight or physical age, can be altered by Feruchemy."

"So, it's more powerful than Allomancy?" Vin said.

Kelsier shrugged. "Feruchemy doesn't have any external powers—it can't Push and Pull emotions, nor can it Steelpush or Ironpull. And, the biggest limitation to Feruchemy is that you have to store up all of its abilities by drawing them from your own body.

"Want to be twice as strong for a time? Well, you have to spend several hours being weak to store up the strength. If you want to store up the ability to heal quickly, you have to spend a great deal of time feeling sick. In Allomancy, the metals themselves are our fuel—we can generally keep going as long as we have enough metal to burn. In Feruchemy, the metals are just storage devices—your own body is the real fuel."

"So, you just steal someone else's storage metals, right?" Vin said.

Kelsier shook his head. "Doesn't work—Feruchemists can only access metal stores they themselves created."

"Oh."

Kelsier nodded. "So, no. I wouldn't say that Feruchemy is more powerful than Allomancy. They both have advantages and limitations. For instance, an Allomancer can only flare a metal so high, and so his maximum strength is bounded. Feruchemists don't have that kind of limitation; if a Feruchemist had enough strength stored up to be twice as strong as normal for an hour, he could choose instead to be *three* times as strong for a shorter period of time—or even four, five, or six times as strong for even shorter periods."

Vin frowned. "That sounds like a pretty big advantage."

"True," Kelsier said, reaching inside of his cloak and pulling out a vial containing several beads of atium. "But we have *this.* It doesn't matter if a Feruchemist is as strong as five men or as strong as fifty men—if I know what he's going to do next, I'll beat him."

Vin nodded.

"Here," Kelsier said, unstoppering the vial and pulling out one of the beads. He took out another vial, this one filled with the normal alcohol solution, and dropped the bead in it. "Take one of these. You might need it."

"Tonight?" Vin asked, accepting the vial.

Kelsier nodded.

"But, it's just Marsh."

"It might be," he said. "Then again, maybe the obligators caught him and forced him to write that letter. Maybe they're following him, or maybe they've since captured him and have tortured him to find out about the meeting. Marsh is in a very dangerous place—think about trying to do the same thing you're doing at those balls, except exchange all the noblemen for obligators and Inquisitors."

Vin shivered. "I guess you have a point," she said, tucking away the bead of atium. "You know, something must be wrong with me—I barely even stop to think how much this stuff is worth anymore."

Kelsier didn't respond immediately. "I have trouble forgetting how much it's worth," he said quietly.

"I . . ." Vin trailed off, glancing down at his hands. He usually wore long-sleeved shirts and gloves now; his reputation was making it dangerous for his identifying scars to be visible in public. Vin knew they were there, however. Like thousands of tiny white scratches, layered one over the other.

"Anyway," Kelsier said, "you're right about the logbook—I had hoped that it would mention the Eleventh Metal. But, Allomancy isn't even mentioned in reference to Feruchemy. The two powers are similar in many respects; you'd think that he would compare them."

"Maybe he worried that someone would read the book, and didn't want to give away that he was an Allomancer."

Kelsier nodded. "Maybe. It's also possible that he hadn't Snapped yet. Whatever happened in those Terris Mountains changed him from hero to tyrant; maybe it also awakened his powers. We won't know, I guess, until Saze finishes his translation."

"Is he close?"

Kelsier nodded. "Just a bit left—the important bit, hopefully. I feel a little frustrated with the text so far. The Lord Ruler hasn't even told us what he is supposed to accomplish in those mountains! He claims that he's doing something to protect the entire world, but that might just be his ego coming through."

*He didn't seem very egotistical in the text to me,* Vin thought. *Kind of the opposite, actually.*

"Regardless," Kelsier said, "we'll know more once the last few sections are translated."

It was growing dark outside, and Vin had to turn up her tin to see properly. The street outside her window grew visible, adopting the strange mixture of shadow and luminance that was the result of tin-enhanced vision. She knew it was dark, logically. Yet, she could still see. Not as she did in regular light—everything was muted—but it was sight nonetheless.

Kelsier checked his pocket watch.

"How long?" Vin asked.

"Another half hour," Kelsier said. "Assuming he's on time—and I doubt he will be. He *is* my brother, after all."

Vin nodded, shifting so that she leaned with arms crossed across the broken windowsill. Though it was a very small thing, she felt a comfort in having the atium Kelsier had given her.

She paused. Thinking of atium reminded her of something important. Something she'd been bothered by on several occasions. "You never taught me the ninth metal!" she accused, turning.

Kelsier shrugged. "I told you that it wasn't very important."

"Still. What is it? Some alloy of atium, I assume?"

Kelsier shook his head. "No, the last two metals don't follow the same pattern as the basic eight. The ninth metal is gold."

"Gold?" Vin asked. "That's it? I could have tried it a long time ago on my own!"

Kelsier chuckled. "Assuming you wanted to. Burning gold is a somewhat. . . . uncomfortable experience."

Vin narrowed her eyes, then turned to look back out the window. *We'll see,* she thought.

"You're going to try it anyway, aren't you?" Kelsier said, smiling.

Vin didn't respond.

Kelsier sighed, reaching into his sash and pulling out a golden boxing and a file. "You should probably get one of these," he said, holding up the file. "However, if you collect a metal yourself, burn just a tiny bit first to make certain that it's pure or alloyed correctly."

"If it isn't?" Vin asked.

"You'll know," Kelsier promised, beginning to file away at the coin. "Remember that headache you had from pewter dragging?"

"Yes?"

"Bad metal is worse," Kelsier said. "Far worse. Buy your metals when you can—in every city, you'll find a small group of merchants who provide powdered metals to Allomancers. Those merchants have a vested interest in making certain that all of their metals are pure—a grumpy Mistborn with a headache isn't exactly the kind of slighted customer one wants to deal with." Kelsier finished filing, then collected a few flakes of gold on a small square of cloth. He stuck one on his finger, then swallowed it.

“This is good,” he said, handing her the cloth. “Go ahead—just remember, burning the ninth metal is a strange experience.”

Vin nodded, suddenly feeling a bit apprehensive. *You’ll never know if you don’t try it for yourself,* she thought, then dumped the dustlike flakes into her mouth. She washed them down with a bit of water from her flask.

A new metal reserve appeared within her—unfamiliar and different from the nine she knew. She looked up at Kelsier, took a breath, and burned gold.

She was in two places at once. She could see herself, and she could see herself.

One of her was a strange woman, changed and transformed from the girl she had always been. That girl had been careful and cautious—a girl who would never burn an unfamiliar metal based solely on the word of one man. This woman was foolish; she had forgotten many of the things that had let her survive so long. She drank from cups prepared by others. She fraternized with strangers. She didn’t keep track of the people around her. She was still far more careful than most people, but she had lost so much.

The other her was something she had always secretly loathed. A child, really. Thin to the point of scrawniness, she was lonely, hateful, and untrusting. She loved no one, and no one loved her. She always told herself, quietly, that she didn’t care. Was there something worth living for? There had to be. Life couldn’t be as pathetic as it seemed. Yet, it had to be. There wasn’t anything else.

Vin was both. She stood in two places, moving both bodies, being both girl and woman. She reached out with hesitant, uncertain hands—one each—and touched herself on the faces, one each.

Vin gasped, and it was gone. She felt a sudden rush of emotions, a sense of worthlessness and confusion. There were no chairs in the room, so she simply squatted to the ground, sitting with her back to the wall, knees pulled up, arms wrapped around them.

Kelsier walked over, squatting down to lay a hand on her shoulder. “It’s all right.”

“What was that?” she whispered.

“Gold and atium are complements, like the other metal pairs,” Kelsier said. “Atium lets you see, marginally, into the future. Gold works in a similar way, but it lets you see into the past. Or, at least, it gives you a glimpse of another version of yourself, had things been different in the past.”

Vin shivered. The experience of being both people at once, of seeing herself twice over, had been disturbingly eerie. Her body still shook, and her mind didn't feel . . . right anymore.

Fortunately, the sensation seemed to be fading. "Remind me to listen to you in the future," she said. "Or, at least, when you talk about Allomancy."

Kelsier chuckled. "I tried to put it out of your mind for as long as possible. But, you had to try it sometime. You'll get over it."

Vin nodded. "It's . . . almost gone already. But, it wasn't just a vision, Kelsier. It was *real.* I could touch her, the other me."

"It may feel that way," Kelsier said. "But she wasn't here—I couldn't see her, at least. It's an hallucination."

"Atium visions aren't just hallucinations," Vin said. "The shadows really do show what people will do."

"True," Kelsier said. "I don't know. Gold is strange, Vin. I don't think anybody understands it. My trainer, Gemmel, said that a gold shadow was a person who didn't exist—but could have. A person you might have become, had you not made certain choices. Of course, Gemmel was a bit screwy, so I'm not sure how much I'd believe of what he said."

Vin nodded. However, it was unlikely that she'd find out more about gold anytime soon. She didn't intend to ever burn it again, if she could help it. She continued to sit, letting her emotions recover for a while, and Kelsier moved back over by the window. Eventually, he perked up.

"He's here?" Vin asked, crawling to her feet.

Kelsier nodded. "You want to stay here and rest some more?"

Vin shook her head.

"All right, then," he said, placing his pocket watch, file, and other metals on the windowsill. "Let's go."

They didn't go out the window—Kelsier wanted to maintain a low profile, though this section of the Twists was so deserted that Vin wasn't sure why he bothered. They left the building via a set of untrustworthy stairs, then crossed the street in silence.

The building Marsh had chosen was even more run-down than the one Vin and Kelsier had been sitting in. The front door was gone, though Vin could see remnants of it in the splintered refuse on the floor. The room inside smelled of dust and soot, and she had to stifle a sneeze.

A figure standing on the far side of the room spun at the sound. "Kell?"

"It's me," Kelsier said. "And Vin."

As Vin drew closer, she could see Marsh squinting in the darkness. It was odd to watch him, feeling like she was in plain sight, yet knowing that to him she and Kelsier were nothing more than shadows. The far wall of the building had collapsed, and mist floated freely in the room, nearly as dense as it was outside.

"You have Ministry tattoos!" Vin said, staring at Marsh.

"Of course," Marsh said, his voice as stern as ever. "I had them put on before I met up with the caravan. I had to have them to play the part of an acolyte."

They weren't extensive—he was playing a low-ranked obligator—but the pattern was unmistakable. Dark lines, rimming the eyes, running outward like crawling cracks of lightning. There was one, single line—much thicker, and in bright red, running down the side of his face. Vin recognized the pattern: These were the lines of an obligator who belonged to the Canton of Inquisition. Marsh hadn't just infiltrated the Ministry, he'd chosen the most dangerous section of it to infiltrate.

"But, you'll always have them," Vin said. "They're so distinctive—everywhere you go, you'll be known as either an obligator or a fraud."

"That was part of the price he paid to infiltrate the Ministry, Vin," Kelsier said quietly.

"It doesn't matter," Marsh said. "I didn't have much of a life before this anyway. Look, can we hurry? I'm expected to be somewhere soon. Obligators lead busy lives, and I only have a few minutes' leeway."

"All right," Kelsier said. "I assume your infiltration went well, then?"

"It went fine," Marsh said tersely. "Too well, actually—I think I might have distinguished myself from the group. I assumed that I would be at a disadvantage, since I didn't have the same five years of training that the other acolytes did. I made certain to answer questions as thoroughly as possible, and to perform my duties with precision. However, I apparently know more about the Ministry than even some of its members do. I'm certainly more competent than this batch of newcomers, and the prelans have noticed that."

Kelsier chuckled. "You always were an overachiever."

Marsh snorted quietly. "Anyway, my knowledge—not to mention my skill as a Seeker—has already earned me an outstanding reputation. I'm not sure how closely I want the prelans paying attention to me; that background we devised begins to sound a bit flimsy when an Inquisitor is grilling you."

Vin frowned. "You told them that you're a Misting?"

"Of course I did," Marsh said. "The Ministry—particularly the

Canton of Inquisition—recruits noblemen Seekers diligently. The fact that I'm one is enough to keep them from asking too many questions about my background. They're happy enough to have me, despite the fact that I'm a fair bit older than most acolytes."

"Besides," Kelsier said, "he needed to tell them he was a Misting so that he could get into the more secretive Ministry sects. Most of the higher-ranking obligators are Mistings of one sort or another. They tend to favor their own kind."

"With good reason," Marsh said, speaking quickly. "Kell, the Ministry is far more competent than we assumed."

"What do you mean?"

"They make use of their Mistings," Marsh said. "*Good* use of them. They have bases throughout the city—Soothing stations, as they call them. Each one contains a couple of Ministry Soothers whose only duty is to extend a dampening influence around them, calming and depressing the emotions of everyone in the area."

Kelsier hissed quietly. "How many?"

"Dozens," Marsh said. "Concentrated in skaa sections of the city. They know that the skaa are beaten, but they want to make sure things stay that way."

"Bloody hell!" Kelsier said. "I always thought that the skaa inside Luthadel seemed more beaten down than others. No wonder we had so much trouble recruiting. The people's emotions are under a constant Soothing!"

Marsh nodded. "The Ministry Soothers are good, Kell—*very* good. Even better than Breeze. All they do is Soothe all day, every day. And, since they're not trying to get you to do anything specific—instead just keeping you from extreme emotional ranges—they're very hard to notice.

"Each team has a Smoker to keep them hidden, as well as a Seeker to watch for passing Allomancers. I'll bet this is where the Inquisitors get a lot of their leads—most of our people are smart enough not to burn when they know that there's an obligator in the area, but they're more lax in the slums."

"Can you get us a list of the stations?" Kelsier asked. "We need to know where those Seekers are, Marsh."

Marsh nodded. "I'll try. I'm on my way to a station right now—they always do personnel changes at night, to maintain their secret. The upper ranks have taken an interest in me, and they're letting me visit some stations to become familiar with their work. I'll see if I can get a list for you."

Kelsier nodded in the darkness.

"Just . . . don't be stupid with the information, all right?" Marsh said. "We have to be careful, Kell. The Ministry has kept these stations secret for quite some time. Now that we know about them, we have a serious advantage. Don't waste it."

"I won't," Kelsier promised. "What about the Inquisitors? Did you find anything out about them?"

Marsh stood quietly for a moment. "They're . . . strange, Kell. I don't know. They seem to have all of the Allomantic powers, so I assume that they were once Mistborn. I can't find out much else about them—though I do know that they age."

"Really?" Kelsier said with interest. "So, they're not immortal?"

"No," Marsh said. "The obligators say that Inquisitors change occasionally. The creatures are very long-lived, but they do eventually die of old age. New ones must be recruited from noblemen ranks. They're people, Kell—they've just been . . . changed."

Kelsier nodded. "If they can die of old age, then there's probably other ways to kill them too."

"That's what I think," Marsh said. "I'll see what I can find, but don't get your hopes up. The Inquisitors don't have many dealings with normal obligators—there's political tension between the two groups. The lord prelan leads the church, but the Inquisitors think that they should be in charge."

"Interesting," Kelsier said slowly. Vin could practically hear his mind working on the new information.

"Anyway, I should go," Marsh said. "I had to jog all the way here, and I'm going to be late getting to my appointment anyway."

Kelsier nodded, and Marsh began to move away, picking his way over the rubble in his dark obligator's robe.

"Marsh," Kelsier said as Marsh reached the doorway.

Marsh turned.

"Thank you," Kelsier said. "I can only guess how dangerous this is."

"I'm not doing this for you, Kell," Marsh said. "But . . . I appreciate the sentiment. I'll try and send you another missive once I have more information."

"Be careful," Kelsier said.

Marsh vanished out into the misty night. Kelsier stood in the fallen room for a few minutes, staring after his brother.

*He wasn't lying about that either,* Vin thought. *He really* does *care for Marsh.*

"Let's go," Kelsier said. "We should get you back to Mansion Renoux—House Lekal is throwing another party in a few days, and you'll need to be there."

*Sometimes, my companions claim that I worry and question too much. However, while I may wonder about my stature as the hero, there is one thing that I have never questioned: the ultimate good of our quest.*

*The Deepness must be destroyed. I have seen it, and I have felt it. This name we give it is too weak a word, I think. Yes, it is deep and unfathomable, but it is also terrible. Many do not realize that it is sentient, but I have sensed its mind, such that it is, the few times I have confronted it directly.*

*It is a thing of destruction, madness, and corruption. It would destroy this world not out of spite or out of animosity, but simply because that is what it does.*

## 28

Keep Lekal's ballroom was shaped like the inside of a pyramid. The dance floor was set on a waist-high platform at the very center of the room, and the dining tables sat on four similar platforms surrounding it. Servants scuttled through the trenches running between the platforms, delivering food to the dining aristocrats.

Four tiers of balconies ran along the inside perimeter of the pyramidal room, each one a little closer to the point at the top, each one extending just a little bit more over the dance floor. Though the main room was well lit, the balconies themselves were shadowed by their overhangs. The design was intended to allow proper viewing of the keep's most distinctive artistic feature—the small stained-glass windows that lined each balcony.

Lekal noblemen bragged that while other keeps had larger windows, Keep Lekal had the most detailed ones. Vin had to admit that they were impressive. She'd seen so many stained-glass windows over the last few months that she was beginning to take them for granted. Keep Lekal's windows, however, put most of them to shame. Each of these was an extravagant, detailed marvel of resplendent color. Exotic animals pranced, distant landscapes enticed, and portraits of famous noblemen sat proudly.

There were also, of course, the requisite pictures dedicated to the Ascension. Vin could recognize these more easily now, and she was surprised to see references to things she had read in the logbook. The hills of emerald green. The steep mountains, with faint wavelike lines coming from the tips. A deep, dark lake. And . . . blackness. The Deepness. A chaotic thing of destruction.

*He defeated it,* Vin thought. *But . . . what was it?* Perhaps the end of the logbook would reveal more.

Vin shook her head, leaving the alcove—and its black window—behind. She strolled along the second balcony, wearing a pure white gown—an outfit she would never have been able to even imagine during her life as a skaa. Ash and soot had been too much a part of her life, and she didn't think she'd even had a concept of what a pristine white looked like. That knowledge made the dress even more wondrous to her. She hoped she would never lose that—the sense within herself of how life had been before. It made her appreciate what she had so much more than the real nobility seemed to.

She continued along the balcony, seeking her prey. Glittering colors shone from backlit windows, sparkling light across the floor. Most of the windows glowed inside small viewing alcoves along the balcony, and so the balcony before her was interspersed with pockets of dark and color. Vin didn't stop to study any more of the windows; she'd done quite a bit of that during her first balls at Keep Lekal. This night she had business to attend to.

She found her quarry halfway down the east balcony walkway. Lady Kliss was speaking with a group of people, so Vin paused, pretending to study a window. Kliss's group soon broke up—one could generally only take so much of Kliss at a time. The short woman began to walk along the balcony toward Vin.

When she drew close, Vin turned, as if in surprise. "Why, Lady Kliss! I haven't seen you all evening."

Kliss turned eagerly, obviously excited by the prospect of another person with whom to gossip. "Lady Valette!" she said, waddling forward. "You missed Lord Cabe's ball last week! Not due to a relapse of your earlier malady, I hope?"

"No," Vin said. "I spent that evening dining with my uncle."

"Oh," Kliss said, disappointed. A relapse would have made a better story. "Well, that's good."

"I hear you have some interesting news about Lady Tren-Pedri Delouse," Vin said carefully. "I myself have heard some interesting things lately." She eyed Kliss, implying that she'd be willing to trade tidbits.

"Oh, that!" Kliss said eagerly. "Well, *I* heard that Tren-Pedri isn't at all interested in a union with House Aime, though her father is implying that there will be a wedding soon. You know how the Aime sons are, though. Why, Fedren is an *absolute* buffoon."

Inwardly, Vin rolled her eyes. Kliss just kept on talking, not even noticing that Vin had something she herself wanted to share. *Using* *subtlety on this woman is about as effective as trying to sell bathwater perfumes to a plantation skaa.*

“That *is* interesting,” Vin said, interrupting Kliss. “Perhaps Tren-Pedri’s hesitance comes because of House Aime’s connection to House Hasting.”

Kliss paused. “Why would that be?”

“Well, we all know what House Hasting is planning.”

“We do?” Kliss asked.

Vin pretended to look embarrassed. “Oh. Perhaps that isn’t known yet. Please, Lady Kliss, forget that I said anything.”

“Forget?” Kliss said. “Why, it’s already forgotten. But, come now, you can’t just stop. What do you mean?”

“I shouldn’t say,” Vin said. “It’s just something I overheard my uncle talking about.”

“Your uncle?” Kliss asked, growing more eager. “What did he say? You know that you can trust me.”

“Well . . .” Vin said. “He said that House Hasting was relocating a lot of resources back to its plantations in the Southern Dominance. My uncle was quite happy—Hasting has withdrawn from some of its contracts, and my uncle was hoping to get them instead.”

“Relocating . . .” Kliss said. “Why, they wouldn’t do that unless they were planning to withdraw from the city. . . .”

“Could you blame them?” Vin asked quietly. “I mean, who wants to risk what happened to House Tekiel?”

“Who indeed . . .” Kliss said. She was practically shaking with eagerness to go share the news.

“Anyway, please, this is obviously only hearsay,” Vin said. “You probably shouldn’t tell anyone about it.”

“Of course,” Kliss said. “Um . . . excuse me. I need to go refresh myself.”

“Of course,” Vin said, watching the woman zip away toward the balcony stairs.

Vin smiled. House Hasting was making no such preparations, of course; Hasting was one of the strongest families in the city, and wouldn’t likely withdraw. However, Dockson was back at the shop forging documents which, when delivered to the right places, would imply that Hasting was planning to do what Vin had said.

If all went well, the entire city would soon expect a Hasting withdrawal. Their allies would plan for it, and might even begin to withdraw themselves. People seeking to buy weapons would instead look to other places, fearing that Hasting wouldn't be able to make good on contracts once it left. When Hasting *didn't* withdraw, it would make them look indecisive. Their allies gone, their income weakened, they could very well be the next house to fall.

House Hasting, however, was one of the easy ones to work against. It had a reputation for extreme subterfuge, and people would believe that it was planning a secret retreat. In addition, Hasting was a strong mercantile house—meaning it depended a great deal upon its contracts to survive. A house with such an obvious, dominating source of income also had an obvious weakness. Lord Hasting had worked hard to increase his house's influence over the last few decades, and in doing so he had extended his house's resources to their limits.

Other houses were far more stable. Vin sighed, turning and strolling down the walkway, eyeing the massive clock set between the balconies on the other side of the chamber.

Venture would not fall easily. It remained powerful through the sheer force of fortune; though it participated in some contracts, it didn't rely on them like other houses. Venture was rich enough, and powerful enough, that even mercantile disaster would only jostle it.

In a way, Venture's stability was a good thing—for Vin, at least. The house had no obvious weaknesses, so maybe the crew wouldn't be too disappointed when she couldn't discover any way to bring it down. After all, they didn't *absolutely* need to destroy House Venture; doing so would simply make the plan go more smoothly.

Whatever happened, Vin had to make sure that Venture didn't suffer the same fate as House Tekiel. Their reputation destroyed, their finances unhinged, the Tekiel had tried to pull out of the city—and this final show of weakness had been too much. Some of Tekiel's nobility had been assassinated before they left; the rest had been found in the burned-out ruins of their canal boats, apparently hit by bandits. Vin, however, knew of no thieving band who would dare slaughter so many noblemen.

Kelsier still hadn't been able to discover which house was behind the murders, but the Luthadel nobility didn't seem to care who the culprit was. House Tekiel had allowed itself to grow weak, and nothing was more embarrassing to the aristocracy than a Great House that couldn't maintain itself. Kelsier had been right: Though polite groups met at balls, the nobility were more than willing to stab each other square in the chest if it benefited them.

*Kind of like thieving crews,* she thought. *The nobility really aren't that different from the people I grew up around.*

The atmosphere was only made more dangerous by its polite niceties. Underneath that front were plots, assassinations, and—perhaps most importantly—Mistborn. It was no accident that all of the balls she had attended recently had displayed great numbers of guards, both wearing armor and not. The parties now served the additional purpose of warning and showing strength.

*Elend is safe,* she told herself. *Despite what he thinks of his family, they've done a good job of maintaining their place in the Luthadel hierarchy. He's the heir—they'll protect him from assassins.*

She wished those assertions sounded just a bit more convincing. She knew that Shan Elariel was planning something. House Venture might be safe, but Elend himself was a little bit . . . oblivious sometimes. If Shan did something against him personally, it might or might not be a major blow against House Venture—but it would certainly be a major blow against Vin.

"Lady Valette Renoux," a voice said. "I do believe that you're late."

Vin turned to see Elend lounging in an alcove to her left. She smiled, glancing down at the clock, noticing that it was indeed a few minutes past the time when she had promised to meet him. "I must be picking up bad habits from some friends of mine," she said, stepping into the alcove.

"Now, see, I didn't say it was a *bad* thing," Elend said, smiling. "Why, I'd say that it is a lady's courtly duty to be a bit dilatory. It does gentlemen good to be forced to wait upon a woman's whims—or, so my mother was always fond of telling me."

"It sounds like she was a wise woman," Vin said. The alcove was just large enough for two people standing sideways. She stood across from him, the balcony overhang a short distance to her left, a marvelous lavender window to her right, their feet nearly touching.

"Oh, I don't know about that," Elend said. "She married my father, after all."

"Thereby joining the most powerful house in the Final Empire. You can't do much better than that—though, I suppose she could have tried to marry the Lord Ruler. Last I knew, though, he wasn't in the market for a wife."

"Pity," Elend said. "Maybe he'd look a little less depressed if there were a woman in his life."

"I guess that would depend on the woman." Vin glanced to the side as a small group of courtgoers strolled past. "You know, this isn't exactly the most private location. People are giving us odd looks."

"You're the one who stepped in here with me," Elend pointed out.

"Yes, well, I wasn't thinking about the gossip we might start."

"Let it start," Elend said standing up straight.

"Because it will make your father angry?"

Elend shook his head. "I don't care about that anymore, Valette." Elend took a step forward, bringing them even closer together. Vin could feel his breath. He stood there for a moment before speaking. "I think I'm going to kiss you."

Vin shivered slightly. "I don't think you want to do that, Elend."

"Why?"

"How much do you really know about me?"

"Not as much as I'd like to," he said.

"Not as much as you need to, either," Vin said, looking up into his eyes.

"So tell me," he said.

"I can't. Not right now."

Elend stood for a moment, then nodded slightly and pulled away. He walked out onto the balcony walkway. "So, shall we go for a stroll, then?"

"Yes," Vin said, relieved—yet just a bit disappointed as well.

"It's for the best," Elend said. "That alcove has absolutely *terrible* reading light."

"Don't you dare," Vin said, eyeing the book in his pocket as she joined him on the walkway. "Read when you're with someone else, not me."

"But that's how our relationship began!"

"And that's how it could end too," Vin said, taking his arm.

Elend smiled. They weren't the only couple walking the balcony, and down below, other pairs spun slowly to the faint music.

*It seems so peaceful. Yet, just a few days ago, many of these people stood and watched idly as women and children were beheaded.*

She felt Elend's arm, his warmth beside her. Kelsier said that he smiled so much because he felt he needed to take what joy he could in the world—to relish the moments of happiness that seemed so infrequent in the Final Empire. Strolling for a time beside Elend, Vin thought she was beginning to understand how Kelsier felt.

"Valette . . ." Elend said slowly.

"What?"

"I want you to leave Luthadel," he said.

"*What?*"

He paused, turning to look at her. "I've thought about this a lot. You may not realize it, but the city is becoming dangerous. Very dangerous."

"I know."

"Then you know that a small house without allies has no place in the Central Dominance right now," Elend said. "Your uncle was brave to come here and try to establish himself, but he chose the wrong time. I . . . I think things are going to get out of hand here very soon. When that happens, I can't guarantee your safety."

"My uncle knows what he's doing, Elend."

"This is *different*, Valette," Elend said. "Entire houses are falling. The Tekiel family wasn't slaughtered by bandits—that was the work of House Hasting. Those won't be the last deaths we see before this is through."

Vin paused, thinking of Shan again. "But . . . you're safe, right? House Venture—it's not like the others. It's stable."

Elend shook his head. "We're even more vulnerable than the rest, Valette."

"But, your fortune is large," Vin said. "You don't depend on contracts."

"They may not be visible," Elend said quietly, "but they're there, Valette. We put on a good show, and the others assume that we have more than we do. However, with the Lord Ruler's house taxings . . . well, the only way we maintain so much power in this city is through income. Secret income."

Vin frowned, and Elend leaned closer, speaking almost in a whisper. "My family mines the Lord Ruler's atium, Valette," he said. "That's where our wealth comes from. In a way, our stability depends almost completely on the Lord Ruler's whims. He doesn't like to bother collecting the atium himself, but he gets *very* perturbed if the delivery schedule is disrupted."

*Find out more!* instinct told her. *This is the secret; this is what Kelsier needs.* "Oh, Elend," Vin whispered. "You shouldn't be telling me this."

"Why not?" he said. "I trust you. Look, you need to understand how dangerous things are. The atium supply has been having some troubles lately. Ever since. . . . well, something happened a few years ago. Ever since then, things have been different. My father can't meet the Lord Ruler's quotas, and last time that happened . . ."

"What?"

"Well," Elend said, looking troubled. "Let's just say that things could soon grow very bad for the Ventures. The Lord Ruler depends on that atium, Valette—it's one of the prime ways he controls the nobility. A house without atium is a house that can't defend itself from Mistborn. By keeping a large reserve, the Lord Ruler controls the market, making himself extremely wealthy. He funds his armies by making atium scarce, then selling extra bits for lavish amounts. If you knew more about the economics of Allomancy, this would probably make a lot more sense to you."

*Oh, trust me. I understand more than you think. And now I know far more than I should.*

Elend paused, smiling pleasantly as an obligator strolled along the balcony walkway beside them. The obligator looked them over as he passed, eyes thoughtful within their web of tattoos.

Elend turned back to her as soon as the obligator had passed. "I want you to leave," he repeated. "People know that I've paid attention to you. Hopefully, they'll assume it was just to spite my father, but they could still try to use you. The Great Houses wouldn't have any qualms about crushing your entire family just to get at me and my father. You have to go."

"I'll . . . think about it," Vin said.

"There isn't much time left for thinking," Elend warned. "I want you to leave before you get too involved with what is going on in this city."

*I'm already involved so much more than you think.* "I said I'd think about it," she said. "Look, Elend, I think you should be more worried about yourself. I think Shan Elariel is going to try something to strike against you."

"Shan?" Elend said with amusement. "She's harmless."

"I don't think she is, Elend. You need to be more careful."

He laughed. "Look at us . . . each one trying to convince the other how dreadfully dire the situation is, each one bullheadedly refusing to listen to the other."

Vin paused, then smiled.

Elend sighed. "You're not going to listen to me, are you? Is there anything I can do to make you leave?"

"Not right now," she said quietly. "Look, Elend, can't we just enjoy the time we have together? If things continue as they are, we might not have many more opportunities like this for a while."

He paused, then finally nodded. She could see he was still troubled, but he did turn back to their walk, letting her gently take his arm again as they strolled. They walked together for a time, silent until something drew Vin's attention. She removed her hands from his arm, instead reaching down to take his hand in her own.

He glanced at her, frowning in confusion as she tapped the ring on his finger. “It really is metal,” she said, a bit surprised, despite what she’d been told.

Elend nodded. “Pure gold.”

“Don’t you worry about . . .”

“Allomancers?” Elend asked. He shrugged. “I don’t know—they’re not the sort of thing that I’ve ever had to deal with. You don’t wear metal, out on the plantations?”

Vin shook her head, tapping one of the barrettes in her hair. “Painted wood,” she said.

Elend nodded. “Probably wise,” he said. “But, well, the longer you stay in Luthadel, the more you’ll realize that little we do here is done in the name of wisdom. The Lord Ruler wears metal rings—and so, therefore, does the nobility. Some philosophers think that’s all part of His plan. The Lord Ruler wears metal because he knows that the nobility will mimic him, and therefore give his Inquisitors power over them.”

“Do you agree?” Vin asked, taking his arm again as they walked. “With the philosophers, I mean?”

Elend shook his head. “No,” he said in a quieter voice. “The Lord Ruler . . . he’s just arrogant. I’ve read of warriors, long ago, who would run into battle without armor on, supposedly to prove how brave and strong they were. That’s how this is, I think—though admittedly on a far more subtle level. He wears metal to flaunt his power, to show how unfrightened—how unthreatened—he is by anything we could do to him.”

*Well,* Vin thought, *he’s willing to call the Lord Ruler arrogant. Perhaps I can get him to admit a little more. . . .*

Elend paused, glancing over at the clock. “I’m afraid I don’t have a whole lot of time tonight, Valette.”

“That’s right,” Vin said. “You’ll need to go off and meet with your friends.” She glanced at him, trying to gauge his reaction.

He didn’t seem very surprised. He simply raised an eyebrow in her direction. “Indeed, I will. You’re very observant.”

“It doesn’t take much observing,” Vin said. “Anytime we’re at Keeps Hasting, Venture, Lekal, or Elariel, you run off with the same people.”

“My drinking friends,” Elend said with a smile. “An unlikely group in today’s political climate, but one that helps annoy my father.”

“What do you do at these meetings?” Vin asked.

“We talk philosophy, mostly,” Elend said. “We’re kind of a stuffy lot—which isn’t too surprising, I guess, if you know any of us. We talk about the government, about politics . . . about the Lord Ruler."

"What about him?"

"Well, we don't like some of the things he's done with the Final Empire."

"So you *do* want to overthrow him!" Vin said.

Elend gave her a strange look. "Overthrow him? What gave you that idea, Valette? He's the Lord Ruler—he's God. We can't do anything about him being in charge." He looked away as they continued to walk. "No, my friends and I, we just . . . wish the Final Empire could be a little different. We can't change things now, but maybe someday—assuming we all survive the next year or so—we'll be in positions to influence the Lord Ruler."

"To do what?"

"Well, take those executions a few days ago," Elend said. "I don't see that they did any good. The skaa rebelled. In reprisal, the Ministry executed a few hundred random people. What is that going to do besides make the populace even *more* angry? So, next time the rebellion will be bigger. Does that mean that the Lord Ruler will order more people beheaded? How long can that continue before there just aren't any skaa left?"

Vin walked thoughtfully. "And what would you do, Elend Venture?" she finally said. "If you were in charge."

"I don't know," Elend confessed. "I've read a lot of books—some that I'm not supposed to—and I haven't found any easy answers. I'm pretty certain, however, that beheading people won't solve anything. The Lord Ruler has been around for a long time—you'd think that he'd have found a better way. But, anyway, we'll have to continue this later. . . ." He slowed, turning to look at her.

"Time already?" she asked.

Elend nodded. "I promised I'd meet them, and they kind of look to me. I suppose I could tell them I'll be late. . . ."

Vin shook her head. "Go drink with your friends. I'll be fine—I have a few more people I need to talk to anyway." She did need to get back to work; Breeze and Dockson had spent hours planning and preparing the lies that she was supposed to spread, and they would be waiting for her report back at Clubs's shop after the party.

Elend smiled. "Maybe I shouldn't worry about you so much. Who knows—considering all of your political maneuvering, maybe House Renoux will soon be the power in town, and I'll just be a lowly beggar."

Vin smiled, and he bowed—winking at her—then was off toward the stairs. Vin walked slowly over to the balcony railing, looking down at the people dancing and dining below.

*So he's not a revolutionary,* she thought. *Kelsier was right again. I wonder if he ever gets tired of that.*

But still, she couldn't feel too disappointed with Elend. Not everyone was so insane that they'd think to overthrow their god-emperor. The mere fact that Elend was willing to think for himself set him apart from the rest; he was a good man, one who deserved a woman who was worthy of his trust.

Unfortunately, he had Vin.

*So House Venture secretly mines the Lord Ruler's atium,* she thought. *They must be the ones who administer the Pits of Hathsin.*

It was a frighteningly precarious position for a house to be in—their finances depended directly on pleasing the Lord Ruler. Elend thought that he was being careful, but Vin was worried. He wasn't taking Shan Elariel seriously enough—of that, Vin was certain. She turned, walking intently from the balcony and down to the main floor.

She found Shan's table easily; the woman always sat with a large group of attendant noblewomen, presiding like a lord over his plantation. Vin paused. She'd never approached Shan directly. Someone, however, needed to protect Elend; he was obviously too foolish to do it himself.

Vin strode forward. Shan's Terrisman studied Vin as she approached. He was so different from Sazed—he didn't have the same . . . spirit. This man maintained a flat expression, like some creature carved of stone. A few of the ladies shot disapproving glances toward Vin, but most of them—Shan included—ignored her.

Vin stood awkwardly beside the table, waiting for a lull in the conversation. There was none. Finally, she just took a few steps closer to Shan.

"Lady Shan?" she asked.

Shan turned with an icy glare. "I didn't send for you, country girl."

"Yes, but I've found some books like you—"

"I no longer require your services," Shan said, turning away. "I can deal with Elend Venture on my own. Now, be a good little twit and stop bothering me."

Vin stood, stunned. "But, your plan—"

"I *said* that you are *no longer needed.* You think I was harsh on you before, girl? That was when you were on my good side. Try annoying me now."

Vin wilted reflexively before the woman's demeaning gaze. She seemed . . . disgusted. Angry, even. Jealous?

*She must have figured it out,* Vin thought. *She finally realized out that I'm not just playing with Elend. She knows that I care for him, and doesn't trust me to keep her secrets.*

Vin backed away from the table. Apparently, she would have to use other methods to discover Shan's plans.

Despite what he often said, Elend Venture did not consider himself to be a rude man. He was more of a . . . verbal philosopher. He liked to test and turn conversation to see how people would react. Like the great thinkers of old, he pushed boundaries and experimented with unconventional methods.

*Of course,* he thought, holding his cup of brandy up before his eyes, inspecting it musingly, *most of those old philosophers were eventually executed for treason.* Not exactly the most successful role models.

His evening political conversation with his group was finished, and he had retired with several friends to Keep Lekal's gentlemen's lounge, a small chamber adjacent to the ballroom. It was furnished in deep green colors, and the chairs were comfortable; it would have been a nice place to read, had he been in a slightly better mood. Jastes sat across from him, puffing contentedly on his pipe. It was good to see the young Lekal looking so calm. These last few weeks had been difficult for him.

*House war,* Elend thought. *What terrible timing. Why now? Things were going so well. . . .*

Telden returned with a refilled drink a few moments later.

"You know," Jastes said, gesturing with his pipe, "any one of the servants in here would have brought you a new drink."

"I felt like stretching my legs," Telden said, settling into the third chair.

"And you flirted with no less than three women on your way back," Jastes said. "I counted."

Telden smiled, sipping his drink. The large man never just "sat"—he lounged. Telden could look relaxed and comfortable no matter what the situation, his sharp suits and well-styled hair enviably handsome.

*Maybe I should pay just a little more attention to things like that,* Elend thought to himself. *Valette suffers my hair the way it is, but would she like it better if I had it styled?*

Elend often intended to make his way to a stylist or tailor, but other things tended to steal his attention. He'd get lost in his studies or spend too long reading, then find himself late for his appointments.

Again.

“Elend is quiet this evening,” Telden noticed. Though other groups of gentlemen sat in the dim lounge, the chairs were spread out enough to allow for private conversations.

“He’s been like that a lot, lately,” Jastes said.

“Ah, yes,” Telden said, frowning slightly.

Elend knew them well enough to take the hint. “Now, see, why must people be like this? If you have something to say, why not simply say it?”

“Politics, my friend,” Jastes said. “We are—if you haven’t noticed—noblemen.”

Elend rolled his eyes.

“All right, I’ll say it,” Jastes replied, running his hand through his hair—a nervous habit that Elend was sure contributed somewhat to the young man’s growing baldness. “You’ve been spending a lot of time with that Renoux girl, Elend.”

“There is a simple explanation for that,” Elend said. “You see, I happen to like her.”

“Not good, Elend,” Telden said with a shake of his head. “Not good.”

“Why?” Elend asked. “You seem pleased enough to ignore class variances yourself, Telden. I’ve seen you flirt with half the serving girls in the room.”

“I’m not heir to my house,” Telden said.

“And,” Jastes said, “these girls are trustworthy. My family hired these women—we know their houses, their backgrounds, and their allegiances.”

Elend frowned. “What are you implying?”

“Something’s strange about that girl, Elend,” Jastes said. He’d gone back to his normal nervous self, his pipe sitting unnoticed in its holder on the table.

Telden nodded. “She got too close to you too quickly, Elend. She wants something.”

“Like what?” Elend asked, growing annoyed.

“Elend, Elend,” Jastes said. “You can’t just avoid the game by saying you don’t want to play. It’ll find you. Renoux moved into town just as house tensions began to rise, and he brought with him an unknown scion—a girl who immediately began to woo the most important and available young man in Luthadel. Doesn’t that seem odd to you?”

“Actually,” Elend noted, “I approached her first—if only because she had stolen my reading spot."

"But, you have to admit that it's suspicious how quickly she latched on to you," Telden said. "If you're going to dabble with romance, Elend, you need to learn one thing: You can play with women if you want, but don't let yourself get too close to them. That's where the trouble starts."

Elend shook his head. "Valette is different."

The other two shared a look, then Telden shrugged, turning back to his drink. Jastes, however, sighed, then stood and stretched. "Anyway, I should probably be going."

"One more drink," Telden said.

Jastes shook his head, running a hand through his hair. "You know how my parents are on ball nights—if I don't go out and bid farewell to at least *some* of the guests, I'll be nagged about it for weeks."

The younger man wished them good night, walking back toward the main ballroom. Telden sipped his drink, eyeing Elend.

"I'm not thinking about her," Elend said testily.

"What, then?"

"The meeting tonight," Elend said. "I'm not sure if I like how it went."

"Bah," the large man said with a wave of his hand. "You're getting as bad as Jastes. What happened to the man who attended these meetings just to relax and enjoy time with his friends?"

"He's worried," Elend said. "Some of his friends might end up in charge of their houses sooner than he expected, and he's worried that none of us are ready."

Telden snorted. "Don't be so melodramatic," he said, smiling and winking to the serving girl who came to clear away his empty cups. "I have a feeling that this is all just going to blow over. In a few months, we'll look back and wonder what all the fretting was about."

*Kale Tekiel won't look back,* Elend thought.

The conversation waned, however, and Telden eventually excused himself. Elend sat for a while longer, opening *The Dictates of Society* for another read, but he had trouble concentrating. He turned the cup of brandy in his fingers, but didn't drink much.

*I wonder if Valette's out yet. . . .* He'd tried to find her once his meeting was over, but apparently she'd been in a private gathering of her own.

*That girl,* he thought lazily, *is far too interested in politics for her own good.* Perhaps he was just jealous—only a few months in court, and she already seemed to be more competent than he was. She was so fearless, so bold, so . . . interesting. She didn't fit any of the courtly stereotypes he'd been taught to expect.

*Could Jastes be right?* he wondered. *She certainly is different from other women, and she did imply there were things about her I didn't know.*

Elend pushed the thought out of his mind. Valette was different, true—but she was also innocent, in a way. Eager, full of wonder and spunk.

He worried about her; she obviously didn't know how dangerous Luthadel could be. There was so much more to politics in the city than simple parties and petty intrigues. What would happen if someone decided to send a Mistborn to deal with her and her uncle? Renoux was poorly connected, and none of the court's members would blink twice at a few assassinations in Fellise. Did Valette's uncle know how to take the proper precautions? Did he even worry about Allomancers?

Elend sighed. He'd just have to make certain that Valette left the area. That was the only option.

By the time his carriage reached Keep Venture, Elend had decided that he'd drunk too much. He made his way up to his rooms, looking forward to his bed and pillows.

The hallway to his bedroom, however, passed by his father's study. The door was open, and light still spilled out despite the late hour. Elend tried to walk quietly on the carpeted floor, but he'd never really been all that stealthy.

"Elend?" his father's voice called from the study. "Come in here."

Elend sighed quietly. Lord Straff Venture didn't miss much. He was a Tineye—his senses were so keen that he'd probably heard Elend's carriage approaching outside. *If I don't deal with him now, he'll just send the servants to pester me until I come down to speak with him. . . .*

Elend turned and walked into the study. His father sat in his chair, speaking quietly with TenSoon—the Venture Kandra. Elend still wasn't used to the creature's most recent body, which had once belonged to a servant in the Hasting household. Elend shivered as it noticed him. It bowed, then quietly retreated from the room.

Elend leaned against the doorframe. Straff's chair sat in front of several shelves of books—not a single one of which, Elend was confident, his father had ever read. The room was lit by two lamps, their hoods mostly closed to allow out only a bit of light.

"You attended the ball tonight," Straff said. "What did you learn?"

Elend reached up, rubbing his forehead. "That I have a tendency to drink far too much brandy."

Straff was not amused by the comment. He was the perfect imperial nobleman—tall, firm-shouldered, always dressed in a tailored vest and suit. "You met with that . . . woman again?" he asked.

"Valette? Hum, yes. Not for as long as I would have liked, though."

"I forbade you from spending time with her."

"Yes," Elend said. "I remember."

Straff's expression darkened. He stood, walking over to the desk. "Oh, Elend," he said. "When are you going to get over this childish temperament you have? Do you think I don't realize that you act foolishly simply to spite me?"

"Actually, I got over my 'childish temperament' some time ago, Father—it just seems that my natural inclinations work even better to annoy you. I wish I had known that earlier; I could have saved a great deal of effort in my younger years."

His father snorted, then held up a letter. "I dictated this to Staxles a short time ago. It is an acceptance of a lunch appointment with Lord Tegas tomorrow afternoon. If a house war *does* come, I want to make certain we are in a position to destroy the Hastings as quickly as possible, and Tegas could be a strong ally. He has a daughter. I'd like you to dine with her at the luncheon."

"I'll consider it," Elend said, tapping his head. "I'm not sure what kind of state I'll be in tomorrow morning. Too much brandy, remember?"

"You'll be there, Elend. This is not a request."

Elend paused. A part of him wanted to snap back at his father, to make a stand—not because he cared about where he dined, but because of something far more important.

*Hasting is the second-most-powerful house in the city. If we made an allegiance with them, together we could keep Luthadel from chaos. We could stop the house war, not enflame it.*

That's what his books had done to him—they had changed him from rebellious fop into would-be philosopher. Unfortunately, he'd been a fool for so long. Was it any wonder that Straff hadn't noticed the change in his son? Elend himself was only starting to realize it.

Straff continued to glare at him, and Elend looked away. "I'll think about it," he said.

Straff waved his hand dismissively, turning.

Trying to salvage something of his pride, Elend continued. "You probably don't even have to worry about the Hastings—it seems that they're making preparations to bolt the city."

"*What?*" Straff asked. "Where did you hear that?"

"At the ball," Elend said lightly.

"I thought you said you didn't learn anything important."

"Now, see, I never said anything of the sort. I just didn't feel like sharing with you."

Lord Venture frowned. "I don't know why I even care—anything you learn is bound to be worthless. I tried to train you in politics, boy. I really did. But now . . . well, I hope I live to see you dead, because this house is in for dire times if you ever take control."

"I know more than you think, Father."

Straff laughed, walking back to sit in his chair. "I doubt that, boy. Why, you can't even bed a woman properly—the last, and only, time I know about you trying it, *I* had to take you to the brothel myself."

Elend flushed. *Careful,* he told himself. *He's bringing that up on purpose. He knows how much it bothers you.*

"Get to bed, boy," Straff said with a wave of his hand. "You look terrible."

Elend stood for a moment, then finally ducked out into the hallway, sighing quietly to himself.

*That's the difference between you and them, Elend,* he thought. *Those philosophers you read—they were revolutionaries. They were willing to risk execution. You can't even stand up to your father.*

He walked tiredly up to his rooms—where, oddly, he found a servant waiting for him.

Elend frowned. "Yes?"

"Lord Elend, you have a guest," the man said.

"At this hour?"

"It's Lord Jastes Lekal, my lord."

Elend cocked his head slightly. *What in the Lord Ruler's name . . .?* "He's waiting in the sitting room, I assume?"

"Yes, my lord," the servant said.

Elend turned regretfully away from his chambers, walking back down the hallway. He found Jastes waiting impatiently.

"Jastes?" Elend said tiredly, walking into the sitting room. "I hope you have something *very* important to tell me."

Jastes shuffled uncomfortably for a moment, looking even more nervous than normal.

"What?" Elend demanded, his patience waning.

"It's about the girl."

"Valette?" Elend asked. "You came here to discuss Valette? *Now?*"

"You should trust your friends more," Jastes said.

Elend snorted. "Trust *your* knowledge of women? No offense, Jastes, but I think not."

"I had her followed, Elend," Jastes blurted out.

Elend paused. "What?"

"I had her carriage followed. Or, at least, I had someone watch for it at the city gates. She wasn't in it when it left the city."

"What do you mean?" Elend asked, his frown deepening.

"She wasn't *in the carriage,* Elend," Jastes repeated. "While her Terrisman was producing papers for the guards, my man snuck up and peeked through the carriage window, and there was nobody inside.

"The carriage must have dropped her off somewhere in town. She's a spy from one of the other houses—they're trying to get at your father through you. They created the perfect woman to attract you—dark-haired, a bit mysterious, and outside of the regular political structure. They made her lowborn enough that it would be a scandal for you to be interested in her, then set her on you."

"Jastes, this is ridicu—"

"Elend," Jastes interrupted. "Tell me one more time: How did you meet her the first time?"

Elend paused. "She was standing on the balcony."

"In your reading spot," Jastes said. "Everyone knows that's where you usually go. Coincidence?"

Elend closed his eyes. *Not Valette. She* can't *be part of all this.* But, immediately, another thought occurred to him. *I told her about the atium! How could I be so stupid?*

It couldn't be true. He wouldn't believe that he had been duped so easily. But . . . could he risk it? He was a bad son, true, but he was no traitor to the house. He didn't want to see Venture fall; he wanted to lead it someday, so that perhaps he'd be able to change things.

He bid Jastes farewell, then walked back to his rooms with a distracted step. He felt too tired to think about house politics. However, when he finally got into bed, he found that he couldn't sleep.

Eventually, he rose, sending for a servant.

"Tell my father I want to make a trade," Elend explained to the man. "I'll go to his luncheon tomorrow, just as he wants." Elend paused, standing in his evening robe by his bedroom door.

“In exchange,” he finally said, “tell him I want to borrow a couple of spies so that they can follow someone for me.”

*The others all think I should have had Kwaan executed for betraying me. To tell the truth, I'd probably kill him this moment if I knew where he'd gone. At the time, however, I just couldn't do it.*

*The man had become like a father to me. To this day, I don't know why he suddenly decided that I wasn't the Hero. Why did he turn against me, denouncing me to the entire Conclave of Worldbringers?*

*Would he rather that the Deepness win? Surely, even if I'm not the right one—as Kwaan now claims—my presence at the Well of Ascension couldn't possibly be worse than what will happen if the Deepness continues to destroy the land.*

# 29

It's almost over, Vin read.

> We can see the cavern from our camp. It will take a few more hours of hiking to reach it, but I know that it is the right place. I can feel it somehow, feel it up there . . . pulsing, in my mind.
>
> It's so cold. I swear that the rocks themselves are made of ice, and the snow is deep enough in places that we have to dig our way through. The wind blows all the time. I fear for Fedik—he hasn't been quite the same since the creature made of mist attacked him, and I worry that he will wander off a cliffside or slip through one of the many icy rifts in the ground.
>
> The Terrismen, however, are a wonder. It is fortunate that we brought them, for no regular packmen would have survived the trip. The Terrismen don't seem to mind the cold—something about their strange metabolisms gives them a supernatural ability to resist the elements. Perhaps they have "saved up" heat from their bodies for later use?
>
> They won't talk about their powers, however—and I am sure that Rashek is to blame. The other packmen look to him for leadership, though I don't think he has complete control over them. Before he was stabbed, Fedik feared that the Terrismen would abandon us up here in the ice. I don't think that will happen, however. I am here by providence of Terris prophecies—these men will not disobey their own religion simply because one of their number has taken a dislike to me.
>
> I did finally confront Rashek. He did not want to speak to me, of course, but I forced him. Unleashed, he spoke at great length regarding his hatred of Khlennium and my people. He thinks that we have turned his people into little more than slaves. He thinks that Terrismen deserve far more—he keeps saying that his people should be "dominant" because of their supernatural powers.
>
> I fear his words, for I see some truth in them. Yesterday, one of the packmen lifted a boulder of enormous size, then tossed it out of our way with an almost casual throw. I have not seen such a feat of strength in all my days.
>
> These Terrismen could be very dangerous, I think. Perhaps we have treated them unfairly. However, men like Rashek must be contained—he irrationally believes that all people outside of Terris have oppressed him. He is such a young man to be so angry.
>
> It is so cold. When this is finished, I think I should like to live where it is warm all year. Braches has told of such places, islands to the south where great mountains create fire.

> What will it be like, when this is all over? I will be just a regular man again. An unimportant man. It sounds nice—more desirable, even, than a warm sun and a windless sky. I am so tired of being the Hero of Ages, tired of entering cities to find either armed hostility or fanatic adoration. I am tired of being loved and hated for what a bunch of old men say I will eventually do.
>
> I want to be forgotten. Obscurity. Yes, that would be nice.
>
> If men read these words, let them know that power is a heavy burden. Seek not to be bound by its chains. The Terris prophecies say that I will have the power to save the world. They hint, however, that I will have the power to destroy it as well.
>
> I will have the ability to fulfill any wish of my heart. "He will take upon himself authority that no mortal should hold." Yet, the philosophers warned me that if I am self-serving with the power, my selfishness will taint it.
>
> Is this a burden that any man should bear? Is this a temptation any man could resist? I feel strong now, but what will happen when I touch that power? I will save the world, certainly—but will I try to take it as well?
>
> Such are my fears as I scribble with an ice-crusted pen on the eve before the world is reborn. Rashek watches. Hating me. The cavern lies above. Pulsing. My fingers quiver. Not from the cold.
>
> Tomorrow, it will end.

Vin eagerly turned the page. The back page of the booklet, however, was empty. She turned it over, rereading the last few lines. Where was the next entry?

Sazed must not have finished the last part yet. She stood, sighing as she stretched. She'd finished the entire newest portion of the logbook in one sitting, a feat that surprised even her. The gardens of Mansion Renoux extended before her, the cultured pathways, broad-limbed trees, and quiet stream creating her favorite reading spot. The sun was low in the sky, and it was beginning to get chilly.

She wound her way up the path toward the mansion. Despite the chill evening, she could barely imagine a place like the one the Lord Ruler described. She had seen snow on some distant peaks, but she had rarely seen it fall—and even then it was usually just an icy slush. To experience that much snow day after day, to be in danger of having it fall upon you in great crushing avalanches . . .

A part of her wished that she could visit such places, no matter how dangerous. Though the logbook didn't describe the Lord Ruler's entire journey, some of the marvels it did include—the ice fields to the north, the great black lake, and the Terris waterfalls—sounded amazing.

*If only he'd put in more detail about what things look like!* she thought with annoyance. The Lord Ruler spent far too much time worrying. Though, admittedly, she was beginning to feel an odd sort of . . . familiarity with him through his words. She found it hard to associate the person in her mind with the dark creature that had caused so much death. What had occurred at the Well of Ascension? What could have changed him so drastically? She had to know.

She reached the mansion and went searching for Sazed. She was back to wearing dresses—it felt odd to be seen in trousers by anyone but the crewmembers. She smiled at Lord Renoux's interior steward as she passed, eagerly climbing the main entryway stairs and seeking out the library.

Sazed wasn't inside. His small desk sat empty, the lamp extinguished, the inkwell empty. Vin frowned in annoyance.

*Wherever he is, he'd better be working on the translation!*

She went back down the stairs, asking after Sazed, and a maid directed her to the main kitchen. Vin frowned, making her way down the back hallway. *Getting himself a snack, perhaps?*

She found Sazed standing amongst a small group of servants, pointing toward a list on the table and speaking in a low voice. He didn't notice Vin as she entered.

"Sazed?" Vin asked, interrupting him.

He turned. "Yes, Mistress Valette?" he asked, bowing slightly.

"What are you doing?"

"I am seeing to Lord Renoux's food stores, Mistress. Though I have been assigned to assist you, I am still his steward, and have duties to attend to when I am not otherwise occupied."

"Are you going to get back to the translation soon?"

Sazed cocked his head. "Translation, Mistress? It is finished."

"Where's the last part, then?"

"I gave it to you," Sazed said.

"No, you didn't," she said. "This part ends the night before they go into the cavern."

"That is the end, Mistress. That is as far as the logbook went."

"*What?*" she said. "But . . ."

Sazed glanced at the other servants. "We should speak of these things in private, I think." He gave them a few more instructions, pointing at the list, then nodded for Vin to join him as he made his way out the back kitchen exit and into the side gardens.

Vin stood dumbfounded for a moment, then hurried out to join him. "It can't end like that, Saze. We don't know what happened!"

"We can surmise, I think," Sazed said, walking down the garden path. The eastern gardens weren't as lavish as the ones Vin frequented, and were instead made up of smooth brown grass and the occasional shrub.

"Surmise what?" Vin asked.

"Well, the Lord Ruler must have done what was necessary to save the world, for we are still here."

"I suppose," Vin said. "But then he took the power for himself. That must have been what happened—he couldn't resist the temptation to use the power selfishly. But, why isn't there another entry? Why wouldn't he speak further of his accomplishments?"

"Perhaps the power changed him too much," Sazed said. "Or, maybe he simply didn't feel a need to record any more. He had accomplished his goal, and had become immortal as a side benefit. Keeping a journal for one's posterity becomes somewhat redundant when one is going to live forever, I think."

"That's just . . ." Vin ground her teeth in frustration. "It's a very unsatisfying end to a story, Sazed."

He smiled in amusement. "Be careful, Mistress—become too fond of reading, and you may just turn into a scholar."

Vin shook her head. "Not if all the books I read are going to end like this one!"

"If it is of any comfort," Sazed said, "you are not the only one who is disappointed by the logbook's contents. It didn't contain much that Master Kelsier could use—certainly, there was nothing about the Eleventh Metal. I feel somewhat guilty, since I am the one who benefited most from the book."

"But, there wasn't very much about the Terris religion either."

"Not much," Sazed agreed. "But, truly and regretfully, 'not much' is far more than we knew previously. I am only worried that I will not have an opportunity to pass this information on. I have sent a translated copy of the logbook to a location where my brethren and sister Keepers will know to check—it would be a pity if this new knowledge were to die with me."

"It won't," Vin said.

"Oh? Has my lady suddenly become an optimist?"

"Has my Terrisman suddenly become a smart-mouth?" Vin retorted.

"He always has been, I think," Sazed said with a slight smile. "It is one of the things that made him a poor steward—at least, in the eyes of most of his masters."

"Then they must have been fools," Vin said honestly.

"So I was inclined to think, Mistress," Sazed replied. "We should return to the mansion—we should not be seen out in the gardens when the mists arrive, I think."

"I'm just going to go back out into them."

"There are many of the grounds staff that do not know you are Mistborn, Mistress," Sazed said. "It would be a good secret to keep, I think."

"I know," Vin said, turning. "Let's go back then."

"A wise plan."

They walked for a few moments, enjoying the eastern garden's subtle beauty. The grasses were kept carefully trimmed, and they had been arranged in pleasant tiers, the occasional shrubbery giving accent. The southern garden was far more spectacular, with its brook, trees, and exotic plants. But the eastern garden had its own peace—the serenity of simplicity.

"Sazed?" Vin said in a quiet voice.

"Yes, Mistress?"

"It's all going to change, isn't it?"

"What specifically do you mean?"

"Everything," Vin said. "Even if we aren't all dead in a year, the crewmembers will be off working on other projects. Ham will probably be back with his family, Dox and Kelsier will be planning some new escapade, Clubs will be renting his shop to another crew. . . . Even these gardens that we've spent so much money on—they'll belong to someone else."

Sazed nodded. "What you say is likely. Though, if things go well, perhaps the skaa rebellion will be ruling Luthadel by this time next year."

"Maybe," Vin said. "But even still . . . things will change."

"That is the nature of all life, Mistress," Sazed said. "The world must change."

"I know," Vin said with a sigh. "I just wish . . . Well, I actually *like* my life now, Sazed. I like spending time with the crew, and I like training with Kelsier. I love going to balls with Elend on the weekends, love walking in these gardens with you. I don't want these things to change. I don't want my life to go back to the way it was a year ago."

"It doesn't have to, Mistress," Sazed said. "It could change for the better."

"It won't," Vin said quietly. "It's starting already—Kelsier has hinted that my training is almost finished. When I practice in the future, I'll have to do it alone.

"As for Elend, he doesn't even know that I'm skaa—and it's my job to try and destroy his family. Even if House Venture doesn't fall by my hand, others will bring it down—I know Shan Elariel is planning something, and I haven't been able to discover anything about her schemes.

"That's only the beginning, though. We face the Final Empire. We'll probably fail—to be honest, I don't see how things could possibly turn out otherwise. We'll fight, we'll do some good, but we won't change much—and those of us who survive will spend the rest of our lives running from the Inquisitors. Everything's going to change, Sazed, and I can't stop it."

Sazed smiled fondly. "Then, Mistress," he said quietly, "simply enjoy what you have. The future will surprise you, I think."

"Maybe," Vin said, unconvinced.

"Ah, you just need to have hope, Mistress. Perhaps you've earned a little bit of good fortune. There were a group of people before the Ascension known as the Astalsi. They claimed that each person was born with a certain finite amount of ill luck. And so, when an unfortunate event happened, they thought themselves blessed—thereafter, their lives could only get better."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "Sounds a bit simpleminded to me."

"I do not believe so," Sazed said. "Why, the Astalsi were rather advanced—they mixed religion with science quite profoundly. They thought that different colors were indications of different kinds of fortune, and were quite detailed in their descriptions of light and color. Why, it's from them that we get some of our best ideas as to what things might have looked like before the Ascension. They had a scale of colors, and used it to describe the sky of the deepest blue and various plants in their shades of green.

"Regardless, I find their philosophies regarding luck and fortune enlightened. To them, a poor life was only a sign of fortune to come. It might be a good fit for you, Mistress; you could benefit from the knowledge that your luck cannot always be bad."

"I don't know," Vin said skeptically. "I mean, if your bad luck were limited, wouldn't your *good* luck be limited too? Every time something good happened, I'd be worried about using it all up."

"Hum," Sazed said. "I suppose that depends on your viewpoint, Mistress."

"How can you be so optimistic?" Vin asked. "You and Kelsier both."

"I don't know, Mistress," Sazed said. "Perhaps our lives have been easier than yours. Or, perhaps we are simply more foolish."

Vin fell silent. They walked for a short time longer, weaving their way back toward the building, but not rushing the walk. "Sazed," she finally said. "When you saved me, that night in the rain, you used Feruchemy, didn't you?"

Sazed nodded. "Indeed. The Inquisitor was very focused on you, and

I was able to sneak up behind him, then hit him with a stone. I had grown many times stronger than a regular man, and my blow threw him into the wall, breaking several of his bones, I suspect."

"Is that it?" Vin asked.

"You sound disappointed, Mistress," Sazed noted, smiling. "You expected something more spectacular, I suppose?"

Vin nodded. "It's just . . . you've been so quiet about Feruchemy. That makes it seem more mystical, I guess."

Sazed sighed. "There is really little to hide from you, Mistress. The truly unique power of Feruchemy—the ability to store and recover memories—you must surely have already guessed. The rest of the powers are not different, really, from the powers granted to you by pewter and tin. A few of them are a little more odd—making a Feruchemist heavier, or changing his age—but they offer little martial application."

"Age?" Vin said, perking up. "You could make yourself younger?"

"Not really, Mistress," Sazed said. "Remember, a Feruchemist must draw his powers from his own body. He could, for instance, spend a few weeks with his body aged to the point that it felt and looked ten years older than he really was. Then, he could withdraw that age to make himself seem ten years younger for an equal amount of time. However, in Feruchemy, there must be a balance."

Vin thought about that for a moment. "Does the metal you use matter?" she asked. "Like in Allomancy?"

"Most certainly," Sazed said. "The metal determines what can be stored."

Vin nodded and continued to walk, thinking over what he'd said. "Sazed, can I have a bit of your metal?" she finally asked.

"My metal, Mistress?"

"Something you've used as a Feruchemical store," Vin said. "I want to try burning it—maybe that will let me use some of its power."

Sazed frowned curiously.

"Has anyone ever tried it before?"

"I'm sure someone must have," Sazed said. "But, I honestly can't think of a specific example. Perhaps if I were to go search my memory copperminds . . ."

"Why not just let me try it now?" Vin asked. "Do you have something made from one of the basic metals? Something you haven't stored anything too valuable in?"

Sazed paused, then reached up to one of his oversized earlobes and undid an earring much like the one Vin wore. He handed the earring's tiny backing, used to hold the earring in place, to Vin. “It is pure pewter, Mistress. I have stored a moderate amount of strength in it.”

Vin nodded, swallowing the tiny stud. She felt at her Allomantic reserve, but the stud’s metal didn’t seem to do anything different. She tentatively burned pewter.

“Anything?” Sazed asked.

Vin shook her head. “No, I don’t . . .” She trailed off. There *was* something there, something different.

“What is it, Mistress?” Sazed asked, uncharacteristic eagerness sounding in his voice.

“I . . . can feel the power, Saze. It’s faint—far beyond my grasp—but I swear that there’s another reserve within me, one that only appears when I’m burning your metal.”

Sazed frowned. “It’s faint, you say? Like . . . you can see a shadow of the reserve, but can’t access the power itself?”

Vin nodded. “How do you know?”

“That’s what it feels like when you try to use another Feruchemist’s metals, Mistress,” Sazed said, sighing. “I should have suspected this would be the result. You cannot access the power because it does not belong to you.”

“Oh,” Vin said.

“Do not be too disappointed, Mistress. If Allomancers could steal strength from my people, it would already be known. It was a clever thought, however.” He turned, pointing toward the mansion. “The carriage has already arrived. We are late for the meeting, I think.”

Vin nodded, and they hurried their pace toward the mansion.

*Funny,* Kelsier thought to himself as he slipped across the darkened courtyard before Mansion Renoux. *I have to sneak into my own house, as if I were attacking some nobleman’s keep.*

There was no avoiding it, however—not with his reputation. Kelsier the thief had been distinctive enough; Kelsier the rebellion instigator and skaa spiritual leader was even more infamous. That didn’t, of course, keep him from spreading his nightly chaos—he just had to be more careful. More and more families were pulling out of the city, and the powerful houses were growing increasingly paranoid. In a way, that made manipulating them easier—but sneaking around their keeps was getting very dangerous.

In comparison, Mansion Renoux was virtually unprotected. There were guards, of course, but no Mistings. Renoux had to keep a low profile; too many Allomancers would make him stand out. Kelsier kept to the shadows, carefully making his way around to the east side of the building. Then he Pushed off a coin and guided himself up onto Renoux's own balcony.

Kelsier landed lightly, then peeked through the glass balcony doors. The drapes were shut, but he could pick out Dockson, Vin, Sazed, Ham, and Breeze standing around Renoux's desk. Renoux himself sat in the far corner of the room, staying out of the proceedings. His contract included playing the part of Lord Renoux, but he didn't wish to be involved in the plan anymore than he had to.

Kelsier shook his head. *It would be far too easy for an assassin to get in here. I'll have to make sure that Vin continues to sleep at Clubs' shop.* He wasn't worried about Renoux; the kandra's nature was such that he didn't need to fear an assassin's blade.

Kelsier tapped lightly on the door, and Dockson strolled over, pulling it open.

"And he makes his stunning entry!" Kelsier announced, sweeping into the room, throwing back his mistcloak.

Dockson snorted, shutting the doors. "You're truly a wonder to behold, Kell. Particularly the soot stains on your knees."

"I had to do some crawling tonight," Kelsier said, waving an indifferent hand. "There's an unused drainage ditch that passes right under Keep Lekal's defensive wall. You'd think they'd get that patched up."

"I doubt they need worry," Breeze said from beside the desk. "Most of you Mistborn are probably too proud to crawl. I'm surprised you were willing to do so yourself."

"Too proud to crawl?" Kelsier said. "Nonsense! Why, I'd say that we Mistborn are too proud *not* to be humble enough to go crawling about—in a dignified manner, of course."

Dockson frowned, approaching the desk. "Kell, that didn't make any sense."

"We Mistborn need not make sense," Kelsier said haughtily. "What's this?"

"From your brother," Dockson said, pointing at a large map laid across the desk. "It arrived this afternoon in the hollow of a broken table leg that the Canton of Orthodoxy hired Clubs to repair."

"Interesting," Kelsier said, scanning the map. "It's a list of the Soothing stations, I assume?"

"Indeed," Breeze said. "It's quite the discovery—I've never seen such a detailed, carefully drawn map of the city. Why, it not only shows every one of the thirty-four Soothing stations, but also locations of Inquisitor activity, as well as places that the different Cantons are concerned about. I haven't had the opportunity to associate much with your brother, but I must say that the man is obviously a genius!"

"It's almost hard to believe he's related to Kell, eh?" Dockson said with a smile. He had a notepad before him, and was in the process of making a list of all the Soothing stations.

Kelsier snorted. "Marsh might be the genius, but I'm the handsome one. What are these numbers?"

"Inquisitor raids and dates," Ham said. "You'll notice that Vin's crewhouse is listed."

Kelsier nodded. "How in the world did Marsh manage to steal a map like this?"

"He didn't," Dockson said as he wrote. "There was a note with the map. Apparently, high prelans *gave* it to him—they've been very impressed with Marsh, and wanted him to look over the city and recommend locations for new Soothing stations. It seems that the Ministry is a bit worried about the house war, and they want to send out some extra Soothers to try and keep things under control."

"We're supposed to send the map back inside the repaired table leg," Sazed said. "Once we are done this evening, I shall endeavor to copy it in as short a time as possible."

*And memorize it as well, thereby making it part of every Keeper's record,* Kelsier thought. *The day when you'll stop memorizing and start teaching is coming soon, Saze. I hope your people are ready.*

Kelsier turned, studying the map. It was as impressive as Breeze had said. Indeed, Marsh must have taken an extremely great risk in sending it away. Perhaps a foolhardy risk, even—but the information it contained . . .

*We'll have to get this back quickly,* Kelsier thought. *Tomorrow morning, if possible.*

"What is this?" Vin asked quietly, leaning across the large map and pointing. She wore a noblewoman's dress—a pretty one-piece garment that was only slightly less ornate than a ball gown.

Kelsier smiled. He could remember a time when Vin had looked frighteningly awkward in a dress, but she seemed to have taken an increasing liking to them. She still didn't move *quite* like a noble-born lady. She was graceful—but it was the dexterous grace of a predator, not the deliberate grace of a courtly lady. Still, the gowns seemed to fit Vin now—in a way that had nothing at all to do with tailoring.

*Ah, Mare,* Kelsier thought. *You always wanted a daughter you could teach to walk the line between noblewoman and thief.* They would have liked each other; they both had a hidden streak of unconventionality. Perhaps if his wife were still alive, she could have taught Vin things about pretending to be a noblewoman that even Sazed didn't know.

*Of course, if Mare were still alive, I wouldn't be doing any of this. I wouldn't dare.*

"Look!" Vin said. "One of these Inquisitor dates is new—it's marked as yesterday!"

Dockson shot a glance at Kelsier.

*We would have had to tell her eventually anyway. . . .* "That was Theron's crew," Kelsier said. "An Inquisitor hit them yesterday evening."

Vin paled.

"Should I recognize that name?" Ham asked.

"Theron's crew was part of the team that was trying to dupe the Ministry with Camon," Vin said. "This means . . . they probably still have my trail."

*The Inquisitor recognized her that night when we infiltrated the palace. He wanted to know who her father was. It's fortunate that those inhuman things make the nobility uncomfortable—otherwise, we'd have to worry about sending her to balls.*

"Theron's crew," Vin said. "Was . . . it like last time?"

Dockson nodded. "No survivors."

There was an uncomfortable silence, and Vin looked visibly sick.

*Poor kid,* Kelsier thought. There was little they could do but move on, though. "All right. How are we going to use this map?"

"It has some Ministry notes on house defenses," Ham said. "Those will be useful."

"There doesn't appear to be any pattern in the Inquisitor hits, however," Breeze said. "They probably just go where the information leads them."

"We'll want to refrain from being too active near Soothing stations," Dox said, lowering his pen. "Fortunately, Clubs's shop isn't close to any specific station—most of them are in the slums."

"We need to do more than just avoid the stations," Kelsier said. "We need to be ready to take them out."

Breeze frowned. "If we do, we risk playing our hand recklessly."

"But think of the damage it would do," Kelsier said. "Marsh said there were at least three Soothers and a Seeker at *every* one of these stations. That's a hundred and thirty Ministry Mistings—they must have recruited across the entire Central Dominance to gather those kinds of numbers. If we were to take them all out at once . . .”

“We’d never be able to kill that many ourselves,” Dockson said.

“We could if we used the rest of our army,” Ham said. “We’ve got them stashed throughout the slums.”

“I have a better idea,” Kelsier said. “We can hire other thieving crews. If we had ten crews, each assigned to take out three stations, we could clear the city of Ministry Soothers and Seekers in barely a few hours.”

“We’d have to discuss timing, though,” Dockson said. “Breeze is right—killing that many obligators in one evening means making a major commitment. It won’t take the Inquisitors long to retaliate.”

Kelsier nodded. *You’re right, Dox. Timing will be vital.* “Would you look into it? Find some appropriate crews, but wait until we decide on a time before giving them the locations of the Soothing stations.”

Dockson nodded.

“Good,” Kelsier said. “Speaking of our soldiers, Ham, how are things going with them?”

“Better than I expected, actually,” Ham said. “They went through training in the caves, and so they’re fairly competent. And, they consider themselves the more ‘faithful’ segment of the army, since they didn’t follow Yeden to battle against your will.”

Breeze snorted. “That’s a convenient way of looking past the fact that they lost three-fourths of their army in a tactical blunder.”

“They’re good men, Breeze,” Ham said firmly. “And so were those who died. Don’t speak ill of them. Regardless, I worry about hiding the army as we are—it won’t be too long before one of the teams gets discovered.”

“That’s why none of them know where to find the others,” Kelsier said.

“I do want to mention something about the men,” Breeze said, seating himself in one of Renoux’s desk chairs. “I see the importance of sending Hammond to train the soldiers—but honestly, what is the reason for forcing Dockson and myself to go and visit them?”

“The men need to know who their leaders are,” Kelsier said. “If Ham were to become indisposed, someone else will need to take command.”

“Why not you?” Breeze asked.

“Just bear with me,” Kelsier said, smiling. “It’s for the best.”

Breeze rolled his eyes. “Bear with you. We seem to do an awful lot of that. . . .”

“Anyway,” Kelsier said. “Vin, what news from the nobility? Have you discovered anything useful about House Venture?”

She paused. “No.”

“But the ball next week will be at Keep Venture, right?” Dockson asked.

Vin nodded.

Kelsier eyed the girl. *Would she even tell us if she knew?* She met his eyes, and he couldn’t read a thing in them. *Blasted girl’s far too experienced a liar.*

“All right,” he said to her. “Keep looking.”

“I will,” she said.

Despite his fatigue, Kelsier found sleep elusive that night. Unfortunately, he couldn’t go out and roam the hallways—only certain servants knew he was at the mansion, and he needed to keep a low profile, now that his reputation was building.

His reputation. He sighed as he leaned against the balcony railing, watching the mists. In a way, the things he did worried even him. The others didn’t question him out loud, as per his request, but he could tell that they were still bothered by his growing fame.

*It’s the best way. I may not need all of this . . . but, if I do, I’m going to be glad I went to the trouble.*

A soft knock came at his door. He turned, curious, as Sazed peeked his head into the room.

“I apologize, Master Kelsier,” Sazed said. “But a guard came to me and said he could see you up on your balcony. He was worried that you’d give yourself away.”

Kelsier sighed, but backed away from the balcony, pulling the doors closed and shutting the drapes. “I’m not meant for anonymity, Saze. For a thief, I’m really not all that good at hiding.”

Sazed smiled and began to withdraw.

“Sazed?” Kelsier asked, causing the Terrisman to pause. “I can’t sleep—do you have a new proposal for me?”

Sazed smiled deeply, walking into the room. “Of course, Master Kelsier. Lately, I’ve been thinking that you should hear about the Truths of the Bennet. They fit you quite well, I think. The Bennet were a highly developed people who lived on the southern islands. They were brave seafarers and brilliant cartographers; some of the maps the Final Empire still uses were developed by Bennet explorers.

“Their religion was designed to be practiced aboard ships that were away at sea for months at a time. The captain was also their minister, and no man was allowed to command unless he had received theological training."

"Probably weren't very many mutinies."

Sazed smiled. "It was a good religion, Master Kelsier. It focused on discovery and knowledge—to these people, the making of maps was a reverent duty. They believed that once all of the world was known, understood, and catalogued, men would finally find peace and harmony. Many religions teach such ideals, but few actually managed to practice them as well as the Bennet."

Kelsier frowned, leaning back against the wall beside the balcony drapes. "Peace and harmony," he said slowly. "I'm not really looking for either right now, Saze."

"Ah," Sazed said.

Kelsier looked up, staring at the ceiling. "Could you . . . tell me about the Valla again?"

"Of course," Sazed said, pulling a chair over from beside Kelsier's desk and seating himself. "What specifically would you like to know?"

Kelsier shook his head. "I'm not sure," he said. "I'm sorry, Saze. I'm in a strange mood tonight."

"You are always in a strange mood, I think," Sazed said with a slight smile. "However, you choose an interesting sect to ask after. The Valla lasted longer into the Lord Ruler's dominion than any other religion."

"That's why I ask," Kelsier said. "I . . . need to understand what kept them going for so long, Saze. What made them keep fighting?"

"They were the most determined, I think."

"But they didn't have any leaders," Kelsier said. "The Lord Ruler had slaughtered the entire Vallan religious council as part of his first conquest."

"Oh, they had leaders, Master Kelsier," Sazed said. "Dead ones, true, but leaders nonetheless."

"Some men would say that their devotion didn't make sense," Kelsier said. "The loss of the Vallan leaders should have broken the people, not made them more determined to keep going."

Sazed shook his head. "Men are more resilient than that, I think. Our belief is often strongest when it should be weakest. That is the nature of hope."

Kelsier nodded.

"Did you want further instruction on the Valla?"

"No. Thanks, Saze. I just needed to be reminded that there were people who fought even when things looked hopeless."

Sazed nodded, rising. “I think I understand, Master Kelsier. Good evening, then.”

Kelsier nodded distractedly, letting the Terrisman withdraw.

*Most of the Terrismen are not as bad as Rashek. However, I can see that they believe him, to an extent. These are simple men, not philosophers or scholars, and they don't understand that their own prophecies say the Hero of Ages will be an outsider. They only see what Rashek points out—that they are an ostensibly superior people, and should be "dominant" rather than subservient.*

*Before such passion and hatred, even good men can be deceived.*

# 30

It took returning to the Venture ballroom to remind Vin what true majesty was.

She'd visited so many keeps that she had begun to grow desensitized to the splendor. There was something special about Keep Venture, however—something that the other keeps strived for, but never quite achieved. It was as if Venture were the parent, and the others were well-taught children. All of the keeps were beautiful, but there was no denying which one was the finest.

The enormous Venture hall, lined by a row of massive pillars on each side, seemed even more grand than usual. Vin couldn't quite decide why. She thought about it as she waited for a servant to take her shawl. The normal limelights shone outside the stained-glass windows, spraying the room with shards of light. The tables were immaculate beneath their pillared overhang. The lord's table, set on the small balcony at the very end of the hallway, looked as regal as ever.

*It's almost . . . too perfect,* Vin thought, frowning to herself. Everything seemed slightly exaggerated. The tablecloths were even whiter, and pressed even flatter, than usual. The servants' uniforms seemed particularly sharp. Instead of regular soldiers at the doors, hazekillers stood looking intentionally impressive, distinguished by their wooden shields and lack of armor. All together, the room made it seem as if even the regular Venture perfection had been heightened.

"Something's wrong, Sazed," she whispered as a servant moved off to prepare her table.

"What do you mean, Mistress?" the tall steward asked, standing behind her and to the side.

"There are too many people here," Vin said, realizing one of the things that was bothering her. Ball attendance had been tapering off during the last few months. Yet, it seemed like everyone had returned for the Venture event. And they all wore their finest.

"Something's going on," Vin said quietly. "Something we don't know about."

"Yes . . ." Sazed said quietly. "I sense it too. Perhaps I should go to the stewards' dinner early."

"Good idea," Vin said. "I think I might just skip the meal this evening. We're a bit late, and it looks like people have already started chatting."

Sazed smiled.

"What?"

"I remember a time when you would *never* skip a meal, Mistress."

Vin snorted. "Just be glad I never tried to stuff my pockets with food from one of these balls—trust me, I was tempted. Now, get going."

Sazed nodded and moved off toward the stewards' dinner. Vin scanned the chatting groups. *No sign of Shan, thankfully,* she thought. Unfortunately, Kliss was nowhere to be seen either, so Vin had to choose someone else to go to for gossip. She strolled forward, smiling at Lord Idren Seeris, a cousin to House Elariel and a man she had danced with on several occasions. He acknowledged her with a stiff nod, and she joined his group.

Vin smiled at the other members of the group—three women and one other lord. She knew them all at least passingly, and had danced with Lord Yestal. However, this evening all four of them gave her cold looks.

"I haven't been to Keep Venture in a while," Vin said, falling into her persona as a country girl. "I'd forgotten how majestic it is!"

"Indeed," said one of the ladies. "Excuse me—I'm going to go get something to drink."

"I'll go with you," one of the other ladies added, both of them leaving the group.

Vin watched them go, frowning.

"Ah," Yestal said. "Our meal has arrived. Coming, Triss?"

"Of course," the final lady said, joining Yestal as they walked away.

Idren adjusted his spectacles, shooting Vin a halfhearted look of apology, then withdrew. Vin stood, dumbfounded. She hadn't received such an obviously cold reception since her first few balls.

*What's going on?* she thought with increasing trepidation. *Is this*

*Shan's work? Could she turn an entire room full of people against me?*

No, that didn't feel right. It would have required too much effort. In addition, the oddity wasn't just around her. All of the groups of noblemen were . . . different this evening.

Vin tried a second group, with an even worse result. As soon as she joined, the members pointedly ignored her. Vin felt so out of place that she withdrew, fleeing to get herself a cup of wine. As she walked, she noticed that the first group—the one with Yestal and Idren—had re-formed with exactly the same members.

Vin paused, standing just inside the shade of the eastern overhang and scanning the crowd. There were very few people dancing, and she recognized them all as established couples. There also seemed to be very little mingling between groups or tables. While the ballroom was filled, it seemed most of the attendees were distinctly trying to ignore everyone else.

*I need to get a better view of this,* she thought, walking to the stairwell. A short climb later, she came out on the long, corridorlike balcony set into the wall above the dance floor, its familiar blue lanterns giving the stonework a soft, melancholy hue.

Vin paused. Elend's cubbyhole sat between the rightmost column and the wall, well lit by a single lantern. He almost always spent Venture balls reading there; he didn't like the pomp and ceremony that came from hosting a party.

The cubbyhole was empty. She approached the railing, then craned out to look toward the far end of the grand hallway. The host's table sat on an overhang at the same level as the balconies, and she was shocked to see Elend sitting there dining with his father.

*What?* she thought incredulously. Never once, during the half-dozen balls she'd attended at Keep Venture, had she seen Elend sit with his family.

Down below, she caught sight of a familiar, colorful-robed figure moving through the crowd. She waved toward Sazed, but he had obviously already seen her. As she waited for him, Vin thought she faintly heard a familiar voice coming from the other end of the balcony. She turned and checked, noticing a short figure she'd missed before. Kliss was speaking with a small group of minor lords.

*So that's where Kliss went,* Vin thought. *Maybe* she'll *talk to me.* Vin stood, waiting for either Kliss to finish her conversation or Sazed to arrive.

Sazed came first, leaving the stairwell, breathing heavily. "Mistress," he said in a low voice, joining her by the railing.

"Tell me you discovered something, Sazed. This ball feels . . .

creepy. Everyone's so solemn and cold. It's almost like we're at a funeral, not a party."

"It is an apt metaphor, my lady," Sazed said quietly. "We have missed an important announcement. House Hasting said it is not going to hold its regular ball this week."

Vin frowned. "So? Houses have canceled balls before."

"House Elariel canceled as well. Normally, Tekiel would come next—but that house is defunct. House Shunah has already announced that it won't be holding any more balls."

"What are you saying?"

"It appears, Mistress, that this will be the last ball for a time . . . perhaps a very long time."

Vin glanced down at the hall's magnificent windows, which stood above the independent—almost hostile—groups of people.

"*That's* what's going on," she said. "They're finalizing alliances. Everyone is standing with their strongest friends and supporters. They know this is the last ball, and so they all came to put in an appearance, but they know they've no time left for politicking."

"It seems that way, Mistress."

"They're all going on the defensive," Vin said. "Retreating behind their walls, so to speak. That's why no one wants to talk to me—we made Renoux too neutral a force. I don't have a faction, and it's a bad time to be gambling on random political elements."

"Master Kelsier needs to know this information, Mistress," Sazed said. "He planned on pretending to be an informant again tonight. If he's ignorant of this situation, it could seriously damage his credibility. We should leave."

"No," Vin said, turning toward Sazed. "I can't go—not when everyone else is staying. They all thought it was important to come and be seen at this last ball, and so I shouldn't leave until they start to."

Sazed nodded. "Very well."

"You go, Sazed. Hire a carriage and go tell Kell what we've learned. I'll stay for a little longer, then leave when it won't make House Renoux look weak."

Sazed paused. "I . . . don't know, Mistress."

Vin rolled her eyes. "I appreciate the help you've given me, but you don't need to keep holding my hand. Plenty of people come to these balls without their stewards to watch after them."

Sazed sighed. "Very well, Mistress. I shall return, however, after I have located Master Kelsier."

Vin nodded, bidding him farewell, and he retreated down the stone stairwell. Vin leaned against the balcony in Elend's spot, watching until Sazed appeared below and disappeared toward the front gates.

*Now what? Even if I can find someone to talk to, there's really no point in spreading rumors now.*

She felt a feeling of dread. Who would have thought that she would come to enjoy noble frivolity so much? The experience was tainted by her knowledge of what many noblemen were capable of, but even still, there had been a . . . dreamlike joy to the entire experience.

Would she ever attend balls like these again? What would happen to Valette the noblewoman? Would she have to put away her dresses and makeup, and return to simply being Vin the street thief? There probably wouldn't be room for things like grand balls in Kelsier's new kingdom, and that might not be a bad thing—what right did she have to dance while other skaa starved? Yet . . . it seemed like the world would be missing something beautiful without the keeps and dancers, the dresses and the festivities.

She sighed, leaning back from the railing, glancing down at her own dress. It was of a deep shimmering blue, with white circular designs sewn around the base of the skirt. It was sleeveless, but the blue silk gloves she wore ran all the way past her elbows.

Once she would have found the outfit frustratingly bulky. Now, however, she found it beautifying. She liked how it was designed to make her look full through the chest, yet accentuated her thin upper torso. She liked how it flared at the waist, slowly fanning out into a wide bell that rustled as she walked.

She'd miss it—she'd miss it all. But, Sazed was right. She couldn't stop the progression of time, she could only enjoy the moment.

*I'm* not *going to let him sit up there at the high table all evening and ignore me,* she decided.

Vin turned and walked along the balcony, nodding to Kliss as she passed. The balcony ended in a corridor that turned, and—as Vin had correctly guessed—led out onto the ledge that held the host's table.

She stood inside the corridor for a moment, looking out. Lords and ladies sat in regal outfits, basking in the privilege of being invited up to sit with Lord Straff Venture. Vin waited, trying to get Elend's attention, and finally one of the guests noticed her, then nudged Elend. He turned with surprise, saw Vin, then flushed slightly.

She waved briefly, and he stood, excusing himself. Vin ducked back into the stone corridor a bit so they could speak more privately.

"Elend!" she said as he walked into the corridor. "You're sitting with your father!"

He nodded. “This ball has turned into something of a special event, Valette, and my father was fairly insistent that I obey protocol.”

“When are we going to have time to talk?”

Elend paused. “I’m not sure that we will.”

Vin frowned. He seemed . . . reserved. His usual, slightly worn and wrinkled suit had been replaced by a sharp, well-fitted one. His hair was even combed.

“Elend?” she said, stepping forward.

He raised a hand, warding her back. “Things have changed, Valette.”

*No,* she thought. *This can’t change, not yet!* “Things? What ‘things’? Elend, what are you talking about?”

“I am heir to House Venture,” he said. “And dangerous times are coming. House Hasting lost an entire convoy this afternoon, and that’s only the beginning. Within the month, the keeps will openly be at war. These aren’t things I can ignore, Valette. It’s time I stopped being a liability to my family.”

“That’s fine,” Vin said. “That doesn’t mean—”

“Valette,” Elend interrupted. “You are a liability too. A very big one. I won’t lie and claim that I never cared for you—I did, and I still do. However, I knew from the start—as you did—that this could never be anything more than a passing dalliance. The truth is, my house needs me—and it’s more important than you are.”

Vin paled. “But . . .”

He turned to go back to dinner.

“Elend,” she said quietly, “please don’t turn away from me.”

He paused, then looked back at her. “I know the truth, Valette. I know how you’ve lied about who you are. I don’t care, really—I’m not angry, or even disappointed. The truth is, I expected it. You’re just . . . playing the game. Like we all are.” He paused, then shook his head and turned away from her. “Like I am.”

“Elend?” she said, reaching for him.

“Don’t make me embarrass you in public, Valette.”

Vin paused, feeling numb. And then, she was too angry to be numb—too angry, too frustrated . . . and too terrified.

“Don’t leave,” she whispered. “Don’t you leave me too.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. “But I have to go meet with my friends. It was . . . fun.”

And he left.

Vin stood in the darkened corridor. She felt herself shiver quietly, and she turned to stumble back out onto the main balcony. To the side, she could see Elend bid good evening to his family, then head through a back corridor toward the keep's living section.

*He can't do this to me. Not Elend. Not now . . .*

However, a voice from within—a voice she had nearly forgotten—began to speak. *Of course he left you,* Reen whispered. *Of course he abandoned you. Everyone will betray you, Vin. What did I teach you?*

*No!* she thought. *It's just the political tension. Once this is over, I'll be able to convince him to come back. . . .*

*I never came back for you,* Reen whispered. *He won't either.* The voice felt so real—it was almost like she could hear him beside her.

Vin leaned up against the balcony railing, using the iron grating for strength, holding herself up. She wouldn't let him destroy her. A life on the streets hadn't been able to break her; she wouldn't let a self-important nobleman do so. She just kept telling herself that.

But, why did this hurt so much more than starvation—so much more than one of Camon's beatings?

"Well, Valette Renoux," a voice said from behind.

"Kliss," Vin said. "I'm . . . not in the mood to talk right now."

"Ah," Kliss said. "So Elend Venture finally spurned you. Don't worry, child—he'll get what he deserves shortly."

Vin turned, frowning at the odd tone in Kliss's voice. The woman didn't seem like herself. She seemed too . . . controlled.

"Deliver a message to your uncle for me, will you dear?" Kliss asked lightly. "Tell him that a man such as himself—without house alliances—might have a difficult time gathering intelligence in the upcoming months. If he needs a good source of information, tell him to send for me. I know lots of interesting things."

"You're an informant!" Vin said, pushing aside her pain for the moment. "But, you're . . ."

"A foolish gossip?" the short woman asked. "Why, yes I am. It's fascinating, the kinds of things you can learn when you're known as the court gossip. People come to you to spread obvious lies—such as the things you told me about House Hasting last week. Why would you want me to spread such untruths? Could House Renoux be making a bid for the weapons market during the house war? Indeed—could Renoux be *behind* the recent attack on the Hasting barges?"

Kliss's eyes twinkled. "Tell your uncle that I can be made to keep quiet about what I know—for a small fee."

"You've been duping me all along. . . ." Vin said numbly.

"Of course, dear," Kliss said, patting Vin's arm. "That's what we do here at court. You'll learn eventually—if you survive. Now, be a good child and deliver my message, all right?"

Kliss turned, her squat, gaudy dress suddenly seeming a brilliant costume to Vin.

"Wait!" Vin said. "What was that you said about Elend earlier? He's going to get what he deserves?"

"Hum?" Kliss said, turning. "Why . . . that's right. You've been asking after Shan Elariel's plans, haven't you?"

*Shan?* Vin thought with rising concern. "What is she planning?"

"Now *that,* my dear, is an expensive secret indeed. I could tell you . . . but then, what would I have in return? A woman of an unimportant house like myself needs to find sustenance somewhere. . . ."

Vin pulled off her sapphire necklace, the only piece of jewelry she was wearing. "Here. Take it."

Kliss accepted the necklace with a thoughtful expression. "Hum, yes, very nice indeed."

"What do you know?" Vin snapped.

"Young Elend is going to be one of the first Venture casualties in the house war, I'm afraid," Kliss said, stuffing the necklace into a sleeve pocket. "It's unfortunate—he really does seem like a nice boy. Too nice, probably."

"When?" Vin demanded. "Where? How?"

"So many questions, but only one necklace," Kliss said idly.

"It's all I have right now!" Vin said truthfully. Her coin pouch contained only bronze clips for Steelpushing.

"But it's a *very* valuable secret, as I've said," Kliss continued. "By telling you, my own life would be—"

*That's it!* Vin thought furiously. *Stupid aristocratic games!*

Vin burned zinc and brass, hitting Kliss with a powerful blast of emotional Allomancy. She Soothed away all of the woman's feelings but fear, then took hold of that fear and yanked on it with a firm tug.

"Tell me!" Vin growled.

Kliss gasped, wobbling and nearly falling to the ground. "An Allomancer! No *wonder* Renoux brought such a distant cousin with him to Luthadel!"

"Speak!" Vin said, taking a step forward.

"You're too late to help him," Kliss said. "I'd never sell a secret like this if it had a chance of turning on me!"

"Tell me!"

"He'll be assassinated by Elariel Allomancers this evening," Kliss whispered. "He might be dead already—it was supposed to happen as soon as he withdrew from the lord's table. But if you want revenge, you'll have to look toward Lord Straff Venture too."

"Elend's father?" Vin asked with surprise.

"Of course, foolish child," Kliss said. "Lord Venture would love nothing more than an excuse to give the house title to his nephew instead. All Venture had to do was withdraw a few of his soldiers from the rooftop around young Elend's room to let in the Elariel assassins. And, since the assassination will occur during one of Elend's little philosophy meetings, Lord Venture will be able to rid himself of a Hasting and a Lekal too!"

Vin spun. *I have to do something!*

"Of course," Kliss said with a chuckle, standing up. "Lord Venture is in for a surprise himself. I've heard that your Elend has some very . . . choice books in his possession. Young Venture should be much more careful about the things he tells his women, I think."

Vin turned back to the smiling Kliss. The woman winked at her. "I'll keep your Allomancy a secret, child. Just make certain I get payment by tomorrow afternoon. A lady must buy food—and as you can see, I need a lot of it.

"As for House Venture . . . well, I'd distance myself from them, if I were you. Shan's assassins are going to make *quite* the disturbance tonight. I wouldn't be surprised if half the court ended up in the boy's room to see what the ruckus was about. When the court sees those books Elend has . . . well, let's just say that the obligators are going to become very interested in House Venture for a time. Too bad Elend will already be dead—we haven't had an open execution of a nobleman in quite some time!"

*Elend's room,* Vin thought desperately. *That's where they must be!* She turned, holding the sides of her dress and rustling frantically down the balcony walkway toward the corridor she had left moments before.

"Where are you going?" Kliss asked with surprise.

"I have to stop this!" Vin said.

Kliss laughed. "I already told you that you're too late. Venture is a very old keep, and the back passages leading to the lords' quarters are quite the maze. If you don't know your way, you'll end up lost for hours."

Vin glanced around, feeling helpless.

"Besides, child," Kliss added, turning to walk away. "Didn't the boy just spurn you? What do you owe him?"

Vin paused.

*She's right. What* do *I owe him?*

The answer came immediately. *I love him.*

With that thought came strength. Vin rushed forward despite Kliss's laughter. She had to try. She entered the corridor and moved into the back passageways. However, Kliss's words soon proved true: The dark stone passageways were narrow and unadorned. She'd never find her way in time.

*The roof,* she thought. *Elend's rooms will have an outside balcony. I need a window!*

She dashed down a passage, kicking off her shoes and pulling off her stockings, then running as best she could in the dress. She searched frantically for a window big enough to fit through. She burst out into a larger corridor, empty save for flickering torches.

A massive lavender rose window stood on the far side of the room.

*Good enough,* Vin thought. With a flare of steel, she threw herself into the air, Pushing against a massive iron door behind her. She flew forward for a moment, then Pushed powerfully against the rose window's iron bindings.

She lurched to a stop in the air, Pushing both backward and forward at the same time. She strained, hanging in the empty corridor, flaring her pewter to keep from being crushed. The rose window was enormous, but it was mostly glass. How strong could it be?

Very strong. Vin groaned beneath the strain. She heard a snap behind her, and the door began to twist in its mountings.

*You . . . must . . . give!* she thought angrily, flaring her steel. Chips of stone fell around the window.

Then, with a *crack* of sound, the rose window burst free from the stone wall. It fell backward into the dark night, and Vin shot out behind it.

Cool mist enveloped her. She Pulled slightly against the door inside the room, keeping herself from going out too far, then Pushed mightily against the falling window. The enormous dark-glassed window tumbled beneath her, churning the mists as Vin shot away from it. Straight up, toward the roof.

The window crashed to the ground just as Vin flew up over the edge of the rooftop, her dress fluttering madly in the wind. She landed on the bronze-plated roof with a thump, falling to a crouch. The metal was cool beneath her toes and fingers.

Tin flared, illuminating the night. She could see nothing out of the ordinary.

She burned bronze, using it as Marsh had taught her, searching for signs of Allomancy. There weren't any—the assassins had a Smoker with them.

*I can't search the entire building!* Vin thought, desperately, flaring her bronze. *Where are they?*

Then, oddly, she thought she sensed something. An Allomantic pulse in the night. Faint. Hidden. But enough.

Vin rose to dash across the rooftop, trusting her instincts. As she ran, she flared pewter and grabbed her dress near the neck, then ripped the garment down the front with a single yank. She pulled her coin pouch and metal vials from a hidden pocket, and then—still running—she ripped the dress, petticoats, and attached leggings free, tossing it all aside. Her corset and gloves went next. Underneath, she wore a thin, sleeveless white shift and a pair of white shorts.

She dashed frantically. *I can't be too late,* she thought. *Please. I can't.*

Figures resolved in the mists ahead. They stood beside an angled rooftop skylight; Vin had passed several similar ones as she ran. One of the figures pointed toward the skylight, a weapon glittering in its hand.

Vin cried out, Pushing herself off the bronze roof in an arcing jump. She landed in the very center of the surprised group of people, then thrust her coin pouch upward, ripping it in two.

Coins sprayed into the air, reflecting light from the window below. As the glistening shower of metal fell around Vin, she *Pushed.*

Coins zipped away from her like a swarm of insects, each one leaving a trail in the mist. Figures cried out as coins hit flesh, and several of the dark forms dropped.

Several did not. Some of the coins snapped away, Pushed aside by invisible Allomantic hands. Four people remained standing: Two of them wore mistcloaks; one of them was familiar.

Shan Elariel. Vin didn't need to see the cloak to understand; there was only one reason a woman as important as Shan would come on an assassination like this. She was a Mistborn.

"*You?*" Shan asked in shock. She wore a black outfit of trousers and shirt, her dark hair pulled back, her mistcloak worn almost stylishly.

*Two Mistborn,* Vin thought. *Not good.* She scrambled away, ducking as one of the assassins swung a dueling cane at her.

Vin slid across the rooftop, then Pulled herself to a brief halt, spinning with one hand resting against the cold bronze. She reached out and Pulled against the few coins that hadn't escaped out into the night, yanking them back into her hand.

"Kill her!" Shan snapped. The two men Vin had felled lay groaning on the rooftop. They weren't dead; in fact, one was climbing unsteadily to his feet.

*Thugs,* Vin thought. *The other two are probably Coinshots.*

As if to prove her right, one of the men tried to Push away Vin's vial of metals. Fortunately, there weren't enough metals in the vial to give him a very good anchor, and she kept hold of it easily.

Shan turned her attention back to the skylight.

*No you don't!* Vin thought, dashing forward again.

The Coinshot cried out as she approached. Vin flipped a coin and shot it at him. He, of course, Pushed back—but Vin anchored herself against the bronze roof and flared Steel, Pushing with a firm effort.

The man's own Steelpush—transmitted from the coin, to Vin, to the roof—launched him out into the air. He cried out, shooting off into the darkness. He was only a Misting, and couldn't Pull himself back to the rooftop.

The other Coinshot tried to spray Vin with coins, but she deflected them with ease. Unfortunately, he wasn't as foolish as his companion, and he released the coins soon after Pushing them. However, it was obvious that he couldn't hit her. Why did he keep—

*The other Mistborn!* Vin thought, ducking to a roll as a figure leaped from the dark mists, glass knives flashing in the air.

Vin just barely got out of the way, flaring pewter to give herself balance. She came to her feet beside the wounded Thug, who stood on obviously weak legs. With another flare of pewter, Vin slammed her shoulder into the man's chest, shoving him to the side.

The man stumbled maladroitly, still holding his bleeding side. Then he tripped and fell right into the skylight. The fine, tinted glass shattered as he fell, and Vin's tin-enhanced ears could hear cries of surprise from below, followed by a crash as the Thug hit the ground.

Vin looked up, smiling evilly at the stunned Shan. Behind her, the second Mistborn—a man—swore quietly.

"You . . . You . . ." Shan sputtered, her eyes flaring dangerously with anger in the night.

*Take the warning, Elend,* Vin thought, *and escape. It's time for me to go.*

She couldn't face two Mistborn at once—she couldn't even beat Kelsier most nights. Flaring Steel, Vin launched herself backward. Shan took a step forward and—looking determined—Pushed herself after Vin. The second Mistborn joined her.

*Bloody hell!* Vin thought, spinning in the air and Pulling herself to the rooftop's edge near where she had broken the rose window. Below, figures scrambled about, lanterns brightening the mists. Lord Venture probably thought that the fuss meant his son was dead. He was in for a surprise.

Vin launched herself into the air again, jumping out into the misty void. She could hear the two Mistborn land behind her, then push off as well.

*This isn't good,* Vin thought with trepidation as she hurled through the misty air currents. She didn't have any coins left, nor did she have daggers—and she faced two trained Mistborn.

She burned iron, searching frantically for an anchor in the night. A line of blue, moving slowly, appeared beneath her to the right.

Vin yanked on the line, changing her trajectory. She shot downward, the Venture grounds wall appearing as a dark shadow beneath her. Her anchor was the breastplate of an unfortunate guard, who lay atop the wall, holding frantically to a tooth in the battlements to keep himself from being pulled up toward Vin.

Vin slammed feet-first into the man, then spun in the misty air, flipping to land on the cool stone. The guard collapsed to the stone, then cried out, desperately grabbing his stone anchor as another Allomantic force Pulled against him.

*Sorry, friend,* Vin thought, kicking the man's hand free from the battlement tooth. He immediately snapped upward, yanked into the air as if pulled by a powerful tether.

The sound of bodies colliding sounded from the darkness above, and Vin saw a pair of forms drop limply to the Venture courtyard. Vin smiled, dashing along the wall. *I sure hope that was Shan.*

Vin jumped up, landing atop the gatehouse. Near the keep, people were scattering, climbing in carriages to flee.

*And so the house war starts,* Vin thought. *Didn't think I'd be the one to officially begin it.*

A figure plummeted toward her from the mists above. Vin cried out, flaring pewter and jumping to the side. Shan landed dexterously—mistcloak tassels billowing—atop the gatehouse. She had both daggers out, and her eyes burned with anger.

Vin jumped to the side, rolling off the gatehouse and landing on the walltop below. A pair of guards jumped back in alarm, surprised to see a half-naked girl fall into their midst. Shan dropped to the wall behind them, then Pushed, throwing one of the guards in Vin's direction.

The man cried out as Vin Pushed against his breastplate as well—

but he was far heavier than she, and she was thrown backward. She Pulled on the guard to slow herself, and the man crashed down to the walltop. Vin landed lithely beside him, then grabbed his staff as it rolled free from his hand.

Shan attacked in a flash of spinning daggers, and Vin was forced to jump backward again. *She's so good!* Vin thought with anxiety. Vin herself had barely trained with daggers; now she wished she'd asked Kelsier for a little more practice. She swung the staff, but she'd never used one of the weapons before, and her attack was laughable.

Shan slashed, and Vin felt a flare of pain in her cheek as she dodged. She dropped the staff in shock, reaching up to her face and feeling blood. She stumbled back, seeing the smile on Shan's face.

And then Vin remembered the vial. The one she still carried—the one Kelsier had given her.

Atium.

She didn't bother to grab it from the place she had tucked it at her waist. She burned steel, Pushing it out into the air in front of her. Then, she immediately burned iron and yanked on the bead of atium. The vial shattered, the bead heading back toward Vin. She caught it in her mouth, swallowing the lump and forcing it down.

Shan paused. Then, before Vin could do anything, she downed a vial of her own.

*Of course she has atium!*

But, how much did she have? Kelsier hadn't given Vin much—only enough for about thirty seconds. Shan jumped forward, smiling, her long black hair flaring in the air. Vin gritted her teeth. She didn't have much choice.

She burned atium. Immediately, Shan's form shot forth dozens of phantom atium shadows. It was a Mistborn standoff: The first one who ran out of atium would be vulnerable. You couldn't escape an opponent who knew exactly what you were going to do.

Vin scrambled backward, keeping an eye on Shan. The noblewoman stalked forward, her phantoms forming an insane bubble of translucent motion around her. She seemed calm. Secure.

*She has plenty of atium,* Vin thought, feeling her own storage burn away. *I need to get away.*

A shadowy length of wood suddenly shot through Vin's chest. She ducked to the side just as the real arrow—apparently made with no arrowhead—passed through the air where she had been standing. She glanced toward the gate-house, where several soldiers were raising bows.

She cursed, glancing to the side, into the mists. As she did so, she caught a smile from Shan.

*She's just waiting for my atium to burn out. She wants me to run—she knows she can chase me down.*

There was only one other option: attack.

Shan frowned in surprise as Vin dashed forward, phantom arrows snapping against the stones just before their real counterparts arrived. Vin dodged between two arrows—her atium enhanced mind knowing exactly how to move—passing so close that she could feel the missiles in the air to either side of her.

Shan swung her daggers, and Vin twisted to the side, dodging one slice and blocking the other with her forearm, earning a deep gash. Her own blood flew in the air as she spun—each droplet tossing out a translucent atium image—and flared pewter, punching Shan square in the stomach.

Shan grunted in pain, bending slightly, but she didn't fall.

*Atium's almost gone,* Vin thought desperately. *Only a few seconds left.*

So, she extinguished her atium early, exposing herself.

Shan smiled wickedly, coming up from her crouch, right-hand dagger swinging confidently. She assumed that Vin had run out of atium—and therefore assumed that she was exposed. Vulnerable.

At that moment, Vin burned her last bit of atium. Shan paused just briefly in confusion, giving Vin an opening as a phantom arrow streaked through the mists overhead.

Vin caught the real arrow as it followed—the grainy wood burning her fingers—then rammed it down into Shan's chest. The shaft snapped in Vin's hand, leaving about an inch protruding from Shan's body. The woman stumbled backward, staying on her feet.

*Damn pewter,* Vin thought, ripping a sword from a sheath beside the unconscious soldier at her feet. She jumped forward, gritting her teeth in determination, and Shan—still dazed—raised a hand to Push against the sword.

Vin let the weapon go—it was just a distraction—as she slammed the second half of the broken arrow into Shan's chest just beside its counterpart.

This time, Shan dropped. She tried to rise, but one of the shafts must have done some serious damage to her heart, for her face paled. She struggled for a moment, then fell lifeless to the stones.

Vin stood, breathing deeply as she wiped the blood from her cheek—only to realize that her bloody arm was just making her face worse. Behind her, the soldiers called out, nocking more arrows.

Vin glanced back toward the keep, bidding farewell to Elend, then Pushed herself out into the night.

*Other men worry whether or not they will be remembered. I have no such fears; even disregarding the Terris prophecies, I have brought such chaos, conflict, and hope to this world that there is little chance that I will be forgotten.*

*I worry about what they will say of me. Historians can make what they wish of the past. In a thousand years' time, will I be remembered as the man who protected mankind from a powerful evil? Or, will I be remembered as a tyrant who arrogantly tried to make himself a legend?*

## 31

"I DON'T KNOW," KELSIER SAID, smiling as he shrugged. "Breeze would make a pretty good Minister of Sanitation."

The group chuckled, though Breeze just rolled his eyes. "Honestly, I don't see why *I* consistently prove to be the target of you people's humor. Why must you choose the only dignified person in this crew as the butt of your mockery?"

"Because, my dear man," Ham said, imitating Breeze's accent, "you are, by far, the best butt we have."

"Oh, please," Breeze said as Spook nearly collapsed to the floor with laughter. "This is just getting juvenile. The teenage boy was the only one who found *that* comment amusing, Hammond."

"I'm a soldier," Ham said, raising his cup. "Your witty verbal attacks have no effect on me, for I'm far too dense to understand them."

Kelsier chuckled, leaning back against the cupboard. One problem with working at night was that he missed the evening gatherings in Clubs's kitchen. Breeze and Ham continued their general banter. Dox sat at the end of the table, going over ledgers and reports, while Spook sat by Ham eagerly, trying his best to take part in the conversation. Clubs sat in his corner, overseeing, occasionally smiling, and generally enjoying his ability to give the best scowls in the room.

"I should be leaving, Master Kelsier," Sazed said, checking the wall clock. "Mistress Vin should be about ready to leave."

Kelsier nodded. "I should get going myself. I still have to—"

The outside kitchen door slammed open. Vin stood silhouetted by the dark mist, wearing nothing but her dressing undergarments—a flimsy white shirt and shorts. Both were sprayed with blood.

"Vin!" Ham exclaimed, standing.

Her cheek bore a long, thin gash, and she had a bandage tied on one forearm. "I'm fine," she said wearily.

"What happened to your dress?" Dockson immediately demanded.

"You mean this?" Vin asked apologetically, holding up a ripped, soot-stained blue mass of cloth. "It . . . got in the way. Sorry, Dox."

"Lord Ruler, girl!" Breeze said. "Forget the dress—what happened to *you!*"

Vin shook her head, shutting the door. Spook blushed furiously at her outfit, and Sazed immediately moved over, checking the wound on her cheek.

"I think I did something bad," Vin said. "I . . . kind of killed Shan Elariel."

"You did *what*?" Kelsier asked as Sazed tisked quietly, leaving the small cheek cut alone as he undid the bandage on her arm.

Vin flinched slightly at Sazed's ministrations. "She was Mistborn. We fought. I won."

*You killed a fully-trained Mistborn?* Kelsier thought with shock. *You've practiced for barely eight months!*

"Master Hammond," Sazed requested, "would you fetch my healer's bag?"

Ham nodded, rising.

"You might want to grab her something to wear too," Kelsier suggested. "I think poor Spook's about to have a heart attack."

"What's wrong with this?" Vin asked, nodding toward her clothing. "It's not that much more revealing than some of the thief's clothing I've worn."

"Those are undergarments, Vin," Dockson said.

"So?"

"It's the principle of the matter," Dockson said. "Young ladies do not run around in their undergarments, no matter how much those undergarments may resemble regular clothing."

Vin shrugged, sitting as Sazed held a bandage to her arm. She seemed . . . exhausted. And not just from the fighting. *What else happened at that party?*

"Where did you fight the Elariel woman?" Kelsier asked.

"Outside Keep Venture," Vin said, looking down. "I . . . think some of the guards spotted me. Some of the nobles might have too, I'm not certain."

"That's going to be trouble," Dockson said, sighing. "Of course, that cheek wound is going to be pretty obvious, even with makeup. Honestly, you Allomancers . . . Don't you ever worry about what you're going to look like the day *after* you get into one of these fights?"

"I was kind of focused on staying alive, Dox," Vin said.

"He's just complaining because he's worried about you," Kelsier said as Ham returned with the bag. "That's what he does."

"Both wounds will require immediate stitching, Mistress," Sazed said. "The one on your arm hit the bone, I think."

Vin nodded, and Sazed rubbed her arm with a numbing agent, then began to work. She bore it without much visible discomfort—though she obviously had her pewter flared.

*She looks so exhausted,* Kelsier thought. She was such a frail-looking thing, mostly just arms and legs. Hammond put a cloak around her shoulders, but she appeared too tired to care.

*And I brought her into this.*

Of course, she should know better than to get herself into this kind of trouble. Eventually, Sazed finished his efficient sewing, then tied a new bandage around the arm wound. He moved onto the cheek.

"Why would you fight a Mistborn?" Kelsier asked sternly. "You should have run. Didn't you learn anything from your battle with the Inquisitors?"

"I couldn't get away without turning my back on her," Vin said. "Besides, she had more atium than me. If I hadn't attacked, she would have chased me down. I had to strike while we were equally matched."

"But how did you get into this in the first place?" Kelsier demanded. "Did she attack you?"

Vin glanced down at her feet. "I attacked first."

"Why?" Kelsier asked.

Vin sat for a moment, Sazed working on her cheek. "She was going to kill Elend," she finally said.

Kelsier exhaled in exasperation. "Elend Venture? You risked your life—risked the plan, and our lives—for that fool of a boy?"

Vin looked up, glaring at him. "Yes."

"What is wrong with you, girl?" Kelsier asked. "Elend Venture isn't worth this."

She stood angrily, Sazed backing away, the cloak falling the floor. "He's a good man!"

"He's a nobleman!"

"*So are you!*" Vin snapped. She waved a frustrated arm toward the kitchen and the crew. "What do you think *this* is, Kelsier? The life of a skaa? What do any of you know about skaa? Aristocratic suits, stalking your enemies in the night, full meals and nightcaps around the table with your friends? That's not the life of a skaa!"

She took a step forward, glaring at Kelsier. He blinked in surprise at the outburst.

"What do you know about them, Kelsier?" she asked. "When's the last time you slept in an alley, shivering in the cold rain, listening to the beggar next to you cough with a sickness you knew would kill him? When's the last time you had to lay awake at night, terrified that one of the men in your crew would try to rape you? Have you ever knelt, starving, wishing you had the courage to knife the crewmember beside you just so you could take his crust of bread? Have you ever cowered before your brother as he beat you, all the time feeling thankful because at least you *had someone who paid attention to you?*"

She fell silent, puffing slightly, the crewmembers staring at her.

"Don't talk to me about noblemen," Vin said. "And don't say things about people you don't know. You're no skaa—you're just noblemen without titles."

She turned, stalking from the room. Kelsier watched her go, shocked, hearing her footsteps on the stairs. He stood, dumbfounded, feeling a surprising flush of ashamed guilt.

And, for once, found himself without anything to say.

Vin didn't go to her room. She climbed to the roof, where the mists curled in the quiet, unlit night. She sat down in the corner, the rough stone lip of the flat rooftop against her nearly bare back, wood beneath her.

She was cold, but she didn't care. Her arm hurt a bit, but it was mostly numb. She didn't feel nearly numb enough herself.

She crossed her arms, huddling down, watching the mists. She didn't know what to think, let alone what to feel. She shouldn't have exploded at Kelsier, but everything that had happened . . . the fight, Elend's betrayal . . . it just left her feeling frustrated. She needed to be angry at *someone*.

*You should just be angry at yourself,* Reen's voice whispered. *You're the one who let them get close. Now they're all just going to leave you.*

She couldn't make it stop hurting. She could only sit and shiver as the tears fell, wondering how everything had collapsed so quickly.

The trapdoor to the rooftop opened with a quiet creak, and Kelsier's head appeared.

*Oh, Lord Ruler! I don't want to face him now.* She tried to wipe away her tears, but she only succeeded in aggravating the freshly stitched wound on her cheek.

Kelsier closed the trapdoor behind him, then stood, so tall and proud, staring up at the mists. *He didn't deserve the things I said. None of them did.*

"Watching the mists is comforting, isn't it?" Kelsier asked.

Vin nodded.

"What is it I once told you? The mists protect you, they give you power . . . they hide you. . . ."

He looked down, then he walked over and crouched before her, holding out a cloak. "There are some things you can't hide from, Vin. I know—I've tried."

She accepted the cloak, then wrapped it around her shoulders.

"What happened tonight?" he asked. "What *really* happened?"

"Elend told me that he didn't want to be with me anymore."

"Ah," Kelsier said, moving over to sit beside her. "Was this before or after you killed his former fiancée?"

"Before," Vin said.

"And you still protected him?"

Vin nodded, sniffling quietly. "I know. I'm an idiot."

"No more than the rest of us," Kelsier said with a sigh. He looked up into the mists. "I loved Mare too, even after she betrayed me. Nothing could change how I felt."

"And that's why it hurts so much," Vin said, remembering what Kelsier had said before. *I think I finally understand.*

"You don't stop loving someone just because they hurt you," he said. "It would certainly make things easier if you did."

She started to sniffle again, and he put a fatherly arm around her. She pulled close, trying to use his warmth to push away the pain.

"I loved him, Kelsier," she whispered.

"Elend? I know."

"No, not Elend," Vin said. "Reen. He beat me over, and over, and over. He swore at me, he yelled at me, he told me he'd betray me. Every day, I thought about how much I hated him.

"And I loved him. I still do. It hurts so much to think that he's gone, even though he always told me he would leave."

"Oh, child," Kelsier said, pulling her close. "I'm sorry."

"Everyone leaves me," she whispered. "I can barely remember my mother. She tried to kill me, you know. She heard voices, in her head, and they made her kill my baby sister. She was probably going to kill me next, but Reen stopped her.

"Either way, she left me. After that, I clung to Reen. He left too. I love Elend, but he doesn't want me anymore." She looked up at Kelsier. "When are you going to go? When will you leave me?"

Kelsier looked sorrowful. "I . . . Vin, I don't know. This job, the plan . . ."

She searched his eyes, looking for the secrets therein. *What are you hiding from me, Kelsier? Something that dangerous?* She wiped her eyes again, pulling away from him, feeling foolish.

He looked down, shaking his head. "Look, now you got blood all over my nice, dirty, pretend informant's clothing."

Vin smiled. "At least some of it is noble blood. I got Shan pretty good."

Kelsier chuckled. "You're probably right about me, you know. I don't give the nobility much of a chance, do I?"

Vin flushed. "Kelsier, I shouldn't have said those things. You're good people, and this plan of yours . . . well, I realize what you're trying to do for the skaa."

"No, Vin," Kelsier said, shaking his head. "What you said was true. We're not really skaa."

"But, that's good," Vin said. "If you were regular skaa, you wouldn't have the experience or courage to plan something like this."

"They might lack experience," Kelsier said. "But not courage. Our army lost, true, but they were willing—with minimal training—to charge a superior force. No, the skaa don't lack courage. Just opportunity."

"Then it's your position as half skaa, half nobleman that has given *you* opportunity, Kelsier. And you've chosen to use that opportunity to help your skaa half. That makes you worthy of being a skaa if anything does."

Kelsier smiled. "Worthy to be a skaa. I like the sound of that. Regardless, perhaps I need to spend a little less time worrying about which noblemen to kill, and a little more time worrying about which peasants to help."

Vin nodded, pulling the cloak close as she stared up into the mists. *They protect us. . . . give us power . . . hide us. . . .*

She hadn't felt like she needed to hide in a long time. But now, after the things she'd said below, she almost wished that she could just blow away like a wisp of mist.

*I need to tell him. It could mean the plan's success or failure.* She took a deep breath. "House Venture has a weakness, Kelsier."

He perked up. "It does?"

Vin nodded. "Atium. They make certain the metal is harvested and delivered—it's the source of their wealth."

Kelsier paused for a moment. "Of course! That's how they can pay the taxes, that's why they're so powerful. . . . He *would* need someone to handle things for him. . . ."

"Kelsier?" Vin asked.

He looked back at her.

"Don't . . . do anything unless you have to, all right?"

Kelsier frowned. "I . . . don't know that I can promise anything, Vin. I'll try and think of another way, but as things stand now, Venture has to fall."

"I understand."

"I'm glad you told me, though."

She nodded. *And now I've betrayed him too.* There was a peace in knowing, however, that she hadn't done it out of spite. Kelsier was right: House Venture was a power that needed to be toppled. Oddly, her mention of the house seemed to bother Kelsier more than it did her. He sat, staring into the mists, strangely melancholy. He reached down, absently scratching his arm.

*The scars,* Vin thought. *It isn't House Venture he's thinking about—it's the Pits. Her.* "Kelsier?" she said.

"Yes?" His eyes still looking a bit . . . absent as he watched the mists.

"I don't think that Mare betrayed you."

He smiled. "I'm glad you think that way."

"No, I really mean it," Vin said. "The Inquisitors were waiting for you when you got to the center of the palace, right?"

Kelsier nodded.

"They were waiting for us too."

Kelsier shook his head. "You and I fought some guards, made some noise. When Mare and I went in, we were quiet. We'd planned for a year—we were stealthy, secretive, and very careful. Someone set a trap for us."

"Mare was an Allomancer, right?" Vin asked. "They could have just sensed you coming."

Kelsier shook his head. “We had a Smoker with us. Redd was his name—the Inquisitors killed him straight off. I’ve wondered if he was the traitor, but that just doesn’t work. Redd didn’t even know about the infiltration until that night, when we went and got him. Only Mare knew enough—dates, times, objectives—to have betrayed us. Besides, there’s the Lord Ruler’s comment. You didn’t see him, Vin. Smiling as he thanked Mare. There was . . . honesty in his eyes. They say the Lord Ruler doesn’t lie. Why would he need to?”

Vin sat quietly for a moment, considering what he’d said. “Kelsier,” she said slowly, “I think that Inquisitors can sense our Allomancy even when we’re burning copper.”

“Impossible.”

“I did it tonight. I punctured Shan’s coppercloud to locate her and the other assassins. That’s how I got to Elend in time.”

Kelsier frowned. “You’ve got to be mistaken.”

“It happened before too,” Vin said. “I can feel the Lord Ruler’s touch on my emotions, even when I’m burning copper. And I swear that when I was hiding from that Inquisitor who was hunting me, he found me when he shouldn’t have been able to. Kelsier, what if it’s possible? What if hiding yourself by Smoking isn’t just a simple matter of whether or not your copper is on? What if it just depends on how strong you are?”

Kelsier sat thoughtfully. “It could be possible, I suppose.”

“Then Mare wouldn’t have had to betray you!” Vin said eagerly. “Inquisitors are extremely powerful. The ones who were waiting for you, maybe they just felt you burning metals! They knew that an Allomancer was trying to sneak into the palace. Then, the Lord Ruler thanked her because she was the one who gave you away! She was the Allomancer, burning tin, that led them to you.”

Kelsier’s face took on a troubled expression. He turned, sitting himself so he was directly in front of her. “Do it now, then. Tell me what metal I’m burning.”

Vin closed her eyes, flaring bronze, listening . . . feeling, as Marsh had taught her. She remembered her solitary trainings, time spent focusing on the waves Breeze, Ham, or Spook gave off for her. She tried to pick out the fuzzing rhythm of Allomancy. Tried to . . .

For a moment, she thought she felt something. Something very strange—a slow pulsing, like a distant drum, unlike any Allomantic rhythm she’d felt before. But it wasn’t coming from Kelsier. It was distant . . . far away. She focused harder, trying to pick out the direction it was coming from.

But suddenly, as she focused harder, something else drew her attention. A more familiar rhythm, coming from Kelsier. It was faint, difficult to feel over the pulsing of her own heartbeat. It was a bold beat, and quick.

She opened her eyes. “Pewter! You’re burning pewter.”

Kelsier blinked in surprise. “Impossible,” he whispered. “Again!”

She closed her eyes. “Tin,” she said after a moment. “Now steel—you changed as soon as I spoke.”

“Bloody hell!”

“I was right,” Vin said eagerly. “You *can* feel Allomantic pulses through copper! They’re quiet, but I guess you just have to focus hard enough to—”

“Vin,” Kelsier interrupted. “Don’t you think Allomancers have tried this before? You don’t think that after a thousand years’time, someone would have noticed that you could pierce a coppercloud? *I’ve* even tried it. I focused for hours on my Master, trying to sense something through his coppercloud.”

“But . . .” Vin said. “But why . . .?”

“It must have to do with strength, like you said. Inquisitors can Push and Pull harder than any regular Mistborn—perhaps they’re so strong that they can overwhelm someone else’s metal.”

“But, Kelsier,” Vin said quietly. “I’m not an Inquisitor.”

“But you’re strong,” he said. “Stronger than you have any right to be. You killed a full Mistborn tonight!”

“By luck,” Vin said, face flushing. “I just tricked her.”

“Allomancy is nothing *but* tricks, Vin. No, there’s something special about you. I noticed it on that first day, when you shrugged off my attempts to Push and Pull your emotions.”

She flushed. “It can’t be that, Kelsier. Maybe I’ve just practiced with bronze more than you. . . . I don’t know, I just . . .”

“Vin,” Kelsier said, “you’re still too self-effacing. You’re good at this—that much is obvious. If that’s why you can see through copperclouds . . . well, I don’t know. But learn to take a little pride in yourself, kid! If there’s anything I can teach you, it’s how to be self-confident.”

Vin smiled.

“Come on,” he said, standing and holding out a hand to help her up. “Sazed is going to fret all night if you don’t let him finish stitching that cheek wound, and Ham’s dying to hear about your battle. Good job leaving Shan’s body back at Keep Venture, by the way—when House Elariel hears that she was found dead on Venture property . . .”

Vin allowed him to pull her up, but she glanced toward the trapdoor apprehensively. "I . . . don't know if I want to go down yet, Kelsier. How can I face them?"

Kelsier laughed. "Oh, don't worry. If you didn't say some stupid things every once in a while, you certainly wouldn't fit in with *this* group. Come on."

Vin hesitated, then let him lead her back down to the warmth of the kitchen.

"Elend, how can you read at times like this?" Jastes asked.

Elend looked up from his book. "It calms me."

Jastes raised an eyebrow. The young Lekal sat impatiently in the coach, tapping his fingers on the armrest. The window shades were drawn, partially to hide the light of Elend's reading lantern, partially to keep out the mists. Though Elend would never admit it, the swirling fog made him just a bit nervous. Noblemen weren't supposed to be afraid of such things, but that didn't change the fact that the deep, caliginous mist was just plain creepy.

"Your father is going to be livid when you get back," Jastes noted, still tapping the armrest.

Elend shrugged, though this comment did make him a little bit nervous. Not because of his father, but because of what had happened this night. Some Allomancers had, apparently, been spying on Elend's meeting with his friends. What information had they gathered? Did they know about the books he'd read?

Fortunately, one of them had tripped, falling through Elend's skylight. After that, it had been confusion and chaos—soldiers and ballgoers running about in a semi-panic. Elend's first thought had been for the books—the dangerous ones, the ones that if the obligators found he possessed, could get him into serious trouble.

So, in the confusion, he'd dumped them all in a bag and followed Jastes down to the palace side exit. Grabbing a carriage and sneaking out of the palace grounds had been an extreme move, perhaps, but it had been ridiculously easy. With the number of carriages fleeing the Venture grounds, not a single person had paused to notice that Elend himself was in the carriage with Jastes.

*It's probably all died down by now,* Elend told himself. *People will realize that House Venture wasn't trying to attack them, and that there wasn't really any danger. Just some spies who got careless.*

He should have returned by now. However, his convenient absence from the palace gave him a perfect excuse to check on another group of spies. And this time, Elend himself had sent them.

A sudden knock on the door made Jastes jump, and Elend closed his book, then opened the carriage door. Felt, one of the House Venture chief spies, climbed into the carriage, nodding his hawkish, mustached face respectfully to Elend, then Jastes.

"Well?" Jastes asked.

Felt sat down with the keen litheness of his kind. "The building is ostensibly a woodcrafter's shop, m'lord. One of my men has heard of the place—it's run by one Master Cladent, a skaa carpenter of no small skill."

Elend frowned. "Why did Valette's steward come here?"

"We think that the shop is a front, m'lord," Felt said. "We've been observing it ever since the steward led us here, as you ordered. However, we've had to be very careful—there are several watchnests hidden on its roof and top floors."

Elend frowned. "An odd precaution for a simple craftsman's shop, I should think."

Felt nodded. "That's not the half of it, m'lord. We managed to sneak one of our best men up to the building itself—we don't think he was spotted—but he had a remarkably difficult time hearing what's going on inside. The windows are sealed and stuffed to keep in sound."

*Another odd precaution,* Elend thought. "What do you think it means?" he asked Felt.

"It's got to be an underground hideout, m'lord," Felt said. "And a good one. If we hadn't been watching carefully, and been certain what to look for, we would never have noticed the signs. My guess is that the men inside—even the Terrisman—are members of a skaa thieving crew. A very well-funded and skilled one."

"A skaa thieving crew?" Jastes asked. "And Lady Valette too?"

"Likely, m'lord," Felt said.

Elend paused. "A . . . skaa thieving crew . . ." he said, stunned. *Why would they send one of their members to balls? To perform a scam of some sort, perhaps?*

"M'lord?" Felt asked. "Do you want us to break in? I've got enough men to take their entire crew."

"No," Elend said. "Call your men back, and tell no one of what you've seen this night."

"Yes, m'lord," Felt said, climbing out of the coach.

"Lord Ruler!" Jastes said as the carriage door closed. "No wonder she didn't seem like a regular noblewoman. It wasn't her rural upbringing—she's just a thief!"

Elend nodded, thoughtful, not certain what to think.

"You owe me an apology," Jastes said. "I was right about her, eh?"

"Perhaps," Elend said. "But . . . in a way, you were wrong about her too. She wasn't trying to spy on me—she was just trying to rob me."

"So?"

"I . . . need to think about this," Elend said, reaching out and knocking for the carriage to start moving. He sat back as the coach began to roll back toward Keep Venture.

Valette wasn't the person that she'd said she was. However, he'd already prepared himself for that news. Not only had Jastes's words about her made him suspicious, Valette herself hadn't denied Elend's accusations earlier in the night. It was obvious; she had been lying to him. Playing a part.

He should have been furious. He realized this, logically, and a piece of him did ache of betrayal. But, oddly, the primary emotion he felt was one of . . . relief.

"What?" Jastes asked, studying Elend with a frown.

Elend shook his head. "You've had me worrying over this for days, Jastes. I felt so sick that I could barely function—all because I thought that Valette was a traitor."

"But she *is*. Elend, she's probably trying to scam you!"

"Yes," Elend said, "but at least she probably isn't a spy for another house. In the face of all the intrigue, politics, and backbiting that has been going on lately, something as simple as a robbery feels slightly refreshing."

"But . . ."

"It's only money, Jastes."

"Money is kind of important to some of us, Elend."

"Not as important as Valette. That poor girl . . . all this time, she must have been worrying about the scam she would have to pull on me!"

Jastes sat for a moment, then he finally shook his head. "Elend, only *you* would be relieved to find out that someone was trying to steal from you. Need I remind you that the girl has been lying this entire time? You might have grown attached to her, but I doubt her own feelings are genuine."

"You may be right," Elend admitted. "But . . . I don't know, Jastes. I feel like I *know* this girl. Her emotions . . . they just seem too real, too honest, to be false."

"Doubtful," Jastes said.

Elend shook his head. "We don't have enough information to judge her yet. Felt thinks she's a thief, but there have to be other reasons a group like that would send someone to balls. Maybe she's just an informant. Or, maybe she is a thief—but not one who ever intended to rob me. She spent an awful lot of time mixing with the other nobility—why would she do that if I was her target? In fact, she spent relatively *little* time with me, and she never plied me for gifts."

He paused—imagining his meeting Valette as a pleasant accident, an event that had thrown a terrible twist into both of their lives. He smiled, then shook his head. "No, Jastes. There's more here than we're seeing. Something about her still doesn't make sense."

"I . . . suppose, El," Jastes said, frowning.

Elend sat upright, a sudden thought occurring to him—a thought that made his speculations about Valette's motivation seem far less important. "Jastes," he said. "She's skaa!"

"And?"

"And she fooled me—fooled us both. She acted the part of an aristocrat almost perfectly."

"An inexperienced aristocrat, perhaps."

"I had a real skaa thief with me!" Elend said. "Think of the questions I could have asked her."

"Questions? What kind of questions?"

"Questions about being skaa," Elend said. "That's not the point. Jastes, she *fooled* us. If we can't tell the difference between a skaa and a noblewoman, that means that the skaa can't be very different from us. And, if they're not that different from us, what right do we have treating them as we do?"

Jastes shrugged. "Elend, I don't think you're looking at this in perspective. We're in the middle of a house war."

Elend nodded distractedly. *I was so hard on her this evening. Too hard?*

He had wanted her to believe, totally and completely, that he didn't want anything more to do with her. Part of that had been genuine, for his own worries had convinced him that she couldn't be trusted. And she couldn't be, not at the moment. Either way, he'd wanted her to leave the city. He'd thought that the best thing to do was break off the relationship until the house war was through.

*But, assuming she's really not a noblewoman, then there's no reason for her to leave.*

"Elend?" Jastes asked. "Are you even paying attention to me?"

Elend looked up. "I think I did something wrong tonight. I wanted to get Valette out of Luthadel. But, now I think I hurt her for no reason.”

“Bloody hell, Elend!” Jastes said. “Allomancers were listening to our conference this night. Do you realize what could have happened? What if they’d decided to kill us, rather than just spy on us?”

“Ah, yes, you’re right,” Elend said with a distracted nod. “It’s best if Valette leaves anyway. Anyone close to me will be in danger during the days to come.”

Jastes paused, his annoyance deepening, then he finally laughed. “You’re hopeless.”

“I try my best,” Elend said. “But, seriously, there’s no use worrying. The spies gave themselves away, and likely got chased off—or even captured—in the chaos. We now know some of the secrets that Valette is hiding, so we’re ahead there too. It’s been a very productive night!”

“That’s an optimistic way of looking at it, I guess. . . .”

“Once again, I try my best.” Even still, he would feel more comfortable when they got back to Keep Venture. Perhaps it had been foolhardy to sneak away from the palace before hearing the details of what had happened, but Elend hadn’t exactly been thinking carefully at the time. Besides, he’d had the previously arranged meeting with Felt to attend, and the chaos had made a perfect opportunity to slip away.

The carriage slowly pulled up to the Venture gates. “You should go,” Elend said, slipping out of the carriage door. “Take the books.”

Jastes nodded, grabbing the sack, then bidding Elend farewell as he shut the carriage door. Elend waited as the carriage rolled back away from the gates, then he turned and walked the rest of the way to the keep, the surprised gate guards letting him pass with ease.

The grounds were still ablaze with light. Guards were already waiting for him at the front of the keep, and a group of them rushed out into the mists to meet him. And surround him.

“My lord, your father—”

“Yes,” Elend interrupted, sighing. “I assume I’m to be taken to him immediately?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Lead on, then, Captain.”

They entered through the lord’s entrance on the side of the building. Lord Straff Venture stood in his study, speaking with a group of guard officers. Elend could tell from the pale faces that they had received a firm scolding, perhaps even threats of beatings. They were noblemen, so Venture couldn’t execute them, but he was very fond of the more brutal disciplinary forms.

Lord Venture dismissed the soldiers with a sharp gesture, then turned to Elend with hostile eyes. Elend frowned, watching the soldiers go. Everything all seemed a little too . . . tense.

"Well?" Lord Venture demanded.

"Well what?"

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, I left," Elend said offhandedly.

Lord Venture sighed. "Fine. Endanger yourself if you wish, boy. In a way, it's too bad that Mistborn *didn't* catch you—they could have saved me a great deal of frustration."

"Mistborn?" Elend asked, frowning. "What Mistborn?"

"The one that was planning to assassinate you," Lord Venture snapped.

Elend blinked in startlement. "So . . . it wasn't just a spying team?"

"Oh, no," Venture said, smiling somewhat wickedly. "An entire assassination team, sent here after you and your friends."

*Lord Ruler!* Elend thought, realizing how foolish he had been to go out alone. *I didn't expect the house war to get so dangerous so quickly! At least, not for me . . .*

"How do we know it was a Mistborn?" Elend asked, gathering his wits.

"Our guards managed to kill her," Straff said. "As she was fleeing."

Elend frowned. "A full Mistborn? Killed by common soldiers?"

"Archers," Lord Venture said. "Apparently, they took her by surprise."

"And the man who fell through my skylight?" Elend asked.

"Dead," Lord Venture said. "Broken neck."

Elend frowned. *That man was still alive when we fled. What are you hiding, Father?* "The Mistborn. Anyone I know?"

"I'd say so," Lord Venture said, settling into his desk chair, not looking up. "It was Shan Elariel."

Elend froze in shock. *Shan?* he thought, dumbfounded. They'd been engaged, and she'd never even mentioned that she was an Allomancer. That probably meant . . .

She'd been a plant all along. Perhaps House Elariel had planned to have Elend killed once an Elariel grandson was born to the house title.

*You're right, Jastes. I can't avoid politics by ignoring it. I've been a part of it all for much longer than I assumed.*

His father was obviously pleased with himself. A high-profile member of House Elariel was dead on Venture grounds after trying to assassinate Elend. . . . With such a triumph, Lord Venture would be insufferable for days.

Elend sighed. “Did we capture any of the assassins alive, then?”

Straff shook his head. “One fell to the courtyard as he was trying to flee. He got away—he might have been Mistborn too. We found one man dead on the roof, but we aren’t sure if there were others in the team or not.” He paused.

“What?” Elend asked, reading the slight confusion in his father’s eyes.

“Nothing,” Straff said, waving a dismissive hand. “Some of the guards claim there was a third Mistborn, fighting the other two, but I doubt the reports—it wasn’t one of ours.”

Elend paused. *A third Mistborn, fighting the other two* . . . “Maybe someone found out about the assassination and tried to stop it.”

Lord Venture snorted. “Why would someone else’s Mistborn try to protect *you*?”

“Maybe they just wanted to stop an innocent man from being murdered.”

Lord Venture shook his head, laughing. “You are an idiot, boy. You understand that, right?”

Elend flushed, then turned away. It didn’t appear that Lord Venture wanted anything more, so Elend left. He couldn’t go back to his rooms, not with the broken window and the guards, so he made his way to a guest bedroom, calling for a set of hazekillers to watch outside his door and balcony—just in case.

He prepared for bed, thinking about the conversation. His father was probably right about the third Mistborn. That just wasn’t the way things worked.

*But . . . that’s the way it should be. The way it could be, maybe.*

There were so many things Elend wished he could do. But, his father was healthy, and young for a lord of his power. It would be decades before Elend assumed the house title, assuming he even survived that long. He wished he could go to Valette, talk to her, explain his frustrations. She’d understand what he was thinking; for some reason, she always seemed to understand him better than others.

*And, she’s skaa!* He couldn’t get over the thought. He had so many questions, so many things he wanted to find out from her.

*Later,* he thought as he climbed into bed. *For now, focus on keeping the house together.* His words to Valette in that area hadn’t been false—he needed to make certain his family survived the house war.

After that . . . well, perhaps they could find a way to work around the lies and the scams.

*Though many Terrismen express a resentment of Khlennium, there is also envy. I have heard the packmen speak in wonder of the Khlenni cathedrals, with their amazing stained-glass windows and broad halls. They also seem very fond of our fashion—back in the cities, I saw that many young Terrismen had traded in their furs and skins for well-tailored gentlemen's suits.*

## 32

Two streets over from Clubs's shop, there was a building of unusual height compared with those surrounding it. It was some kind of tenement, Vin thought—a place to pack skaa families. She'd never been inside of it, however.

She dropped a coin, then shot herself up along the side of the six-story building. She landed lightly on the rooftop, causing a figure crouching in the darkness to jump in surprise.

"It's just me," Vin whispered, sneaking quietly across the sloped roof.

Spook smiled at her in the night. As the crew's best Tineye, he usually got the most important watches. Recently, those were the ones during the early evening. That was the time when conflict among the Great Houses was most likely to turn to outright fighting.

"Are they still going at it?" Vin asked quietly, flaring her tin, scanning the city. A bright haze shone in the distance, giving the mists a strange luminescence.

Spook nodded, pointing toward the light. "Keep Hasting. Elariel soldiers with the attacking tonight."

Vin nodded. Keep Hasting's destruction had been expected for some time—it had suffered a half-dozen raids from different houses during the last week. Allies withdrawing, finances wrecked, it was only a matter of time before it fell.

Oddly, none of the houses attacked during the daytime. There was a feigned air of secrecy about the war, as if the aristocracy acknowledged the Lord Ruler's dominance, and didn't want to upset him by resorting to daylight warfare. It was all handled at night, beneath a cloak of mists.

"Wasing the *want* of this," Spook said.

Vin paused. "Uh, Spook. Could you try to speak . . . normal?"

Spook nodded toward a distant, dark structure in the distance. "The Lord Ruler. Liking he wants the fighting."

Vin nodded. *Kelsier was right. There hasn't been much of an outcry from the Ministry or the palace regarding the house war, and the Garrison is taking its time getting back to Luthadel. The Lord Ruler expected the house war—and intends to let it run its course. Like a wildfire, left to blaze and renew a field.*

Except this time, as one fire died, another would start—Kelsier's attack on the city.

*Assuming Marsh can find out how to stop the Steel Inquisitors. Assuming we can take the palace. And, of course, assuming Kelsier can find a way to deal with the Lord Ruler . . .*

Vin shook her head. She didn't want to think poorly of Kelsier, but she just didn't see how it was all going to happen. The Garrison wasn't back yet, but reports said it was close, perhaps only a week or two out. Some noble houses were falling, but there didn't seem to be the air of general chaos that Kelsier had wanted. The Final Empire was strained, but she doubted that it would crack.

However, maybe that wasn't the point. The crew had done an amazing job of instigating a house war; three entire Great Houses were no more, and the rest were seriously weakened. It would take decades for the aristocracy to recover from their own squabbling.

*We've done an amazing job,* Vin decided. *Even if we don't attack the palace—or if that attack fails—we'll have accomplished something wonderful.*

With Marsh's intelligence about the Ministry and Sazed's translation of the logbook, the rebellion would have new and useful information for future resistance. It wasn't what Kelsier had hoped for; it wasn't a complete toppling of the Final Empire. However, it was a major victory—one that the skaa could look to for years as a source of courage.

And, with a start of surprise, Vin realized that she felt proud to have been part of it. Perhaps, in the future, she could help start a real rebellion—one in a place where the skaa weren't quite so beaten down.

*If such a place exists . . .* Vin was beginning to understand that it wasn't just Luthadel and its Soothing stations that made skaa subservient. It was *everything*—the obligators, the constant work in field and mill, the mind-set encouraged by a thousand years of oppression. There was a reason why skaa rebellions were always so small. The people knew—or thought they knew—that there was no fighting against the Final Empire.

Even Vin—who'd assumed herself a "liberated" thief—had believed the same. It had taken Kelsier's insane, over-the-top plan to convince her otherwise. Perhaps that was why he'd set such lofty goals for the crew—he'd known that only something this challenging would make them realize, in a strange way, that they *could* resist.

Spook glanced at her. Her presence still made him uncomfortable.

"Spook," Vin said, "you know that Elend broke off his relationship with me."

Spook nodded, perking up slightly.

"But," Vin said regretfully, "I still love him. I'm sorry, Spook. But it's true."

He looked down, deflating.

"It's not you," Vin said. "Really, it isn't. It's just that . . . well, you can't help who you love. Trust me, there are some people I really would rather *not* have loved. They didn't deserve it."

Spook nodded. "I understand."

"Can I still keep the handkerchief?"

He shrugged.

"Thank you," she said. "It does mean a lot to me."

He looked up, staring out into the mists. "I'm notting a fool. I . . . knew it wasing not to happen. I see things, Vin. I see lots of things."

She laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. *I see things.* . . . An appropriate statement, for a Tineye like him.

"You've been an Allomancer for a long time?" she asked.

Spook nodded. "Wasing the Snap when I was five. Barely even remember it."

"And since then you've been practicing with tin?"

"Mostly," he said. "Wasing a good thing for me. Letting me see, letting me hear, letting me feel."

"Any tips you can pass on?" Vin asked hopefully.

He paused thoughtfully, sitting by the edge of the slanted rooftop, one foot dangling over the side. "Tin burning . . . Notting about the seeing. Wasing about the *not seeing.*"

Vin frowned. "What do you mean?"

"When burning," he said, "everything comes. Lots of everything. Distractions here, there. Iffing the power of wants, *ignoring* the distractions of both."

*If you want to be good at burning tin,* she thought, translating as best she could, *learn to deal with distraction. It isn't about what you see—it's about what you can ignore.*

"Interesting," Vin said thoughtfully.

Spook nodded. "When looking, seeing the mist and seeing the houses and feeling the wood and hearing the rats below. Choose one, and don't get distracted."

"Good advice," Vin said.

Spook nodded as a sound thumped behind them. They both jumped and ducked down, and Kelsier chuckled as he walked across the rooftop. "We really have to find a better way of warning people that we're coming up. Every time I visit a spynest, I worry that I'm going to startle someone off the rooftop."

Vin stood, dusting off her clothing. She wore mistcloak, shirt, and trousers; it had been days since she'd worn a dress. She only put in token appearances at Mansion Renoux. Kelsier was too worried about assassins to let her stay there for long.

*At least we bought Kliss's silence,* Vin thought, annoyed at the expense. "It's time?" she asked.

Kelsier nodded. "Nearly so, at least. I want to stop somewhere on the way."

Vin nodded. For their second meeting, Marsh had chosen a location that he was supposedly scouting for the Ministry. It was a perfect opportunity to meet, since Marsh had an excuse to be in the building all night, ostensibly Seeking for any Allomantic activity nearby. He would have a Soother with him for a good deal of the time, but there would be an opening near the middle of the night when Marsh figured he would have a good hour alone. Not much time if he had to sneak out and back, but plenty of time for a pair of stealthy Mistborn to pay him a quick visit.

They bid farewell to Spook and Pushed off into the night. However, they didn't travel the rooftops for long before Kelsier led them down onto the street, landing and walking to conserve strength and metals.

*It's kind of odd,* Vin thought, remembering her first night practicing Allomancy with Kelsier. *I don't even think of the empty streets as creepy anymore.*

The cobblestones were slick from mistwater, and the deserted street eventually disappeared into the distant haze. It was dark, silent, and lonely; even the war hadn't changed very much. Soldier groups, when they attacked, went in clumps, striking quickly and trying to overrun the defenses of an enemy house.

Yet, despite the emptiness of the nighttime city, Vin felt comfortable in it. The mists were with her.

"Vin," Kelsier said as they walked. "I want to thank you."

She turned to him, a tall, proud figure in a majestic mist-cloak. "Thank me? Why?"

"For the things you said about Mare. I've been thinking a lot about that day . . . about her. I don't know if your ability to see through copperclouds explains everything, but . . . well, given the choice, I'd rather believe that Mare *didn't* betray me."

Vin nodded, smiling.

He shook his head ruefully. "It sounds foolish, doesn't it? As if . . . all these years, I've just been waiting for a reason to give in to self-delusion."

"I don't know," Vin said. "Once, maybe I would have thought you a fool, but . . . well, that's kind of what trust is, isn't it? A willful self-delusion? You have to shut out that voice that whispers about betrayal, and just hope that your friends aren't going to hurt you."

Kelsier chuckled. "I don't think you're helping the argument any, Vin."

She shrugged. "Makes sense to me. Distrust is really the same thing—only on the other side. I can see how a person, given the choice between two assumptions, would choose to trust."

"But not you?" Kelsier asked.

Vin shrugged again. "I don't know anymore."

Kelsier hesitated. "This . . . Elend of yours. There's a chance that he was just trying to scare you into leaving the city, right? Perhaps he said those things for your own good."

"Maybe," Vin said. "But, there was something different about him . . . about the way he looked at me. He knew I was lying to him, but I don't think he realized that I was skaa. He probably thought I was a spy from one of the other houses. Either way, he seemed honest in his desire to be rid of me."

"Maybe you thought that because you were already convinced that he was going to leave you."

"I . . ." Vin trailed off, glancing down at the slick, ashen street as they walked. "I don't know—and it's your fault, you know. I used to understand everything. Now it's all confused."

"Yes, we've messed you up right properly," Kelsier said with a smile.

"You don't seem bothered by the fact."

"Nope," Kelsier said. "Not a bit. Ah, here we are."

He stopped beside a large, wide building—probably another skaa tenement. It was dark inside; skaa couldn't afford lamp oil, and they would have put out the building's central hearth after preparing the evening meal.

"This?" Vin asked uncertainly.

Kelsier nodded, walking up to tap lightly on the door. To Vin's surprise, it opened hesitantly, a wiry skaa face peeking out into the mists.

"Lord Kelsier!" the man said quietly.

"I told you I'd visit," Kelsier said, smiling. "Tonight seemed like a good time."

"Come in, come in," the man said, pulling the door open. He stepped back, careful not to let any of the mist touch him as Kelsier and Vin entered.

Vin had been in skaa tenements before, but never before had they seemed so . . . depressing. The smell of smoke and unwashed bodies was almost overpowering, and she had to extinguish her tin to keep from gagging. The wan light of a small coal stove showed a crowd of people packed together, sleeping on the floor. They kept the room swept of ash, but there was only so much they could do—black stains still covered clothing, walls, and faces. There were few furnishings, not to mention far too few blankets to go around.

*I used to live like this,* Vin thought with horror. *The crew lairs were just as packed—sometimes more so. This . . . was my life.*

People roused as they saw that they had a visitor. Kelsier had his sleeves rolled up, Vin noticed, and the scars on his arms were visible even by emberlight. They stood out starkly, running lengthwise up from his wrist past his elbows, crisscrossing and overlapping.

The whispers began immediately.

"The Survivor . . ."

"He's here!"

"Kelsier, the Lord of the Mists . . ."

*That's a new one,* Vin thought with a raised eyebrow. She stayed back as Kelsier smiled, stepping forward to meet the skaa. The people gathered around him with quiet excitement, reaching out to touch his arms and cloak. Others just stood and stared, watching him with reverence.

"I come to spread hope," Kelsier said to them quietly. "House Hasting fell tonight."

There were murmurs of surprise and awe.

"I know many of you worked in the Hasting smithies and steel mills," Kelsier said. "And, honestly, I cannot say what this means for you. But it is a victory for all of us. For a time, at least, your men won't die before the forges or beneath the whips of Hasting taskmasters."

There were murmurs through the small crowd, and one voice finally spoke the concern loud enough for Vin to hear. "House Hasting is gone? Who will feed us?"

*So frightened,* Vin thought. *I was never like* that . . . *was I?*

"I'll send you another shipment of food," Kelsier promised. "Enough to last you for a while, at least."

"You've done so much for us," another man said.

"Nonsense," Kelsier said. "If you wish to repay me, then stand up just a little straighter. Be a little less afraid. They *can* be beaten."

"By men like you, Lord Kelsier," a woman whispered. "But not by us."

"You'd be surprised," Kelsier said as the crowd began to make way for parents bringing their children forward. It seemed like everyone in the room wanted their sons to meet Kelsier personally. Vin watched with mixed feelings. The crew still had reservations regarding Kelsier's rising fame with the skaa, though they kept their word and remained silent.

*He really does seem to care for them,* Vin thought, watching Kelsier pick up a small child. *I don't think it's just a show. This is how he is—he loves people, loves the skaa. But . . . it's more like the love of a parent for a child than it is like the love of a man for his equals.*

Was that so wrong? He was, after all, a kind of father to the skaa. He was the noble lord they always *should* have had. Still, Vin couldn't help feeling uncomfortable as she watched the faintly illuminated, dirty faces of those skaa families, their eyes worshipful and reverent.

Kelsier eventually bid the group farewell, telling them he had an appointment. Vin and he left the cramped room, stepping out into blessedly fresh air. Kelsier remained quiet as they traveled toward Marsh's new Soothing station, though he did walk with a bit more of a spring in his step.

Eventually, Vin had to say something. "You visit them often?"

Kelsier nodded. "At least a couple of houses a night. It breaks up the monotony of my other work."

*Killing noblemen and spreading false rumors,* Vin thought. *Yes, visiting the skaa would be a nice break.*

The meeting place was only a few streets away. Kelsier paused in a doorway as they approached, squinting in the dark night. Finally, he pointed at a window, just faintly lit. “Marsh said he’d leave a light burning if the other obligators were gone.”

“Window or stairs?” Vin asked.

“Stairs,” Kelsier said. “The door should be unlocked, and the Ministry owns the entire building. It will be empty.”

Kelsier was right on both counts. The building didn’t smell musty enough to be abandoned, but the bottom few floors were obviously unused. Vin and he quickly climbed up the stairwell.

“Marsh should be able to tell us the Ministry reaction to the House War,” Kelsier said as they reached the top floor. Lanternlight flickered through the door at the top, and he pushed it open, still speaking. “Hopefully, that Garrison won’t get back too quickly. The damage is mostly done, but I’d like the war to go on for—”

He froze in the doorway, blocking Vin’s view.

She flared pewter and tin immediately, falling to a crouch, listening for attackers. There was nothing. Just silence.

“No . . .” Kelsier whispered.

Then Vin saw the trickle of dark red liquid seeping around the side of Kelsier’s foot. It pooled slightly, then began to drip down the first step.

*Oh, Lord Ruler . . .*

Kelsier stumbled into the room. Vin followed, but she knew what she’d see. The corpse lay near the center of the chamber, flayed and dismembered, the head completely crushed. It was barely recognizable as human. The walls were sprayed red.

*Could one body really produce this much blood?* It was just like before, in the basement of Camon’s lair—only with a single victim.

“Inquisitor,” Vin whispered.

Kelsier, heedless of the gore, stumbled to his knees beside Marsh’s corpse. He raised a hand as if to touch the skinless body, but remained frozen there, stunned.

“Kelsier,” Vin said urgently. “This was recent—the Inquisitor could still be near.”

He didn’t move.

“Kelsier!” Vin snapped.

Kelsier shook, looking around. His eyes met hers, and lucidity returned. He stumbled to his feet.

“Window,” Vin said, rushing across the room. She paused, however, when she saw something sitting on a small desk beside the wall. A wooden table leg, tucked half-hidden beneath a blank sheet of paper.

Vin snatched it as Kelsier reached the window.

He turned back, looking over the room one last time, then jumped out into the night.

*Farewell, Marsh,* Vin thought regretfully, following.

“ ‘I think that the Inquisitors suspect me,’ ” Dockson read. The paper—a single sheet recovered from inside the table leg—was clean and white, free from the blood that stained Kelsier’s knees and the bottom of Vin’s cloak.

Dockson continued, reading as he sat at Clubs’s kitchen table. “ ‘I’ve been asking too many questions, and I know they sent at least one message to the corrupt obligator who supposedly trained me as an acolyte. I thought to seek out the secrets that the rebellion has always needed to know. How does the Ministry recruit Mistborn to be Inquisitors? Why are Inquisitors more powerful than regular Allomancers? What, if any, are their weaknesses?

“ ‘Unfortunately, I’ve learned next to nothing about the Inquisitors—though the politicking within the regular Ministry ranks continues to amaze me. It’s like the regular obligators don’t even care about the world outside, except for the prestige they earn by being the most clever or successful in applying the Lord Ruler’s dictates.

“ ‘The Inquisitors, however, are different. They are far more loyal to the Lord Ruler than the regular obligators—and this is, perhaps, part of the dissension between the two groups.

“ ‘Regardless, I feel that I am close. They *do* have a secret, Kelsier. A weakness. I’m sure of it. The other obligators whisper of it, though none of them know it.

“ ‘I fear that I’ve prodded too much. The Inquisitors tail me, watch me, ask after me. So, I prepare this note. Perhaps my caution is unnecessary.

“ ‘Perhaps not.’ ”

Dockson looked up. “That’s . . . all it says.”

Kelsier stood at the far side of the kitchen, back to the cupboard, reclining in his usual position. But . . . there was no levity in his posture this time. He stood with arms folded, head slightly bowed. His disbelieving grief appeared to have vanished, replaced with another emotion—one Vin had sometimes seen smoldering darkly behind his eyes. Usually when he spoke of the nobility.

She shivered despite herself. Standing as he was, she was suddenly aware of his clothing—dark gray mistcloak, long-sleeved black shirt, charcoal trousers. In the night, the clothing was simply camouflage. In the lit room, however, the black colors made him look menacing.

He stood up straight, and the room grew tense.

“Tell Renoux to pull out,” Kelsier said softly, his voice like iron. “He can use the planned exit story—that of a ‘retreat’ back to his family lands because of the house war—but I want him gone by tomorrow. Send a Thug and a Tineye with him as protection, but tell him to abandon his canal boats one day out of the city, then return to us.”

Dockson paused, then glanced at Vin and the others. “Okay . . .”

“Marsh knew everything, Dox,” Kelsier said. “They broke him before they killed him—that’s how Inquisitors work.”

He let the words hang. Vin felt a chill. The lair was compromised.

“To the backup lair, then?” Dockson asked. “Only you and I knew its location.”

Kelsier nodded firmly. “I want everyone out of this shop, apprentices included, in fifteen minutes. I’ll meet you at the backup lair in two days.”

Dockson looked up at Kelsier, frowning. “Two days? Kell, what are you planning?”

Kelsier strode over to the door. He threw it open, letting in the mist, then glanced back at the crew with eyes as hard as any Inquisitor’s spikes.

“They hit me where it couldn’t have hurt worse. I’m going to do likewise.”

Walin pushed himself in the darkness, feeling his way through the cramped caverns, forcing his body through cracks nearly too small. He continued downward, searching with his fingers, ignoring his numerous scrapes and cuts.

*Must keep going, must keep going* . . . His remaining sanity told him that this was his last day. It had been six days since his last success. If he failed a seventh time, he would die.

*Must keep going.*

He couldn’t see; he was too far beneath the surface to catch even a reflected glimpse of sunlight. But, even without light, he could find his way. There were only two directions: up and down. Movements to the side were unimportant, easily disregarded. He couldn’t get lost as long as he kept moving down.

All the while, he quested with his fingers, seeking the telltale roughness of budding crystal. He couldn’t return this time, not until he’d been successful, not until . . .

*Must keep going.*

His hands brushed something soft and cold as he moved. A corpse, stuck rotting between two rocks. Walin moved on. Bodies weren't uncommon in the tight caverns; some of the corpses were fresh, most were simply bones. Often, Walin wondered if the dead ones weren't really the lucky ones.

*Must keep going.*

There wasn't really "time" in the caverns. Usually, he returned above to sleep—though the surface held taskmasters with whips, they also had food. It was meager, barely enough to keep him alive, but it was better than the starvation that would come from staying below too long.

*Must keep—*

He froze. He lay with his torso pinched in a tight rift in the rock, and had been in the process of wiggling his way through. However, his fingers—always searching, even when he was barely conscious—had been feeling the walls. And they'd found something.

His hand quivered with anticipation as he felt the crystal buds. Yes, yes, that was them. They grew in a wide, circular pattern on the wall; they were small at the edges, but got gradually bigger near the center. At the direct middle of the circular pattern, the crystals curved inward, following a pocketlike hollow in the wall. Here, the crystals grew long, each one having a jagged, sharp edge. Like teeth lining the maw of a stone beast.

Taking a breath, praying to the Lord Ruler, Walin rammed his hand into the fist-sized, circular opening. The crystals ripped his arm, tearing long, shallow gashes in his skin. He ignored the pain, forcing his arm in further, up to his elbow, searching with his fingers for . . .

*There!* His fingers found a small rock at the center of the pocket—a rock formed by the mysterious drippings of the crystals. A Hathsin geode.

He grasped it eagerly, pulling it out, ripping his arm again as he withdrew it from the crystal-lined hole. He cradled the small rock sphere, breathing heavily with joy.

Another seven days. He would live another seven days.

Before hunger and fatigue could weaken him further, Walin began the laborious climb back upward. He squeezed through crevasses, climbed up juttings in walls. Sometimes he had to move to the right or left until the ceiling opened up, but it always did. There were really only two directions: up and down.

He kept a wary ear out for others. He had seen climbers killed before, slain by younger, stronger men who hoped to steal a geode. Fortunately, he met nobody. It was good. He was an older man—old enough to know that he never should have tried to steal food from his plantation lord.

Perhaps he had earned his punishment. Perhaps he deserved to die in the Pits of Hathsin.

*But I won't die today,* he thought, finally smelling sweet, fresh air. It was night above. He didn't care. The mists didn't bother him anymore—even beatings didn't bother him much anymore. He was just too tired to care.

Walin began to climb out of the crack—one of dozens in the small, flat valley known as the Pits of Hathsin. Then he froze.

A man stood above him in the night. He was dressed in a large cloak that appeared to have been shredded to strips. The man looked at Walin, quiet and powerful in his black clothing. Then he reached down.

Walin cringed. The man, however, grabbed Walin's hand and pulled him out of the crack.

"Go!" the man said quietly in the swirling mists. "Most of the guards are dead. Gather as many prisoners as you can, and escape this place. You have a geode?"

Walin cringed again, pulling his hand toward his chest.

"Good," the stranger said. "Break it open. You'll find a nugget of metal inside—it is very valuable. Sell it to the underground in whatever city you eventually find yourself; you should earn enough to live on for years. Go quickly! I don't know how long you have until an alarm is raised."

Walin stumbled back, confused. "Who . . . who are you?"

"I am what *you* will soon be," the stranger said, stepping up to the rift. The ribbons of his enveloping black cloak billowed around him, mixing with the mists as he turned toward Walin. "I am a survivor."

Kelsier looked down, studying the dark scar in the rock, listening as the prisoner scrambled away in the distance.

"And so I return," Kelsier whispered. His scars burned, and memories returned. Memories of months spent squeezing through cracks, of ripping his arms on crystalline knives, of seeking each day to find a geode . . . just one, so that he could live on.

Could he really go back down into those cramped, quiet depths? Could he enter the darkness again? Kelsier held up his arms, looking at the scars, still white and stark on his arms.

Yes. For her dreams, he could.

He stepped over to the rift and forced himself to climb down inside of it. Then he burned tin. Immediately, he heard a cracking sound from below.

Tin illuminated the rift beneath him. Though the crack widened, it also branched, sending out twisting rifts in all directions. Part cavern, part crack, part tunnel. He could already see his first crystalline atium-hole—or what was left of it. The long, silvery crystals were fractured and broken.

Using Allomancy near atium crystals caused them to shatter. That was why the Lord Ruler had to use slaves, and not Allomancers, to collect his atium for him.

*Now the real test,* Kelsier thought, squeezing down further into the crack. He burned iron, and immediately he saw several blue lines pointing downward, toward atium-holes. Though the holes themselves probably didn't have an atium geode in them, the crystals themselves gave off faint blue lines. They contained residual amounts of atium.

Kelsier focused on one of the blue lines and Pulled lightly. His tin enhanced ears heard something shatter in the crack beneath him.

Kelsier smiled.

Nearly three years before, standing over the bloody corpses of the taskmasters who had beaten Mare to death, he had first noticed that he could use iron to sense where crystal pockets were. He'd barely understood his Allomantic powers at the time, but even then, a plan had begun to form in his mind. A plan for vengeance.

That plan had evolved, growing to encompass so much more than he'd originally intended. However, one of its key parts had remained sequestered away in a corner of his mind. He could find the crystal pockets. He could shatter them, using Allomancy.

And they were the only means of producing atium in the entire Final Empire.

*You tried to destroy me, Pits of Hathsin,* he thought, climbing down further into the rift. *It's time to return the favor.*

*We are close now. Oddly, this high in the mountains, we seem to finally be free from the oppressive touch of the Deepness. It has been quite a while since I knew what that was like.*

*The lake that Fedik discovered is below us now—I can see it from the ledge. It looks even more eerie from up here, with its glassy—almost metallic—sheen. I almost wish I had let him take a sample of its waters.*

*Perhaps his interest was what angered the mist creature that follows us. Perhaps . . . that was why it decided to attack him, stabbing him with its invisible knife.*

*Strangely, the attack comforted me. At least I know that since another has seen it. That means I'm not mad.*

# 33

“SO . . . THAT’S IT?” VIN ASKED. “For the plan, I mean.”

Ham shrugged. “If the Inquisitors broke Marsh, that means they know everything. Or, at least, they know enough. They’ll know that we plan to strike the palace, and that we’re going to use the house war as a cover. We’ll never get the Lord Ruler out of the city now, and we’ll certainly never get him to send the palace guard into the city. It doesn’t look good, Vin.”

Vin sat quietly, digesting the information. Ham sat cross-legged on the dirty floor, leaning against the bricks of the far wall. The backup lair was a dank cellar with only three rooms, and the air smelled of dirt and ash. Clubs’s apprentices took up one room to themselves, though Dockson had sent away all of the other servants before coming to the safe house.

Breeze stood by the far wall. He occasionally shot uncomfortable looks at the dirty floor and dusty stools, but then decided to remain standing. Vin didn’t see why he bothered—it was going to be impossible to keep his suits clean while living in what was, essentially, a pit in the ground.

Breeze wasn’t the only one taking their self-imposed captivity resentfully; Vin had heard several of the apprentices grumble that they’d almost rather have been taken by the Ministry. Yet, during their two days in the cellar, everyone had stayed in the safe house except when absolutely necessary. They understood the danger: Marsh could have given the Inquisitors descriptions and aliases for each crewmember.

Breeze shook his head. “Perhaps, gentlemen, it is time to pack up this operation. We tried hard, and considering the fact that our original plan—gathering the army—ended up so dreadfully, I’d say that we’ve done quite a marvelous job.”

Dockson sighed. “Well, we certainly can’t live off of saved funds for much longer—especially if Kell keeps giving our money away to the skaa.” He sat beside the table that was the room’s only piece of furniture, his most important ledgers, notes, and contracts organized into neat piles before him. He had been remarkably efficient at gathering every bit of paper that could have incriminated the crew or given further information about their plan.

Breeze nodded. “I, for one, am looking forward to a change. This has all been fun, delightful, and all of those other fulfilling emotions, but working with Kelsier can be a bit draining.”

Vin frowned. “You’re not going to stay on his crew?”

“It depends on his next job,” Breeze said. “We aren’t like other crews you’ve known—we work as we please, not because we are told to. It pays for us to be very discerning in the jobs we take. The rewards are great, but so are the risks.”

Ham smiled, resting with his arms behind his head, completely unconcerned about the dirt. “It kind of makes you wonder how we ended up on this particular job, eh? Very high risk, very little reward.”

“None, actually,” Breeze noted. “We’ll never get that atium now. Kelsier’s words about altruism and working to help the skaa were all well and good, but I was always hoping that we’d still get to take a swipe at that treasury.”

“True,” Dockson said, looking up from his notes. “But, was it worth it anyway? The work we did—the things we accomplished?”

Breeze and Ham paused, then they both nodded.

“And that’s why we stayed,” Dockson said. “Kell said it himself—he picked us because he knew we would try something a little different to accomplish a worthwhile goal. You’re good men—even you, Breeze. Stop scowling at me.”

Vin smiled at the familiar banter. There was a sense of mourning regarding Marsh, but these were men who knew how to move on despite their losses. In that way, they really were like skaa, after all.

“A house war,” Ham said idly, smiling to himself. “How many noblemen dead, do you think?”

“Hundreds, at least,” Dockson said without looking up. “All killed by their own greedy noble hands.”

“I’ll admit that I had my doubts about this entire fiasco,” Breeze said. "But the interruption in trade this will cause, not to mention the disorder in the government . . . well, you're right, Dockson. It was worth it."

"Indeed!" Ham said, mimicking Breeze's stuffy voice.

*I'm going to miss them,* Vin thought regretfully. *Maybe Kelsier will take me with him on his next job.*

The stairs rattled, and Vin moved reflexively back into the shadows. The splintery door opened, and a familiar, black-clothed form strode in. He carried his mistcloak over his arm, and his face looked incredibly wearied.

"Kelsier!" Vin said, stepping forward.

"Hello, all," he said in a tired voice.

*I know that tiredness,* Vin thought. *Pewter drag. Where has he been?*

"You're late, Kell," Dockson said, still not looking up from his ledgers.

"I strive for nothing if not consistency," Kelsier said, dropping his mistcloak on the floor, stretching, then sitting down. "Where are Clubs and Spook?"

"Clubs is sleeping in the back room," Dockson said. "Spook went with Renoux. We figured you'd want him to have our best Tineye to keep a watch."

"Good idea," Kelsier said, letting out a deep sigh and closing his eyes as he leaned against the wall.

"My dear man," Breeze said, "you look terrible."

"It's not as bad as it looks—I took it easy coming back, even stopped to sleep for a few hours on the way."

"Yes, but where *were* you?" Ham asked pointedly. "We've been worried sick that you were out doing something . . . well, stupid."

"Actually," Breeze noted, "we took it for granted that you were doing something stupid. We've just been wondering *how* stupid this particular event would turn out to be. So, what is it? Did you assassinate the lord prelan? Slaughter dozens of noblemen? Steal the cloak off the Lord Ruler's own back?"

"I destroyed the Pits of Hathsin," Kelsier said quietly.

The room fell into a stunned silence.

"You know," Breeze finally said, "you'd think that by now we'd have learned not to underestimate him."

"Destroyed them?" Ham asked. "How do you destroy the Pits of Hathsin? They're just a bunch of cracks in the ground!"

"Well, I didn't actually destroy the pits themselves," Kelsier explained. "I just shattered the crystals that produce atium geodes."

"All of them?" Dockson asked, dumbstruck.

"All of them that I could find," Kelsier said. "And that was several hundred pockets' worth. It was actually a lot easier to get around down there, now that I have Allomancy."

"Crystals?" Vin asked, confused.

"Atium crystals, Vin," Dockson said. "They produce the geodes—I don't think anyone actually knows how—that have atium beads at the center."

Kelsier nodded. "The crystals are why the Lord Ruler can't just send down Allomancers to Pull out the atium geodes. Using Allomancy near the crystals makes them shatter—and it takes centuries for them to grow back."

"Centuries during which they won't produce atium," Dockson added.

"And so you . . ." Vin trailed off.

"I pretty much ended atium production in the Final Empire for the next three hundred years or so."

*Elend. House Venture. They're in charge of the Pits. How will the Lord Ruler react when he finds out about this?*

"You madman," Breeze said quietly, eyes open wide. "Atium is the foundation of the imperial economy—controlling it is one of the main ways that the Lord Ruler maintains his hold over the nobility. We may not get to his reserves, but this will eventually have the same effect. You blessed lunatic . . . you blessed *genius*!"

Kelsier smiled wryly. "I appreciate both compliments. Have the Inquisitors moved against Clubs's shop yet?"

"Not that our watchmen have seen," Dockson said.

"Good," Kelsier said. "Maybe they didn't get Marsh to break. At the very least, maybe they don't realize that their Soothing stations were compromised. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to sleep. We have a lot of planning to do tomorrow."

The group paused.

"Planning?" Dox finally asked. "Kell . . . we were kind of thinking that we should pull out. We caused a house war, and you just took out the imperial economy. With our cover—and our plan—compromised . . . Well, you can't honestly expect us to do anything more, right?"

Kelsier smiled, staggering to his feet and moving into the back room. "We'll talk tomorrow."

“What do you think he’s planning, Sazed?” Vin asked, sitting on a stool beside the cellar’s hearth as the Terrisman prepared the afternoon meal. Kelsier had slept through the night, and had yet to rise this afternoon.

“I really have no idea, Mistress,” Sazed replied, sipping the stew. “Though, this moment—with the city so unbalanced—does seem like the perfect opportunity to move against the Final Empire.”

Vin sat thoughtfully. “I suppose we could still seize the palace—that’s what Kell always wanted to do. But, if the Lord Ruler has been warned, the others don’t see that happening. Plus, it doesn’t seem like we have enough soldiers to do much in the city. Ham and Breeze never finished their recruiting.”

Sazed shrugged.

“Maybe Kelsier plans to do something about the Lord Ruler,” Vin mused.

“Perhaps.”

“Sazed?” Vin said slowly. “You collect legends, right?”

“As a Keeper I collect many things,” Sazed said. “Stories, legends, religions. When I was young, another Keeper recited all of his knowledge to me so that I could store it, and then add to it.”

“Have you ever heard about this ‘Eleventh Metal’ legend that Kelsier talks about?”

Sazed paused. “No, Mistress. That legend was new to me when I heard of it from Master Kelsier.”

“But he swears that it’s true,” Vin said. “And I . . . believe him, for some reason.”

“It is very possible that there are legends I haven’t heard of,” Sazed said. “If the Keepers knew everything, then why would we need to keep searching?”

Vin nodded, still a bit uncertain.

Sazed continued to stir the soup. He seemed so . . . dignified, even while performing such a menial task. He stood in his steward’s robes, unconcerned with how simple a service he was performing, easily taking over for the servants the crew had dismissed.

Quick footsteps sounded on the stairs, and Vin perked up, sliding off her stool.

“Mistress?” Sazed asked.

“Someone on the stairs,” Vin said, moving to the doorway.

One of the apprentices—Vin thought his name was Tase—burst into the main room. Now that Lestibournes was gone, Tase had become the crew's main lookout.

"People are gathering in the square," Tase said, gesturing toward the stairs.

"What's this?" Dockson said, entering from the other room.

"People in the fountain square, Master Dockson," the boy said. "Word on the street is that the obligators are planning more executions."

*Retribution for the Pits,* Vin thought. *That didn't take long.*

Dockson's expression darkened. "Go wake Kell."

"I intend to watch them," Kelsier said, walking through the room, dressed in simple skaa clothing and cloak.

Vin's stomach twisted. *Again?*

"You all may do as you wish," Kelsier said. He looked much better after his extended rest—his exhaustion was gone, replaced with the characteristic strength Vin had come to expect from him.

"The executions are probably a reaction to what I did at the Pits," Kelsier continued. "I'm going to watch those people's deaths—because indirectly, I caused them."

"It's not your fault, Kell," Dockson said.

"It's all of our faults," Kelsier said bluntly. "That doesn't make what we do wrong—however, if it weren't for us, these people wouldn't have to die. I, for one, think that the least we can do for these people is bear witness to their passing."

He pulled open the door, climbing the steps. Slowly, the rest of the crew followed him—though Clubs, Sazed, and the apprentices remained with the safe house.

Vin climbed the musty-aired steps, eventually joining the others on a grimy street in the middle of a skaa slum. Ash fell from the sky, floating in lazily flakes. Kelsier was already walking down the street, and the rest of them—Breeze, Ham, Dockson, and Vin—quickly moved to catch up with him.

The safe house wasn't far from the fountain square. Kelsier, however, paused a few streets away from their destination. Dull-eyed skaa continued walking around them, jostling the crew. Bells rang in the distance.

"Kell?" Dockson asked.

Kelsier cocked his head. "Vin, you hear that?"

She closed her eyes, then flared her tin. *Focus,* she thought. *Like Spook said. Cut through the shuffling feet and murmuring voices. Hear over* *the doors shutting and the people breathing. Listen. . . .*

"Horses," she said, dampening her tin and opening her eyes. "And carriages."

"Carts," Kelsier said, turning toward the side of the street. "The prisoner carts. They're coming this way."

He looked up at the buildings around him, then grabbed hold of a raingutter and began to shimmy up a wall. Breeze rolled his eyes, nudging Dockson and nodding toward the front of the building, but Vin and Ham—with pewter—easily followed Kelsier up to the roof.

"There," Kell said, pointing at a street a short ways away. Vin could just barely make out a row of barred prison carts rolling toward the square.

Dockson and Breeze entered the slanted rooftop through a window. Kelsier remained where he was, standing by the roof's lip, staring out at the prison carts.

"Kell," Ham said warily. "What are you thinking?"

"We're still a short distance from the square," he said slowly. "And the Inquisitors aren't riding with the prisoners—they'll come down from the palace, like last time. There can't be more than a hundred soldiers guarding those people."

"A hundred men are plenty, Kell," Ham said.

Kelsier didn't seem to hear the words. He took another step forward, approaching up onto the roof's edge. "I can stop this. . . . I can save them."

Vin stepped up beside him. "Kell, there might not be many guards with the prisoners, but the fountain square is only a few blocks away. It's packed with soldiers, not to mention the Inquisitors!"

Ham, unexpectedly, didn't back her up. He turned, glancing at Dockson and Breeze. Dox paused, then shrugged.

"Are you all crazy?" Vin demanded.

"Wait a moment," Breeze said, squinting. "I'm no Tineye, but don't some of those prisoners look a bit too well dressed?"

Kelsier froze, then he cursed. Without warning, he jumped off the rooftop, dropping to the street below.

"Kell!" Vin said. "What—" Then she paused, looking up in the red sunlight, watching the slowly approaching procession of carts. Through tin-enhanced eyes, she thought that she recognized someone sitting near the front of one of the carts.

Spook.

“Kelsier, what’s going on!” Vin demanded, dashing down the street behind him.

He slowed just a bit. “I saw Renoux and Spook in that first cart. The Ministry must have hit Renoux’s canal procession—the people in those cages are the servants, staff, and guards we hired to work at the mansion.”

*The canal procession* . . . Vin thought. *The Ministry must know that Renoux was a fake. Marsh broke after all.*

Behind them, Ham appeared out of the building and onto the street. Breeze and Dockson were slower in coming.

“We have to work quickly!” Kelsier said, picking up his pace again.

“Kell!” Vin said, grabbing his arm. “Kelsier, you can’t save them. They’re too well guarded, and it’s daylight in the middle of the city. You’ll just get yourself killed!”

He paused, halting in the street, turning in Vin’s grasp. He looked into her eyes, disappointed. “You don’t understand what this is all about, do you, Vin? You never did. I let you stop me once before, on the hillside by the battlefield. Not this time. This time I can do something.”

“But . . .”

He shook his arm free. “You still have some things to learn about friendship, Vin. I hope someday you realize what they are.”

Then he took off, charging in the direction of the carts. Ham barreled past Vin, heading in a different direction, pushing his way through skaa on their way to the square.

Vin stood stupidly for a few moments, standing in the falling ash as Dockson caught up to her.

“It’s insanity,” she mumbled. “We can’t do this, Dox. We’re not invincible.”

Dockson snorted. “We’re not helpless either.”

Breeze puffed up behind them, pointing toward a side street. “There. We need to get me to a place where I can see the soldiers.”

Vin let them tow her along, suddenly feeling shame mix with her worry.

*Kelsier* . . .

Kelsier tossed away a pair of empty vials, their contents ingested. The vials sparkled in the air beside him, falling to shatter against the cobblestones. He ducked through one final alleyway, bursting out onto an eerily empty thoroughfare.

The prisoner carts rolled toward him, entering a small courtyard square formed by the intersection of two streets. Each rectangular vehicle was lined with bars; each one was packed with people who were now distinctly familiar. Servants, soldiers, housekeepers—some were rebels, many were just regular people. None of them deserved death.

*Too many skaa have died already,* he thought, flaring his metals. *Hundreds. Thousands. Hundreds of thousands.*

*Not today. No more.*

He dropped a coin and jumped, Pushing himself through the air in a wide arc. Soldiers looked up, pointing. Kelsier landed directly in their center.

There was a quiet moment as the soldiers turned in surprise. Kelsier crouched amid them, bits of ash falling from the sky.

Then he Pushed.

He flared steel with a yell, standing and Pushing outward. The burst of Allomantic power hurled soldiers away by their breastplates, tossing a dozen men into the air, sending them crashing into companions and walls.

Men screamed. Kelsier spun, Pushing against a group of soldiers and sending himself flying toward a prison cart. He smashed into it, flaring his steel and grabbing the metal door with his hands.

Prisoners huddled back in surprise. Kelsier ripped the door free with a burst of pewter-enhanced power, then tossed it toward a group of approaching soldiers.

“Go!” he told the prisoners, jumping down and landing lightly in the street. He spun.

And came face-to-face with a tall figure wearing a brown robe. Kelsier paused, stepping back as the tall form reached up, lowering his hood, revealing a pair of eyes impaled by spikes.

The Inquisitor smiled, and Kelsier heard footsteps approaching down side alleyways. Dozens. Hundreds.

“Damnation!” Breeze swore as soldiers flooded the square. Dockson pulled Breeze into an alley. Vin followed them in, crouching in the shadows, listening to soldiers yelling in the crossroads outside.

“What?” she demanded.

“Inquisitor!” Breeze said, pointing toward a robed figure standing before Kelsier.

“*What?*” Dockson said, standing.

*It’s a trap,* Vin realized with horror. Soldiers began to pile into the square, appearing from hidden side streets. *Kelsier, get out of there!*

Kelsier Pushed off a fallen guard, throwing himself backward in a flip over one of the prison carts. He landed in a crouch, eyeing the new squads of soldiers. Many of them carried staves and wore no armor. Hazekillers.

The Inquisitor Pushed himself through the ash-filled air, landing with a thump in front of Kelsier. The creature smiled.

*It's the same man. The Inquisitor from before.*

"Where's the girl?" the creature said quietly.

Kelsier ignored the question. "Why only one of you?" he demanded.

The creature's smile deepened. "I won the draw."

Kelsier flared pewter, dashing to the side as the Inquisitor pulled out a pair of obsidian axes. The square was quickly becoming clogged with soldiers. From inside the carts he could hear people crying out.

"Kelsier! Lord Kelsier! Please!"

Kelsier cursed quietly as the Inquisitor bore down on him. He reached out, Pulling against one of the still full carts and yanking himself into the air over a group of soldiers. He landed, then dashed to the cart, intending to free its occupants. As he arrived, however, the cart shook. Kelsier glanced up just in time to see a steel-eyed monster grinning down at him from atop the vehicle.

Kelsier Pushed himself backward, feeling the wind of an axehead swing beside his head. He landed smoothly, but immediately had to jump to the side as a group of soldiers attacked. As he landed, he reached out—Pulling against one of the carts to anchor himself—and Pulled against the fallen iron door he had thrown before. The barred door lurched into the air and crashed through the squad of soldiers.

The Inquisitor attacked from behind, but Kelsier jumped away. The still tumbling door careened across the cobblestones in front of him, and as he passed over it, Kelsier Pushed, sending himself streaking into the air.

*Vin was right,* Kelsier thought with frustration. Below, the Inquisitor watched him, trailing him with unnatural eyes. *I shouldn't have done this.* Below, a group of soldiers rounded up the skaa that he had freed.

*I should run—try to lose the Inquisitor. I've done it before.*

But . . . he couldn't. He wouldn't, not this time. He had compromised too many times before. Even if it cost him everything else, he *had* to free those prisoners.

And then, as he began to fall, he saw a group of men charging the crossroads. They bore weapons, but no uniforms. At their head ran a familiar form.

*Ham! So that's where you went.*

"What is it?" Vin asked anxiously, craning to see into the square. Above, Kelsier's form plunged back toward the fight, dark cloak trailing behind him.

"It's one of our soldier units!" Dockson said. "Ham must have fetched them."

"How many?"

"We kept them in patches of a couple hundred."

"So they'll be outnumbered."

Dockson nodded.

Vin stood. "I'm going out."

"No, you're not," Dockson said firmly, grabbing her cloak and pulling her back. "I don't want a repeat of what happened to you last time you faced one of those monsters."

"But . . ."

"Kell will be just fine," Dockson said. "He'll just try to stall long enough for Ham to free the prisoners, then he'll run. Watch."

Vin stepped back.

To her side, Breeze was mumbling to himself. "Yes, you're afraid. Let's focus on that. Soothe everything else away. Leave you terrified. That's an Inquisitor and a Mistborn fighting—you don't want to interfere with *that*. . . ."

Vin glanced back toward the square, where she saw a soldier drop his staff and flee. *There are other ways to fight,* she realized, kneeling beside Breeze. "How can I help?"

Kelsier ducked back from the Inquisitor again as Ham's unit crashed into the imperial soldiers and began cutting its way toward the prisoner carts. The attack diverted the attention of the regular soldiers, who appeared all too happy to leave Kelsier and the Inquisitor to their solitary battle.

To the side, Kelsier could see skaa beginning to clog the streets around the small courtyard, the fighting drawing the attention of those waiting up above at the fountain square. Kelsier could see other squads of imperial soldiers trying to push their way toward the fight, but the thousands of skaa crowding the streets seriously slowed their progress.

The Inquisitor swung, and Kelsier dodged. The creature was obviously growing frustrated. To the side, a small group of Ham's men reached one of the prisoner carts and broke open its lock, freeing the prisoners. The rest of Ham's men kept the imperial soldiers busy as the prisoners fled.

Kelsier smiled, eyeing the annoyed Inquisitor. The creature growled quietly.

"Valette!" a voice screamed.

Kelsier turned in shock. A well-dressed nobleman was pushing his way through the soldiers toward the center of the fighting. He carried a dueling cane and was protected by two beleaguered bodyguards, but he mostly avoided harm by virtue of neither side being certain of wanting to strike down a man of obvious noble blood.

"Valette!" Elend Venture yelled again. He turned to one of the soldiers. "Who told you to raid House Renoux's convoy! Who authorized this!"

*Great,* Kelsier thought, keeping a wary eye on the Inquisitor. The creature regarded Kelsier with a twisted, hateful expression.

*You just go right on hating me,* Kelsier thought. *I only have to hang on long enough for Ham to free the prisoners. Then, I can lead you away.*

The Inquisitor reached out and casually beheaded a fleeing servant as she ran by.

"No!" Kelsier yelled as the corpse fell at the Inquisitor's feet. The creature grabbed another victim and raised its axe.

"All right!" Kelsier said, striding forward, pulling a pair of vials from his sash. "All right. You want to fight me? Come on!"

The creature smiled, pushing the captured woman aside and striding toward Kelsier.

Kelsier flicked the corks off and downed both vials at once, then tossed them aside. Metals flared in his chest, burning alongside his rage. His brother, dead. His wife, dead. Family, friends, and heroes. All dead.

*You push me to seek revenge?* he thought. *Well, you shall have it!*

Kelsier paused a few feet in front of the Inquisitor. Fists clinched, he flared his steel in a massive Push. Around him, people were thrown back by their metal as they were hit by the awesome, invisible wave of power. The square—packed with imperial soldiers, prisoners, and rebels—opened up in a small pocket around Kelsier and the Inquisitor.

"Let's do it, then," Kelsier said.

*I never wanted to be feared.*

*If I regret one thing, it is the fear I have caused. Fear is the tool of tyrants. Unfortunately, when the fate of the world is in question, you use whatever tools are available.*

## 34

DEAD AND DYING MEN COLLAPSED to the cobblestones. Skaa crowded the roads. Prisoners cried out, calling his name. Heat from a smoky sun burned the streets.

And ash fell from the sky.

Kelsier dashed forward, flaring pewter and whipping out his daggers. He burned atium, as did the Inquisitor—and they both probably had enough to last for an extended fight.

Kelsier slashed twice in the hot air, striking at the Inquisitor, his arms a blur. The creature dodged amid an insane vortex of atium-shadows, then swung an axe.

Kelsier jumped, pewter lending his leap inhuman height, and passed just over the swinging weapon. He reached out and Pushed against a group of fighting soldiers behind him, throwing himself forward. He planted both feet in the Inquisitor's face and kicked off, flipping backward in the air.

The Inquisitor stumbled. As Kelsier fell, he Pulled on a soldier, yanking himself backward. The soldier was pulled off his feet by the force of the Ironpull, and he began to streak toward Kelsier. Both men flew in the air.

Kelsier flared iron, Pulling against a patch of soldiers to his right while still Pulling against the single soldier. The result was a pivot. Kelsier flew to the side, and the soldier—held as if by tether to Kelsier's body—swung in a wide arc like a ball on a chain.

The unfortunate soldier crashed into the stumbling Inquisitor, smashing them both into the bars of an empty prison cart.

The soldier toppled, unconscious, to the ground. The Inquisitor bounced off the iron cage, falling to its hands and knees. A line of blood ran down the creature's face, across its eye tattoos, but it looked up, smiling. It didn't seem the least bit dizzy as it stood.

Kelsier landed, cursing quietly to himself.

With an incredible burst of speed, the Inquisitor grabbed the empty, boxlike prison cell by a pair of bars, then ripped the entire thing free of the cartwheels.

*Bloody hell!*

The creature spun and hurled the massive iron cage at Kelsier, who stood only a few feet away. There was no time to dodge. A building stood right behind him; if he Pushed himself back, he'd be crushed.

The cage crashed toward him, and he jumped, using a Steelpush to guide his body through the open doorway of the spinning cage. He twisted within the cell, Pushing outward in all directions, holding himself in the metal cage's exact center as it smashed into the wall, then bounced free.

The cage rolled, then began to skid across the ground. Kelsier let himself drop, landing on the underside of the roof as the cage slowly slid to a halt. Through the bars, he could see the Inquisitor watching him amid a sea of fighting soldiers, its body surrounded by a twisting, dashing, moving cloud of atium-images. The Inquisitor nodded its head to Kelsier in a slight sign of respect.

Kelsier Pushed out with a yell, flaring pewter to keep from crushing himself. The cage exploded, the metal top flipping into the air, the bars ripping free and bursting outward. Kelsier Pulled the bars behind him and Pushed the ones in front of him, sending a stream of metal shooting toward the Inquisitor.

The creature raised a hand, expertly dividing the large missiles. Kelsier, however, followed the bars with his own body—shooting himself toward the Inquisitor with a Steelpush. The Inquisitor Pulled himself to the side, using an unfortunate soldier as an anchor. The man cried out as he was wrenched away from his duel—but he choked off as the Inquisitor jumped, Pushing against the soldier and crushing the man to the ground.

The Inquisitor shot into the air. Kelsier slowed himself with a Push against a group of soldiers, tracking the Inquisitor. Behind him, the top of the cage crashed back to the ground, throwing up chips of stone. Kelsier blasted against it and hurled himself upward, after the Inquisitor.

Flakes of ash streaked past him. Ahead, the Inquisitor turned, Pulling against something below. The creature switched directions immediately, instead hurling toward Kelsier.

*Head-on collision. Bad idea for the guy without spikes in his head.* Kelsier frantically Pulled against a soldier, lurching downward as the Inquisitor passed diagonally overhead.

Kelsier flared pewter, then crashed into the soldier he had Pulled up toward him. The two of them spun in midair. Fortunately, the soldier wasn't one of Ham's.

"Sorry, friend," Kelsier said conversationally, Pushing himself to the side.

The soldier shot away, eventually smashing into the side of a building as Kelsier used him to soar over the battlefield. Below, Ham's main squad had finally reached the last prison cart. Unfortunately, several more groups of imperial soldiers had pushed their way through the gawking skaa crowds. One of them was a large team of archers—armed with obsidian-tipped arrows.

Kelsier cursed, letting himself fall. The archers set up, obviously preparing to fire straight into the fighting crowd. They would kill some of their own soldiers, but the brunt of their attack would be borne by the fleeing prisoners.

Kelsier dropped to the cobblestones. He reached to the side, Pulling against some discarded bars from the cage he had destroyed. They flew toward him.

The archers drew. But he could see their atium-shadows.

Kelsier released the bars and Pushed himself to the side just slightly, allowing the bars to fly between the archers and the fleeing prisoners.

The archers fired.

Kelsier grabbed the bars, flaring both steel and iron, Pushing against one tip of each bar and Pulling against the opposite tip. The bars lurched in the air, immediately beginning to spin like furious, lunatic windmills. Most of the flying arrows were sprayed to the side by the spinning rods of iron.

The bars clanged to the ground amid the scattered, discarded arrows. The archers stood, stupefied, as Kelsier jumped to the side again, then Pulled lightly on the bars, flipping them up into the air in front of him. He Pushed, sending the bars crashing toward the archers. He turned away as men screamed and died, his eyes seeking his true foe.

*Where is that creature hiding?*

He looked into a scene of chaos. Men fought, ran, fled, and died—each one bearing a prophetic atium-shadow to Kelsier's eyes. In this case, however, the shadows effectively doubled the number of people moving on the battlefield, and only served to increase the sense of confusion.

More and more soldiers were arriving. Many of Ham's men were down, most of the rest were retreating—fortunately, they could simply discard their armor and blend into the skaa crowds. Kelsier was more worried about that last prisoner cart—the one with Renoux and Spook in it. The trajectory at which Ham's group had entered the battle had required them to move up the line of carts, back to front. Trying to get to Renoux first would have required passing by the five other carts, leaving their people still trapped.

Ham obviously didn't intend to leave until Spook and Renoux were free. And, where Ham fought, the rebel soldiers held. There was a reason Pewterarms were also called Thugs: there was no subtlety to their fighting, no clever Ironpulls or Steelpushes. Ham simply attacked with raw strength and speed, throwing enemy soldiers out of his way, laying waste to their ranks, leading his squad of fifty men toward the final prison cart. As they reached it, Ham stepped back to fight off a group of enemy soldiers as one of his men broke the cart's lock.

Kelsier smiled with pride, eyes still searching for the Inquisitor. His men were few, but the enemy soldiers seemed visibly unsettled by the skaa rebels' determination. Kelsier's men fought with passion—despite their other, numerous hindrances, they still had this one advantage.

*This is what happens when you finally convince them to fight. This is what hides within them all. It's just so hard to release. . . .*

Renoux exited the cart, then stepped to the side, watching as his servants rushed free from their cage. Suddenly, a well-dressed figure burst from the melee, grabbing Renoux by the front of his suit.

"Where's Valette?" Elend Venture demanded, his desperate voice carrying to Kelsier's tin-enhanced ears. "Which cage was she in?"

*Kid, you're really starting to annoy me,* Kelsier thought, Pushing himself a path through the soldiers as he ran toward the cart.

The Inquisitor appeared, leaping out from behind a pile of soldiers. It landed on top of the cage, shaking the entire structure, an obsidian axe grasped in each clawlike hand. The creature met Kelsier's eyes and smiled, then dropped from the top of the cage and buried an axe in Renoux's back.

The kandra jerked, eyes opening wide. The Inquisitor turned toward Elend next. Kelsier wasn't certain if the creature recognized the boy. Perhaps the Inquisitor thought Elend to be a member of Renoux's family. Perhaps it didn't care.

Kelsier paused for just a moment.

The Inquisitor raised his axe to strike.

*She loves him.*

Kelsier flared steel within, stoking it, raging it until his chest burned like the Ashmounts themselves. He blasted against the soldiers behind him—throwing dozens of them backward—and streaked toward the Inquisitor. He crashed into the creature as it began to swing.

The discarded axe clicked against the stones a few feet away. Kelsier gripped the Inquisitor by its neck as the two hit the ground; then he began to squeeze with pewter-enhanced muscles. The Inquisitor reached up, grabbing Kelsier's hands, desperately trying to force them apart.

*Marsh was right,* Kelsier thought through the chaos. *It fears for its life. It* can *be killed.*

The Inquisitor gasped raggedly, the metal spikeheads protruding from its eyes just inches from Kelsier's face. To his side Kelsier saw Elend Venture stumble back.

"The girl is fine!" Kelsier said through gritted teeth. "She wasn't on the Renoux barges. Go!"

Elend paused uncertainly; then one of his bodyguards finally appeared. The boy let himself get dragged away.

*Can't believe I just saved a nobleman,* Kelsier thought, struggling to choke the Inquisitor. *You'd better appreciate this, girl.*

Slowly, with straining muscles, the Inquisitor forced Kelsier's hands apart. The creature began to smile again.

*They're so strong!*

The Inquisitor pushed Kelsier back, then Pulled against a soldier, yanking itself in a skidding motion across the cobblestones. The Inquisitor hit a corpse and flipped backward, up to its feet. Its neck was red from Kelsier's grip, bits of flesh torn by his fingernails, but it smiled still.

Kelsier Pushed against a soldier, flipping himself up as well. To his side, he saw Renoux leaning against the cart. Kelsier caught the kandra's eyes and nodded slightly.

Renoux dropped to the ground with a sigh, axe in his back.

"Kelsier!" Ham yelled over the crowd.

"Go!" Kelsier told him. "Renoux is dead."

Ham glanced at Renoux's body, then nodded. He turned to his men, calling orders.

"Survivor," a rasping voice said.

Kelsier spun. The Inquisitor strode forward, stepping with pewter's lithe power, surrounded by a haze of atium-shadows.

"Survivor of Hathsin," it said. "You promised me a fight. Must I kill more skaa?"

Kelsier flared his metals. "I never said we were done." Then, he smiled. He was worried, he was pained, but he was also exhilarated. All of his life, there had been a piece of him that had wished to stand and fight.

He'd always wanted to see if he could take an Inquisitor.

Vin stood, trying desperately to see over the crowd.

"What?" Dockson asked.

"I thought I saw Elend!"

"Here? That sounds a bit ridiculous, don't you think?"

Vin flushed. *Probably.* "Regardless, I'm going to try and get a better view." She grabbed the side of the alleyway.

"Be careful," Dox said. "If that Inquisitor sees you . . ."

Vin nodded, scrambling up the bricks. Once she got high enough, she scanned the intersection for familiar figures. Dockson was right: Elend was nowhere to be seen. One of the carts—the one off of which the Inquisitor had ripped the cage—lay on its side. Horses stomped about, hedged in by the fighting and the skaa crowds.

"What do you see?" Dox called up.

"Renoux is down!" Vin said, squinting and burning tin. "Looks like an axe in his back."

"That may or may not be fatal for him," Dockson said cryptically. "I don't know a lot about kandra."

*Kandra?*

"What about the prisoners?" Dox called.

"They're all free," Vin said. "The cages are empty. Dox, there are a *lot* of skaa out there!" It looked like the entire population from the fountain square had crowded down to the small intersection. The area was in a small depression, and Vin could see thousands of skaa packing the streets sloping upward in all directions.

"Ham's free!" Vin said. "I don't see him—alive or dead—anywhere! Spook's gone too."

"And Kell?" Dockson asked urgently.

Vin paused. "He's still fighting the Inquisitor."

Kelsier flared his pewter, punching the Inquisitor, careful to avoid the flat disks of metal sticking out the front of its eyes. The creature stumbled, and Kelsier buried his fist in its stomach. The Inquisitor growled and slapped Kelsier across the face, throwing him down with one blow.

Kelsier shook his head. *What does it take to kill this thing?* he thought, Pushing himself up to his feet, backing away.

The Inquisitor strode forward. Some of the soldiers were trying to search the crowd for Ham and his men, but many just stood still. A fight between two powerful Allomancers was something whispered about, but never seen. Soldier and peasant stood dumbfounded, watching the battle with awe.

*He's stronger than I am,* Kelsier acknowledged, watching the Inquisitor warily. *But strength isn't everything.*

Kelsier reached out, grabbing smaller metal sources and Pulling them away from their owners—metal caps, fine steel swords, coin pouches, daggers. He threw them at the Inquisitor—carefully manipulating Steelpushes and Ironpulls—and kept his atium burning so that each item he controlled would have a fanning multitude of atium-images in the Inquisitor's eyes.

The Inquisitor cursed quietly as it deflected the swarming bits of metal. Kelsier, however, just used the Inquisitor's own Pushes against it, Pulling each item back, whipping them around at the creature. The Inquisitor blasted outward, Pushing against all the items at once, and Kelsier let them go. As soon as the Inquisitor stopped Pushing, however, Kelsier Pulled his weapons back.

The imperial soldiers formed a ring, watching warily. Kelsier used them, Pushing against breastplates, lurching himself back and forth in the air. The quick changes in position let him move constantly, disorienting the Inquisitor, allowing him to Push his different flying pieces of metal where he wanted them.

"Keep an eye on my belt buckle," Dockson asked, wobbling slightly as he clung to the bricks beside Vin. "If I fall off, give me a Pull to slow the fall, eh?"

Vin nodded, but she wasn't paying much attention to Dox. She was watching Kelsier. "He's incredible!"

Kelsier lurched back and forth in the air, his feet never touching the ground. Bits of metal buzzed around him, responding to his Pushes and Pulls. He controlled them with such skill, one would have thought they were living things. The Inquisitor slapped them away with a fury, but was obviously having trouble keeping track of them all.

*I underestimated Kelsier,* Vin thought. *I assumed that he was less skilled than the Mistings because he'd spread himself too thin. But that wasn't it at all. This.* This *is his specialty—Pushing and Pulling with expert control.*

*And iron and steel are the metals he personally trained me in. Maybe he understood all along.*

Kelsier spun and flew amid a maelstrom of metal. Every time something hit the ground, he flicked it back up. The items always flew in straight lines, but he kept moving, Pushing himself around, keeping them in the air, periodically shooting them at the Inquisitor.

The creature spun, confused. It tried to Push itself upward, but Kelsier shot several larger pieces of metal over the creature's head, and it had to Push against them, throwing off its jump.

An iron bar hit the Inquisitor in the face.

The creature stumbled, blood marring the tattoos on the side of its face. A steel helmet struck it in the side, tossing it backward.

Kelsier began to shoot pieces of metal quickly, feeling his rage and anger mount. "Were you the one who killed Marsh?" he yelled, not bothering to listen for an answer. "Were you there when I was condemned, years ago?"

The Inquisitor raised a warding hand, Pushing away the next swarm of metals. It limped backward, putting its back against the overturned wooden cart.

Kelsier heard the creature growl, and a sudden Push of strength washed through the crowd, toppling soldiers, causing Kelsier's metal weapons to shoot away.

Kelsier let them go. He dashed forward, rushing the disoriented Inquisitor, scooping up a loose cobblestone.

The creature turned toward him, and Kelsier yelled, swinging the cobblestone, his strength fueled almost more by rage than by pewter.

He hit the Inquisitor square in the eyes. The creature's head snapped back, smacking against the bottom of the overturned cart. Kelsier struck again, yelling, repeatedly smashing his cobblestone into the creature's face.

The Inquisitor howled in pain, reaching clawlike hands for Kelsier, moving as if to jump forward. Then it suddenly jerked to a stop, its head stuck against the cart's wood. The spike tips that jutted from the back of its skull had been pounded into the wood by Kelsier's attack.

Kelsier smiled as the creature screamed in rage, struggling to pull its head free from the wood. Kelsier turned to the side, seeking an item he had seen on the ground a few moments before. He kicked over a corpse, snatching the obsidian axe off the ground, its rough-chipped blade glittering in the red sunlight.

"I'm glad you talked me into this," he said quietly. Then he swung with a two-handed blow, slamming the axehead through the Inquisitor's neck and into the wood behind.

The Inquisitor's body slumped to the cobblestones. The head remained where it was, staring out with its eerie, tattooed, unnatural gaze—pinned to the wood by its own spikes.

Kelsier turned to face the crowd, suddenly feeling incredibly wearied. His body ached from dozens of bruises and cuts, and he didn't even know when his cloak had ripped free. He faced the soldiers defiantly, however, his scarred arms plainly visible.

"The Survivor of Hathsin!" one whispered.

"He killed an Inquisitor. . . ." said another.

And then the chanting began. The skaa in the surrounding streets began to scream his name. The soldiers looked around, realizing with horror that they were surrounded. The peasants began to press in, and Kelsier could feel their anger and hope.

*Maybe this doesn't have to go the way I assumed,* Kelsier thought triumphantly. *Maybe I don't have—*

Then it hit. Like a cloud moving before the sun, like a sudden storm on a quiet night, like a pair of fingers snuffing a candle. An oppressive hand stifled the budding skaa emotions. The people cringed, and their cries died out. The fire Kelsier had built within them was too new.

*So close* . . . he thought.

Up ahead, a single, black carriage crested the hill and began to move down from the fountain square.

The Lord Ruler had arrived.

Vin nearly lost her grip as the wave of depression hit her. She flared her copper, but—as always—she could still slightly feel the Lord Ruler's oppressive hand.

"Lord Ruler!" Dockson said, though Vin couldn't tell if it was a curse or an observation. Skaa that had been packed in to view the fight somehow managed to make room for the dark carriage. It rolled down a corridor of people toward the corpse-littered square.

Soldiers pulled back, and Kelsier stepped away from the fallen cart, moving out to face the oncoming carriage.

"What is he doing?" Vin asked, turning toward Dockson, who had propped himself up on a small outcropping. "Why doesn't he run? This is no Inquisitor—this isn't something to fight!"

"This is it, Vin," Dockson said, awed. "This is what he's been waiting for. A chance to face the Lord Ruler—a chance to prove those legends of his."

Vin turned back toward the square. The carriage rolled to a stop.

"But . . ." she said quietly. "The Eleventh Metal. Did he bring it?"

"He must have."

*Kelsier always said that the Lord Ruler was* his *task,* Vin thought. *He let the rest of us work on the nobility, the Garrison, and the Ministry. But this . . . Kelsier always planned to do this himself.*

The Lord Ruler stepped from his carriage, and Vin leaned forward, burning tin. He looked like . . .

A man.

He was dressed in a black and white uniform somewhat like a nobleman's suit, but far more exaggerated. The coat reached all the way to his feet, and trailed behind him as he walked. His vest wasn't colored, but a pure black, though it was accented with brilliant white markings. As Vin had heard, his fingers glittered with rings, the symbol of his power.

*I'm so much stronger than you,* the rings proclaimed, *that it doesn't matter if I wear metal.*

Handsome, with jet black hair and pale skin, the Lord Ruler was tall, thin, and confident. And he was young—younger than Vin would have expected, even younger than Kelsier. He strode across the square, avoiding corpses, his soldiers pulling back and forcing the skaa away.

Suddenly, a small group of figures burst through the line of soldiers. They wore the mismatched armor of rebels, and the man leading them looked just a bit familiar. He was one of Ham's Thugs.

"For my wife!" the Thug said, holding up a spear and charging.

"For Lord Kelsier!" yelled the other four.

*Oh no* . . . Vin thought.

The Lord Ruler, however, ignored the men. The lead rebel bellowed in defiance, then rammed his spear through the Lord Ruler's chest.

The Lord Ruler just continued to walk, passing the soldier, spear sticking all the way through his body.

The rebel paused, then grabbed a spear from one of his friends and drove this one through the Lord Ruler's back. Again, the Lord Ruler ignored the men—as if they, and their weapons, were completely beneath his contempt.

The lead rebel stumbled back, then spun as his friends began to scream under an Inquisitor's axe. He joined them shortly, and the Inquisitor stood above the corpses for a moment, hacking gleefully.

The Lord Ruler continued forward, two spears sticking—as if unnoticed—from his body. Kelsier stood waiting. He looked ragged in his ripped skaa clothing. Yet, he was proud. He didn't bend or bow beneath the weight of the Lord Ruler's Soothing.

The Lord Ruler stopped a few feet away, one of the spears nearly touching Kelsier's chest. Black ash fell lightly around the two men, bits of it curling and blowing in the faint wind. The square fell horribly silent—even the Inquisitor stopped his gruesome work. Vin leaned forward, clinging precariously to the rough brickwork.

*Do something, Kelsier! Use the metal!*

The Lord Ruler glanced at the Inquisitor that Kelsier had killed. "Those are very hard to replace." His accented voice carried easily to Vin's tin-enhanced ears.

Even from a distance, she could see Kelsier smile.

"I killed you, once," the Lord Ruler said, turning back to Kelsier.

"You tried," Kelsier replied, his voice loud and firm, carrying across the square. "But you can't kill me, Lord Tyrant. I represent that thing you've *never* been able to kill, no matter how hard you try. I am hope."

The Lord Ruler snorted in disdain. He raised a casual arm, then backhanded Kelsier with a blow so powerful that Vin could hear the crack resound through the square.

Kelsier lurched and spun, spraying blood as he fell.

"*NO!*" Vin screamed.

The Lord Ruler ripped one of the spears from his own body, then slammed it down through Kelsier's chest. "Let the executions begin," he said, turning toward his carriage and ripping out the second spear, then tossing it aside.

Chaos followed. Prompted by the Inquisitor, the soldiers turned and attacked the crowd. Other Inquisitors appeared from the square above, riding black horses, ebony axes glistening in the afternoon light.

Vin ignored it all. "Kelsier!" she screamed. His body lay where it had fallen, spear jutting from his chest, scarlet blood pooling around him.

*No. No. NO!* She jumped from the building, Pushing against some people and throwing herself over the massacre. She landed in the center of the oddly empty square—Lord Ruler gone, Inquisitors busy killing skaa. She scrambled to Kelsier's side.

There was almost nothing remaining of the left side of his face. The right side, however . . . it still smiled faintly, single dead eye staring up into the red-black sky. Bits of ash fell lightly on his face.

"Kelsier, no . . ." Vin said, tears streaming down her face. She prodded his body, feeling for a pulse. There was none.

"You said you couldn't be killed!" she cried. "What of your plans? What of the Eleventh Metal? What of *me*?"

He didn't move. Vin had trouble seeing through the tears. *It's* *impossible. He always said we aren't invincible . . . but that meant me. Not him. Not Kelsier. He* was *invincible.*

*He should have been.*

Someone grabbed her and she squirmed, crying out.

"Time to go, kid," Ham said. He paused, looking at Kelsier, assuring for himself that the crewleader was dead.

Then he towed her away. Vin continued to struggle weakly, but she was growing numb. In the back of her mind, she heard Reen's voice.

*See. I told you he would leave you. I warned you. I promised you. . . .*

# THE END OF PART FOUR

# PART FIVE

# BELIEVERS IN A FORGOTTEN WORLD

*I know what will happen if I make the wrong choice. I must be strong; I must not take the power for myself.*

*For I have seen what will happen if I do.*

## 35

*To work with me,* Kelsier had said, *I only ask that you promise one thing—to trust me.*

Vin hung in the mist, immobile. It flowed around her like a quiet stream. Above, ahead, to the sides, and beneath. Mist all around her.

*Trust me, Vin,* he'd said. *You trusted me enough to jump off the wall, and I caught you. You're going to have to trust me this time too.*

*I'll catch you.*

*I'll catch you. . . .*

It was as if she were nowhere. Among, and *of*, the mist. How she envied it. It didn't think. Didn't worry.

Didn't hurt.

*I trusted you, Kelsier,* she thought. *I actually did—but you let me fall. You promised that your crews had no betrayals. What of this? What of your betrayal?*

She hung, her tin extinguished to let her better see the mists. They were slightly wet, cool upon her skin. Like the tears of a dead man.

*Why does it matter, anymore?* she thought, staring upward. *Why does anything matter? What was it you said to me, Kelsier? That I never really understood? That I still needed to learn about friendship? What about you? You didn't even fight him.*

He stood there again, in her mind. The Lord Ruler struck him down with a disdainful blow. The Survivor had died like any other man.

*Is this why you were so hesitant to promise that you wouldn't abandon me?*

She wished she could just . . . go. Float away. Become mist. She'd once wished for freedom—and then had assumed she'd found it. She'd been wrong. This wasn't freedom, this grief, this hole within her.

It was the same as before, when Reen had abandoned her. What was the difference? At least Reen had been honest. He'd always promised that he would leave. Kelsier had led her along, telling her to trust and to love, but Reen had always been the truthful one.

"I don't want to do this anymore," she whispered to the mists. "Can't you just take me?"

The mists gave no answer. They continued to spin playfully, uncaring. Always changing—yet somehow, always the same.

"Mistress?" called an uncertain voice from below. "Mistress, is that you up there?"

Vin sighed, burning tin, then extinguishing steel and letting herself drop. Her mistcloak fluttered as she fell through the mists; she landed quietly on the rooftop above their safe house. Sazed stood a short distance away, beside the steel ladder that the lookouts had been using to get atop the building.

"Yes, Saze?" she asked tiredly, reaching out to Pull up the three coins she'd been using as anchors to stabilize her like the legs of a tripod. One of them was twisted and bent—the same coin she and Kelsier had gotten into a Pushing match over so many months ago.

"I'm sorry, Mistress," Sazed said. "I simply wondered where you had gone."

She shrugged.

"It is a strangely quiet night, I think," Sazed said.

"A mournful night." Hundreds of skaa had been massacred following Kelsier's death, and hundreds more had been trampled during the rush to escape.

"I wonder if his death even meant anything," she said quietly. "We probably saved a lot fewer than were killed."

"Slain by evil men, Mistress."

"Ham often asks if there even *is* such a thing as 'evil.' "

"Master Hammond likes to ask questions," Sazed said, "but even he doesn't question the answers. There are evil men . . . just as there are good men."

Vin shook her head. "I was wrong about Kelsier. He wasn't a good man—he was just a liar. He never had a plan for defeating the Lord Ruler."

"Perhaps," Sazed said. "Or, perhaps he never had an opportunity to fulfill that plan. Perhaps we just don't understand the plan."

"You sound like you still believe in him." Vin turned and walked to the edge of the flat-topped roof, staring out over the quiet, shadowy city.

"I do, Mistress," Sazed said.

"How? How can you?"

Sazed shook his head, walking over to stand beside her. "Belief isn't simply a thing for fair times and bright days, I think. What is belief—what is faith—if you don't continue in it after failure?"

Vin frowned.

"Anyone can believe in someone, or something, that always succeeds, Mistress. But failure . . . ah, now, that is hard to believe in, certainly and truly. Difficult enough to have value, I think."

Vin shook her head. "Kelsier doesn't deserve it."

"You don't mean that, Mistress," Sazed said calmly. "You're angry because of what happened. You hurt."

"Oh, I mean it," Vin said, feeling a tear on her cheek. "He doesn't deserve our belief. He never did."

"The skaa think differently—their legends about him are growing quickly. I shall have to return here soon and collect them."

Vin frowned. "You would gather stories about Kelsier?"

"Of course," Sazed said. "I collect all religions."

Vin snorted. "This is no religion we're talking about, Sazed. This is Kelsier."

"I disagree. He is certainly a religious figure to the skaa."

"But, we *knew* him," Vin said. "He was no prophet or god. He was just a man."

"So many of them are, I think," Sazed said quietly.

Vin just shook her head. They stood there for a moment, watching the night. "What of the others?" she finally asked.

"They are discussing what to do next," Sazed said. "I believe it has been decided that they will leave Luthadel separately and seek refuge in other towns."

"And . . . you?"

"I must travel north—to my homeland, to the place of the Keepers—so that I can share the knowledge that I possess. I must tell my brethren and sisters of the logbook—especially the words regarding our ancestor, the man named Rashek. There is much to learn in this story, I think."

He paused, then glanced at her. "This is not a journey I can take with another, Mistress. The places of the Keepers must remain secret, even from you."

*Of course,* Vin thought. *Of course he'd go too.*

"I will return," he promised.

*Sure you will. Just like all of the others have.*

The crew had made her feel needed for a time, but she'd always known it would end. It was time to go back to the streets. Time to be alone again.

"Mistress . . ." Sazed said slowly. "Do you hear that?"

She shrugged. But . . . there was something. Voices. Vin frowned, walking to the other side of the building. They grew louder, becoming easily distinct even without tin. She peered over the side of the rooftop.

A group of skaa men, perhaps ten in number, stood in the street below. *A thieving crew?* Vin wondered as Sazed joined her. The group's numbers were swelling as more skaa timidly left their dwellings.

"Come," said a skaa man who stood at the front of the group. "Fear not the mist! Didn't the Survivor name himself Lord of the Mists? Did he not say that we have nothing to fear from them? Indeed, they will protect us, give us safety. Give us power, even!"

As more and more skaa left their homes without obvious repercussion, the group began to swell even further.

"Go get the others," Vin said.

"Good idea," Sazed said, moving quickly to the ladder.

"Your friends, your children, your fathers, your mothers, wives, and lovers," the skaa man said, lighting a lantern and holding it up. "They lie dead in the street not a half hour from here. The Lord Ruler doesn't even have the decency to clean up his slaughter!"

The crowd began to mutter in agreement.

"Even when the cleaning occurs," the man said, "will it be the Lord Ruler's hands that dig the graves? No! It will be our hands. Lord Kelsier spoke of this."

"Lord Kelsier!" several men agreed. The group was getting large now, being joined by women and youths.

Clanking on the ladder announced Ham's arrival. He was joined shortly by Sazed, then Breeze, Dockson, Spook, and even Clubs.

"Lord Kelsier!" proclaimed the man below. Others lit torches, brightening the mists. "Lord Kelsier fought for us today! He slew an immortal Inquisitor!"

The crowd grumbled in assent.

"But then he died!" someone yelled.

Silence.

"And what did we do to help him?" the leader asked. "Many of us were there—thousands of us. Did we help? No! We waited and watched, even as he fought for us. We stood dumbly and let him fall. We watched him die!

"Or did we? What did the Survivor say—that the Lord Ruler could never really kill him? Kelsier is the Lord of the Mists! Is he not with us now?"

Vin turned to the others. Ham was watching carefully, but Breeze just shrugged. "The man's obviously insane. A religious nut."

"I tell you, friends!" screamed the man below. The crowd was still growing, more and more torches being lit. "I tell you the truth! *Lord Kelsier appeared to me this very night!* He said that he would always be with us. Will we let him down again?"

"No!" came the reply.

Breeze shook his head. "I didn't think they had it in them. Too bad it's such a small—"

"What's that?" Dox asked.

Vin turned, frowning. There was a pocket of light in the distance. Like . . . torches, lit in the mists. Another one appeared to the east, near a skaa slum. A third appeared. Then a fourth. In a matter of moments, it seemed like the entire city was glowing.

"You insane genius . . ." Dockson whispered.

"What?" Clubs asked, frowning.

"We missed it," Dox said. "The atium, the army, the nobility . . . that wasn't the job Kelsier was planning. *This* was his job! Our crew was never supposed to topple the Final Empire—we were too small. An entire city's population, however . . ."

"You're saying he did this on purpose?" Breeze asked.

"He always asked me the same question," Sazed said from behind. "He always asked what gave religions so much power. Each time, I answered him the same. . . ." Sazed looked at them, cocking his head. "I told him that it was because their believers had something they felt passionate about. Something . . . or someone."

"But, why not tell us?" Breeze asked.

"Because he knew," Dox said quietly. "He knew something we would never agree to. He knew that he would have to die."

Breeze shook his head. "I don't buy it. Why even bother with us, then? He could have done this on his own."

*Why even bother* . . . "Dox," Vin said, turning. "Where's that warehouse Kelsier rented, the one where he held his informant meetings?"

Dockson paused. "Not far away, actually. Two streets down. He said he wanted it to be near the bolt-lair. . . ."

"Show me!" Vin said, scrambling over the side of the building. The gathered skaa continued to yell, each cry louder than the one before. The entire street blazed with light, flickering torches turning the mist into a brilliant haze.

Dockson led her down the street, the rest of the crew trailing behind. The warehouse was a large, run-down structure squatting disconsolately in the slum's industrial section. Vin walked up to it, then flared pewter and smashed off the lock.

The door slowly swung open. Dockson held up a lantern, and its light revealed sparkling piles of metal. Weapons. Swords, axes, staves, and helmets glittered in the light—an incredible silvery hoard.

The crew stared at the room in wonder.

"*This* is the reason," Vin said quietly. "He needed the Renoux front to buy weapons in such numbers. He knew his rebellion would need these if they were going to succeed in taking the city."

"Why gather an army, then?" Ham said. "Was it just a front too?"

"I guess," Vin said.

"Wrong," a voice said, echoing through the cavernous warehouse. "There was so much more to it than that."

The crew jumped, and Vin flared her metals . . . until she recognized the voice. "Renoux?"

Dockson held his lantern higher. "Show yourself, creature."

A figure moved in the far back of the warehouse, staying to shadow. However, when it spoke, its voice was unmistakable. "He needed the army to provide a core of trained men for the rebellion. That part of his plan was . . . hampered by events. That was only one bit of why he needed you, however. The noble houses needed to fall to leave a void in the political structure. The Garrison needed to leave the town so that the skaa wouldn't be slaughtered."

"He planned this all from the start," Ham said with wonder. "Kelsier knew that the skaa wouldn't rise up. They'd been beaten down for so long, trained to think that the Lord Ruler owned both their bodies and their souls. He understood that they would never rebel . . . not unless he gave them a *new* god."

"Yes," Renoux said, stepping forward. The light glittered off his face, and Vin gasped in surprise.

"Kelsier!" she screamed.

Ham grabbed her shoulder. "Careful, child. It's not him."

The creature looked at her. It wore Kelsier's face, but the eyes . . .

they were different. The face didn't bear Kelsier's characteristic smile. It seemed hollow. Dead.

"I apologize," it said. "This was to be my part in the plan, and is the reason Kelsier originally contracted with me. I was to take his bones once he was dead, then appear to his followers to give them faith and strength."

"What are you?" Vin asked with horror.

Renoux-Kelsier looked at her, and then his face shimmered, becoming transparent. She could see his bones through the gelatinous skin. It reminded her of . . .

"*A mistwraith.*"

"A kandra," the creature said, its skin losing its transparency. "A mistwraith that has . . . grown up, you might say."

Vin turned away in revulsion, remembering the creatures she had seen in the mist. Scavengers, Kelsier had said . . . creatures that digested the bodies of the dead, stealing their skeletons and images. *The legends are even more true than I thought.*

"You were part of this plan too," the kandra said. "All of you. You ask why he needed a crew? He needed men of virtue, men who could learn to worry more for the people than for coin. He put you before armies and crowds, letting you practice leadership. He was using you . . . but he was also training you."

The creature looked to Dockson, Breeze, then Ham. "Bureaucrat, politician, general. For a new nation to be born, it will need men of your individual talents." The kandra nodded to a large sheet of paper affixed to a table a short distance away. "That is for you to follow. I have other business to be about."

It turned as if to leave, then paused beside Vin, turning toward her with its disturbingly Kelsier-like face. Yet, the creature itself wasn't like Renoux or Kelsier. It seemed passionless.

The kandra held up a small pouch. "He asked me to give you this." It dropped the pouch into her hand, then continued on, the crew giving it a wide berth as it left the warehouse.

Breeze started toward the table first, but Ham and Dockson beat him to it. Vin looked down at the bag. She was . . . afraid to see what it contained. She hurried forward, joining the crew.

The sheet was a map of the city, apparently copied from the one Marsh had sent. Written at the top were some words.

> My friends, you have a lot of work to do, and you must do it quickly. You must organize and distribute the weapons in this warehouse, then you must do the same in two others like it located in the other slums. There are horses in a side room for ease of travel.

> Once you distribute the weapons, you must secure the city gates and subdue the remaining members of the Garrison. Breeze, your team will do this—march on the Garrison first, so that you can take the gates in peace.
>
> There are four Great Houses that retain a strong military presence in the city. I have marked them on the map. Ham, your team will deal with these. We don't want an armed force other than our own inside the city.
>
> Dockson, remain behind while the initial strikes happen. More and more skaa will come to the warehouses once word gets out. Breeze and Ham's armies will include the troops we have trained, as well as augmentations—I hope—from the skaa gathering in the streets. You will need to make certain that the regular skaa get their weapons, so that Clubs can lead the assault on the palace itself.
>
> The Soothing stations should already be gone—Renoux delivered the proper order to our assassin teams before he came to get you to bring you here. If you have time, send some of Ham's Thugs to check out those stations. Breeze, your own Soothers will be needed amongst the skaa to encourage them to bravery.
>
> I think that's everything. It was a fun job, wasn't it? When you remember me, please remember that. Remember to smile. Now, move quickly.
>
> May you rule in wisdom.

The map had the city divided, with the various divisions labeled with various crewmembers' names. Vin noticed that she, along with Sazed, were left out. "I'll go back to that group we left by our house," Clubs said in a grumbling voice. "Bring them here to get weapons."

He began to hobble away. "Clubs?" Ham said, turning. "No offense, but . . . why did he include you as an army leader? What do you know of warfare?"

Clubs snorted, then lifted up his trouser leg, showing the long, twisting scar that ran up the side of his calf and thigh—obviously the source of his limp. "Where do you think I got this?" he said, then began to move away.

Ham turned back with wonder. "I don't believe this is happening."

Breeze shook his head. "And I assumed that *I* knew something about manipulating people. This . . . this is amazing. The economy is on the verge of collapsing, and the nobility that survive will soon be at open warfare on the countryside. Kell showed us how to kill Inquisitors—we'll just need to pull down the others and behead them. As for the Lord Ruler . . ."

Eyes turned on Vin. She looked down at the pouch in her hand, and pulled it open. A smaller sack, obviously filled with atium beads, fell into her hand. It was followed by a small bar of metal wrapped in a sheet of paper. The Eleventh Metal.

Vin unwrapped the paper.

*Vin,* it read. *Your original duty tonight was going to be to assassinate the high noblemen remaining in the city. But, well, you convinced me that maybe they should live.*

*I could never figure out how this blasted metal was supposed to work. It's* *safe to burn—it won't kill you—but it doesn't appear to do anything useful. If you're reading this, then I failed to figure out how to use it when I faced the Lord Ruler. I don't think it matters. The people needed something to believe in, and this was the only way to give it to them.*

*Please don't be angry at me for abandoning you. I was given an extension on life. I should have died in Mare's place years ago. I was ready for this.*

*The others will need you. You're their Mistborn now—you'll have to protect them in the months to come. The nobility will send assassins against our fledgling kingdom's rulers.*

*Farewell. I'll tell Mare about you. She always wanted a daughter.*

"What does it say, Vin?" Ham asked.

"It . . . says that he doesn't know how the Eleventh Metal works. He's sorry—he wasn't certain how to defeat the Lord Ruler."

"We've got an entire city full of people to fight him," Dox said. "I seriously doubt he can kill us all—if we can't destroy him, we'll just tie him up and toss him in a dungeon."

The others nodded.

"All right!" Dockson said. "Breeze and Ham, you need to get to those other warehouses and begin giving out weapons. Spook, go fetch the apprentices—we'll need them to run messages. Let's go!"

Everyone scattered. Soon, the skaa they had seen earlier burst into the warehouse, holding their torches high, looking in awe at the wealth of weaponry. Dockson worked efficiently, ordering some of the newcomers to be distributors, sending others to go gather their friends and family. Men began to gear up, gathering weapons. Everyone was busy except for Vin.

She looked up at Sazed, who smiled at her. "Sometimes we just have to wait long enough, Mistress," he said. "Then we find out why exactly it was that we kept believing. There is a saying that Master Kelsier was fond of."

"There's always another secret," Vin whispered. "But Saze, everyone has something to do except me. I was originally supposed to go assassinate noblemen, but Kell doesn't want me to do that anymore."

"They have to be neutralized," Sazed said, "but not necessarily murdered. Perhaps your place was simply to show Kelsier that fact?"

Vin shook her head. "No. I have to do more, Saze." She gripped the empty pouch, frustrated. Something crinkled inside of it.

She looked down, opening the pouch and noticing a piece of paper that she hadn't seen before. She pulled it out and unfolded it delicately. It was the drawing that Kelsier had shown her—the picture of a flower. Mare had always kept it with her, dreaming of a future where the sun wasn't red, where plants were green. . . .

Vin looked up.

*Bureaucrat, politician, soldier . . . there's something else that every kingdom needs.*

*A good assassin.*

She turned, pulling out a vial of metal and drinking its contents, using the liquid to wash down a couple beads of atium. She walked over to the pile of weapons, picking up a small bundle of arrows. They had stone heads. She began breaking the heads off, leaving about a half inch of wood attached to them, discarding the fletched shafts.

"Mistress?" Sazed asked with concern.

Vin walked past him, searching through the armaments. She found what she wanted in a shirtlike piece of armor, constructed from large rings of interlocking metal. She pried a handful of these free with a dagger and pewter-enhanced fingers.

"Mistress, what are you doing?"

Vin walked over to a trunk beside the table, within which she had seen a large collection of powdered metals. She filled her pouch with several handfuls of pewter dust.

"I'm worried about the Lord Ruler," she said, taking a file from the box and scraping off a few flakes of the Eleventh Metal. She paused—eyeing the unfamiliar, silvery metal—then swallowed the flakes with a gulp from her flask. She put a couple more flakes in one of her backup metal vials.

"Surely the rebellion can deal with him," Sazed said. "He is not so strong without all of his servants, I think."

"You're wrong," Vin said, rising and walking toward the door. "He's strong, Saze. Kelsier couldn't feel him, not like I can. He didn't know."

"Where are you going?" Sazed asked behind her.

Vin paused in the doorway, turning, mist curling around her. "Inside the palace complex, there is a chamber protected by soldiers and Inquisitors. Kelsier tried to get into it twice." She turned back toward the dark mists. "Tonight, I'm going to find out what's inside of it."

*I have decided that I am thankful for Rashek's hatred. It does me well to remember that there are those who abhor me. My place is not to seek popularity or love; my place is to ensure mankind's survival.*

# 36

VIN WALKED QUIETLY TOWARD KREDIK Shaw. The sky behind her burned, the mists reflecting and diffusing the light of a thousand torches. It was like a radiant dome over the city.

The light was yellow, the color Kelsier had always said the sun should be.

Four nervous guards waited at the same palace doorway that she and Kelsier had attacked before. They watched her approach. Vin stepped slowly, quietly, on the mist-wetted stones, her mistcloak rustling solemnly.

One of the guards lowered a spear at her, and Vin stopped right in front of him.

"I know you," she said quietly. "You endured the mills, the mines, and the forges. You knew that someday they would kill you, and leave your families to starve. So, you went to the Lord Ruler—guilty but determined—and joined his guards."

The four men glanced at each other, confused.

"The light behind me comes from a massive skaa rebellion," she said. "The entire city is rising up against the Lord Ruler. I don't blame you men for your choices, but a time of change is coming. Those rebels could use your training and your knowledge. Go to them—they gather in the Square of the Survivor."

"The . . . Square of the Survivor?" a soldier asked.

"The place where the Survivor of Hathsin was killed earlier today."

The four men exchanged looks, uncertain.

Vin Rioted their emotions slightly. "You don't have to live with the guilt anymore."

Finally, one of the men stepped forward and ripped the symbol off his uniform, then strode determinedly into the night. The other three paused, then followed—leaving Vin with an open entrance to the palace.

Vin walked down the corridor, eventually passing the same guard chamber as before. She strode inside—stepping past a group of chatting guards without hurting any of them—and entered the hallway beyond. Behind her, the guards shook off their surprise and called out in alarm. They burst into the corridor, but Vin jumped and Pushed against the lantern brackets, hurling herself down the hallway.

The men's voices grew distant; even running, they wouldn't be able to keep up with her. She reached the end of the corridor, then let herself drop lightly to the ground, enveloping cloak falling around her body. She continued her resolute, unhurried pace. There was no reason to run. They'd be waiting for her anyway.

She passed through the archway, stepping into the dome-roofed central chamber. Silver murals lined the walls, braziers burned in the corners, the floor was an ebony marble.

And two Inquisitors stood blocking her path.

Vin strode quietly through the room, approaching the building-within-a-building that was her goal.

"We search all this time," said an Inquisitor in his grinding voice. "And you come to us. A second time."

Vin stopped, standing about twenty feet in front of the pair. They loomed, each of them nearly two feet taller than she, smiling and confident.

Vin burned atium, then whipped her hands from beneath her cloak, tossing a double handful of arrowheads into the air. She flared steel, Pushing powerfully against the rings of metal wrapped loosely around the arrowheads' broken hafts. The missiles shot forward, ripping across the room. The lead Inquisitor chuckled, raising a hand and Pushing disdainfully against the missiles.

His Push ripped the unattached rings free from the hafts, shooting the bits of metal backward. The arrowheads themselves, however, continued forward—no longer Pushed from behind, but still carried by a deadly momentum.

The Inquisitor opened his mouth in surprise as two dozen arrowheads struck him. Several punched completely through his flesh, continuing on to snap against the stone wall behind him. Several others struck his companion in the legs.

The lead Inquisitor jerked, spasming as he collapsed. The other growled, staying on his feet, but wobbling a bit on the weakened leg. Vin dashed forward, flaring her pewter. The remaining Inquisitor moved to block her, but she reached inside her cloak and threw out a large handful of pewter dust.

The Inquisitor stopped, confused. To his “eyes” he would see nothing but a mess of blue lines—each one leading to a speck of metal. With so many sources of metal concentrated in one place, the lines would be virtually blinding.

The Inquisitor spun, angry, as Vin dashed past him. He Pushed against the dust, blowing it away, but as he did so, Vin whipped out a glass dagger and flipped it toward him. In the confusing mess of blue lines and atium shadows, he missed noticing the dagger, and it took him square in the thigh. He fell, cursing in a crackly voice.

*Good thing that worked,* Vin thought, leaping over the groaning body of the first Inquisitor. *Wasn’t sure about those eyes of theirs.*

She threw her weight against the door, flaring pewter and tossing up another handful of dust to keep the remaining Inquisitor from targeting any metals on her body. She didn’t turn back to fight the two further—not with the trouble one of the creatures had given Kelsier. Her goal this infiltration wasn’t to kill, but to gather information, then run.

Vin burst into the building-within-a-building, nearly tripping on a rug made from some exotic fur. She frowned, scanning the chamber urgently, searching for whatever the Lord Ruler hid inside of it.

*It has to be here,* she thought desperately. *The clue to defeating him—the way to win this battle.* She was counting on the Inquisitors being distracted by their wounds long enough for her to search out the Lord Ruler’s secret and escape.

The room had only one exit—the entrance she’d come through—and a hearth burned in the center of the chamber. The walls were decorated with odd trappings; furs hung from most places, the pelts dyed in strange patterns. There were a few old paintings, their colors faded, their canvases yellowed.

Vin searched quickly, urgently, looking for anything that could prove to be a weapon against the Lord Ruler. Unfortunately, she saw nothing useful; the room felt foreign, but unremarkable. In fact, it had a comfortable hominess, like a study or den. It was packed full of strange objects and decorations—like the horns of some foreign beast and a strange pair of shoes with very wide, flat bottoms. It was the room of a pack rat, a place to keep memories of the past.

She jumped as something moved near the center of the room. A pivoting chair stood by the hearth, and it spun slowly, revealing the wizened old man who sat in it. Bald, with liver-spotted skin, he appeared to be in his seventies. He wore rich, dark clothing, and he frowned angrily at Vin.

*That’s it,* Vin thought. *I’ve failed—there’s nothing here. Time to get out.*

Just as she was spinning to dash away, however, rough hands grabbed her from behind. She cursed, struggling as she glanced down at the Inquisitor's bloodied leg. Even with pewter, he shouldn't have been able to walk on it. She tried to twist away, but the Inquisitor had her in a powerful grasp.

"What is this?" the old man demanded, standing.

"I'm sorry, Lord Ruler," the Inquisitor said deferentially.

*Lord Ruler! But . . . I saw him. He was a* young *man.*

"Kill her," the old man said, waving his hand.

"My lord," the Inquisitor said. "This child is . . . of special interest. Might I keep her for a time?"

"What special interest?" the Lord Ruler said, sighing as he sat again.

"We wish to petition you, Lord Ruler," said the Inquisitor. "Regarding the Canton of Orthodoxy."

"This again?" the Lord Ruler said wearily.

"Please, my lord," said the Inquisitor. Vin continued to struggle, flaring her pewter. The Inquisitor pinned her arms to her sides, however, and her backward kicking did very little good. *He's so strong!* she thought with frustration.

And then, she remembered it. The Eleventh Metal, its power sitting within her, forming an unfamiliar reserve. She looked up, glaring at the old man. *This had better work.* She burned the Eleventh Metal.

Nothing happened.

Vin struggled in frustration, her heart sinking. And then she saw him. Another man, standing right beside the Lord Ruler. Where had he come from? She hadn't seen him enter.

He had a full beard and wore a thick, woolen outfit with a fur-lined cloak. It wasn't rich clothing, but it was well constructed. He stood quietly, seeming . . . content. He smiled happily.

Vin cocked her head. There was something familiar about the man. His features looked very similar to those of the man who had killed Kelsier. However, this man was older and . . . more alive.

Vin turned to the side. There was another unfamiliar man beside her, a young nobleman. He was a merchant, from the looks of his suit—and a very wealthy one at that.

*What is going on?*

The Eleventh Metal burned out. Both newcomers vanished like ghosts.

"Very well," said the elderly Lord Ruler, sighing. "I agree to your request. We will meet in several hours' time—Tevidian has already requested a gathering to discuss matters outside the palace."

"Ah," said the second Inquisitor. "Yes . . . it will be good for him to be there. Good indeed."

Vin continued to squirm as the Inquisitor pushed her to the ground, then lifted his hand, gripping something she couldn't see. He swung, and pain flashed through her head.

Despite her pewter, all went black.

Elend found his father in the north entryway—a smaller, less daunting entrance to Keep Venture, though only when compared with the majestic grand hall.

"What's going on?" Elend demanded, pulling on his suit coat, his hair disheveled from sleep. Lord Venture stood with his guard captains and canalmasters. Soldiers and servants scattered through the white-and-brown hallway, rushing about with an air of apprehensive fright.

Lord Venture ignored Elend's question, calling for a messenger to ride for the east river docks.

"Father, what's happening?" Elend repeated.

"Skaa rebellion," Lord Venture snapped.

*What?* Elend thought as Lord Venture waved for another group of soldiers to approach. *Impossible.* A skaa rebellion in Luthadel itself . . . it was unthinkable. They didn't have the disposition to try such a bold move, they were just . . .

*Valette is skaa,* he thought. *You have to stop thinking like other noblemen, Elend. You have to open your eyes.*

The Garrison was gone, off to slaughter a different group of rebels. The skaa had been forced to watch those gruesome executions weeks ago, not to mention the slaughter that had come this day. They had been stressed to the point of breaking.

*Temadre predicted this,* Elend realized. *So did half a dozen other political theorists. They said that the Final Empire couldn't last forever. God at its head or not, the people would someday rise up. . . . It's finally happening. I'm living through it!*

*And . . . I'm on the wrong side.*

"Why the canalmasters?" Elend asked.

"We're leaving the city," Lord Venture said tersely.

"Abandon the keep?" Elend asked. "Where's the honor in that?"

Lord Venture snorted. "This isn't about bravery, boy. It's about survival. Those skaa are attacking the main gates, slaughtering the remnants of the Garrison. I have no intention of waiting until they come for noble heads."

"But . . ."

Lord Venture shook his head. "We were leaving anyway. Something . . . happened at the Pits a few days ago. The Lord Ruler isn't going to be happy when he discovers it." He stepped back, waving over his lead narrowboat captain.

*Skaa rebellion,* Elend thought, still a little numb. *What was it that Temadre warned in his writings? That, when a real rebellion finally came, the skaa would slaughter wantonly . . . that every nobleman's life would be forfeit.*

*He predicted that the rebellion would die out quickly, but that it would leave piles of corpses in its wake. Thousands of deaths. Tens of thousands.*

"Well, boy?" Lord Venture demanded. "Go and organize your things."

"I'm not going," Elend surprised himself by saying.

Lord Venture frowned. "What?"

Elend looked up. "I'm not going, Father."

"Oh, you're going," Lord Venture said, eyeing Elend with one of his glares.

Elend looked into those eyes—eyes that were angry not because they cared for Elend's safety, but because Elend dared defy them. And, strangely, Elend didn't feel the least bit cowed. *Someone has to stop this. The rebellion could do some good, but only if the skaa don't insist on slaughtering their allies. And, that's what the nobility should be—their allies against the Lord Ruler. He's our enemy too.*

"Father, I'm serious," Elend said. "I'm going to stay."

"Bloody hell, boy! Must you insist on mocking me?"

"This isn't about balls or luncheons, father. It's about something more important."

Lord Venture paused. "No flippant comments? No buffoonery?"

Elend shook his head.

Suddenly, Lord Venture smiled. "Stay then, boy. That's a good idea. Someone should maintain our presence here while I go rally our forces. Yes . . . a very good idea."

Elend paused, frowning slightly at the smile in his father's eyes. *The atium—Father is setting me up to fall in his place! And . . . even if the Lord Ruler doesn't kill me, Father assumes I'll die in the rebellion. Either way, he's rid of me.*

*I'm really not very good at this, am I?*

Lord Venture laughed to himself, turning.

"At least leave me some soldiers," Elend said.

"You can have most of them," Lord Venture said. "It will be hard enough to get one boat out in this mess. Good luck, boy. Say hello to the Lord Ruler in my absence." He laughed again, moving toward his stallion, which was saddled and readied outside.

Elend stood in the hall, and suddenly he was the focus of attention. Nervous guards and servants, realizing that they'd been abandoned, turned to Elend with desperate eyes.

*I'm . . . in charge,* Elend thought with shock. *Now what?* Outside, he could see the mists flaring with the light of burning fires. Several of the guards were yelling about an approaching mob of skaa.

Elend walked to the open doorway, staring out into the chaos. The hall grew quiet behind him, terrified people realizing the extent of their danger.

Elend stood for a long moment. Then he spun. "Captain!" he said. "Gather your forces and the remaining servants—don't leave anyone behind—then march to Keep Lekal."

"Keep . . . Lekal, my lord?"

"It's more defensible," Elend said. "Plus, both of us have too few soldiers—separated, we'll be destroyed. Together, we might be able to stand. We'll offer our men to the Lekal in exchange for protecting our people."

"But . . . my lord," the soldier said. "The Lekal are your enemies."

Elend nodded. "Yes, but someone needs to make the first overture. Now, get moving!"

The man saluted, then rushed into motion.

"Oh, and Captain?" Elend said.

The soldier paused.

"Pick out five of your best soldiers to be my honor guard. I'll be leaving you in charge—those five and I have another mission."

"My lord?" the captain asked with confusion. "What mission?"

Elend turned back toward the mists. "We're going to go turn ourselves in."

Vin awoke to wetness. She coughed, then groaned, feeling a sharp pain in the back of her skull. She opened dizzy eyes—blinking away the water that had been thrown on her—and immediately burned pewter and tin, bringing herself completely awake.

A pair of rough hands hoisted her into the air. She coughed as the Inquisitor shoved something into her mouth.

“Swallow,” he ordered, twisting her arm.

Vin cried out, trying without success to resist the pain. Eventually, she gave in and swallowed the bit of metal.

“Now burn it,” the Inquisitor ordered, twisting harder.

Vin resisted nonetheless, sensing the unfamiliar metal reserve within her. The Inquisitor could be trying to get her to burn a useless metal, one that would make her sick—or, worse, kill her.

*But, there are easier ways to kill a captive,* she thought in agony. Her arm hurt so much that it felt like it would twist free. Finally, Vin relented, burning the metal.

Immediately, all of her other metal reserves vanished.

“Good,” the Inquisitor said, dropping her to the ground. The stones were wet, pooled with a bucketful of water. The Inquisitor turned, leaving the cell and slamming its barred door; then he disappeared through a doorway on the other side of the room.

Vin crawled to her knees, massaging her arm, trying to sort out what was going on. *My metals!* She searched desperately inside, but she found nothing. She couldn’t feel any metals, not even the one she had ingested moments before.

*What was it?* A twelfth metal? Perhaps Allomancy wasn’t as limited as Kelsier and the others had always assured her.

She took a few deep breaths, climbing to her knees, calming herself. There was something . . . Pushing against her. The Lord Ruler’s presence. She could feel it, though it wasn’t as powerful as it had been earlier, when he had killed Kelsier. Still, she didn’t have copper to burn—she had no way to hide from the Lord Ruler’s powerful, almost omnipotent, hand. She felt depression twisting her, telling her to just lie down, to give up. . . .

*No!* she thought. *I have to get out. I have to stay strong!*

She forced herself to stand and inspect her surroundings. Her prison was more like a cage than a cell. It had bars running along three of the four sides, and it contained no furniture—not even a sleeping mat. There were two other cell-cages in the room, one to either side of her.

She had been stripped, they had only left her with her undergarments. The move was probably to make certain that she didn’t have any hidden metals. She glanced around the room. It was long and thin, and had stark stone walls. A stool sat in one corner, but the room was otherwise empty.

*If I could find just a bit of metal* . . .

She began to search. Instinctively, she tried to burn iron, expecting the blue lines to appear—but, of course, she had no iron to burn. She shook her head at the foolish move, but it was simply a sign of how much she'd come to rely on her Allomancy. She felt . . . blinded. She couldn't burn tin to listen for voices. She couldn't burn pewter to strengthen her against the pain of her hurting arm and head. She couldn't burn bronze to search for nearby Allomancers.

Nothing. She had nothing.

*You functioned without Allomancy before,* she told herself sternly. *You can do it now.*

Even so, she searched the bare floor of her cell, hoping for the chance existence of a discarded pin or nail. She found nothing, so she turned her attention to the bars. However, she couldn't think of a way to get off even a flake of the iron.

*So much metal here,* she thought with frustration. *And I can't use any of it!*

She sat back on the ground, huddling up against the stone wall, shivering quietly in her damp clothing. It was still dark outside; the room's window casually allowed in a few trails of mist. What had happened with the rebellion? What about her friends? She thought that the mists outside looked a bit brighter than usual. Torchlight in the night? Without tin, her senses were too weak to tell.

*What was I thinking?* she thought with despair. *Did I presume to succeed where Kelsier had failed? He knew that the Eleventh Metal was useless.*

It had done something, true—but it certainly hadn't killed the Lord Ruler. She sat, thinking, trying to figure out what had happened. There had been an odd familiarity about the things the Eleventh Metal had shown her. Not because of the way the visions had appeared, but because of the way Vin had felt when burning the metal.

*Gold. The moment when I burned the Eleventh Metal felt like that time when Kelsier had me burn gold.*

Could it be that the Eleventh Metal wasn't really "eleventh" at all? Gold and atium had always seemed oddly paired to Vin. All of the other metals came in pairs that were similar—a base metal, then its alloy, each doing opposite things. Iron Pulled, steel Pushed. Zinc Pulled, brass Pushed. It made sense. All except for atium and gold.

What if the Eleventh Metal was really an alloy of atium or of gold? *It would mean . . . that gold and atium* aren't *paired. They do two different things. Similar, but different. They're like . . .*

Like the other metals, which were grouped into larger bases of four. There were the physical metals: iron, steel, tin, and pewter. The mental metals: bronze, copper, zinc, and brass. And . . . there were the time-affecting metals: gold and its alloy, and atium and its alloy.

*That means there's another metal. One that hasn't been discovered—probably because atium and gold are too valuable to forge into different alloys.*

But, what good was the knowledge? Her "Eleventh Metal" was probably just a paired opposite of gold—the metal Kelsier had told her was the most useless of them all. Gold had shown Vin herself—or, at least, a different version of her that had felt real enough to touch. But, it had simply been a vision of what she could have become, had the past been different.

The Eleventh Metal had done something similar: Instead of showing Vin's own past, it had shown her similar images from other people. And that told her . . . nothing. What difference did it make what the Lord Ruler *could* have been? It was the current man, the tyrant that ruled the Final Empire, that she had to defeat.

A figure appeared in the doorway—an Inquisitor dressed in a black robe, the hood up. His face was shadowed, but his spike-heads jutted from the front of the cowl.

"It is time," he said. Another Inquisitor waited in the doorway as the first creature pulled out a set of keys and moved to open Vin's door.

Vin tensed. The door clicked, and she sprang to her feet, scrambling forward.

*Have I always been this slow without pewter?* she thought with horror. The Inquisitor snatched her arm as she passed, his motions unconcerned, almost casual—and she could see why. His hands moved supernaturally quickly, making her seem even more sluggish by comparison.

The Inquisitor pulled her up, twisting her and easily holding her. He smiled with an evil grin, his face pocked with scars. Scars that looked like . . .

*Arrowhead wounds,* she thought with shock. *But . . . healed already? How can it be?*

She struggled, but her weak, pewterless body was no match for the Inquisitor's strength. The creature carried her toward the doorway, and the second Inquisitor stepped back, regarding her with spikes that peeked out from beneath its cowl. Though the Inquisitor who carried her was smiling, this second one had a flat line of a mouth.

Vin spat at the second Inquisitor as she passed, her spittle smacking it right on one of its spike-heads. Her captor carried her out of the chamber and through a narrow hallway. She cried out for help, knowing that her screams—in the middle of Kredik Shaw itself—would be useless. At least she succeeded in annoying the Inquisitor, for he twisted her arm.

“Quiet,” he said as she grunted in pain.

Vin fell silent, instead focusing on their location. They were probably in one of the lower sections of the palace; the hallways were too long to be in a tower or spire. The decorations were lavish, but the rooms looked . . . unused. The carpets were pristine, the furniture unmarked by scuff or scratch. She had the feeling that the murals were rarely seen, even by those who often passed through the chambers.

Eventually, the Inquisitors entered a stairwell and began to climb. *One of the spires,* she thought.

With each climbing step, Vin could feel the Lord Ruler getting closer. His mere presence dampened her emotions, stealing her willpower, making her numb to everything but lonely depression. She sagged in the Inquisitor’s grip, no longer struggling. It took all of her energy to simply resist the Lord Ruler’s pressure on her soul.

After a short time in the tunnel-like stairwell, the Inquisitors carried her out into a large, circular room. And, despite the power of the Lord Ruler’s Soothing, despite her visits to noble keeps, Vin took just a brief moment to stare at her surroundings. They were majestic like none she’d ever seen.

The room was shaped like a massive, stocky cylinder. The wall—there was only one, running in a wide circle—was made entirely of glass. Lit by fires from behind, the room glowed with spectral light. The glass was colored, though it didn’t depict any specific scene. Instead, it seemed crafted from a single sheet, the colors blown and melded together in long, thin trails. Like . . .

*Like mist,* she thought with wonder. *Colorful streams of mist, running in a circle around the entire room.*

The Lord Ruler sat in an elevated throne in the very center of the room. He wasn’t the old Lord Ruler—this was the younger version, the handsome man who had killed Kelsier.

*Some kind of impostor? No, I can feel him—just as I could feel the one before. They’re the same man. Can he change how he looks, then? Appearing young when he wishes to put forth a pretty face?*

A small group of gray-robed, eye-tattooed obligators stood conversing on the far side of the room. Seven Inquisitors stood waiting, like a row of shadows with iron eyes. That made nine of them in all, counting the two that had escorted Vin. Her scar-faced captor delivered her to one of the others, who held her with a similarly inescapable grip.

“Let us be on with this,” said the Lord Ruler.

A regular obligator stepped forward, bowing. With a chill, she realized that she recognized him.

*Lord Prelan Tevidian,* she thought, eyeing the thin balding man. *My . . . father.*

“My lord,” Tevidian said, “forgive me, but I do not understand. We have already discussed this matter!”

“The Inquisitors say they have more to add,” the Lord Ruler said in a tired voice.

Tevidian eyed Vin, frowning in confusion. *He doesn’t know who I am,* she thought. *He never knew he was a father.*

“My lord,” Tevidian said, turning away from her. “Look outside your window! Do we not have better things to discuss? The entire *city* is in rebellion! Skaa torches light up the night, and they dare go out into the mists. They blaspheme in riots, attacking the keeps of the nobility!”

“Let them,” the Lord Ruler said in an uncaring voice. He seemed so . . . worn. He sat strongly on his throne, but there was still a weariness to his posture and his voice.

“But my lord!” Tevidian said. “The Great Houses are falling!”

The Lord Ruler waved a dismissive hand. “It is good for them to get purged every century or so. It fosters instability, keeps the aristocracy from growing too confident. Usually, I let them kill each other in one of their foolish wars, but these riots will work.”

“And . . . if the skaa come to the palace?”

“Then I will deal with them,” the Lord Ruler said softly. “You will not question this further.”

“Yes, my lord,” Tevidian said, bowing and backing away.

“Now,” the Lord Ruler said, turning to the Inquisitors. “What is it you wished to present?”

The scarred Inquisitor stepped forward. “Lord Ruler, we wish to petition that leadership of your Ministry be taken from these . . . men and granted to the Inquisitors instead.”

“We have discussed this,” the Lord Ruler said. “You and your brothers are needed for more important tasks. You are too valuable to waste on simple administration.”

“But,” the Inquisitor said, “by allowing common men to rule your Ministry, you have unwittingly allowed corruption and vice to enter the very heart of your holy palace!”

“Idle claims!” Tevidian spat. “You say such things often, Kar, but you never offer any proof.”

Kar turned slowly, his eerie smile lit by the twisting, colored windowlight. Vin shivered. That smile was nearly as unsettling as the Lord Ruler's Soothing.

"Proof?" Kar asked. "Why, tell me, *Lord Prelan*. Do you recognize that girl?"

"Bah, of course not!" Tevidian said with a wave of his hand. "What does a skaa girl have to do with the government of the Ministry?"

"Everything," Kar said, turning to Vin. "Oh, yes . . . everything. Tell the Lord Ruler who your father is, child."

Vin tried to squirm, but the Lord Ruler's Allomancy was so oppressive, the Inquisitor's hands were so strong. "I don't know," she managed to say through gritted teeth.

The Lord Ruler perked up slightly, turning toward her, leaning forward.

"You cannot lie to the Lord Ruler, child," Kar said in a quiet, rasping voice. "He has lived for centuries, and has learned to use Allomancy like no mortal man. He can see things in the way your heart beats, and can read your emotions in your eyes. He can sense the moment when you lie. He knows . . . oh, yes. He knows."

"I never knew my father," Vin said stubbornly. If the Inquisitor wanted to know something, then keeping it a secret seemed like a good idea. "I'm just a street urchin."

"A Mistborn street urchin?" Kar asked. "Why, that's interesting. Isn't it, Tevidian?"

The lord prelan paused, his frown deepening. The Lord Ruler stood slowly, walking down the steps of his dais toward Vin.

"Yes, my lord," Kar said. "You felt her Allomancy earlier. You know that she is a full Mistborn—an amazingly powerful one. Yet, she claims to have grown up on the street. What noble house would have abandoned such a child? Why, for her to have such strength, she must be of an extremely pure line. At least . . . *one* of her parents must have been from a very pure line."

"What are you implying?" Tevidian demanded, paling.

The Lord Ruler ignored them both. He strode through the streaming colors of the reflective floor, then stopped right in front of Vin.

*So close,* she thought. His Soothing was so strong that she couldn't even feel terror—all she felt was the deep, overpowering, *horrible* sorrow.

The Lord Ruler reached out with delicate hands, taking her by the cheeks, tilting her face up to look into his eyes. "Who is your father, girl?" he asked quietly.

"I . . ." Despair twisted inside of her. Grief, pain, a desire to die.

The Lord Ruler held her face close to his own, looking into her eyes. In that moment, she knew the truth. She could see a piece of him; she could sense his power. His . . . godlike power.

He wasn't worried about the skaa rebellion. Why would he have to worry? If he wished, he could slaughter every person in the city by himself. Vin knew it to be the truth. It might take him time, but he could kill forever, tirelessly. He need fear no rebellion.

He'd never needed to. Kelsier had made a terrible, terrible mistake.

"Your father, child," the Lord Ruler prompted, his demand like a physical weight upon her soul.

Vin spoke despite herself. "My . . . brother told me that my father was that man over there. The lord prelan." Tears rolled down her cheeks, though when the Lord Ruler turned from her, she couldn't quite remember why she had been crying.

"It's a lie, my lord!" Tevidian said, backing away. "What does she know? She's just a silly child."

"Tell me truthfully, Tevidian," the Lord Ruler said, walking slowly toward the obligator. "Have you ever bedded a skaa woman?"

The obligator paused. "I followed the law! Each time, I had them slain afterward."

"You . . . lie," the Lord Ruler said, as if surprised. "You're uncertain."

Tevidian was visibly shaking. "I . . . I think I got them all, my lord. There . . . there was one I may have been too lax with. I didn't know she was skaa at first. The soldier I sent to kill her was too lenient, and he let her go. But I found her, eventually."

"Tell me," the Lord Ruler said. "Did this woman bear any children?"

The room fell silent.

"Yes, my lord," the high prelan said.

The Lord Ruler closed his eyes, sighing. He turned back toward his throne. "He is yours," he said to the Inquisitors.

Immediately, six Inquisitors dashed across the room, howling in joy, pulling obsidian knives from sheaths beneath their robes. Tevidian raised his arms, crying out as the Inquisitors fell on him, exulting in their brutality. Blood flew as they plunged their daggers over and over again into the dying man. The other obligators backed away, looking on in horror.

Kar remained behind, smiling as he watched the massacre, as did the Inquisitor who was Vin's captor. One other Inquisitor remained back as well, though Vin didn't know why.

“Your point is proven, Kar,” the Lord Ruler said, sitting wearily on his throne. “It seems that I have trusted too much in the . . . obedience of mankind. I did not make a mistake. I have never made a mistake. However, it is time for a change. Gather the high prelans and bring them here—rouse them from their beds, if need be. They will witness as I grant the Canton of Inquisition command and authority over the Ministry.”

Kar’s smile deepened.

“The half-breed child will be destroyed.”

“Of course, my lord,” Kar said. “Though . . . there are some questions I wish to ask her first. She was part of a team of skaa Mistings. If she can help us locate the others . . .”

“Very well,” the Lord Ruler said. “That is your duty, after all.”

*Is there anything more beautiful than the sun? I often watch it rise, for my restless sleep usually awakens me before dawn.*

*Each time I see its calm yellow light peeking above the horizon, I grow a little more determined, a little more hopeful. In a way, it is the thing that has kept me going all this time.*

# 37

*KELSIER, YOU CURSED LUNATIC,* Dockson thought, scribbling notes on the table map, *why do you always just saunter away, leaving me to handle your messes?* However, he knew his frustration wasn't real—it was simply a way of keeping himself from focusing on Kell's death. It worked.

Kelsier's part in the plan—the vision, the charismatic leadership—was finished. Now it was Dockson's turn. He took Kelsier's original strategy and modified it. He was careful to keep the chaos at a manageable level, rationing the best equipment to the men who seemed the most stable. He sent contingents to capture points of interest—food and water deposits—before general rioting could steal them.

In short, he did what he always did: He made Kelsier's dreams become reality.

A disturbance came from the front of the room, and Dockson looked up as a messenger rushed in. The man immediately sought out Dockson at the center of the warehouse.

"What news?" Dockson asked as the man approached.

The messenger shook his head. He was a young man, in an imperial uniform, though he had removed the jacket to make himself look less obtrusive. "I'm sorry, sir," the man said quietly. "None of the guards have seen her come out, and . . . well, one claimed he saw her being carried toward the palace dungeons."

"Can you get her out?" Dockson asked.

The soldier—Goradel—paled. Until just a short time before, Goradel had been one of the Lord Ruler's own men. In truth, Dockson wasn't even certain how much he trusted the man. Yet, the soldier—as a former palace guardsman—could get into places that other skaa could not. His former allies didn't know he'd switched sides.

*Assuming he really has switched sides,* Dockson thought. But . . . well, things were moving too quickly now for self-doubt. Dockson had decided to use this man. He'd have to trust his initial instincts.

"Well?" Dockson repeated.

Goradel shook his head. "There was an *Inquisitor* holding her captive, sir. I couldn't free her—I wouldn't have the authority. I don't . . . I . . ."

Dockson sighed. *Damn fool girl!* he thought. *She should have had better sense than this. Kelsier must have rubbed off on her.*

He waved the soldier away, then looked up as Hammond walked in, a large sword with a broken hilt resting on his shoulder.

"It's done," Ham said. "Keep Elariel just fell. Looks like Lekal is still holding, however."

Dockson nodded. "We'll need your men at the palace soon." *The sooner we break in there, the better chance we have of saving Vin.* However, his instincts told him that they'd be too late to help her. The main forces would take hours to gather and organize; he wanted to attack the palace with all of their armies in tandem. The truth was he just couldn't afford to spare men on a rescue operation at the moment. Kelsier would probably have gone after her, but Dockson wouldn't let himself do something that brash.

As he always said—*someone* on the crew needed to be realistic. The palace was not a place to attack without substantial preparation; Vin's failure proved that much. She'd just have to look after herself for the moment.

"I'll get my men ready," Ham said, nodding as he tossed his sword aside. "I'm going to need a new sword, though."

Dockson sighed. "You Thugs. Always breaking things. Go see what you can find, then."

Ham moved off.

"If you see Sazed," Dockson called, "tell him that . . ."

Dockson paused, his attention drawn by a group of skaa rebels who marched into the room, pulling a bound prisoner with a cloth sack on his head.

"What is this?" Dockson demanded.

One of the rebels elbowed his captive. "I think he's someone important, m'lord. Came to us unarmed, asked to be brought to you. Promised us gold if we did it."

Dockson raised an eyebrow. The grunt pulled off the hood, revealing Elend Venture.

Dockson blinked in surprise. "You?"

Elend looked around. He was apprehensive, obviously, but held himself well, all things considered. "Have we met?"

"Not exactly," Dockson said. *Blast. I don't have time for captives right now.* Still, the son of the Ventures . . . Dockson was going to need leverage with the powerful nobility when the fighting was over.

"I've come to offer you a truce," Elend Venture said.

" . . . excuse me?" Dockson asked.

"House Venture will not resist you," Elend said. "And I can probably talk the rest of the nobility into listening as well. They're frightened—there's no need to slaughter them."

Dockson snorted. "I can't exactly leave hostile armed forces in the city."

"If you destroy the nobility, you won't be able to hold on for very long," Elend said. "We control the economy—the empire will collapse without us."

"That is kind of the point of this all," Dockson said. "Look, I don't have time—"

"You *must* hear me out," Elend Venture said desperately. "If you start your rebellion with chaos and bloodshed, you'll lose it. I've studied these things; I know what I'm talking about! When the momentum of your initial conflict runs out, the people will start looking for other things to destroy. They'll turn on themselves. *You must keep control of your armies.*"

Dockson paused. Elend Venture was supposed to be a fool and a fop, but now he just seemed . . . earnest.

"I'll help you," Elend said. "Leave the noblemen's keeps alone and focus your efforts on the Ministry and the Lord Ruler—they're your real enemies."

"Look," Dockson said, "I'll pull our armies away from Keep Venture. There's probably no need to fight them now that—"

"I sent my soldiers to Keep Lekal," Elend said. "Pull your men away from *all* the nobility. They're not going to attack your flanks—they'll just hole up in their mansions and worry."

*He's probably right about that.* "We'll consider . . ." Dockson trailed off, noticing that Elend wasn't paying attention to him anymore. *Blasted hard man to have a conversation with.*

Elend was staring at Hammond, who had returned with a new sword. Elend frowned, then his eyes opened wide. "I know you! You were the one who rescued Lord Renoux's servants from the executions!"

Elend turned back to Dockson, suddenly eager. "Do you know

Valette, then? She'll tell you to listen to me."

Dockson shared a look with Ham.

"What?" Elend asked.

"Vin . . ." Dockson said. "Valette . . . she went into the palace a few hours back. I'm sorry, lad. She's probably in the Lord Ruler's dungeons right now—assuming she's even still alive."

Kar tossed Vin back into her cell. She hit the ground hard and rolled, her loose undershirt twisting around her, her head knocking against the cell's back wall.

The Inquisitor smiled, slamming the door. "Thank you very much," he said through the bars. "You just helped us achieve something that has been a long time in coming."

Vin glared up at him, the effects of the Lord Ruler's Soothing weaker now.

"It is unfortunate that Bendal isn't here," Kar said. "He chased your brother for years, swearing that Tevidian had fathered a skaa half-breed. Poor Bendal . . . If only the Lord Ruler had left the Survivor to us, so that we could have had revenge."

He looked over at her, shaking his spike-eyed head. "Ah, well. He was vindicated in the end. The rest of us believed your brother, but Bendal . . . even then he wasn't convinced—and he found you in the end."

"My brother?" Vin said, scrambling to her feet. "He sold me out?"

"Sold you out?" Kar said. "He died promising us that you had starved to death years ago! He screamed it night and day beneath the hands of Ministry torturers. It is very hard to hold out against the pains of an Inquisitor's torture . . . something you shall soon discover." He smiled. "But, first, let me show you something."

A group of guards dragged a naked, bound figure into the room. Bruised and bleeding, the man stumbled to the stone floor as they pushed him into the cell beside Vin's.

"*Sazed?*" Vin cried, rushing to the bars.

The Terrisman lay groggily as the soldiers tied his hands and feet to a small metal ring set into the stone floor. He had been beaten so severely that he barely seemed conscious, and he was completely naked. Vin turned away from his nudity, but not before she saw the place between his legs—a simple, empty scar where his manhood should have been.

*All Terrisman stewards are eunuchs,* he had told her. That wound wasn't new—but the bruises, cuts, and scrapes were fresh.

“We found him sneaking into the palace after you,” Kar said. “Apparently, he feared for your safety.”

“What have you done to him?” she asked quietly.

“Oh, very little . . . so far,” Kar said. “Now, you may wonder why I spoke to you of your brother. Perhaps you think me a fool for admitting that your brother’s mind snapped before we drew out his secret. But, you see, I am not so much a fool that I will not admit a mistake. We should have drawn out your brother’s torture . . . made him suffer longer. That was an error indeed.”

He smiled wickedly, nodding to Sazed. “We won’t make that mistake again, child. No—this time, we’re going to try a different tactic. We’re going to let you watch us torture the Terrisman. We’re going to be very careful, making certain his pain is lasting, and quite vibrant. When you tell us what we want to know, we’ll stop.”

Vin shivered in horror. “No . . . please . . .”

“Oh, yes,” Kar said. “Why don’t you take some time to think about what we’re going to do to him? The Lord Ruler has commanded my presence—I need to go and receive formal leadership of the Ministry. We’ll begin when I return.”

He turned, black robe sweeping the ground. The guards followed, likely taking positions in the guard chamber just outside the room.

“Oh, Sazed,” Vin said, sinking to her knees beside the bars of her cage.

“Now, Mistress,” Sazed said in a surprisingly lucid voice. “What did we tell you about running around in your undergarments? Why, if Master Dockson were here, he would scold you for certain.”

Vin looked up, shocked. Sazed was smiling at her.

“Sazed!” she said quietly, glancing in the direction the guards had gone. “You’re awake?”

“Very awake,” he said. His calm, strong voice was a stark contrast to his bruised body.

“I’m sorry, Sazed,” she said. “Why did you follow me? You should have stayed back and let me be stupid on my own!”

He turned a bruised head toward her, one eye swollen, but the other looking into her eyes. “Mistress,” he said solemnly, “I vowed to Master Kelsier that I would see to your safety. The oath of a Terrisman is not something given lightly.”

“But . . . you should have known you’d be captured,” she said, looking down in shame.

“Of course I knew, Mistress,” he said. “Why, how else was I going to get them to bring me to you?”

Vin looked up. “Bring you . . . to me?”

“Yes, Mistress. There is one thing that the Ministry and my own people have in common, I think. They both underestimate the things that we can accomplish.”

He closed his eyes. And then, his body changed. It seemed to . . . deflate, the muscles growing weak and scrawny, the flesh hanging loosely on his bones.

“Sazed!” Vin cried out, pushing herself against the bars, trying to reach him.

“It is all right, Mistress,” he said in a faint, frighteningly weak voice. “I just need a moment to . . . gather my strength.”

*Gather my strength.* Vin paused, lowering her hand, watching Sazed for a few minutes. *Could it be* . . .

He looked so weak—as if his strength, his very muscles, were being drawn away. And perhaps . . . stored somewhere?

Sazed’s eyes snapped open. His body returned to normal; then his muscles continued to grow, becoming large and powerful, growing bigger, even, than Ham’s.

Sazed smiled at her from a head sitting atop a beefy, muscular neck; then he easily snapped his bindings. He stood, a massive, inhumanly muscular man—so different from the lanky, quiet scholar she had known.

*The Lord Ruler spoke of their strength in his logbook,* she thought with wonder. *He said the man Rashek lifted a boulder by himself and threw it out of their way.*

“But, they took all of your jewelry!” Vin said. “Where did you hide the metal?”

Sazed smiled, grabbing the bars separating their cages. “I took a hint from you, Mistress. I swallowed it.” With that, he ripped the bars free.

She ran into the cage, embracing him. “Thank you.”

“Of course,” he said, gently pushing her aside, then slamming a massive palm against the door to his cell, breaking the lock, sending the door crashing open.

“Quickly now, Mistress,” Sazed said. “We must get you to safety.”

The two guards who had thrown Sazed into the chamber appeared in the doorway a second later. They froze, staring up at the massive beast who stood in place of the weak man they had beaten.

Sazed jumped forward, holding one of the bars from Vin’s cage. His Feruchemy, however, had obviously given him strength only, no speed. He stepped with a lumbering gait, and the guards dashed away, crying for help.

“Come now, Mistress,” Sazed said, tossing aside the bar. “My strength will not last long—the metal I swallowed wasn’t large enough to hold much of a Feruchemical charge.”

Even as he spoke, he began to shrink. Vin moved past him, scrambling out of the room. The guard chamber beyond was quite small, set with only a pair of chairs. Beneath one, however, she found a cloak rolled around one of the guards’ evening meals. Vin shook the cloak free, tossing it to Sazed.

“Thank you, Mistress,” he said.

She nodded, moving to the doorway and peeking out. The larger room outside was empty, and had two hallways leading off of it—one going right, one extending into the distance across from her. The wall to her left was lined with wooden trunks, and the center of the room held a large table. Vin shivered as she saw the dried blood and the set of sharp instruments lying in a row on the table’s side. *This is where we’ll both end up if we don’t move quickly,* she thought, waving Sazed forward.

She froze mid-step as a group of soldiers appeared in the far hallway, led by one of the guards from before. Vin cursed quietly—she would have heard them earlier if she’d had tin.

Vin glanced backward. Sazed was hobbling through the guard chamber. His Feruchemical strength was gone, and the soldiers had obviously beaten him soundly before tossing him into the cell. He could barely walk.

“Go, Mistress!” he said, waving her forward. “Run!”

*You still have some things to learn about friendship, Vin,* Kelsier’s voice whispered in her mind. *I hope someday you realize what they are. . . .*

*I can’t leave him. I won’t.*

Vin dashed toward the soldiers. She swiped a pair of torturing knives from the table, their bright, polished steel glistening between her fingers. She jumped atop the table, then leapt off of it toward the oncoming soldiers.

She had no Allomancy, but she flew true anyway, her months of practice helping despite her lack of metals. She slammed a knife into a surprised soldier’s neck as she fell. She hit the ground harder than she had expected, but managed to scramble away from a second soldier, who cursed and swung at her.

The sword clanged against the stone behind her. Vin spun, slashing another soldier across the thighs. He stumbled back in pain.

*Too many,* she thought. There were at least two dozen of them. She tried to jump for a third soldier, but another man swung his quarterstaff, slamming the weapon into Vin's side.

She grunted in pain, dropping her knife as she was thrown to the side. No pewter strengthened her against the fall, and she hit the hard stones with a crack, rolling to a dazed stop beside the wall.

She struggled, unsuccessfully, to rise. To her side, she could barely make out Sazed collapsing as his body grew suddenly weak. He was trying to store up strength again. He wouldn't have enough time. The soldiers would be on him soon.

*At least I tried,* she thought as she heard another group of soldiers charging down the rightmost hallway. *At least I didn't abandon him. I think . . . think that's what Kelsier meant.*

"Valette!" a familiar voice cried.

Vin looked up with shock as Elend and six soldiers burst into the room. Elend wore a nobleman's suit, a little ill-fitting, and carried a dueling cane.

"Elend?" Vin asked, dumbfounded.

"Are you all right?" he said with concern, stepping toward her. Then he noticed the Ministry soldiers. They seemed a bit confused to be confronted by a nobleman, but they still had superior numbers.

"I'm taking the girl with me!" Elend said. His words were brave, but he was obviously no soldier. He carried only a nobleman's dueling cane as a weapon, and he wore no armor. Five of the men with him wore Venture red—men from Elend's keep. One, however—the one who had been leading them as they charged into the room—wore a palace guard's uniform. Vin realized that she recognized him just vaguely. His uniform jacket was missing the symbol on its shoulder. *The man from before,* she thought, stupefied. *The one I convinced to change sides . . .*

The lead Ministry soldier apparently made his decision. He waved curtly, ignoring Elend's command, and the soldiers began to edge around the room, moving to surround Elend's band.

"Valette, you have to go!" Elend said urgently, raising his dueling cane.

"Come, Mistress," Sazed said, reaching her side, moving to lift her to her feet.

"We can't abandon them!" Vin said.

"We have to."

"But you came for me. We have to do the same for Elend!"

Sazed shook his head. "That was different, child. I knew I had a chance to save you. You cannot help here—there is beauty in compassion, but one must learn wisdom too."

She allowed herself to be pulled to her feet, Elend's soldiers obediently moving to block off the Ministry soldiers. Elend stood at their front, obviously determined to fight.

*There has to be another way!* Vin thought with despair. *There has to . . .*

And then she saw it sitting discarded in one of the trunks along the wall. A familiar strip of gray cloth, one single tassel, hanging over the trunk's side.

She pulled free of Sazed as the Ministry soldiers attacked. Elend cried out behind her, and weapons rang.

Vin threw the top pieces of cloth—her trousers and shirt—out of the trunk. And there, at the bottom, lay her mistcloak. She closed her eyes and reached into the side cloak pocket.

Her fingers found a single glass vial, cork still in place.

She pulled the vial out, spinning toward the battle. The Ministry soldiers had retreated slightly. Two of their members lay wounded on the floor—but three of Elend's men were down. The small size of the room had, fortunately, kept Elend's men from being surrounded at first.

Elend stood sweating, a cut in his arm, his dueling cane cracked and splintered. He grabbed the sword from the man he had felled, holding the weapon in unpracticed hands, staring down a much larger force.

"I was wrong about that one, Mistress," Sazed said softly. "I . . . apologize."

Vin smiled. Then she flipped the cork free from her vial and downed the metals in one gulp.

Wells of power exploded within her. Fires blazed, metals raging, and strength returned to her weakened, tired body like a dawning sun. Pains became trivial, dizziness disappeared, the room became brighter, the stones more *real* beneath her toes.

The soldiers attacked again, and Elend raised his sword in a determined, but unhopeful, posture. He seemed utterly shocked when Vin flew through the air over his head.

She landed amid the soldiers, blasting outward with a Steelpush. The soldiers on either side of her smashed into the walls. One man swung a quarterstaff at her, and she slapped it away with a disdainful hand, then smashed a fist into his face, spinning his head back with a crack.

She caught the quarterstaff as it fell, spinning, slamming it into the head of the soldier attacking Elend. The staff exploded, and she let it drop with the corpse. The soldiers at the back began to yell, turning and dashing away as she Pushed two more groups of men into the walls. The final soldier left in the room turned, surprised, as Vin Pulled his metal cap to her hands. She Pushed it back at him, smashing it into his chest and anchoring herself from behind. The soldier flew down the hallway toward his fleeing companions, crashing into them.

Vin breathed out in excitement, standing with tense muscles amidst the groaning men. *I can . . . see how Kelsier would get addicted to this.*

"Valette?" Elend asked, stupefied.

Vin jumped up, grabbing him in a joyful embrace, hanging onto him tightly and burying her face into his shoulder. "You came back," she whispered. "You came back, you came back, you came back. . . ."

"Um, yes. And . . . I see that you're a Mistborn. That's rather interesting. You know, it's generally common courtesy to tell one's friends about things like that."

"Sorry," she mumbled, still holding on to him.

"Well, yes," he said, sounding very distracted. "Um, Valette? What happened to your clothes?"

"They're on the floor over there," she said, looking up at him. "Elend, how did you find me?"

"Your friend, one Master Dockson, told me that you'd been captured in the palace. And well, this fine gentleman here—Captain Goradel, I believe his name is—happens to be a palace soldier, and he knew the way here. With his help—and as a nobleman of some rank—I was able to get into the building without much problem, and then we heard screaming down this hallway. . . . And, um, yes. Valette? Do you think you could go put your clothes on? This is . . . kind of distracting."

She smiled up at him. "You found me."

"For all the good it did," he said wryly. "It doesn't look like you needed our help very much. . . ."

"That doesn't matter," she said. "You came back. No one's ever come back before."

Elend looked down at her, frowning slightly.

Sazed approached, carrying Vin's clothing and cloak. "Mistress, we need to leave."

Elend nodded. "It's not safe anywhere in the city. The skaa are rebelling!" He paused, looking at her. "But, uh, you probably already know that."

Vin nodded, finally letting go of him. "I helped start it. But, you're right about the danger. Go with Sazed—he's known by many of the rebel leaders. They won't hurt you as long as he vouches for you."

Elend and Sazed both frowned as Vin pulled on her trousers. In the pocket, she found her mother's earring. She put it back on.

"Go with Sazed?" Elend asked. "But, what about you?"

Vin pulled on her loose overshirt. Then she glanced upward . . . sensing through the stone, feeling *him* up above. He was there. Too powerful. Now, having faced him directly, she was certain of his strength. The skaa rebellion was doomed as long as he lived.

"I have another task, Elend," she said, taking the mistcloak from Sazed.

"You think you can defeat him, Mistress?" Sazed said.

"I have to try," she said. "The Eleventh Metal worked, Saze. I saw . . . something. Kelsier was convinced it would provide the secret."

"But . . . the Lord Ruler, Mistress . . ."

"Kelsier died to start this rebellion," Vin said firmly. "I have to see that it succeeds. This is *my* part, Sazed. Kelsier didn't know what it was, but I do. I have to stop the Lord Ruler."

"The Lord Ruler?" Elend asked with shock. "No, Valette. He's immortal!"

Vin reached over, grabbing Elend's head and pulling him down to kiss her. "Elend, your family delivered the atium to the Lord Ruler. Do you know where he keeps it?"

"Yes," he said with confusion. "He keeps the beads in a treasury building just east of here. But—"

"You *have* to get that atium, Elend. The new government is going to need that wealth—and power—if it's going to keep from getting conquered by the first nobleman who can raise an army."

"No, Valette," Elend said shaking his head. "I have to get you to safety."

She smiled at him, then turned to Sazed. The Terrisman nodded to her.

"Not going to tell me not to go?" she asked.

"No," he said quietly. "I fear that you are right, Mistress. If the Lord Ruler is not defeated . . . well, I will not stop you. I will bid you, however, good luck. I will come to help you once I see young Venture to safety."

Vin nodded, smiled at the apprehensive Elend, then looked up. Toward the dark force waiting above, pulsing with a tired depression.

She burned copper, pushing aside the Lord Ruler's Soothing.

"Valette . . ." Elend said quietly.

She turned back to him. “Don’t worry,” she said. “I think I know how to kill him.”

*Such are my fears as I scribble with an ice-crusted pen on the eve before the world is reborn. Rashek watches. Hating me. The cavern lies above. Pulsing. My fingers quiver. Not from the cold.*

*Tomorrow it will end.*

# 38

VIN PUSHED HERSELF THROUGH THE air above Kredik Shaw. Spires and towers rose around her like the shadowed tines of some phantom monster lurking below. Dark, straight, and ominous, for some reason they made her think of Kelsier, lying dead in the street, an obsidian-tipped spear jutting from his chest.

The mists spun and swirled as she blew through them. They were still thick, but tin let her see a faint glistening on the horizon. Morning was near.

Below her, a greater light was building. Vin caught hold of a thin spire, letting her momentum spin her around the slick metal, giving her a sweeping view of the area. Thousands of torches burned in the night, mixing and merging like luminescent insects. They were organized in great waves, converging on the palace.

*The palace guard doesn't have a chance against such a force,* she thought. *But, by fighting its way into the palace, the skaa army will seal its own doom.*

She turned to the side, the mist-wetted spire cold beneath her fingers. The last time she had jumped through the spires of Kredik Shaw, she had been bleeding and semiconscious. Sazed had arrived to save her, but he wouldn't be able to help this time.

A short distance away, she could see the throne tower. It wasn't difficult to spot; a ring of blazing bonfires illuminated its outside, lighting its single stained-glass window to those inside. She could feel Him inside. She waited for a few moments, hoping, perhaps, that she might be able to attack after the Inquisitors had left the room.

*Kelsier believed that the Eleventh Metal was the key,* she thought.

She had one idea. It would work. It had to.

"As of this moment," the Lord Ruler proclaimed in a loud voice, "the

Canton of Inquisition is granted organizational dominance of the Ministry. Inquiries once addressed to Tevidian should now go to Kar.”

The throne room fell silent, the collection of high-ranking obligators dumbfounded by the night’s events. The Lord Ruler waved a hand, indicating that the meeting was finished.

*Finally!* Kar thought. He raised his head, his eye-spikes throbbing as always, bringing him pain—but, this evening it was the pain of joy. The Inquisitors had been waiting for two centuries, carefully politicking, subtly encouraging corruption and dissension among the regular obligators. And finally it had worked. The Inquisitors would no longer bow before the dictates of inferior men.

He turned and smiled toward the group of Ministry priests, knowing full well the discomfort the gaze of an Inquisitor could cause. He couldn’t see anymore, not as he once had, but he had been given something better. A command of Allomancy so subtle, so detailed, that he could make out the world around him with startling accuracy.

Almost everything had metal in it—water, stone, glass . . . even human bodies. These metals were too diffuse to be affected by Allomancy—indeed, most Allomancers couldn’t even sense them.

With his Inquisitor’s eyes, however, Kar could see the iron-lines of these things—the blue threads were fine, nearly invisible, but they outlined the world for him. The obligators before him were a shuffling mass of blues, their emotions—discomfort, anger, and fear—showing in their postures. Discomfort, anger, and fear . . . so sweet, all three. Kar’s smile widened, despite his fatigue.

He had been awake for too long. Living as an Inquisitor drained the body, and he had to rest often. His brethren were already shuffling from the room, heading toward their rest chambers, which lay intentionally close to the throne room. They would sleep immediately; with the executions earlier in the day and the excitement of the night, they would be extremely fatigued.

Kar, however, stayed behind as both Inquisitors and obligators left. Soon, only he and the Lord Ruler remained, standing in a room lit by five massive braziers. The external bonfires slowly went out, extinguished by servants, leaving the glass panorama dark and black.

“You finally have what you want,” the Lord Ruler said quietly. “Perhaps now I can have peace in this matter.”

“Yes, Lord Ruler,” Kar said, bowing. “I think that . . .”

A strange sound snapped in the air—a soft click. Kar looked up, frowning as a small disk of metal bounced across the floor, eventually rolling to a stop against his foot. He picked up the coin, then looked up at the massive window, noting the small hole broken through it.

*What?*

Dozens more coins zipped through the window, scattering it with holes. Metallic clinks and tinkling glass rang in the air. Kar stepped back in surprise.

The entire southern section of the window shattered, blasting inward, the glass weakened by coins to the point that a soaring body could break through.

Shards of colorful glass spun in the air, spraying before a small figure clad in a fluttering mistcloak and carrying a pair of glittering black daggers. The girl landed in a crouch, skidding a short distance on the bits of glass, mist billowing through the opening behind her. It curled forward, drawn by her Allomancy, swirling around her body. She crouched for just a moment in the mists, as if she were some herald of the night itself.

Then she sprang forward, dashing directly toward the Lord Ruler.

Vin burned the Eleventh Metal. The Lord Ruler's past-self appeared as it had before, forming as if out of mist to stand on the dais beside the throne.

Vin ignored the Inquisitor. The creature, fortunately, reacted slowly—she was halfway up the dais steps before it thought to chase her. The Lord Ruler, however, sat quietly, watching her with a barely interested expression.

*Two spears through the chest didn't even bother him,* Vin thought as she leapt the last bit of distance up to the top of the dais. *He has nothing to fear from my daggers.*

Which was why she didn't intend to attack him with them. Instead, she raised her weapons and plunged directly toward the past-self's heart.

Her daggers hit—and passed right through the man, as if he weren't there. Vin stumbled forward, skidding directly through the image, nearly slipping off the dais.

She spun, slicing at the image again. Again, her daggers passed through it harmlessly. It didn't even waver or distort.

*My gold image,* she thought in frustration, *I was able to touch that. Why can't I touch this?*

It obviously didn't work the same way. The shadow stood still, completely oblivious of her attacks. She'd thought that maybe, if she killed the past version of the Lord Ruler, his current form would die as well. Unfortunately, the past-self appeared to be just as insubstantial as an atium shadow.

She had failed.

Kar crashed into her, his powerful Inquisitor's grip grabbing her at the shoulders, his momentum carrying her off the dais. They tumbled down the back steps.

Vin grunted, flaring pewter. *I'm not the same powerless girl you held prisoner just a short time ago, Kar,* she thought with determination, kicking him upward as they hit the ground behind the throne.

The Inquisitor grunted, her kick tossing him into the air and ripping his grip free of her shoulders. Her mistcloak came off in his hands, but she flipped to her feet and scrambled away.

"*Inquisitors!*" the Lord Ruler bellowed, standing. "*Come to me!*"

Vin cried out, the powerful voice striking pain in her tin-enhanced ears.

*I have to get out of here,* she thought, stumbling. *I'll need to come up with a different way to kill him. . . .*

Kar tackled her again from behind. This time he got his arms wrapped completely around her, and he squeezed. Vin cried out in pain, flaring her pewter, pushing back, but Kar forced her to her feet. He dexterously wrapped one arm around her throat while pinning her own arms behind her back with his other. She fought angrily, squirming and struggling, but his grip was tight. She tried throwing them both back with a sudden Steelpush against a doorlatch, but the anchor was too weak, and Kar barely stumbled. His grip held.

The Lord Ruler chuckled as he sat back down on his throne. "You'll have little success against Kar, child. He was a soldier, many years ago. He knows how to hold a person so that they can't break his grip, no matter how strong they may be."

Vin continued to struggle, gasping for breath. The Lord Ruler's words proved true, however. She tried ramming her head back against Kar's, but he was ready for this. She could hear him in her ear, his quick breathing almost . . . passionate as he choked her. In the reflection on the window, she could see the door behind them open. Another Inquisitor strode into the room, his spikes gleaming in the distorted reflection, his dark robe ruffling.

*That's it,* she thought in a surreal moment, watching the mists on the ground before her, creeping through the shattered window wall, flowing across the floor. Oddly, they didn't curl around her as they usually did—as if something were pushing them away. To Vin, it seemed a final testament to her defeat.

*I'm sorry, Kelsier. I've failed you.*

The second Inquisitor stepped up beside his companion. Then, he reached out and grabbed something at Kar's back. There was a ripping sound.

Vin dropped immediately to the ground, gasping for breath. She rolled, pewter allowing her to recover quickly.

Kar stood above her, teetering. Then, he toppled limply to the side, sprawling to the ground. The second Inquisitor stood behind him, holding what appeared to be a large metal spike—just like the ones in the Inquisitor's eyes.

Vin glanced toward Kar's immobile body. The back of his robe had been ripped, exposing a bloody hole right between the shoulder blades. A hole big enough for a metal spike. Kar's scarred face was pale. Lifeless.

*Another spike!* Vin thought with wonder. *The other Inquisitor pulled it out of Kar's back, and he died. That's the secret!*

"What?" the Lord Ruler bellowed, standing, the sudden motion tossing his throne backwards. The stone chair toppled down the steps, chipping and cracking the marble. "Betrayal! From one of my own!"

The new Inquisitor dashed toward the Lord Ruler. As he ran, his robe cowl fell back, giving Vin a view of his bald head. There was something familiar about the newcomer's face despite the spike-heads coming out the front—and the gruesome spike-tips jutting from the back—of his skull. Despite the bald head and the unfamiliar clothing, the man looked a little like Kelsier.

*No,* she realized. *Not Kelsier.*

*Marsh!*

Marsh took the dais steps in twos, moving with an Inquisitor's supernatural speed. Vin struggled to her feet, shrugging off the effects of her near-choking. Her surprise, however, was more difficult to dismiss. Marsh was alive.

Marsh was an Inquisitor.

*The Inquisitors weren't investigating him because they suspected him. They intended to recruit him!* And now he looked like he intended to fight the Lord Ruler. *I've got to help! Perhaps . . . perhaps he knows the secret to killing the Lord Ruler. He figured out how to kill Inquisitors, after all!*

Marsh reached the top of the dais.

"Inquisitors!" the Lord Ruler yelled. "Come to—"

The Lord Ruler froze, noticing something sitting just outside the door. A small group of steel spikes, just like the one Marsh had pulled from Kar's back, lay piled on the floor. There looked to be about seven of them.

Marsh smiled, the expression looking eerily like one of Kelsier's smirks. Vin reached the bottom of the dais and Pushed herself off a coin, throwing herself up toward the top of the platform.

The awesome, full power of the Lord Ruler's fury hit her halfway up. The depression, the anger-fueled asphyxiation of her soul, pushed through her copper, hitting her like a physical force. She flared copper, gasping slightly, but wasn't completely able to push the Lord Ruler off of her emotions.

Marsh stumbled slightly, and the Lord Ruler swung a backhand much like the one that had killed Kelsier. Fortunately, Marsh recovered in time to duck. He spun around the Lord Ruler, reaching up to grab the back of the emperor's black, robelike suit. Marsh yanked, ripping the cloth open along the back seam.

Marsh froze, his spike-eyed expression unreadable. The Lord Ruler spun, slamming his elbow into Marsh's stomach, throwing the Inquisitor across the room. As the Lord Ruler turned, Vin could see what Marsh had seen.

Nothing. A normal, if muscular, back. Unlike the Inquisitors, the Lord Ruler didn't have a spike driven through his spine.

*Oh, Marsh* . . . Vin thought with a sinking depression. It had been a clever idea, far more clever than Vin's foolish attempt with the Eleventh Metal—however, it had proven equally faulty.

Marsh finally hit the ground, his head cracking, then slid across the floor until he ran into the far wall. He lay slumped against the massive window, immobile.

"Marsh!" she cried, jumping and Pushing herself toward him. However, as she flew, the Lord raised his hand absently.

Vin felt a powerful . . . *something* crash into her. It felt like a Steelpush, slamming against the metals inside her stomach—but of course it couldn't have been that. Kelsier had promised that no Allomancer could affect metals that were inside of someone's body.

But he had also said that no Allomancer could affect the emotions of a person who was burning copper.

Discarded coins shot away from the Lord Ruler, streaking across the floor. The doors wrenched free from their mountings, shattering and breaking away from the room. Incredibly, bits of colored glass even quivered and slid away from the dais.

And Vin was tossed to the side, the metals in her stomach threatening to rip free from her body. She slammed to the ground, the blow knocking her nearly unconscious. She lay in a daze, addled, confused, able to think of only one thing.

*Such power . . .*

Clicks sounded as the Lord Ruler walked down his dais. He moved quietly, ripping off his torn suit coat and shirt, leaving himself bare from the waist up save for the jewelry sparkling on his fingers and wrists. Several thin bracelets, she noticed, pierced the skin of his upper arms.

*Clever,* she thought, struggling to her feet. *Keeps them from being Pushed or Pulled.*

The Lord Ruler shook his head regretfully, his steps kicking up trails in the cool mist that poured across the floor from the broken window. He looked so strong, his torso erupting with muscles, his face handsome. She could feel the power of his Allomancy snapping at her emotions, barely held back by her copper.

"What did you think, child?" the Lord Ruler asked quietly. "To defeat me? Am I some common Inquisitor, my powers endowed fabrications?"

Vin flared pewter. She then turned and dashed away—intending to grab Marsh's body and break through the glass at the other side of the room.

But then, *he* was there, moving with a speed as if to make the fury of a tornado's winds seem sluggish. Even within a full pewter flare, Vin couldn't outrun him. He almost seemed casual as he reached out, grabbing her shoulder and yanking her backward.

He flung her like a doll, tossing her toward one of the room's massive support pillars. Vin quested desperately for an anchor, but he had blown all of the metal out of the room. Except . . .

She Pulled on one of the Lord Ruler's own bracelets, ones that didn't pierce his skin. He immediately whipped his arm upward, throwing off her Pull, making her spin maladroitly in the air. He slammed her with another of his powerful Pushes, blasting her backward. Metals in her stomach wrenched, glass quivered, and her mother's earring ripped free of her ear.

She tried to spin and hit feet-first, but she crashed into a stone pillar at a terrible speed, and pewter failed her. She heard a sickening snap, and a spear of pain shot up her right leg.

She collapsed to the ground. She didn't have the will to look, but the agony from her torso told her that her leg jutted from beneath her body, broken at an awkward angle.

The Lord Ruler shook his head. No, Vin realized, he didn't worry about wearing jewelry. Considering his abilities and strength, a man would have to be foolish—as Vin had been—to try and use the Lord Ruler's jewelry as an anchor. It had only let him control her jumps.

He stepped forward, feet clicking against broken glass. "You think this is the first time someone has tried to kill me, child? I've survived burnings and beheadings. I've been stabbed and sliced, crushed and dismembered. I was even flayed once, near the beginning."

He turned toward Marsh, shaking his head. Strangely, Vin's earlier impression of the Lord Ruler returned. He looked . . . tired. Exhausted, even. Not his body—it was still muscular. It was just his . . . air. She tried to climb to her feet, using the stone pillar for stability.

"I am God," he said.

*So different from the humble man in the logbook.*

"*God* cannot be killed," he said. "*God* cannot be overthrown. Your rebellion—you think I haven't seen its like before? You think I haven't destroyed entire armies on my own? What will it take before you people stop questioning? How many centuries must I prove myself before you *idiot* skaa see the truth? How many of you must I kill!"

Vin cried out as she twisted her leg the wrong way. She flared pewter, but tears came to her eyes anyway. She was running out of metals. Her pewter would be gone soon, and there was no way she would be able to remain conscious without it. She slumped against the pillar, the Lord Ruler's Allomancy pressing against her. The pain in her leg throbbed.

*He's just too strong,* she thought with despair. *He's right. He is God. What were we thinking?*

"How dare you?" the Lord Ruler asked, picking up Marsh's limp body with a bejeweled hand. Marsh groaned slightly, trying to lift his head.

"How dare you?" the Lord Ruler demanded again. "After what I gave you? I made you superior to regular men! I made you dominant!"

Vin's head snapped up. Through the haze of pain and hopelessness, something triggered a memory inside of her.

*He keeps saying . . . he keeps saying that his people should be dominant. . . .*

She reached within, feeling her last little bit of Eleventh Metal reserve. She burned it, looking through tearstained eyes as the Lord Ruler held Marsh in a one-handed grip.

The Lord Ruler's past self appeared next to him. A man in a fur cloak and heavy boots, a man with a full beard and strong muscles. Not an aristocrat or a tyrant. Not a hero, or even a warrior. A man dressed for life in the cold mountains. A herdsman.

Or, perhaps, a packman.

"Rashek," Vin whispered.

The Lord Ruler spun toward her in startlement.

"Rashek," Vin said again. "That's your name, isn't it? You aren't the man who wrote the logbook. You're not the hero that was sent to protect the people . . . you're his servant. The packman who hated him."

She paused for a moment. "You . . . you killed him," she whispered. "That's what happened that night! That's why the logbook stopped so suddenly! You killed the hero and took his place. You went into the cavern in his stead, and you claimed the power for yourself. But . . . instead of saving the world, you took control of it."

"You know nothing!" he bellowed, still holding Marsh's limp body in one hand. "You know nothing of that!"

"You hated him," Vin said. "You thought that a Terrisman should have been the hero. You couldn't stand the fact that he—a man from the country that had oppressed yours—was fulfilling your own legends."

The Lord Ruler lifted a hand, and Vin suddenly felt an impossible weight press against her. Allomancy, Pushing the metals in her stomach and in her body, threatening to crush her back against the pillar. She cried out, flaring her last bit of pewter, struggling to remain conscious. Mists curled around her, creeping through the broken window and across the floor.

Outside, through the broken window, she could hear something ringing faintly in the air. It sounded like . . . like cheering. Yells of joy, thousands in chorus. It sounded almost like they were cheering her on.

*What does it matter?* she thought. *I know the Lord Ruler's secret, but what does it tell me? That he was a packman? A servant? A Terrisman?*

*A Feruchemist.*

She looked through dazed eyes, and again saw the pair of bracelets glittering on the Lord Ruler's upper arms. Bracelets made of metal, bracelets that pierced his skin in places. So . . . so that they couldn't be affected by Allomancy. Why do that? He supposedly wore metal as a sign of bravado. He wasn't worried about people Pulling or Pushing against his metals.

Or, that was what he claimed. But, what if all the other metals he wore—the rings, the bracelets, the fashion that had made its way to the nobility—were simply a distraction?

A distraction to keep people from focusing on this one pair of bracers, twisting around the upper arms. *Could it really be that easy?* she thought as the Lord Ruler's weight threatened to crush her.

Her pewter was nearly gone. She could barely think. Yet, she burned iron. The Lord Ruler could pierce copperclouds. She could too. They were the same, somehow. If he could affect metals inside of a person's body, then she could as well.

She flared the iron. Blue lines appeared pointing to the Lord Ruler's rings and bracelets—all of them but the ones on his upper arms, piercing his skin.

Vin stoked her iron, concentrating, Pushing it as hard as she could. She kept her pewter flared, struggling to keep from being crushed, and she knew somehow that she was no longer breathing. The force pushing against her was too strong. She couldn't get her chest to go up and down.

Mist spun around her, dancing because of her Allomancy. She was dying. She knew it. She could barely even feel the pain anymore. She was being crushed. Suffocated.

She drew upon the mists.

Two new lines appeared. She screamed, *Pulling* with a strength she had never known before. She flared her iron higher and higher, the Lord Ruler's own Push giving her the leverage she needed to Pull against his bracelets. Anger, desperation, and agony mixed within her, and the Pull became her only focus.

Her pewter ran out.

*He killed Kelsier!*

The bracelets ripped free. The Lord Ruler cried out in pain, a faint, distant sound to Vin's ears. The weight suddenly released her, and she dropped to the floor, gasping, her vision swimming. The bloody bracelets hit the ground, released from her grip, skidding across the marble to land before her. She looked up, using tin to clear her vision.

The Lord Ruler stood where he had been before, his eyes widening with terror, his arms bloodied. He dropped Marsh to the ground, rushing toward her and the mangled bracelets. However, with her last bit of strength—pewter gone—Vin Pushed on the bracelets, shooting them past the Lord Ruler. He spun in horror, watching the bracelets fly out the broken wall-window.

In the distance, the sun broke the horizon. The bracelets dropped in front of its red light, sparkling for a moment before plunging down into the city.

"*No!*" the Lord Ruler screamed, stepping toward the window.

His muscles grew limp, deflating as Sazed's had. He turned back toward Vin, angry, but his face was no longer that of a young man. He was middle-aged, his youthful features matured.

He stepped toward the window. His hair grayed, and wrinkles formed around his eyes like tiny webs.

His next step was feeble. He began to shake with the burden of old age, his back stooping, his skin sagging, his hair growing limp.

Then, he collapsed to the floor.

Vin leaned back, her mind fuzzing from the pain. She lay there for . . . a time. She couldn't think.

"Mistress!" a voice said. And then, Sazed was at her side, his brow wet with sweat. He reached over and poured something down her throat, and she swallowed.

Her body knew what to do. She reflexively flared pewter, strengthening her body. She flared tin, and the sudden increase of sensitivity shocked her awake. She gasped, looking up at Sazed's concerned face.

"Careful, Mistress," he said, inspecting her leg. "The bone is fractured, though it appears only in one place."

"Marsh," she said, exhausted. "See to Marsh."

"Marsh?" Sazed asked. Then he saw the Inquisitor stirring slightly on the floor a distance away.

"By the Forgotten Gods!" Sazed said, moving to Marsh's side.

Marsh groaned, sitting up. He cradled his stomach with one arm. "What . . . is that . . .?"

Vin glanced at the withered form on the ground a short distance away. "It's him. The Lord Ruler. He's dead."

Sazed frowned curiously, standing. He wore a brown robe, and had brought a simple wooden spear with him. Vin shook her head at the thought of such a pitiful weapon facing the creature that had nearly killed her and Marsh.

*Of course. In a way, we were all just as useless. We should be dead, not the Lord Ruler.*

*I pulled his bracelets off. Why? Why can I do things like he can?*

*Why am I different?*

"Mistress . . ." Sazed said slowly. "He is not dead, I think. He's . . . still alive."

"What?" Vin asked, frowning. She could barely think at the moment. There would be time to sort out her questions later. Sazed was right—the aged figure wasn't dead. Actually, it was moving pitifully on the floor, crawling toward the broken window. Toward where his bracelets had gone.

Marsh stumbled to his feet, waving away Sazed's ministrations. "I will heal quickly. See to the girl."

"Help me up," Vin said.

"Mistress . . ." Sazed said disapprovingly.

"Please, Sazed."

He sighed, handing her the wooden spear. "Here, lean on this." She took it, and he helped her to her feet.

Vin leaned on the shaft, hobbling with Marsh and Sazed toward the Lord Ruler. The crawling figure reached the edge of the room, overlooking the city through the shattered window.

Vin's footsteps crackled on broken glass. People cheered again below, though she couldn't see them, nor see what they were cheering about.

"Listen," Sazed said. "Listen, he who would have been our god. Do you hear them cheering? Those cheers aren't for you—this people never cheered for you. They have found a new leader this evening, a new pride."

"My . . . obligators . . ." the Lord Ruler whispered.

"Your obligators will forget you," Marsh said. "I will see to that. The other Inquisitors are dead, slain by my own hand. Yet, the gathered prelans saw you transfer power to the Canton of Inquisition. I am the only Inquisitor left in Luthadel. *I* rule your church now."

"No . . ." the Lord Ruler whispered.

Marsh, Vin, and Sazed stopped in a ragged group, looking down at the old man. In the morning light below, Vin could see a massive collection of people standing before a large podium, holding up their weapons in a sign of respect.

The Lord Ruler cast his eyes down at the crowd, and the final realization of his failure seemed to hit him. He looked back up at the ring of people who had defeated him.

"You don't understand," he wheezed. "You don't know what I do for mankind. I *was* your god, even if you couldn't see it. By killing me, you have doomed yourselves. . . ."

Vin glanced at Marsh and Sazed. Slowly, each of them nodded. The Lord Ruler had begun coughing, and he seemed to be aging even further.

Vin leaned on Sazed, her teeth gritted against the pain of her broken leg. "I bring you a message from a friend of ours," she said quietly. "He wanted you to know that he's not dead. He can't be killed.

"He is hope."

Then she raised the spear and rammed it directly into the Lord Ruler's heart.

*Oddly, on occasion, I sense a peacefulness within. You would think that after all I have seen—after all I have suffered—my soul would be a twisted jumble of stress, confusion, and melancholy. Often, it's just that.*

*But then, there is the peace.*

*I feel it sometimes, as I do now, staring out over the frozen cliffs and glass mountains in the still of morning, watching a sunrise that is so majestic that I know that none shall ever be its match.*

*If there are prophecies, if there is a Hero of Ages, then my mind whispers that there must be something directing my path. Something is watching; something cares. These peaceful whispers tell me a truth I wish very much to believe.*

*If I fail, another shall come to finish my work.*

# EPILOGUE

"The only thing I can conclude, Master Marsh," Sazed said, "is that the Lord Ruler was both a Feruchemist *and* an Allomancer."

Vin frowned, sitting atop an empty building near the edge of a skaa slum. Her broken leg—carefully splinted by Sazed—hung over the edge of the rooftop, dangling in the air.

She'd slept most of the day—as, apparently, had Marsh, who stood beside her. Sazed had carried a message to the rest of the crew, telling them of Vin's survival. Apparently, there had been no major casualties among the others—for which Vin was glad. She hadn't gone to them yet, however. Sazed had told them that she needed to rest, and they were busy setting up Elend's new government.

"A Feruchemist and an Allomancer," Marsh said speculatively. He had recovered quickly indeed—though Vin still bore bruises, fractures, and cuts from the fight, he seemed to have already healed his broken ribs. He leaned down, resting one arm on his knee, staring out over the city with spikes instead of eyes.

*How does he even see?* Vin wondered.

"Yes, Master Marsh," Sazed explained. "You see, youth is one of the things that a Feruchemist can store. It's a fairly useless process—in order to store up the ability to feel and look a year younger, you would have to spend part of your life feeling and looking one year older. Often, Keepers use the ability as a disguise, changing ages to fool others and hide. Beyond this, however, no one has ever seen much use for the ability.

"However, if the Feruchemist were *also* an Allomancer, he might be able to burn his own metal storages, releasing the energy within them tenfold. Mistress Vin tried to burn some of my metals earlier, but couldn't access the power. However, if you were able to make up the Feruchemical storages yourself, then burn them for the extra power . . ."

Marsh frowned. "I don't follow you, Sazed."

"I apologize," Sazed said. "This is, perhaps, a thing that is difficult to understand without a background in both Allomantic and Feruchemical theory. Let me see if I can explain it better. What is the main difference between Allomancy and Feruchemy?"

"Allomancy draws its power from metals," Marsh said. "Feruchemy draws its powers from the person's own body."

"Exactly," Sazed said. "So, what the Lord Ruler did—I presume—was *combine* these two abilities. He used one of the attributes only available to Feruchemy—that of changing his age—but fueled it with *Allomancy* instead. By burning a Feruchemical storage that he himself had made, he effectively made a new Allomantic metal for himself—one that made him younger when he burned it. If my guess is correct, he would have gained a limitless supply of youth, since he was drawing most of his power from the metal itself, rather than his own body. All he would have to do was spend the occasional bit of time aged to give himself Feruchemical storages to burn and stay young."

"So," Marsh said, "just burning those storages would make him even younger than when he started?"

"He would have had to place that excess youth inside of another Feruchemical storage, I think," Sazed explained. "You see, Allomancy is quite spectacular—its powers generally come in bursts and flares. The Lord Ruler wouldn't have wanted all of that youth at once, so he'd have stored it inside of a piece of metal which he could slowly drain, keeping himself young."

"The bracelets?"

"Yes, Master Marsh. However, Feruchemy gives decreasing returns—it takes more than the proportionate amount of strength, for instance, to make yourself four times as strong as a regular man, as opposed to simply twice as strong. In the Lord Ruler's case, this meant that he had to spend more and more youth to keep from aging. When Mistress Vin stole the bracelets, he aged incredibly quickly because his body was trying to stretch back to where it should have been."

Vin sat in the cool evening wind, staring out toward Keep Venture. It was bright with light; not even a single day had passed, and Elend was already meeting with skaa and noblemen leaders, drafting a code of laws for his new nation.

Vin sat quietly, fingering her earring. She'd found it in the throne room, had put it back in her torn ear as it began to heal. She wasn't certain why she kept it. Perhaps because it was a link to Reen, and the mother who had tried to kill her. Or, perhaps, simply because it was a reminder of things she shouldn't have been able to do.

There was much to learn, still, about Allomancy. For a thousand years, the nobility had simply trusted what the Inquisitors and Lord Ruler told them. What secrets had they shadowed, what metals had they hidden?

"The Lord Ruler," she finally said. "He . . . just used a trick to be immortal, then. That means he wasn't ever really a god, right? He was just lucky. Anyone who was both a Feruchemist and an Allomancer could have done what he did."

"It appears that way, Mistress," Sazed said. "Perhaps that was why he feared Keepers so much. He hunted and killed Feruchemists, for he knew that the skill was hereditary—just as Allomancy is. If the Terris lines ever mixed with those of the imperial nobility, the result could very well have been a child who could challenge him."

"Hence the breeding programs," Marsh said.

Sazed nodded. "He needed to make absolutely sure that the Terrismen weren't allowed to mix with the regular populace, lest they pass on latent Feruchemical abilities."

Marsh shook his head. "His own people. He did such horrible things to them just to keep hold of his power."

"But," Vin said, frowning, "if the Lord Ruler's powers came from a mixture of Feruchemy and Allomancy, what happened at the Well of Ascension? What was the power that the man who wrote the logbook—whoever he was—was supposed to find?"

"I don't know, Mistress," Sazed said quietly.

"Your explanation doesn't answer everything," Vin said, shaking her head. She hadn't spoken of her own strange abilities, but she had spoken of what the Lord Ruler had done in the throne room. "He was so *powerful*, Sazed. I could feel his Allomancy. He was able to Push on metals inside my body! Perhaps he could enhance his Feruchemy by burning the storages, but how did he get so strong at Allomancy?"

Sazed sighed. "I fear that the only person who could have answered these questions died this morning."

Vin paused. The Lord Ruler had held secrets about the Terris religion that Sazed's people had been searching for centuries to find. "I'm sorry. Maybe I shouldn't have killed him."

Sazed shook his head. “His own aging would have killed him soon anyway, Mistress. What you did was right. This way, I can record that the Lord Ruler was struck down by one of the skaa he had oppressed.”

Vin flushed. “Record?”

“Of course. I am still a Keeper, Mistress. I must pass these things on—history, events, and truths.”

“You won’t . . . say too much about me, will you?” For some reason the idea of other people telling stories about her made her uncomfortable.

“I wouldn’t worry too much, Mistress,” Sazed said with a smile. “My brethren and I will be very busy, I think. We have so much to restore, so much to tell the world. . . . I doubt details about you need to be passed on with any urgent timing. I will record what happened, but I will keep it to myself for a while, if you wish.”

“Thank you,” Vin said, nodding.

“That power that the Lord Ruler found in the cave,” Marsh said speculatively, “perhaps it was just Allomancy. You said that there is no record of any Allomancers before the Ascension.”

“It is indeed a possibility, Master Marsh,” Sazed said. “There are very few legends about the origins of Allomancy, and nearly all of them agree that Allomancers first ‘appeared with the mists.’ ”

Vin frowned. She’d always assumed that the title “Mistborn” had come about because Allomancers tended to do their work at night. She’d never considered that there might be a stronger connection.

*Mist reacts to Allomancy. It swirls when an Allomancer uses his abilities nearby. And . . . what did I feel at the end? It was like I drew something* from *the mists.*

Whatever she’d done, she hadn’t been able to replicate it.

Marsh sighed and stood. He had been awake only a few hours, but he already seemed tired. His head hung slightly, as if the weight of the spikes were pulling it down.

“Does that . . . hurt, Marsh?” she asked. “The spikes, I mean?”

He paused. “Yes. All eleven of them . . . throb. The pain reacts to my emotions somehow.”

“Eleven?” Vin asked with shock.

Marsh nodded. “Two in the head, eight in the chest, one in the back to seal them together. That’s the only way to kill an Inquisitor—you have to separate the top spikes from the bottom ones. Kell did it through a beheading, but it’s easier to just pull out the middle spike.”

“We thought you were dead,” Vin said. “When we found the body and the blood at the Soothing station . . .”

Marsh nodded. “I was going to send word of my survival, but they watched me fairly closely that first day. I didn’t expect Kell to make his move so quickly.”

“None of us did, Master Marsh,” Sazed said. “None of us expected it at all.”

“He actually did it, didn’t he?” Marsh said, shaking his head in wonder. “That bastard. There are two things I’ll never forgive him for. The first is for stealing my dream of overthrowing the Final Empire, then actually succeeding at it.”

Vin paused. “And the second?”

Marsh turned spike-heads toward her. “Getting himself killed to do it.”

“If I may ask, Master Marsh,” Sazed said. “Who *was* that corpse that Mistress Vin and Master Kelsier discovered at the Soothing station?”

Marsh looked back over the city. “There were several corpses, actually. The process to create a new Inquisitor is . . . messy. I’d rather not speak about it.”

“Of course,” Sazed said, bowing his head.

“*You,* however,” Marsh said, “could tell me about this creature that Kelsier used to imitate Lord Renoux.”

“The kandra?” Sazed said. “I fear even the Keepers know little of them. They are related to mistwraiths—perhaps even the same creatures, just older. Because of their reputation, they generally prefer to remain unseen—though some of the noble houses hire them on occasion.”

Vin frowned. “So . . . why didn’t Kell just have this kandra impersonate him and die in his stead?”

“Ah,” Sazed said. “You see, Mistress, for a kandra to impersonate someone, they first must devour that person’s flesh and absorb their bones. Kandra are like mistwraiths—they have no skeletons of their own.”

Vin shivered. “Oh.”

“He is back, you know,” Marsh said. “The creature is no longer using my brother’s body—he has another one—but he came looking for you, Vin.”

“Me?” Vin asked.

Marsh nodded. “He said something about Kelsier transferring his contract to you before he died. I believe the beast sees you as its master, now.”

Vin shivered. *That . . . thing ate Kelsier’s body.* “I don’t want it around,” she said. “I’ll send it away.”

“Do not be quite so hasty, Mistress,” Sazed said. “Kandra are expensive servants—you must pay them in atium. If Kelsier bought an extended contract for one, it would be foolish to waste its services. A kandra might prove a very useful ally in the months to come.”

Vin shook her head. “I don’t care. I don’t want that thing around. Not after what it did.”

The trio fell silent. Finally, Marsh stood, sighing. “Anyway, if you will excuse me, I should go make an appearance at the keep—the new king wants me to represent the Ministry in his negotiations.”

Vin frowned. “I don’t see why the Ministry deserves any say in things.”

“The obligators are still quite powerful, Mistress,” Sazed said. “And, they are the most efficient and well-trained bureaucratic force in the Final Empire. His majesty would be wise to try and bring them to his side, and recognizing Master Marsh may help achieve this.”

Marsh shrugged. “Of course, assuming I can establish control over the Canton of Orthodoxy, the Ministry should . . . change during the next few years. I’ll move slowly and carefully, but by the time I’m done, the obligators won’t even realize what they’ve lost. Those other Inquisitors could present a problem, though.”

Vin nodded. “How many are there outside of Luthadel?”

“I don’t know,” Marsh said. “I wasn’t a member of the order for very long before I destroyed it. However, the Final Empire was a big place. Many speak of there being around twenty Inquisitors in the empire, but I never was able to pin anyone down on a hard number.”

Vin nodded as Marsh left. However, the Inquisitors—while dangerous—worried her far less now that she knew their secret. She was more concerned about something else.

*You don’t know what I do for mankind. I was your god, even if you couldn’t see it. By killing me, you have doomed yourselves. . . .*

The Lord Ruler’s final words. At the time, she thought he’d been referring to the Final Empire as the thing he did “for mankind.” However, she wasn’t so certain anymore. There had been . . . fear in his eyes when he’d spoken those words, not pride.

“Saze?” she said. “What was the Deepness? The thing that the Hero from the logbook was supposed to defeat?”

“I wish that we knew, Mistress,” Sazed said.

“But, it didn’t come, right?”

“Apparently not,” Sazed said. “The legends agree that had the Deepness not been stopped, the very world would have been destroyed. Of course, perhaps these stories have been exaggerated.

Maybe the danger of the ‘Deepness’ was really just the Lord Ruler himself—perhaps the Hero’s fight was simply one of conscience. He had to choose to dominate the world or to let it be free.”

That didn’t sound right to Vin. There was more. She remembered that fear in the Lord Ruler’s eyes. Terror.

*He said “do,” not “did.” “What I* do *for mankind.” That implies that he was still doing it, whatever it was.*

*You have doomed yourselves. . . .*

She shivered in the evening air. The sun was setting, making it even easier to see the illuminated Keep Venture—Elend’s choice of headquarters for the moment, though he might still move to Kredik Shaw. He hadn’t decided yet.

“You should go to him, Mistress,” Sazed said. “He needs to see that you are well.”

Vin didn’t reply immediately. She stared out over the city, watching the bright keep in the darkening sky. “Were you there, Sazed?” she asked. “Did you hear his speech?”

“Yes, Mistress,” he said. “Once we discovered that there was no atium in that treasury, Lord Venture insisted that we go seek help for you. I was inclined to agree with him—neither of us were warriors, and I was still without my Feruchemical storages.”

*No atium,* Vin thought. *After all of this, we haven’t found a speck of it. What did the Lord Ruler do with it all? Or . . . did someone else get to it first?*

“When Master Elend and I found the army,” Sazed continued, “its rebels were slaughtering the palace soldiers. Some of them tried to surrender, but our soldiers weren’t letting them. It was a . . . disturbing scene, Mistress. Your Elend . . . he didn’t like what he saw. When he stood up there before the skaa, I thought that they would simply kill him too.”

Sazed paused, cocking his head slightly. “But . . . the things he said, Mistress . . . his dreams of a new government, his condemnation of bloodshed and chaos . . . Well, Mistress, I fear that I cannot repeat it. I wish I’d had my metalminds, so that I could have memorized his exact words.”

He sighed, shaking his head. “Regardless, I believe that Master Breeze was very influential in helping calm that riot. Once one group started listening to Master Elend, the others did too, and from there . . . well, it is a good thing that a nobleman ended up as king, I think. Master Elend brings some legitimacy to our bid for control, and I think that we will see more support from the nobility and the merchants with him at our head.”

Vin smiled. “Kell would be angry with us, you know. He did all this work, and we just turned around and put a nobleman on the throne.”

Sazed shook his head. “Ah, but there is something more important to consider, I think. We didn’t just put a nobleman on the throne—we put a *good man* on the throne.”

“A good man . . .” Vin said. “Yes. I’ve known a few of those, now.”

Vin knelt in the mists atop Keep Venture. Her splinted leg made it harder to move around at night, but most of the effort she used was Allomantic. She just had to make certain that her landings were particularly soft.

Night had come, and the mists surrounded her. Protecting her, hiding her, giving her power . . .

Elend Venture sat at a desk below, beneath a skylight that still hadn’t been patched from the time Vin had thrown a body through it. He didn’t notice her crouching above. Who would? Who saw a Mistborn in her element? She was, in a way, like one of the shadow images created by the Eleventh Metal. Incorporeal. Really just something that *could* have been.

Could have been . . .

The events of the last day were difficult enough to sort through; Vin hadn’t even tried to make sense of her emotions, which were a far bigger mess. She hadn’t gone to Elend yet. She hadn’t been able to.

She looked down at him, sitting in the lanternlight, reading at his desk and making scribbled notes in his little book. His meetings earlier had apparently gone well—everyone seemed willing to accept him as king. Marsh whispered that there were politics behind the support, however. The nobility saw Elend as a puppet they could control, and factions were already appearing amongst the skaa leadership.

Still, Elend finally had an opportunity to draft the law code he’d been dreaming of. He could try to create the perfect nation, try to apply the philosophies he had studied for so long. There would be bumps, and Vin suspected that he would ultimately have to settle for something far more realistic than his idealistic dream. That didn’t really matter. He would make a good king.

*Of course, compared with the Lord Ruler, a pile of soot would make a good king. . . .*

She wanted to go to Elend, to drop down into the warm room, but . . . something kept her back. She’d been through too many recent twists in her fortune, too many emotional strains—both Allomantic and non-Allomantic. She wasn’t certain what she wanted anymore; she wasn’t certain if she were Vin or Valette, or even which of them she wished that she were.

She felt cold in the mists, in the quiet darkness. The mist empowered, protected, and hid . . . even when she didn't really want it to do any of the three.

*I can't do this. That person who would be with him, that's not me. That was an illusion, a dream. I am that child who grew up in the shadows, the girl who should be alone. I don't deserve this.*

*I don't deserve him.*

It was over. As she had anticipated, everything was changing. In truth, she'd never really made a very good noblewoman. It was time for her to go back to being what she was good at. A thing of shadows, not of parties and balls.

It was time to go.

She turned to leave, ignoring her tears, frustrated with herself. She left him, her shoulders slumped as she hobbled across the metallic roof and disappeared into the mist.

But then . . .

*He died promising us that you had starved to death years ago.*

With all the chaos, she'd nearly forgotten the Inquisitor's words about Reen. Now, however, the memory made her pause. Mists passed her, curling, coaxing.

Reen hadn't abandoned her. He'd been captured by the Inquisitors who had been looking for Vin, the unlawful child of their enemy. They'd tortured him.

And he had died protecting her.

*Reen didn't betray me. He always promised that he would, but in the end, he didn't.* He had been far from a perfect brother, but he had loved her nonetheless.

A whispered voice came from the back of her mind, speaking in Reen's voice. *Go back.*

Before she could convince herself otherwise, she dashed limpingly back to the broken skylight and dropped a coin to the floor below.

Elend turned curiously, looking at the coin, cocking his head. Vin dropped down a second later, Pushing herself up to slow the fall, landing only on her good leg.

"Elend Venture," she said, standing up. "There is something I've been meaning to tell you for some time." She paused, blinking away her tears. "You read too much. Especially in the presence of ladies."

He smiled, throwing back his chair and grabbing her in a firm embrace. Vin closed her eyes, simply feeling the warmth of being held.

And realized that was all she had ever really wanted.

## ARS ARCANUM

*Find extensive author's annotations of every chapter of this book, along with deleted scenes and expanded world information, at* www.brandonsanderson.com.

### ALLOMANCY QUICK REFERENCE CHART

| **METAL** | **MISTING TITLE** | |
|---|---|---|
| *Iron* | Lurcher | Pulls on Nearby Metals |
| ***Steel*** | **Coinshot** | **Pushes on Nearby Metals** |
| Tin | Tineye | Enhances Senses |
| **Pewter** | **Pewterarm, Thug** | **Enhances Physical Abilities** |
| ***Zinc*** | **Rioter** | **Riots Emotions** |
| *Brass* | Soother | Soothes Emotions |
| Copper | Smoker | Hides Allomancy |
| **Bronze** | **Seeker** | **Reveals Allomancy** |

(Note: External metals have been italicized. Pushing metals have been bolded.)

### ALLOMANCY ALPHABETICAL REFERENCE

**BRASS (EXTERNAL MENTAL PULLING METAL)** A person burning brass can Soothe another person's emotions, dampening them and making particular emotions less powerful. A careful Allomancer can Soothe away all emotions but a single one, essentially making a person feel exactly as they wish. Brass, however, does not let that Allomancer read minds or even emotions. A Misting who burns brass is known as a Soother.

**BRONZE (INTERNAL MENTAL PUSHING METAL)** A person burning bronze can sense when people nearby are using Allomancy. Allomancers burning metals nearby will give off "Allomantic pulses"—something like drumbeats that are audible only to a person burning bronze. A Misting who can burn bronze is known as a Seeker.

**COINSHOT** A Misting who can burn steel.

**COPPER (INTERNAL MENTAL PULLING METAL)** A person burning copper gives off an invisible cloud that protects anyone inside of it from the senses of a Seeker. While within one of these "copperclouds," an Allomancer can burn any metal they wish, and not worry that someone will sense their Allomantic pulses by burning bronze. As a side effect, the person burning copper is themselves immune to any form of emotional Allomancy (Soothing or Rioting). A Misting who can burn copper is known as a Smoker.

**LURCHER** A Misting who can burn iron.

**PEWTER (INTERNAL PHYSICAL PUSHING METAL)** A person burning pewter enhances the physical attributes of their body. They become stronger, more durable, and more dexterous. Pewter also enhances the body’s sense of balance and ability to recover from wounds. Mistings who can burn pewter are known as both Pewterarms and Thugs.

**PEWTERARM** A Misting who can burn pewter.

**IRON (EXTERNAL PHYSICAL PULLING METAL)** A person burning iron can see translucent blue lines pointing to nearby sources of metal. The size and brightness of the line depends on the size and proximity of the metal source. All types of metal are shown, not just sources of iron. The Allomancer can then mentally yank on one of these lines to Pull that source of metal toward them.

A Misting who can burn iron is known as a Lurcher.

**RIOTER** A Misting who can burn zinc.

**SEEKER** A Misting who can burn bronze.

**SMOKER** A Misting who can burn copper.

**SOOTHER** A Misting who can burn brass.

**STEEL (EXTERNAL PHYSICAL PUSHING METAL)** A person burning iron can see translucent blue lines pointing to nearby sources of metal. The size and brightness of the line depends on the size and proximity of the metal source. All types of metal are shown, not just sources of steel. The Allomancer can then mentally Push on one of these lines to send that source of metal away from them. A Misting who can burn steel is known as a Coinshot.

**TIN (INTERNAL PHYSICAL PULLING METAL)** A person burning tin gains enhanced senses. They can see farther and smell better, and their sense of touch becomes far more acute. This has the side effect of letting them pierce the mists, allowing them to see much farther at night than even their enhanced senses should have let them. A Misting who can burn tin is known as a Tineye.

**TINEYE** A Misting who can burn tin.

**THUG** A Misting who can burn pewter.

**ZINC (EXTERNAL MENTAL PUSHING METAL)** A person burning zinc can Riot another person’s emotions, enflaming them and making particular emotions more powerful. It does not let one read minds or even emotions. A Misting who burns zinc is known as a Rioter.

Turn the page for a sneak peek at Brandon Sanderson's

# THE WELL OF ASCENSION

## BOOK TWO OF MISTBORN

(0-7653-1688-9) Available now from Tom Doherty Associates

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She liked that. It gave her an edge—and she needed every edge she could get.

She also liked the night. During the day, Luthadel was cramped and confining despite its size. But at night the mists fell like a deep cloud. They dampened, softened, shaded. Massive keeps became shadowed mountains, and crowded tenements melted together like a chandler's rejected wares.

Vin crouched beside her building, still watching the intersection. Carefully, she reached within herself and burned steel—one of the other metals she'd swallowed earlier. Immediately, a group of translucent blue lines sprung up around her. Visible only to her eyes, the lines pointed from her chest to nearby sources of metal—all metals, no matter what type. The thickness of the lines was proportionate to the size of the metal pieces they met. Some pointed to bronze door latches, others to crude iron nails holding boards together.

She waited silently. None of the lines moved. Burning steel was an easy way to tell if someone were moving nearby. If they were wearing bits of metal, they would trail telltale moving lines of blue. Of course, that wasn't the main purpose of steel. Vin reached her hand carefully into her belt pouch and pulled out one of the many coins that sat within, muffled by cloth batting. Like all other bits of metal, this coin had a blue line extending from its center to Vin's chest.

She flipped the coin into the air, then mentally grabbed its line and —burning steel—Pushed on the coin. The bit of metal shot into the air, arcing through the mists, forced away by the Push. It plinked to the ground in the middle of the street.

The mists continued to spin. They were thick and mysterious, even to Vin. More dense than a simple fog and more constant than any normal weather pattern, they churned and flowed, making rivulets around her. Her eyes could pierce them—tin made her sight more keen. The night seemed lighter to her, the mists less thick. Yet, they were still there.

A shadow moved in the city square, responding to her coin—which she had Pushed out into the square as a signal. Vin crept forward, and recognized OreSeur the kandra. He wore a different body than he had a year ago, during the days when he had acted the part of Lord Renoux. Yet, this balding, nondescript body had now become just as familiar to Vin.

OreSeur met up with her. "Did you find what you were looking for, Mistress?" he asked, tone respectful—yet somehow still a little hostile. As always.

Vin shook her head, glancing around in the darkness. "Maybe I was wrong," she said. "Maybe I *wasn't* being followed." The acknowledgment made her a bit sad. She'd been looking forward to sparring with the Watcher again tonight. She still didn't even know who he was; the first night, she'd mistaken him for an assassin. And, maybe he was. Yet, he seemed to display very little interest in Elend—and a whole lot of interest in Vin.

"We should go back to the wall," Vin decided, standing up. "Elend will be wondering where I went."

OreSeur nodded. At that moment, a burst of coins shot through the mists, spraying toward Vin.

v1.1 proofed by billbo196

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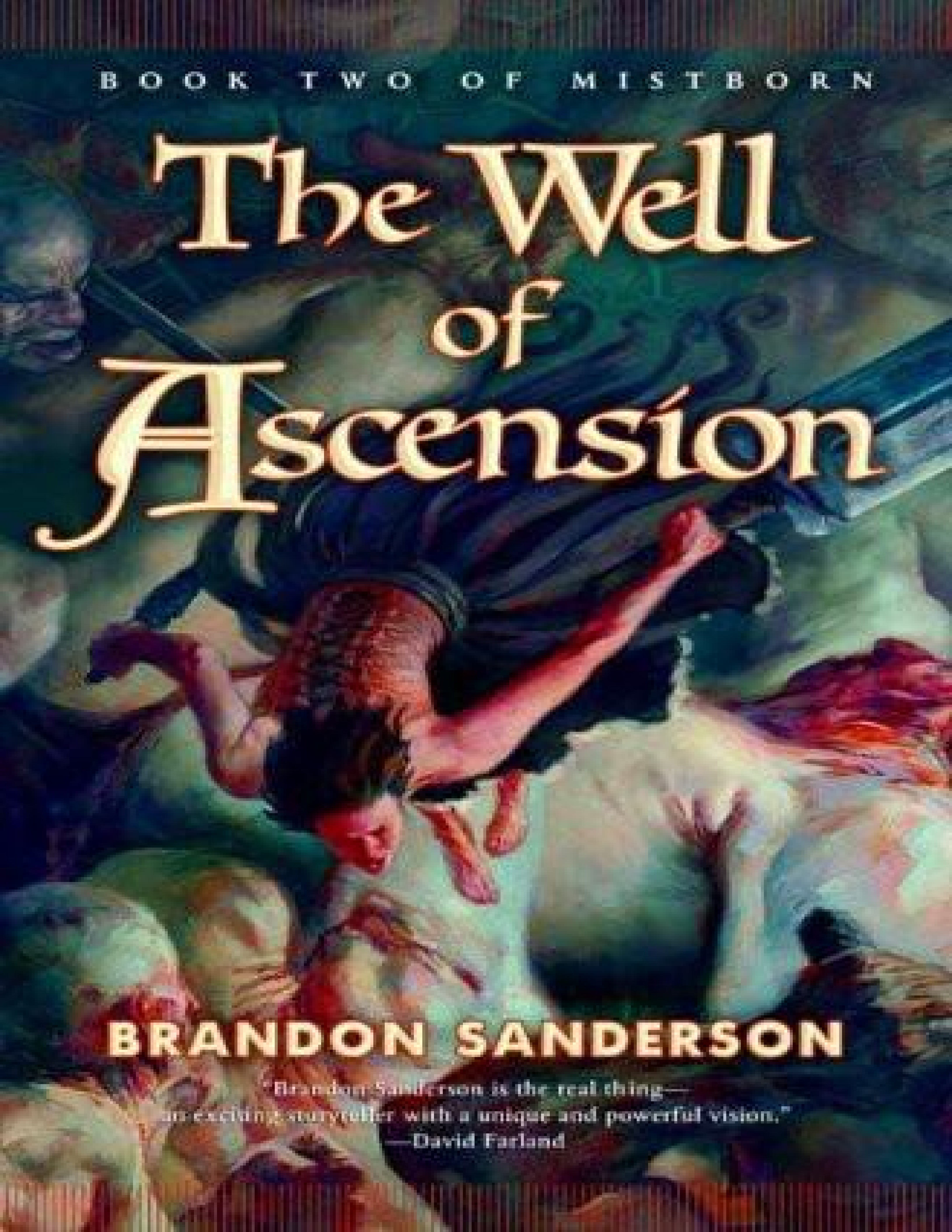

BOOK TWO OF MISTBORN

# The Well of Ascension

BRANDON SANDERSON

"Brandon Sanderson is the real thing—
an exciting storyteller with a unique and powerful vision."
—David Farland

## Praise for *The Well of Ascension*

"Sanderson's hallmark is to take traditional high-fantasy tropes and turn them upside down, and he doesn't disappoint here. Vin's a beautifully realized protagonist whose struggles are wonderfully written and, as always, the world-building is unusual and compelling."

—*Romantic Times BOOKreviews*

"This entertaining read will especially please those who always wanted to know what happened after the good guys won."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Vin's struggles with love and power inject the human element into Sanderson's engaging epic."

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## Praise for *Mistborn*

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—Robin Hobb

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—Faren Miller, *Locus*

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"It's rare for a fiction writer to have much understanding of how leadership works, how communities form, and how love really takes root in the human heart. Sanderson is astonishingly wise."

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**A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK**
**NEW YORK**

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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# THE WELL OF ASCENSION

## TOR BOOKS BY BRANDON SANDERSON

*Elantris*
*Mistborn*
*The Well of Ascension*
*The Hero of Ages**

**FOR PHYLLIS CALL,**

*Who may never understand my fantasy books,*
*yet who taught me more about life*
*—and therefore writing—*
*than she can probably ever know*

*(Thanks, Grandma!)*

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nethermore.com. Shawn Boyles is the official Mistborn Llama artist, and a great guy to boot. Check my Web site for more information. Finally, I'd like to thank the Tor publicity department—specifically Dot Lin—which has been wonderful in promoting my books and taking care of me. Thank you so much, all of you!

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My mother, father, and sisters are always a wonderful help as well. If I forgot any alpha readers, I'm sorry! I'll put you in twice next time. Note, Peter Ahlstrom, I didn't forget you—I just decided to stick you in late to make you sweat a bit.

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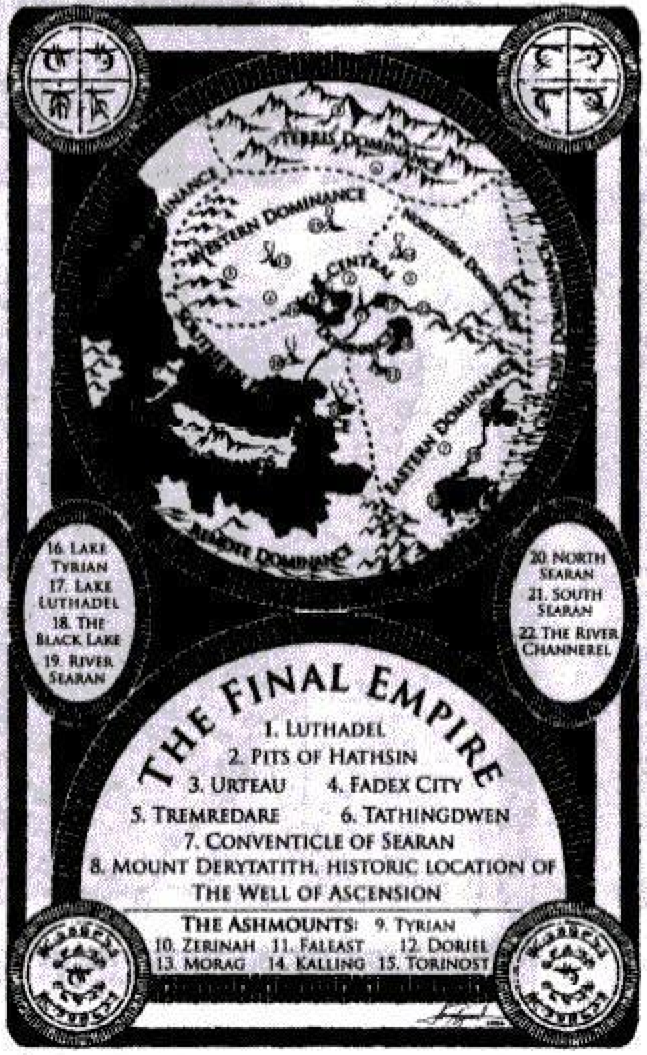
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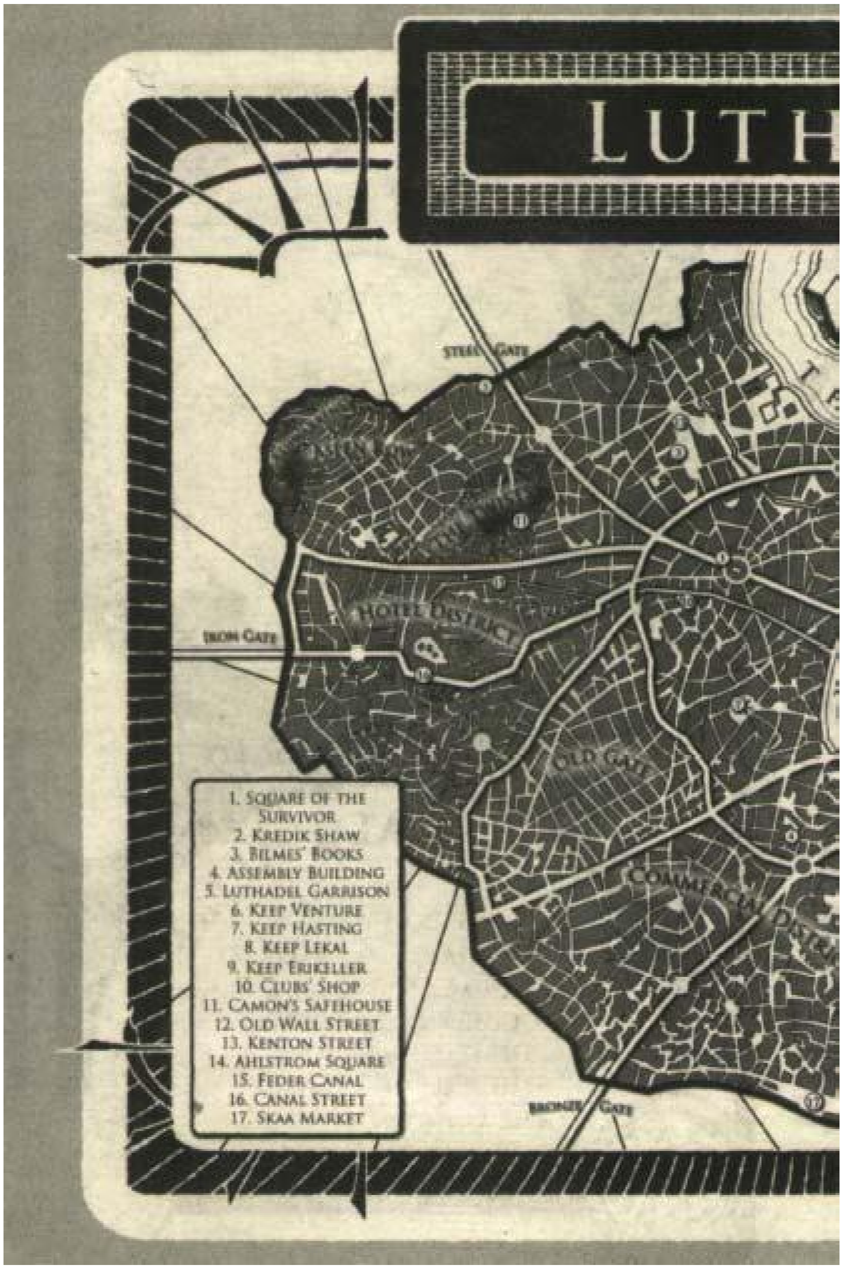
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PEWTER GATE
ZINC GATE
INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT
BRASS GATE
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2006

## PART ONE

# HEIR OF THE SURVIVOR

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## 1

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Power she appreciated, for she well knew what it was like to lack it. Even now, she was not what one would likely envision as a warrior. Slight of frame and barely five feet tall, with dark hair and pale skin, she knew she had an almost frail look about her. She no longer displayed the underfed look she had during her childhood on the streets, but she certainly wasn't someone any man would find intimidating.

She liked that. It gave her an edge—and she needed every edge she could get.

She also liked the night. During the day, Luthadel was cramped and confining despite its size. But at night the mists fell like a deep cloud. They dampened, softened, shaded. Massive keeps became shadowed mountains, and crowded tenements melted together like a chandler's rejected wares.

Vin crouched beside her building, still watching the intersection. Carefully, she reached within herself and burned steel—one of the other metals she'd swallowed earlier. Immediately, a group of translucent blue lines sprang up around her. Visible only to her eyes, the lines pointed from her chest to nearby sources of metal—all metals, no matter what type. The thickness of the lines was proportionate to the size of the metal pieces they met. Some pointed to bronze door latches, others to crude iron nails holding boards together.

She waited silently. None of the lines moved. Burning steel was an easy way to tell if someone was moving nearby. If they were wearing bits of metal, they would trail telltale moving lines of blue. Of course, that wasn't the main purpose of steel. Vin reached her hand carefully into her belt pouch and pulled out one of the many coins that sat within, muffled by cloth batting. Like all other bits of metal, this coin had a blue line extending from its center to Vin's chest.

She flipped the coin into the air, then mentally grabbed its line and—burning steel—Pushed on the coin. The bit of metal shot into the air, arcing through the mists, forced away by the Push. It plinked to the ground in the middle of the street.

The mists continued to spin. They were thick and mysterious, even to Vin. More dense than a simple fog and more constant than any normal weather pattern, they churned and flowed, making rivulets around her. Her eyes could pierce them; tin made her sight more keen. The night seemed lighter to her, the mists less thick. Yet, they were still there.

A shadow moved in the city square, responding to her coin—which she had Pushed out into the square as a signal. Vin crept forward, and recognized OreSeur the kandra. He wore a different body than he had a year ago, during the days when he had acted the part of Lord Renoux. Yet, this balding, nondescript body had now become just as familiar to Vin.

OreSeur met up with her. "Did you find what you were looking for, Mistress?" he asked, tone respectful—yet somehow still a little hostile. As always.

Vin shook her head, glancing around in the darkness. "Maybe I was wrong," she said. "Maybe I *wasn't* being followed." The acknowledgment made her a bit sad. She'd been looking forward to sparring with the Watcher again tonight. She still didn't even know who he was; the first night, she'd mistaken him for an assassin. And maybe he was. Yet, he seemed to display very little interest in Elend—and a whole lot of interest in Vin.

"We should go back to the wall," Vin decided, standing up. "Elend will be wondering where I went."

OreSeur nodded. At that moment, a burst of coins shot through the mists, spraying toward Vin.

*I have begun to wonder if I am the only sane man left. Can the others not see? They have been waiting so long for their hero to come—the one spoken of in Terris prophecies—that they quickly jump between conclusions, presuming that each story and legend applies to this one man.*

# 2

VIN REACTED IMMEDIATELY, SPRINGING AWAY. She moved with incredible speed, tasseled cloak swirling as she skidded across the wet cobblestones. The coins hit the ground behind her, throwing up chips of stone, then leaving trails in the mist as they ricocheted away.

"OreSeur, go!" she snapped, though he was already fleeing toward a nearby alleyway.

Vin spun into a low crouch, hands and feet on the cool stones, Allomantic metals flaring in her stomach. She burned steel, watching the translucent blue lines appear around her. She waited, tense, watching for. . .

Another group of coins shot from the dark mists, each one trailing a blue line. Vin immediately flared steel and Pushed against the coins, deflecting them out into the darkness.

The night fell still again.

The street around her was wide—for Luthadel—though tenements rose high on either side. Mist spun lazily, making the ends of the street disappear into a haze.

A group of eight men appeared from the mists and approached. Vin smiled. She *had* been right: Someone was following her. These men weren't, however, the Watcher. They didn't have his solid grace, his sense of power. These men were something far more blunt. Assassins.

It made sense. If 1*she* had just arrived with an army to conquer Luthadel, the first thing she'd have done was send in a group of Allomancers to kill Elend.

She felt a sudden pressure at her side, and she cursed as she was thrown off balance, her coin pouch jerking away from her waist. She ripped its string free, letting the enemy Allomancer Push the coins away from her. The assassins had at least one Coinshot—a Misting who had the power to burn steel and Push on metals. In fact, two of the assassins trailed blue lines pointing to coin pouches of their own. Vin considered returning the favor and Pushing their pouches away, but hesitated. No need to play her hand yet. She might need those coins.

Without coins of her own, she couldn't attack from a distance. However, if this was a good team, then attacking from a distance would be pointless—their Coinshots and Lurchers would be ready to deal with shot coins. Fleeing wasn't an option either. These men hadn't come for her alone; if she fled, they'd continue on to their real goal.

Nobody sent assassins to kill bodyguards. Assassins killed important men. Men like Elend Venture, king of the Central Dominance. The man she loved.

Vin flared pewter—body growing tense, alert, dangerous. *Four Thugs at the front*, she thought, eyeing the advancing men. The pewter burners would be inhumanly strong, capable of surviving a great deal of physical punishment. Very dangerous up close. *And the one carrying the wooden shield is a Lurcher*.

She feinted forward, causing the approaching Thugs to jump backward. Eight Mistings against one Mistborn was decent odds for them—but only if they were careful. The two Coinshots moved up the sides of the street, so that they'd be able to Push at her from both directions. The last man, standing quietly beside the Lurcher, had to be a Smoker—relatively unimportant in a fight, his purpose was to hide his team from enemy Allomancers.

Eight Mistings. Kelsier could have done it; he'd killed an Inquisitor. She wasn't Kelsier, however. She had yet to decide if that was a bad or a good thing.

Vin took a deep breath, wishing she had a bit of atium to spare, and burned iron. This let her Pull on a nearby coin—one of those that had been shot at her—much as steel would have let her Push on it. She caught it, dropped it, then jumped, making as if to Push on the coin and shoot herself into the air.

One of the Coinshots, however, Pushed against the coin, shooting it away. Since Allomancy would only let a person Push directly away from—or Pull directly toward—their body, Vin was left without a decent anchor. Pushing against the coin would only shoot her sideways.

She dropped back to the ground.

*Let them think they have me trapped*, she thought, crouching in the center of the street. The Thugs approached a little more confidently. *Yes*, Vin thought. *I know what you're thinking. This is the Mistborn who killed the Lord Ruler? This scrawny thing? Can it be possible*?

*I wonder the same thing myself*.

The first Thug ducked in to attack, and Vin burst into motion. Obsidian daggers flashed in the night as she ripped them free from their sheaths, and blood sprayed black in the darkness as she ducked beneath the Thug's staff and slashed her weapons across his thighs.

The man cried out. The night was no longer silent.

Men cursed as Vin moved through them. The Thug's partner attacked her—blurrin1gly fast, his muscles fueled by pewter. His staff whipped a tassel from Vin's mistcloak as she threw herself to the ground, then pushed herself back up out of a third Thug's reach.

A spray of coins flew toward her. Vin reached out and Pushed on them. The Coinshot, however, continued to Push—and Vin's Push smashed against his.

Pushing and Pulling metals was all about weight. And—with the coins between them—that meant Vin's weight was slammed against the assassin's weight. Both were tossed backward. Vin shot out of a Thug's reach; the Coinshot fell to the ground.

A flurry of coins came at her from the other direction. Still tumbling in the air, Vin flared steel, giving herself an extra burst of power. Blue lines were a jumbled mess, but she didn't need to isolate the coins to Push them all away.

This Coinshot let go of his missiles as soon as he felt Vin's touch. The bits of metal scattered out into the mists.

Vin hit the cobblestones shoulder-first. She rolled—flaring pewter to enhance her balance—and flipped to her feet. At the same time, she burned iron and Pulled hard on the disappearing coins.

They shot back toward her. As soon as they got close, Vin jumped to the side and Pushed them toward the approaching Thugs. The coins, however, immediately veered away, twisting through the mists toward the Lurcher. He was unable to Push the coins away—like all Mistings, he only had one Allomantic power, and his was to Pull with iron.

He did this effectively, protecting the Thugs. He raised his shield and grunted from the impact as the coins hit it and bounced away.

Vin was already moving again. She ran directly for the now exposed Coinshot to her left, the one who had fallen to the ground. The man yelped in surprise, and the other Coinshot tried to distract Vin, but he was too slow.

The Coinshot died with a dagger in his chest. He was no Thug; he couldn't burn pewter to enhance his body. Vin pulled out her dagger, then yanked his pouch free. He gurgled quietly and collapsed back to the stones.

*One,* Vin thought, spinning, sweat flying from her brow. She now faced seven men down the corridor-like street. They probably expected her to flee. Instead, she charged.

As she got close to the Thugs, she jumped—then threw down the pouch she'd taken from the dying man. The remaining Coinshot cried out, immediately Pushing it away. Vin, however, got some lift from the coins, throwing herself in a leap directly over the heads of the Thugs.

One of them—the wounded one—had unfortunately been smart enough to remain behind to protect the Coinshot. The Thug raised his cudgel as Vin landed. She ducked his first attack, raised her dagger, and—

A blue line danced into her vision. Quick. Vin reacted immediately, twisting and Pushing against a door latch to throw herself out of the way. She hit the ground on her side, then flung herself up with one hand. She landed skidding on mist-wetted feet.

A coin hit the ground behind her, bouncing against the cobbles. It hadn't come close to hitting her. In fact, it had seemed aimed at the remaining assassin Coinshot. He'd probably been forced to Push it away.

But who had fired it?

*OreSeur*? Vin wondered. But, that was foolish. The kandra was no Allomancer—and besides, he wouldn't have taken the initiative. OreSeur did only what he was expre1ssly told.

The assassin Coinshot looked equally confused. Vin glanced up, flaring tin, and was rewarded with the sight of a man standing atop a nearby building. A dark silhouette. He didn't even bother to hide.

*It's him*, she thought. *The Watcher*.

The Watcher remained atop his perch, offering no further interference as the Thugs rushed Vin. She cursed as she found three staves coming at her at once. She ducked one, spun around the other, then planted a dagger in the chest of the man holding the third. He stumbled backward, but didn't drop. Pewter kept him on his feet.

*Why did the Watcher interfere*? Vin thought as she jumped away. *Why would he shoot that coin at a Coinshot who could obviously Push it away*?

Her preoccupation with the Watcher nearly cost her her life as an unnoticed Thug charged her from the side. It was the man whose legs she'd slashed. Vin reacted-just in time to dodge his blow. This, however, put her into range of the other three.

All attacked at once.

She actually managed to twist out of the way of two of the strikes. One, however, crashed into her side. The powerful blow tossed her across the street, and she collided with a shop's wooden door. She heard a crack—from the door, fortunately, and not her bones—and she slumped to the ground, daggers lost. A normal person would be dead. Her pewter-strengthened body, however, was tougher than that.

She gasped for breath, forcing herself up to her feet, and flared tin. The metal enhanced her senses—including her sense of pain—and the sudden shock cleared her mind. Her side ached where she'd been struck. But she couldn't stop. Not with a Thug charging her, swinging his staff in an overhead blow.

Crouching before the doorway, Vin flared pewter and caught the staff in both hands. She growled, pulling back her left hand, then cracking her fist against the weapon, shattering the fine hardwood in a single blow. The Thug stumbled, and Vin smashed her half of the staff across his eyes.

Though dazed, he stayed on his feet. *Can't fight the Thugs*, she thought. *I have to keep moving*.

She dashed to the side, ignoring her pain. The Thugs tried to follow, but she was lighter, thinner, and—much more important—faster. She circled them, coming back toward the Coinshot, Smoker, and Lurcher. A wounded Thug had again retreated to protect these men.

As Vin approached, the Coinshot threw a double handful of coins at her. Vin Pushed the coins away, then reached out and Pulled on the ones in the bag at the man's waist.

The Coinshot grunted as the bag whipped toward Vin. It was tied by a short tether to his waist, and the pull of her weight jerked him forward. The Thug grabbed and steadied him.

And since her anchor couldn't move, Vin was instead Pulled toward it. She flared her iron, flying through the air, raising a fist. The Coinshot cried out and he pulled a tie to free the bag.

Too late. Vin's momentum carried her forward, and she drove her fist into the Coinshot's cheek as she passed. His head spun around, neck snapping. As Vin landed, she brought her elbow up into the surprised Thug's chin, tossing him backward. Her foot followed, crashing against the Thug's neck.

Neither rose. That was three down. The discarded coin pouch fell to the ground, breaking and throwing a hundred sparkling bits o1f copper across the cobblestones around Vin. She ignored the throbbing in her elbow and faced down the Lurcher. He stood with his shield, looking strangely unworried.

A *crack* sounded behind her. Vin cried out, her tin-enhanced ears overreacting to the sudden sound. Pain shot through her head, and she raised hands to her ears. She'd forgotten the Smoker, who stood holding two lengths of wood, crafted to make sharp noises when pounded together.

Movements and reactions, actions and consequences—these were the essence of Allomancy. Tin made her eyes pierce the mists—giving her an edge over the assassins. However, the tin also made her ears extremely acute. The Smoker raised his sticks again. Vin growled and yanked a handful of coins off the cobblestones, then shot them at the Smoker. The Lurcher, of course, Pulled them toward him instead. They hit the shield and bounced free. And as they sprayed into the air, Vin carefully Pushed one so it fell behind him.

The man lowered his shield, unaware of the coin Vin had manipulated. Vin Pulled, whipping the single coin directly toward her—and into the back of the Lurcher's chest. He fell without a sound.

*Four*.

All fell still. The Thugs running toward her drew to a stop, and the Smoker lowered his sticks. They had no Coinshots and no Lurchers—nobody that could Push or Pull metal—and Vin stood amid a field of coins. If she used them, even the Thugs would fall quickly. All she had to do was—

Another coin shot through the air, fired from the Watcher's rooftop. Vin cursed, ducking. The coin, however, didn't strike her. It took the stick-holding Smoker directly in the forehead. The man toppled backward, dead.

*What*? Vin thought, staring at the dead man.

The Thugs charged, but Vin retreated, frowning. *Why kill the Smoker? He wasn't a threat anymore*.

Unless. . .

Vin extinguished her copper, then burned bronze, the metal that let her sense when other Allomancers were using powers nearby. She couldn't feel the Thugs burning pewter. They were still being Smoked, their Allomancy hidden.

Someone else was burning copper.

Suddenly, it all made sense. It made sense that the group would risk attacking a full Mistborn. It made sense that the Watcher had fired at the Coinshot. It made sense that he had killed the Smoker.

Vin was in grave danger.

She only had a moment to make her decision. She did so on a hunch, but she'd grown up on the streets, a thief and a scam artist. Hunches felt more natural to her than logic ever would.

"OreSeur!" she yelled. "Go for the palace!"

It was a code, of course. Vin jumped back, momentarily ignoring the Thugs as her servant ducked out of an alleyway. He pulled something off his belt and whipped it toward Vin: a small glass vial, the kind that Allomancers used to store metal shavings. Vin quickly Pulled the vial to her hand. A short distance away, the second Coinshot—who had lain there, as if dead—now cursed and scrambled to his feet.

Vin spun, drinking the vial with a quick gulp. It contained only a single bead of metal. Atium. She couldn't risk carrying it on her own body—couldn't risk having it Pulled away from her during a fight. She'd ordered OreSeur to remain close this night, ready to give her the vial in an emergency.

The "Coinshot" pulled a hidden glass dagger from his waist, charging at Vin ahead of the Thugs, who were getting close. Vin paused for just a moment—regretting her decision, but seeing its inevitability.

The men had hidden a Mistborn among their numbers. A Mistborn like Vin, a person who could burn all ten metals. A Mistborn who had been waiting for the right moment to strike at her, to catch her unprepared.

He would have atium, and there was only one way to fight someone who had atium. It was the ultimate Allomantic metal, usable only by full Mistborn, and it could easily decide the fate of a battle. Each bead was worth a fortune—but what good was a fortune if she died?

Vin burned her atium.

The world around her seemed to change. Every moving object—swinging shutters, blowing ash, attacking Thugs, even trails of mist—shot out a translucent replica of itself. The replicas moved just in front of their real counterparts, showing Vin exactly what would happen a few moments in the future.

Only the Mistborn was immune. Rather than shooting out a single atium shadow, he released dozens—the sign that he was burning atium. He paused just briefly. Vin's own body would have just exploded with dozens of confusing atium shadows. Now that she could see the future, she could see what he was going to do. That, in turn, changed what she was going to do. That changed what he was going to do. And so, like the reflections in two mirrors facing each other, the possibilities continued into infinity. Neither had an advantage.

Though their Mistborn paused, the four unfortunate Thugs continued to charge, having no way to know that Vin burned atium. Vin turned, standing beside the body of the fallen Smoker. With one foot, she kicked the soundsticks into the air.

A Thug arrived, swinging. His diaphanous atium shadow of a staff blow passed through her body. Vin twisted, ducking to the side, and could feel the real staff pass over her ear. The maneuver seemed easy within the aura of atium.

She snatched one of the soundsticks from the air, then slammed it up into the Thug's neck. She spun, catching the other soundstick, then twisted back and cracked it against the man's skull. He fell forward, groaning, and Vin spun again, easily dodging between two more staves.

She smashed the noise sticks against the sides of a second Thug's head. They shattered—ringing with a hollow sound like that of a musician's beat—as the Thug's skull cracked.

He fell, and did not move again. Vin kicked his staff into the air, then dropped the broken soundsticks and caught it. She spun, twisting the staff and tripping both remaining Thugs at once. In a fluid motion, she delivered two swift—yet powerful—blows to their faces.

She fell to a crouch as the men died, holding the staff in one hand, her other hand resting against the mist-wetted cobbles. The Mistborn held back, and she could see uncertainty in his eyes. Power didn't necessarily mean competence, and his two best advantages—surprise and atium—had been negated.

He turned, Pulling a group of coins up off the ground, then shot them. Not toward Vin—but toward OreSeur, who still stood in the mouth of an alleyway. The Mistborn obviously hoped that Vin's concern for her servant would draw her attention away, perhaps letting him escape.

He was wrong.

Vin ignored the coins, dashing forward. Even as OreSeur cried out in pain—a 1dozen coins piercing his skin—Vin threw her staff at the Mistborn's head. Once it left her fingers, however, its atium shadow became firm and singular.

The Mistborn assassin ducked, dodging perfectly. The move distracted him long enough for her to close the distance, however. She needed to attack quickly; the atium bead she'd swallowed had been small. It would burn out quickly. And, once it was gone, she'd be exposed. Her opponent would have total power over her. He—

Her terrified opponent raised his dagger. At that moment, his atium ran out.

Vin's predatory instincts reacted instantly, and she swung a fist. He raised an arm to block her blow, but she saw it coming, and she changed the direction of her attack. The blow took him square in the face. Then, with deft fingers, she snatched his glass dagger before it could fall and shatter. She stood and swung it through her opponent's neck.

He fell quietly.

Vin stood, breathing heavily, the group of assassins dead around her. For just a moment, she felt overwhelming power. With atium, she was invincible. She could dodge any blow, kill any enemy.

Her atium ran out.

Suddenly, everything seemed to grow dull. The pain in her side returned to her mind, and she coughed, groaning. She'd have bruises—large ones. Perhaps some cracked ribs.

But she'd won again. Barely. What would happen when she failed? When she didn't watch carefully enough, or fight skillfully enough?

Elend would die.

Vin sighed, and looked up. *He* was still there, watching her from atop a roof. Despite a half-dozen chases spread across several months, she'd never managed to catch him. Someday she would corner him in the night.

But not today. She didn't have the energy. In fact, a part of her worried that he'd strike her down. *But. . .*she thought. *He saved me. I would have died if I'd gotten too close to that hidden Mistborn. An instant of him burning atium with me unaware, and I'd have found his daggers in my chest*.

The Watcher stood for a few more moments—wreathed, as always, in the curling mists. Then he turned, jumping away into the night. Vin let him go; she had to deal with OreSeur.

She stumbled over to him, then paused. His nondescript body—in a servant's trousers and shirt—had been pelted with coins, and blood seeped from the several wounds.

He looked up at her. "What?" he asked.

"I didn't expect there to be blood."

OreSeur snorted. "You probably didn't expect me to feel pain either."

Vin opened her mouth, then paused. Actually, she hadn't ever thought about it. Then she hardened herself. *What right does this* thing *have to chastise me*?

Still, OreSeur had proven useful. "Thank you for throwing me the vial," she said.

"It was my duty, Mistress," OreSeur said, grunting as he pulled his broken body up against the side of the alleyway. "I was charged with your protection by Master Kelsier. As always, I serve the Contract."

*Ah, yes. The almighty Contract*. "Can you walk?"

"Only with effort, Mistress. The coins shattered several of these bones. I will need a new body. One of the assassins, perhaps1?"

Vin frowned. She glanced back toward the dead men, and her stomach twisted slightly at the gruesome sight of their fallen bodies. She'd killed them, eight men, with the cruel efficiency that Kelsier had trained in her.

*This is what I am*, she thought. *A killer, like those men*. That was how it had to be. Someone had to protect Elend.

However, the thought of OreSeur eating one of them—digesting the corpse, letting his strange kandra senses memorize the positioning of muscles, skin, and organs, so that he could reproduce them—sickened her.

She glanced to the side, and saw the veiled scorn in OreSeur's eyes. They both knew what she thought of him eating human bodies. They both knew what he thought of her prejudice.

"No," Vin said. "We won't use one of these men."

"You'll have to find me another body, then," OreSeur said. "The Contract states that I cannot be forced to kill men."

Vin's stomach twisted again. *I'll think of something*, she thought. His current body was that of a murderer, taken after an execution. Vin was still worried that someone in the city would recognize the face.

"Can you get back to the palace?" Vin asked.

"With time," OreSeur said.

Vin nodded, dismissing him, then turned back toward the bodies. Somehow she suspected that this night would mark a distinct turning point in the fate of the Central Dominance.

Straff's assassins had done more damage than they would ever know. That bead of atium had been her last. The next time a Mistborn attacked her, she would be exposed.

And would likely die as easily as the Mistborn she'd slain this night.

*My brethren ignore the other facts. They cannot connect the other strange things that are happening. They are deaf to my objections and blind to my discoveries*.

# 3

ELEND DROPPED HIS PEN TO his desk with a sigh, then leaned back in his chair and rubbed his forehead.

Elend figured that he knew as much about political theory as any living man. He'd certainly read more about economics, studied more about governments, and held more political debates than anyone he knew. He understood all the theories about how to make a nation stable and fair, and had tried to implement those in his new kingdom.

He just hadn't realized how incredibly frustrating a parliamentary council would be.

He stood up and walked over to get himself some chilled wine. He paused, however, as he glanced out his balcony doors. In the distance, a glowing haze shone through the mists. The campfires of his father's army.

He put down the wine. He was already exhausted, and the alcohol probably wouldn't help. *I can't afford to fall asleep until I get this done*! he thought, forcing himself to return to his seat. The Assembly would meet soon, and he needed to have the proposal finished tonight.

Elend picked up the sheet, scanning its contents. His handwriting looked cramped even to him, and the page was scattered with crossed-out lines and notations—reflections of his frustration. They'd known about the army's approach for weeks now, and the Assembly still quibbled about what1 to do.

Some of its members wanted to offer a peace treaty; others thought they should simply surrender the city. Still others felt they should attack without delay. Elend feared that the surrender faction was gaining strength; hence his proposal. The motion, if passed, would buy him more time. As king, he already had prime right of parlay with a foreign dictator. The proposal would forbid the Assembly from doing anything rash until he'd at least met with his father.

Elend sighed again, dropping the sheet. The Assembly was only twenty-four men, but getting them to agree on anything was almost more challenging than any of the problems they argued about. Elend turned, looking past the solitary lamp on his desk, out through the open balcony doors and toward the fires. Overhead, he heard feet scuttling on the rooftop—Vin, going about her nightly rounds.

Elend smiled fondly, but not even thinking of Vin could restore his good temper. *That group of assassins she fought tonight. Can I use that somehow*? Perhaps if he made the attack public, the Assembly would be reminded of the disdain Straff had for human life, and then be less likely to surrender the city to him. But. . .perhaps they'd also get frightened that he'd send assassins after *them*, and be more likely to surrender.

Sometimes Elend wondered if the Lord Ruler had been right. Not in oppressing the people, of course—but in retaining all of the power for himself. The Final Empire had been nothing if not stable. It had lasted a thousand years, weathering rebellions, maintaining a strong hold on the world.

*The Lord Ruler was immortal, though*, Elend thought. *That's an advantage I'll certainly never have*.

The Assembly was a better way. By giving the people a parliament with real legal authority, Elend would craft a stable government. The people would have a king—a man to provide continuity, a symbol of unity. A man who wouldn't be tainted by the need to get reappointed. However, they would also have an Assembly—a council made up of their peers that could voice their concerns.

It all sounded wonderful in theory. Assuming they survived the next few months.

Elend rubbed his eyes, then dipped his pen and began to scratch new sentences at the bottom of the document.

The Lord Ruler was dead.

Even a year later, Vin sometimes found that concept difficult to grasp. The Lord Ruler had been. . .everything. King and god, lawmaker and ultimate authority. He had been eternal and absolute, and now he was dead.

Vin had killed him.

Of course, the truth wasn't as impressive as the stories. It hadn't been heroic strength or mystical power that had let Vin defeat the emperor. She'd just figured out the trick that he'd been using to make himself immortal, and she'd fortunately—almost accidentally—exploited his weakness. She wasn't brave or clever. Just lucky.

Vin sighed. Her bruises still throbbed, but she had suffered far worse. She sat atop the palace—once Keep Venture—just above Elend's balcony. Her reputation might have been unearned, but it had helped keep Elend alive. Though dozens of warlords squabbled in the land that had once been the Final Empire, none of them had marched on Luthadel.

Until now.

Fires burned outside the city. Straff would soon know that his assassins had failed. What then? Assault the city? Ham and Clubs warned that Luthadel couldn'1t hold against a determined attack. Straff had to know that.

Still, for the moment, Elend was safe. Vin had gotten pretty good at finding and killing assassins; barely a month passed that she didn't catch someone trying to sneak into the palace. Many were just spies, and very few were Allomancers. However, a normal man's steel knife would kill Elend just as easily as an Allomancer's glass one.

She wouldn't let that occur. Whatever else happened—whatever sacrifices it required—Elend *had* to stay alive.

Suddenly apprehensive, she slipped over to the skylight to check on him. Elend sat safely at his desk below, scribbling away on some new proposal or edict. Kingship had changed the man remarkably little. About four years her senior—placing him in his early twenties—Elend was a man who put great stock in learning, but little in appearance. He only bothered to comb his hair when he attended an important function, and he somehow managed to wear even well-tailored outfits with an air of dishevelment.

He was probably the best man she had ever known. Earnest, determined, clever, and caring. And, for some reason, he loved her. At times, that fact was even more amazing to her than her part in the Lord Ruler's death.

Vin looked up, glancing back at the army lights. Then she looked to the sides. The Watcher had not returned. Often on nights like this he would tempt her, coming dangerously close to Elend's room before disappearing into the city.

*Of course, if he'd wanted to kill Elend, he could just have done it while I was fighting the others*. . ..

It was a disquieting thought. Vin couldn't watch Elend every moment. He was exposed a frightening amount of the time.

True, Elend had other bodyguards, and some were even Allomancers. They, however, were stretched as thin as she was. This night's assassins had been the most skilled, and most dangerous, that she had ever faced. She shivered, thinking about the Mistborn who had hid among them. He hadn't been very good, but he wouldn't have needed much skill to burn atium, then strike Vin directly in the right place.

The shifting mists continued to spin. The army's presence whispered a disturbing truth: The surrounding warlords were beginning to consolidate their domains, and were thinking about expansion. Even if Luthadel stood against Straff somehow, others would come.

Quietly, Vin closed her eyes and burned bronze, still worried that the Watcher—or some other Allomancer—might be nearby, planning to attack Elend in the supposedly safe aftermath of the assassination attempt. Most Mistborn considered bronze to be a relatively useless metal, as it was easily negated. With copper, a Mistborn could mask their Allomancy—not to mention protect themselves from emotional manipulation by zinc or brass. Most Mistborn considered it foolish not to have their copper on at all times.

And yet. . .Vin had the ability to pierce copperclouds.

A coppercloud wasn't a visible thing. It was far more vague. A pocket of deadened air where Allomancers could burn their metals and not worry that bronze burners would be able to sense them. But Vin could sense Allomancers who used metals inside of a coppercloud. She still wasn't certain why. Even Kelsier, the most powerful Allomancer she had known, hadn't been able to pierce a coppercloud.

Tonight, however, she sensed nothing.

With a sigh, she opened her eyes. Her strange power was confusing, but i1t wasn't unique to her. Marsh had confirmed that Steel Inquisitors could pierce copperclouds, and she was certain that the Lord Ruler had been able to do so. But. . .why her? Why could Vin—a girl who barely had two years' training as a Mistborn—do it?

There was more. She still remembered vividly the morning when she'd fought the Lord Ruler. There was something about that event that she hadn't told anyone—partially because it made her fear, just a bit, that the rumors and legends about her were true. Somehow, she'd drawn upon the mists, using *them* to fuel her Allomancy instead of metals.

It was only with that power, the power of the mists, that she had been able to beat the Lord Ruler in the end. She liked to tell herself that she had simply been lucky in figuring out the Lord Ruler's tricks. But. . .there *had* been something strange that night, something that she'd done. Something that she shouldn't have been able to do, and had never been able to repeat.

Vin shook her head. There was so much they didn't know, and not just about Allomancy. She and the other leaders of Elend's fledgling kingdom tried their best, but without Kelsier to guide them, Vin felt blind. Plans, successes, and even goals were like shadowy figures in the mist, formless and indistinct.

*You shouldn't have left us, Kell,* she thought. *You saved the world—but you should have been able to do it without dying*. Kelsier, the Survivor of Hathsin, the man who had conceived and implemented the collapse of the Final Empire. Vin had known him, worked with him, been trained by him. He was a legend and a hero. Yet, he had also been a man. Fallible. Imperfect. It was easy for the skaa to revere him, then blame Elend and the others for the dire situation that Kelsier had created.

The thought left her feeling bitter. Thinking about Kelsier often did that. Perhaps it was the sense of abandonment, or perhaps it was just the uncomfortable knowledge that Kelsier—like Vin herself—didn't fully live up to his reputation.

Vin sighed, closing her eyes, still burning bronze. The evening's fight had taken a lot out of her, and she was beginning to dread the hours she still intended to spend watching. It would be difficult to remain alert when—

She sensed something.

Vin snapped her eyes open, flaring her tin. She spun and stooped against the rooftop to obscure her profile. There was someone out there, burning metal. Bronze pulses thumped weakly, faint, almost unnoticeable—like someone playing drums very quietly. They were muffled by a coppercloud. The person—whoever it was—thought that their copper would hide them.

So far, Vin hadn't left anyone alive, save Elend and Marsh, who knew of her strange power.

Vin crept forward, fingers and toes chilled by the roof's copper sheeting. She tried to determine the direction of the pulses. Something was. . .odd about them. She had trouble distinguishing the metals her enemy was burning. Was that the quick, beating thump of pewter? Or was it the rhythm of iron? The pulses seemed indistinct, like ripples in a thick mud.

They were coming from somewhere very close. . .. On the rooftop. . .

Just in front of her.

Vin froze, crouching, the night breezes blowing a wall of mist across her. Where was he? Her senses argued with each other; her bronze said there was something right in front of her, but her eyes refused to agree.

She studied the dark mists, glan1ced upward just to be certain, then stood. *This is the first time my bronze has been wrong*, she thought with a frown.

Then she saw it.

Not something *in* the mists, but something *of* the mists. The figure stood a few feet away, easy to miss, for its shape was only faintly outlined by the mist. Vin gasped, stepping backward.

The figure continued to stand where it was. She couldn't tell much about it; its features were cloudy and vague, outlined by the chaotic churnings of windblown mist. If not for the form's persistence, she could have dismissed it—like the shape of an animal seen briefly in the clouds.

But it stayed. Each new curl of the mist added definition to thin its body and long head. Haphazard, yet persistent. It suggested a human, but it lacked the Watcher's solidity. It felt. . .looked. . .wrong.

The figure took a step forward.

Vin reacted instantly, throwing up a handful of coins and Pushing them through the air. The bits of metal zipped through the mist, trailing streaks, and passed right through the shadowy figure.

It stood for a moment. Then, it simply puffed away, dissipating into the mists' random curls.

Elend wrote the final line with a flair, though he knew he'd simply have a scribe rewrite the proposal. Still, he was proud. He thought that he'd been able to work out an argument that would finally convince the Assembly that they could not simply surrender to Straff.

He glanced unconsciously toward a stack of papers on his desk. On their top sat an innocent-seeming yellow letter, still folded, bloodlike smudge of wax broken at the seal. The letter had been short. Elend remembered its words easily.

> *Son,*
>
> *I trust you've enjoyed seeing after Venture interests in Luthadel. I have secured the Northern Dominance, and will shortly be returning to our keep in Luthadel. You may turn over control of the city to me at that time.*
>
> *King Straff Venture*

Of all the warlords and despots that had afflicted the Final Empire since the Lord Ruler's death, Straff was the most dangerous. Elend knew this firsthand. His father was a true imperial nobleman: He saw life as a competition between lords to see who could earn the greatest reputation. He had played the game well, making House Venture the most powerful of the pre-Collapse noble families.

Elend's father would not see the Lord Ruler's death as a tragedy or a victory—just as an opportunity. The fact that Straff's supposedly weak-willed fool of a son now claimed to be king of the Central Dominance probably gave him no end of mirth.

Elend shook his head, turning back to the proposal. *A few more rereads, a few tweaks, and I'll finally be able to get some sleep. I just—*

A cloaked form dropped from the skylight in the roof and landed with a quiet thump behind him.

Elend raised an eyebrow, turning toward the crouching figure. "You know, I leave the balcony open for a reason, Vin. You could come in that way, if you wanted."

"I know," Vin said. Then she darted across the room, moving with an Alloman1cer's unnatural litheness. She checked beneath his bed, then moved over to his closet and threw open the doors. She jumped back with the tension of an alert animal, but apparently found nothing inside that met with her disapproval, for she moved over to peek through the door leading into the rest of Elend's chambers.

Elend watched her with fondness. It had taken him some time to get used to Vin's particular. . .idiosyncrasies. He teased her about being paranoid; she just claimed she was careful. Regardless, half the time she visited his chambers she checked underneath his bed and in his closet. The other times, she held herself back—but Elend often caught her glancing distrustfully toward potential hiding places.

She was far less jumpy when she didn't have a particular reason to worry about him. However, Elend was only just beginning to understand that there was a very complex person hiding behind the face he had once known as Valette Renoux's. He had fallen in love with her courtly side without ever knowing the nervous, furtive Mistborn side. It was still a little difficult to see them as the same person.

Vin closed the door, then paused briefly, watching him with her round, dark eyes. Elend found himself smiling. Despite her oddities—or, more likely *because* of them—he loved this thin woman with the determined eyes and blunt temperament. She was like no one he had ever known—a woman of simple, yet honest, beauty and wit.

She did, however, sometimes worry him.

"Vin?" he asked, standing.

"Have you seen anything strange tonight?"

Elend paused. "Besides you?"

She frowned, striding across the room. Elend watched her small form, clothed in black trousers and a man's buttoning shirt, mistcloak tassels trailing behind her. She wore the cloak's hood down, as usual, and she stepped with a supple grace—the unconscious elegance of a person burning pewter.

*Focus*! he told himself. *You really* are *getting tired*. "Vin? What's wrong?"

Vin glanced toward the balcony. "That Mistborn, the Watcher, is in the city again."

"You're sure?"

Vin nodded. "But. . .I don't think he's going to come for you tonight."

Elend frowned. The balcony doors were still open, and trails of mist puffed through them, creeping along the floor until they finally evaporated. Beyond those doors was. . .darkness. Chaos.

*It's just mist*, he told himself. *Water vapor. Nothing to fear*. "What makes you think the Mistborn won't come for me?"

Vin shrugged. "I just feel he won't."

She often answered that way. Vin had grown up a creature of the streets, and she trusted her instincts. Oddly, so did Elend. He eyed her, reading the uncertainty in her posture. Something else had unsettled her this night. He looked into her eyes, holding them for a moment, until she glanced away.

"What?" he asked.

"I saw. . .something else," she said. "Or, I thought I did. Something in the mist, like a person formed from smoke. I could feel it, too, with Allomancy. It disappeared, though."

Elend frowned more deeply. He walked forward, putting his arms around her. "Vin, you're pushing yourself too hard. You can't keep prowling the city at night and then staying up all day. 1Even Allomancers need rest."

She nodded quietly. In his arms, she didn't seem to him like the powerful warrior who had slain the Lord Ruler. She felt like a woman past the edge of fatigue, a woman overwhelmed by events—a woman who probably felt a lot like Elend did.

She let him hold her. At first, there was a slight stiffness to her posture. It was as if a piece of her still expected to be hurt—a primal sliver that couldn't understand that it was possible to be touched out of love rather than anger. Then, however, she relaxed. Elend was one of the few she could do that around. When she held him—really held him—she clung with a desperation that bordered on terror. Somehow, despite her powerful skill as an Allomancer and her stubborn determination, Vin was frighteningly vulnerable. She seemed to need Elend. For that, he felt lucky.

Frustrated, at times. But lucky. Vin and he hadn't discussed his marriage proposal and her refusal, though Elend often thought of the encounter.

*Women are difficult enough to understand*, he thought, *and I had to go and pick the oddest one of the lot*. Still, he couldn't really complain. She loved him. He could deal with her idiosyncrasies.

Vin sighed, then looked up at him, finally relaxing as he leaned down to kiss her. He held it for a long moment, and she sighed. After the kiss, she rested her head on his shoulder. "We do have another problem," she said quietly. "I used the last of the atium tonight."

"Fighting the assassins?"

Vin nodded.

"Well, we knew it would happen eventually. Our stockpile couldn't last forever."

"Stockpile?" Vin asked. "Kelsier only left us six beads."

Elend sighed, then pulled her tight. His new government was supposed to have inherited the Lord Ruler's atium reserves—a supposed cache of the metal comprising an amazing treasure. Kelsier had counted on his new kingdom holding those riches; he had died expecting it. There was only one problem. Nobody had ever found the reserve. They had found some small bit—the atium that had made up the bracers that the Lord Ruler had used as a Feruchemical battery to store up age. However, they had spent those on supplies for the city, and they had actually contained only a very small bit of atium. Nothing like the cache was said to have. There should still be, somewhere in the city, a wealth of atium thousands of times larger than those bracers.

"We'll just have to deal with it," Elend said.

"If a Mistborn attacks you, I won't be able to kill him."

"Only if he has atium," Elend said. "It's becoming more and more rare. I doubt the other kings have much of it."

Kelsier had destroyed the Pits of Hathsin, the only place where atium could be mined. Still, if Vin *did* have to fight someone with atium. . .

*Don't think about that*, he told himself. *Just keep searching. Perhaps we can buy some. Or maybe we'll find the Lord Ruler's cache. If it even exists*. . ..

Vin looked up at him, reading the concern in his eyes, and he knew she had arrived at the same conclusions as he. There was little that could be accomplished at the moment; Vin had done well to conserve their atium as long as she had. Still, as Vin stepped back and let Elend return to his table, he couldn't help thinking about how they could have spent that atium. His people would need food for the winter.1

*But, by selling the metal*, he thought, sitting, *we would have put more of the world's most dangerous Allomantic weapon into the hands of our enemies*. Better that Vin used it up.

As he began to work again, Vin poked her head over his shoulder, obscuring his lamplight. "What is it?" she asked.

"The proposal blocking the Assembly until I've had my right of parlay."

"Again?" she asked, cocking her head and squinting as she tried to make out his handwriting.

"The Assembly rejected the last version."

Vin frowned. "Why don't you just tell them that they *have* to accept it? You're the king."

"Now, see," Elend said, "that's what I'm trying to prove by all this. I'm just one man, Vin—maybe my opinion isn't better than theirs. If we all work on the proposal together, it will come out better than if one man had done it himself."

Vin shook her head. "It will be too weak. No teeth. You should trust yourself more."

"It's not about trust. It's about what's right. We spent a thousand years fighting off the Lord Ruler—if I do things the same way he did, then what will be the difference?"

Vin turned and looked him in the eyes. "The Lord Ruler was an evil man. You're a good one. *That's* the difference."

Elend smiled. "It's that easy for you, isn't it?"

Vin nodded.

Elend leaned up and kissed her again. "Well, some of us have to make things a little more complicated, so you'll have to humor us. Now, kindly remove yourself from my light so I can get back to work."

She snorted, but stood up and rounded the desk, leaving behind a faint scent of perfume. Elend frowned. *When'd she put that on*? Many of her motions were so quick that he missed them.

Perfume—just another of the apparent contradictions that made up the woman who called herself Vin. She wouldn't have been wearing it out in the mists; she usually put it on just for him. Vin liked to be unobtrusive, but she loved wearing scents—and got annoyed at him if he didn't notice when she was trying out a new one. She seemed suspicious and paranoid, yet she trusted her friends with a dogmatic loyalty. She went out at night in black and gray, trying so hard to hide—but Elend had seen her at the balls a year ago, and she had looked natural in gowns and dresses.

For some reason she had stopped wearing those. She hadn't ever explained why.

Elend shook his head, turning back to his proposal. Next to Vin, politics seemed simplistic. She rested her arms on the desktop, watching him work, yawning.

"You should get some rest," he said, dipping his pen again.

Vin paused, then nodded. She removed her mistcloak, wrapped it around herself, then curled up on the rug beside his desk.

Elend paused. "I didn't mean *here*, Vin," he said with amusement.

"There's still a Mistborn out there somewhere," she said with a tired, muffled voice. "I'm not leaving you." She twisted in the cloak, and Elend caught a brief grimace of pain on her face. She was favoring her left side.

She didn't often tell him the details of her fights. She didn't want to worry him. It 1didn't help.

Elend pushed down his concern and forced himself to start reading again. He was almost finished—just a bit more and—

A knock came at his door.

Elend turned with frustration, wondering at this new interruption. Ham poked his head in the doorway a second later.

"Ham?" Elend said. "You're still awake?"

"Unfortunately," Ham said, stepping into the room.

"Mardra is going to kill you for working late again," Elend said, setting down his pen. Complain though he might about some of Vin's quirks, at least she shared Elend's nocturnal habits.

Ham just rolled his eyes at the comment. He still wore his standard vest and trousers. He'd agreed to be the captain of Elend's guard on a single condition: that he would never have to wear a uniform. Vin cracked an eye as Ham wandered into the room, then relaxed again.

"Regardless," Elend said. "To what do I owe the visit?"

"I thought you might want to know that we identified those assassins who tried to kill Vin."

Elend nodded. "Probably men I know." Most Allomancers were noblemen, and he was familiar with all of those in Straff's retinue.

"Actually, I doubt it," Ham said. "They were Westerners."

Elend paused, frowning, and Vin perked up. "You're sure?"

Ham nodded. "Makes it a bit unlikely that your father sent them—unless he's done some heavy recruiting in Fadrex City. They were of Houses Gardre and Conrad, mostly."

Elend sat back. His father was based in Urteau, hereditary home of the Venture family. Fadrex was halfway across the empire from Urteau, several months' worth of travel. The chances were slim that his father would have access to a group of Western Allomancers.

"Have you heard of Ashweather Cett?" Ham asked.

Elend nodded. "One of the men who's set himself up as king in the Western Dominance. I don't know much about him."

Vin frowned, sitting. "You think he sent these?"

Ham nodded. "They must have been waiting for a chance to slip into the city, and the traffic at the gates these last few days would have provided the opportunity. That makes the arrival of Straff's army and the attack on Vin's life something of a coincidence."

Elend glanced at Vin. She met his eyes, and he could tell that she wasn't completely convinced that Straff hadn't sent the assassins. Elend, however, wasn't so skeptical. Pretty much every tyrant in the area had tried to take him out at one point or another. Why not Cett?

*It's that atium,* Elend thought with frustration. He'd never found the Lord Ruler's cache—but that didn't stop the despots in the empire from assuming he was hiding it somewhere.

"Well, at least your father didn't send the assassins," Ham said, ever the optimist.

Elend shook his head. "Our relationship wouldn't stop him, Ham. Trust me."

"He's your father," Ham said, looking troubled.

"Things like that don't matter to Straff. He probably hasn't sent assassins because he doesn't think I'm worth the trouble. If we last long enough, though, he will."

Ham shook his head. "I've heard of sons killing their fathers to take their place. . .but fathers killing their sons. . .I wonder what that says about old Straff's mind, that he'd be willing to kill you. You think that—"

"Ham?" Elend interrupted.

"Hum?"

"You know I'm usually good for a discussion, but I don't really have time for philosophy right now."

"Oh, right." Ham smiled wanly, standing and moving to go. "I should get back to Mardra anyway."

Elend nodded, rubbing his forehead and picking up his pen yet again. "Make sure you gather the crew for a meeting. We need to organize our allies, Ham. If we don't come up with something incredibly clever, this kingdom may be doomed."

Ham turned back, still smiling. "You make it sound so desperate, El."

Elend looked over at him. "The Assembly is a mess, a half-dozen warlords with superior armies are breathing down my neck, barely a month passes without someone sending assassins to kill me, and the woman I love is slowly driving me insane."

Vin snorted at this last part.

"Oh, is that all?" Ham said. "See? It's not so bad after all. I mean, we *could* be facing an immortal god and his all-powerful priests instead."

Elend paused, then chuckled despite himself. "Good night, Ham," he said, turning back to his proposal.

"Good night, Your Majesty."

*Perhaps they are right. Perhaps I am mad, or jealous, or simply daft. My name is Kwaan. Philosopher, scholar, traitor. I am the one who discovered Alendi, and I am the one who first proclaimed him to be the Hero of Ages. I am the one who started this all.*

# 4

THE BODY SHOWED NO OVERT wounds. It still lay where it had fallen—the other villagers had been afraid to move it. Its arms and legs were twisted in awkward positions, the dirt around it scuffed from predeath thrashings.

Sazed reached out, running his fingers along one of the marks. Though the soil here in the Eastern Dominance held far more clay than soil did in the north, it was still more black than it was brown. Ashfalls came even this far south. Ashless soil, washed clean and fertilized, was a luxury used only for the ornamental plants of noble gardens. The rest of the world had to do what it could with untreated soil.

"You say that he was alone when he died?" Sazed asked, turning to the small cluster of villagers standing behind him.

A leather-skinned man nodded. "Like I said, Master Terrisman. He was just standing there, no one else about. He paused, then he fell and wiggled on the ground for a bit. After that, he just. . .stopped moving."

Sazed turned back to the corpse, studying the twisted muscles, the face locked in a mask of pain. Sazed had brought his medical coppermind—the metal armband wrapped around his upper right arm—and he reached into it with his mind, pulling out some of the memorized books he had stored therein. Yes, there were some diseases that killed with shakes and spasms. They rarely took a man so suddenly, but it sometimes happened. If it hadn't been for other circumstances, Sazed would have paid the death little heed.

"Please, repeat to me again what you1 saw," Sazed asked.

The leather-skinned man at the front of the group, Teur, paled slightly. He was in an odd position—his natural desire for notoriety would make him want to gossip about his experience. However, doing so could earn the distrust of his superstitious fellows.

"I was just passing by, Master Terrisman," Teur said. "On the path twenty yards yon. I seen old Jed working his field—a hard worker, he was. Some of us took a break when the lords left, but old Jed just kept on. Guess he knew we'd be needing food for the winter, lords or no lords."

Teur paused, then glanced to the side. "I know what people say, Master Terrisman, but I seen what I seen. It was day when I passed, but there was *mist* in the valley here. It stopped me, because I've never been out in the mist—my wife'll vouch me that. I was going to turn back, and then I seen old Jed. He was just working away, as if he hadn't seen the mist.

"I was going to call out to him, but before I could, he just. . .well, like I told you. I seen him standing there, then he froze. The mist swirled about him a bit, then he began to jerk and twist, like something really strong was holding him and shaking him. He fell. Didn't get up after that."

Still kneeling, Sazed looked back at the corpse. Teur apparently had a reputation for tall tales. Yet, the body was a chilling corroboration—not to mention Sazed's own experience several weeks before.

Mist during the day.

Sazed stood, turning toward the villagers. "Please fetch for me a shovel."

Nobody helped him dig the grave. It was slow, muggy work in the southern heat, which was strong despite the advent of autumn. The clay earth was difficult to move—but, fortunately, Sazed had a bit of extra stored-up strength inside a pewtermind, and he tapped it for help.

He needed it, for he wasn't what one would call an athletic man. Tall and long-limbed, he had the build of a scholar, and still wore the colorful robes of a Terris steward. He also still kept his head shaved, after the manner of the station he had served in for the first forty-some years of his life. He didn't wear much of his jewelry now—he didn't want to tempt highway bandits—but his earlobes were stretched out and pierced with numerous holes for earrings.

Tapping strength from his pewtermind enlarged his muscles slightly, giving him the build of a stronger man. Even with the extra strength, however, his steward's robes were stained with sweat and dirt by the time he finished digging. He rolled the body into the grave, and stood quietly for a moment. The man had been a dedicated farmer.

Sazed searched through his religions coppermind for an appropriate theology. He started with an index—one of the many that he had created. When he had located an appropriate religion, he pulled free detailed memories about its practices. The writings entered his mind as fresh as when he had just finished memorizing them. They would fade, with time, like all memories—however, he intended to place them back in the coppermind long before that happened. It was the way of the Keeper, the method by which his people retained enormous wealths of information.

This day, the memories he selected were of HaDah, a southern religion with an agricultural deity. Like most religions—which had been oppressed during the time of the Lord Ruler—the HaDah faith was a thousand years extinct.

Following the dictates of the HaDah funeral ceremony, Sazed walked over to a nearby tree1—or, at least, one of the shrublike plants that passed for trees in this area. He broke off a long branch—the peasants watching him curiously—and carried it back to the grave. He stooped down and drove it into the dirt at the bottom of the hole, just beside the corpse's head. Then he stood and began to shovel dirt back into the grave.

The peasants watched him with dull eyes. *So depressed,* Sazed thought. The Eastern Dominance was the most chaotic and unsettled of the five Inner Dominances. The only men in this crowd were well past their prime. The press gangs had done their work efficiently; the husbands and fathers of this village were likely dead on some battlefield that no longer mattered.

It was hard to believe that anything could actually be worse than the Lord Ruler's oppression. Sazed told himself that these people's pain would pass, that they would someday know prosperity because of what he and the others had done. Yet, he had seen farmers forced to slaughter each other, had seen children starve because some despot had "requisitioned" a village's entire food supply. He had seen thieves kill freely because the Lord Ruler's troops no longer patrolled the canals. He had seen chaos, death, hatred, and disorder. And he couldn't help but acknowledge that he was partially to blame.

He continued to refill the hole. He had been trained as a scholar and a domestic attendant; he was a Terrisman steward, the most useful, most expensive, and most prestigious of servants in the Final Empire. That meant almost nothing now. He'd never dug a grave, but he did his best, trying to be reverent as he piled dirt on the corpse. Surprisingly, about halfway through the process, the peasants began to help him, pushing dirt from the pile into the hole.

*Perhaps there is hope for these yet,* Sazed thought, thankfully letting one of the others take his shovel and finish the work. When they were done, the very tip of the HaDah branch breached the dirt at the head of the grave.

"Why'd you do that?" Teur asked, nodding to the branch.

Sazed smiled. "It is a religious ceremony, Goodman Teur. If you please, there is a prayer that should accompany it."

"A prayer? Something from the Steel Ministry?"

Sazed shook his head. "No, my friend. It is a prayer from a previous time, a time before the Lord Ruler."

The peasants eyed each other, frowning. Teur just rubbed his wrinkled chin. They all remained quiet, however, as Sazed said a short HaDah prayer.

When he finished, he turned toward the peasants. "It was known as the religion of HaDah. Some of your ancestors might have followed it, I think. If any of you wish, I can teach you of its precepts."

The assembled crowd stood quietly. There weren't many of them—two dozen or so, mostly middle-aged women and a few older men. There was a single young man with a club leg; Sazed was surprised that he'd lived so long on a plantation. Most lords killed invalids to keep them from draining resources.

"When is the Lord Ruler coming back?" asked a woman.

"I do not believe that he will," Sazed said.

"Why did he abandon us?"

"It is a time of change," Sazed said. "Perhaps it is also time to learn of other truths, other ways."

The group of people shuffled quietly. Sazed sighed quietly; these people associated faith with the Steel Ministry and its obligators. Religion wasn't something that skaa worried about—sav1e, perhaps, to avoid it when possible.

*The Keepers spent a thousand years gathering and memorizing the dying religions of the world*, Sazed thought. *Who would have thought that now—with the Lord Ruler gone—people wouldn't care enough to want what they'd lost*?

Yet, he found it hard to think ill of these people. They were struggling to survive, their already harsh world suddenly made unpredictable. They were tired. Was it any wonder that talk of beliefs long forgotten failed to interest them?

"Come," Sazed said, turning toward the village. "There are other things—more practical things—that I can teach you."

*And I am the one who betrayed Alendi, for I now know that he must never be allowed to complete his quest*.

# 5

VIN COULD SEE SIGNS OF anxiety reflected in the city. Workers milled anxiously and markets bustled with an edge of concern—showing that same apprehension that one might see in a cornered rodent. Frightened, but not sure what to do. Doomed with nowhere to run.

Many had left the city during the last year—noblemen fleeing, merchants seeking some other place of business. Yet, at the same time, the city had swelled with an influx of skaa. They had somehow heard of Elend's proclamation of freedom, and had come with optimism—or, at least, as much optimism as an overworked, underfed, repeatedly beaten populace could manage.

And so, despite predictions that Luthadel would soon fall, despite whispers that its army was small and weak, the people had stayed. Worked. Lived. Just as they always had. The life of a skaa had never been very certain.

It was still strange for Vin to see the market so busy. She walked down Kenton Street, wearing her customary trousers and buttoned shirt, thinking about the time when she'd visited the street during the days before the Collapse. It had been the quiet home of some exclusive tailoring shops.

When Elend had abolished the restrictions on skaa merchants, Kenton Street had changed. The thoroughfare had blossomed into a wild bazaar of shops, pushcarts, and tents. In order to target the newly empowered—and newly waged—skaa workers, the shop owners had altered their selling methods. Where once they had coaxed with rich window displays, they now called and demanded, using criers, salesmen, and even jugglers to try to attract trade.

The street was so busy that Vin usually avoided it, and this day was even worse than most. The arrival of the army had sparked a last-minute flurry of buying and selling, the people trying to get ready for whatever was to come. There was a grim tone to the atmosphere. Fewer street performers, more yelling. Elend had ordered all eight city gates barred, so flight was no longer an option. Vin wondered how many of the people regretted their decision to stay.

She walked down the street with a businesslike step, hands clasped to keep the nervousness out of her posture. Even as a child—an urchin on the streets of a dozen different cities—she hadn't liked crowds. It was hard to keep track of so many people, hard to focus with so much going on. As a child, she'd stayed near the edges of crowds, hiding, venturing out to snatch the occasional fallen coin or ignored bit of food.

She was different now. She forced herself to walk with a straight back, and kept her eyes from glancing down or looking for places to hide. She was getting so much better—but seeing th1e crowds reminded her of what she had once been. What she would always—at least in part—still be.

As if in response to her thoughts, a pair of street urchins scampered through the throng, a large man in a baker's apron screaming at them. There were still urchins in Elend's new world. In fact, as she considered it, paying the skaa population probably made for a far better street life for urchins. There were more pockets to pick, more people to distract the shop owners, more scraps to go around, and more hands to feed beggars.

It was difficult to reconcile her childhood with such a life. To her, a child on the street was someone who learned to be quiet and hide, someone who went out at night to search through garbage. Only the most brave of urchins had dared cut purses; skaa lives had been worthless to many noblemen. During her childhood, Vin had known several urchins who been killed or maimed by passing noblemen who found them offensive.

Elend's laws might not have eliminated the poor, something he so much wanted to do, but he had improved the lives of even the street urchins. For that—among other things—she loved him.

There were still some noblemen in the crowd, men who had been persuaded by Elend or circumstances that their fortunes would be safer in the city than without. They were desperate, weak, or adventuresome. Vin watched one man pass, surrounded by a group of guards. He didn't give her a second glance; to him, her simple clothing was reason enough to ignore her. No noblewoman would dress as she did.

*Is that what I am*? she wondered, pausing beside a shop window, looking over the books inside—the sale of which had always been a small, but profitable, market for the idle imperial nobility. She also used the glass reflection to make certain no one snuck up behind her. *Am I a noblewoman*?

It could be argued that she was noble simply by association. The king himself loved her—had asked her to marry him—and she had been trained by the Survivor of Hathsin. Indeed, her father had been noble, even if her mother had been skaa. Vin reached up, fingering the simple bronze earring that was the only thing she had as a memento of Mother.

It wasn't much. But, then, Vin wasn't sure she wanted to think about her mother all that much. The woman had, after all, tried to kill Vin. In fact, she *had* killed Vin's full sister. Only the actions of Reen, Vin's half brother, had saved her. He had pulled Vin, bloody, from the arms of a woman who had shoved the earring into Vin's ear just moments before.

And still Vin kept it. As a reminder, of sorts. The truth was, she didn't feel like a noblewoman. At times, she thought she had more in common with her insane mother than she did with the aristocracy of Elend's world. The balls and parties she had attended before the Collapse—they had been a charade. A dreamlike memory. They had no place in this world of collapsing governments and nightly assassinations. Plus, Vin's part in the balls—pretending to be the girl Valette Renoux—had always been a sham.

She pretended still. Pretended not to be the girl who had grown up starving on the streets, a girl who had been beaten far more often than she had been befriended. Vin sighed, turning from the window. The next shop, however, drew her attention despite herself.

It contained ball gowns.

The shop was empty of patrons; few thought of gowns on the eve of an invasion. Vin paused before the open doorway, held almost as if she were metal being Pulled. Inside, dressing dummies stood posed in majestic gowns. Vin 1looked up at the garments, with their tight waists and tapering, bell-like skirts. She could almost imagine she was at a ball, soft music in the background, tables draped in perfect white, Elend standing up on his balcony, leafing through a book. . ..

She almost went in. But why bother? The city was about to be attacked. Besides, the garments were expensive. It had been different when she'd spent Kelsier's money. Now she spent Elend's money—and Elend's money was the kingdom's money.

She turned from the gowns and walked back out onto the street. *Those aren't me anymore. Valette is useless to Elend—he needs a Mistborn, not an uncomfortable girl in a gown that she doesn't quite fill.* Her wounds from the night before, now firm bruises, were a reminder of her place. They were healing well—she'd been burning pewter heavily all day—but she'd be stiff for a while yet.

Vin quickened her pace, heading for the livestock pens. As she walked, however, she caught sight of someone tailing her.

Well, perhaps "tailing" was too generous a word—the man certainly wasn't doing a very good job of going unnoticed. He was balding on top, but wore the sides of his hair long. He wore a simple skaa's smock: a single-piece tan garment that was stained dark with ash.

*Great,* Vin thought. There was another reason she avoided the market—or any place where crowds of skaa gathered.

She sped up again, but the man hurried as well. Soon, his awkward movements gained attention—but, instead of cursing him, most people paused reverently. Soon others joined him, and Vin had a small crowd trailing her.

A part of her wanted to just slap down a coin and shoot away. *Yes,* Vin thought to herself wryly, *use Allomancy in the daylight. That'll make you inconspicuous*.

So, sighing, she turned to confront the group. None of them looked particularly threatening. The men wore trousers and dull shirts; the women wore one-piece, utilitarian dresses. Several more men wore single-piece, ash-covered smocks.

Priests of the Survivor.

"Lady Heir," one of them said, approaching and falling to his knees.

"Don't call me that," Vin said quietly.

The priest looked up at her. "Please. We need direction. We have cast off the Lord Ruler. What do we do now?"

Vin took a step backward. Had Kelsier understood what he was doing? He had built up the skaa's faith in him, then had died a martyr to turn them in rage against the Final Empire. What had he thought would happen after that? Could he have foreseen the Church of the Survivor—had he known that they would replace the Lord Ruler with Kelsier himself as God?

The problem was, Kelsier had left his followers with no doctrine. His only goal had been to defeat the Lord Ruler; partially to get his revenge, partially to seal his legacy, and partially—Vin hoped—because he had wanted to free the skaa.

But now what? These people must feel as she did. Set adrift, with no light to guide them.

Vin could not be that light. "I'm not Kelsier," she said quietly, taking another step backward.

"We know," one of the men said. "You're his heir—he passed on, and this time *you* Survived."

"Please," a woman said, stepping forward, holding a young child in her arms. "Lady Heir. If th1e hand that struck down the Lord Ruler could touch my child. . ."

Vin tried to back away farther, but realized she was up against another crowd of people. The woman stepped closer, and Vin finally raised an uncertain hand to the baby's forehead.

"Thank you," the woman said.

"You'll protect us, won't you, Lady Heir?" asked a young man—no older than Elend—with a dirty face but honest eyes. "The priests say that you'll stop that army out there, that its soldiers won't be able to enter the city while you're here."

That was too much for her. Vin mumbled a halfhearted response, but turned and pushed her way through the crowd. The group of believers didn't follow her, fortunately.

She was breathing deeply, though not from exertion, by the time she slowed. She moved into an alley between two shops, standing in the shade, wrapping her arms around herself. She had spent her life learning to remain unnoticed, to be quiet and unimportant. Now she could be none of those things.

What did the people expect of her? Did they really think that she could stop an army by herself? That was one lesson she'd learned very early into her training: Mistborn weren't invincible. One man, she could kill. Ten men could give her trouble. An army. . .

Vin held herself and took a few calming breaths. Eventually, she moved back out onto the busy street. She was near her destination now—a small, open-sided tent surrounded by four pens. The merchant lounged by it, a scruffy man who had hair on only half of his head—the right half. Vin stood for a moment, trying to decide if the odd hairstyle was due to disease, injury, or preference.

The man perked up when he saw her standing at the edge of his pens. He brushed himself off, throwing up a small amount of dust. Then he sauntered up to her, smiling with what teeth he still had, acting as if he hadn't heard—or didn't care—that there was an army just outside.

"Ah, young lady," he said. "Lookin' for a pup? I've got some wee scamps that any girl is sure to love. Here, let me grab one. You'll agree it's the cutest thing you ever seen."

Vin folded her arms as the man reached down to grab a puppy from one of the pens. "Actually," she said, "I was looking for a wolfhound."

The merchant looked up. "Wolfhound, miss? 'Tis no pet for a girl like yourself. Mean brutes, those. Let me find you a nice bobbie. Nice dogs, those—smart, too."

"No," Vin said, drawing him up short. "You will bring me a wolfhound."

The man paused again, looking at her, scratching himself in several undignified places. "Well, I guess I can see. . ."

He wandered toward the pen farthest from the street. Vin waited quietly, nose downturned at the smell as the merchant yelled at a few of his animals, selecting an appropriate one. Eventually, he pulled a leashed dog up to Vin. It was a wolfhound, if a small one—but it had sweet, docile eyes, and an obviously pleasant temperament.

"The runt of the litter," the merchant said. "A good animal for a young girl, I'd say. Will probably make an excellent hunter, too. These wolfhounds, they can smell better than any beast you seen."

Vin reached for her coin purse, but paused, looking down at the dog's panting face. It almost seemed to be smiling at her.

"Oh, for the Lord Ruler's sake," she snapped, pushing past th1e dog and master, stalking toward the back pens.

"Young lady?" the merchant asked, following uncertainly.

Vin scanned the wolfhounds. Near the back, she spotted a massive black and gray beast. It was chained to a post, and it regarded her defiantly, a low growl rising in its throat.

Vin pointed. "How much for that one in the back?"

"*That*?" the merchant asked. "Good lady, that's a watchbeast. It's meant to be set loose on a lord's grounds to attack anyone who enters! It's the one of the meanest things you'll ever see!"

"Perfect," Vin said, pulling out some coins.

"Good lady, I couldn't possibly sell you that beast. Not possibly at all. Why, I'll bet it weighs half again as much as you do."

Vin nodded, then pulled open the pen gate and strode in. The merchant cried out, but Vin walked right up to the wolfhound. He began to bark wildly at her, frothing.

*Sorry about this,* Vin thought. Then, burning pewter, she ducked in and slammed her fist into the animal's head.

The animal froze, wobbled, then fell unconscious in the dirt. The merchant stopped up short beside her, mouth open.

"Leash," Vin ordered.

He gave her one. She used it to tie the wolfhound's feet together, and then—with a flare of pewter—she threw the animal over her shoulders. She cringed only slightly at the pain in her side.

*This thing better not get drool on my shirt*, she thought, handing the merchant some coins and walking back toward the palace.

Vin slammed the unconscious wolfhound to the floor. The guards had given her some strange looks as she entered the palace, but she was getting used to those. She brushed off her hands.

"What is that?" OreSeur asked. He'd made it back to her rooms at the palace, but his current body was obviously unusable. He'd needed to form muscles in places that men didn't normally have them to even keep the skeleton together, and while he'd healed his wounds, his body looked unnatural. He still wore the bloodstained clothing from the night before.

"This," Vin said, pointing at the wolfhound, "is your new body."

OreSeur paused. "*That*? Mistress, that is a dog."

"Yes," Vin said.

"I am a man."

"You're a kandra," Vin said. "You can imitate flesh and muscle. What about fur?"

The kandra did not look pleased. "I cannot imitate it," he said, "but I can use the beast's own fur, like I use its bones. However, surely there is—"

"I'm not going to kill for you, kandra," Vin said. "And even if I did kill someone, I wouldn't let you. . .eat them. Plus, this will be more inconspicuous. People will begin to talk if I keep replacing my stewards with unknown men. I've been telling people for months that I was thinking of dismissing you. Well, I'll tell them that I finally did—nobody will think to realize that my new pet hound is actually my kandra."

She turned, nodding toward the carcass. "This will be very useful. People pay less attention to hounds than they do to humans, and so you'll be able to listen in on conversations."

OreSeur's frown deepened. 1"I will not do this thing easily. You will need to compel me, by virtue of the Contract."

"Fine," Vin said. "You're commanded. How long will it take?"

"A regular body only takes a few hours," OreSeur said. "This could take longer. Getting that much fur to look right will be challenging."

"Get started, then," Vin said, turning toward the door. On her way, however, she noticed a small package sitting on her desk. She frowned, walking over and taking off the lid. A small note sat inside.

> *Lady Vin,*
>
> *Here is the next alloy you requested. Aluminum is very difficult to acquire, but when a noble family recently left the city, I was able to buy some of their diningware.*
>
> *I do not know if this one will work, but I believe it worth a try. I have mixed the aluminum with four percent copper, and found the outcome quite promising. I have read of this composition; it is called duralumin.*
>
> *Your servant, Terion*

Vin smiled, setting aside the note and removing the rest of the box's contents: a small pouch of metal dust and a thin silvery bar, both presumably of this "duralumin" metal. Terion was a master Allomantic metallurgist. Though not an Allomancer himself, he had been mixing alloys and creating dusts for Mistborn and Mistings for most of his life.

Vin pocketed both pouch and bar, then turned toward OreSeur. The kandra regarded her with a flat expression.

"This came for me today?" Vin asked, nodding to the box.

"Yes, Mistress," OreSeur said. "A few hours ago."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I'm sorry, Mistress," OreSeur said in his toneless way, "but you did not *command* me to tell you if packages arrived."

Vin ground her teeth. He knew how anxiously she'd been waiting for another alloy from Terion. All of the previous aluminum alloys they'd tried had turned out to be duds. It bothered her to know that there was another

Allomantic metal out there somewhere, waiting to be discovered. She wouldn't be satisfied until she found it.

OreSeur just sat where he was, bland expression on his face, unconscious wolfhound on the floor in front of him.

"Just get to work on that body," Vin said, spinning and leaving the room to search for Elend.

Vin finally found Elend in his study, going over some ledgers with a familiar figure.

"Dox!" Vin said. He'd retired to his rooms soon after his arrival the day before, and she hadn't seen much of him.

Dockson looked up and smiled. Stocky without being fat, he had short dark hair and still wore his customary half beard. "Hello, Vin."

"How was Terris?" she asked.

"Cold," Dockson replied. "I'm glad to be back. Though I wish I hadn't arrived to find that army here."

"Either way, we're glad you've returned, Dockson," Elend said. "The kingdom practically fell apart without you."

"That hardly seems the case," Dockson said, closing his ledger and setting it on the stack. "All things—and armies—considered, it looks like the royal bureaucracy held together fairly well in my absence. You hardly need me anymore!"

"Nonsense!" Elend said.

Vin leaned against the door, eyeing the two men as they continued their discussion. They maintained their air of forced joviality. Both were dedicated to making the new kingdom work, even if it meant pretending that they liked each other. Dockson pointed at places in the ledgers, talking about finances and what he'd discovered in the outlying villages under Elend's control.

Vin sighed, glancing across the room. Sunlight streamed through the room's stained-glass rose window, throwing colors across the ledgers and table. Even now, Vin still wasn't accustomed to the casual richness of a noble keep. The window—red and lavender—was a thing of intricate beauty. Yet, noblemen apparently found its like so commonplace that they had put this one in the keep's back rooms, in the small chamber that Elend now used as his study.

As one might expect, the room was piled with stacks of books. Shelves lined the walls from floor to ceiling, but they were no match for the sheer volume of Elend's growing collection. She'd never cared much for Elend's taste in books. They were mostly political or historical works, things with topics as musty as their aged pages. Many of them had once been forbidden by the Steel Ministry, but somehow the old philosophers could make even salacious topics seem boring.

"Anyway," Dockson said, finally closing his ledgers. "I have some things to do before your speech tomorrow, Your Majesty. Did Ham say there's a city defense meeting that evening as well?"

Elend nodded. "Assuming I can get the Assembly to agree not to hand the city over to my father, we'll need to come up with a strategy to deal with this army. I'll send someone for you tomorrow night."

"Good," Dockson said. With that, he nodded to Elend, winked at Vin, then made his way from the cluttered room.

As Dockson shut the door, Elend sighed, then relaxed back in his oversized plush chair.

Vin walked forward. "He really is a good man, Elend."

"Oh, I realize he is. Being a good man doesn't always make one likable, however."

"He's nice, too," Vin said. "Sturdy, calm, stable. The crew relied on him." Even though Dockson wasn't an Allomancer, he had been Kelsier's right-hand man.

"He doesn't like me, Vin," Elend said. "It's. . .very hard to get along with someone who looks at me like that."

"You're not giving him a fair chance," Vin complained, stopping beside Elend's chair.

He looked up at her, smiling wanly, his vest unbuttoned, his hair an absolute mess. "Hum. . ." he said idly, taking her hand. "I really like that shirt. Red looks good on you."

Vin rolled her eyes, letting him gently pull her into the chair and kiss her. There was a passion to the kiss—a need, perhaps, for something stable. Vin responded, feeling herself relax as she pulled up against him. A few minutes later, she sighed, feeling much better snuggled into the chair beside him. He pulled her close, leaning the chair back into the window's sunlight.

He smiled and glanced at her. "That's a. . .new perfume you're wearing."

Vin 1snorted, putting her head against his chest. "It's not perfume, Elend. It's dog."

"Ah, good," Elend said. "I was worried that you'd departed from your senses. Now, is there any particular reason *why* you smell like dog?"

"I went to the market and bought one, then carried it back and fed it to OreSeur, so it can be his new body."

Elend paused. "Why, Vin. That's brilliant! Nobody will suspect a dog to be a spy. I wonder if anyone's ever thought of that before. . .."

"Someone must have," Vin said. "I mean, it makes such sense. I suspect those who thought of it, however, didn't share the knowledge."

"Good point," Elend said, relaxing back. Yet, from as close as they were, she could still feel a tension in him.

*Tomorrow's speech*, Vin thought. *He's worried about it*.

"I must say, however," Elend said idly, "that I find it a bit disappointing that you're *not* wearing dog-scented perfume. With your social station, I could see some of the local noblewomen trying to imitate you. That could be amusing indeed."

She leaned up, looking at his smirking face. "You know, Elend—sometimes it's bloody difficult to tell when you're teasing, and when you're just being dense."

"That makes me more mysterious, right?"

"Something like that," she said, snuggling up against him again.

"Now, see, you don't understand how clever that is of me," he said. "If people can't tell when I'm being an idiot and when I'm being a genius, perhaps they'll assume my blunders are brilliant political maneuverings."

"As long as they don't mistake your actual brilliant moves for blunders."

"That shouldn't be difficult," Elend said. "I fear I have few enough of *those* for people to mistake."

Vin looked up with concern at the edge in his voice. He, however, smiled, shifting the topic. "So, OreSeur the dog. Will he still be able to go out with you at nights?"

Vin shrugged. "I guess. I wasn't really planning on bringing him for a while."

"I'd like it if you did take him," Elend said. "I worry about you out there, every night, pushing yourself so hard."

"I can handle it," Vin said. "Someone needs to watch over you."

"Yes," Elend said, "but who watches over you?"

*Kelsier*. Even now, that was still her immediate reaction. She'd known him for less than a year, but that year had been the first in her life that she had felt protected.

Kelsier was dead. She, like the rest of the world, had to live without him.

"I know you were hurt when you fought those Allomancers the other night," Elend said. "It would be really nice for my psyche if I knew someone was with you."

"A kandra's no bodyguard," Vin said.

"I know," Elend said. "But they're incredibly loyal—I've never heard of one breaking Contract. He'll watch out for you. I worry about you, Vin. You wonder why I stay up so late, scribbling at my proposals? I can't sleep, knowing that you might be out there fighting—or, worse, lying somewhere in a street, dying because nobody was there to help you."

"I take OreSeur with me sometimes."

"Yes," Elend said, "but I know you find excuses to leave him behind. Kelsier bought you the services of an incredibly valuable servant. I can't understand why you work so hard to avoid him."

Vin closed her eyes. "Elend. He *ate* Kelsier."

"So?" Elend asked. "Kelsier was already dead. Besides, he himself gave that order."

Vin sighed, opening her eyes. "I just. . .don't trust that thing, Elend. The creature is unnatural."

"I know," Elend said. "My father always kept a kandra. But, OreSeur is something, at least. Please. Promise me you'll take him with you."

"All right. But I don't think he's going to like the arrangement much either. He and I didn't get along very well even when he was playing Renoux, and I his niece."

Elend shrugged. "He'll hold to his Contract. That's what is important."

"He holds to the Contract," Vin said, "but only grudgingly. I swear that he enjoys frustrating me."

Elend looked down at her. "Vin, kandra are excellent servants. They don't do things like that."

"No, Elend," Vin said. "*Sazed* was an excellent servant. He enjoyed being with people, helping them. I never felt that he resented me. OreSeur may do everything I command, but he doesn't like me; he never has. I can tell."

Elend sighed, rubbing her shoulder. "Don't you think you might be a little irrational? There's no real reason to hate him so."

"Oh?" Vin asked. "Just like there's no reason you shouldn't get along with Dockson?"

Elend paused. Then he sighed. "I guess you have a point," he said. He continued to rub Vin's shoulder as he stared upward, toward the ceiling, contemplative.

"What?" Vin asked.

"I'm not doing a very good job of this, am I?"

"Don't be foolish," Vin said. "You're a wonderful king."

"I might be a passable king, Vin, but I'm not *him*."

"Who?"

"Kelsier," Elend said quietly.

"Elend, nobody expects you to be Kelsier."

"Oh?" he said. "That's why Dockson doesn't like me. He hates noblemen; it's obvious in the way that he talks, the way he acts. I don't know if I really blame him, considering the life he's known. Regardless, he doesn't think I should be king. He thinks that a skaa should be in my place—or, even better, Kelsier. They all think that."

"That's nonsense, Elend."

"Really? And if Kelsier still lived, would I be king?"

Vin paused.

"You see? They accept me—the people, the merchants, even the noblemen. But in the back of their minds, they wish they had Kelsier instead."

"I don't wish that."

"Don't you?"

Vin frowned. Then she sat up, turning so that she was kneeling over Elend in the reclined chair, their faces just inches apart. "Don't you *ever* wonder that, Elend. Kelsier was my teacher, but I didn't love him. Not like I love you."

Elend stared into her eyes, then nodded. Vin kissed him deeply, then snuggled down beside him again.

"Why not?" Elend eventually asked.

"Well, he was old, for one thing."

Elend chuckled. "I seem to recall you making fun of *my* age as well."

"That's different," Vin said. "You're only a few years older than me—Kelsier was ancient."

"Vin, thirty-eight is not ancient."

"Close enough."

Elend chuckled again, but she could tell that he wasn't satisfied. Why *had* she chosen Elend, rather than Kelsier? Kelsier had been the visionary, the hero, the Mistborn.

"Kelsier was a great man," Vin said quietly as Elend began to stroke her hair. "But. . .there were things about him, Elend. Frightening things. He was intense, reckless, even a little bit cruel. Unforgiving. He'd slaughter people without guilt or concern, just because they upheld the Final Empire or worked for the Lord Ruler.

"I could love him as a teacher and a friend. But I don't think I could ever love—not *really* love—a man like that. I don't blame him; he was of the streets, like me. When you struggle so hard for life, you grow strong—but you can grow harsh, too. His fault or not, Kelsier reminded me too much of men I. . .knew when I was younger. Kell was a far better person than they—he really could be kind, and he did sacrifice his life for the skaa. However, he was just so hard."

She closed her eyes, feeling Elend's warmth. "You, Elend Venture, are a good man. A *truly* good man."

"Good men don't become legends," he said quietly.

"Good men don't need to become legends." She opened her eyes, looking up at him. "They just do what's right anyway."

Elend smiled. Then he kissed the top of her head and leaned back. They lay there for a time, in a room warm with sunlight, relaxing.

"He saved my life, once," Elend finally said.

"Who?" Vin asked with surprise. "Kelsier?"

Elend nodded. "That day after Spook and OreSeur were captured, the day Kelsier died. There was a battle in the square when Ham and some soldiers tried to free the captives."

"I was there," Vin said. "Hiding with Breeze and Dox in one of the alleyways."

"Really?" Elend said, sounding a bit amused. "Because I came looking for you. I thought that they'd arrested you, along with OreSeur—he was pretending to be your uncle, then. I tried to get to the cages to rescue you."

"You did *what*? Elend, it was a battlefield in that square! There was an Inquisitor there, for the Lord Ruler's sake!"

"I know," Elend said, smiling faintly. "See, that Inquisitor is the one who tried to kill me. It had its axe raised and everything. And then. . .Kelsier was there. He smashed into the Inquisitor, throwing it to the ground."

"Probably just a coincidence," Vin said.

"No," Elend said softly. "He meant it, Vin. He looked at me while he struggled with the Inquisitor, and I saw it in his eyes. I've always wondered about that moment; everyone tells me that Kelsier hated the nobility even more than Dox does."

Vin1 paused. "He. . .started to change a little at the end, I think."

"Change enough that he'd risk himself to protect a random nobleman?"

"He knew that I loved you," Vin said, smiling faintly. "I guess, in the end, that proved stronger than his hatred."

"I didn't realize. . ." He trailed off as Vin turned, hearing something. Footsteps approaching. She sat up, and a second later, Ham poked his head into the room. He paused when he saw Vin sitting in Elend's lap, however.

"Oh," Ham said. "Sorry."

"No, wait," Vin said. Ham poked his head back in, and Vin turned to Elend. "I almost forgot why I came looking for you in the first place. I got a new package from Terion today."

"*Another* one?" Elend asked. "Vin, when are you going to give this up?"

"I can't afford to," she said.

"It can't be all that important, can it?" he asked. "I mean, if everybody's forgotten what that last metal does, then it must not be very powerful."

"Either that," Vin said, "or it was so amazingly powerful that the Ministry worked very hard to keep it a secret." She slid off of the chair to stand up, then took the pouch and thin bar out of her pocket. She handed the bar to Elend, who sat up in his plush chair.

Silvery and reflective, the metal—like the aluminum from which it was made—felt too light to be real. Any Allomancer who accidentally burned aluminum had their other metal reserves stripped away from them, leaving them powerless. Aluminum had been kept secret by the Steel Ministry; Vin had only found out about it on the night when she'd been captured by the Inquisitors, the same night she'd killed the Lord Ruler.

They had never been able to figure out the proper Allomantic alloy of aluminum. Allomantic metals always came in pairs—iron and steel, tin and pewter, copper and bronze, zinc and brass. Aluminum and. . .something. Something powerful, hopefully. Her atium was gone. She needed an edge.

Elend sighed, handing back the bar. "The last time you tried to burn one of those it left you sick for two days, Vin. I was terrified."

"It can't kill me," Vin said. "Kelsier promised that burning a bad alloy would only make me sick."

Elend shook his head. "Even Kelsier was wrong on occasion, Vin. Didn't you say that he misunderstood how bronze worked?"

Vin paused. Elend's concern was so genuine that she felt herself being persuaded. However. . .

*When that army attacks, Elend is going to die*. The city's skaa might survive—no ruler would be foolish enough to slaughter the people of such a productive city. The king, however, would be killed. She couldn't fight off an entire army, and she could do little to help with preparations.

She did know Allomancy, however. The better she got at it, the better she'd be able to protect the man she loved.

"I have to try it, Elend," she said quietly. "Clubs says that Straff won't attack for a few days—he'll need that long to rest his men from the march and scout the city for attack. That means I can't wait. If this metal does make me sick, I'll be better in time to help fight—but only if I try it now."

Elend's face grew grim, but he did not forbid her. He had learned better than that. Instead, he stood. "Ham, you think this is a1 good idea?"

Ham nodded. He was a warrior; to him, her gamble would make sense. She'd asked him to stay because she'd need someone to carry her back to her bed, should this go wrong.

"All right," Elend said, turning back to Vin, looking resigned.

Vin climbed into the chair, sat back, then took a pinch of the duralumin dust and swallowed it. She closed her eyes, and felt at her Allomantic reserves. The common eight were all there, well stocked. She didn't have any atium or gold, nor did she have either of their alloys. Even if she'd had atium, it was too precious to use except in an emergency—and the other three had only marginal usefulness.

A new reserve appeared. Just as one had the four times before. Each time she'd burned an aluminum alloy, she'd immediately felt a blinding headache. *You'd think I'd have learned*. . .she thought. Gritting her teeth, she reached inside and burned the new alloy.

Nothing happened.

"Have you tried it yet?" Elend asked apprehensively.

Vin nodded slowly. "No headache. But. . .I'm not sure if the alloy is doing anything or not."

"But it's burning?" Ham asked.

Vin nodded. She felt the familiar warmth from within, the tiny fire that told her that a metal was burning. She tried moving about a bit, but couldn't distinguish any change to her physical self. Finally she just looked up and shrugged.

Ham frowned. "If it didn't make you sick, then you've found the right alloy. Each metal only has one valid alloy."

"Or," Vin said, "that's what we've always been told."

Ham nodded. "What alloy was this?"

"Aluminum and copper," Vin said.

"Interesting," Ham said. "You don't feel anything at all?"

Vin shook her head.

"You'll have to practice some more."

"Looks like I'm lucky," Vin said, extinguishing the duralumin. "Terion came up with forty different alloys he thought we could try, once we had enough aluminum. This was only the fifth."

"Forty?" Elend asked incredulously. "I wasn't aware that there were so many metals you could make an alloy from!"

"You don't have to have two metals to make an alloy," Vin said absently. "Just one metal and something else. Look at steel—it's iron and carbon."

"Forty. . ." Elend repeated. "And you would have tried them all?"

Vin shrugged. "Seemed like a good place to start."

Elend looked concerned at that thought, but didn't say anything further. Instead, he turned to Ham. "Anyway, Ham, was there something you wanted to see us about?"

"Nothing important," Ham said. "I just wanted to see if Vin was up for some sparring. That army has me feeling antsy, and I figure Vin could still use some practice with the staff."

Vin shrugged. "Sure. Why not?"

"You want to come, El?" Ham asked. "Get in some practice?"

Elend laughed. "And face one of you two? I've got my royal dignity to think of!"

Vin frowned slightly, looking up at him. 1"You really should practice more, Elend. You barely know how to hold a sword, and you're *terrible* with a dueling cane."

"Now, see, why would I worry about that when I have you to protect me?"

Vin's concern deepened. "We can't always be around you, Elend. I'd worry a lot less if you were better at defending yourself."

He just smiled and pulled her to her feet. "I'll get to it eventually, I promise. But, not today—I've got too much to think about right now. How about if I just come watch you two? Perhaps I'll pick up something by observation—which is, by the way, the preferable method of weapons training, since it doesn't involve me getting beaten up by a girl."

Vin sighed, but didn't press the point further.

*I write this record now, pounding it into a metal slab, because I am afraid. Afraid for myself, yes—I admit to being human. If Alendi does return from the Well of Ascension, I am certain that my death will be one of his first objectives. He is not an evil man, but he is a ruthless one. That is, I think, a product of what he has been through.*

# 6

ELEND LEANED DOWN AGAINST THE railing, looking in at the sparring yard. Part of him did wish to go out and practice with Vin and Ham. However, the larger part of him just didn't see the point.

*Any assassin likely to come after me will be an Allomancer*, he thought. *I could train ten years and be no match for one of them*.

In the yard itself, Ham took a few swings with his staff, then nodded. Vin stepped up, holding her own staff, which was a good foot taller than she was. Watching the two of them, Elend couldn't help remarking on the disparity. Ham had the firm muscles and powerful build of a warrior. Vin looked even thinner than usual, wearing only a tight buttoned shirt and a pair of trousers, with no cloak to mask her size.

The inequality was enhanced by Ham's next words. "We're practicing with the staff, not practicing Pushing and Pulling. Don't use anything but pewter, all right?"

Vin nodded.

It was the way they often sparred. Ham claimed that there was no substitute for training and practice, no matter how powerful an Allomancer one was. He let Vin use pewter, however, because he said the enhanced strength and dexterity was disorienting unless one was accustomed to it.

The sparring field was like a courtyard. Situated in the palace barracks, it had an open-sided hallway built around it. Elend stood in this, roof overhead keeping the red sun out of his eyes. That was nice, for a light ashfall had begun, and occasional flakes of ash floated down from the sky. Elend crossed his arms on the railing. Soldiers passed occasionally in the hallway behind, bustling with activity. Some, however, paused to watch; Vin and Ham's sparring sessions were something of a welcome diversion to the palace guards.

*I should be working on my proposal*, Elend thought. *Not standing here watching Vin fight*.

But. . .the tension of the last few days had been so pressing that he was finding it difficult to get up the motivation to do yet *another* read-through of the speech. What he really needed was to just spend a few moments thinking.

So, he simply watched. Vin approached Ham warily, staff held in a firm, two-handed stance. Once, Elend p1robably would have found trousers and shirt on a lady to be inappropriate, but he'd been around Vin too long to still be bothered by that. Ball gowns and dresses were beautiful—but there was something *right* about Vin in simple garb. She wore it more comfortably.

Besides, he kind of liked how the tight clothing looked on her.

Vin usually let others strike first, and this day was no exception. Staves rapped as Ham engaged her, and despite her size, Vin held her own. After a quick exchange, they both backed away, circling warily.

"My money's on the girl."

Elend turned as he noticed a form limping down the hallway toward him. Clubs stepped up beside Elend, setting a ten-boxing coin down on the railing with a snap. Elend smiled to the general, and Clubs scowled back—which was generally accepted as Clubs's version of a smile. Dockson excluded, Elend had taken quickly to the other members of Vin's crew. Clubs, however, had taken a little getting used to. The stocky man had a face like a gnarled toadstool, and he always seemed to be squinting in displeasure—an expression usually matched by his tone of voice.

However, he was a gifted craftsman, not to mention an Allomancer—a Smoker, actually, though he didn't get to use his power much anymore. For the better part of a year, Clubs had acted as general of Elend's military forces. Elend didn't know where Clubs had learned to lead soldiers, but the man had a remarkable knack for it. He'd probably gotten the skill in the same place that he'd acquired the scar on his leg—a scar that produced the hobble from which Clubs drew his nickname.

"They're just sparring, Clubs," Elend said. "There won't be a 'winner.'"

"They'll end with a serious exchange," Clubs said. "They always do."

Elend paused. "You're asking me to bet against Vin, you know," he noted. "That could be unhealthy."

"So?"

Elend smiled, pulling out a coin. Clubs still kind of intimidated him, and he didn't want to risk offending the man.

"Where's that worthless nephew of mine?" Clubs asked as he watched the sparring.

"Spook?" Elend asked. "He's back? How'd he get into the city?"

Clubs shrugged. "He left something on my doorstep this morning."

"A gift?"

Clubs snorted. "It was a woodcarving from a master carpenter up in Yelva City. The note said, 'I just wanted to show you what *real* carpenters are up to, old man.'"

Elend chuckled, but trailed off as Clubs eyed him with a discomforting stare. "Whelp was never this insolent before," Clubs muttered. "I swear, you lot have corrupted the lad."

Clubs almost seemed to be smiling. Or, was he serious? Elend couldn't ever decide if the man was as crusty as he seemed, or if Elend was the butt of some elaborate joke.

"How is the army doing?" Elend finally asked.

"Terribly," Clubs said. "You want an army? Give me more than one year to train it. Right now, I'd barely trust those boys against a mob of old women with sticks."

*Great*, Elend thought.

"Can't do much right now, though," Clubs grumbled. "Straff is digging in some cursory fortifications, but mostly he's just resting his men. The attack w1ill come by the end of the week."

In the courtyard, Vin and Ham continued to fight. It was slow, for the moment, Ham taking time to pause and explain principles or stances. Elend and Clubs watched for a short time as the sparring gradually became more intense, the rounds taking longer, the two participants beginning to sweat as their feet kicked up puffs of ash in the packed, sooty earth.

Vin gave Ham a good contest despite the ridiculous differences in strength, reach, and training, and Elend found himself smiling slightly despite himself. She was something special—Elend had realized that when he'd first seen her in the Venture ballroom, nearly two years before. He was only now coming to realize how much of an understatement "special" was.

A coin snapped against the wooden railing. "My money's on Vin, too."

Elend turned with surprise. The man who had spoken was a soldier who had been standing with the others watching behind. Elend frowned. "Who —"

Then, Elend cut himself off. The beard was wrong, the posture too straight, but the man standing behind him was familiar. "Spook?" Elend asked incredulously.

The teenage boy smiled behind an apparently fake beard. "Wasing the where of calling out."

Elend's head immediately began to hurt. "Lord Ruler, don't tell me you've gone back to the dialect?"

"Oh, just for the occasional nostalgic quip," Spook said with a laugh. His words bore traces of his Easterner accent; during the first few months Elend had known the boy, Spook had been utterly unintelligible. Fortunately, the boy had grown out of using his street cant, just as he'd managed to grow out of most of his clothing. Well over six feet tall, the sixteen-year-old young man hardly resembled the gangly boy Elend had met a year before.

Spook leaned against the railing beside Elend, adopting a teenage boy's lounging posture and completely destroying his image as a soldier—which, indeed, he wasn't.

"Why the costume, Spook?" Elend asked with a frown.

Spook shrugged. "I'm no Mistborn. We more mundane spies have to find ways to get information without flying up to windows and listening outside."

"How long you been standing there?" Clubs asked, glaring at his nephew.

"Since before you got here, Uncle Grumbles," Spook said. "And, in answer to your question, I got back a couple days ago. Before Dockson, actually. I just thought I'd take a bit of a break before I went back to duty."

"I don't know if you've noticed, Spook," Elend said, "but we're at war. There isn't a lot of time to take breaks."

Spook shrugged. "I just didn't want you to send me away again. If there's going to be war here, I want to be around. You know, for the excitement."

Clubs snorted. "And where did you get that uniform?"

"Uh. . .Well. . ." Spook glanced to the side, displaying just a hint of the uncertain boy Elend had known.

Clubs grumbled something about insolent boys, but Elend just laughed and clapped Spook on the shoulder. The boy looked up, smiling; though he'd been easy to ignore at first, he was proving as valuable as any of the other members of Vin's former crew. As a Tineye—a Misting who could burn tin to enhance his senses—Spook could listen to conversations from far away, not to mention notice distant details.

"Anyway, welcome back," Elend said. "What's the word from the west?"

Spook shook his head. "I hate to sound too much like Uncle Crusty over there, but the news isn't good. You know those rumors about the Lord Ruler's atium being in Luthadel? Well, they're back. Stronger this time."

"I thought we were past that!" Elend said. Breeze and his team had spent the better part of six months spreading rumors and manipulating the warlords into believing that the atium must have been hidden in another city, since Elend hadn't found it in Luthadel.

"Guess not," Spook said. "And. . .I think someone's spreading these rumors intentionally. I've been on the street long enough to sense a planted story, and this rumor smells wrong. Someone really wants the warlords to focus on you."

*Great*, Elend thought. "You don't know where Breeze is, do you?"

Spook shrugged, but he no longer seemed to be paying attention to Elend. He was watching the sparring. Elend glanced back toward Vin and Ham.

As Clubs had predicted, the two had fallen into a more serious contest. There was no more instruction; there were no more quick, repetitive exchanges. They sparred in earnest, fighting in a swirling melee of staffs and dust. Ash flew around them, blown up by the wind of their attacks, and even more soldiers paused in the surrounding hallways to watch.

Elend leaned forward. There was something *intense* about a duel between two Allomancers. Vin tried an attack. Ham, however, swung simultaneously, his staff blurringly quick. Somehow, Vin got her own weapon up in time, but the power of Ham's blow threw her back in a tumble. She hit the ground on one shoulder. She gave barely a grunt of pain, however, and somehow got a hand beneath her, throwing herself up to land on her feet. She skidded for a moment, retaining her balance, holding her staff up.

*Pewter*, Elend thought. It made even a clumsy man dexterous. And, for a person normally graceful like Vin. . .

Vin's eyes narrowed, her innate stubbornness showing in the set of her jaw, the displeasure in her face. She didn't like being beaten—even when her opponent was obviously stronger than she was.

Elend stood up straight, intending to suggest an end to the sparring. At that moment, Vin dashed forward.

Ham brought his staff up expectantly, swinging as Vin came within reach. She ducked to the side, passing within inches of the attack, then brought her weapon around and slammed it into the back of Ham's staff, throwing him off balance. Then she ducked in for the attack.

Ham, however, recovered quickly. He let the force of Vin's blow spin him around, and he used the momentum to bring his staff around in a powerful blow aimed directly at Vin's chest.

Elend cried out.

Vin jumped.

She didn't have metal to Push against, but that didn't seem to matter. She sprang a good seven feet in the air, easily cresting Ham's staff. She flipped as the swing passed beneath her, her fingers brushing the air just above the weapon, her own staff spinning in a one-handed grip.

Vin landed, her staff already howling in a low swing, its tip throwing up a line of ash as it ran along the ground. It slammed into the back of Ham's legs. The blow swept Ham's feet out from beneath him, and he cried out as he fell.

Vin jumped into the air again.

Ham slammed to the earth on his back, and Vin landed on his chest. Then, she calmly rapped him on the forehead with the end of her staff. "I win."

Ham lay, looking dazed, Vin crouching on his chest. Dust and ash settled quietly in the courtyard.

"Damn. . ." Spook whispered, voicing a sentiment that seemed to be shared by the dozen or so watching soldiers.

Finally, Ham chuckled. "Fine. You beat me—now, if you would, kindly get me something to drink while I try to massage some feeling back into my legs."

Vin smiled, hopping off his chest and scampering away to do as requested. Ham shook his head, climbing to his feet. Despite his words, he walked with barely a limp; he'd probably have a bruise, but it wouldn't bother him for long. Pewter not only enhanced one's strength, balance, and speed, it also made one's body innately stronger. Ham could shrug off a blow that would have shattered Elend's legs.

Ham joined them, nodding to Clubs and punching Spook lightly on the arm. Then he leaned against the railing and rubbed his left calf, cringing slightly. "I swear, Elend—sometimes sparring with that girl is like trying to fight with a gust of wind. She's never where I think she'll be."

"How did she do that, Ham?" Elend asked. "The jump, I mean. That leap seemed inhuman, even for an Allomancer."

"Used steel, didn't she?" Spook said.

Ham shook his head. "No, I doubt it."

"Then how?" Elend asked.

"Allomancers draw strength from their metals," Ham said, sighing and putting his foot down. "Some can squeeze out more than others—but the real power comes from the metal itself, not the person's body."

Elend paused. "So?"

"So," Ham said, "an Allomancer doesn't have to be physically strong to be incredibly powerful. If Vin were a Feruchemist, it would be different—if you ever see Sazed increase *his* strength, his muscles will grow larger. But with Allomancy, all the strength comes directly from the metal.

"Now, most Thugs—myself included—figure that making their bodies strong will only add to their power. After all, a muscular man burning pewter will be that much stronger than a regular man of the same Allomantic power."

Ham rubbed his chin, eyeing the passage Vin had left through. "But. . .well, I'm beginning to think that there might be another way. Vin's a thin little thing, but when she burns pewter, she grows several times stronger than any normal warrior. She packs all that strength into a small body, and doesn't have to bother with the weight of massive muscles. She's like. . .an insect. Far stronger than her mass or her body would indicate. So, when she jumps, she can *jump*."

"But you're still stronger than she is," Spook said.

Ham nodded. "And I can make use of that—assuming I can ever hit her. That's getting harder and harder to do."

Vin finally returned, carrying a jug of chilled juice—apparently she'd decided to go all the way to the keep, rather than grabbing some of the warm ale kept on hand in the courtyard. She handed a flagon to Ham, and had thought to bring cups for Elend and Clubs.

"Hey!" Spook said as she poured. "What about me?"

"That beard looks silly on you," Vin said as she poured.

"So I don't get anything to drink?"

"No."

Spook paused. "Vin, you're a strange girl."

Vin rolled her eyes; then she glanced toward the water barrel in the corner of the courtyard. One of the tin cups lying beside it lurched into the air, shooting across the courtyard. Vin stuck her hand out, catching it with a slapping sound, then set it on the railing before Spook. "Happy?"

"I will be once you pour me something to drink," Spook said as Clubs grunted, taking a slurp from his own cup. The old general then reached over, sliding two of the coins off the railing and pocketing them.

"Hey, that's right!" Spook said. "You owe me, El. Pay up."

Elend lowered his cup. "I never agreed to the bet."

"You paid Uncle Irritable. Why not me?"

Elend paused, then sighed, pulling out a ten-boxing coin and setting it beside Spook's. The boy smiled, plucking both up in a smooth street-thief gesture. "Thanks for winning the bout, Vin," he said with a wink.

Vin frowned at Elend. "You bet against me?"

Elend laughed, leaning across the railing to kiss her. "I didn't mean it. Clubs bullied me."

Clubs snorted at that comment, downed the rest of his juice, then held out his cup for a refill. When Vin didn't respond, he turned to Spook and gave the boy a telling scowl. Finally, Spook sighed, picking up the jug to refill the cup.

Vin was still regarding Elend with dissatisfaction.

"I'd be careful, Elend," Ham said with a chuckle. "She can hit pretty hard. . .."

Elend nodded. "I should know better than to antagonize her when there are weapons lying around, eh?"

"Tell me about it," Ham said.

Vin sniffed at that comment, rounding the railing so that she could stand next to Elend. Elend put his arm around her, and as he did, he caught a bare flash of envy in Spook's eyes. Elend suspected that the boy'd had a crush on Vin for some time—but, well, Elend couldn't really blame him for that.

Spook shook his head. "I've got to find myself a woman."

"Well, that beard isn't going to help," Vin said.

"It's just a disguise, Vin," Spook said. "El, I don't suppose you could give me a title or something?"

Elend smiled. "I don't think that will matter, Spook."

"It worked for you."

"Oh, I don't know," Elend said. "Somehow, I think Vin fell in love with me *despite* my title, rather than because of it."

"But you had others before her," Spook said. "Noble girls."

"A couple," Elend admitted.

"Though Vin has a habit of killing off her competition," Ham quipped.

Elend laughed. "Now, see, she only did that once. And I think Shan deserved it—she was, after all, trying to assassinate me at the time." He looked down fondly, eyeing Vin. "Though, I do have to admit, Vin *is* a bit hard on other women. With her around, everybody else looks bland by comparison."

Spook rolled his eyes. "It's more interesting when she kills them off."

Ham chuckled, letting Spook pour him some more juice. "Lord Ruler only knows what she'd do to you if you ever tried to leave her, Elend."

Vin stiffened immediately, pulling him a little tighter. She'd been abandoned far too many times. Even after what they'd been through, even after his proposal of marriage, Elend had to keep promising Vin that he wasn't going to leave her.

*Time to change the topic*, Elend thought, the joviality of the moment fading. "Well," he said, "I think I'm going to go visit the kitchens and get something to eat. You coming, Vin?"

Vin glanced at the sky—likely checking to see how soon it would grow dark. Finally, she nodded.

"I'll come," Spook said.

"No you won't," Clubs said, grabbing the boy by the back of the neck. "You're going to stay right here and explain exactly where you got one of my soldiers' uniforms."

Elend chuckled, leading Vin away. Truth be told, even with the slightly sour end of conversation, he felt better for having come to watch the sparring. It was strange how the members of Kelsier's crew could laugh and make light, even during the most terrible of situations. They had a way of making him forget about his problems. Perhaps that was a holdover from the Survivor. Kelsier had, apparently, insisted on laughing, no matter how bad the situation. It had been a form of rebellion to him.

None of that made the problems go away. They still faced an army several times larger than their own, in a city that they could barely defend. Yet, if anyone could survive such a situation, it would be Kelsier's crew.

Later that night, having filled her stomach at Elend's insistence, Vin made her way with Elend to her rooms.

There, sitting on the floor, was a perfect replica of the wolfhound she had bought earlier. It eyed her, then bowed its head. "Welcome back, Mistress," the kandra said in a growling, muffled voice.

Elend whistled appreciatively, and Vin walked in a circle around the creature. Each hair appeared to have been placed perfectly. If it hadn't spoken, one would never have been able to tell it wasn't the original dog.

"How do you manage the voice?" Elend asked curiously.

"A voice box is a construction of flesh, not bone, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. "Older kandra learn to manipulate their bodies, not just replicate them.

I still need to digest a person's corpse to memorize and re-create their exact features. However, I can improvise some things."

Vin nodded. "Is that why making this body took you so much longer than you'd said?"

"No, Mistress," OreSeur said. "The hair. I'm sorry I didn't warn you—placing fur like this takes a great deal of precision and effort."

"Actually, you did mention it," Vin said, waving her hand.

"What do you think of the body, OreSeur?" Elend asked.

"Honestly, Your Majesty?"

"Of course."

"It is offensive and degrading," OreSeur said.

Vin raised an eyebrow. *That's forward of you, Renoux,* she thought. *Feeling a little belligerent today, are we*?

He glanced at her, and she tried—unsuccessfully—to read his canine expression.

"But," Elend said, "you'll wear the body anyway, right?"

"Of course, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. "I would die before breaking the Contract. It is life."

Elend nodded to Vin, as if he'd just made a major point.

*Anyone can claim loyalty,* Vin thought. *If someone has a "Contract" to ensure their honor, then all the better. That makes the surprise more poignant when they do turn on you*.

Elend was obviously waiting for something. Vin sighed. "OreSeur, we'll be spending more time together in the future."

"If that is what you wish, Mistress."

"I'm not sure if it is or not," Vin said. "But it's going to happen anyway. How well can you move about in that body?"

"Well enough, Mistress."

"Come on," she said, "let's see if you can keep up."

*I am also afraid, however, that all I have known—that my story—will be forgotten. I am afraid for the world that is to come. Afraid that my plans will fail*.

*Afraid of a doom worse, even, than the Deepness*.

# 7

SAZED NEVER THOUGHT HE'D HAVE reason to appreciate dirt floors. However, they proved remarkably useful in writing instruction. He drew several words in the dirt with a long stick, giving his half-dozen students a model. They proceeded to scribble their own copies, rewriting the words several times.

Even after living among various groups of rural skaa for a year, Sazed was still surprised by their meager resources. There wasn't a single piece of chalk in the entire village, let alone ink or paper. Half the children ran around naked, and the only shelters were the hovels—long, one-room structures with patchy roofs. The skaa had farming tools, fortunately, but no manner of bows or slings for hunting.

Sazed had led a scavenging mission up to the plantation's abandoned manor. The leavings had been meager. He'd suggested that the village elders relocate their people to the manor itself for the winter, but he doubted they would do so. They had visited the manor with apprehension, and many hadn't been willing to leave Sazed's side. The place reminded them of lords—and lords reminded them of pain.

His students continued to scribble. He had spent quite a bit of effort explaining to the elders why writing was so important. Finally, they had chosen him some students—partially, Sazed was sure, just to appease him. He shook his head slowly as he watched them write. There was no passion in their learning. They came because they were ordered, and because "Master Terrisman" willed it, not because of any real desire for education.

During the days before the Collapse, Sazed had often imagined what the world would be like once the Lord Ruler was gone. He had pictured the Keepers emerging, bringing forgotten knowledge and truths to an excited, thankful populace. He'd imagined teaching before a warm hearth at night, telling stories to an eager audience. He'd never paused to consider a village, stripped of its working men, whose people were too exhausted at night to bother with tales from the past. He'd never imagined a people who seemed more annoyed by his presence than thankful.

*You must be patient with them*, Sazed told himself sternly. His dreams now seemed like hubris. The Keepers who had come before him, the hundreds who had died keeping their knowledge safe and quiet, had never expected praise or accolades. They had performed their great task with solemn anonymity.

Sazed stood up and inspected his students' writings. They were getting better—they could recognize all of the letters. It wasn't much, but it was a start. He nodded to the group, dismissing them to help prepare the evening meal.

They bowed, then scattered. Sazed followed them out, then realized how dim the sky was; he had probably kept his students too late. He shook his head as he strolled between the hill-like hovels. He again wore his steward's robes, with their colorful V-shaped patterns, and he had put in several of his earrings. He kept to the old ways because they were familiar, even though they were also a symbol of oppression. How would future Terris generations dress? Would a lifestyle forced upon them by the Lord Ruler become an innate part of their culture?

He paused at the edge of the village, glancing down the corridor of the southern valley. It was filled with blackened soil occasionally split by brown vines or shrubs. No mist, of course; mist came only during the night. The stories had to be mistakes. The thing he'd seen had to have been a fluke.

And what did it matter if it wasn't? It wasn't his duty to investigate such things. Now that the Collapse had come, he had to disperse his knowledge, not waste his time chasing after foolish stories. Keepers were no longer investigators, but instructors. He carried with him thousands of books—information about farming, about sanitation, about government, and about medicine. He needed to give these things to the skaa. That was what the Synod had decided.

And yet, a part of Sazed resisted. That made him feel deeply guilty; the villagers needed his teachings, and he wished dearly to help them. However. . .he felt that he was *missing* something. The Lord Ruler was dead, but the story did not seem finished. Was there something he had overlooked?

Something larger, even, than the Lord Ruler? Something so large, so big, that it was effectively invisible?

*Or, do I just* want *there to be something else*? he wondered. *I've spent most of my adult life resisting and fighting, taking risks that the other Keepers called mad. I wasn't content with feigned subservience—I had to get involved in the rebellion.*

Despite that rebellion's success, Sazed's brethren still hadn't forgiven him for his involvement. He knew that Vin and the others saw him as docile, but compared with other Keepers he was a wild man. A reckless, untrustworthy fool who threatened the entire order with his impatience. They had believed their duty was to wait, watching for the day when the Lord Ruler was gone. Feruchemists were too rare to risk in open rebellion.

Sazed had disobeyed. Now he was having trouble living the peaceful life of a teacher. Was that because some subconscious part of him knew that the people were still in danger, or was it because he simply couldn't accept being marginalized?

"Master Terrisman!"

Sazed spun. The voice was terrified. *Another death in the mists*? he thought immediately.

It was eerie how the other skaa remained inside their hovels despite the horrified voice. A few doors creaked, but nobody rushed out in alarm—or even curiosity—as the screamer dashed up to Sazed1. She was one of the fieldworkers, a stout, middle-aged woman. Sazed checked his reserves as she approached; he had on his pewtermind for strength, of course, and a very small steel ring for speed. Suddenly, he wished he'd chosen to wear just a few more bracelets this day.

"Master Terrisman!" the woman said, out of breath. "Oh, he's come back! He's come for us!"

"Who?" Sazed asked. "The man who died in the mists?"

"No, Master Terrisman. The *Lord Ruler*."

Sazed found him standing just outside the village. It was already growing dark, and the woman who'd fetched Sazed had returned to her hovel in fear. Sazed could only imagine how the poor people felt—trapped by the onset of the night and its mist, yet huddled and worried at the danger that lurked outside.

And an ominous danger it was. The stranger waited quietly on the worn road, wearing a black robe, standing almost as tall as Sazed himself. The man was bald, and he wore no jewelry—unless, of course, you counted the massive iron spikes that had been driven point-first through his eyes.

Not the Lord Ruler. A Steel Inquisitor.

Sazed still didn't understand how the creatures continued to live. The spikes were wide enough to fill the Inquisitor's entire eye sockets; the nails had destroyed the eyes, and pointed tips jutted out the back of the skull. No blood dripped from the wounds—for some reason, that made them seem more strange.

Fortunately, Sazed knew this particular Inquisitor. "Marsh," Sazed said quietly as the mists began to form.

"You are a very difficult person to track, Terrisman," Marsh said—and the sound of his voice shocked Sazed. It had changed, somehow, becoming more grating, more gristly. It now had a grinding quality, like that of a man with a cough. Just like the other Inquisitors Sazed had heard.

"Track?" Sazed asked. "I wasn't planning on others needing to find me."

"Regardless," Marsh said, turning south. "I did. You need to come with me."

Sazed frowned. "What? Marsh, I have a work to do here."

"Unimportant," Marsh said, turning back, focusing his eyeless gaze on Sazed.

*Is it me, or has he become stranger since we last met*? Sazed shivered. "What is this about, Marsh?"

"The Conventical of Seran is empty."

Sazed paused. The Conventical was a Ministry stronghold to the south—a place where the Inquisitors and high obligators of the Lord Ruler's religion had retreated after the Collapse.

"Empty?" Sazed asked. "That isn't likely, I think."

"True nonetheless," Marsh said. He didn't use body language as he spoke—no gesturing, no movements of the face.

"I. . ." Sazed trailed off. *What kinds of information, wonders, secrets, the Conventical's libraries must hold*.

"You must come with me," Marsh said. "I may need help, should my brethren discover us."

*My brethren. Since when are the Inquisitors Marsh's "brethren"*? Marsh had infiltrated their numbers as part of Kelsier's plan to overthrow the Final Empire. He was a traitor to their numbers, not their brother.

Sazed hesitated. Marsh's profile looked. . .unnatura1l, even unnerving, in the dim light. Dangerous.

*Don't be foolish*, Sazed chastised himself. Marsh was Kelsier's brother—the Survivor's only living relative. As an Inquisitor, Marsh had authority over the Steel Ministry, and many of the obligators had listened to him despite his involvement with the rebellion. He had been an invaluable resource for Elend Venture's fledgling government.

"Go get your things," Marsh said.

*My place is here*, Sazed thought. *Teaching the people, not gallivanting across the countryside, chasing my own ego*.

And yet. . .

"The mists are coming during the day," Marsh said quietly.

Sazed looked up. Marsh was staring at him, the heads of his spikes shining like round disks in the last slivers of sunlight. Superstitious skaa thought that Inquisitors could read minds, though Sazed knew that was foolish. Inquisitors had the powers of Mistborn, and could therefore influence other people's emotions—but they could *not* read minds.

"Why did you say that?" Sazed asked.

"Because it is true," Marsh said. "This is not over, Sazed. It has not yet begun. The Lord Ruler. . .he was just a delay. A cog. Now that he is gone, we have little time remaining. Come with me to the Conventical—we must search it while we have the opportunity."

Sazed paused, then nodded. "Let me go explain to the villagers. We can leave tonight, I think."

Marsh nodded, but he didn't move as Sazed retreated to the village. He just remained, standing in the darkness, letting the mist gather around him.

*It all comes back to poor Alendi. I feel bad for him, and for all the things he has been forced to endure. For what he has been forced to become*.

# 8

VIN THREW HERSELF INTO THE mists. She soared in the night air, passing over darkened homes and streets. An occasional, furtive bob of light glowed in the mists—a guard patrol, or perhaps an unfortunate late-night traveler.

Vin began to descend, and she immediately flipped a coin out before herself. She Pushed against it, her weight plunging it down into the quiet depths. As soon as it hit the street below, her Push forced her upward, and she sprang back into the air. Soft Pushes were very difficult—so each coin she Pushed against, each jump she made, threw her into the air at a terrible speed. The jumping of a Mistborn wasn't like a bird's flight. It was more like the path of a ricocheting arrow.

And yet, there was a grace to it. Vin breathed deeply as she arced above the city, tasting the cool, humid air. Luthadel by day smelled of burning forges, sun-heated refuse, and fallen ash. At night, however, the mists gave the air a beautiful chill crispness—almost a cleanliness.

Vin crested her jump, and she hung for just a brief moment as her momentum changed. Then she began to plummet back toward the city. Her mistcloak tassels fluttered around her, mingling with her hair. She fell with her eyes closed, remembering her first few weeks in the mist, training beneath Kelsier's relaxed—yet watchful—tutelage. He had given her this. Freedom. Despite two years as a Mistborn, she had never lost the sense of intoxicating wonder she felt when soaring through the mists.

She burned steel with her eyes closed; t1he lines appeared anyway, visible as a spray of threadlike blue lines set against the blackness of her eyelids. She picked two, pointing downward behind her, and Pushed, throwing herself into an other arc.

*What did I ever do without this*? Vin thought, opening her eyes, whipping her mistcloak behind her with a throw of the arm.

Eventually, she began to fall again, and this time she didn't toss a coin. She burned pewter to strengthen her limbs, and landed with a thump on the wall surrounding Keep Venture's grounds. Her bronze showed no signs of Allomantic activity nearby, and her steel revealed no unusual patterns of metal moving toward the keep.

Vin crouched on the dark wall for a few moments, right at the edge, toes curling over the lip of the stone. The rock was cool beneath her feet, and her tin made her skin far more sensitive than normal. She could tell that the wall needed to be cleaned; lichens were beginning to grow along its side, encouraged by the night's humidity, protected from the day's sun by a nearby tower.

Vin remained quiet, watching a slight breeze push and churn the mists. She heard the movement on the street below before she saw it. She tensed, checking her reserves, before she was able to discern a wolfhound's shape in the shadows.

She dropped a coin over the side of the wall, then leapt off. OreSeur waited as she landed quietly before him, using a quick Push on the coin to slow her descent.

"You move quickly," Vin noted appreciatively.

"All I had to do was round the palace grounds, Mistress."

"Still, you stuck closer to me this time than you ever did before. That wolfhound's body *is* faster than a human one."

OreSeur paused. "I suppose," he admitted.

"Think you can follow me through the city?"

"Probably," OreSeur said. "If you lose me, I will return to this point so you can retrieve me."

Vin turned and dashed down a side street. OreSeur then took off quietly behind her, following.

*Let's see how well he does in a more demanding chase*, she thought, burning pewter and increasing her speed. She sprinted along the cool cobbles, barefoot as always. A normal man could never have maintained such a speed. Even a trained runner couldn't have kept pace with her, for he would have quickly tired.

With pewter, however, Vin could run for hours at breakneck speeds. It gave her strength, lent her an unreal sense of balance, as she shot down the dark, mist-ruled street, a flurry of cloak tassels and bare feet.

OreSeur kept pace. He loped beside her in the night, breathing heavily, focused on his running.

*Impressive*, Vin thought, then turned down an alleyway. She easily jumped the six-foot-tall fence at the back, passing into the garden of some lesser nobleman's mansion. She spun, skidding on the wet grass, and watched.

OreSeur crested the top of the wooden fence, his dark, canine form dropping through the mists to land in the loam before Vin. He came to a stop, resting on his haunches, waiting quietly, panting. There was a look of defiance in his eyes.

*All right*, Vin thought, pulling out a handful of coins. *Follow this*.

She dropped a coin and threw herself backward up into the air. She spun in the mists, twisting, then Pushed herself sideways off a well spigot. She landed on a rooftop and jumped off, using another coin to Push herself over the street below.

She kept going, leaping from rooftop to rooftop, using coins when necessary. She occasionally shot a glance behind, and saw a dark form struggling to keep up. He'd rarely followed her as a human; usually, she had checked in with him at specific points. Moving out in the night, jumping through the mists. . .this was the true domain of the Mistborn. Did Elend understand what he asked when he told her to bring OreSeur with her? If she stayed down on the streets, she'd expose herself.

She landed on a rooftop, jarring to a sudden halt as she grabbed hold of the building's stone lip, leaning out over a street three stories below. She maintained her balance, mist swirling below her. All was silent.

*Well, that didn't take long*, she thought. *I'll just have to explain to Elend that—*

OreSeur's canine form thumped to the rooftop a short distance away. He padded over to her, then sat down on his haunches, waiting expectantly.

Vin frowned. She'd traveled for a good ten minutes, running over rooftops with the speed of a Mistborn. "How. . .how did you get up here?" she demanded.

"I jumped atop a shorter building, then used it to reach these tenements, Mistress," OreSeur said. "Then I followed you along the rooftops. They are placed so closely together that it was not difficult to jump from one to another."

Vin's confusion must have shown, for OreSeur continued. "I may have been. . .hasty in my judgment of these bones, Mistress. They certainly do have an impressive sense of smell—in fact, all of their senses are quite keen. It was surprisingly easy to track you, even in the darkness."

"I. . .see," Vin said. "Well, that's good."

"Might I ask, Mistress, the purpose of that chase?"

Vin shrugged. "I do this sort of thing every night."

"It seemed like you were particularly intent on losing me. It will be very difficult to protect you if you don't let me stay near you."

"Protect me?" Vin asked. "You can't even fight."

"The Contract forbids me from killing a human," OreSeur said. "I could, however, go for help should you need it."

*Or throw me a bit of atium in a moment of danger*, Vin admitted. *He's right—he could be useful. Why am I so determined to leave him behind*?

She glanced over at OreSeur, who sat patiently, his chest puffing from exertion. She hadn't realized that kandra even needed to breathe.

*He ate Kelsier*.

"Come on," Vin said. She jumped from the building, Pushing herself off a coin. She didn't pause to see if OreSeur followed.

As she fell, she reached for another coin, but decided not to use it. She Pushed against a passing window bracket instead. Like most Mistborn, she often used clips—the smallest denomination of coin—to jump. It was very convenient that the economy supplied a prepackaged bit of metal of an ideal size and weight for jumping and shooting. To most Mistborn, the cost of a thrown clip—or even a bag of them—was negligible.

But Vin was not most Mistborn. In her younger years, a handful of clips would have seemed an amazing treasure. That m1uch money could have meant food for weeks, if she scrimped. It also could have meant pain—even death—if the other thieves had discovered that she'd obtained such a fortune.

It had been a long time since she'd gone hungry. Though she still kept a pack of dried foods in her quarters, she did so more out of habit than anxiety. She honestly wasn't sure what she thought of the changes within her. It was nice not to have to worry about basic necessities—and yet, those worries had been replaced by ones far more daunting. Worries involving the future of an entire nation.

The future of. . .a people. She landed on the city wall—a structure much higher, and much better fortified, than the small wall around Keep Venture. She hopped up on the battlements, fingers seeking a hold on one of the merlons as she leaned over the edge of the wall, looking out over the army's fires.

She had never met Straff Venture, but she had heard enough from Elend to be worried.

She sighed, pushing back off the battlement and hopping onto the wall walk. Then she leaned back against one of the merlons. To the side, OreSeur trotted up the wall steps and approached. Once again, he went down onto his haunches, watching patiently.

For better or for worse, Vin's simple life of starvation and beatings was gone. Elend's fledgling kingdom was in serious danger, and she'd burned away the last of his atium trying to keep herself alive. She'd left him exposed—not just to armies, but to any Mistborn assassin who tried to kill him.

An assassin like the Watcher, perhaps? The mysterious figure who had interfered in her fight against Cett's Mistborn. What did he want? Why did he watch her, rather than Elend?

Vin sighed, reaching into her coin pouch and pulling out her bar of duralumin. She still had the reserve of it within her, the bit she'd swallowed earlier.

For centuries, it had been assumed that there were only ten Allomantic metals: the four base metals and their alloys, plus atium and gold. Yet, Allomantic metals always came in pairs—a base metal and an alloy. It had always bothered Vin that atium and gold were considered a pair, when neither was an alloy of the other. In the end, it had turned out that they weren't actually paired; they each had an alloy. One of these—malatium, the so-called Eleventh Metal—had eventually given Vin the clue she'd needed to defeat the Lord Ruler.

Somehow Kelsier had found out about malatium. Sazed still hadn't been able to trace the "legends" that Kelsier had supposedly uncovered teaching of the Eleventh Metal and its power to defeat the Lord Ruler.

Vin rubbed her finger on the slick surface of the duralumin bar. When Vin had last seen Sazed, he'd seemed frustrated—or, at least, as frustrated as Sazed ever grew—that he couldn't find even hints regarding Kelsier's supposed legends. Though Sazed claimed he'd left Luthadel to teach the people of the Final Empire—as was his duty as a Keeper—Vin hadn't missed the fact that Sazed had gone south. The direction in which Kelsier claimed to have discovered the Eleventh Metal.

*Are there rumors about this metal, too*? Vin wondered, rubbing the duralumin. *Ones that might tell me what it does*?

Each of the other metals produced an immediate, visible effect; only copper, with its ability to create a cloud that masked an Allomancer's powers from others, didn't have an obvious sensory clue to its purpose. Perhaps duralumin was similar. Could its effect be noticed only by another Allomancer, one trying to use hi1s or her powers on Vin? It was the opposite of aluminum, which made metals disappear. Did that mean duralumin would make other metals last longer?

Movement.

Vin just barely caught the hint of shadowed motion. At first, a primal bit of terror rose in her: Was it the misty form, the ghost in the darkness she had seen the night before?

*You were just seeing things,* she told herself forcefully. *You were too tired*. And, in truth, the glimmer of motion proved too dark—too *real*—to be the same ghostly image.

It was him.

He stood atop one of the watchtowers—not crouching, not even bothering to hide. Was he arrogant or foolish, this unknown Mistborn? Vin smiled, her apprehension turning to excitement. She prepared her metals, checking her reserves. Everything was ready.

*Tonight I catch you, my friend*.

Vin spun, throwing out a spray of coins. Either the Mistborn knew he'd been spotted, or he was ready for an attack, for he easily dodged. OreSeur hopped to his feet, spinning, and Vin whipped her belt free, dropping her metals.

"Follow if you can," she whispered to the kandra, then sprang into the darkness after her prey.

The Watcher shot away, bounding through the night. Vin had little experience chasing another Mistborn; her only real chance to practice had come during Kelsier's training sessions. She soon found herself struggling to keep up with the Watcher, and she felt a stab of guilt for what she had done to OreSeur earlier. She was learning firsthand how difficult it was to follow a determined Mistborn through the mists. And she didn't have the advantage of a dog's sense of smell.

She did, however, have tin. It made the night clearer and enhanced her hearing. With it, she managed to follow the Watcher as he moved toward the center of the city. Eventually, he let himself drop down toward one of the central fountain squares. Vin fell as well, hitting the slick cobblestones with a flare of pewter, then dodging to the side as he threw out a handful of coins.

Metal rang against stone in the quiet night, coins plinging against statues and cobblestones. Vin smiled as she landed on all fours; then she bounded forward, jumping with pewter-enhanced muscles and Pulling one of the coins up into her hand.

Her opponent leaped backward, landing on the edge of a nearby fountain. Vin landed, then dropped her coin, using it to throw herself upward over the Watcher's head. He stooped, watching warily as she passed over him.

Vin caught of one of the bronze statues at the center of the fountain itself and pulled herself to a stop atop it. She crouched on the uneven footing, looking down at her opponent. He stood balanced on one foot at the edge of the fountain, quiet and black in the churning mists. There was a. . .challenge in his posture.

*Can you catch me*? he seemed to ask.

Vin whipped her daggers out and jumped free of the statue. She Pushed herself directly toward the Watcher, using the cool bronze as an anchor.

The Watcher used the statue as well, Pulling himself forward. He shot just beneath Vin, throwing up a wave of water, his incredible speed letting him skid like a stone across the fountain's still surface. As he jumped clear of the water, he Pushed himself away, shooting across the square.

Vin landed on the founta1in lip, chill water spraying across her. She growled, jumping after the Watcher.

As he landed, he spun and whipped out his own daggers. She rolled beneath his first attack, then brought her daggers up in a two-handed double jab. The Watcher jumped quickly out of the way, his daggers sparkling and dropping beads of fountain water. He had a lithe power about him as he came to rest in a crouch. His body looked tense and sure. Capable.

Vin smiled again, breathing quickly. She hadn't felt like this since. . .since those nights so long ago, when she'd sparred with Kelsier. She remained in a crouch, waiting, watching the mist curl between her and her opponent. He was of medium height, had a wiry build, and he wore no mistcloak.

*Why no cloak*? Mistcloaks were the ubiquitous mark of her kind, a symbol of pride and security.

She was too far away to distinguish his face. She thought she saw a hint of a smile, however, as he jumped backward and Pushed against another statue. The chase began again.

Vin followed him through the city, flaring steel, landing on roofs and streets, Pushing herself in great arcing leaps. The two bounded through Luthadel like children on a playground—Vin trying to cut off her opponent, he cleverly managing to stay just a little bit ahead of her.

He was good. Far better than any Mistborn she had known or faced, save perhaps for Kelsier. However, she'd grown greatly in skill since she'd sparred with the Survivor. Could this newcomer be even better? The thought thrilled her. She'd always considered Kelsier a paradigm of Allomantic ability, and it was easy to forget that he'd had his powers for only a couple of years before the Collapse.

*That's the same amount of time that I've been training*, Vin realized as she landed in a small, cramped street. She frowned, crouching, remaining still. She'd seen the Watcher fall toward this street.

Narrow and poorly maintained, the street was practically an alleyway, lined on both sides by three- and four-story buildings. There was no motion—either the Watcher had slipped away or he was hiding nearby. She burned iron, but the iron-lines revealed no motion.

However, there was another way. . ..

Vin pretended to still be looking around, but she turned on her bronze, flaring it, trying to pierce the coppercloud that she thought might be close.

And there he was. Hiding in a room behind the mostly closed shutters of a derelict building. Now that she knew where to look, she saw the bit of metal he'd probably used to jump up to the second story, the latch he must have Pulled on to quickly close the shutters behind him. He'd probably scouted this street beforehand, always intending to lose her here.

*Clever*, Vin thought.

He couldn't have anticipated her ability to pierce copperclouds. But, attacking him now might give away that ability. Vin stood quietly, thinking of him crouching above, tensely waiting for her to move off.

She smiled. Reaching inside, she examined the duralumin reserve. There was a possible way to discover if burning it created some change in the way she looked to another Mistborn. The Watcher was likely burning most of his metals, trying to determine what her next move would be.

So, thinking herself incredibly clever, Vin burned the fourteenth metal.

A massive explosion sounded in her ears. Vin gasped, dro1pping to her knees in shock. Everything grew bright around her, as if some crack of energy had illuminated the entire street. And she felt cold; frigidly, stunningly cold.

She moaned, trying to make sense of the sound. It. . .it wasn't an explosion, but many explosions. A rhythmic thudding, like a drum pounding just beside her. Her heart-beat. And the breeze, loud as a howling wind. The scratchings of a dog searching for food. Someone snoring in their sleep. It was as if her hearing had been magnified a hundred times.

And then. . .nothing. Vin fell backward against the cobblestones, the sudden rush of light, coldness, and sound evaporating. A form moved in the shadows nearby, but she couldn't make it out—she couldn't see in the darkness anymore. Her tin was. . .

*Gone,* she realized, coming to. *My entire store of tin has been burned away. I was. . .burning it, when I turned on the duralumin*.

*I burned them both at once. That's the secret*. The duralumin had burned away all her tin in a single, massive burst. It had made her senses amazingly acute for a very short time, but had stolen away her entire reserve. And, looking, she could see that her bronze and her pewter—the other metals she'd been burning at the time—were gone as well. The onrush of sensory information had been so vast that she hadn't noticed the effects of the other two.

*Think about it later,* Vin told herself, shaking her head. She felt like she should be deafened and blinded, but she wasn't. She was just a bit stunned.

The dark form moved up beside her in the mists. She didn't have time to recover; she pushed herself to her feet, stumbling. The form, it was too short to be the Watcher. It was. . .

"Mistress, do you require assistance?"

Vin paused as OreSeur padded up to her, then sat on his haunches.

"You. . .managed to follow," Vin said.

"It was not easy, Mistress," OreSeur said flatly. "Do you require assistance?"

"What? No, no assistance." Vin shook her head, clearing her mind. "I guess that's one thing I didn't think of by making you a dog. You can't carry metals for me now."

The kandra cocked his head, then padded over into an alleyway. He returned a moment later with something in his mouth. Her belt.

He dropped it by her feet, then returned to his waiting position. Vin picked up the belt, pulling off one of her extra metal vials. "Thank you," she said slowly. "That is very. . .thoughtful of you."

"I fulfill my Contract, Mistress," the kandra said. "Nothing more."

*Well, this is more than you've ever done before,* she thought, downing a vial and feeling her reserves return. She burned tin, restoring her night vision, releasing a veil of tension from her mind; since she'd discovered her powers, she'd never had to go out at night in complete darkness.

The shutters of the Watcher's room were open; he had apparently fled during her fit. Vin sighed.

"Mistress!" OreSeur snapped.

Vin spun. A man landed quietly behind her. He looked. . .familiar, for some reason. He had a lean face—topped with dark hair—and his head was cocked slightly in confusion. She could see the question in his eyes. Why had she fallen down?

Vin smiled. "Maybe I just did it1 to lure you closer," she whispered—softly, yet loud enough that she knew tin-enhanced ears would hear her.

The Mistborn smiled, then tipped his head to her as if in respect.

"Who are you?" Vin asked, stepping forward.

"An enemy," he replied, holding up a hand to ward her back.

Vin paused. Mist swirled between them on the quiet street. "Why, then, did you help me fight those assassins?"

"Because," he said. "I'm also insane."

Vin frowned, eyeing the man. She had seen insanity before in the eyes of beggars. This man was not insane. He stood proudly, eyes controlled as he regarded her in the darkness.

*What kind of game is he playing*? she wondered.

Her instincts—a lifetime's worth of instincts—warned her to be wary. She had only just learned to trust her friends, and she wasn't about to offer the same privilege to a man she had met in the night.

And yet, it had been over a year since she'd spoken with another Mistborn. There were conflicts within her that she couldn't explain to the others. Even Mistings, like Ham and Breeze, couldn't understand the strange dual life of a Mistborn. Part assassin, part bodyguard, part noblewoman. . .part confused, quiet girl. Did this man have similar troubles with his identity?

Perhaps she could make an ally out of him, bringing a second Mistborn to the defense of the Central Dominance. Even if she couldn't, she certainly couldn't afford to fight him. A spar in the night was one thing, but if their contest grew dangerous, atium might come into play.

If that happened, she'd lose.

The Watcher studied her with a careful eye. "Answer something for me," he said in the mists.

Vin nodded.

"Did you really kill Him?"

"Yes," Vin whispered. There was only one person he could mean.

He nodded slowly. "Why do you play their games?"

"Whose games?"

The Watcher gestured into the mists, toward Keep Venture.

"Those aren't games," Vin said. "It's no game when the people I love are in danger."

The Watcher stood quietly, then shook his head, as if. . .disappointed. Then, he pulled something from his sash.

Vin jumped back immediately. The Watcher, however, simply flipped a coin to the ground between them. It bounced a couple of times, coming to a rest on the cobbles. Then, the Watcher Pushed himself backward into the air.

Vin didn't follow. She reached up, rubbing her head; she still felt like she should have a headache.

"You're letting him go?" OreSeur asked.

Vin nodded. "We're done for tonight. He fought well."

"You sound almost respectful," the kandra said.

Vin turned, frowning at the hint of disgust in the kandra's voice. OreSeur sat patiently, displaying no further emotion.

She sighed, tying her belt around her waist. "We're going to need to come up with a harness or something for you," she said. "I want you to carry extra metal vials for me, like you 1did as a human."

"A harness won't be necessary, Mistress," OreSeur said.

"Oh?"

OreSeur rose, padding forward. "Please get out one of your vials."

Vin did as requested, pulling out a small glass vial. OreSeur stopped, then turned one shoulder toward her. As she watched, the fur parted and the flesh itself split, showing forth veins and layers of skin. Vin pulled back a bit.

"There is no need to be worried, Mistress," OreSeur said. "My flesh is not like your own. I have more. . .control over it, you might say. Place the metal vial inside my shoulder."

Vin did as asked. The flesh sealed around the vial, obscuring it from view. Experimentally, Vin burned iron. No blue lines appeared pointing toward the hidden vial. Metal inside of a person's stomach couldn't be affected by another Allomancer; indeed, metal piercing a body, like Inquisitor spikes or Vin's own earring, couldn't be Pushed or Pulled by someone else. Apparently, the same rule applied to metals hidden within a kandra.

"I will deliver this to you in an emergency," OreSeur said.

"Thank you," Vin said.

"The Contract, Mistress. Do not give me thanks. I do only what I am required."

Vin nodded slowly. "Let's go back to the palace, then," she said. "I want to check on Elend."

*But, let me begin at the beginning. I met Alendi first in Khlennium; he was a young lad then, and had not yet been warped by a decade spent leading armies.*

# 9

MARSH HAD CHANGED. THERE WAS something. . .harder about the former Seeker. Something in the way he always seemed to be staring at things Sazed couldn't see, something in his blunt responses and terse language.

Of course, Marsh had always been a straightforward man. Sazed eyed his friend as the two strode down the dusty highway. They had no horses; even if Sazed had possessed one, most beasts wouldn't go near an Inquisitor.

*What did Spook say that Marsh's nickname was*? Sazed thought to himself as they walked. *Before his transformation, they used to call him. . .Ironeyes*. The name that had turned out to be chillingly prophetic. Most of the others found Marsh's transformed state discomforting, and had left him isolated. Though Marsh hadn't seemed to mind the treatment, Sazed had made a special effort to befriend the man.

He still didn't know if Marsh appreciated the gesture or not. They did seem to get along well; both shared an interest in scholarship and history, and both were interested in the religious climate of the Final Empire.

*And, he did come looking for me,* Sazed thought. *Of course, he did claim that he wanted help in case the Inquisitors weren't all gone from the Conventical of Seran*. It was a weak excuse. Despite his powers as a Feruchemist, Sazed was no warrior.

"You should be in Luthadel," Marsh said.

Sazed looked up. Marsh had spoken bluntly, as usual, without preamble. "Why do you say that?" Sazed asked.

"They need you there."

"The rest of the Final Empire has need of me too, Marsh. I am a Keeper—one group of people should not be able to monopolize al1l of my time."

Marsh shook his head. "These peasants, they will forget your passing. No one will forget the things that will soon happen in the Central Dominance."

"You would be surprised, I think, at what men can forget. Wars and kingdoms may seem important now, but even the Final Empire proved mortal. Now that it has fallen, the Keepers have no business being involved in politics." *Most would say we never had any business being involved in politics at all*.

Marsh turned toward him. Those eyes, sockets filled entirely with steel. Sazed did not shiver, but he felt distinctly uncomfortable.

"And your friends?" Marsh asked.

This touched on something more personal. Sazed looked away, thinking of Vin, and of his vow to Kelsier that he would protect her. *She needs little protection now,* he thought. *She's grown more adept at Allomancy than even Kelsier was*. And yet, Sazed knew that there were modes of protection that didn't relate to fighting. These thingsâ”upport, counsel, kindnessâ”ere vital to every person, and most especially to Vin. So much rested on that poor girl's shoulders.

"I have. . .sent help," Sazed said. "What help I can."

"Not good enough," Marsh said. "The things happening in Luthadel are too important to ignore."

"I am not ignoring them, Marsh," Sazed said. "I am simply performing my duty as best I can."

Marsh finally turned away. "The wrong duty. You will return to Luthadel once we are finished here."

Sazed opened his mouth to argue, but said nothing. What was there to say? Marsh was right. Though he had no proof, Sazed knew that there *were* important things happening in Luthadelâ”hings that would require his aid to fight. Things that likely affected the future of the entire land once known as the Final Empire.

So, he closed his mouth and trudged after Marsh. He would return to Luthadel, proving himself a rebel once again. Perhaps, in the end, he would realize that there was no ghostly threat facing the worldâ”hat he had simply returned because of his own selfish desire to be with his friends.

In fact, he hoped that proved to be the truth. The alternative made him very uncomfortable.

*Alendi's height struck me the first time I saw him. Here was a man who towered over others, a man whoâ”espite his youth and his humble clothingâ”emanded respect.*

# 10

THE ASSEMBLY HALL WAS in the former Steel Ministry Canton of Finance headquarters. It was a low-ceilinged space, more of a large lecture room than an assembly hall. There were rows of benches fanning out in front of a raised stage. On the right side of the stage, Elend had constructed a tier of seats for the Assembly members. On the left of the stage, he had constructed a single lectern for speakers.

The lectern faced the Assemblymen, not the crowd. The common people were, however, encouraged to attend. Elend thought that everyone should be interested in the workings of their government; it pained him that the Assembly's weekly meetings usually had a small audience.

Vin's seat was on the stage, but at the back, directly opposite the audience. From her vantage with the other bodyguards, she would look past the lectern toward the crowd. Another row of Ham's guardsâ”n regular clothingâ”at in the first row of the audience, providing a first line of protection. Elend had balked at Vin's demands to having guards both in front of the stage and behind itâ”e thought that bodyguards sitting right behind the speakers would be distracting. Ham and Vin, however, had insisted. If Elend was going to stand up in front of a crowd every week, Vin wanted to be certain she could keep a close eye on himâ”nd on those watching him.

Getting to her chair, therefore, required Vin to walk across the stage. Stares followed her. Some of the watching crowd were interested in the scandal; they assumed that she was Elend's mistress, and a king sleeping with his personal assassin made for good gossip. Others were interested in the politics; they wondered how much influence Vin had over Elend, and whether they could use her to get the king's ear. Still others were curious about the growing legends; they wondered if a girl like Vin could really have slain the Lord Ruler.

Vin hurried her pace. She passed the Assemblymen and found her seat next to Ham, whoâ”espite the formal occasionâ”till wore a simple vest with no shirt. Sitting next to him in her trousers and shirt, Vin didn't feel quite so out of place.

Ham smiled, clapping her affectionately on the shoulder. She had to force herself not to jump at the touch. It wasn't that she disliked Hamâ”uite the opposite, actually. She loved him as she did all of the former members of Kelsier's band. It was just that. . .well, she had trouble explaining it, even to herself. Ham's innocent gesture made her want to squirm. It seemed to her that people shouldn't be so casual with the way that they touched others.

She pushed those thoughts away. She had to learn to be like other people. Elend deserved a woman who was normal.

He was already there. He nodded to Vin as he noticed her arrival, and she smiled. Then he turned back to speaking quietly with Lord Penrod, one of the noblemen in the Assembly.

"Elend will be happy," Vin whispered. "Place is packed."

"They're worried," Ham said quietly. "And worried people pay more attention to things like this. Can't say I'm happyâ”ll these people make our job harder."

Vin nodded, scanning the audience. The crowd was a strangely mixed oneâ” collection of different groups who would never have met together during the days of the Final Empire. A major part were noblemen, of course. Vin frowned, thinking of how often various members of the nobility tried to manipulate Elend, and of the promises he made to them. . ..

"What's that look for?" Ham asked, nudging her.

Vin eyed the Thug. Expectant eyes twinkled in his firm, rectangular face. Ham had an almost supernatural sense when it came to arguments.

Vin sighed. "I don't know about this, Ham."

"This?"

"*This*," Vin said quietly, waving her hand at the Assembly. "Elend tries so hard to make everyone happy. He gives so much awayâ”is power, his money. . .."

"He just wants to see that everyone is treated fairly."

"It's more than that, Ham," Vin said. "It's like he's determined to make everyone a nobleman."

"Would that be such a bad thing?"

"If everyone is a nobleman, then there is no such thing as a nobleman. Everyone *can't* be rich, and everyone can't be in charge. That's just not the way things work."

"Perhaps," Ham said thoughtfully. "But, doesn't Elend have a civic duty to try and make sure justice is served?"

*Civic duty*? Vin thought. *I should have known better than to talk to Ham about something like this*. . ..

Vin looked down. "I just think he could see that everyone was treated well without having an Assembly. All they do is argue and try to take his power away. And he lets them."

Ham let the discussion die, and Vin turned back to her study of the audience. It appeared that a large group of mill workers had arrived first and managed to get the best seats. Early in the Assembly's history—perhaps ten months before—the nobility had sent servants to reserve seats for them, or had bribed people to give up their places. As soon as Elend had discovered this, however, he had forbidden both practices.

Other than the noblemen and the mill workers, there was a large number of the "new" class. Skaa merchants and craftsmasters, now allowed to set their own prices for their services. They were the true winners in Elend's economy. Beneath the Lord Ruler's oppressive hand, only the few most extraordinarily skilled skaa had been able to rise to positions of even moderate comfort. Without those restrictions, these same people had quickly proven to have abilities and acumen far above their noble counterparts'. They represented a faction in the Assembly at least as powerful as that of the nobility.

Other skaa peppered the crowd. They looked much the same as they had before Elend's rise to power. While noblemen generally wore suits—complete with dayhats and coats—these skaa wore simple trousers. Some of them were still dirty from their day's labor, their clothing old, worn, and stained with ash.

And yet. . .there *was* something different about them. It wasn't in their clothing, but their postures. They sat a little straighter, their heads held a little higher. And they had enough free time to attend an Assembly meeting.

Elend finally stood to begin the meeting. He had let his attendants dress him this morning, and the result was attire that was almost completely free of dishevelment. His suit fit well, all the buttons were done up, and his vest was of an appropriate dark blue. His hair was even neatly styled, the short, brown curls lying flat.

Normally, Elend would begin the meeting by calling on other speakers, Assemblymen who would drone on for hours about various topics like taxation rates or city sanitation. However, this day, there were more pressing matters.

"Gentlemen," Elend said. "I beg your leave to depart from our usual agenda this afternoon, in the light of our current. . .state of city affairs."

The group of twenty-four Assemblymen nodded, a few muttering things under their breath. Elend ignored them. He was comfortable before crowds, far more comfortable than Vin would ever be. As he unrolled his speech, Vin kept one eye on the crowd, watching for reactions or problems.

"The dire nature of our situation should be quite obvious," Elend said, beginning the speech he had prepared earlier. "We face a danger that this city has never known. Invasion and siege from an outside tyrant.

"We are a new nation, a kingdom founded on principles unknown during the days of the Lord Ruler. Yet, we are already a kingdom of tradition. Freedom for the skaa. Rule by our own choice and of our own design. Noblemen who don't have to cower before the Lord Ruler's obligators and Inquisitors.

"Gentlemen, one year is not enough. We have tasted freedom, and we need time to savor it. During the last month, we have frequently discussed and argued regarding what to do should this day arrive. Obviously, we are of many minds on the issue. Therefore, I ask for a vote of solidarity. Let us promise ourselves, and these people, that we will not give this city over to a foreign power without due consideration. Let us resolve to gather more information, to seek for other avenues, and even to fight should it be deemed necessary."

The speech went on, but Vin had heard it a dozen times as Elend practiced it. As he spoke, she found herself eying the crowd. She was most worried about the obligators she saw sitting in the back. They showed little reaction to the negative light in which Elend's remarks cast them.

She'd never understood why Elend allowed the Steel Ministry to continue teaching. It was the last real remnant of the Lord Ruler's power. Most obligators obstinately refused to lend their knowledge of bureaucracy and administration to Elend's government, and they still regarded skaa with contempt.

And yet, Elend let them remain. He maintained a strict rule that they were not allowed to incite rebellion or violence. However, he also didn't eject them from the city, as Vin had suggested. Actually, if the choice had been solely hers, she probably would have executed them.

Eventually, Elend's speech drew to a close, and Vin turned her attention back to him. "Gentlemen," he said, "I make this proposal out of faith, and I make it in the names of those we represent. I ask for time. I propose that we forgo all votes regarding the future of the city until a proper royal delegation has been allowed to meet with the army outside and determine what, if any, opportunity there is for negotiations."

He lowered his sheet, looking up, waiting for comments.

"So," said Philen, one of the merchants on the Assembly. "You're asking us to give *you* the power to decide the city's fate." Philen wore his rich suit so well that an observer would never have known that he'd first put one on about a year ago.

"What?" Elend asked. "I said nothing of the sort—I'm simply asking for more time. To meet with Straff."

"He's rejected all of our earlier messages," said another Assemblyman. "What makes you think he'll listen now?"

"We're approaching this wrong!" said one of the noble representatives. "We should be resolving to *beg* Straff Venture not to attack, not resolving to meet with him and chat. We need to establish quickly that we're willing to work with him. You've all seen that army. He's planning to destroy us!"

"Please," Elend said, raising a hand. "Let us stay on topic!"

One of the other Assemblymen—one of the skaa—spoke up, as if he hadn't heard Elend. "You say that because you're noble," he said, pointing at the noble Elend had interrupted. "It's easy for you to talk about working with Straff, since you've got very little to lose!"

"Very little to lose?" the nobleman said. "I and all of my house could be executed for supporting Elend against his father!"

"Bah," said one of the merchants. "This is all pointless. We should have hired mercenaries months ago, as I'd suggested."

"And where would we have gotten the funds for that?" asked Lord Penrod, senior of the noble Assemblymen.

"Taxes," the merchant 1said with a wave of his hand.

"Gentlemen!" Elend said; then, louder, "Gentlemen!"

This garnered him some small measure of attention.

"We *have* to make a decision," Elend said. "Stay focused, if you please. What of my proposal?"

"It's pointless," said Philen the merchant. "Why should we wait? Let's just invite Straff into the city and be done. He's going to take it anyway."

Vin sat back as the men began to argue again. The problem was, the merchant Philen—as little as she liked him—had a point. Fighting was looking like a very unattractive option. Straff had such a large army. Would stalling really do that much good?

"Look, see," Elend said, trying to get their attention again—and only partially succeeding. "Straff is my father. Maybe I could talk to him. Get him to listen? Luthadel was his home for years. Perhaps I can convince him not to attack it."

"Wait," said one of the skaa representatives. "What of the food issue? Have you seen what the merchants are charging for grain? Before we worry about that army, we should talk about bringing prices down."

"Always blaming us for your problems," one of the merchant Assemblymen said, pointing. And the squabbling began again. Elend slumped just slightly behind the lectern. Vin shook her head, feeling sorry for Elend as the discussion degenerated. This was what often happened at Assembly meetings; it seemed to her that they simply didn't give Elend the respect he deserved. Perhaps that was his own fault, for elevating them to his near equals.

Finally, the discussion wound down, and Elend got out a piece of paper, obviously planning to record the vote on his proposal. He did not look optimistic.

"All right," Elend said. "Let's vote. Please remember—giving me time will *not* play our hand. It will simply give me a chance to try and make my father reconsider his desire to take our city away from us."

"Elend, lad," said Lord Penrod. "We all lived here during the Lord Ruler's reign. We all know what kind of man your father is. If he wants this city, he *is* going to take it. All we can decide, then, is how to best give up. Perhaps we can find a way for the people to retain some freedom under his rule."

The group sat quietly, and for the first time nobody brought up a new squabble. A few of them turned toward Penrod, who sat with a calm, in-control expression. Vin knew little of the man. He was one of the more powerful noblemen who had remained in the city after the Collapse, and he was politically conservative. However, she had never heard him speak derogatively of the skaa, which was probably why he was so popular with the people.

"I speak bluntly," Penrod said, "for it is the truth. We are not in a position to bargain."

"I agree with Penrod," Philen said, jumping in. "If Elend wants to meet with Straff Venture, then I guess that's his right. As I understand it, kingship grants him authority to negotiate with foreign monarchs. However, we don't have to promise not to give Straff the city."

"Master Philen," Lord Penrod said. "I think you misjudged my intent. I said that giving up the city was inevitable—but that we should try to gain as much from it as possible. *That* means at least meeting with Straff to assess his disposition. Voting to give him the city now would be to play our hand too soon."

Elend looked up, lo1oking hopeful for the first time since the discussion had first degenerated. "So, you support my proposal?" he asked.

"It is an awkward way to achieve the pause I think necessary," Penrod said. "But. . .seeing as how the army is already here, then I doubt we have time for anything else. So, yes, Your Majesty. I support your proposal."

Several other members of the Assembly nodded as Penrod spoke, as if giving the proposal consideration for the first time. *That Penrod has too much power*, Vin thought, eyes narrowing as she regarded the elderly statesman. *They listen to him more than they do Elend*.

"Should we vote, then?" one of the other Assemblymen asked.

And they did. Elend recorded votes as they moved down the line of Assemblymen. The eight noblemen—seven plus Elend—voted for the proposal, giving Penrod's opinion a great deal of weight. The eight skaa were mostly for it, and the merchants mostly against it. In the end, however, Elend got the two-thirds vote he needed.

"Proposal accepted," Elend said, making the final tally, looking a bit surprised. "The Assembly divests itself of the right to surrender the city until after the king has met with Straff Venture in official parlay."

Vin sat back in her seat, trying to decide what she thought of the vote. It was good that Elend had gotten his way, but the manner in which he'd achieved it bothered her.

Elend finally relinquished the lectern, sitting and letting a disgruntled Philen take the lead. The merchant read a proposal calling for a vote to turn control of city food stockpiles over to the merchants. However, this time Elend himself led the dissent, and the arguing began again. Vin watched with interest. Did Elend even realize how much like the others he acted while he was arguing against their proposals?

Elend and a few of the skaa Assemblymen managed to filibuster long enough that the lunch break arrived with no vote cast. The people in the audience stood, stretching, and Ham turned toward her. "Good meeting, eh?"

Vin just shrugged.

Ham chuckled. "We really have to do something about your ambivalence toward civic duty, kid."

"I already overthrew one government," Vin said. "I figure that takes care of my 'civic duty' for a while."

Ham smiled, though he kept a wary eye on the crowd—as did Vin. Now, with everyone moving about, would be the perfect time for an attempt on Elend's life. One person in particular caught her attention, and she frowned.

"Be back in a few seconds," she said to Ham, rising.

"You did the right thing, Lord Penrod," Elend said, standing beside the older nobleman, whispering quietly as break proceeded. "We need more time. You know what my father will do to this city if he takes it."

Lord Penrod shook his head. "I didn't do this for you, son. I did it because I wanted to make certain that fool Philen didn't hand the city over before the nobility extracted promises from your father about our rights to title."

"Now, see," Elend said, holding up a finger. "There has to be another way! The Survivor would never have given this city away without a fight."

Penrod frowned, and Elend paused, quietly cursing himself. The old lord was a traditionalist—quoting the Survivor at him would have little positive effect. Many of the noblemen felt threatened by K1elsier's influence with the skaa.

"Just think about it," Elend said, glancing to the side as Vin approached. She waved him away from the Assemblymen seats, and he excused himself. He crossed the stage, joining her. "What is it?" he asked quietly.

"Woman at the back," Vin said quietly, eyes suspicious. "Tall one, in the blue."

The woman in question wasn't hard to find; she wore a bright blue blouse and colorful red skirt. She was middle-aged, of lean build, and had her waist-length hair pulled back in a braid. She waited patiently as people moved about the room.

"What about her?" Elend asked.

"Terris," Vin said.

Elend paused. "You're sure?"

Vin nodded. "Those colors. . .that much jewelry. She's a Terriswoman for sure."

"So?"

"So, I've never met her," Vin said. "And she was watching you, just now."

"People watch me, Vin," Elend noted. "I *am* the king, after all. Besides, why should you have met her?"

"All of the other Terris people have come to meet me right after they enter the city," Vin said. "I killed the Lord Ruler; they see me as the one that freed their homeland. But, I don't recognize her. She hasn't ever come thank me."

Elend rolled his eyes, grabbing Vin by the shoulders and turning her away from the woman. "Vin, I feel it's my gentlemanly duty to tell you something."

Vin frowned. "What?"

"You're gorgeous."

Vin paused. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Absolutely nothing," Elend said with a smile. "I'm just trying to distract you."

Slowly, Vin relaxed, smiling slightly.

"I don't know if anyone's ever told you this, Vin," Elend noted, "but you can be a bit paranoid at times."

She raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"I know it's hard to believe, but it's true. Now, I happen to find it rather charming, but do you honestly think that a *Terriswoman* would try to kill me?"

"Probably not," Vin admitted. "But, old habits. . ."

Elend smiled. Then, he glanced back at the Assemblymen, most of whom were speaking quietly in groups. They didn't mix. Noblemen spoke with noblemen, merchants with merchants, skaa workers with other skaa workers. They seemed so fragmented, so obstinate. The simplest proposals sometimes met with arguments that could take hours.

*They need to give me more time*! he thought. Yet, even as he thought, he realized the problem. More time for what? Penrod and Philen had accurately attacked his proposal.

The truth was, the entire city was in over its head. Nobody really knew what to do about a superior invading force, least of all Elend. He just knew that they couldn't give up. Not yet. There *had* to be a way to fight.

Vin was still looking to the side, out over the audience. Elend followed her gaze. "Still watching that Terriswoman?"

Vin shook her head. "Something else. . .something odd. Is that one of Clubs's messengers?"

Elend paused, turning. Indeed, several soldiers were working their way through the crowd, approaching the stage. At the back of the room, people had begun whispering and shuffling, and some were already moving quickly out of the chamber.

Elend felt Vin stiffen in anxiety, and fear stabbed him. *We're too late. The army has attacked*.

One of the soldiers finally reached the stage, and Elend rushed over. "What?" he asked. "Has Straff attacked?"

The soldier frowned, looking concerned. "No, my lord."

Elend sighed slightly. "What, then?"

"My lord, it's a second army. It just arrived outside the city."

*Oddly, it was Alendi's simple ingenuousness that first led me to befriend him. I employed him as an assistant during his first months in the grand city*.

# 11

FOR THE SECOND TIME IN two days, Elend stood atop the Luthadel city wall, studying an army that had come to invade his kingdom. Elend squinted against the red afternoon sunlight, but he was no Tineye; he couldn't make out details about the new arrival.

"Any chance they're here to help us?" Elend asked hopefully, looking toward Clubs, who stood beside him.

Clubs just scowled. "They fly Cett's banner. Remember him? Guy who sent eight Allomancer assassins to kill you two days back?"

Elend shivered in the chill autumn weather, glancing back out over the second army. It was making camp a good distance from Straff's army, close to the Luth-Davn Canal, which ran out the west side of the River Channerel. Vin stood at Elend's side, though Ham was off organizing things among the city guard. OreSeur, wearing the wolfhound's body, sat patiently on the wall walk beneath Vin.

"How did we miss their approach?" Elend asked.

"Straff," Clubs said. "This Cett came in from the same direction, and our scouts were focused on him. Straff probably knew about this other army a few days ago, but we had virtually no chance of seeing them."

Elend nodded.

"Straff is setting up a perimeter of soldiers, watching the enemy army," Vin said. "I doubt they're friendly to each other." She stood atop one of the sawtooth parapet crenels, feet positioned dangerously close to the wall's edge.

"Maybe they'll attack each other," Elend said hopefully.

Clubs snorted. "I doubt it. They're too evenly matched, though Straff might be a little stronger. I doubt Cett would take the chance by attacking him."

"Why come, then?" Elend asked.

Clubs shrugged. "Maybe he hoped he'd beat Venture to Luthadel, and get to take it first."

He spoke of the event—the capture of Luthadel—as if it were a given. Elend's stomach twisted as he leaned against the battlement, looking out through a merlon. Vin and the others were thieves and skaa Allomancers—outcasts who had been hunted for most of their lives. Perhaps they were accustomed to dealing with this pressure—this fear—but Elend was not.

How did they live with the lack of control, the sense of inevitability? Elend felt powerless. What could he do? Flee, and leave the city to fend for itself? That, of course, was not an option. But, confron1ted with not one, but two armies preparing to destroy his city and take his throne, Elend found it hard to keep his hands steady as he gripped the rough stone of the battlement.

*Kelsier would have found a way out of this*, he thought.

"There!" Vin's voice interrupted Elend's thoughts. "What's that?"

Elend turned. Vin was squinting, looking toward Cett's army, using tin to see things that were invisible to Elend's mundane eyes.

"Someone's leaving the army," Vin said. "Riding on horseback."

"Messenger?" Clubs asked.

"Maybe," Vin said. "He's riding pretty fast. . .." She began to run from one stone tooth to the next, moving along the wall. Her kandra immediately followed, padding quietly across the wall beneath her.

Elend glanced at Clubs, who shrugged, and they began to follow. They caught up with Vin standing on the wall near one of the towers, watching the oncoming rider. Or, at least, Elend assumed that was what she watched—he still couldn't see what she had.

*Allomancy*, Elend thought, shaking his head. Why couldn't he have at least ended up with one power—even one of the weaker ones, like copper or iron?

Vin cursed suddenly, standing up straight. "Elend, that's *Breeze*!"

"What!" Elend said. "Are you sure?"

"Yes! He's being chased. Archers on horseback."

Clubs cursed, waving to a messenger. "Send riders! Cut off his pursuit!"

The messenger dashed away. Vin, however, shook her head. "They won't make it in time," she said, almost to herself. "The archers will catch him, or at least shoot him. Even I couldn't get there fast enough, not running. But, maybe. . ."

Elend frowned, looking up at her. "Vin, that's way too far to jump—even for you."

Vin glanced at him, smiled, then leaped off the wall.

Vin readied the fourteenth metal, duralumin. She had a reserve, but she didn't burn it—not yet. *I hope this works*, she thought, seeking an appropriate anchor. The tower beside her had a reinforced iron bulwark on the top—that would work.

She Pulled on the bulwark, yanking herself up to the top of the tower. She immediately jumped again, Pushing herself up and out, angling into the air away from the wall. She extinguished all of her metals except for steel and pewter.

Then, still Pushing against the bulwark, she burned duralumin.

A sudden force smashed against her. It was so powerful, she was certain that only an equally powerful flash of pewter held her body together. She blasted away from the keep, hurtling through the sky as if tossed by some giant, invisible god. The air rushed by so quickly that it roared, and the pressure of sudden acceleration made it difficult to think.

She floundered, trying to regain control. She had, fortunately, picked her trajectory well: she was shooting right toward Breeze and his pursuers. Whatever Breeze had done, it had been enough to make someone extremely angry—for there were a full two dozen men charging after him, arrows nocked.

Vin fell, her steel and pewter completely burned away in that single duralumin-fueled flash of power. She grabbed a metal vial off her belt, downing its contents1. However, as she tossed the vial away, she suddenly felt an odd sense of vertigo. She wasn't accustomed to jumping during the day. It was strange to see the ground coming at her, strange not to have a mistcloak flapping behind her, strange not to have the mist. . ..

The lead rider lowered his bow, taking sight at Breeze. Neither appeared to have noticed Vin, swooping down like a bird of prey above.

Well, not exactly swooping. Plummeting.

Suddenly snapped back to the moment, Vin burned pewter and threw a coin toward the quickly approaching ground. She Pushed against the coin, using it to slow her momentum and to nudge her to the side. She hit right between Breeze and the archers, landing with a jarring crash, throwing up dust and dirt.

The archer released his arrow.

Even as Vin rebounded, dirt spraying around her, she reached out and Pushed herself back into the air straight at the arrow. Then she Pushed against it. The arrowhead ripped backward—throwing out shards of wood as it split its own shaft in midair—then smacked directly into the forehead of the archer who had released it.

The man toppled from his mount. Vin landed from her rebound. She reached out, Pushing against the horseshoes of the two beasts behind the leader, causing the animals to stumble. The Push threw Vin backward into the air, and cries of equine pain sounded amid the crash of bodies hitting the ground.

Vin continued to Push, flying along the road just a few feet above the ground, quickly catching up with Breeze. The portly man turned in shock, obviously stunned to find Vin hanging in the air beside his galloping horse, her clothing flapping in the wind of her passage. She winked at him, then reached out and Pulled against the armor of another rider.

She immediately lurched in the air. Her body protested the sudden shift in momentum, but she ignored the twist of pain. The man she Pulled against managed to stay in his saddle—until Vin smashed into him feet-first, throwing him backward.

She landed on the black earth, the rider tumbling to the ground beside her. A short distance away, the remaining riders finally reined in their mounts, coming to an abrupt stop a few feet away.

Kelsier probably would have attacked. There were a lot of them, true, but they were wearing armor and their horses were shod. Vin, however, was not Kelsier. She had delayed the riders long enough for Breeze to get away. That was enough.

Vin reached out and Pushed against one of the soldiers, throwing herself backward, leaving the riders to gather their wounded. The soldiers, however, promptly pulled out stone-tipped arrows and nocked their bows.

Vin hissed in frustration as the group took sight. *Well, friends*, she thought, *I suggest that you hang on tightly*.

She Pushed slightly against them all, then burned duralumin. The sudden crash of force was expected—the wrench in her chest, the massive flare in her stomach, the howling wind. What she didn't expect was the effect she'd have on her anchors. The blast of power scattered men and horses, throwing them into the air like leaves in the wind.

*I'm going to have to be very careful with this*, Vin thought, gritting her teeth and spinning herself in the air. Her steel and pewter were gone again, and she was forced to down her last metal vial. She'd have to start carrying more of those.

She hit the ground running, pew1ter keeping her from tripping despite her terrific speed. She slowed just slightly, letting the mounted Breeze catch up to her, then increased her pace to keep up with him. She dashed like a sprinter, letting pewter's strength and balance keep her upright as she paced the tiring horse. The beast eyed her as they ran, seeming to display a hint of animal frustration to see a human matching it.

They reached the city a few moments later. Breeze reined in as the doors to Iron Gate began to open, but, rather than wait, Vin simply threw down a coin and Pushed, letting her forward momentum carry her toward the walls. As the gates swung open, she Pushed against their studs, and this second Push sent her sailing straight up. She just barely crested the battlements—passing between a pair of startled soldiers—before dropping over the other side. She landed in the courtyard, steadying herself with one hand against the cool stones, as Breeze entered through the gate.

Vin stood. Breeze patted his forehead with a handkerchief as he trotted his animal up beside her. He'd let his hair grow longer since she'd last seen him, and he kept it slicked back, its lower edges tickling his collar. It wasn't graying yet, though he was in his mid-forties. He wore no hat—it had probably blown free—but he had on one of his rich suits and silken vests. They were powdered with black ash from his hurried ride.

"Ah, Vin, my dear," Breeze said, breathing almost as deeply as his horse. "I must say, that was a timely arrival on your part. Impressively flamboyant as well. I do hate to force a rescue—but, well, if one is necessary, then it might as well happen with style."

Vin smiled as he climbed down from the horse—proving he was hardly the most adroit man in the square—and stablehands arrived to care for the beast. Breeze wiped his brow again as Elend, Clubs, and OreSeur scrambled down the steps to the courtyard. One of the aides must have finally found Ham, for he ran up through the courtyard.

"Breeze!" Elend said, approaching and clasping arms with the shorter man.

"Your Majesty," Breeze said. "You are in good health and good humor, I assume?"

"Health, yes," Elend said. "Humor. . .well, there *is* an army crouching just outside my city."

"Two armies, actually," Clubs grumbled as he hobbled up.

Breeze folded up his handkerchief. "Ah, and dear Master Cladent. Optimistic as always, I see."

Clubs snorted. To the side, OreSeur padded up to sit next to Vin.

"And Hammond," Breeze said, eyeing Ham, who was smiling broadly. "I'd almost managed to delude myself into forgetting that *you* would be here when I returned."

"Admit it," Ham said. "You're glad to see me."

"See you, perhaps. *Hear* you, never. I had grown quite fond of my time spent away from your perpetual, pseudo-philosophical pratterings."

Ham just smiled a little broader.

"I'm glad to see you, Breeze," Elend said. "But your timing could have been a little better. I was hoping that you would be able to stop some of these armies from marching on us."

"*Stop* them?" Breeze asked. "Now, why would I want to do that, my dear man? I did, after all, just spend three months working to get Cett to march his army down here."

Elend paused, and Vin frowned to herself, standing just outside the group1. Breeze looked rather pleased with himself—though that was, admittedly, rather common for him.

"So. . .Lord Cett's on our side?" Elend asked hopefully.

"Of course not," Breeze said. "He's here to ravage the city and steal your presumed atium supply."

"You," Vin said. "You're the one who has been spreading the rumors about the Lord Ruler's atium stash, aren't you?"

"Of course," Breeze said, eyeing Spook as the boy finally arrived at the gates.

Elend frowned. "But. . .why?"

"Look outside your walls, my dear man," Breeze said. "I knew that your father was going to march on Luthadel eventually—even *my* powers of persuasion wouldn't have been enough to dissuade him. So, I began spreading rumors in the Western Dominance, then made myself one of Lord Cett's advisors."

Clubs grunted. "Good plan. Crazy, but good."

"Crazy?" Breeze said. "*My* mental stability is no issue here, Clubs. The move was not crazy, but brilliant."

Elend looked confused. "Not to insult your brilliance, Breeze. But. . .how exactly is bringing a hostile army to our city a good idea?"

"It's basic negotiating strategy, my good man," Breeze explained as a packman handed him his dueling cane, taken off the horse. Breeze used it to gesture westward, toward Lord Cett's army. "When there are only two participants in a negotiation, one is generally stronger than the other. That makes things very difficult for the weaker party—which, in this case, would have been us."

"Yes," Elend said, "but with three armies, we're still the weakest."

"Ah," Breeze said, holding up the cane, "but those other two parties are fairly even in strength. Straff is likely stronger, but Cett has a very large force. If either of those warlords risks attacking Luthadel, his army will suffer losses—enough losses that he won't be able to defend himself from the third army. To attack us is to expose oneself."

"And that makes this a standoff," Clubs said.

"Exactly," Breeze said. "Trust me, Elend my boy. In this case, two large, enemy armies are far better than a single large, enemy army. In a three-way negotiation, the weakest party actually has the most power—because his allegiance added to either of the other two will choose the eventual winner."

Elend frowned. "Breeze, we don't want to give our allegiance to *either* of these men."

"I realize that," Breeze said. "However, our opponents do not. By bringing a second army in, I've given us time to think. Both warlords thought they could get here first. Now that they've arrived at the same time, they'll have to reevaluate. I'm guessing we'll end up in an extended siege. A couple of months at least."

"That doesn't explain how we're going to get rid of them," Elend said.

Breeze shrugged. "I got them here—you get to decide what to do with them. And I'll tell you, it was no easy task to make Cett arrive on time. He was due to come in a full five days before Venture. Fortunately, a certain. . .malady spread through camp a few days ago. Apparently, someone poisoned the main water supply and gave the entire camp diarrhea."

Spook, standing behind Clubs, snickered.

"Yes," Breeze said, eyeing the boy. "I tho1ught you might appreciate that. You still an unintelligible nuisance, boy?"

"Wassing the where of not," Spook said, smiling and slipping back into his Eastern street slang.

Breeze snorted. "You still make more sense than Hammond, half the time," he mumbled, turning to Elend. "So, isn't anyone going to send for a carriage to drive me back to the palace? I've been Soothing you ungrateful lot for the better part of five minutes—looking as tired and pathetic as I can—and not one of you has had the good graces to pity me!"

"You must be losing your touch," Vin said with a smile. Breeze was a Soother—an Allomancer who could burn brass to calm another person's emotions. A very skilled Soother—and Vin knew of none more skilled than Breeze—could dampen all of a person's emotions but a single one, effectively making them feel exactly as he wanted.

"Actually," Elend said, turning and looking back up at the wall, "I was hoping we could go back up on the wall and study the armies some more. If you spent time with Lord Cett's force, then you could probably tell us a lot about it."

"I can; I will; I am *not* going to climb those steps. Can't you see how tired I am, man?"

Ham snorted, clapping Breeze on the shoulder—and throwing up a puff of dust. "How can you be tired? Your poor horse did all the running."

"It was emotionally exhausting, Hammond," Breeze said, rapping the larger man's hand with his cane. "My departure was somewhat disagreeable."

"What happened, anyway?" Vin asked. "Did Cett find out you were a spy?"

Breeze looked embarrassed. "Let's just say that Lord Cett and I had a. . .falling-out."

"Caught you in bed with his daughter, eh?" Ham said, earning a chuckle from the group. Breeze was anything but a ladies' man. Despite his ability to play with emotions, he had expressed no interest in romance for as long as Vin had known him. Dockson had once noted that Breeze was just too focused on himself to consider such things.

Breeze simply rolled his eyes at Ham's comment. "Honestly, Hammond. I think your jokes are getting worse as you age. One too many hits on the head while sparring, I suspect."

Ham smiled, and Elend sent for a couple of carriages. While they waited, Breeze launched into a narrative of his travels. Vin glanced down at OreSeur. She still hadn't found a good opportunity to tell the rest of the crew about the body change. Perhaps now that Breeze was back, Elend would hold a conference with his inner circle. That would be a good time. She had to be quiet about it, since she wanted the palace staff to think that she'd sent OreSeur away.

Breeze continued his story, and Vin looked back at him, smiling. Not only was Breeze a natural orator, but he had a very subtle touch with Allomancy. She could barely feel his fingers on her emotions. Once, she had found his intrusions offensive, but she was growing to understand that touching people's emotions was simply part of who Breeze was. Just as a beautiful woman demanded attention by virtue of her face and figure, Breeze drew it by near unconscious use of his powers.

Of course, that didn't make him any less a scoundrel. Getting others to do as he wished was one of Breeze's main occupations. Vin just no longer resented him for using Allomancy to do it.

The carriage finally approached, and Breeze sighed in relief. As the vehicle pulled up, he eyed Vin, then nodded toward1 OreSeur. "What's that?"

"A dog," Vin said.

"Ah, blunt as ever, I see," Breeze said. "And, why is it that you now have a dog?"

"I gave it to her," Elend said. "She wanted one, so I bought it for her."

"And you chose a *wolfhound*?" Ham asked, amused.

"You've fought with her before, Ham," Elend said, laughing. "What would you have given her? A poodle?"

Ham chuckled. "No, I guess not. It fits, actually."

"Though it's almost as big as she is," Clubs added, regarding her with a squinty-eyed look.

Vin reached down, resting her hand on OreSeur's head. Clubs did have a point; she'd chosen a big animal, even for a wolfhound. He stood over three feet tall at the shoulder—and Vin knew from experience how heavy that body was.

"Remarkably well-behaved for a wolfhound," Ham said, nodding. "You chose well, El."

"Regardless," Breeze said. "Can we please return to the palace? Armies and wolfhounds are all well and good, but I believe supper is more pressing at this point."

"So, why didn't we tell them about OreSeur?" Elend asked, as their carriage bumped its way back toward Keep Venture. The three of them had taken a carriage of their own, leaving the other four to follow in the other vehicle.

Vin shrugged. OreSeur sat on the seat across from her and Elend, quietly watching the conversation. "I'll tell them eventually," Vin said. "A busy city square didn't seem the right place for the revelation."

Elend smiled. "Keeping secrets is a hard habit to break, eh?"

Vin flushed. "I'm not keeping him secret, I'm just. . ." She trailed off, looking down.

"Don't feel bad, Vin," Elend said. "You lived a long time on your own, without anyone to trust. Nobody expects you to change overnight."

"It hasn't been one night, Elend," she said. "It's been two years."

Elend laid a hand on her knee. "You're getting better. The others talk about how much you've changed."

Vin nodded. *Another man would be afraid that I'm keeping secrets from him, too. Elend just tries to make me feel less guilty*. He was a better man than she deserved.

"Kandra," Elend said, "Vin says you do well at keeping up with her."

"Yes, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. "These bones, though distasteful, are well equipped for tracking and quick movement."

"And if she gets hurt?" Elend said. "Will you be able to pull her to safety?"

"Not with any speed, Your Majesty. I will, however, be able to go for aid. These bones have many limitations, but I will do my best to fulfill the Contract."

Elend must have caught Vin's raised eyebrow, for he chuckled. "He'll do as he says, Vin."

"The Contract is everything, Mistress," OreSeur said. "It demands more than simple service. It requires diligence and devotion. It *is* the kandra. By serving it, we serve our people."

Vin shrugged. The group fell silent, Elend pulling a book from his pocket, Vin leaning against him. OreSeur lay down, filling the entire seat opposite the humans. Eventu1ally, the carriage rolled into the Venture courtyard, and Vin found herself looking forward to a warm bath. As they were climbing from the carriage, however, a guard rushed up to Elend. Tin allowed Vin to hear what the man said, even though he spoke before she could close the distance.

"Your Majesty," the guard whispered, "our messenger reached you, then?"

"No," Elend said with a frown as Vin walked over. The soldier gave her a look, but continued speaking; the soldiers all knew that Vin was Elend's primary bodyguard and confidant. Still, the man looked oddly concerned when he saw her.

"We. . .ah, don't want to be intrusive," the soldier said. "That's why we've kept this quiet. We were just wondering if. . .everything is all right." He looked at Vin as he spoke.

"What is this about?" Elend asked.

The guard turned back toward the king. "The corpse in Lady Vin's room."

The "corpse" was actually a skeleton. One completely picked clean, without a hint of bloodâ”r even tissueâ”arring its shiny white surfaces. A good number of the bones were broken, however.

"I'm sorry, Mistress," OreSeur said, speaking low enough that only she could hear. "I assumed that you were going to dispose of these."

Vin nodded. The skeleton was, of course, the one OreSeur had been using before she gave him the animal body. Finding the door unlockedâ”in's usual sign that she wanted a room cleanedâ”he maids had entered. Vin had stashed the bones in a basket, intending to deal with them later. Apparently, the maids had decided to check and see what was in the basket, and been somewhat surprised.

"It's all right, Captain," Elend said to the young guardâ”aptain Demoux, second-in-command of the palace guard. Despite the fact that Ham shunned uniforms, this man seemed to take great pride in keeping his own uniform very neat and smart.

"You did well by keeping this quiet," Elend said. "We knew about these bones already. They aren't a reason for concern."

Demoux nodded. "We figured it was something intentional." He didn't look at Vin as he spoke.

*Intentional,* Vin thought. *Great. I wonder what this man thinks I did*. Few skaa knew what kandra were, and Demoux wouldn't know what to make of remains like these.

"Could you dispose of these quietly for me, Captain?" Elend asked, nodding to the bones.

"Of course, Your Majesty," the guard said.

*He probably assumes I ate the person or something*, Vin thought with a sigh. *Sucked the flesh right off his bones*.

Which, actually, wasn't that far from the truth.

"Your Majesty," Demoux said. "Would you like us to dispose of the other body as well?"

Vin froze.

"Other one?" Elend asked slowly.

The guard nodded. "When we found this skeleton, we brought in some dogs to sniff about. The dogs didn't turn up any killers, but they did find another body. Just like this oneâ” set of bones, completely cleaned of flesh."

Vin and Elend shared a look. "Show us," Elend said.

Demoux nodded, and led them out of the room, giving a few whispered orders to one of his men. The four of themâ”hree humans and one kandraâ”raveled a short distance down the palace hallway, toward a less used section of visitors' chambers. Demoux dismissed a soldier standing at a particular door, then led them inside.

"This body wasn't in a basket, Your Majesty," Demoux said. "It was stuffed in a back closet. We'd probably never have found it without the dogsâ”hey picked up the scent pretty easily, though I can't see how. These corpses are completely clean of flesh."

And there it was. Another skeleton, like the first, sitting piled beside a bureau. Elend glanced at Vin, then turned to Demoux. "Would you excuse us, Captain?"

The young guard nodded, walking from the room and closing the door.

"Well?" Elend said, turning to OreSeur.

"I do not know where this came from," the kandra said.

"But it is another kandra-eaten corpse," Vin said.

"Undoubtedly, Mistress," OreSeur said. "The dogs found it because of the particular scent our digestive juices leave on recently excreted bones."

Elend and Vin shared a look.

"However," OreSeur said, "it is probably not what you think. This man was probably killed far from here."

"What do you mean?"

"They are discarded bones, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. "The bones a kandra leaves behind. . ."

"After he finds a new body," Vin finished.

"Yes, Mistress," OreSeur said.

Vin looked at Elend, who frowned. "How long ago?" he asked. "Maybe the bones were left a year before, by my father's kandra."

"Perhaps, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. But he sounded hesitant. He padded over, sniffing at the bones. Vin picked one up herself, holding it to her nose. With tin, she easily picked out a sharp scent that reminded her of bile.

"It's very strong," she said, glancing at OreSeur.

He nodded. "These bones haven't been here long, Your Majesty. A few hours at most. Perhaps even less."

"Which means we have another kandra somewhere in the palace," Elend said, looking a bit sick. "One of my staff has been. . .eaten and replaced."

"Yes, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. "There is no way to tell from these bones whom it could be, since these are the discards. The kandra would have taken the new bones, eating their flesh and wearing their clothing."

Elend nodded, standing. He met Vin's eyes, and she knew he was thinking the same thing she was. It was possible that a member of the palace staff had been replaced, which would mean a slight breach in security. There was a far more dangerous possibility, however.

Kandra were incomparable actors; OreSeur had imitated Lord Renoux so perfectly that even people who'd known him had been fooled. Such talent could have been used for the imitation of a maid or a servant. However, if an enemy had wanted to get a spy into Elend's closed meetings, he would need to replace a person far more important.

*It would be someone that we haven't seen during the last few hours,* Vin thought, dropping the bone. She, Elend, and OreSeur had been on the wall for most of the afternoon and eveningâ”ver since the end of the Assembly meetingâ”ut the city and palace had been in chaos since the second army had arrived. The messengers had had trouble finding Ham, and she still wasn't certain where Dockson was. In fact, she hadn't seen Clubs until he'd joined her and Elend on the wall just a bit before. And Spook had been the last to arrive.

Vin looked down at the pile of bones, feeling a sickening sense of unease. There was a very good chance that someone in their core team—a member of Kelsier's former band—was now an impostor.

## PART TWO

# GHOSTS IN THE MIST

*It wasn't until years later that I became convinced that Alendi was the Hero of Ages. Hero of Ages: the one called Rabzeen in Khlennium, the Anamnesor.*

*Savior*.

## 12

A FORTRESS SAT IN THE misty murk of evening.

It rested at the bottom of a large depression in the land. The steep-sided, craterlike valley was so wide that even in daylight Sazed would barely have been able to see the other side. In the oncoming darkness, obscured by mist, the far edge of the massive hole was only a deep shadow.

Sazed knew very little about tactics and strategy; though his metalminds held dozens of books on the subjects, he had forgotten their contents in order to create the stored records. The little he did know told him that this fortress—the Conventical of Seran—was not very defensible. It relinquished the high ground, and the crater sides would provide an excellent location for siege engines to pelt rocks down at the walls.

This fortress, however, had not been built to defend against enemy soldiers. It had been built to provide solitude. The crater made it difficult to find, for a slight rise in the land around the crater's lip made it practically invisible until one drew near. No roads or paths marked the way, and travelers would have great trouble getting down the sheer sides.

The Inquisitors did not want visitors.

"Well?" Marsh asked.

He and Sazed stood on the crater's northern lip, before a drop of several hundred feet. Sazed tapped his vision tinmind, drawing forth some of the eyesight he had stored within it. The edges of his vision fuzzed, but things directly in front of him seemed to grow much closer. He tapped a little more sight, ignoring the nausea that came from compounding so much vision.

The increased eyesight let him study the Conventical as if he stood before it. He could see each notch in the dark stone walls—flat, broad, imposing. He could discern each bit of rust on the large steel plates that hung bolted into outside stones of the wall. He could see each lichen-encrusted corner and ash-stained ledge. There were no windows.

"I do not know," Sazed said slowly, releasing his vision tinmind. "It is not easy to say whether or not the fortress is inhabited. There is no motion, nor is there light. But, perhaps the Inquisitors are just hiding inside."

"No," Marsh said, his stiff voice uncomfortably loud in the evening air. "They are gone."

"Why would they leave? This is a place of great strength, I think. Poor defense against an army, but a great defense against the chaos of the times."

Marsh shook his head. "They are gone."

"How are you so certain?"

"I do not know."

"Where did they go, then?"

Marsh looked at him, then turned and glanced over his shoulder. "North."

"Toward Luthadel?" Sazed asked, frowning.

"Among other things," Marsh said. "Come. I do not know if they will return, but we should exploit this opportunity."

Sazed nodded. This was why they had come, after all. Still, a part of him hesitated. He was a man of books and genteel service. Traveling the countryside to visit villages was enough removed from his experience to be discomforting. Infiltrating the Inquisitor stronghold. . .

Marsh obviously didn't care about his companion's inner struggles. The Inquisitor turned and began to walk along the rim of the crater. Sazed threw his pack over his shoulder, then followed. They eventually arrived at a cage-like contraption, obviously meant to be lowered down to the bottom by ropes and pulleys. The cage sat locked in place at the top ledge, and Marsh stopped at its side, but did not enter.

"What?" Sazed asked.

"The pulley system," Marsh said. "The cage is meant to be lowered by men holding it from below."

Sazed nodded, realizing this was true. Marsh stepped forward and threw a lever. The cage fell. Ropes began to smoke, and pulleys squealed as the massive cage plummeted toward the chasm floor. A muted crash echoed against the rocks.

*If there is anyone down there,* Sazed thought, *they now know we're here*.

Marsh turned toward him, the heads of his eye-spikes glistening slightly in the failing sunlight. "Follow however you wish," he said. Then, he tied off the counterrope and began to climb down the ropes.

Sazed stepped up to the platform's edge, watching Marsh shimmy down the dangling rope into the shadowed, misty abyss. Then, Sazed knelt and opened his pack. He unhooked the large metal bracers around his upper and lower arms—his core copperminds. They contained the memories of a Keeper, the stored knowledge of centuries past. He reverently placed them to the side, then pulled a pair of much smaller bracelets—one iron, one pewter—from the pack. Metalminds for a warrior.

Did Marsh understand how unskilled Sazed was in this area? Amazing strength did not a warrior make. Regardless, Sazed snapped the two bracelets around his ankles. Next, he pulled out two rings—tin and copper. These he slipped on his fingers.

He closed the pack and threw it over his shoulder, then picked up his core copperminds. He carefully located a good hiding place—a secluded hollow between two boulders—and slid them inside. Whatever happened below, he didn't want to risk them being taken and destroyed by the Inquisitors.

In order to fill a coppermind with memories, Sazed had listened to another Keeper recite his entire collection of histories, facts, and stories. Sazed had memorized each sentence, then shoved those memories into the coppermind for later retrieval. Sazed remembered very little of the actual experience—but he could draw forth any of the books or essays he wished, placing them back into his mind, gaining the ability to recollect them as crisply as when he'd first memorized them. He just had to have the bracers on.

Being without hi1s copperminds made him anxious. He shook his head, walking back over to the platform. Marsh was moving very quickly down toward the chasm floor; like all Inquisitors, he had the powers of a Mistborn. Though how he had gotten those powers—and how he managed to live despite the spikes that had been driven directly through his brain—was a mystery. Marsh had never answered Sazed's questions on the subject.

Sazed called down, drawing Marsh's attention, then held up his pack and dropped it. Marsh reached out, and the pack lurched, Pulled by its metals into Marsh's hand. The Inquisitor threw it over his shoulder before continuing his descent.

Sazed nodded thankfully, then stepped off the platform. As he began to fall, he mentally reached into his ironmind, searching for the power he had stored therein. Filling a metalmind always had a cost: in order to store up sight, Sazed had been forced to spend weeks with poor eyesight. During that time, he had worn a tin bracelet, stowing away the excess sight for later use.

Iron was a bit different from the others. It didn't store up sight, strength, endurance—or even memories. It stored something completely different:

weight.

This day, Sazed didn't tap the power stored inside the ironmind; that would have made him more heavy. Instead, he began to fill the ironmind, letting it suck away his weight. He felt a familiar sense of lightness—a sense that his own body wasn't pressing upon itself as forcefully.

His fall slowed. The Terris philosophers had much to say on using an ironmind. They explained that the power didn't actually change a person's bulk or size—it just somehow changed the way that the ground pulled against them. Sazed's fall didn't slow because of his decrease in weight—it slowed because he suddenly had a relatively large amount of surface exposed to the wind of his fall, and a lighter body to go along with it.

Regardless of the scientific reasons, Sazed didn't fall as quickly. The thin metal bracelets on his legs were the heaviest things on his body, and they kept him pointed feet-downward. He held out his arms and bent his body slightly, letting the wind push against him. His descent was not terribly slow—not like that of a leaf or a feather. However, he didn't plummet either. Instead, he fell in a controlled—almost leisurely—manner. Clothing flapping, arms outspread, he passed Marsh, who watched with a curious expression.

As he approached the ground, Sazed tapped his pewtermind, drawing forth a tiny bit of strength to prepare. He hit the ground—but, because his body was so light, there was very little shock. He barely even needed to bend his knees to absorb the force of impact.

He stopped filling the ironmind, released his pewter, and waited quietly for Marsh. Beside him, the carrying cage lay in shambles. Sazed noticed several broken iron shackles with discomfort. Apparently, some of those who had visited the Conventical had not come by choice.

By the time Marsh neared the bottom, the mists were thick in the air. Sazed had lived with them all of his life, and had never before felt uncomfortable in them. Yet, now he half expected the mists to begin choking him. To kill him, as they seemed to have done to old Jed, the unfortunate farmer whose death Sazed had investigated.

Marsh dropped the last ten feet or so, landing with an Allomancer's increased agility. Even after spending so much time with Mistborn, Sazed was impressed with Allomancy's gifts. Of course, he'd never been jealous of them—not really. True, Allomancy was better in a fight; but it could not expand the mind, giving one access t1o the dreams, hopes, and beliefs of a thousand years of culture. It could not give the knowledge to treat a wound, or help teach a poor village to use modern fertilization techniques. The metalminds of Feruchemy weren't flamboyant, but they had a far more lasting value to society.

Besides, Sazed knew a few tricks with Feruchemy that were bound to surprise even the most prepared warrior.

Marsh handed him the pack. "Come."

Sazed nodded, shouldering the pack and following the Inquisitor across the rocky ground. Walking next to Marsh was odd, for Sazed wasn't accustomed to being around people who were as tall as he was. Terrismen were tall by nature, and Sazed even more so: his arms and legs were a bit too long for his body, a medical condition brought on by his having been castrated as a very young boy. Though the Lord Ruler was dead, Terris culture would long feel the effects of his stewardship and breeding programs—the methods by which he had tried to breed Feruchemical powers out of the Terris people.

The Conventical of Seran loomed in the darkness, looking even more ominous now that Sazed stood within the crater. Marsh strode right up to the front doors, and Sazed followed behind. He wasn't afraid, not really. Fear had never been a strong motivator in Sazed's life. However, he did worry. There were so few Keepers left; if he died, that was one fewer person who could travel, restoring lost truths and teaching the people.

*Not that I'm doing such at the moment anyway*. . ..

Marsh regarded the massive steel doors. Then he threw his weight against one, obviously burning pewter to enhance his strength. Sazed joined him, pushing hard. The door did not budge.

Regretting the expenditure of power, Sazed reached into his pewtermind and tapped strength. He used far more than he had when landing, and his muscles immediately increased in size. Unlike Allomancy, Feruchemy often had direct effects on a person's body. Beneath his robes, Sazed gained the bulk and build of a lifetime warrior, easily becoming twice as strong as he had been a moment earlier. With their combined effort, the two of them managed to push the door open.

It did not creak. It slid slowly, but evenly, inward, exposing a long, dark hallway.

Sazed released his pewtermind, reverting to his normal self. Marsh strode into the Conventical, his feet kicking up the mist that had begun to pour through the open doorway.

"Marsh?" Sazed asked.

The Inquisitor turned.

"I won't be able to see inside there."

"Your Feruchemy. . ."

Sazed shook his head. "It can let me see better in darkness, but only if there's some light to begin with. In addition, tapping that much sight would drain my tinmind in a matter of minutes. I'll need a lantern."

Marsh paused, then nodded. He turned into the darkness, quickly disappearing from Sazed's view.

*So,* Sazed thought, *Inquisitors don't need light to see*. It was to be expected: the spikes filled Marsh's entire sockets, completely destroying the eyeballs. Whatever strange power allowed Inquisitors to see, it apparently worked just as well in pure darkness as it did in daylight.

Marsh returned a few moments later, carrying a lamp. From the chains Sazed had seen on the descent cage, Sazed suspected that the Inquisitors had kept a sizable group of1 slaves and servants to attend their needs. If that was the case, where had the people gone? Had they fled?

Sazed lit the lamp with a flint from his pack. The lamp's ghostly light illuminated a stark, daunting hallway. He stepped into the Conventical, holding the lamp high, and began to fill the small copper ring on his finger, the process transforming it into a coppermind.

"Large rooms," he whispered, "without adornment." He didn't really need to say the words, but he'd found that speaking helped him form distinct memories. He could then place them into the coppermind.

"The Inquisitors, obviously, had a fondness for steel," he continued. "This is not surprising, considering that their religion was often referred to as the Steel Ministry. The walls are hung with massive steel plates, which bear no rust, unlike the ones outside. Many of those here are not completely smooth, but instead crafted with some interesting patterns etched. . .almost *buffed*. . .into their surfaces."

Marsh frowned, turning toward him. "What are you doing?"

Sazed held up his right hand, showing the copper ring. "I must make an account of this visit. I will need to repeat this experience back to other

Keepers when the opportunity presents itself. There is much to be learned from this place, I think."

Marsh turned away. "You should not care about the Inquisitors. They are not worthy of your record."

"It isn't a matter of worthiness, Marsh," Sazed said, holding up his lamp to study a square pillar. "Knowledge of all religions is valuable. I must make certain these things persist."

Sazed regarded the pillar for a moment, then closed his eyes and formed an image of it inside his head, which he then added to the coppermind. Visual memories, however, were less useful than spoken words. Visualizations faded very quickly once taken out of a coppermind, suffering from the mind's distortion. Plus, they could not be passed to other Keepers.

Marsh didn't respond to Sazed's comment about religion; he just turned and walked deeper into the building. Sazed followed at a slower pace, speaking to himself, recording the words in his coppermind. It was an interesting experience. As soon as he spoke, he felt the thoughts sucked from his mind, leaving behind a blank hollowness. He had difficulty remembering the specifics of what he had just been saying. However, once he was done filling his coppermind, he would be able to tap those memories later and know them with crisp clarity.

"The room is tall," he said. "There are a few pillars, and they are also wrapped in steel. They are blocky and square, rather than round. I get a sense that this place was created by a people who cared little for subtlety. They ignored small details in favor of broad lines and full geometries.

"As we move beyond the main entryway, this architectural theme continues. There are no paintings on the walls, nor are there wooden adornments or tile floors. Instead, there are only the long, broad hallways with their harsh lines and reflective surfaces. The floor is constructed of steel squares, each a few feet across. They are. . .cold to the touch.

"It is strange not to see the tapestries, stained-glass windows, and sculpted stones that are so common in Luthadel's architecture. There are no spires or vaultings here. Just squares and rectangles. Lines. . .so many lines. Nothing here is soft. No carpet, no rugs, no windows. It is a place for people who see the world differently from ordinary men.

"Marsh walked straight down this massive hallway, as if oblivious to its decor. I will follow him, then come back to record more later. He seems to be following something. . .something I cannot sense. Perhaps it is. . ."

Sazed trailed off as he stepped around a bend and saw Marsh standing in the doorway of a large chamber. The lamplight flickered unevenly as Sazed's arm quivered.

Marsh had found the servants.

They had been dead long enough that Sazed hadn't noticed the scent until he had come close. Perhaps that was what Marsh had been following; the senses of a man burning tin could be quite acute.

The Inquisitors had done their work thoroughly. These were the remnants of a slaughter. The room was large, but had only one exit, and the bodies were piled high near the back, killed by what looked like harsh sword or axe strokes. The servants had huddled up against the back wall as they died.

Sazed turned away.

Marsh, however, remained in the doorway. "There is a bad air about this place," he finally said.

"You have only just noticed that?" Sazed asked.

Marsh turned, glancing at him, demanding his gaze. "We should not spend much time here. There are stairs at the end of the hallway behind us. I will go up—that is where the Inquisitors' quarters will be. If the information I seek is here, I will find it there. You may stay, or you may descend. However, do not follow me."

Sazed frowned. "Why?"

"I must be alone here. I cannot explain it. I do not care if you witness Inquisitor atrocities. I just. . .do not wish to be with you when you do."

Sazed lowered his lamp, turning its light away from the horrific scene. "Very well."

Marsh turned, brushing past Sazed and disappearing into the dark hallway. And Sazed was alone.

He tried not to think about that very much. He returned to the main hallway, describing the slaughter to his coppermind before giving a more detailed explanation of the architecture and the art—if, indeed, that was what the different patterns on the wall plates could be called.

As he worked—his voice echoing quietly against the rigid architecture, his lamp a weak drop of light reflected in steel—his eyes were drawn toward the back of the hallway. There was a pool of darkness there. A stairwell, leading down.

Even as he turned back to his description of one of the wall mounts, he knew that he would eventually find himself walking toward that darkness. It was the same as ever—the curiosity, the *need* to understand the unknown. This sense had driven him as a Keeper, had led him to Kelsier's company. His search for truths could never be completed, but neither could it be ignored. So, he eventually turned and approached the stairwell, his own whispering voice his only companion.

"The stairs are akin to what I saw in the hallway. They are broad and expansive, like the steps leading up to a temple or palace. Except, these go down, into darkness. They are large, likely cut from stone and then lined with steel. They are tall, meant for a determined stride.

"As I walk, I wonder what secrets the Inquisitors deemed worthy of hiding below the earth, in the basement of their stronghold. This entire building is a secret. What did they do here, in these massive hallways and open, empty rooms?

"The stairwell ends in another large, square room. I've noticed something—there are no doors in the doorways here. Each room is open, visible to those outside. As I walk, peeking into the rooms beneath the earth, I find cavernous chambers with few furnishings. No libraries, no lounges. Several contain large metal blocks that could be altars.

"There is. . .something different here in this last room, at the back of the main landing. I'm not certain what to make of it. A torture chamber, perhaps? There are tables—metal tables—set into the floor. They are bloody, though there are no corpses. Blood flakes and powders at my feet—a lot of men have died in this room, I think. There don't appear to be torture implements beyond. . .

"Spikes. Like the ones in Inquisitor eyes. Massive, heavy things—like the spikes one might pound into the ground with a very large mallet. Some are tipped with blood, though I don't think I'll handle those. These other ones. . .yes, they look indistinguishable from the ones in Marsh's eyes. Yet, some are of different metals."

Sazed set the spike down on a table, metal clinking against metal. He shivered, scanning the room again. A place to make new Inquisitors, perhaps? He had a sudden horrific vision of the creatures—once only several dozen in number—having swelled their ranks during their months sequestered in the Conventical.

But that didn't seem right. They were a secretive, exclusive bunch. Where would they have found enough men worthy of joining their ranks? Why not make Inquisitors from the servants above, rather than just killing them?

Sazed had always suspected that a man had to be an Allomancer to be changed into an Inquisitor. Marsh's own experience substantiated that premise: Marsh had been a Seeker, a man who could burn bronze, before his transformation. Sazed looked again at the blood, the spikes, and the tables, and decided he wasn't certain that he wanted to know how one made a new Inquisitor.

Sazed was about to leave the room when his lamp revealed something at the back. Another doorway.

He moved forward, trying to ignore the dried blood at his feet, and entered a chamber that didn't seem to match the rest of the Conventical's daunting architecture. It was cut directly into the stone, and it twisted down into a very small stairwell. Curious, Sazed walked down the set of worn stone steps. For the first time since entering the building, he felt cramped, and he had to stoop as he reached the bottom of the stairwell and entered a small chamber. He stood up straight, and held up his lamp to reveal. . .

A wall. The room ended abruptly, and his light sparkled off the wall. It held a steel plate, like those above. This one was a good five feet across, and nearly as tall. And it bore writing. Suddenly interested, Sazed set down his pack and stepped forward, raising his lamp to read the top words on the wall.

The text was in Terris.

It was an old dialect, certainly, but one that Sazed could make out even without his language coppermind. His hand trembled as he read the words.

> *I write these words in steel, for anything not set in metal cannot be trusted.*
>
> *I have begun to wonder if I am the only sane man remaining. Can the others not see? They have been waiting so long for their hero to come—the one spoken of in Terris prophecies—that they quickly jump between conclusions, presuming that each story and legend ap1plies to this one man.*

> *My brethren ignore the other facts. They cannot connect the other strange things that are happening. They are deaf to my objections and blind to my discoveries*.
>
> *Perhaps they are right. Perhaps I am mad, or jealous, or simply daft. My name is Kwaan. Philosopher, scholar, traitor. I am the one who discovered Alendi, and I am the one who first proclaimed him to be the Hero of Ages. I am the one who started this all*.
>
> *And I am the one who betrayed him, for I now know that he must never be allowed to complete his quest*.

"Sazed."

Sazed jumped, nearly dropping the lamp. Marsh stood in the doorway behind him. Imperious, discomforting, and so dark. He fit this place, with its lines and hardness.

"The upstairs quarters are empty," Marsh said. "This trip has been a waste—my brethren took anything of use with them."

"Not a waste, Marsh," Sazed said, turning back to the plate of text. He hadn't read all of it; he hadn't even gotten close. The script was written in a tight, cramped hand, its etchings coating the wall. The steel had preserved the words despite their obvious age. Sazed's heart beat a little faster.

This was a fragment of text from before the Lord Ruler's reign. A fragment written by a Terris philosopher—a holy man. Despite ten centuries of searching, the Keepers had never fulfilled the original goal of their creation: they had never discovered their own Terris religion.

The Lord Ruler had squelched Terris religious teachings soon after his rise to power. His persecution of the Terris people—his own people—had been the most complete of his long reign, and the Keepers had never found more than vague fragments regarding what their own people had once believed.

"I have to copy this down, Marsh," Sazed said, reaching for his pack. Taking a visual memory wouldn't work—no man could stare at a wall of so much text, then remember the words. He could, perhaps, read them into his coppermind. However, he wanted a physical record, one that perfectly preserved the structure of lines and punctuation.

Marsh shook his head. "We will not stay here. I do not think we should even have come."

Sazed paused, looking up. Then he pulled several large sheets of paper from his pack. "Very well, then," he said. "I'll take a rubbing. That will be better anyway, I think. It will let me see the text exactly as it was written."

Marsh nodded, and Sazed got out his charcoal.

*This discovery*. . .he thought with excitement. *This will be like Rashek's logbook. We are getting close*!

However, even as he began the rubbing—his hands moving carefully and precisely—another thought occurred to him. With a text like this in his possession, his sense of duty would no longer let him wander the villages. He had to return to the north to share what he had found, lest he die and this text be lost. He had to go to Terris.

Or. . .to Luthadel. From there he could send messages north. He had a valid excuse to get back to the center of action, to see the other crewmembers again.

Why 1did that make him feel even more guilty?

*When I finally had the realization—finally connected all of the signs of the Anticipation to Alendi—I was so excited. Yet, when I announced my discovery to the other Worldbringers, I was met with scorn*.

*Oh, how I wish that I had listened to them*.

# 13

MIST SWIRLED AND SPUN, LIKE monochrome paints running together on a canvas. Light died in the west, and night came of age.

Vin frowned. "Does it seem like the mists are coming earlier?"

"Earlier?" OreSeur asked in his muffled voice. The kandra wolfhound sat next to her on the rooftop.

Vin nodded. "Before, the mists didn't start to appear until after it grew dark, right?"

"It is dark, Mistress."

"But they're already here—they started to gather when the sun was barely beginning to set."

"I don't see that it matters, Mistress. Perhaps the mists are simply like other weather patterns—they vary, sometimes."

"Doesn't it even seem a little strange to you?"

"I will think it strange if you wish me to, Mistress," OreSeur said.

"That isn't what I meant."

"I apologize, Mistress," OreSeur said. "Tell me what you *do* mean, and I will be certain to believe as commanded."

Vin sighed, rubbing her brow. *I wish Sazed were back. . .*she thought. It was an idle wish, however. Even if Sazed were in Luthadel, he wouldn't be her steward. The Terrismen no longer called any man master. She'd have to make do with OreSeur. The kandra, at least, could provide information that Sazed could not—assuming she could get it out of him.

"We need to find the impostor," Vin said. "The one who. . .replaced someone."

"Yes, Mistress," OreSeur said.

Vin sat back in the mists, reclining on a slanted rooftop, resting her arms back on the tiles. "Then, I need to know more about you."

"Me, Mistress?"

"Kandra in general. If I'm going to find this impostor, I need to know how he thinks, need to understand his motivations."

"His motivations will be simple, Mistress," OreSeur said. "He will be following his Contract."

"What if he's acting without a Contract?"

OreSeur shook his canine head. "Kandra always have a Contract. Without one, they are not allowed to enter human society."

"Never?" Vin asked.

"Never."

"And what if this is some kind of rogue kandra?" Vin said.

"Such a thing does not exist," OreSeur said firmly.

*Oh*? Vin thought skeptically. However, she let the matter drop. There was little reason for a kandra to infiltrate the palace on his own; it was far more likely that one of Elend's enemies had sent the creature. One of the warlords, perhaps, or maybe the obligators. Even the other nobility in the city would have had good reason to spy on Elend.

"Okay," Vin said. "The kandra is a spy, sent to gather information for another human."

"Yes."

"But," Vin said, "if he did take the body of someone in the palace, he didn't kill them himself. Kandra can't kill humans, right?"

OreSeur nodded. "We are all bound by that rule."

"So, somebody snuck into the palace, murdered a member of the staff, then had their kandra take the body." She paused, trying to work through the problem. "The most dangerous possibilities—the crewmembers—should be considered first. Fortunately, since the killing happened yesterday, we can eliminate Breeze, who was outside the city at the time."

OreSeur nodded.

"We can eliminate Elend as well," Vin said. "He was with us on the wall yesterday."

"That still leaves the majority of the crew, Mistress."

Vin frowned, sitting back. She'd tried to establish solid alibis for Ham, Dockson, Clubs, and Spook. However, all of them had had at least a few hours unaccounted for. Long enough for a kandra to digest them and take their place.

"All right," she said. "So, how do I find the impostor? How can I tell him from other people?"

OreSeur sat quietly in the mists.

"There has to be a way," Vin said. "His imitation can't be perfect. Would cutting him work?"

OreSeur shook his head. "Kandra replicate a body perfectly, Mistress—blood, flesh, skin, and muscle. You have seen that when I split my skin."

Vin sighed, standing and stepping up on the tip of the peaked rooftop. The mists were already full, and the night was quickly becoming black. She began to walk idly back and forth on the ridge, an Allomancer's balance keeping her from falling.

"Perhaps I can just see who isn't acting oddly," she said. "Are most kandra as good at imitation as you are?"

"Among kandra, my own skill is average. Some are worse, others are better."

"But no actor is perfect," Vin said.

"Kandra don't often make mistakes, Mistress," OreSeur said. "But, this is probably your best method. Be warned, however—he could be anyone. My kind are very skilled."

Vin paused. *It's not Elend,* she told herself forcibly. *He was with me all day yesterday*. Except in the morning.

*Too long,* she decided. *We were on the wall for hours, and those bones were freshly expelled. Besides, I'd know if it were him. . .wouldn't I*?

She shook her head. "There has to be another way. Can I spot a kandra with Allomancy somehow?"

OreSeur didn't answer immediately. She turned toward him in the darkness, studying his canine face. "What?" she asked.

"These are not things we speak of with outsiders."

Vin sighed. "Tell me anyway."

"Do you command me to speak?"

"I don't really care to command you in anything."

"Then I may leave?" OreSeur asked. "You do not wish to command me, so our Contract is dissolved?"

"That isn't what I meant," Vin 1said.

OreSeur frowned—a strange expression to see on a dog's face. "It would be easier for me if you would try to say what you mean, Mistress."

Vin gritted her teeth. "Why is it you're so hostile?"

"I'm not hostile, Mistress. I am your servant, and will do as you command. That is part of the Contract."

"Sure. Are you like this with all of your masters?"

"With most, I am fulfilling a specific role," OreSeur said. "I have bones to imitate—a person to become, a personality to adopt. You have given me no direction; just the bones of this. . .animal."

*So that's it,* Vin thought. *Still annoyed by the dog's body*. "Look, those bones don't really change anything. You are still the same person."

"You do not understand. It is not who a kandra *is* that's important. It's who a kandra *becomes*. The bones he takes, the role he fulfills. None of my previous masters have asked me to do something like this."

"Well, I'm not like other masters," Vin said. "Anyway, I asked you a question. Is there a way I can spot a kandra with Allomancy? And yes, I command you to speak."

A flash of triumph shone in OreSeur's eyes, as if he enjoyed forcing her into her role. "Kandra cannot be affected by mental Allomancy, Mistress."

Vin frowned. "Not at all?"

"No, Mistress," OreSeur said. "You can try to Riot or Soothe our emotions, if you wish, but it will have no effect. We won't even know that you are trying to manipulate us."

*Like someone who is burning copper*. "That's not exactly the most useful bit of information," she said, strolling past the kandra on the roof. Allomancers couldn't read minds or emotions; when they Soothed or Rioted another person, they simply had to hope that the person reacted as intended.

She could "test" for a kandra by Soothing someone's emotions, perhaps. If they didn't react, that might mean they were a kandra—but it could also just mean that they were good at containing their emotions.

OreSeur watched her pacing. "If it were easy to detect kandra, Mistress, then we wouldn't be worth much as impostors, would we?"

"I suppose not," Vin acknowledged. However, thinking about what he'd said made her consider something else. "Can a kandra *use* Allomancy? If they eat an Allomancer, I mean?"

OreSeur shook his head.

*That's another method, then*, Vin thought. *If I catch a member of the crew burning metals, then I know he's not the kandra*. Wouldn't help with Dockson or the palace servants, but it would let her eliminate Ham and Spook.

"There's something else," Vin said. "Before, when we were doing the job with Kelsier, he said that we had to keep you away from the Lord Ruler and his Inquisitors. Why was that?"

OreSeur looked away. "This is not a thing we speak of."

"Then I command you to speak of it."

"Then I must refuse to answer," OreSeur said.

"Refuse to answer?" Vin asked. "You can do that?"

OreSeur nodded. "We are not required to reveal secrets about kandra nature, Mistress. It is—"

"In the Contract," Vin finished, frowning. *I really need to read that thing again*.

"Yes, Mistress. I have, perhaps, said too much already."

Vin turned away from OreSeur, looking out over the city. The mists continued to spin. Vin closed her eyes, questing out with bronze, trying to feel the telltale pulse of an Allomancer burning metals nearby.

OreSeur rose and padded over beside her, then settled down on his haunches again, sitting on the inclined roof. "Shouldn't you be at the meeting the king is having, Mistress?"

"Perhaps later," Vin said, opening her eyes. Out beyond the city, watchfires from the armies lit the horizon. Keep Venture blazed in the night to her right, and inside of it, Elend was holding council with the others. Many of the most important men in the government, sitting together in one room. Elend would call her paranoid for insisting that she be the one who watched for spies and assassins. That was fine; he could call her whatever he wanted, as long as he stayed alive.

She settled back down. She was glad Elend had decided to pick Keep Venture as his palace, rather than moving into Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's home. Not only was Kredik Shaw too big to be properly defended, but it also reminded her of him. The Lord Ruler.

She thought of the Lord Ruler often, lately—or, rather, she thought of Rashek, the man who had become the Lord Ruler. A Terrisman by birth, Rashek had killed the man who should have taken the power at the Well of Ascension and. . .

And done what? They still didn't know. The Hero had been on a quest to protect the people from a danger simply known as the Deepness. So much had been lost; so much had been intentionally destroyed. Their best source of information about those days came in the form of an aged journal, written by the Hero of Ages during the days before Rashek had killed him. However, it gave precious few clues about his quest.

*Why do I even worry about these things*? Vin thought. *The Deepness is a thing a thousand years forgotten. Elend and the others are right to be concerned about more pressing events*.

And still, Vin found herself strangely detached from them. Perhaps that was why she found herself scouting outside. It wasn't that she didn't worry about the armies. She just felt. . .removed from the problem. Even now, as she considered the threat to Luthadel, her mind was drawn back to the Lord Ruler.

*You don't know what I do for mankind*, he had said. *I was your god, even if you couldn't see it. By killing me, you have doomed yourselves*. Those were the Lord Ruler's last words, spoken as he lay dying on the floor of his own throne room. They worried her. Chilled her, even still.

She needed to distract herself. "What kinds of things do you like, kandra?" she asked, turning to the creature, who still sat on the rooftop beside her. "What are your loves, your hatreds?"

"I do not want to answer that."

Vin frowned. "Do not want to, or do not *have* to?"

OreSeur paused. "Do not want to, Mistress." The implication was obvious. *You're going to have to command me*.

She almost did. However, something gave her pause, something in those eyes—inhuman though they were. Something familiar.

She'd known resentment like that. She'd felt it often during her youth, when she'd served crewleaders 1who had lorded over their followers. In the crews, one did what one was commanded—especially if one was a small waif of a girl, without rank or means of intimidation.

"If you don't wish to speak of it," Vin said, turning away from the kandra, "then I won't force you."

OreSeur was silent.

Vin breathed in the mist, its cool wetness tickling her throat and lungs. "Do you know what *I* love, kandra?"

"No, Mistress."

"The mists," she said, holding out her arms. "The power, the freedom."

OreSeur nodded slowly. Nearby, Vin felt a faint pulsing with her bronze. Quiet, strange, unnerving. It was the same odd pulsing that she had felt atop Keep Venture a few nights before. She had never been brave enough to investigate it again.

*It's time to do something about that*, she decided. "Do you know what I hate, kandra?" she whispered, falling to a crouch, checking her knives and metals.

"No, Mistress."

She turned, meeting OreSeur's eyes. "I hate being afraid."

She knew that others thought her jumpy. Paranoid. She had lived with fear for so long that she had once seen it as something natural, like the ash, the sun, or the ground itself.

Kelsier had taken that fear away. She was careful, still, but she didn't feel a constant sense of terror. The Survivor had given her a life where the ones she loved didn't beat her, had shown her something better than fear. Trust.

Now that she knew of these things, she would not quickly surrender them. Not to armies, not to assassins. . .

Not even to spirits.

"Follow if you can," she whispered, then dropped off the rooftop to the street below.

She dashed along the mist-slicked street, building momentum before she had time to lose her nerve. The source of the bronze pulses was close; it came from only one street over, in a building. Not the top, she decided. One of the darkened windows on the third floor, the shutters open.

Vin dropped a coin and jumped into the air. She shot upward, angling herself by Pushing against a latch across the street. She landed in the window's pitlike opening, arms grabbing the sides of the frame. She flared tin, letting her eyes adjust to the deep darkness within the abandoned room.

And it was there. Formed entirely of mists, it shifted and spun, its outline vague in the dark chamber. It had a vantage to see the rooftop where Vin and OreSeur had been talking.

*Ghosts don't spy on people. . .do they*? Skaa didn't speak of things like spirits or the dead. It smacked too much of religion, and religion was for the nobility. To worship was death for skaa. That hadn't stopped some, of course—but thieves like Vin had been too pragmatic for such things.

There was only one thing in skaa lore that this creature matched. Mistwraiths. Creatures said to steal the souls of men foolish enough to go outside at night. But, Vin now knew what mistwraiths were. They were cousins to the kandra—strange, semi-intelligent beasts who used the bones of those they ingested. They were odd, true—but hardly phantoms, and not really even that dangerous. There were no dark wraiths in the night, no haunting spirits or ghouls.

Or so Kelsier had said. The thing standing in the dark room—its insubstantial form w1rithing in the mists—seemed a powerful counterexample. She gripped the sides of the window, fear—her old friend—returning.

*Run. Flee. Hide*.

"Why have you been watching me?" she demanded.

The thing did not move. Its form seemed to draw the mists forward, and they spun slightly, as if in an air current.

*I can sense it with bronze. That means it's using Allomancy—and Allomancy attracts the mist*.

The thing stepped forward. Vin tensed.

And then the spirit was gone.

Vin paused, frowning. That was it? She had—

Something grabbed her arm. Something cold, something terrible, but something very real. A pain shot through her head, moving as if from her ear and into her mind. She yelled, but cut off as her voice failed. With a quiet groan—her arm quivering and shaking—she fell backward out of the window.

Her arm was still cold. She could feel it whipping in the air beside her, seeming to exude chill air. Mist passed like trailing clouds.

Vin flared tin. Pain, cold, wetness, and lucidity burst into her mind, and she threw herself into a twist and flared pewter just as she hit the ground.

"Mistress?" OreSeur said, darting from the shadows.

Vin shook her head, pushing herself up to her knees, her palms cool against the slick cobblestones. She could still feel the trailing chill in her left arm.

"Shall I go for aid?" the wolfhound asked.

Vin shook her head, forcing herself into a wobbling stand. She looked upward, through swirling mists, toward the black window above.

She shivered. Her shoulder was sore from where she had hit the ground, and her still bruised side throbbed, but she could feel her strength returning. She stepped away from the building, still looking up. Above her, the deep mists seemed. . .ominous. Obscuring.

*No*, she thought forcefully. *The mists are my freedom; the night is my home! This is where I belong. I haven't needed to be afraid in the night since Kelsier taught me otherwise*.

She couldn't lose that. She wouldn't go back to the fear. Still, she couldn't help the quick urgency in her step as she waved to OreSeur and scampered away from the building. She gave no explanation for her strange actions.

He didn't ask for one.

Elend set a third pile of books onto the table, and it slumped against the other two, threatening to topple the entire lot to the floor. He steadied them, then glanced up.

Breeze, in a prim suit, regarded the table with amusement as he sipped his wine. Ham and Spook were playing a game of stones as they waited for the meeting to begin; Spook was winning. Dockson sat in the corner of the room, scribbling on a ledger, and Clubs sat in a deep plush chair, eyeing Elend with one of his stares.

*Any of these men could be an impostor*, Elend thought. The thought still seemed insane to him. What was he to do? Exclude them all from his confidence? No, he needed them too much.

The only option was to act normally and watch them. Vin had told him to try and spot inconsistencies in their personalities. He intended to do his best, but the reality was1 he wasn't sure how much he would be able to see. This was more Vin's area of expertise. He needed to worry about the armies.

Thinking of her, he glanced at the stained-glass window at the back of the study, and was surprised to see it was dark.

*That late already*? Elend thought.

"My dear man," Breeze noted. "When you told us you needed to 'go and gather a few important references,' you might have warned us that you were planning to be gone for two full hours."

"Yes, well," Elend said, "I kind of lost track of time. . .."

"For two hours?"

Elend nodded sheepishly. "There were books involved."

Breeze shook his head. "If the fate of the Central Dominance weren't at stake—and if it weren't so fantastically enjoyable to watch Hammond lose an entire month's earnings to the boy there—I'd have left an hour ago."

"Yes, well, we can get started now," Elend said.

Ham chuckled, standing up. "Actually, it's kind of like the old days. Kell always arrived late, too—and he liked to hold his meetings at night. Mistborn hours."

Spook smiled, his coin pouch bulging.

*We still use boxings—Lord Ruler imperials—as our coinage*, Elend thought. *We'll have to do something about that*.

"I miss the charcoal board, though," Spook said.

"I certainly don't," Breeze replied. "Kell had atrocious handwriting."

"Absolutely atrocious," Ham said with a smile, sitting. "You have to admit, though—it was distinctive."

Breeze raised an eyebrow. "It *was* that, I suppose."

*Kelsier, the Survivor of Hathsin*, Elend thought. *Even his handwriting is legendary*. "Regardless," he said, "I think perhaps we should get to work. We've still got two armies waiting out there. We're not leaving tonight until we have a plan to deal with them!"

The crewmembers shared looks.

"Actually, Your Majesty," Dockson said, "we've already worked on that problem for a bit."

"Oh?" Elend asked, surprised. *Well, I guess I did leave them alone for a couple of hours*. "Let me hear it, then."

Dockson stood, pulling his chair a bit closer to join the rest of the group, and Ham began to speak.

"Here's the thing, El," Ham said. "With two armies here, we don't have to worry about an immediate attack. But, we're still in serious danger. This will probably turn into an extended siege as each army tries to outlast the other."

"They'll try to starve us out," Clubs said. "Weaken us, and their enemies, before attacking."

"And," Ham continued, "that puts us in a bind—because we can't last very long. The city is already on the edge of starvation—and the enemy kings are probably aware of that fact."

"What are you saying?" Elend asked slowly.

"We have to make an alliance with one of those armies, Your Majesty," Dockson said. "They both know it. Alone, they can't reliably defeat one another. With our help, however, the balance will be tipped."

"They'll he1m us in," Ham said. "Keep us blockaded until we get desperate enough to side with one of them. Eventually, we'll have to do so—either that, or let our people starve."

"The decision comes down to this," Breeze said. "We can't outlast the others, so we have to choose *which* of those men we want to take over the city. And, I would suggest making our decision quickly as opposed to waiting while our supplies run out."

Elend stood quietly. "By making a deal with one of those armies, we'll essentially be giving away our kingdom."

"True," Breeze said, tapping the side of his cup. "However, what I gained us by bringing a second army is bargaining power. You see, at least we are in a position to demand something in exchange for our kingdom."

"What good is that?" Elend asked. "We still lose."

"It's better than nothing," Breeze said. "I think that we might be able to persuade Cett to leave you as a provisional leader in Luthadel. He doesn't like the Central Dominance; he finds it barren and flat."

"Provisional leader of the city," Elend said with a frown. "That is somewhat different from king of the Central Dominance."

"True," Dockson said. "But, every emperor needs good men to administrate the cities under their rule. You wouldn't be king, but you—and our armies—would live through the next few months, and Luthadel wouldn't be pillaged."

Ham, Breeze, and Dockson all sat resolutely, looking him in the eye. Elend glanced down at his pile of books, thinking of his research and study. Worthless. How long had the crew known that there was only one course of action?

The crew seemed to take Elend's silence as assent.

"Cett really is the best choice, then?" Dockson asked. "Perhaps Straff would be more likely to make an agreement with Elend—they are, after all, family."

*Oh, he'd make an agreement,* Elend thought. *And he'd break it the moment it was convenient. But. . .the alternative? Give the city over to this Cett? What would happen to this land, this people, if he were in charge*?

"Cett is best, I think," Breeze said. "He is very willing to let others rule, as long as he gets his glory and his coins. The problem is going to be that atium. Cett thinks it is here, and if he doesn't find it. . ."

"We just let him search the city," Ham said.

Breeze nodded. "You'd have to persuade him that I misled him about the atium—and that shouldn't be too hard, considering what he thinks of me. Which is another small matter—you'll have to convince him that I've been dealt with. Perhaps he'd believe that I was executed as soon as Elend found out I had raised an army against him."

The others nodded.

"Breeze?" Elend asked. "How does Lord Cett treat the skaa in his lands?"

Breeze paused, then glanced away. "Not well, I'm afraid."

"Now, see," Elend said. "I think we need to consider how to best protect our people. I mean, if we give everything over to Cett, then we'd save my skin—but at the cost of the entire skaa population of the dominance!"

Dockson shook his head. "Elend, it's not a betrayal. Not if this is the only way."

"That's easy to say," Elend said. "But I'm the one who'd have to bear the guilty co1nscience for doing such a thing. I'm not saying that we should throw out your suggestion, but I do have a few ideas that we might talk about. . .."

The others shared looks. As usual, Clubs and Spook remained quiet during proceedings; Clubs only spoke when he felt it absolutely necessary, and Spook tended to stay on the periphery of the conversations. Finally, Breeze, Ham, and Dockson looked back at Elend.

"This is your country, Your Majesty," Dockson said carefully. "We're simply here to give advice." *Very good advice*, his tone implied.

"Yes, well," Elend said, quickly selecting a book. In his haste, he knocked over one of the stacks, sending a clatter of books across the table and landing a volume in Breeze's lap.

"Sorry," Elend said, as Breeze rolled his eyes and sat the book back up on the table. Elend pulled open his own book. "Now, this volume had some very interesting things to say about the movement and arrangement of troop bodies—"

"Uh, El?" Ham asked, frowning. "That looks like a book on shipping grain."

"I know," Elend said. "There weren't a lot of books about warfare in the library. I guess that's what we get for a thousand years without any wars. However, this book does mention how much grain it took to keep the various garrisons in the Final Empire stocked. Do you have any idea how much food an army needs?"

"You have a point," Clubs said, nodding. "Usually, it's a blasted pain to keep soldiers fed; we often had supply problems fighting on the frontier, and we were only small bands, sent to quell the occasional rebellion."

Elend nodded. Clubs didn't often speak of his past fighting in the Lord Ruler's army—and the crew didn't often ask him about it.

"Anyway," Elend said, "I'll bet both Cett and my father are unaccustomed to moving large bodies of men. There will be supply problems, especially for Cett, since he marched so hastily."

"Maybe not," Clubs said. "Both armies have secured canal routes into Luthadel. That will make it easy for them to send for more supplies."

"Plus," Breeze added, "though much of Cett's land is in revolt right now, he *does* still hold the city of Haverfrex, which held one of the Lord Ruler's main canneries. Cett has a remarkable amount of food a short canal trip away."

"Then, we disrupt the canals," Elend said. "We find a way to stop those supplies from coming. Canals make resupply quick, but also vulnerable, since we know exactly which route it will take. And, if we can take away their food, perhaps they'll be forced to turn around and march home."

"Either that," Breeze said, "or they'll just decide to risk attacking Luthadel."

Elend paused. "That's a possibility," he said. "But, well, I've been researching how to hold the city as well." He reached across the table, picking up a book. "Now, this is Jendellah's *City Management in the Modern Era*. He mentions how difficult Luthadel is to police because of its extreme size and large number of skaa slums. He suggests using roving bands of city watchmen. I think we could adapt his methods to use in a battle—our wall is too long to defend in detail, but if we had mobile bands of troops that could respond to—"

"Your Majesty," Dockson interrupted.

"Hum? Yes?"

"We've got a troop of boys and men who have barely a year's training, an1d we're facing not one overwhelming force, but *two*. We can't win this battle by force."

"Oh, yes," Elend said. "Of course. I was just saying that if we *did* have to fight, I have some strategies. . .."

"If we fight, we lose," Clubs said. "We'll probably lose anyway."

Elend paused for a moment. "Yes, well, I just. . ."

"Attacking the canal routes is a good idea, though," Dockson said. "We can do that covertly, perhaps hire some of the bandits in the area to attack supply barges. It probably won't be enough to send Cett or Straff home, but we could make them more desperate to make alliances with us."

Breeze nodded. "Cett's already worried about instability back in his home dominance. We should send him a preliminary messenger, let him know we're interested in an alliance. That way, as soon as his supply problems begin, he'll think of us."

"We could even send him a letter explaining Breeze's execution," Dockson said, "as a sign of good faith. That—"

Elend cleared his throat. The others paused.

"I, uh, wasn't finished yet," Elend said.

"I apologize, Your Majesty," Dockson said.

Elend took a deep breath. "You're right—we can't afford to fight those armies. But, I think we need to find a way to get them to fight each other."

"A pleasant sentiment, my dear man," Breeze said. "But getting those two to attack one another isn't as simple as persuading Spook over there to refill my wine." He turned, holding out his empty cup. Spook paused, then sighed, rising to fetch the wine bottle.

"Well, yes," Elend said. "But, while there aren't a lot of books on warfare, there *are* a lot about politics. Breeze, you said the other day that being the weakest party in a three-way stalemate gives us power."

"Exactly," Breeze said. "We can tip the battle for either of the two larger sides."

"Yes," Elend said, opening a book. "Now that there are three parties involved, it's not warfare—it's politics. This is just like a contest between houses. And in house politicking, even the most powerful houses can't stand without allies. The small houses are weak individually, but they are strong when considered as a group.

"We're like one of those small houses. If we want to make any gains, we're going to have to get our enemies to forget about us—or, at least, make them think us inconsequential. If they both assume that they have the better of us—that they can use us to defeat the other army, then turn on us at their leisure—then they'll leave us alone and concentrate on each other."

Ham rubbed his chin. "You're talking about playing both sides, Elend. It's a dangerous position to put ourselves in."

Breeze nodded. "We'd have to switch our allegiance to whichever side seems weaker at the moment, keep them snapping at each other. And there's no guarantee that the winner between the two would be weakened enough for us to defeat."

"Not to mention our food problems," Dockson said. "What you propose would take time, Your Majesty. Time during which we'd be under siege, our supplies dwindling. It's autumn right now. Winter will soon be upon us."

"It will be tough," Elend agreed. "And risky. But, I think we can do it. We make them *both* think we're allied1 with them, but we hold back our support. We encourage them against one another, and we wear away at their supplies and morale, pushing them into a conflict. When the dust settles, the surviving army might just be weak enough for us to beat."

Breeze looked thoughtful. "It has style," he admitted. "And, it does kind of sound fun."

Dockson smiled. "You only say that because it involves making someone else do our work for us."

Breeze shrugged. "Manipulation works so well on a personal level, I don't see why it wouldn't be an equally viable national policy."

"That's actually how most rulership works," Ham mused. "What is a government but an institutionalized method of making sure somebody *else* does all the work?"

"Uh, the plan?" Elend asked.

"I don't know, El," Ham said, getting back on topic. "It sounds like one of Kell's plans—foolhardy, brave, and a little insane." He sounded as if he were surprised to hear Elend propose such a measure.

*I can be as foolhardy as any man*, Elend thought indignantly, then paused. Did he really want to follow that line of thought?

"We could get ourselves into some serious trouble," Dockson said. "If either side decides it's tired of our games. . ."

"They'll destroy us," Elend said. "But. . .well, gentlemen, you're gamblers. You can't tell me that this plan doesn't appeal to you more than simply bowing before Lord Cett."

Ham shared a look with Breeze, and they seemed to be considering the idea. Dockson rolled his eyes, but seemed like he was objecting simply out of habit.

No, they didn't want to take the safe way out. These were the men who had challenged the Lord Ruler, men who had made their livelihood scamming noblemen. In some ways, they were very careful; they could be precise in their attention to detail, cautious in covering their tracks and protecting their interests. But when it came time to gamble for the big prize, they were often willing.

No, not willing. Eager.

*Great,* Elend thought. *I've filled my inner council with a bunch of thrill-seeking masochists. Even worse, I've decided to join them.* But, what else could he do?

"We could at least consider it," Breeze said. "It does sound exciting."

"Now, see, I didn't suggest this because it was exciting, Breeze," Elend said. "I spent my youth trying to plan how I would make a better city of Luthadel once I became leader of my house. I'm not going to throw away those dreams at the first sign of opposition."

"What about the Assembly?" Ham said.

"That's the best part," Elend said. "They voted in my proposal at the meeting two days back. They can't open the city gates to any invader until I meet with my father in parlay."

The crew sat quietly for a few moments. Finally, Ham turned to Elend, shaking his head. "I really don't know, El. It sounds appealing. We actually discussed a few more daring plans like this while we were waiting for you. But. . ."

"But what?" Elend asked.

"A plan like this depends a lot on you, my dear man," Breeze said, sipping his wine. "You'd have to be the one to meet with the kings—the one to persuade them both that we're on their side. No offense, but you're new to 1scamming. It's difficult to agree to a daring plan that puts a newcomer in as the linchpin member of the team."

"I can do this," Elend said. "Really."

Ham glanced at Breeze, then both glanced at Clubs. The gnarled general shrugged. "If the kid wants to try it, then let him."

Ham sighed, then looked back. "I guess I agree. As long as you're up to this, El."

"I think I am," Elend said, covering his nervousness. "I just know we can't give up, not easily. Maybe this won't work—maybe, after a couple months of being besieged, we'll just end up giving away the city anyway. However, that gives us a couple of months during which *something* could happen. It's worth the risk to wait, rather than fold. Wait, and plan."

"All right, then," Dockson said. "Give us some time to come up with some ideas and options, Your Majesty. We'll meet again in a few days to talk about specifics."

"All right," Elend said. "Sounds good. Now, if we can move on to other matters, I'd like to mention—"

A knock came at the door. At Elend's call, Captain Demoux pushed open the door, looking a little embarrassed. "Your Majesty?" he said. "I apologize, but. . .I think we caught someone listening in on your meeting."

"What?" Elend said. "Who?"

Demoux turned to the side, waving in a pair of his guards. The woman they led into the room was vaguely familiar to Elend. Tall, like most Terris, she wore a bright-colored, but utilitarian, dress. Her ears were stretched downward, the lobes elongated to accommodate numerous earrings.

"I recognize you," Elend said. "From the Assembly hall a few days ago. You were watching me."

The woman didn't answer. She looked over the room's occupants, standing stiffly—even haughtily—despite her bound wrists. Elend had never actually met a Terriswoman before; he'd only met stewards, eunuchs trained from birth to work as manservants. For some reason, Elend had expected a Terriswoman to seem a bit more servile.

"She was hiding in the next room over," Demoux said. "I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I don't know how she got past us. We found her listening against the wall, though I doubt she heard anything. I mean, those walls are made of stone."

Elend met the woman's eyes. Older—perhaps fifty—she wasn't beautiful, but neither was she homely. She was sturdy, with a straightforward, rectangular face. Her stare was calm and firm, and it made Elend uncomfortable to hold it for long.

"So, what did you expect to overhear, woman?" Elend asked.

The Terriswoman ignored the comment. She turned to the others, and spoke in a lightly accented voice. "I would speak with the king alone. The rest of you are excused."

Ham smiled. "Well, at least she's got nerve."

Dockson addressed the Terriswoman. "What makes you think that we would leave our king alone with you?"

"His Majesty and I have things to discuss," the woman said in a businesslike manner, as if oblivious of—or unconcerned about—her status as a prisoner. "You needn't be worried about his safety; I'm certain that the young Mistborn hiding outside the window will be more than enough to deal with me."

Elend glanced to the side, toward the small ventilation window beside the more massive stained-glass one. How wo1uld the Terriswoman have known that Vin was watching? Her ears would have to be extraordinarily keen. Keen enough, perhaps, to listen in on the meeting through a stone wall?

Elend turned back to the newcomer. "You're a Keeper."

She nodded.

"Did Sazed send you?"

"It is because of him that I am here," she said. "But I was not 'sent.'"

"Ham, it's all right," Elend said slowly. "You can go."

"Are you sure?" Ham asked, frowning.

"Leave me bound, if you wish," the woman said.

*If she really is a Feruchemist, that won't be much of a hindrance*, Elend thought. *Of course, if she really is a Feruchemist—a Keeper, like Sazed—I shouldn't have anything to fear from her. Theoretically*.

The others shuffled from the room, their postures indicating what they thought of Elend's decision. Though they were no longer thieves by profession, Elend suspected that they—like Vin—would always bear the effects of their upbringing.

"We'll be just outside, El," Ham—the last one out—said, then pulled the door shut.

*And yet, any who know me will realize that there was no chance I would give up so easily. Once I find something to investigate, I become dogged in my pursuit*.

## 14

THE TERRISWOMAN SNAPPED HER BONDS, and the ropes dropped to the floor.

"Uh, Vin?" Elend said, beginning to wonder about the logic of meeting with this woman. "Perhaps it's time you came in."

"She's not actually there," the Terriswoman said offhandedly, walking forward. "She left a few minutes ago to do her rounds. That is why I let myself be caught."

"Um, I see," Elend said. "I'll be calling for the guards now."

"Don't be a fool," the Terriswoman said. "If I wanted to kill you, I could do it before the others got back in. Now be quiet for a moment."

Elend stood uncomfortably as the tall woman walked around the table in a slow circle, studying him as a merchant might inspect a piece of furniture up for auction. Finally she stopped, placing her hands on her hips.

"Stand up straight," she commanded.

"Excuse me?"

"You're slouching," the woman said. "A king must maintain an air of dignity at all times, even when with his friends."

Elend frowned. "Now, while I appreciate advice, I don't—"

"No," the woman said. "Don't hedge. Command."

"Excuse me?" Elend said again.

The woman stepped forward, placing a hand on his shoulder and pressing his back firmly to improve his posture. She stepped back, then nodded slightly to herself.

"Now, see," Elend said. "I don't—"

"No," the woman interrupted. "You must be stronger in the way that you speak. Presentation—words, actions, postures—will determine how people judge you and react to you. If you start every sentence with softness and uncertainty, you will seem soft and uncertain. Be forceful!"1

"What is going on here?" Elend demanded, exasperated.

"There," the woman said. "Finally."

"You said that you know Sazed?" Elend asked, resisting the urge to slouch back into his earlier posture.

"He is an acquaintance," the woman said. "My name is Tindwyl; I am, as you have guessed, a Keeper of Terris." She tapped her foot for a moment, then shook her head. "Sazed warned me about your slovenly appearance, but I honestly assumed that no king could have such a poor sense of self-presentation."

"Slovenly?" Elend asked. "Excuse me?"

"Stop saying that," Tindwyl snapped. "Don't ask questions; say what you mean. If you object, object—don't leave your words up to my interpretation."

"Yes, well, while this is fascinating," Elend said, walking toward the door, "I'd rather avoid further insults this evening. If you'll excuse me. . ."

"Your people think you are a fool, Elend Venture," Tindwyl said quietly.

Elend paused.

"The Assembly—a body you yourself organized—ignores your authority. The skaa are convinced that you won't be able to protect them. Even your own council of friends makes their plans in your absence, assuming your input to be no great loss."

Elend closed his eyes, taking a slow, deep breath.

"You have good ideas, Elend Venture," Tindwyl said. "Regal ideas. However, you are not a king. A man can only lead when others accept him as their leader, and he has only as much authority as his subjects give to him. All of the brilliant ideas in the world cannot save your kingdom if no one will listen to them."

Elend turned. "This last year I've read every pertinent book on leadership and governance in the four libraries."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "Then, I suspect that you spent a great deal of time in your room that you *should* have been out, being seen by your people and learning to be a ruler."

"Books have great value," Elend said.

"Actions have greater value."

"And where am I to learn the proper actions?"

"From me."

Elend paused.

"You may know that every Keeper has an area of special interest," Tindwyl said. "While we all memorize the same store of information, one person can only study and understand a limited amount of that store. Our mutual friend Sazed spends his time on religions."

"And your specialty?"

"Biographies," she said. "I have studied the lives of generals, kings, and emperors whose names you have never heard. Understanding theories of politics and leadership, Elend Venture, is not the same as understanding the lives of men who lived such principles."

"And. . .you can teach me to emulate those men?"

"Perhaps," Tindwyl said. "I haven't yet decided whether or not you're a hopeless case. But, I am here, so I will do what I can. A few months ago, I received a letter from Sazed, explaining your predicament. He did not ask me to come to train you—but, then, Sazed is perhaps another man who could learn to be more forceful."

Elend nodded slowly, meet1ing the Terriswoman's eyes.

"Will you accept my instruction, then?" she asked.

Elend thought for a moment. *If she's anywhere near as useful as Sazed, then. . .well, I could certainly use some help at this*. "I will," he said.

Tindwyl nodded. "Sazed also mentioned your humility. It could be an asset—assuming you don't let it get in the way. Now, I believe that your Mistborn has returned."

Elend turned toward the side window. The shutter swung open, allowing mist to begin streaming into the room and revealing a crouching, cloaked form.

"How did you know I was here?" Vin asked quietly.

Tindwyl smiled—the first such expression Elend had seen on her face. "Sazed mentioned you as well, child. You and I should speak soon in private, I think."

Vin slipped into the room, drawing mist in behind her, then closed the shutter. She didn't bother to hide her hostility or mistrust as she put herself between Elend and Tindwyl.

"Why are you here?" Vin demanded.

Tindwyl smiled again. "It took your king there several minutes to get to that question, and here you ask it after a few bare moments. You are an interesting couple, I think."

Vin's eyes narrowed.

"Regardless, I should withdraw," Tindwyl said. "We shall speak again, I assume, Your Majesty?"

"Yes, of course," Elend said. "Um. . .is there anything I should begin practicing?"

"Yes," Tindwyl said, walking to the door. "Stop saying 'um.'"

"Right."

Ham poked his head in the door as soon as Tindwyl opened it. He immediately noticed her discarded bonds. He didn't say anything, however; he likely assumed that Elend had freed her.

"I think we're done for the night, everyone," Elend said. "Ham, would you see that Mistress Tindwyl is given quarters in the palace? She's a friend of Sazed's."

Ham shrugged. "All right, then." He nodded to Vin, then withdrew. Tindwyl did not bid them good night as she left.

Vin frowned, then glanced at Elend. He seemed. . .distracted. "I don't like her," she said.

Elend smiled, stacking up the books on his table. "You don't like anyone when you first meet them, Vin."

"I liked you."

"Thereby demonstrating that you are a terrible judge of character."

Vin paused, then smiled. She walked over and began picking through the books. They weren't typical Elend fare—far more practical than the kinds of things he usually read. "How did it go tonight?" she asked. "I didn't have much time to listen."

Elend sighed. He turned, sitting down on the table, looking up at the massive rose window at the back of the room. It was dark, its colors only hinted as reflections in the black glass. "It went well, I suppose."

"I told you they'd like your plan. It's the sort of thing they'll find challenging."

"I suppose," Elend said.

Vin frowned. "All right," she said, hopping up to stand on the table. She sat down beside him. "What is it? Is it something that woman said? What did1 she want, anyway?"

"Just to pass on some knowledge," he said. "You know how Keepers are, always wanting an ear to listen to their lessons."

"I suppose," Vin said slowly. She hadn't ever seen Elend depressed, but he did get discouraged. He had so many ideas, so many plans and hopes, that she sometimes wondered how he kept them all straight. She would have said that he lacked focus; Reen had always said that focus kept a thief alive. Elend's dreams, however, were so much a part of who he was. She doubted he could discard them. She didn't think she would want him to, for they were part of what she loved about him.

"They agreed to the plan, Vin," Elend said, still looking up at the window. "They even seemed excited, like you said they'd be. It's just. . .I can't help thinking that their suggestion was far more rational than mine. They wanted to side with one of the armies, giving it our support in exchange for leaving me as a subjugated ruler in Luthadel."

"That would be giving up," Vin said.

"Sometimes, giving up is better than failing. I just committed my city to an extended siege. That will mean hunger, perhaps starvation, before this is over with."

Vin put a hand on his shoulder, watching him uncertainly. Usually, he was the one who reassured her. "It's still a better way," she said. "The others probably just suggested a weaker plan because they thought you wouldn't go along with something more daring."

"No," Elend said. "They weren't pandering to me, Vin. They really thought that making a strategic alliance was a good, safe plan." He paused, then looked at her. "Since when did *that* group represent the reasonable side of my government?"

"They've had to grow," Vin said. "They can't be the men they once were, not with this much responsibility."

Elend turned back toward the window. "I'll tell you what worries me, Vin. I'm worried that their plan *wasn't* reasonable—perhaps it itself was a bit foolhardy. Perhaps making an alliance would have been a difficult enough task. If that's the case, then what *I'm* proposing is just downright ludicrous."

Vin squeezed his shoulder. "We fought the Lord Ruler."

"You had Kelsier then."

"Not *that* again."

"I'm sorry," Elend said. "But, really, Vin. Maybe my plan to try and hold on to the government is just arrogance. What was it you told me about your childhood? When you were in the thieving crews, and everyone was bigger, stronger, and meaner than you, what did you do? Did you stand up to the leaders?"

Memories flashed in her mind. Memories of hiding, of keeping her eyes down, of weakness.

"That was then," she said. "You can't let others beat on you forever. That's what Kelsier taught me—that's why we fought the Lord Ruler. That's why the skaa rebellion fought the Final Empire all those years, even when there was no chance of winning. Reen taught me that the rebels were fools. But Reen is dead now—and so is the Final Empire. And. . ."

She leaned down, catching Elend's eyes. "You can't give up the city, Elend," she said quietly. "I don't think I'd like what that would do to you."

Elend paused, then smiled slowly. "You can be very wise sometimes, Vin."

"You think that?"

He nodded.

1

"Well," she said, "then obviously you're as poor a judge of character as I am."

Elend laughed, putting his arm around her, hugging her against his side. "So, I assume the patrol tonight was uneventful?"

The mist spirit. Her fall. The chill she could still feel—if only faintly remembered—in her forearm. "It was," she said. The last time she'd told him of the mist spirit, he'd immediately thought she'd been seeing things.

"See," Elend said, "you should have come to the meeting; I would have liked to have had you here."

She said nothing.

They sat for a few minutes, looking up at the dark window. There was an odd beauty to it; the colors weren't visible because of the lack of back light, and she could instead focus on the patterns of glass. Chips, slivers, slices, and plates woven together within a framework of metal.

"Elend?" she finally said. "I'm worried."

"I'd be concerned if you weren't," he said. "Those armies have *me* so worried that I can barely think straight."

"No," Vin said. "Not about that. I'm worried about other things."

"Like what?"

"Well. . .I've been thinking about what the Lord Ruler said, right before I killed him. Do you remember?"

Elend nodded. He hadn't been there, but she'd told him.

"He talked about what he'd done for mankind," Vin said. "He saved us, the stories say. From the Deepness."

Elend nodded.

"But," Vin said, "what *was* the Deepness? You were a nobleman—religion wasn't forbidden to you. What did the Ministry teach about the Deepness and the Lord Ruler?"

Elend shrugged. "Not much, really. Religion wasn't forbidden, but it wasn't encouraged either. There was something proprietary about the

Ministry, an air that implied they would take care of religious things—that we didn't need to worry ourselves."

"But they did teach you about some things, right?"

Elend nodded. "Mostly, they talked about why the nobility were privileged and the skaa cursed. I guess they wanted us to understand how fortunate we were—though honestly, I always found the teachings a little disturbing. See, they claimed that we were noble because our ancestors supported the Lord Ruler before the Ascension. But, that means that we were privileged because of what other people had done. Not really fair, eh?"

Vin shrugged. "Fair as anything else, I guess."

"But, didn't you get angry?" Elend said. "Didn't it frustrate you that the nobility had so much while you had so little?"

"I didn't think about it," Vin said. "The nobility had a lot, so we could take it from them. Why should I care how they got it? Sometimes, when I had food, other thieves beat me and took it. What did it matter how I got my food? It was still taken from me."

Elend paused. "You know, sometimes I wonder what the political theorists I've read would say if they met you. I have a feeling they'd throw up their hands in frustration."

She poked him in the side. "Enough politics. Tell me about the Deepness."

"Well, I think it was a creature of some1 sort—a dark and evil thing that nearly destroyed the world. The Lord Ruler traveled to the Well of Ascension, where he was given the power to defeat the Deepness and unite mankind. There are several statues in the city depicting the event."

Vin frowned. "Yes, but they never really show what the Deepness looked like. It's depicted as a twisted lump at the Lord Ruler's feet."

"Well, the last person who actually saw the Deepness died a year ago, so I guess we'll have to make do with the statues."

"Unless it comes back," Vin said quietly.

Elend frowned, looking at her again. "Is that what this is about, Vin?" His face softened slightly. "Two armies aren't enough? You have to worry about the fate of the world as well?"

Vin glanced down sheepishly, and Elend laughed, pulling her close. "Ah, Vin. I know you're a bit paranoid—honestly, considering our situation, I'm starting to feel the same—but I think this is one problem you don't have to worry about. I haven't heard any reports of monstrous incarnations of evil rampaging across the land."

Vin nodded, and Elend leaned back a bit, obviously assuming that he'd answered her question.

*The Hero of Ages traveled to the Well of Ascension to defeat the Deepness,* she thought. *But the prophecies all said that the Hero shouldn't take the Well's power for himself. He was supposed to give it, trust in the power itself to destroy the Deepness.*

*Rashek didn't do that—he took the power for himself. Wouldn't that mean that the Deepness was never defeated? Why, then, wasn't the world destroyed*?

"The red sun and brown plants," Vin said. "Did the Deepness do that?"

"Still thinking about that?" Elend frowned. "Red sun and brown plants? What other colors would they be?"

"Kelsier said that the sun was once yellow, and plants were green."

"That's an odd image."

"Sazed agrees with Kelsier," Vin said. "The legends all say that during the early days of the Lord Ruler, the sun changed colors, and ash began to fall from the skies."

"Well," Elend said, "I guess the Deepness *could* have had something to do with it. I don't know, honestly." He sat musingly for a few moments. "Green plants? Why not purple or blue? So odd. . .."

*The Hero of Ages traveled north, to the Well of Ascension,* Vin thought again. She turned slightly, her eyes drawn toward the Terris mountains so far away. Was it still up there? The Well of Ascension?

"Did you have any luck getting information out of OreSeur?" Elend asked. "Anything to help us find the spy?"

Vin shrugged. "He told me that kandra can't use Allomancy."

"So, you can find our impostor that way?" Elend said, perking up.

"Maybe," Vin said. "I can test Spook and Ham, at least. Regular people will be more difficult—though kandra can't be Soothed, so maybe that will let me find the spy."

"That sounds promising," Elend said.

Vin nodded. The thief in her, the paranoid girl that Elend always teased, itched to use Allomancy on him—to test him, to see if he reacted to her Pushes and Pulls. She stopped herself. This one man she would trust. The others she would test, but1 she would not question Elend. In a way, she'd rather trust him and be wrong than deal with the worry of mistrust.

*I finally understand*, she thought with a start. *Kelsier. I understand what it was like for you with Mare. I won't make your same mistake*.

Elend was looking at her.

"What?" she asked.

"You're smiling," he said. "Do I get to hear the joke?"

She hugged him. "No," she said simply.

Elend smiled. "All right then. You can test Spook and Ham, but I'm pretty sure the impostor isn't one of the crew—I talked to them all today, and they were all themselves. We need to search the palace staff."

*He doesn't know how good kandra can be*. The enemy kandra had probably studied his victim for months and months, learning and memorizing their every mannerism.

"I've spoken to Ham and Demoux," Elend said. "As members of the palace guard, they know about the bones—and Ham was able to guess what they were. Hopefully, they can sort through the staff with minimal disturbance and locate the impostor."

Vin's senses itched at how trusting Elend was. *No*, she thought. *Let him assume the best. He has enough to worry about. Besides, perhaps the kandra* is *imitating someone outside our core team. Elend can search that avenue*.

*And, if the impostor is a member of the crew. . .Well, that's the sort of situation where my paranoia comes in handy*.

"Anyway," Elend said, standing. "I have a few things to check on before it gets too late."

Vin nodded. He gave her a long kiss, then left. She sat on the table for a few moments longer, not looking at the massive rose window, but at the smaller window to the side, which she'd left slightly open. It stood, a doorway into the night. Mist churned in the blackness, tentatively sending tendrils into the room, evaporating quietly in the warmth.

"I will not fear you," Vin whispered. "And I will find your secret." She climbed off the table and slipped out the window, back out to meet with OreSeur and do another check of the palace grounds.

*I had determined that Alendi was the Hero of Ages, and I intended to prove it. I should have bowed before the will of the others; I shouldn't have insisted on traveling with Alendi to witness his journeys.*

*It was inevitable that Alendi himself would find out what I believed him to be.*

# 15

ON THE EIGHTH DAY OUT of the Conventical, Sazed awoke to find himself alone.

He stood, pushing off his blanket and the light film of ash that had fallen during the night. Marsh's place beneath the tree's canopy was empty, though a patch of bare earth indicated where the Inquisitor had slept.

Sazed stood, following Marsh's footsteps out into the harsh red sunlight. The ash was deeper here, without the cover of trees, and there was also more wind blowing it into drifts. Sazed regarded the windswept landscape. There was no further sign of Marsh.

Sazed returned to camp. The trees here—in the middle of the Eastern Dominance—rose twisted and knotted, but they had shelflike, overlapping branches, thick with brown needles. These provide1d decent shelter, though the ash seemed capable of infiltrating any sanctuary.

Sazed made a simple soup for breakfast. Marsh did not return. Sazed washed his brown travel robes in a nearby stream. Marsh did not return. Sazed sewed a rent in his sleeve, oiled his walking boots, and shaved his head. Marsh did not return. Sazed got out the rubbing he'd made in the Conventical, transcribed a few words, then forced himself to put the sheet away—he worried about blurring the words by opening it too often or by getting ash on it. Better to wait until he could have a proper desk and clean room.

Marsh did not return.

Finally, Sazed left. He couldn't define the sense of urgency that he felt—part excitement to share what he had learned, part desire to see how Vin and the young king Elend Venture were handling events in Luthadel.

Marsh knew the way. He would catch up.

Sazed raised his hand, shading his eyes against the red sunlight, looking down from his hilltop vantage. There was a slight darkness on the horizon, to the east of the main road. He tapped his geography coppermind, seeking out descriptions of the Eastern Dominance.

The knowledge swelled his mind, blessing him with recollection. The darkness was a village named Urbene. He searched through one of his indexes, looking for the right gazetteer. The index was growing fuzzy, its information difficult to remember—which meant that he'd switched it from coppermind to memory and back too many times. Knowledge inside a coppermind would remain pristine, but anything inside his head—even for only a few moments—would decay. He'd have to re-memorize the index later.

He found what he was looking for, and dumped the right memories into his head. The gazetteer listed Urbene as "picturesque," which probably meant that some important nobleman had decided to make his manor there. The listing said that the skaa of Urbene were herdsmen.

Sazed scribbled a note to himself, then redeposited the gazetteer's memories. Reading the note told him what he had just forgotten. Like the index, the gazetteer memories had inevitably decayed slightly during their stay in his head. Fortunately, he had a second set of copperminds hidden back up in Terris, and would use those to pass his knowledge on to another Keeper. His current copperminds were for everyday use. Unapplied knowledge benefited no one.

He shouldered his pack. A visit to the village would do him some good, even if it slowed him down. His stomach agreed with the decision. It was unlikely the peasants would have much in the way of food, but perhaps they would be able to provide something other than broth. Besides, they might have news of events at Luthadel.

He hiked down the short hill, taking the smaller, eastern fork in the road. Once, there had been little travel in the Final Empire. The Lord Ruler had forbidden skaa to leave their indentured lands, and only thieves and rebels had dared disobey. Still, most of the nobility had made their livings by trading, so a village such as this one might be accustomed to visitors.

Sazed began to notice the oddities immediately. Goats roamed the countryside along the road, unwatched. Sazed paused, then dug a coppermind from his pack. He searched through it as he walked. One book on husbandry claimed that herdsmen sometimes left their flocks alone to graze. Yet, the unwatched animals made him nervous. He quickened his pace.

*Just to the south, the skaa starve*, he thought. *Yet here, livestock is so plentiful that nobody can be spare1d to keep it safe from bandits or predators*?

The small village appeared in the distance. Sazed could almost convince himself that the lack of activity—the lack of movement in the streets, the derelict doors and shutters swinging in the breeze—was due to his approach. Perhaps the people were so scared that they were hiding. Or, perhaps they simply were all out. Tending flocks. . ..

Sazed stopped. A shift in the wind brought a telltale scent from the village. The skaa weren't hiding, and they hadn't fled. It was the scent of rotting bodies.

Suddenly urgent, Sazed pulled out a small ring—a scent tinmind—and slipped it on his thumb. The smell on the wind, it didn't seem like that of a slaughter. It was a mustier, dirtier smell. A smell not only of death, but of corruption, unwashed bodies, and waste. He reversed the use of the tinmind, filling it instead of tapping it, and his ability to smell grew very weak—keeping him from gagging.

He continued on, carefully entering the village proper. Like most skaa villages, Urbene was organized simply. It had a group of ten large hovels built in a loose circle with a well at the center. The buildings were wood, and for thatching they used the same needle-bearing branches from the trees he'd seen. Overseers' huts, along with a fine nobleman's manor, stood a little farther up the valley.

If it hadn't been for the smell—and the sense of haunted emptiness—Sazed might have agreed with his gazetteer's description of Urbene. For skaa residences, the hovels looked well maintained, and the village lay in a quiet hollow amid the rising landscape.

It wasn't until he got a little closer that he found the first bodies. They lay scattered around the doorway to the nearest hovel, about a half-dozen of them. Sazed approached carefully, but could quickly see that the corpses were at least several days old. He knelt beside the first one, that of a woman, and could see no visible cause of death. The others were the same.

Nervous, Sazed forced himself to reach up and pull open the door to the hovel. The stench from inside was so strong that he could smell it through his tinmind.

The hovel, like most, was only a single chamber. It was filled with bodies. Most lay wrapped in thin blankets; some sat with backs pressed up against the walls, rotting heads hanging limply from their necks. They had gaunt, nearly fleshless bodies with withered limbs and protruding ribs. Haunted, unseeing eyes sat in desiccated faces.

These people had died of starvation and dehydration.

Sazed stumbled from the hovel, head bowed. He didn't expect to find anything different in the other buildings, but he checked anyway. He saw the same scene repeated again and again. Woundless corpses on the ground outside; many more bodies huddled inside. Flies buzzing about in swarms, covering faces. In several of the buildings he found gnawed human bones at the center of the room.

He stumbled out of the final hovel, breathing deeply through his mouth. Dozens of people, over a hundred total, dead for no obvious reason. What possibly could have caused so many of them to simply sit, hidden in their houses, while they ran out of food and water? How could they have starved when there were beasts running free? And what had killed those that he'd found outside, lying in the ash? They didn't seem as emaciated as the ones inside, though from the level of decomposition, it was difficult to tell.

*I must be mistaken about the starvation*, Sazed told himself. *It must have been a 1plague of some sort, a disease. That is a much more logical explanation*. He searched through his medical coppermind. Surely there were diseases that could strike quickly, leaving their victims weakened. And the survivors must have fled. Leaving behind their loved ones. Not taking any of the animals from their pastures. . ..

Sazed frowned. At that moment, he thought he heard something.

He spun, drawing auditory power from his hearing tinmind. The sounds were there—the sound of breathing, the sound of movement, coming from one of the hovels he'd visited. He dashed forward, throwing open the door, looking again on the sorry dead. The corpses lay where they had been before. Sazed studied them very carefully, this time watching until he found the one whose chest was moving.

*By the forgotten gods*. . .Sazed thought. The man didn't need to work hard to feign death. His hair had fallen out, and his eyes were sunken into his face. Though he didn't look particularly starved, Sazed must have missed seeing him because of his dirty, almost corpselike body.

Sazed stepped toward the man. "I am a friend," he said quietly. The man remained motionless. Sazed frowned as he walked forward and laid a hand on the man's shoulder.

The man's eyes snapped open, and he cried out, jumping to his feet. Dazed and frenzied, he scrambled over corpses, moving to the back of the room. He huddled down, staring at Sazed.

"Please," Sazed said, setting down his pack. "You mustn't be afraid." The only food he had besides broth spices was a few handfuls of meal, but he pulled some out. "I have food."

The man shook his head. "There is no food," he whispered. "We ate it all. Except. . .the food." His eyes darted toward the center of the room. Toward the bones Sazed had noticed earlier. Uncooked, gnawed on, placed in a pile beneath a ragged cloth, as if to hide them.

"I didn't eat the food," the man whispered.

"I know," Sazed said, taking a step forward. "But, there is other food. Outside."

"Can't go outside."

"Why not?"

The man paused, then looked down. "Mist."

Sazed glanced toward the doorway. The sun was nearing the horizon, but wouldn't set for another hour or so. There was no mist. Not now, anyway.

Sazed felt a chill. He slowly turned back toward the man. "Mist. . .during the day?"

The man nodded.

"And it stayed?" Sazed asked. "It didn't go away after a few hours?"

The man shook his head. "Days. Weeks. All mist."

*Lord Ruler*! Sazed thought, then caught himself. It had been a long time since he'd sworn by that creature's name, even in his thoughts.

But for the mist to come during the day, then to stay—if this man were to be believed—for weeks. . .Sazed could imagine the skaa, frightened in their hovels, a thousand years of terror, tradition, and superstition keeping them from venturing outside.

But to remain inside until they starved? Even their fear of the mist, deep-seated though it was, wouldn't have been enough to make them starve themselves to death, would it?

"Why didn't you leave?" Sazed asked quietly.

"Some did," th1e man said, nodding as if to himself. "Jell. You know what happened to him."

Sazed frowned. "Dead?"

"Taken by the mist. Oh, how he shook. Was a bull-headed one, you know. Old Jell. Oh, how he shook. How he writhed when it took him."

Sazed closed his eyes. *The corpses I found outside the doors*.

"Some got away," the man said.

Sazed snapped his eyes open. "What?"

The crazed villager nodded again. "Some got away, you know. They called to us, after leaving the village. Said it was all right. It didn't take them. Don't know why. It killed others, though. Some, it shook to the ground, but they got up later. Some it killed."

"The mist let some survive, but it killed others?"

The man didn't answer. He'd sat down, and now he lay back, staring unfocused at the ceiling.

"Please," Sazed said. "You must answer me. Who did it kill and who did it let pass? What is the connection?"

The man turned toward him. "Time for food," he said, then rose. He wandered over to a corpse, then pulled on an arm, ripping the rotted meat free. It was easy to see why he hadn't starved to death like the others.

Sazed pushed aside nausea, striding across the room and grabbing the man's arm as he raised the near fleshless bone to his lips. The man froze, then looked up at Sazed. "It's not mine!" he yelped, dropping the bone and running to the back of the room.

Sazed stood for a moment. *I must hurry. I must get to Luthadel. There is more wrong with this world than bandits and armies*.

The wild man watched with a feral sort of terror as Sazed picked up his pack, then paused and set it down again. He pulled out his largest pewtermind. He fastened the wide metal bracer to his forearm, then turned and walked toward the villager.

"No!" the man screamed, trying to dash to the side. Sazed tapped the pewtermind, pulling out a burst of strength. He felt his muscles enlarge, his robes growing tight. He snatched the villager as the man ran passed, then held him out, far enough away that the man couldn't do either of them much harm.

Then he carried the man outside of the building.

The man stopped struggling as soon as they emerged into the sunlight. He looked up, as if seeing the sun for the first time. Sazed set him down, then released his pewtermind.

The man knelt, looking up at the sun, then turned to Sazed. "The Lord Ruler. . .why did he abandon us? Why did he go?"

"The Lord Ruler was a tyrant."

The man shook his head. "He loved us. He ruled us. Now that he's gone, the mists can kill us. They hate us."

Then, surprisingly adroit, the man leaped to his feet and scrambled down the pathway out of the village. Sazed took a step forward, but paused. What would he do? Pull the man all the way to Luthadel? There was water in the well and there were animals to eat. Sazed could only hope that the poor wretch would be able to manage.

Sighing, Sazed returned to the hovel and retrieved his pack. On his way out, he paused, then pulled out one of his steelminds. Steel held one of the very most difficult attributes to store up: physical speed. He had spent months filling this particular steelmind in preparation for the possibility that someday he might need to run somewhere very, very quickly.

He put it on now.

*Yes, he was the one who fueled the rumors after that. I could never have done what he himself did, convincing and persuading the world that he was indeed the Hero. I don't know if he himself believed it, but he made others think that he must be the one*.

# 16

VIN RARELY USED HER QUARTERS. Elend had assigned her spacious rooms—which was, perhaps, part of the problem. She'd spent her childhood sleeping in nooks, lairs, or alleys. Having three separate chambers was a bit daunting.

It didn't really matter, however. During her time awake she was with either Elend or the mists. Her rooms existed for her to sleep in. Or, in this case, for her to make a mess in.

She sat on the floor in the center of her main chamber. Elend's steward, concerned that Vin didn't have any furniture, had insisted on decorating her rooms. This morning, Vin had pushed some of this aside, bunching up rugs and chairs on one side so that she could sit on the cool stones with her book.

It was the first real book she had ever owned, though it was just a collection of pages bound loosely at one side. That suited her just fine; the simple binding had made the book that much easier to pull apart.

She sat amid stacks of paper. It was amazing how many pages there were in the book, once she had separated them. Vin sat next to one pile, looking over its contents. She shook her head, then crawled over to another pile. She leafed through the pages, eventually selecting one.

> *Sometimes I wonder if I'm going mad,* the words read. *Perhaps it is due to the pressure of knowing that I must somehow bear the burden of an entire world. Perhaps it is caused by the death I have seen, the friends I have lost. The friends I have been forced to kill.*
>
> *Either way, I sometimes see shadows following me. Dark creatures that I don't understand, nor do I wish to understand. They are, perhaps, some figment of my overtaxed mind*?

Vin sat for a moment, rereading the paragraphs. Then she moved the sheet over to another pile. OreSeur lay on the side of the room, head on paws, eyeing her. "Mistress," he said as she set down the page, "I have been watching you work for the last two hours, and will admit that I am thoroughly confused. What is the point of all this?"

Vin crawled over to another stack of pages. "I thought you didn't care how I spent my time."

"I don't," OreSeur said. "But I do get bored."

"And annoyed, apparently."

"I like to understand what is going on around me."

Vin shrugged, gesturing toward the stacks of paper. "This is the Lord Ruler's logbook. Well, actually, it's not the logbook of the Lord Ruler we knew, but the logbook of the man who *should* have been the Lord Ruler."

"Should have been?" OreSeur asked. "You mean he should have conquered the world, but didn't?"

"No," Vin said. "I mean he should have been the one who took the power at the Well of Ascension. This man, the man who wrote this book1—we don't actually know his name—was some kind of prophesied hero. Or. . .everyone thought he was. Anyway, the man who became the Lord Ruler—Rashek—was this hero's packman. Don't you remember us talking about this, back when you were imitating Renoux?"

OreSeur nodded. "I recall you briefly mentioning it."

"Well, this is the book Kelsier and I found when we infiltrated the Lord Ruler's palace. We thought it was written by the Lord Ruler, but it turns out it was written by the man the Lord Ruler killed, the man whose place he took."

"Yes, Mistress," OreSeur said. "Now, why exactly are you tearing it to pieces?"

"I'm not," Vin said. "I just took off the binding so I could move the pages around. It helps me think."

"I. . .see," OreSeur said. "And, what exactly are you looking for? The Lord Ruler is dead, Mistress. Last I checked, you killed him."

*What am I looking for*? Vin thought, picking up another page. *Ghosts in the mist*.

She read the words on this page slowly.

> *It isn't a shadow*.
>
> *This dark thing that follows me, the thing that only I can see—it isn't really a shadow. It is blackish and translucent, but it doesn't have a shadowlike solid outline. It's insubstantial—wispy and formless. Like it's made out of black fog*.
>
> *Or mist, perhaps*.

Vin lowered the page. *It watched him, too,* she thought. She remembered reading the words over a year before, thinking that the Hero must have started to go mad. With all the pressures on him, who would have been surprised?

Now, however, she thought she understood the nameless logbook author better. She knew he was not the Lord Ruler, and could see him for what he might have been. Uncertain of his place in the world, but forced into important events. Determined to do the best he could. Idealistic, in a way.

And the mist spirit had chased him. What did it mean? What did seeing it imply for her?

She crawled over to another pile of pages. She'd spent the morning scanning through the logbook for clues about the mist creature. However, she was having trouble digging out much beyond these two, familiar passages.

She made piles of pages that mentioned anything strange or supernatural. She made a small pile with pages that referenced the mist spirit. She also had a special pile for references to the Deepness. This last one, ironically, was both the largest and least informative of the group. The logbook author had a habit of mentioning the Deepness, but not saying much about it.

The Deepness was dangerous, that much was clear. It had ravaged the land, slaying thousands. The monster had sown chaos wherever it stepped, bringing destruction and fear, but the armies of mankind had been unable to defeat it. Only the Terris prophecies and the Hero of Ages had offered any hope.

*If only he had been more specific*! Vin thought with frustration, riffling papers. However, the tone of the logbook really was more melancholy than it was informative. It was something that the Hero had written for himself, to stay sane, to let him put his fears and hopes down on paper. Elen1d said he wrote for similar reasons, sometimes. To Vin, it seemed a silly method of dealing with problems.

With a sigh, she turned to the last stack of papers—the one with pages she had yet to study. She lay down on the stone floor and began to read, searching for useful information.

It took time. Not only was she a slow reader, but her mind kept wandering. She'd read the logbook before—and, oddly, hints and phrases from it reminded her of where she'd been at the time. Two years and a world away in Fellise, still recovering from her near death at the hands of a Steel Inquisitor, she'd been forced to spend her days pretending to be Valette Renoux, a young, inexperienced country noblewoman.

Back then, she still hadn't believed in Kelsier's plan to overthrow the Final Empire. She'd stayed with the crew because she valued the strange things they offered her—friendship, trust, and lessons in Allomancy—not because she accepted their goals. She would never have guessed where that would lead her. To balls and parties, to actually growing—just a bit—to become the noblewoman she had pretended to be.

But that had been a farce, a few months of make-believe. She forced her thoughts away from the frilly clothing and the dances. She needed to focus on practical matters.

*And. . .is this practical*? she thought idly, setting a page in one of the stacks. *Studying things I barely comprehend, fearing a threat nobody else even cares to notice*?

She sighed, folding her arms under her chin as she lay on her stomach. What was she really worried about? That the Deepness would return? All she had were a few phantom visions in the mist—things that could, as Elend implied, have easily been fabricated by her overworked mind. More important was another question. Assuming that the Deepness was real, what did she expect to do about it? She was no hero, general, or leader.

*Oh, Kelsier*, she thought, picking up another page. *We could use you now*. Kelsier had been a man beyond convention. . .a man who had somehow been able to defy reality. He'd thought that by giving his life to overthrow the Lord Ruler, he would secure freedom for the skaa. But, what if his sacrifice had opened the way for a greater danger, something so destructive that the Lord Ruler's oppression was a preferable alternative?

She finally finished the page, then placed it in the stack of those that contained no useful information. Then she paused. She couldn't even remember what she'd just read. She sighed, picking the page back up, looking at it again. How did Elend do it? He could study the same books over and over again. But, for Vin, it was hard to—

She paused. *I must assume that I am not mad*, the words said. *I cannot, with any rational sense of confidence, continue my quest if I do not believe this. The thing following me must, therefore, be real*.

She sat up. She only vaguely remembered this section of the logbook. The book was organized like a diary, with sequential—but dateless—entries. It had a tendency to ramble, and the Hero had been fond of droning on about his insecurities. This section had been particularly dry.

But there, in the middle of his complaining, was a tidbit of information.

*I believe that it would kill me, if it could,* the text continued.

> *There is an evil feel to the thing of shadow and fog, and my skin recoils at its touch. Yet, it seems limited in what it can do,*[1] *especially to me*.
>
> *It can affect this world, however. The knife it placed in Fedik's chest proves that much. I'm still not certain which was more traumatic for him—the wound itself, or seeing the thing that did it to him*.
>
> *Rashek whispers that I stabbed Fedik myself, for only Fedik and I can give witness to that night's events. However, I must make a decision. I must determine that I am not mad. The alternative is to admit that it was I who held that knife*.
>
> *Somehow, knowing Rashek's opinion on the matter makes it much easier for me to believe the opposite*.

The next page continued on about Rashek, and the next several entries contained no mention of the mist spirit. However, Vin found even these few paragraphs exciting.

*He made a decision*, she thought. *I have to make the same one*. She'd never worried that she was mad, but she had sensed some logic in Elend's words. Now she rejected them. The mist spirit was not some delusion brought on by a mixture of stress and memories of the logbook. It was real.

That didn't mean the Deepness was returning, nor did it mean that Luthadel was in any sort of supernatural danger. Both, however, were possibilities.

She set this page with the two others that contained concrete information about the mist spirit, then turned back to her studies, determined to pay closer attention to her reading.

The armies were digging in.

Elend watched from atop the wall as his plan, vague though it was, began to take form. Straff was making a defensive perimeter to the north, holding the canal route back a relatively short distance to Urteau, his home city and capital. Cett was digging in to the west of the city, holding the Luth-Davn Canal, which ran back to his cannery in Haverfrex.

A cannery. That was something Elend wished he had in the city. The technology was newer—perhaps fifty years old—but he'd read of it. The scholars had considered its main use that of providing easily carried supplies for soldiers fighting at the fringes of the empire. They hadn't considered stockpiles for sieges—particularly in Luthadel. But, then, who would have?

Even as Elend watched, patrols began to move out from the separate armies. Some moved to watch the boundaries between the two forces, but others moved to secure other canal routes, bridges across the River Channerel, and roads leading away from Luthadel. In a remarkably short time, the city felt completely surrounded. Cut off from the world, and the rest of Elend's small kingdom. No more moving in or out. The armies were counting on disease, starvation, and other weakening factors to bring Elend to his knees.

The siege of Luthadel had begun.

*That's a good thing*, he told himself. *For this plan to work, they have to think me desperate. They have to be so sure that I'm willing to side with them, that they don't consider that I might be working with their enemies, too*.

As Elend watched, he noticed someone climbing up the steps to the wall. Clubs. The general hobbled over to Elend, who had been standing alone. "Congratulations," Clubs said. "Looks like you now have a full-blown siege on your hands."

"Good."

"It'll give us a little breathing room, I guess," Clubs said. Then he eyed Elend with one of his gnarled looks. "You'd better be up to this, kid."

"I know," Elend whispered.

"You've made yourself the focal point," Clubs said. "The Assembly can't break this siege until you meet officially with Straff, and the kings aren't likely to meet with anyone on the crew other than yourself. This is all about you. Useful place for a king to be, I suppose. If he's a good one."

Clubs fell silent. Elend stood, looking out over the separate armies. The words spoken to him by Tindwyl the Terriswoman still bothered him. *You are a fool, Elend Venture. . ..*

So far, neither of the kings had responded to Elend's requests for a meeting—though the crew was sure that they soon would. His enemies would wait, to make Elend sweat a bit. The Assembly had just called another meeting, probably to try and bully him into releasing them from their earlier proposal. Elend had found a convenient reason to skip the meeting.

He looked at Clubs. "And am I a good king, Clubs? In your opinion."

The general glanced at him, and Elend saw a harsh wisdom in his eyes. "I've known worse leaders," he said. "But I've also known a *hell* of a lot better."

Elend nodded slowly. "I want to be good at this, Clubs. Nobody else is going to look after the skaa like they deserve. Cett, Straff. They'd just make slaves of the people again. I. . .I want to be more than my ideas, though. I want to—*need to*—be a man that others can look to."

Clubs shrugged. "My experience has been that the man is usually made by the situation. Kelsier was a selfish dandy until the Pits nearly broke him." He glanced at Elend. "Will this siege be *your* Pits of Hathsin, Elend Venture?"

"I don't know," he said honestly.

"Then we'll have to wait and see, I guess. For now, someone wants to speak with you." He turned, nodding down toward the street some forty feet below, where a tall, feminine figure stood in colorful Terris robes.

"She told me to send you down," Clubs said. He paused, then glanced at Elend. "It isn't often you meet someone who feels like they can order me around. And a Terriswoman at that. I thought those Terris were all docile and kindly."

Elend smiled. "I guess Sazed spoiled us."

Clubs snorted. "So much for a thousand years of breeding, eh?"

Elend nodded.

"You sure she's safe?" Clubs asked.

"Yes," Elend said. "Her story checks out—Vin brought in several of the Terris people from the city, and they knew and recognized Tindwyl. She's apparently a fairly important person back in her homeland."

Plus, she had performed Feruchemy for him, growing stronger to free her hands. That meant she wasn't a kandra. All of it together meant that she was trustworthy enough; even Vin admitted that, even if she continued to dislike the Terriswoman.

Clubs nodded to him, and Elend took a deep breath. Then he walked down the stairs to meet Tindwyl for another round of lessons.

"Today, we will do something about your clothing," Tindwyl said, closing the door to Elend's study. A plump seamstress with bowl-cut white hair waited insi1de, standing respectfully with a group of youthful assistants.

Elend glanced down at his clothing. It actually wasn't bad. The suit coat and vest fit fairly well. The trousers weren't as stiff as those favored by imperial nobility, but he was the king now; shouldn't he be able to set the trends?

"I don't see what's wrong with it," he said. He held up a hand as Tindwyl began to speak. "I know it's not quite as formal as what other men like to wear, but it suits me."

"It's disgraceful," Tindwyl said.

"Now, I hardly see—"

"Don't argue with me."

"But, see, the other day you said that—"

"Kings don't argue, Elend Venture," Tindwyl said firmly. "They *command*. And, part of your ability to command comes from your bearing. Slovenly clothing invites other slovenly habits—such as your posture, which I've already mentioned, I believe."

Elend sighed, rolling his eyes as Tindwyl snapped her fingers. The seamstress and her assistants started unpacking a pair of large trunks.

"This isn't necessary," Elend said. "I already have some suits that fit more snugly; I wear them on formal occasions."

"You're not going to wear suits anymore," Tindwyl said.

"Excuse me?"

Tindwyl eyed him with a commanding stare, and Elend sighed.

"Explain yourself!" he said, trying to sound commanding.

Tindwyl nodded. "You have maintained the dress code preferred by the nobility sanctioned by the Final Emperor. In some respects, this was a good idea—it gave you a connection to the former government, and made you seem less of a deviant. Now, however, you are in a different position. Your people are in danger, and the time for simple diplomacy is over. You are at war. Your dress should reflect that."

The seamstress selected a particular costume, then brought it over to Elend while the assistants set up a changing screen.

Elend hesitantly accepted the costume. It was stiff and white, and the front of the jacket appeared to button all the way up to a rigid collar. All and all, it looked like. . .

"A uniform," he said, frowning.

"Indeed," Tindwyl said. "You want your people to believe that you can protect them? Well, a king isn't simply a lawmaker—he's a general. It is time you began to act like you deserve your title, Elend Venture."

"I'm no warrior," Elend said. "This uniform is a lie."

"The first point we will soon change," Tindwyl said. "The second is not true. You command the armies of the Central Dominance. That makes you a military man whether or not you know how to swing a sword. Now, go change."

Elend acceded with a shrug. He walked around the changing screen, pushed aside a stack of books to make room, then began to change. The white trousers fit snugly and fell straight around the calves. While there was a shirt, it was completely obscured by the large, stiff jacket—which had military shoulder fittings. It had an array of buttons—all of which, he noticed, were wood instead of metal—as well as a strange shieldlike design over the right breast. It seemed to have some sort of arrow, or perhaps spear, emblazoned in it.

Stiffne1ss, cut, and design considered, Elend was surprised how well the uniform fit. "It's sized quite well," he noted, putting on the belt, then pulling down the bottom of the jacket, which came all the way to his hips.

"We got your measurements from your tailor," Tindwyl said.

Elend stepped around the changing screen, and several assistants approached. One politely motioned for him to step into a pair of shiny black boots, and the other attached a white cape to fastenings at his shoulders. The final assistant handed him a polished hardwood dueling cane and sheath. Elend hooked it onto the belt, then pulled it through a slit in the jacket so it hung outside; that much, at least, he had done before.

"Good," Tindwyl said, looking him up and down. "Once you learn to stand up straight, that will be a decent improvement. Now, sit."

Elend opened his mouth to object, but thought better of it. He sat down, and an assistant approached to attach a sheet around his shoulders. She then pulled out a pair of shears.

"Now, wait," Elend said. "I see where this is going."

"Then voice an objection," Tindwyl said. "Don't be vague!"

"All right, then," Elend said. "I like my hair."

"Short hair is easier to care for than long hair," Tindwyl said. "And you have proven that you cannot be trusted in the area of personal grooming."

"You aren't cutting my hair," Elend said firmly.

Tindwyl paused, then nodded. The apprentice backed away, and Elend stood, pulling off the sheet. The seamstress produced a large mirror, and Elend walked forward to inspect himself.

And froze.

The difference was surprising. All his life, he'd seen himself as a scholar and socialite, but also as just a bit of a fool. He was Elend—the friendly, comfortable man with the funny ideas. Easy to dismiss, perhaps, but difficult to hate.

The man he saw now was no dandy of the court. He was a serious man—a formal man. A man to be taken seriously. The uniform made him want to stand up straighter, to rest one hand on the dueling cane. His hair—slightly curled, long on the top and sides, and blown loose by the wind atop the city wall—didn't fit.

Elend turned. "All right," he said. "Cut it."

Tindwyl smiled, then nodded for him to sit. He did so, waiting quietly while the assistant worked. When he stood again, his head matched the suit. It wasn't extremely short, not like Ham's hair, but it was neat and precise. One of the assistants approached and handed him a loop of silver-painted wood. He turned to Tindwyl, frowning.

"A crown?" he asked.

"Nothing ostentatious," Tindwyl said. "This is a more subtle era than some of those gone by. The crown isn't a symbol of your wealth, but of your authority. You will wear it from now on, whether you are in private or in public."

"The Lord Ruler didn't wear a crown."

"The Lord Ruler didn't need to remind people that he was in charge," Tindwyl said.

Elend paused, then slipped on the crown. It bore no gemstones or ornamentation; it was just a simple coronet. As he might have expected, it fit perfectly.

He turned back toward Tindwyl, who waved for the seamstress to pack up and leave.1 "You have six uniforms like this one waiting for you in your rooms," Tindwyl said. "Until this siege is over, you will wear nothing else. If you want variety, change the color of the cape."

Elend nodded. Behind him, the seamstress and her assistants slipped out the door. "Thank you," he told Tindwyl. "I was hesitant at first, but you are right. This makes a difference."

"Enough of one to deceive people for now, at least," Tindwyl said.

"Deceive people?"

"Of course. You didn't think that this was it, did you?"

"Well. . ."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "A few lessons, and you think you're through? We've barely begun. You are still a fool, Elend Venture—you just don't look like one anymore. Hopefully, our charade will begin reversing some of the damage you've done to your reputation. However, it is going to take a lot more training before I'll actually trust you to interact with people and not embarrass yourself."

Elend flushed. "What do you—" He paused. "Tell me what you plan to teach me, then."

"Well, you need to learn how to walk, for one thing."

"Something's wrong with the way I walk?"

"By the forgotten gods, yes!" Tindwyl said, sounding amused, though no smile marred her lips. "And your speech patterns still need work. Beyond that, of course, there is your inability to handle weapons."

"I've had some training," Elend said. "Ask Vin—I rescued her from the Lord Ruler's palace the night of the Collapse!"

"I know," Tindwyl said. "And, from what I've heard, it was a miracle you survived. Fortunately, the girl was there to do the actual fighting. You apparently rely on her quite a bit for that sort of thing."

"She's Mistborn."

"That is no excuse for your slovenly lack of skill," Tindwyl said. "You cannot always rely on your woman to protect you. Not only is it embarrassing, but your people—your soldiers—will expect you to be able to fight with them. I doubt you will ever be the type of leader who can lead a charge against the enemy, but you should at least be able to handle yourself if your position gets attacked."

"So, you want me to begin sparring with Vin and Ham during their training sessions?"

"Goodness, no! Can't you imagine how terrible it would be for morale if the men saw you being beaten up in public?" Tindwyl shook her head. "No, we'll have you trained discreetly by a dueling master. Given a few months, we should have you competent with the cane and the sword. Hopefully, this little siege of yours will last that long before the fighting starts."

Elend flushed again. "You keep talking down to me. It's like I'm not even king in your eyes—like you see me as some kind of placeholder."

Tindwyl didn't answer, but her eyes glinted with satisfaction. *You said it, not I*, her expression seemed to say.

Elend flushed more deeply.

"You can, perhaps, learn to be a king, Elend Venture," Tindwyl said. "Until then, you'll just have to learn to fake it."

Elend's angry response was cut off by a knock at the door. Elend gritted his teeth, turning. "Come in."

The door swung open. "There's news," Captain 1Demoux said, his youthful face excited as he entered. "I—" He froze.

Elend cocked his head. "Yes?"

"I. . .uh. . ." Demoux paused, looked Elend over again before continuing. "Ham sent me, Your Majesty. He says that a messenger from one of the kings has arrived."

"Really?" Elend said. "From Lord Cett?"

"No, Your Majesty. The messenger is from your father."

Elend frowned. "Well, tell Ham I'll be there in a moment."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Demoux said, retreating. "Uh, I like the new uniform, Your Majesty."

"Thank you, Demoux," Elend said. "Do you, by chance, know where Lady Vin is? I haven't seen her all day."

"I think she's in her quarters, Your Majesty."

*Her quarters? She never stays there. Is she sick*?

"Do you want me to summon her?" Demoux asked.

"No, thank you," Elend said. "I'll get her. Tell Ham to make the messenger comfortable."

Demoux nodded, then withdrew.

Elend turned to Tindwyl, who was smiling to herself with a look of satisfaction. Elend brushed by her, walking over to grab his notebook. "I'm going to learn to do more than just 'fake' being king, Tindwyl."

"We'll see."

Elend shot a glance at the middle-aged Terriswoman in her robes and jewelry.

"Practice expressions like that one," Tindwyl noted, "and you just might do it."

"Is that all it is, then?" Elend asked. "Expressions and costumes? Is that what makes a king?"

"Of course not."

Elend stopped by the door, turning back. "Then, what does? What do *you* think makes a man a good king, Tindwyl of Terris?"

"Trust," Tindwyl said, looking him in the eyes. "A good king is one who is trusted by his people—and one who deserves that trust."

Elend paused, then nodded. *Good answer*, he acknowledged, then pulled open the door and rushed out to find Vin.

*If only the Terris religion, and belief in the Anticipation, hadn't spread beyond our people*.

# 17

THE PILES OF PAPER SEEMED to multiply as Vin found more and more ideas in the logbook that she wanted to isolate and remember. What were the prophecies about the Hero of Ages? How did the logbook author know where to go, and what did he think he'd have to do when he got there?

Eventually, lying amid the mess—overlapping piles turned in odd directions to keep them separate—Vin acknowledged a distasteful fact. She was going to have to take notes.

With a sigh, she rose and crossed the room, stepping carefully over several stacks and approaching the room's desk. She'd never used it before;

in fact, she'd complained about it to Elend. What need did she have of a writing desk?

So she'd thought. She selected a pen, then pulled out a little jar of ink, remembering the days when Reen had taught her to write. He'd quickly grown frustrated with her scratchings, complaining about the co1st of ink and paper. He'd taught her to read so that she could decipher contracts and imitate a noblewoman, but he'd thought that writing was less useful. In general, Vin shared this opinion.

Apparently, however, writing had uses even if one wasn't a scribe. Elend was always scribbling notes and memos to himself; she'd often been impressed by how quickly he could write. How did he make the letters come so easily?

She grabbed a couple of blank sheets of paper and walked back over to her sorted piles. She sat down with crossed legs and unscrewed the top of the ink bottle.

"Mistress," OreSeur noted, still lying with his paws before him, "you do realize that you just left the writing desk behind to sit on the floor."

Vin looked up. "And?"

"The purpose of a writing desk is, well, writing."

"But my papers are all over here."

"Papers can be moved, I believe. If they prove too heavy, you could always burn pewter to give yourself more strength."

Vin eyed his amused face as she inked the nib of her pen. *Well, at least he's displaying something other than his dislike of me*. "The floor is more comfortable."

"If you say so, Mistress, I will believe it to be true."

She paused, trying to determine if he was still mocking her or not. *Blasted dog's face*, she thought. *Too hard to read*.

With a sigh, she leaned down and began to write out the first word. She had to make each line precisely so that the ink didn't smudge, and she had to pause often to sound out words and find the right letters. She'd barely written a couple of sentences before a knock came at her door. She looked up with a frown. Who was bothering her?

"Come in," she called.

She heard a door open in the other room, and Elend's voice called out. "Vin?"

"In here," she said, turning back to her writing. "Why did you knock?"

"Well, you might have been changing," he said, entering.

"So?" Vin asked.

Elend chuckled. "Two years, and privacy is still a strange concept to you."

Vin looked up. "Well, I did—"

For just the briefest flash of a moment, she thought he was someone else. Her instincts kicked in before her brain, and she reflexively dropped the pen, jumping up and flaring pewter.

Then she stopped.

"That much of a change, eh?" Elend asked, holding out his arms so she could get a better look at his costume.

Vin put a hand to her chest, so shocked that she stepped right on one of her stacks. It was Elend, but it wasn't. The brilliant white costume, with its sharp lines and firm figure, looked so different from his normal loose jacket and trousers. He seemed more commanding. More regal.

"You cut your hair," she said, walking around him slowly, studying the costume.

"Tindwyl's idea," he said. "What do you think?"

"Less for people to grab on to in a fight," Vin said.

Elend smiled. "Is that all you think about?"

"No,"1 Vin said absently, reaching up to tug his cape. It came free easily, and she nodded approvingly. Mistcloaks were the same; Elend wouldn't have to worry about someone grabbing his cape in a fight.

She stepped back, arms folded. "Does this mean I can cut my hair, too?"

Elend paused just briefly. "You're always free to do what you want, Vin. But, I kind of think it's pretty longer."

*It stays, then*.

"Anyway," Elend said. "You approve?"

"Definitely," Vin said. "You look like a king." Though, she suspected a part of her would miss the tangle-haired, disheveled Elend. There had been something. . .endearing about that mixture of earnest competence and distracted inattention.

"Good," Elend said. "Because I think we're going to need the advantage. A messenger just. . ." He trailed off, looking over her stacks of paper. "Vin? Were you doing *research*?"

Vin flushed. "I was just looking through the logbook, trying to find references to the Deepness."

"You were!" Elend stepped forward excitedly. To her chagrin, he quickly located the paper with her fledgling notes on it. He held the paper up, then looked over at her. "Did you write this?"

"Yes," she said.

"Your penmanship is beautiful," he said, sounding a bit surprised. "Why didn't you tell me you could write like this?"

"Didn't you say something about a messenger?"

Elend put the sheet back down, looking oddly like a proud parent. "Right. A messenger from my father's army has arrived. I'm making him wait for a bit—it didn't seem wise to appear too eager. But, we should probably go meet with him."

Vin nodded, waving to OreSeur. The kandra rose and padded to her side, and the three of them left her quarters.

That was one nice thing about books and notes. They could always wait for another time.

They found the messenger waiting in the third-floor Venture atrium. Vin and Elend walked in, and she stopped immediately.

It was *him*. The Watcher.

Elend stepped forward to meet the man, and Vin grabbed his arm. "Wait," she hissed quietly.

Elend turned, confused.

*If that man has atium*, Vin thought with a stab of panic, *Elend is dead. We're all dead*.

The Watcher stood quietly. He didn't look much like a messenger or courier. He wore all black, even a pair of black gloves. He wore trousers and a silken shirt, with no cloak or cape. She remembered that face. It was him.

*But*. . .she thought, *if he'd wanted to kill Elend, he could have done so already*. The thought frightened her, yet she had to admit it was true.

"What?" Elend asked, standing in the doorway with her.

"Be careful," she whispered. "This is no simple messenger. That man is Mistborn."

Elend paused, frowning. He turned back toward the Watcher, who stood quietly, clasping his hands behind his back, looking confident. Yes, he was Mistborn; only a man such as he could walk into an enemy palace, completely surrounded by guards, and not be the slightest bit unsettled.

"All right," Elend said, finally stepping into the room. "Straff's man. You bring a message for me?"

"Not just a message, Your Majesty," the Watcher said. "My name is Zane, and I am something of an. . .ambassador. Your father was very pleased to receive your invitation for an alliance. He's glad that you are finally seeing reason."

Vin studied the Watcher, this "Zane." What was his game? Why come himself? Why reveal who he was?

Elend nodded, keeping a distance from Zane. "Two armies," Elend said, "camped outside my door. . .well, that's not the kind of thing I can ignore. I'd like to meet with my father and discuss possibilities for the future."

"I think he would enjoy that," Zane said. "It has been some time since he saw you, and he has long regretted your falling-out. You are, after all, his only son."

"It's been hard on both of us," Elend said. "Perhaps we could set up a tent in which to meet outside the city?"

"I'm afraid that won't be possible," Zane said. "His Majesty rightly fears assassins. If you wish to speak with him, he'd be happy to host you at his tent in the Venture camp."

Elend frowned. "Now, I don't think that makes much sense. If he fears assassins, shouldn't I?"

"I'm certain he could protect you in his own camp, Your Majesty," Zane said. "You have nothing to fear from Cett's assassins there."

"I. . .see," Elend said.

"I'm afraid that His Majesty was quite firm on this point," Zane said. "You are the one who is eager for an alliance—if you wish a meeting, you will have to come to him."

Elend glanced at Vin. She continued to watch Zane. The man met her eyes, and spoke. "I have heard reports of the beautiful Mistborn who accompanies the Venture heir. She who slew the Lord Ruler, and was trained by the Survivor himself."

There was silence in the room for a moment.

Elend finally spoke. "Tell my father that I will consider his offer."

Zane finally turned away from Vin. "His Majesty was hoping for us to set a date and time, Your Majesty."

"I will send another message when I have made my decision," Elend said.

"Very well," Zane said, bowing slightly, though he used the move to catch Vin's eyes once again. Then he nodded once to Elend, and let the guards escort him away.

In the cold mist of early evening, Vin waited on the short wall of Keep Venture, OreSeur sitting at her side.

The mists were quiet. Her thoughts were far less serene.

*Who else would he work for*? she thought. *Of course he's one of Straff's men*.

That explained many things. It had been quite a while since their last encounter; Vin had begun to think that she wouldn't see the Watcher again.

Would they spar again, then? Vin tried to suppress her eagerness, tried to tell herself that she simply wanted to find this Watcher because of the threat he posed. But, the thrill of another fight in the mists—another chance to test her abilities against a Mistborn—made her tense with anticipation.

She didn't know him, and she certainly didn't trust him. That only made the prospect of a fight a1ll the more exciting.

"Why are we waiting here, Mistress?" OreSeur asked.

"We're just on patrol," Vin said. "Watching for assassins or spies. Just like every night."

"Do you command me to believe you, Mistress?"

Vin shot him a flat stare. "Believe as you wish, kandra."

"Very well," OreSeur said. "Why did you not tell the king that you've been sparring with this Zane?"

Vin turned back toward the dark mists. "Assassins and Allomancers are my concern, not Elend's. No need to worry him yet—he has enough troubles at the moment."

OreSeur sat back on his haunches. "I see."

"You don't believe I'm right?"

"I believe as I wish," OreSeur said. "Isn't that what you just commanded me, Mistress?"

"Whatever," Vin said. Her bronze was on, and she had to try very hard not to think about the mist spirit. She could feel it waiting in the darkness to her right. She didn't look toward it.

*The logbook never did mention what became of that spirit. It nearly killed one of the Hero's companions. After that, there was barely a mention of it.*

*Problems for another night*, she thought as another source of Allomancy appeared to her bronze senses. A stronger, more familiar source.

Zane.

Vin hopped up onto the battlements, nodded farewell to OreSeur, then jumped out into the night.

Mist twisted in the sky, different breezes forming silent streams of white, like rivers in the air. Vin skimmed them, burst through them, and rode them like a bouncing stone cast upon the waters. She quickly reached the place where she and Zane had last parted, the lonely abandoned street.

He waited in the center, still wearing black. Vin dropped to the cobbles before him in a flurry of mistcloak tassels. She stood up straight.

*He never wears a cloak. Why is that*?

The two stood opposite one another for a few silent moments. Zane had to know of her questions, but he offered no introduction, greeting, or explanation. Eventually, he reached into a pocket and pulled out a coin. He tossed it to the street between them, and it bounced—metal ringing against stone—and came to a stop.

He jumped into the air. Vin did likewise, both Pushing against the coin. Their separate weights nearly canceled each other out, and they shot up and back, like the two arms of a "V."

Zane spun, throwing a coin behind him. It slammed against the side of a building and he Pushed, throwing himself toward Vin. Suddenly, she felt a force slam against her coin pouch, threatening to toss her back down to the ground.

*What is the game tonight, Zane*? she thought even as she yanked the tie on her pouch, dropping it free from her belt. She Pushed against it, and it shot downward, forced by her weight. When it hit the ground, Vin had the better upward force: she was Pushing against the pouch from directly above, while Zane was only pushing from the side. Vin lurched upward, streaking past Zane in the cool night air, then threw her weight against the coins in his own pocket.

Zane began to drop. However, he grabbed the coins—keeping them from ripping free—and Pushed d1own on her pouch. He froze in the air—Vin Pushing him from above, his own Push forcing him upward. And, because he stopped, Vin's Push suddenly threw her backward.

Vin let go of Zane and allowed herself to drop. Zane, however, didn't let himself fall. He Pushed himself back up into the air, then began to bound away, never letting his feet touch rooftops or cobblestones.

*He tried to force me to the ground*, Vin thought. *First one to fall loses, is that it*? Still tumbling, Vin spun herself in the air. She retrieved her coin pouch with a careful Pull, then threw it down toward the ground and Pushed herself upward.

She Pulled the pouch back into her hand even as she flew, then jumped after Zane, Pushing recklessly through the night, trying to catch up. In the darkness, Luthadel seemed cleaner than it did during the day. She couldn't see the ash-stained buildings, the dark refineries, the haze of smoke from the forges. Around her, the empty keeps of the old high nobility watched like silent monoliths. Some of the majestic buildings had been given to lesser nobles, and others had become government buildings. The rest—after being plundered at Elend's command—lay unused, their stained-glass windows dark, their vaultings, statues, and murals ignored.

Vin wasn't certain if Zane purposely headed to Keep Hasting, or if she simply caught up to him there. Either way, the enormous structure loomed as Zane noticed her proximity and turned, throwing a handful of coins at her.

Vin Pushed against them tentatively. Sure enough, as soon as she touched them, Zane flared steel and Pushed harder. If she'd been Pushing hard, the force of his attack would have thrown her backward. As it was, she was able to deflect the coins to her sides.

Zane immediately Pushed against her coin pouch again, throwing himself upward along one of Keep Hasting's walls. Vin was ready for this move as well. Flaring pewter, she grabbed the pouch in a two-handed grip and ripped it in half.

Coins sprayed beneath her, shooting toward the ground under the force of Zane's Push. She selected one and Pushed herself, gaining lift as soon as it hit the ground. She spun, facing upward, her tin-enhanced ears hearing a shower of metal hit the stones far below. She'd still have access to the coins, but she didn't have to carry them on her body.

She shot up toward Zane, one of the keep's outer towers looming in the mists to her left. Keep Hasting was one of the finest in the city. It had a large tower at the center—tall, imposing, wide—with a ballroom at the very top. It also had six smaller towers rising equidistant around the central structure, each one connected to it by a thick wall. It was an elegant, majestic building. Somehow, she suspected that Zane had sought it out for that reason.

Vin watched him now, his Push losing power as he got too far from the coin anchor below. He spun directly above her, a dark figure against a shifting sky of mist, still well below the top of the wall. Vin yanked sharply on several coins below, Pulling them into the air in case she needed them.

Zane plummeted toward her. Vin reflexively Pushed against the coins in his pocket, then realized that was probably what he'd wanted: it gave him lift while forcing her down. She let go as she fell, and she soon passed the group of coins she'd Pulled into the air. She Pulled on one, bringing it into her hand, then Pushed on another, sending it sideways into the wall.

Vin shot to the side. Zane whooshed by her in the air, his passing churning the mists. He soon bobbed back up—1probably using a coin from below—and flung a double handful of coins straight at her.

Vin spun, again deflecting the coins. They shot around her, and she heard several *pling* against something in the mists behind her. Another wall. She and Zane were sparring between a pair of the keep's outer towers; there was an angled wall to either side of them, with the central tower just a short distance in front of them. They were fighting near the tip of an open-bottomed triangle of stone walls.

Zane shot toward her. Vin reached out to throw her weight against him, but realized with a start that he was no longer carrying any coins. He was Pushing on something behind him, though—the same coin Vin had slammed against the wall with her weight. She Pushed herself upward, trying to get out of the way, but he angled upward as well.

Zane crashed into her, and they began to fall. As they spun together, Zane grabbed her by the upper arms, holding his face close to hers. He didn't seem angry, or even very forceful.

He just seemed calm.

"This is what we are, Vin," he said quietly. Wind and mist whipped around them as they fell, the tassels of Vin's mistcloak writhing in the air around Zane. "Why do you play their games? Why do you let them control you?"

Vin placed her hand lightly against Zane's chest, then Pushed on the coin that had been in her palm. The force of the Push lurched her free of his grip, flipping him up and backward. She caught herself just a few feet from the ground, Pushing against fallen coins, throwing herself upward again.

She passed Zane in the night, and saw a smile on his face as he fell. Vin reached downward, locking on to the blue lines extending toward the ground far below, then flared iron and Pulled against all of them at once. Blue lines zipped around her, the coins rising and rising shooting past the surprised Zane.

She Pulled a few choice coins into her hands. *Let's see if you can stay in the air now,* Vin thought with a smile, Pushing outward, spraying the other coins away into the night. Zane continued to fall.

Vin began to fall as well. She threw a coin to each side, then Pushed. The coins shot into the mists, flying toward the stone walls to either side. Coins slapped against stone, and Vin lurched to a halt in the air.

She Pushed hard, holding herself in place, anticipating a Pull from below. *If he pulls, I Pull, too,* she thought. *We both fall, and I keep the coins between us in the air. He'll hit the ground first*.

A coin shot past her in the air.

*What! Where did he get that*! She'd been sure that she'd Pushed away every coin below.

The coin arced upward, through the mists, trailing a blue line visible to her Allomancer's eyes. It crested the top of the wall to her right. Vin glanced down just in time to see Zane slow, then lurch upward—Pulling on the coin that was now held in place atop the wall by the stone railing.

He passed her with a self-satisfied look on his face.

*Show-off*.

Vin let go of the coin to her left while still Pushing to her right. She lurched to the left, nearly colliding with the wall before she threw another coin at it. She Pushed on this one, throwing herself upward and to the right. Another coin sent her back upward to the left, and she continued to bounce between the walls, back and forth, until she c1rested the top.

She smiled as she twisted in the air. Zane—hovering in the air above the wall's top—nodded appreciatively as she passed. She noticed that he'd grabbed a few of her discarded coins.

*Time for a little attack myself,* Vin thought.

She slammed a Push against the coins in Zane's hand, and they shot her upward. However, Zane was still Pushing against the coin on the wall top below, and so he didn't fall. Instead he hung in the air between the two forces—his own Push forcing him upward, Vin's Push forcing him downward.

Vin heard him grunt in exertion, and she Pushed harder. She was so focused, however, that she barely saw him open his other hand and Push a coin up toward her. She reached out to Push against it, but fortunately his aim was off, and the coin missed her by a few inches.

Or perhaps it didn't. Immediately, the coin zipped back downward and hit her in the back. Zane Pulled on it forcefully, and the bit of metal dug into Vin's skin. She gasped, flaring pewter to keep the coin from cutting through her.

Zane didn't relent. Vin gritted her teeth, but he weighed much more than she did. She inched down toward him in the night, her Push straining to keep the two of them apart, the coin digging painfully into her back.

*Never get into a raw Pushing match, Vin,* Kelsier had warned her. *You don't weigh enough—you'll lose every time*.

She stopped Pushing on the coin in Zane's hand. Immediately, she fell, Pulled by the coin on her back. She Pushed on it slightly, giving herself a little leverage, then threw her final coin to the side. It hit at the last moment, and Vin's Push scooted her out from between Zane and his coin.

Zane's coin snapped him in the chest, and he grunted: he had obviously been trying to get Vin to collide with him again. Vin smiled, then Pulled against the coin in Zane's hand.

*Give him what he wants, I guess*.

He turned just in time to see her slam feet-first into him. Vin spun, feeling him crumple beneath her. She exulted in the victory, spinning in the air above the wall walk. Then she noticed something: several faint lines of blue disappearing into the distance. Zane had pushed all of their coins away.

Desperately, Vin grabbed one of the coins and Pulled it back. Too late, however. She searched frantically for a closer source of metal, but all was stone or wood. Disoriented, she hit the stone wall walk, tumbling amid her mistcloak until she came to a halt beside the wall's stone railing.

She shook her head and flared tin, clearing her vision with a flash of pain and other senses. Surely Zane hadn't fared better. He must have fallen as—

Zane hung a few feet away. He'd found a coin—Vin couldn't fathom how—and was Pushing against it below him. However, he didn't shoot away. He hovered above the wall top, just a few feet in the air, still in a half tumble from Vin's kick.

As Vin watched, Zane rotated slowly in the air, hand outstretched beneath him, twisting like a skilled acrobat on a pole. There was a look of intense concentration on his face, and his muscles—all of them, arms, face, chest—were taut. He turned in the air until he was facing her.

Vin watched with awe. It was possible to Push just slightly against a coin, regulating the amount of force with which one was thrown backward. It was incredibly difficult,1 however—so difficult that even Kelsier had struggled with it. Most of the time, Mistborn simply used short bursts. When Vin fell, for instance, she slowed herself by throwing a coin and Pushing against it briefly—but powerfully—to counteract her momentum.

She'd never seen an Allomancer with as much control as Zane. His ability to push slightly against that coin would be of little use in a fight; it obviously took too much concentration. Yet, there was a grace to it, a beauty to his movements that implied something Vin herself had felt.

Allomancy wasn't just about fighting and killing. It was about skill and grace. It was something beautiful.

Zane rotated until he was upright, standing in a gentleman's posture. Then he dropped to the wall walk, his feet slapping quietly against the stones. He regarded Vin—who still lay on the stones—with a look that lacked contempt.

"You are very skilled," he said. "And quite powerful."

He was tall, impressive. *Like. . .Kelsier*. "Why did you come to the palace today?" she asked, climbing to her feet.

"To see how they treated you. Tell me, Vin. What is it about Mistborn that makes us—despite our powers—so willing to act as slaves to others?"

"Slaves?" Vin said. "I'm no slave."

Zane shook his head. "They use you, Vin."

"Sometimes it's good to be useful."

"Those words are spoken of insecurity."

Vin paused; then she eyed him. "Where did you get that coin, at the end? There were none nearby."

Zane smiled, then opened his mouth and pulled out a coin. He dropped it to the stones with a *pling*. Vin opened her eyes wide. *Metal inside a person's body can't be affected by another Allomancer. . .. That's such an easy trick! Why didn't I think of it*?

*Why didn't Kelsier think of it*?

Zane shook his head. "We don't belong with them, Vin. We don't belong in *their* world. We belong here, in the mists."

"I belong with those who love me," Vin said.

"Love you?" Zane asked quietly. "Tell me. Do they understand you, Vin? *Can* they understand you? And, can a man love something he doesn't understand?"

He watched her for a moment. When she didn't respond, he nodded to her slightly, then Pushed against the coin he had dropped moments before, throwing himself back into the mists.

Vin let him go. His words held more weight than he probably understood. *We don't belong in their world*. . .. He couldn't know that she'd been pondering her place, wondering whether she was noblewoman, assassin, or something else.

Zane's words, then, meant something important. He felt himself to be an outsider. A little like herself. It was a weakness in him, certainly. Perhaps she could turn him against Straff—his willingness to spar with her, his willingness to reveal himself, hinted at that much.

She breathed in deeply of the cool, mist air, her heart still beating quickly from the exchange. She felt tired, yet alive, from fighting someone who might actually be better than she was. Standing in the mists atop the wall of an abandoned keep, she decided something.

She had to keep sparring with Zane.

*If only the Deepness hadn't come when it did, providing a threat that drove men to desperation both in action and belief.*

# 18

"KILL HIM," GOD WHISPERED.

Zane hung quietly in the mists, looking through Elend Venture's open balcony doors. The mists swirled around him, obscuring him from the king's view.

"You should kill him," God said again.

In a way, Zane hated Elend, though he had never met the man before today. Elend was everything that Zane should have been. Favored. Privileged. Pampered. He was Zane's enemy, a block in the road to domination, the thing that was keeping Straff—and therefore Zane—from ruling the Central Dominance.

But he was also Zane's brother.

Zane let himself drop through the mists, falling silently to the ground outside Keep Venture. He Pulled his anchors up into his hand—three small bars he had been pushing on to hold himself in place. Vin would be returning soon, and he didn't want to be near the keep when she did. She had a strange ability to know where he was; her senses were far more keen than any Allomancer he had ever known or fought. Of course, she had been trained by the Survivor himself.

*I would have liked to have known him*, Zane thought as he moved quietly across the courtyard. *He was a man who understood the power of being Mistborn. A man who didn't let others control him*.

*A man who did what had to be done, no matter how ruthless it seemed*. Or so the rumors said.

Zane paused beside the outer keep wall, below a buttress. He stooped, removing a cobblestone, and found the message left there by his spy inside Elend's palace. Zane retrieved it, replaced the cobblestone, then dropped a coin and launched himself out into the night.

Zane did not slink. Nor did he creep, skulk, or cower. In fact, he didn't even like to hide.

So, he approached the Venture army camp with a determined stride. It seemed to him that Mistborn spent too much of their existence hiding. True, anonymity offered some limited freedom. However, his experience had been that it bound them more than it freed them. It let them be controlled, and it let society pretend that they didn't exist.

Zane strode toward a guard post, where two soldiers sat beside a large fire. He shook his head; they were virtually useless, blinded by the firelight.

Normal men feared the mists, and that made them less valuable. That wasn't arrogance; it was a simple fact. Allomancers were more useful, and therefore more valuable, than normal men. That was why Zane had Tineyes watching in the darkness as well. These regular soldiers were more a formality than anything else.

"Kill them," God commanded as Zane walked up to the guard post. Zane ignored the voice, though it was growing more and more difficult to do so.

"Halt!" one of the guards said, lowering a spear. "Who is that?"

Zane Pushed the spear offhandedly, flipping up the tip. "Who else would it be?" he snapped, walking into the firelight.

"Lord Zane!" the other soldier said.

"Summon the king," Zane said, passing the guard post. "Tell him to meet me in the command tent."

"But, 1my lord," the guard said. "The hour is late. His Majesty is probably. . ."

Zane turned, giving the guard a flat stare. The mists swirled between them. Zane didn't even have to use emotional Allomancy on the soldier; the man simply saluted, then rushed off into the night to do as commanded.

Zane strode through the camp. He wore no uniform or mistcloak, but soldiers stopped and saluted as he passed. *This* was the way it should be. They knew him, knew what he was, knew to respect him.

And yet, a part of him acknowledged that if Straff hadn't kept his bastard son hidden, Zane might not be the powerful weapon that he was today. That secrecy had forced Zane to live a life of near squalor while his half brother, Elend, had been privileged. But it also meant that Straff had been able to keep Zane hidden for most of his life. Even still, while rumors were growing about the existence of Straff's Mistborn, few realized that Zane was Straff's son.

Plus, living a harsh life had taught Zane to survive on his own. He had become hard, and powerful. Things he suspected Elend would never understand. Unfortunately, one side effect of his childhood was that it had apparently driven him mad.

"Kill him," God whispered as Zane passed another guard. The voice spoke every time he saw a person—it was Zane's quiet, constant companion. He understood that he was insane. It hadn't really been all that hard to determine, all things considered. Normal people did not hear voices. Zane did.

He found insanity no excuse, however, for irrational behavior. Some men were blind, others had poor tempers. Still others heard voices. It was all the same, in the end. A man was defined not by his flaws, but by how he overcame them.

And so, Zane ignored the voice. He killed when he wanted to, not when it commanded. In his estimation, he was actually quite lucky. Other madmen saw visions, or couldn't distinguish their delusions from reality. Zane, at least, could control himself.

For the most part.

He Pushed on the metal clasps on the flaps of the command tent. The flaps flipped backward, opening for him as the soldiers to either side saluted. Zane ducked inside.

"My lord!" said the nightwatch officer of command.

"Kill him," God said. "He's really not that important."

"Paper," Zane ordered, walking to the room's large table. The officer scrambled to comply, grabbing a stack of sheets. Zane Pulled on the nib of a pen, flipping it across the room to his waiting hand. The officer brought the ink.

"These are troop concentrations and night patrols," Zane said, scribbling down some numbers and diagrams on the paper. "I observed them tonight, while I was in Luthadel."

"Very good, my lord," the soldier said. "We appreciate your help."

Zane paused. Then he slowly continued to write. "Soldier, you are not my superior. You aren't even my equal. I am not 'helping' you. I am seeing to the needs of my army. Do you understand?"

"Of course, my lord."

"Good," Zane said, finishing his notes and handing the paper to the soldier. "Now, leave—or I'll do as a friend has suggested and ram this pen through your throat."

The soldier accepted the paper, then quickly withdrew. Zane waited impatiently. Straff did not arrive. Finally, Zane cursed quietly an1d Pushed open the tent flaps and strode out. Straff's tent was a blazing red beacon in the night, well lit by numerous lanterns. Zane passed the guards, who knew better than to bother him, and entered the king's tent.

Straff was having a late dinner. He was a tall man, brown of hair like both his sons—the two important ones, at least. He had fine nobleman's hands, which he used to eat with finesse. He didn't react as Zane entered.

"You're late," Straff said.

"Kill him," God said.

Zane clinched his fists. This command from the voice was the hardest to ignore. "Yes," he said. "I'm late."

"What happened tonight?" Straff asked.

Zane glanced at the servants. "We should do this in the command tent."

Straff continued to sip his soup, staying where he was, implying that Zane had no power to order him about. It was frustrating, but not unexpected. Zane had used virtually the same tactic on the nightwatch officer just moments before. He had learned from the best.

Finally, Zane sighed, taking a seat. He rested his arms on the table, idly spinning a dinner knife as he watched his father eat. A servant approached to ask Zane if he wanted a meal, but he waved the man away.

"Kill Straff," God commanded. "You should be in his place. You are stronger than he is. You are more competent."

*But I'm not as sane*, Zane thought.

"Well?" Straff asked. "Do they have the Lord Ruler's atium or not?"

"I'm not sure," Zane said.

"Does the girl trust you?" Straff asked.

"She's beginning to," Zane said. "I did see her use atium, that once, fighting Cett's assassins."

Straff nodded thoughtfully. He really was competent; because of him, the Northern Dominance had avoided the chaos that prevailed in the rest of the Final Empire. Straff's skaa remained under control, his noblemen quelled. True, he had been forced to execute a number of people to prove that he was in charge. But, he did what needed to be done. That was one attribute in a man that Zane respected above all others.

Especially since he had trouble displaying it himself.

"*Kill him*!" God yelled. "You hate him! He kept you in squalor, forcing you to fight for your survival as a child."

*He made me strong,* Zane thought.

"Then use that strength to kill him!"

Zane grabbed the carving knife off the table. Straff looked up from his meal, then flinched just slightly as Zane sliced the flesh of his own arm. He cut a long gash into the top of his forearm, drawing blood. The pain helped him resist the voice.

Straff watched for a moment, then waved for a servant to bring Zane a towel so he wouldn't get blood on the rug.

"You need to get her to use atium again," Straff said. "Elend may have been able to gather one or two beads. We'll only know the truth if she runs out." He paused, turning back to his meal. "Actually, what you need to do is get her to tell you where the stash is hidden, if they even have it."

Zane sat, watching the blood seep from the gash on his forearm. "She's more capable than you think, Father."

Straff raised an eyebrow. "Don't tell me you believe those stories, Zane? The lies about her and the Lord Ruler?"

"How do you know they are lies?"

"Because of Elend," Straff said. "That boy is a fool; he only controls Luthadel because every nobleman with half a wit in his head fled the city. If that girl were powerful enough to defeat the Lord Ruler, I sincerely doubt that your brother could ever have gained her loyalty."

Zane cut another slice in his arm. He didn't cut deeply enough to do any real damage, and the pain worked as it usually did. Straff finally turned from his meal, masking a look of discomfort. A small, twisted piece of Zane took pleasure from seeing that look in his father's eyes. Perhaps it was a side effect of his insanity.

"Anyway," Straff said, "did you meet with Elend?"

Zane nodded. He turned to a serving girl. "Tea," he said, waving his uncut arm. "Elend was surprised. He wanted to meet with you, but he obviously didn't like the idea of coming into your camp. I doubt he'll come."

"Perhaps," Straff said. "But, don't underestimate the boy's foolishness. Either way, perhaps now he understands how our relationship will proceed."

*So much posturing,* Zane thought. By sending this message, Straff took a stand: he wouldn't be ordered about, or even inconvenienced, on Elend's behalf.

*Being forced into a siege inconvenienced you, though,* Zane thought with a smile. What Straff would have liked to do was attack directly, taking the city without parlay or negotiations. The arrival of the second army made that impossible. Attack now, and Straff would be defeated by Cett.

That meant waiting, waiting in a siege, until Elend saw reason and joined with his father willingly. But, waiting was something Straff disliked. Zane didn't mind as much. It would give him more time to spar with the girl. He smiled.

As the tea arrived, Zane closed his eyes, then burned tin to enhance his senses. His wounds burst to life, minor pains becoming great, shocking him to wakefulness.

There was a part of all this he wasn't telling Straff. *She is coming to trust me*, he thought. *And there's something else about her. She's like me. Perhaps. . .she could understand me*.

*Perhaps she could save me*.

He sighed, opening his eyes and using the towel to clean his arm. His insanity frightened him sometimes. But, it seemed weaker around Vin. That was all he had to go on for the moment. He accepted his tea from the serving girl—long braid, firm chest, homely features—and took a sip of the hot cinnamon.

Straff raised his own cup, then hesitated, sniffing delicately. He eyed Zane. "Poisoned tea, Zane?"

Zane said nothing.

"Birchbane, too," Straff noted. "That's a depressingly unoriginal move for you."

Zane said nothing.

Straff made a cutting motion. The girl looked up with terror as one of Straff's guards stepped toward her. She glanced at Zane, expecting some sort of aid, but he just looked away. She yelled pathetically as the guard pulled her off to be executed.

*She wanted the chance to kill him*, he thought. *I told her it probably wouldn't work.*

Straff just shook his head. Though not a full Mistborn, the king was a Tineye. Still, even for one with such an ability, sniffing birchbane amid the cinnamon was an impressive feat.

"Zane, Zane. . ." Straff said. "What would you do if you actually managed to kill me?"

*If I actually wanted to kill you*, Zane thought, *I'd use that knife, not poison*. But, he let Straff think what he wished. The king expected assassination attempts. So Zane provided them.

Straff held something up—a small bead of atium. "I was going to give you this, Zane. But I see that we'll have to wait. You need to get over these foolish attempts on my life. If you were ever to succeed, where would you get your atium?"

Straff didn't understand, of course. He thought that atium was like a drug, and assumed that Mistborn relished using it. Therefore, he thought he could control Zane with it. Zane let the man continue in his misapprehension, never explaining that he had his own personal stockpile of the metal.

That, however, brought him to face the real question that dominated his life. God's whispers were returning, now that the pain was fading. And, of all the people the voice whispered about, Straff Venture was the one who most deserved to die.

"Why?" God asked. "Why won't you kill him?"

Zane looked down at his feet. *Because he's my father*, he thought, finally admitting his weakness. Other men did what they had to. They were stronger than Zane.

"You're insane, Zane," Straff said.

Zane looked up.

"Do you really think you could conquer the empire yourself, if you were to kill me? Considering your. . .particular malady, do you think you could run even a city?"

Zane looked away. "No."

Straff nodded. "I'm glad we both understand that."

"You should just attack," Zane said. "We can find the atium once we control Luthadel."

Straff smiled, then sipped the tea. The *poisoned* tea.

Despite himself, Zane started, sitting up straight.

"Don't presume to think you know what I'm planning, Zane," Straff said. "You don't understand *half* as much as you assume."

Zane sat quietly, watching his father drink the last of the tea.

"What of your spy?" Straff asked.

Zane lay the note on the table. "He's worried that they might suspect him. He has found no information about the atium."

Straff nodded, setting down the empty cup. "You'll return to the city and continue to befriend the girl."

Zane nodded slowly, then turned and left the tent.

Straff thought he could feel the birchbane already, seeping through his veins, making him tremble. He forced himself to remain in control. Waiting for a few moments.

Once he was sure Zane was distant, he called for a guard. "Bring me Amaranta!" Straff ordered. "Quickly!"

The soldier rushed to do his master's bidding. Straff sat quietly, tent rustling in the evening breeze, a puff of mist floating to the floor from the once open flap. He burned tin, enhancing his senses. Yes. . .he could feel the poison 1within him. Deadening his nerves. He had time, however. As long as an hour, perhaps, and so he relaxed.

For a man who claimed he didn't want to kill Straff, Zane certainly spent a lot of effort trying. Fortunately, Straff had a tool even Zane didn't know about—one that came in the form of a woman. Straff smiled as his tin-enhanced ears heard soft footsteps approaching in the night.

The soldiers sent Amaranta right in. Straff hadn't brought all of his mistresses with him on the trip—just his ten or fifteen favorites. Mixed in with the ones he was currently bedding, however, were some women that he kept for their effectiveness rather than their beauty. Amaranta was a good example. She had been quite attractive a decade before, but now she was creeping up into her late twenties. Her breasts had begun to sag from childbirth, and every time Straff looked at her, he noticed the wrinkles that were appearing on her forehead and around her eyes. He got rid of most women long before they reached her age.

This one, however, had skills that were useful. If Zane heard that Straff had sent for the woman this night, he'd assume that Straff had simply wanted to bed her. He'd be wrong.

"My lord," Amaranta said, getting down on her knees. She began to disrobe.

*Well, at least she's optimistic,* Straff thought. He would have thought that after four years without being called to his bed, she would understand. Didn't women realize when they were too old to be attractive?

"Keep your clothing on, woman," he snapped.

Amaranta's face fell, and she laid her hands in her lap, leaving her dress half undone, one breast exposed—as if she were trying to tempt him with her aging nudity.

"I need your antidote," he said. "Quickly."

"Which one, my lord?" she asked. She wasn't the only herbalist Straff kept; he learned scents and tastes from four different people. Amaranta, however, was the best of them.

"Birchbane," Straff said. "And. . .maybe something else. I'm not sure."

"Another general potion, then, my lord?" Amaranta asked.

Straff nodded curtly. Amaranta rose, walking to his poison cabinet. She lit the burner at the side, boiling a small pot of water as she quickly mixed powders, herbs, and liquids. The concoction was her particular specialty—a mixture of all of the basic poison antidotes, remedies, and reagents in her repertoire. Straff suspected that Zane had used the birchbane to cover something else. Whatever it was, however, Amaranta's concoction would deal with—or at least identify—it.

Straff waited uncomfortably as Amaranta worked, still half naked. The concoction needed to be prepared freshly each time, but it was worth the wait. She eventually brought him a steaming mug. Straff gulped it, forcing down the harsh liquid despite its bitterness. Immediately, he began to feel better.

He sighed—another trap avoided—as he drank the rest of the cup to be certain. Amaranta knelt expectantly again.

"Go," Straff ordered.

Amaranta nodded quietly. She put her arm back through the dress's sleeve, then retreated from the tent.

Straff sat stewing, empty cup cooling in his hand. He knew he held the edge. As long as he appeared strong before Zane, the Mistborn would continue to do as commanded.

Probably.

1

*If only I had passed over Alendi when looking for an assistant, all those years ago*.

# 19

SAZED UNCLASPED HIS FINAL STEELMIND. He held it up, the braceletlike band of metal glistening in the red sunlight. To another man, it might seem valuable. To Sazed, it was now just another empty husk—a simple steel bracelet. He could refill it if he wished, but for the moment he didn't consider the weight worth carrying.

With a sigh, he dropped the bracelet. It fell with a clank, tossing up a puff of ash from the ground. *Five months of storing, of spending every fifth day drained of speed, my body moving as if impeded by a thick molasses. And now it's all gone*.

The loss had purchased something valuable, however. In just six days of travel, using steelminds on occasion, he had traveled the equivalent of six weeks' worth of walking. According to his cartography coppermind, Luthadel was now a little over a week away. Sazed felt good about the expenditure. Perhaps he'd overreacted to the deaths he'd found in the little southern village. Perhaps there was no need for him to hurry. But, he'd created the steelmind to be used.

He hefted his pack, which was much lighter than it had been. Though many of his metalminds were small, they were heavy in aggregate. He'd decided to discard some of the less valuable or less full ones as he ran. Just like the steel bracelet, which he left sitting in the ash behind him as he went on.

He was definitely in the Central Dominance now. He'd passed Faleast and Tyrian, two of the northern Ashmounts. Tyrian was still just barely visible to the south—a tall, solitary peak with a cut-off, blackened top. The landscape had grown flat, the trees changing from patchy brown pines to the willowy white aspens common around Luthadel. The aspens rose like bones growing from the black soil, clumping, their ashen white bark scarred and twisted. They—

Sazed paused. He stood near the central canal, one of the main routes to Luthadel. The canal was empty of boats at the moment; travelers were rare these days, even more rare than they had been during the Final Empire, for bandits were far more common. Sazed had outrun several groups of them during his hurried flight to Luthadel.

No, solitary travelers were rare. Armies were far more common—and, judging from the several dozen trails of smoke he saw rising ahead of him, he had run afoul of one. It stood directly between him and Luthadel.

He thought quietly for a moment, flakes of ash beginning to fall lightly around him. It was midday; if that army had scouts, Sazed would have a very difficult time getting around it. In addition, his steelminds were empty. He wouldn't be able to run from pursuit.

And yet, an army within a week of Luthadel. . .. Whose was it, and what threat did it pose? His curiosity, the curiosity of a scholar, prodded him to seek a vantage from which to study the troops. Vin and the others could use any information he gathered.

Decision made, Sazed located a hill with a particularly large stand of aspens. He dropped his pack at the base of a tree, then pulled out an ironmind and began to fill it. He felt the familiar sensation of decreased weight, and he easily climbed to the top of the thin tree—his body was now light enough that it didn't take much strength to pull himself upward.

Hanging from the very tip of the tree, Sazed tapped his tinmin1d. The edges of his vision fuzzed, as always, but with the increased vision he could make out details about the large group settled into a hollow before him.

He was right about it being an army. He was wrong about it being made up of men.

"By the forgotten gods. . ." Sazed whispered, so shocked that he nearly lost his grip. The army was organized in only the most simplistic and primitive way. There were no tents, no vehicles, no horses. Just hundreds of large cooking fires, each ringed with figures.

And those figures were of a deep blue. They varied greatly in size; some were just five feet tall, others were lumbering hulks of ten feet or more. They were both the same species, Sazed knew. Koloss. The creatures—though similar to men in base form—never stopped growing. They simply continued to get bigger as they aged, growing until their hearts could no longer support them. Then they died, killed by their body's own growth imperative.

Before they died, however, they got very large. And very dangerous.

Sazed dropped from the tree, making his body light enough that he hit the ground softly. He hurriedly searched through his copperminds. When he found the one he wanted, he strapped it to his upper left arm, then climbed back up the tree.

He searched an index quickly. Somewhere, he'd taken notes on a book about the koloss—he'd studied it trying to decide if the creatures had a religion. He'd had someone repeat the notes back to him, so he could store them in the coppermind. He had the book memorized, too, of course, but placing so much information directly in his mind would ruin the—

*There*, he thought, recovering the notes. He tapped them from the coppermind, filling his mind with knowledge.

Most koloss bodies gave out before they reached twenty years of age. The more "ancient" creatures were often a massive twelve feet in height, with stocky, powerful bodies. However, few koloss lived that long—and not just because of heart failure. Their society—if it could be called that—was extremely violent.

Excitement suddenly overcoming apprehension, Sazed tapped tin for vision again, searching through the thousands of blue humanoids, trying to get visual proof of what he'd read. It wasn't hard to find fights. Scuffles around the fires seemed common, and, interestingly, they were always between koloss of nearly the same size. Sazed magnified his view even further—gripping the tree tightly to overcome the nausea—and got his first good look at a koloss.

It was a creature of smaller size—perhaps six feet tall. It was man-shaped, with two arms and legs, though its neck was hard to distinguish. It was completely bald. The oddest feature, however, was its blue skin, which hung loose and folded. The creature looked like a fat man might, had all his fat been drained away, leaving the stretched skin behind.

And. . .the skin didn't seem to be *connected* very well. Around the creature's red, blood-drop eyes, the skin sagged, revealing the facial muscles. The same was true around the mouth: the skin sagged a few inches below the chin, the lower teeth and jaw completely exposed.

It was a stomach-turning sight, especially for a man who was already nauseated. The creature's ears hung low, flopping down beside its jawline. Its nose was formless and loose, with no cartilage supporting it. Skin hung baggily from the creature's arms and legs, and its only clothing was a crude loincloth.

Sazed turned, selecting a larger crea1ture—one perhaps eight feet tall—to study. The skin on this beast wasn't as loose, but it still didn't seem to fit quite right. Its nose twisted at a crooked angle, pulled flat against the face by an enlarged head that sat on a stumpy neck. The creature turned to leer at a companion, and again, the skin around its mouth didn't quite fit: the lips didn't close completely, and the holes around the eyes were too big, so they exposed the muscles beneath.

*Like. . .a person wearing a mask made of skin,* Sazed thought, trying to push away his disgust. *So. . .their body continues to grow, but their skin doesn't*?

His thought was confirmed as a massive, ten-foot-tall beast of a koloss wandered into the group. Smaller creatures scattered before this newcomer, who thumped up to the fire, where several horses were roasting.

This largest creature's skin was pulled so tight it was beginning to tear. The hairless blue flesh had ripped around the eyes, at the edges of the mouth, and around the massive chest muscles. Sazed could see little trails of red blood dripping from the rips. Even where the skin wasn't torn, it was pulled taut—the nose and ears were so flat they were almost indistinguishable from the flesh around them.

Suddenly, Sazed's study didn't seem so academic. Koloss had come to the Central Dominance. Creatures so violent and uncontrollable that the Lord Ruler had been forced to keep them away from civilization. Sazed extinguished his tinmind, welcoming the return to normal vision. He had to get to Luthadel and warn the others. If they—

Sazed froze. One problem with enhancing his vision was that he temporarily lost the ability to see close up—so it wasn't odd that he hadn't noticed the koloss patrol surrounding his aspens.

*By the forgotten gods*! He held firm to the tip of the tree, thinking quickly. Several koloss were already pushing their way into the stand. If he dropped to the ground, he'd be too slow to escape. As always, he wore a pewtermind; he could easily become as strong as ten men, and maintain it for a good amount of time. He could fight, perhaps. . ..

Yet, the koloss carried crude-looking, but massive, swords. Sazed's notes, his memory, and his lore all agreed: Koloss were very dangerous warriors. Strong as ten men or not, Sazed wouldn't have the skill to defeat them.

"Come down," called a deep, slurred voice from below. "Come down now."

Sazed looked down. A large koloss, skin just beginning to stretch, stood at the tree's base. It gave the aspen a shake.

"Come down now," the creature repeated.

*The lips don't work very well*, Sazed thought. *He sounds like a man trying to talk without moving his lips*. He wasn't surprised that the creature could talk; his notes mentioned that. He was, however, surprised at how calm it sounded.

*I could run*, he thought. He could keep to the tops of trees, perhaps cross the distance between patches of aspens by dropping his metalminds and trying to ride gusts of wind. But it would be very difficult—and very unpredictable.

And he would have to leave his copperminds—a thousand years of history—behind.

So, pewtermind ready in case he needed strength, Sazed let go of the tree. The koloss leader—Sazed could only assume that was what he was—watched Sazed fall to the ground with a red-eyed stare. The creature did not blink. Sazed wondered if it even *could* blink, its skin stretche1d as it was.

Sazed plunked to the ground beside the tree, then reached for his pack.

"No," the koloss snapped, grabbing the pack with an inhumanly quick swipe of the arm. It tossed the pack to another koloss.

"I need that," Sazed said. "I will be much more cooperative if—"

"*Quiet*!" the koloss yelled with a rage so sudden that Sazed took a step backward. Terrismen were tall—especially Terrismen eunuchs—and it was very disconcerting to be dwarfed by this beastly creature, well over nine feet in height, its skin a blackish blue, its eyes the color of the sun at dusk. It loomed over Sazed, and he cringed in spite of himself.

Apparently, that was the proper reaction, for the lead koloss nodded and turned away. "Come," it slurred, lumbering through the small aspen forest. The other koloss—about seven of them—followed.

Sazed didn't want to find out what would happen if he disobeyed. He chose a god—Duis, a god once said to watch over wearied travelers—and said a quick, silent prayer. Then he hurried forward, staying with the pack of koloss as they walked toward the camp.

*At least they didn't kill me out of hand,* Sazed thought. He'd half expected that, considering what he'd read. Of course, even the books didn't know much. The koloss had been kept separate from mankind for centuries; the Lord Ruler only called upon them in times of great martial need, to quell revolts, or to conquer new societies discovered on the inner islands. At those times, the koloss had caused absolute destruction and slaughter—or so the histories claimed.

*Could all that have been propaganda*? Sazed wondered. *Maybe the koloss aren't as violent as we assumed*.

One of the koloss beside Sazed howled in sudden anger. Sazed spun as the koloss jumped at one of its companions. The creature ignored the sword on its back, instead punching his enemy's head with a blocky fist. The others paused, turning to watch the fight, but none of them seemed alarmed.

Sazed watched with growing horror as the aggressor proceeded to repeatedly pummel his enemy. The defender tried to protect himself, getting out a dagger and managing to score a cut on the aggressor's arm. The blue skin tore, seeping bright red blood, as the aggressor got his hands around his opponent's thick head and twisted.

There was a snap. The defender stopped moving. The aggressor removed the sword from his victim's back and strapped it on beside his own weapon, then removed a small pouch that was tied beside the sword. After that, he stood, ignoring the wound on his arm, and the group began to walk again.

"Why?" Sazed asked, shocked. "What was that for?"

The wounded koloss turned around. "I hated him," he said.

"Move!" the lead koloss snapped at Sazed.

Sazed forced himself to start walking. They left the corpse lying in the road. *The pouches*, he thought, trying to find something to focus on besides the brutality. *They all carry those pouches*. The koloss kept them tied to their swords. They didn't carry the weapons in sheaths; they were simply bound on their backs with leather straps. And tied to those straps were pouches. Sometimes there was just one, though the two largest creatures in the group each had several.

*They look like coin pouches,* Sazed thought. *But, the koloss don't have an economy. Perhaps they 1keep personal possessions in them? But what would beasts like these value*?

They entered the camp. There didn't appear to be sentries at the borders—but, then, why would guards be necessary? It would be very difficult for a human to sneak into this camp.

A group of smaller koloss—the five-foot-tall ones—rushed forward as soon as the group arrived. The murderer threw his extra sword to one of them, then pointed into the distance. He kept the pouch for himself, and the small ones rushed off, following the road in the direction of the body.

*Burial detail*? Sazed wondered.

He walked uncomfortably behind his captors as they penetrated into the camp. Beasts of all sorts were being roasted over the firepits, though Sazed didn't think any of them had once been human. In addition, the ground around the camp had been completely stripped of plant life, as if it had been grazed by a group of particularly aggressive goats.

And, according to his coppermind, that wasn't far off the truth. Koloss could, apparently, subsist on practically anything. They preferred meat, but would eat any kind of plant—even grass, going so far as to pull it up by the roots to eat. Some reports even spoke of them eating dirt and ash, though Sazed found that a little difficult to believe.

He continued to walk. The camp smelled of smoke, grime, and a strange musk that he assumed was koloss body odor. Some of the creatures turned as he passed, watching him with steady red eyes.

*It's like they only have two emotions*, he thought, jumping as a fireside koloss suddenly screamed and attacked a companion. *They're either indifferent or they're enraged*.

What would it take to set them all off at once? And. . .what kind of a disaster would they cause if that happened? He nervously revised his earlier thoughts. No, the koloss had not been maligned. The stories he had heard—stories of koloss running wild in the Farmost Dominance, causing widespread destruction and death—were obviously true.

But something kept this group marginally reined in. The Lord Ruler had been able to control the koloss, though no book explained how. Most writers simply accepted this ability as part of what had made the Lord Ruler God. The man had been immortal—compared with that, other powers seemed mundane.

*His immortality, however, was a trick*, Sazed thought. *Simply a clever combination of Feruchemical and Allomantic powers*. The Lord Ruler had been just a normal man—albeit one with an unusual combination of abilities and opportunities.

That being the case, how had he controlled the koloss? *There was something different about the Lord Ruler. Something more than his powers. He did something at the Well of Ascension, something that forever changed the world. Perhaps his ability to control the koloss came from that*.

Sazed's captors ignored the occasional fights around firepits. There didn't appear to be any female koloss in the camp—or, if there were, they were indistinguishable from the males. Sazed did, however, notice a koloss corpse lying forgotten near one of the fires. It had been flayed, the blue skin ripped free.

*How could any society exist like this*? he thought with horror. His books said the koloss bred and aged quickly—a fortunate situation for them, considering the number of deaths he had already seen. Even so, it seemed to him that this species killed too many of its members to continue.

Yet they did continue. Unfortunately. The Keeper in him believed strongly that nothing should be lost, that every society was worth remembering. However, the brutality of the koloss camp—the wounded creatures who sat, ignoring the gashes in their skin, the flayed corpses along the path, the sudden bellows of anger and subsequent murders—tested this belief.

His captors led him around a small hillock in the land, and Sazed paused as he saw something very unexpected.

A tent.

"Go," the lead koloss said, pointing.

Sazed frowned. There were several dozen humans outside the tent, carrying spears and dressed like imperial guards. The tent was large, and behind it stood a line of boxy carts.

"Go!" the koloss yelled.

Sazed did as he was told. Behind him, one of the koloss indifferently tossed Sazed's pack toward the human guards. The metalminds inside clinked together as they hit the ashy ground, causing Sazed to cringe. The soldiers watched the koloss retreat with a wary eye; then one picked up the pack. Another leveled his spear at Sazed.

Sazed held up his hands. "I am Sazed, a Keeper of Terris, once steward, now teacher. I am not your enemy."

"Yes, well," the guard said, still watching the retreating koloss. "You're still going to have to come with me."

"May I have my possessions back?" Sazed asked. This hollow appeared free of koloss; apparently, the human soldiers wanted to keep their distance.

The first guard turned to his companion, who was perusing Sazed's pack. The second guard looked up and shrugged. "No weapons. Some bracelets and rings, maybe worth something."

"None of them are of precious metals," Sazed said. "They are the tools of a Keeper, and are of little value to anyone but myself."

The second guard shrugged, handing the bag to the first man. Both were of standard Central Dominance coloring—dark hair, light skin, the build and height of those who'd had proper nutrition as children. The first guard was the older of the two, and was obviously in charge. He took the bag from his companion. "We'll see what His Majesty says."

*Ah*, Sazed thought. "Let us speak with him then."

The guard turned, pushing aside the tent door and motioning for Sazed to enter. Sazed stepped from red sunlight into a functional—if sparsely furnished—tent room. This main chamber was large, and contained several more guards. Sazed had seen perhaps two dozen so far.

The lead guard walked forward and poked his head into a room at the back. A few moments later, he waved Sazed forward and pulled back the tent door.

Sazed entered the second chamber. The man inside wore the pants and suit jacket of a Luthadel nobleman. He was balding—his hair reduced to a few struggling wisps—despite his youth. He stood, tapping the side of his leg with a nervous hand, and jumped slightly when Sazed entered.

Sazed recognized the man. "Jastes Lekal."

"*King* Lekal," Jastes snapped. "Do I know you, Terrisman?"

"We have not met, Your Majesty," Sazed said, "but I have had some dealings with a friend of yours, I think. King Elend Venture of Luthadel?"

Jastes nodded absently. "My men say the koloss brought you. T1hey found you poking around the camp?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Sazed said carefully, watching as Jastes began to pace. *This man isn't much more stable than the army he apparently leads*, he thought with dissatisfaction. "How is it that you have persuaded the creatures to serve you?"

"You are a prisoner, Terrisman," Jastes snapped. "No questions. Did Elend send you to spy on me?"

"I was sent by no man," Sazed said. "You happened to be in my path, Your Majesty. I meant no harm by my observations."

Jastes paused, eyeing Sazed, before beginning to pace again. "Well, never mind. I've been without a proper steward for some time now. You will serve me now."

"I apologize, Your Majesty," Sazed said, bowing slightly. "But that will not be possible."

Jastes frowned. "You're a steward—I can tell that from the robes. Is Elend so great a master that you would deny me?"

"Elend Venture is not my master, Your Majesty," Sazed said, meeting the young king's eyes. "Now that we are free, the Terrismen no longer call any man master. I cannot be your servant, for I can be no man's servant. Keep me as prisoner, if you must. But I will not serve you. I apologize."

Jastes paused again. Instead of being angry, however, he simply seemed. . .embarrassed. "I see."

"Your Majesty," Sazed said calmly, "I realize that you commanded me to ask no questions, so I will instead make observations. You appear to have placed yourself in a very poor position. I know not how you control these koloss, but I cannot help but think that your grip is tenuous. You are in danger, and you appear intent on sharing that danger with others."

Jastes flushed. "Your 'observations' are flawed, Terrisman. I *am* in control of this army. They obey me completely. How many other noblemen have you seen gather koloss armies? None—only I have been successful."

"They do not seem very much under control, Your Majesty."

"Oh?" Jastes asked. "And did they tear you apart when they found you? Pummel you to death for sport? Ram a stick through you and roast you over one of their fires? No. They don't do these things because *I* commanded them otherwise. It may not seem like much, Terrisman, but trust me—this is a sign of great restraint and obedience for koloss."

"Civilization is no great achievement, Your Majesty."

"Do not try me, Terrisman!" Jastes snapped, running a hand through the remnants of his hair. "These are koloss we speak of—we can't expect much from them."

"And you bring them to Luthadel?" Sazed asked. "Even the Lord Ruler feared these creatures, Your Majesty. He kept them away from cities. You bring them to the most populated area in all of the Final Empire!"

"You don't understand," Jastes said. "I tried overtures of peace, but nobody listens unless you have money or an army. Well, I have one, and I'll soon have the other. I know Elend's sitting on that stash of atium—and I'm just come to. . .to make an alliance with him."

"An alliance where you take over control of the city?"

"Bah!" Jastes said with a wave of his hand. "Elend doesn't control Luthadel—he's just a placeholder waiting for someone more powerful to come along. He's a good man, but he's an innocent idealist. He's going to lose his throne to one army or another, an1d I'll give him a better deal than Cett or Straff will, that's certain."

*Cett? Straff? What kind of trouble has young Venture gotten himself into*? Sazed shook his head. "Somehow I doubt that a 'better deal' involves the use of koloss, Your Majesty."

Jastes frowned. "You certainly are smart-mouthed, Terrisman. You're a sign—your entire people are a sign—of what has gone wrong with the world. I used to respect the Terris people. There's no shame in being a good servant."

"There's often little pride in it either," Sazed said. "But, I apologize for my attitude, Your Majesty. It is not a manifestation of Terris independence. I have always been too free with my comments, I think. I never made the best of stewards." *Or the best of Keepers,* he added to himself.

"Bah," Jastes said again, resuming his pacing.

"Your Majesty," Sazed said. "I must continue to Luthadel. There are. . .events I need to deal with. Think what you will of my people, but you must know that we are honest. The work I do is beyond politics and wars, thrones and armies. It is important for all men."

"Scholars always say things like that," Jastes said. He paused. "Elend always said things like that."

"Regardless," Sazed continued, "I must be allowed to leave. In exchange for my freedom, I will deliver a message from you to His Majesty King Elend, if you wish."

"I could send a messenger of my own at any time!"

"And leave yourself with one less man to protect you from the koloss?" Sazed said.

Jastes paused just briefly.

*Ah, so he does fear them. Good. At least he's not insane*.

"I *will* be leaving, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "I do not mean to be arrogant, but I can see that you don't have the resources to keep prisoners. You can let me go, or you can give me to the koloss. I would be wary, however, of letting them get into a habit of killing humans."

Jastes eyed him. "Fine," he said. "Deliver this message, then. Tell Elend that I don't care if he knows I'm coming—I don't even care if you give our numbers. Be sure you're accurate, though! I have over twenty thousand koloss in this army. He can't fight me. He can't fight the others, either. But, if I had those city walls. . .well, I could hold off both other armies for him. Tell him to be logical. If he gives over the atium, I'll even let him keep Luthadel. We can be neighbors. Allies."

*One bankrupt of coin, the other bankrupt of common sense*, Sazed thought. "Very well, Your Majesty. I will speak with Elend. I will need the return of my possessions, however."

The king waved a hand in annoyance, and Sazed withdrew, waiting quietly as the lead guard entered the king's chambers again and received his orders. As he waited for the soldiers to prepare—his pack thankfully returned to him—Sazed thought about what Jastes had said. *Cett or Straff*. Just how many forces were working on Elend to take his city?

If Sazed had wanted a quiet place to study, he'd apparently chosen the wrong direction to run.

*It wasn't until a few years later that I began to notice the signs. I knew the prophecies—I am a Terris Worldbringer, after all. And yet, not all of us are religious men; some, such as myself, are more interested in other topics. However, during my time with Alendi,1 I could not help but become more interested in the Anticipation. He seemed to fit the signs so well.*

# 20

"THIS IS GOING TO BE dangerous, Your Majesty," Dockson said.

"It's our only option," Elend said. He stood behind his table; it was, as usual, stacked with books. He was backlit by the study's window, and its colors fell upon the back of his white uniform, dyeing it a brilliant maroon.

*He certainly does look more commanding in that outfit*, Vin thought, sitting in Elend's plush reading chair, OreSeur resting patiently on the floor beside her. She still wasn't sure what to think of the changes in Elend. She knew the alterations were mostly visual—new clothing, new haircut—but other things about him seemed to be changing as well. He stood up straighter when he spoke, and was more authoritative. He was even training in the sword and the cane.

Vin glanced at Tindwyl. The matronly Terriswoman sat in a stiff chair at the back of the room, watching the proceedings. She had perfect posture, and was ladylike in her colorful skirt and blouse. She didn't sit with her legs folded beneath her, as Vin currently did, and she'd never wear trousers.

*What is it about her*? Vin thought. *I've spent a year trying to get Elend to practice his swordsmanship. Tindwyl's been here less than a month, and she already has him sparring*.

Why did Vin feel bitter? Elend wouldn't change that much, would he? She tried to quiet the little piece of her that worried about this new confident, well-dressed warrior of a king—worried that he would turn out to be different from the man she loved.

What if he stopped needing her?

She pulled down into the chair just a little bit farther as Elend continued to speak with Ham, Dox, Clubs, and Breeze.

"El," Ham said, "you realize that if you go into the enemy camp, we won't be able to protect you."

"I'm not sure you can protect me here, Ham," Elend said. "Not with two armies camped practically against the walls."

"True," Dockson said, "but I'm worried that if you enter that camp, you'll never come out."

"Only if I fail," Elend said. "If I follow the plan—convince my father that we're his allies—he'll let me return. I didn't spend a lot of time politicking in the court when I was younger. However, one thing I *did* learn to do was manipulate my father. I know Straff Venture—and I know that I can beat him. Besides, he doesn't want me dead."

"Can we be sure of that?" Ham asked, rubbing his chin.

"Yes," Elend said. "After all, Straff hasn't sent assassins after me, while Cett has. It makes sense. What better person for Straff to leave in control of Luthadel than his own son? He thinks he can control me—he'll assume that he can make me give him Luthadel. If I play into that, I should be able to get him to attack Cett."

"He does have a point. . ." Ham said.

"Yes," Dockson said, "but what is to keep Straff from just taking you hostage and forcing his way into Luthadel?"

"He'll still have Cett at his back," Elend said. "If he fights us, he'll lose men—a lot of men—and expose himself to attack from behind."

"But he'll have you, my dear man," Breeze said. "1He wouldn't have to attack Luthadel—he could force us to give in."

"You'll have orders to let me die first" Elend said. "That's why I set up the Assembly. It has the power to choose a new king."

"But why?" Ham asked. "Why take this risk, El? Let's wait a bit longer and see if we can get Straff to meet with you in a more neutral location."

Elend sighed. "You *have* to listen to me, Ham. Siege or no siege, we can't just sit here. If we do, either we'll get starved out, or one of those armies will decide to break the siege and attack us, hoping to take our walls, then turn and immediately defend against its enemies. They won't do that easily, but it could happen. It *will* happen, if we don't begin to play the kings against one another."

The room fell silent. The others slowly turned toward Clubs, who nodded. He agreed.

*Good job, Elend,* Vin thought.

"Someone has to meet with my father," Elend said. "And, I need to be that person. Straff thinks I am a fool, so I can convince him that I'm no threat. Then, I'll go and persuade Cett that I'm on his side. When they finally attack each other—each one thinking we're on their side—we'll withdraw instead and force them to fight it out. The winner won't have enough strength left to take the city from us!"

Ham and Breeze nodded their heads. Dockson, however, shook his. "The plan is good in theory, but going into the enemy camp unguarded? That seems foolish."

"Now, see," Elend said. "I think this is to our advantage. My father believes strongly in control and domination. If I walk into his camp, I'll essentially be telling him that I agree he has authority over me. I'll seem weak, and he'll assume that he can take me whenever he wants. It's a risk, but if I don't do this, *we die*."

The men eyed each other.

Elend stood up a little straighter and pulled his hands into fists at his sides. He always did that when he was nervous.

"I'm afraid that this isn't a discussion," Elend said. "I've made my decision."

*They're not going to accept a declaration like that,* Vin thought. The crew were an independent lot.

Yet, surprisingly, none of them objected.

Dockson finally nodded his head. "All right, Your Majesty," he said. "You're going to need to walk a dangerous line—make Straff believe that he can count on our support, but also convince him that he can betray us at his leisure. You have to make him want our strength of arms while at the same time dismissing our strength of will."

"And," Breeze added, "you need to do so without him figuring out that you're playing both sides."

"Can you do it?" Ham asked. "Honestly, Elend?"

Elend nodded. "I can do it, Ham. I've gotten much better at politics this last year." He said the words with confidence, though Vin noticed that he still had his fists clenched. *He'll have to learn not to do that*.

"You may, perhaps, understand politics," Breeze said, "but *this* is scamming. Face it, my friend, you're dreadfully honest—always talking about how to defend the rights of skaa and the like."

"Now, see, you're being unfair," Elend said. "Honesty and good intentions are completely different. Why, I can be just as dishonest as—" He paused. 1"Why am I arguing this point? We admit what has to be done, and we know that I'm the one who has to do it. Dox, would you draft a letter to my father? Suggest that I would be happy to visit him. In fact. . ."

Elend paused, glancing at Vin. Then, he continued. "In fact, tell him that I want to discuss the future of Luthadel, and because I want to introduce him to someone special."

Ham chuckled. "Ah, nothing like bringing a girl home to meet the father."

"Especially when that girl happens to be the most dangerous Allomancer in the Central Dominance," Breeze added.

"You think he'll agree to letting her come?" Dockson said.

"If he doesn't, there's no deal," Elend said. "Make sure he knows that. Either way, I do think he'll agree. Straff has a habit of underestimating me—probably with good reason. However, I'll bet that sentiment extends to Vin as well. He'll assume she isn't as good as everyone says."

"Straff has his own Mistborn," Vin added. "To protect him. It will only be fair for Elend to be able to bring me. And, if I'm there, I can get him out should something go wrong."

Ham chuckled again. "That probably wouldn't make for a very dignified retreat—getting slung over Vin's shoulder and carried to safety."

"Better than dying," Elend said, obviously trying to act good-natured, but flushing slightly at the same time.

*He loves me, but he's still a man,* Vin thought. *How many times have I hurt his pride by being Mistborn while he is simply a normal person? A lesser man would never have fallen in love with me*.

*But, doesn't he deserve a woman that he feels he can protect? A woman who's more like. . .a woman*?

Vin pulled down in her chair again, seeking warmth within its plushness. However, it was Elend's study chair, where he read. Didn't he also deserve a woman who shared his interests, one who didn't find reading a chore? A woman with whom he could talk about his brilliant political theories?

*Why am I thinking about our relationship so much lately*? Vin thought.

*We don't belong in their world,* Zane had said. *We belong here, in the mists*.

*You don't belong with them. . ..*

"There is something else I wanted to mention, Your Majesty," Dockson said. "You should meet with the Assembly. They've been growing impatient to get your ear—something about counterfeit coins being passed in Luthadel."

"I don't really have time for city business right now," Elend said. "The prime reason I set up the Assembly was so that they could deal with these kinds of issues. Go ahead and send them a message, telling them that I trust their judgment. Apologize for me, and explain that I'm seeing to the city's defense. I'll try and make the Assembly meeting next week."

Dockson nodded, scribbling a note to himself. "Though," he noted, "that is something else to consider. By meeting with Straff, you'll give up your hold on the Assembly."

"This isn't an official parlay," Elend said. "Just an informal meeting. My resolution from before will still stand."

"In all honesty, Your Majesty," Dockson said, "I highly doubt that *they* will see it that way. You know how angry they are to be left without recourse until you decide to hold 1the parlay."

"I know," Elend said. "But the risk is worthwhile. We *need* to meet with Straff. Once that is done, I can return with—hopefully—good news for the Assembly. At that point, I can argue that the resolution hasn't been fulfilled. For now, the meeting goes forward."

*More decisive indeed*, Vin thought. *He's changing*. . ..

She had to stop thinking about things like that. Instead, she focused on something else. The conversation turned to specific ways that Elend could manipulate Straff, each of the crewmembers giving him tips on how to scam effectively. Vin, however, found herself watching them, looking for discrepancies in their personalities, trying to decide if any of them might be the kandra spy.

Was Clubs being even quieter than normal? Was Spook's shift in language patterns due to growing maturity, or because the kandra had difficulty mimicking his slang? Was Ham, perhaps, too jovial? He also seemed to focus less on his little philosophical puzzles than he once had. Was that because he was more serious now, or because the kandra didn't know how to imitate him properly?

It was no good. If she thought too much, she could spot seeming discrepancies in anyone. Yet, at the same time, they all seemed like themselves. People were just too complex to reduce to simple personality traits. Plus, the kandra would be good—very good. He would have a lifetime of training in the art of imitating others, and he had probably been planning his insertion for a long time.

It came down to Allomancy, then. With all of the activities surrounding the siege and her studies about the Deepness, however, she hadn't had a chance to test her friends. As she thought about it, she admitted that the lack of time excuse was a weak one. The truth was that she was probably distracting herself because the thought of one of the crew—one of her first group of friends—being a traitor was just too upsetting.

She had to get over that. If there really were a spy in the group, that would be the end of them. If the enemy kings found out about the tricks Elend was planning. . .

This in mind, she tentatively burned bronze. Immediately, she sensed an Allomantic pulse from Breeze—dear, incorrigible Breeze. He was so good at Allomancy that even Vin couldn't detect his touch most of the time, but he was also compulsive about using his power.

He wasn't currently using it on her, however. She closed her eyes, focusing. Once, long ago, Marsh had tried to train her in the fine art of using bronze to read Allomantic pulses. She hadn't realized at the time just how large a task he'd begun.

When an Allomancer burned a metal, they gave off an invisible, drumlike beat that only another Allomancer burning bronze could sense. The rhythm of these pulses—how quickly the beats came, the way they "sounded"—told exactly what metal was being burned.

It took practice, and was difficult, but Vin was getting better at reading the pulses. She focused. Breeze was burning brass—the internal, mental Pushing metal. And. . .

Vin focused harder. She could feel a pattern washing over her, a double *dum-dum* beat with each pulse. They felt oriented to her right. The pulses were washing against something else, something that was sucking them in.

Elend. Breeze was focused on Elend. Not surprising, considering the current discussion. Breeze was always Pushing on the people he interacted with.

Satisfied, Vi1n sat back. But then she paused. *Marsh implied there was much more to bronze than many people thought. I wonder*. . ..

She squeezed her eyes shut—ignoring the fact that any of the others who saw her would think her actions strange—and focused again on the

Allomantic pulses. She flared the bronze, concentrating so hard she felt she'd give herself a headache. There was a. . .vibration to the pulses. But what that could mean, she wasn't certain.

*Focus*! she told herself. However, the pulses stubbornly refused to yield any further information.

*Fine*, she thought. *I'll cheat*. She turned off her tin—she almost always had it on a little bit—then reached inside and burned the fourteenth metal. Duralumin.

The Allomantic pulses became so loud. . .so powerful. . .she swore she could feel their vibrations shaking her apart. They pounded like beats from a massive drum set right beside her. But she got something from them.

*Anxiety, nervousness, worry, insecurity, anxiety, nervousness, worry*—

It was gone, her bronze expended in one massive flare of power. Vin opened her eyes; no one in the room was looking at her except OreSeur.

She felt drained. The headache she'd predicted before now came in full force, thudding inside her head like the tiny brother of the drum she'd now banished. However, she held to the information she'd gleaned. It hadn't come in words, but feelings—and her first fear was that Breeze was making these emotions appear. Anxiety, nervousness, worry. However, she immediately realized that Breeze was a Soother. If he focused on emotions, it would be the ones he was *dampening*. The ones he was using his powers to Soothe away.

She looked from him to Elend. *Why. . .he's making Elend more confident*! If Elend stood a little taller, it was because Breeze was quietly helping, Soothing away anxiety and worry. And Breeze did this even as he argued and made his usual mocking comments.

Vin studied the plump man, ignoring her headache, feeling a newfound sense of admiration. She'd always wondered just a little at Breeze's placement in the crew. The other men were all, to an extent, idealists. Even Clubs, beneath his crotchety exterior, had always struck her as a solidly good man.

Breeze was different. Manipulative, a little selfish—he seemed like he'd joined the crew for the challenge, not because he really wanted to help the skaa. But, Kelsier had always claimed that he'd chosen his crew carefully, picking the men for their integrity, not just their skill.

Perhaps Breeze wasn't an exception after all. Vin watched him pointing his cane at Ham as he said something flippant. And yet, on the inside, he was completely different.

*You're a good man, Breeze*, she thought, smiling to herself. *You just try your best to hide it*.

And he also wasn't the impostor. She'd known that before, of course; Breeze hadn't been in the city when the kandra had made the switch. However, having a second confirmation lifted a tiny bit of her burden.

Now if she could just eliminate some of the others.

Elend bid the crew farewell after the meeting. Dockson went to pen the requested letters, Ham to go over security, Clubs back to training the soldiers, and Breeze to try and placate the Assembly regarding Elend's lack of attention.

Vin trailed out of1 the study, shooting him a glance, then eyeing Tindwyl. *Suspicious of her still, eh*? Elend thought with amusement. He nodded reassuringly, and Vin frowned, looking just a little annoyed. He would have let her stay, but. . .well, facing Tindwyl was embarrassing enough alone.

Vin left the room, wolfhound kandra at her side. *Looks like she's growing more attached to the creature*, Elend thought with satisfaction. It was good to know that someone watched over her.

Vin shut the door behind her, and Elend sighed, rubbing his shoulder. Several weeks of training with the sword and cane were taking a lot out of him, and his body was bruised. He tried to keep the pain from showing—or, rather, from letting Tindwyl see him show the pain. *At least I proved that I'm learning*, he thought. *She had to see how well I did today*.

"Well?" he asked.

"You are an embarrassment," Tindwyl said, standing before her chair.

"So you like to say," Elend said, walking forward to begin piling up a stack of books. Tindwyl said that he needed to let servants keep his study clean, something he'd always resisted. The clutter of books and papers felt right to him, and he certainly didn't want someone else moving them around.

With her standing there looking at him, however, it was difficult not to feel self-conscious about the mess. He stacked another book on the pile.

"Surely you noticed how well I did," Elend said. "I got them to let me go into Straff's camp."

"You are king, Elend Venture," Tindwyl said, arms folded. "Nobody 'lets' you do anything. The first change in attitude has to be your own—you have to stop thinking that you need permission or agreement from those who follow you."

"A king should lead by consent of his citizens," Elend said. "I will not be another Lord Ruler."

"A king should be strong," Tindwyl said firmly. "He accepts counsel, but only when he asks for it. He makes it clear that the final decision is his, not his counselors'. You need better control over your advisors. If they don't respect you, then your enemies won't either—and the masses never will."

"Ham and the others respect me."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow.

"They do!"

"What do they call you?"

Elend shrugged. "They're my friends. They use my name."

"Or a close approximation of it. Right, 'El'?"

Elend flushed, setting one final book on the stack. "You'd have me force my friends to address me by my title?"

"Yes," Tindwyl said. "Especially in public. You should be addressed as 'Your Majesty,' or at least as 'my lord.'"

"I doubt Ham would deal well with that," Elend said. "He has some issues with authority."

"He will get over them," Tindwyl said, wiping her finger along a bookcase. She didn't need to hold it up for Elend to know there would be dust on its tip.

"What about you?" Elend challenged.

"Me?"

"You call me 'Elend Venture,' not 'Your Majesty.'"

"I am different," Tindwyl said.

"Well, I don't see1 why you should be. You can call me 'Your Majesty' from now on."

Tindwyl smiled slyly. "Very well, Your Majesty. You can unclench your fists now. You're going to have to work on that—a statesman should not give visual clues of his nervousness."

Elend glanced down, relaxing his hands. "All right."

"In addition," Tindwyl continued, "you still hedge too much in your language. It makes you seem timid and hesitant."

"I'm working on that."

"Don't apologize unless you really mean it," Tindwyl said. "And don't make excuses. You don't need them. A leader is often judged by how well he bears responsibility. As king, everything that happens in your kingdom—regardless of who commits the act—is your fault. You are even responsible for unavoidable events such as earthquakes or storms."

"Or armies," Elend said.

Tindwyl nodded. "Or armies. It is your responsibility to deal with these things, and if something goes wrong, it is your fault. You simply have to accept this."

Elend nodded, picking up a book.

"Now, let's talk about guilt," Tindwyl said, seating herself. "Stop cleaning. That isn't a job for a king."

Elend sighed, setting down the book.

"Guilt," Tindwyl said, "does not become a king. You have to stop feeling sorry for yourself."

"You just told me everything that happens in the kingdom is my fault!"

"It is."

"How can I *not* feel guilty, then?"

"You have to feel confident that your actions are the best," Tindwyl explained. "You have to know that no matter how bad things get, they would be worse without you. When disaster occurs, you take responsibility, but you don't wallow or mope. You aren't allowed that luxury; guilt is for lesser men. You simply need to do what is expected."

"And that is?"

"To make everything better."

"Great," Elend said flatly. "And if I fail?"

"Then you accept responsibility, and make everything better on the second try."

Elend rolled his eyes. "And what if I can't ever make things better? What if I'm really not the best man to be king?"

"Then you remove yourself from the position," Tindwyl said. "Suicide is the preferred method—assuming, of course, that you have an heir. A good king knows not to foul up the succession."

"Of course," Elend said. "So, you're saying I should just kill myself."

"No. I'm telling you to have pride in yourself, Your Majesty."

"That's not what it sounds like. Every day you tell me how poor a king I am, and how my people will suffer because of it! Tindwyl, I'm *not* the best man for this position. He got himself killed by the Lord Ruler."

"That is enough!" Tindwyl snapped. "Believe it or not, Your Majesty, you *are* the best person for this position."

Elend snorted.

"You are best," Tindwyl said, "because you hold the throne now. If there is anything worse than a mediocre king, it is chaos—which is what this kingd1om would have if *you* hadn't taken the throne. The people on both sides, noblemen and skaa, accept you. They may not believe in you, but they accept you. Step down now—or even die accidentally—and there would be confusion, collapse, and destruction. Poorly trained or not, weak of character or not, mocked or not, you are all this country has. You are *king*, Elend Venture."

Elend paused. "I'm. . .not sure if you're making me feel any better about myself, Tindwyl."

"It's—"

Elend raised a hand. "Yes, I know. It's not about how I feel."

"You have no place for guilt. Accept that you're king, accept that you can do nothing constructive to change that, and accept responsibility. Whatever you do, be confident—for if you weren't here, there would be chaos."

Elend nodded.

"Arrogance, Your Majesty," Tindwyl said. "Successful leaders all share one common trait—they believe that they can do a better job than the alternatives. Humility is fine when considering your responsibility and duty, but when it comes time to make a decision, you must not question yourself."

"I'll try."

"Good," Tindwyl said. "Now, perhaps, we can move on to another matter. Tell me, why haven't you married that young girl?"

Elend frowned. *Wasn't expecting that. . ..* "That's a very personal question, Tindwyl."

"Good."

Elend deepened his frown, but she sat expectantly, watching him with one of her unrelenting stares.

"I don't know," Elend finally said, sitting back in his chair, sighing. "Vin isn't. . .like other women."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow, her voice softening slightly. "I think that the more women you come to know, Your Majesty, the more you'll find that statement applies to all of them."

Elend nodded ruefully.

"Either way," Tindwyl said, "things are not well as they stand. I will not pry further into your relationship, but—as we've discussed—appearances are very important to a king. It isn't appropriate for you to be seen as having a mistress. I realize that sort of thing was common for imperial nobility. The skaa, however, want to see something better in you. Perhaps because many noblemen were so frivolous with their sexual lives, the skaa have always prized monogamy. They wish desperately for you to respect their values."

"They'll just have to be patient with us," Elend said. "I actually want to marry Vin, but she won't have it."

"Do you know why?"

Elend shook his head. "She. . .doesn't seem to make sense a lot of the time."

"Perhaps she isn't right for a man in your position."

Elend looked up sharply. "What does that mean?"

"Perhaps you need someone a little more refined," Tindwyl said. "I'm certain she's a fine bodyguard, but as a lady, she—"

"Stop," Elend snapped. "Vin is fine as she is."

Tindwyl smiled.

"What?" Elend demanded.

"I've insulted you all afternoon, Your Majesty, and you barely grew sullen. I mentioned your Mistborn in a mildly disparaging way, and now y1ou're ready to throw me out."

"So?"

"So, you do love her?"

"Of course," Elend said. "I don't understand her, but yes. I love her."

Tindwyl nodded. "I apologize, then, Your Majesty. I had to be certain."

Elend frowned, relaxing in his chair slightly. "So, this was some kind of test, then? You wanted to see how I would react to your words about Vin?"

"You will always be tested by those you meet, Your Majesty. You might as well grow accustomed to it."

"But, why do you care about my relationship with Vin?"

"Love is not easy for kings, Your Majesty," Tindwyl said in an uncharacteristically kind voice. "You will find that your affection for the girl can cause far more trouble than any of the other things we've discussed."

"And that's a reason to give her up?" Elend asked stiffly.

"No," Tindwyl said. "No, I don't think so."

Elend paused, studying the stately Terriswoman with her square features and her stiff posture. "That. . .seems odd, coming from you. What about kingly duty and appearances?"

"We must make allowances for the occasional exception," Tindwyl said.

*Interesting,* Elend thought. He wouldn't have considered her the type to agree to any sort of "exceptions." *Perhaps she's a little deeper than I've assumed*.

"Now," Tindwyl said. "How are your training sessions going?"

Elend rubbed his sore arm. "All right, I suppose. But—"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. Captain Demoux entered a moment later. "Your Majesty, a visitor has arrived from Lord Cett's army."

"A messenger?" Elend said, standing.

Demoux paused, looking a little embarrassed. "Well. . .sort of. She says she's Lord Cett's daughter, and she's come looking for Breeze."

*He was born of a humble family, yet married the daughter of a king*.

# 21

THE YOUNG WOMAN'S EXPENSIVE DRESS—light red silk with a shawl and lace sleeves—might have lent her an air of dignity, had she not scampered forward as soon as Breeze entered the room. Her light Western hair bouncing, she made a squeal of happiness as she threw her arms around Breeze's neck.

She was, perhaps, eighteen years old.

Elend glanced at Ham, who stood dumbfounded.

"Well, looks like you were right about Breeze and Cett's daughter," Elend whispered.

Ham shook his head. "I didn't think. . .I mean I joked, because it was Breeze, but I didn't expect to be *right*!"

Breeze, for his part, at least had the decency to look terribly uncomfortable in the young woman's arms. They stood inside the palace atrium, the same place where Elend had met with his father's messenger. Floor-to-ceiling windows let in the afternoon light, and a group of servants stood at one side of the room to wait on Elend's orders.

Breeze met Elend's eyes, blushing deeply. *I don't think I've ever1 seen him do that before*, Elend thought.

"My dear," Breeze said, clearing his throat, "perhaps you should introduce yourself to the king?"

The girl finally let go of Breeze. She stepped back, curtsying to Elend with a noblewoman's grace. She was a bit plump, her hair long after pre-Collapse fashion, and her cheeks were red with excitement. She was a cute thing, obviously well trained for the court—exactly the sort of girl that Elend had spent his youth trying to avoid.

"Elend," Breeze said, "might I introduce Allrianne Cett, daughter to Lord Ashweather Cett, king of the Western Dominance?"

"Your Majesty," Allrianne said.

Elend nodded. "Lady Cett." He paused, then—with a hopeful voice—continued. "Your father sent you as an ambassador?"

Allrianne paused. "Um. . .he didn't exactly send me, Your Majesty."

"Oh, dear," Breeze said, pulling out a handkerchief to dab his brow.

Elend glanced at Ham, then back at the girl. "Perhaps you should explain," he said, gesturing toward the atrium's seats. Allrianne nodded eagerly, but stayed close to Breeze as they sat. Elend waved for some servants to bring chilled wine.

He had a feeling he was going to want something to drink.

"I seek asylum, Your Majesty," Allrianne said, speaking with a quick voice. "I had to go. I mean, Breezy must have told you how my father is!"

Breeze sat uncomfortably, and Allrianne put an affectionate hand on his knee.

"How your father is?" Elend asked.

"He is so manipulative," Allrianne said. "So *demanding*. He drove Breezy away, and I absolutely had to follow. I wouldn't spend another moment in that camp. A war camp! He brought me, a young lady, along with him to war! Why, do you know what it is like to be leered at by every passing soldier? Do you understand what it is like to live in a tent?"

"I—"

"We rarely had fresh water," Allrianne continued. "And I couldn't take a decent bath without fear of peeping soldiers! During our travels, there was dreadful nothing to do all day but sit in the carriage and bounce, bounce, bounce. Why, until Breezy came, I hadn't had a refined conversation in weeks. And then, Father drove him away. . .."

"Because?" Ham asked eagerly.

Breeze coughed.

"I had to get away, Your Majesty," Allrianne said. "You have to give me asylum! I know things that could help you. Like, I saw my father's camp. I'll bet you don't know that he is getting supplies from the cannery in Haverfrex! What do you think of that?"

"Um. . .impressive," Elend said hesitantly.

Allrianne nodded curtly.

"And, you came to find Breeze?" Elend asked.

Allrianne flushed slightly, glancing to the side. However, when she spoke, she displayed little tact. "I had to see him again, Your Majesty. So charming, so. . .wonderful. I wouldn't have expected Father to understand a man such as he."

"I see," Elend said.

"Please, Your Majesty," Allrianne said. "You have to take me in. Now that I've left Father, I have nowhere else to go!"

"You may stay—for a time, at least," Elend said, nodding greetings to Dockson, who had entered through the atrium doors. "But, you've obviously had a difficult trip. Perhaps you would like an opportunity to refresh yourself. . .?"

"Oh, I would much appreciate that, Your Majesty!"

Elend eyed Cadon, one of the palace stewards, who stood at the back of the room with other servants. He nodded; rooms were prepared. "Then," Elend said, standing, "Cadon will lead you to some rooms. We will take dinner this evening at seven, and can speak again then."

"Thank you, Your Majesty!" Allrianne said, jumping up from her chair. She gave Breeze another hug, then stepped forward, as if to do the same for

Elend. Fortunately, she thought better of it, instead allowing the servants to lead her away.

Elend sat. Breeze sighed deeply, leaning back in a wearied posture as Dockson walked forward, taking the girl's seat.

"That was. . .unexpected," Breeze noted.

There was an awkward pause, the atrium trees shifting slightly in the breeze from the balcony. Then—with a sharp bark—Ham began to laugh. The noise sparked Elend, and—despite the danger, despite the gravity of the problem—he found himself laughing as well.

"Oh, honestly," Breeze huffed, which only prompted them further. Perhaps it was the sheer incongruity of the situation, perhaps it was because he needed to release tension, but Elend found himself laughing so hard he almost fell from the chair. Ham wasn't doing much better, and even Dockson cracked a smile.

"I fail to see the levity in this situation," Breeze said. "The daughter of Lord Cett—a man who is currently besieging our home—just demanded asylum in the city. If Cett wasn't determined to kill us before, he certainly will be now!"

"I know," Elend said, taking deep breaths. "I know. It's just. . ."

"It's the image of you," Ham said, "being hugged by that courtly fluffcake. I can't think of anything more awkward than you being confronted by an irrational young woman!"

"This throws another wrinkle into things," Dockson noted. "Although, I'm not accustomed to *you* being the one to bring us a problem of this nature, Breeze. Honestly, I thought we would be able to avoid unplanned female attachments now that Kell is gone."

"This isn't my fault," Breeze said pointedly. "The girl's affection is completely misplaced."

"That's for sure," Ham mumbled.

"All right," a new voice said. "What was that pink thing I just passed in the hallway?"

Elend turned to find Vin standing, arms folded, in the atrium doorway. *So quiet. Why does she walk stealthily even in the palace*? She never wore shoes that clicked, never wore skirts that could rustle, and never had metal on her clothing that could clink or be Pushed by Allomancers.

"That wasn't pink, my dear," Breeze said. "That was red."

"Close enough," Vin said, walking forward. "She was bubbling to the servants about how hot her bath needed to be, and making certain they wrote down her favorite foods."

Breeze sighed. "That's Allrianne. We'll probably have to get a new pastry chef—either that, or have desserts ordered in. She's rather particular about her pastries."

"Allrianne Cett1 is the daughter of Lord Cett," Elend explained as Vin—ignoring the chairs—sat on the edge of a planter beside his chair, laying a hand on his arm. "Apparently, she and Breeze are something of an item."

"Excuse me?" Breeze huffed.

Vin, however, wrinkled her nose. "That's disgusting, Breeze. You're old. She's young."

"There was no relationship," Breeze snapped. "Besides, I'm not *that* old—nor is she *that* young."

"She sounded like she was about twelve," Vin said.

Breeze rolled his eyes. "Allrianne was a child of the country court—a little innocent, a little spoiled—but she hardly deserves to be spoken of in that manner. She's actually quite witty, in the right circumstances."

"So, was there anything between you?" Vin pressed.

"Of course not," Breeze said. "Well, not really. Nothing real, though it could have been taken the wrong way. *Was* taken the wrong way, actually, once her father discovered. . .Anyway, who are you to talk, Vin? I seem to remember a certain *young* girl pining for an *old* Kelsier a few years back."

Elend perked up at this.

Vin flushed. "I never pined over Kelsier."

"Not even at the beginning?" Breeze asked. "Come now, a dashing man like him? He saved you from being beaten by your old crewleader, took you in. . ."

"You're a sick man," Vin declared, folding her arms. "Kelsier was like a father to me."

"Eventually, perhaps," Breeze said, "but—"

Elend held up a hand. "Enough," he said. "This line of discussion is useless."

Breeze snorted, but fell silent. *Tindwyl is right,* Elend thought. *They will listen to me if I act like I expect them to*.

"We have to decide what to do," Elend said.

"The daughter of the man threatening us could be a very powerful bargaining chip," Dockson said.

"You mean take her hostage?" Vin said, eyes narrowing.

Dockson shrugged. "Someone has to state the obvious, Vin."

"Not really a hostage," Ham said. "She came to us, after all. Simply letting her stay could have the same effect as taking her hostage."

"That would risk antagonizing Cett," Elend said. "Our original plan was to make him think we're his ally."

"We could give her back, then," Dockson said. "That could get us a long way in the negotiations."

"And her request?" Breeze asked. "The girl wasn't happy in her father's camp. Shouldn't we at least consider her wishes?"

All eyes turned toward Elend. He paused. Just a few weeks ago, they would have kept on arguing. It seemed strange that they should so quickly begin to look to him for decisions.

Who was he? A man who had haphazardly ended up on the throne? A poor replacement for their brilliant leader? An idealist who hadn't considered the dangers his philosophies would bring? A fool? A child? An impostor?

The best they had.

"She stays," Elend said. "For now. Perhaps we'll be forced to return her eventually, but this will make 1a useful distraction for Cett's army. Let them sweat for a bit. It will only buy us more time."

The crewmembers nodded, and Breeze looked relieved.

*I'll do what I can, make the decisions as I see they must be made,* Elend thought.

*Then accept the consequences*.

*He could trade words with the finest of philosophers, and had an impressive memory. Nearly as good, even, as my own. Yet, he was not argumentative*.

# 22

CHAOS AND STABILITY, THE MIST was both. Upon the land there was an empire, within that empire were a dozen shattered kingdoms, within those kingdoms were cities, towns, villages, plantations. And above them all, within them all, around them all, was the mist. It was more constant than the sun, for it could not be hidden by clouds. It was more powerful than the storms, for it would outlast any weather's fury. It was always there. Changing, but eternal.

Day was an impatient sigh, awaiting the night. When the darkness did come, however, Vin found that the mists did not calm her as they once had.

Nothing seemed certain anymore. Once the night had been her refuge; now she found herself glancing behind, watching for ghostly outlines. Once Elend had been her peace, but he was changing. Once she had been able to protect the things she loved—but she was growing more and more afraid that the forces moving against Luthadel were beyond her capacity to stop.

Nothing frightened her more than her own impotence. During her childhood she had taken it for granted that she couldn't change things, but Kelsier had given her pride in herself.

If she couldn't protect Elend, what good was she?

*There are still some things I can do,* she thought forcefully. She crouched quietly on a ledge, mistcloak tassels hanging down, waving slightly in the wind. Just below her, torches burned fitfully at the front of Keep Venture, illuminating a pair of Ham's guards. They stood alert in the swirling mists, showing impressive diligence.

The guards wouldn't be able to see her sitting just above them; they'd barely be able to see twenty feet in the thick mists. They weren't Allomancers. Besides the core crew, Elend had access to barely half a dozen Mistings—which made him Allomantically weak compared with most of the other new kings in the Final Empire. Vin was supposed to make up the difference.

The torches flickered as the doors opened, and a figure left the palace. Ham's voice echoed quietly in the mist as he greeted his guards. One reason—perhaps the main reason—that the guards were so diligent was because of Ham. He might have been a bit of an anarchist at heart, but he could be a very good leader if he was given a small team. Though his guards weren't the most disciplined, polished soldiers Vin had seen, they were fiercely loyal.

Ham talked with the men for a time, then he waved farewell and walked out into the mists. The small courtyard between the keep and its wall contained a couple of guard posts and patrols, and Ham would visit each one in turn. He walked boldly in the night, trusting to diffused starlight to see, rather than blinding himself with a torch. A thief's habit.

Vin smiled, leaping quietly to the ground, then scampering after Ham. He walked on, ignorant of her presence. *What would it be like to have only one Allomantic power*? Vi1n thought. *To be able to make yourself stronger, but to have ears as weak as those of any normal man*? It had been only two years, but already she had come to rely so heavily on her abilities.

Ham continued forward, Vin following discreetly, until they reached the ambush. Vin tensed, flaring her bronze.

OreSeur howled suddenly, jumping from a pile of boxes. The kandra was a dark silhouette in the night, his inhuman baying disturbing even to Vin. Ham spun, cursing quietly.

And he instinctively flared pewter. Focused on her bronze, Vin confirmed that the pulses were definitely coming from him. Ham spun around, searching in the night as OreSeur landed. Vin, however, simply smiled. Ham's Allomancy meant he wasn't the impostor. She could cross another name off her list.

"It's okay, Ham," Vin said, walking forward.

Ham paused, lowering his dueling cane. "Vin?" he asked, squinting in the mist.

"It's me," she said. "I'm sorry, you startled my hound. He can get jumpy at night."

Ham relaxed. "We all can, I guess. Anything happening tonight?"

"Not that I can tell," she said. "I'd let you know."

Ham nodded. "I'd appreciate it—though I doubt you'd need me. I'm captain of the guard, but you're the one who does all the work."

"You're more valuable than you think, Ham," Vin said. "Elend confides in you. Since Jastes and the others left him, he's needed a friend."

Ham nodded. Vin turned, glancing into the mists, where OreSeur sat waiting on his haunches. He seemed to be getting more and more comfortable with his hound's body.

Now that she knew Ham was not an impostor, there was something she needed to discuss with him. "Ham," she said, "your protection of Elend is more valuable than you know."

"You're talking about the impostor," Ham said quietly. "El has me searching through the palace staff to see who might have gone missing for a few hours on that day. It's a tough task, though."

She nodded. "There's something else, Ham. I'm out of atium."

He stood quietly in the mists for a moment, and then she heard him mutter a curse.

"I'll die the next time I fight a Mistborn," she said.

"Not unless he has atium," Ham said.

"What are the chances that someone would send a Mistborn without atium to fight me?"

He hesitated.

"Ham," she said, "I need to find a way to fight against someone who is burning atium. Tell me that you know a way."

Ham shrugged in the darkness. "There are lots of theories, Vin. I once had a long conversation with Breeze about this—though he spent most of it grumbling that I was annoying him."

"Well?" Vin asked. "What can I do?"

He rubbed his chin. "Most people agree that the best way to kill a Mistborn with atium is to surprise them."

"That doesn't help if they attack me first," Vin said.

"Well," Ham said. "Barring surprise, there isn't much. Some people think that you *might* be able to kill an atium-using Mistborn if you catch them in an unavoidable situation1. It's like a game of fets—sometimes, the only way to take a piece is to corner it so that no matter which way it moves, it dies.

"Doing that to a Mistborn is pretty tough, though. The thing is, atium lets the Mistborn see the future—so he knows when a move will trap him, and so he can avoid the situation. The metal is supposed to enhance his mind somehow, too."

"It does. When I'm burning atium, I often dodge before I even register the attacks that are coming."

Ham nodded.

"So," Vin said, "what else?"

"That's it, Vin," Ham said. "Thugs talk about this topic a lot—we're all afraid of going up against a Mistborn. Those are your two options: Surprise him or overwhelm him. I'm sorry."

Vin frowned. Neither option would do her much good if she got ambushed. "Anyway, I need to keep moving. I promise to tell you about any corpses I produce."

Ham laughed. "How about you just try and avoid getting into situations where you have to produce them, eh? The Lord only knows what this kingdom would do if we lost you. . ."

Vin nodded, though she wasn't certain how much Ham could see of her in the darkness. She waved to OreSeur, heading out toward the keep wall, leaving Ham on the cobbled path.

"Mistress," OreSeur said as they reached the top of the wall, "might I know the purpose of surprising Master Hammond like that? Are you that fond of startling your friends?"

"It was a test," Vin said, pausing beside a merlon gap, looking out over the city proper.

"A test, Mistress?"

"To see if he would use Allomancy. That way, I could know that he wasn't the impostor."

"Ah," the kandra said. "Clever, Mistress."

Vin smiled. "Thank you," she said. A guard patrol was moving toward them. Not wanting to have to deal with them, Vin nodded to the wall-top stone guardhouse. She jumped, pushing off a coin, and landed on top of it. OreSeur bounded up beside her, using his strange kandra musculature to leap the ten feet.

Vin sat down cross-legged to think, and OreSeur padded over to the roof's side and lay down, paws hanging over the edge. As they sat, Vin considered something. *OreSeur told me that a kandra didn't gain Allomantic powers if he ate an Allomancer. . .but, can a kandra be an Allomancer on his own? I never did finish that conversation*.

"This will tell me if a person isn't a kandra, won't it?" Vin asked, turning to OreSeur. "Your people don't have Allomantic powers, right?"

OreSeur didn't answer.

"OreSeur?" Vin said.

"I'm not required to answer that question, Mistress."

*Yes,* Vin thought with a sigh. *The Contract. How am I supposed to catch this other kandra if OreSeur won't answer any of my questions*? She leaned back in frustration, staring up into the endless mists, using her mistcloak to cushion her head.

"Your plan will work, Mistress," OreSeur said quietly.

Vin paused, rolling her head to look at him. He lay with head on forepaws, staring over the city. "If you sense Allomancy from someone, then they aren't a kandra."

Vin sensed a hesitant reluctance to his w1ords, and he didn't look at her. It was as if he spoke grudgingly, giving up information that he'd rather have kept to himself.

*So secretive*, Vin thought. "Thank you," she said.

OreSeur shrugged a pair of canine shoulders.

"I know you'd rather not have to deal with me," she said. "We'd both rather keep our distance from each other. But, we'll just have to make things work this way."

OreSeur nodded again, then turned his head slightly and looked at her. "Why is it that you hate me?"

"I don't hate you," Vin said.

OreSeur raised a canine eyebrow. There was a wisdom in those eyes, an understanding that Vin was surprised to see. She'd never seen such things in him before.

"I. . ." Vin trailed off, looking away. "I just haven't ever gotten over the fact that you ate Kelsier's body."

"That isn't it," OreSeur said, turning back to look at the city. "You're too smart to be bothered by that."

Vin frowned indignantly, but the kandra wasn't looking at her. She turned, staring back up at the mists. *Why did he bring this up*? she thought. *We were just starting to get along*. She'd been willing to forget.

*You really want to know*? she thought. *Fine*.

"It's because you knew," she whispered.

"Excuse me, Mistress?"

"You knew," Vin said, still looking into the mists. "You were the only one on the crew who knew Kelsier was going to die. He told you that he was going to let himself be killed, and that you were to take his bones."

"Ah," OreSeur said quietly.

Vin turned accusing eyes at the creature. "Why didn't you say something? You knew how we felt about Kelsier. Did you even *consider* telling us that the idiot planned to kill himself? Did it even cross your mind that we might be able to stop him, that we might be able to find another way?"

"You are being quite harsh, Mistress."

"Well, you wanted to know," Vin said. "It was worst right after he died. When you came to be my servant, by his order. You never even spoke of what you'd done."

"The Contract, Mistress," OreSeur said. "You do not wish to hear this, perhaps, but I was bound. Kelsier did not wish you to know of his plans, so I could not tell you. Hate me if you must, but I do not regret my actions."

"I don't hate you." *I got over that*. "But, honestly, you wouldn't even break the Contract for his own good? You served Kelsier for two years. Didn't it even hurt you to know he was going to die?"

"Why should I care if one master or another dies?" OreSeur said. "There is always another to take their place."

"Kelsier wasn't that kind of master," Vin said.

"Wasn't he?"

"No."

"I apologize, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I will believe as commanded, then."

Vin opened her mouth to reply, then snapped it closed. If he was determined to keep thinking like a fool, then it was his right to do so. He could continue to resent masters, just as. . .

Just as she resented him. For keeping his word, for holding to his Contract.

*Ever since I've known him, I've done nothing but treat him poorly*, Vin thought. *First, when he was Renoux, I reacted against his haughty bearing—but that bearing wasn't his, it was part of the act he had to play. Then, as OreSeur, I avoided him. Hated him, even, for letting Kelsier die. Now I've forced him into an animal's body*.

*And, in two years of knowing him, the only times I've asked about his past, I did it so that I could glean more information about his people so that I could find the impostor*.

Vin watched the mists. Of all the people in the crew, only OreSeur had been an outsider. He hadn't been invited to their conferences. He hadn't inherited a position in the government. He'd helped as much as any of them, playing a vital role—that of the "spirit" Kelsier, who had returned from the grave to incite the skaa to their final rebellion. Yet, while the rest of them had titles, friendships, and duties, the only thing OreSeur had gained from overthrowing the Final Empire was another master.

One who hated him.

*No wonder he reacts like he does,* Vin thought. Kelsier's last words to her returned to her mind: *You have a lot to learn about friendship, Vin. . ..* Kell and the others had invited her in, treated her with dignity and friendliness, even when she hadn't deserved it.

"OreSeur," she said, "what was your life like before you were recruited by Kelsier?"

"I don't see what that has to do with finding the impostor, Mistress," OreSeur said.

"It doesn't have anything to do with that," Vin said. "I just thought maybe I should get to know you better."

"My apologies, Mistress, but I don't want you to know me."

Vin sighed. *So much for that.*

But. . .well, Kelsier and the others hadn't turned away when she'd been blunt with them. There was a familiar tone to OreSeur's words. Something in them that she recognized.

"Anonymity," Vin said quietly.

"Mistress?"

"Anonymity. Hiding, even when you're with others. Being quiet, unobtrusive. Forcing yourself to stay apart—emotionally, at least. It's a way of life. A protection."

OreSeur didn't answer.

"You serve beneath masters," Vin said. "Harsh men who fear your competence. The only way to keep them from hating you is to make certain they don't pay attention to you. So, you make yourself look small and weak. Not a threat. But sometimes you say the wrong thing, or you let your rebelliousness show."

She turned toward him. He was watching her. "Yes," he finally said, turning to look back over the city.

"They hate you," Vin said quietly. "They hate you because of your powers, because they can't make you break your word, or because they worry that you are too strong to control."

"They become afraid of you," OreSeur said. "They grow paranoid—terrified, even as they use you, that you will take their place. Despite the Contract, despite knowing that no kandra would break his sacred vow, they fear you. And men hate what they fear."

"And so," Vin said, "they find excuses to beat you. Sometimes, even your efforts to remain harmless seem to provoke them. They hate your s1kill, they hate the fact that they don't have more reasons to beat you, so they beat you."

OreSeur turned back to her. "How do you know these things?" he demanded.

Vin shrugged. "That's not only how they treat kandra, OreSeur. That's the same way crewleaders treat a young girl—an anomaly in a thieving underground filled with men. A child who had a strange ability to make things happen—to influence people, to hear what she shouldn't, to move more quietly and quickly than others. A tool, yet a threat at the same time."

"I. . .didn't realize, Mistress. . .."

Vin frowned. *How could he not have known about my past? He knew I was a street urchin.* Except. . .had he? For the first time, Vin realized how OreSeur must have seen her two years before, when she'd first met him. He had arrived in the area after her recruitment; he probably assumed that she'd been part of Kelsier's team for years, like the others.

"Kelsier recruited me for the first time just a few days before I met you," Vin said. "Well, actually, he didn't so much *recruit* me as *rescue* me. I spent my childhood serving in one thieving crew after another, always working for the least reputable and most dangerous men, for those were the only ones who would take in a couple of transients like my brother and me. The smart crewleaders learned that I was a good tool. I'm not sure if they figured out that I was an Allomancer—some probably did, others just thought I was 'lucky.' Either way, they needed me. And that made them hate me."

"So they beat you?"

Vin nodded. "The last one especially. That was when I was really beginning to figure out how to use Allomancy, even though I didn't know what it was. Camon knew, though. And he hated me even as he used me. I think he was afraid that I would figure out how to use my powers fully. And on that day, he worried that I would kill him. . ." Vin turned her head, looking at OreSeur. "Kill him and take his place as crewleader."

OreSeur sat quietly, up on his haunches now, regarding her.

"Kandra aren't the only ones that humans treat poorly," Vin said quietly. "We're pretty good at abusing each other, too."

OreSeur snorted. "With you, at least, they had to hold back for fear they'd kill you. Have you ever been beaten by a master who knows that no matter how hard he hits, you won't die? All he has to do is get you a new set of bones, and you'll be ready to serve again the next day. We are the ultimate servant—you can beat us to death in the morning, then have us serve you dinner that night. All the sadism, none of the cost."

Vin closed her eyes. "I understand. I wasn't a kandra, but I did have pewter. I think Camon knew he could beat me far harder than he should have been able to."

"Why didn't you run?" OreSeur asked. "You didn't have a Contract bonding you to him."

"I. . .don't know," Vin said. "People are strange, OreSeur, and loyalty is so often twisted. I stayed with Camon because he was familiar, and I feared leaving more than I did staying. That crew was all I had. My brother was gone, and I was terrified of being alone. It seems kind of strange now, thinking back."

"Sometimes a bad situation is still better than the alternative. You did what you needed to do to survive."

"Perhaps," Vin said. "But there's a better way, OreSeur. I didn't know it until Kelsier found me, but life doesn't have to be like that. You do1n't have to spend your years mistrusting, staying in the shadows and keeping yourself apart."

"Perhaps if you are human. I am kandra."

"You can still trust," Vin said. "You don't *have* to hate your masters."

"I don't hate them all, Mistress."

"But you don't trust them."

"It is nothing personal, Mistress."

"Yes it is," Vin said. "You don't trust us because you're afraid we'll hurt you. I understand that—I spent months with Kelsier wondering when I was going to get hurt again."

She paused. "But OreSeur, nobody betrayed us. Kelsier was *right*. It seems incredible to me even now, but the men in this crew—Ham, Dockson, Breeze—they're good people. And, even if one of them were to betray me, I'd still rather have trusted them. I can sleep at night, OreSeur. I can feel peace, I can laugh. Life is different. Better."

"You are human," OreSeur said stubbornly. "You can have friends because they don't worry that you'll eat them, or some other foolishness."

"I don't think that about you."

"Don't you? Mistress, you just admitted that you resent me because I ate Kelsier. Beyond that, you hate the fact that I followed my Contract. You, at least, have been honest.

"Human beings find us disturbing. They hate that we eat their kind, even though we only take bodies that are already dead. Your people find it unsettling that we can take their forms. Don't tell me that you haven't heard the legends of my people. Mistwraiths, they call us—creatures that steal the shapes of men who go into the mists. You think a monster like that, a legend used to frighten children, will ever find acceptance in your society?"

Vin frowned.

"This is the reason for the Contract, Mistress," OreSeur said, his muffled voice harsh as he spoke through dog's lips. "You wonder why we don't just run away from you? Meld into your society, and become unseen? We tried that. Long ago, when the Final Empire was new. Your people found us, and they started to destroy us. They used Mistborn to hunt us down, for there were many more Allomancers in those days. Your people hated us because they feared we would replace them. We were almost completely destroyed—and then we came up with the Contract."

"But, what difference does that make?" Vin asked. "You're still doing the same things, aren't you?"

"Yes, but now we do them at *your* command," OreSeur said. "Men like power, and they love controlling something powerful. Our people offered to serve, and we devised a binding contract—one that every kandra vowed to uphold. We will not kill men. We will take bones only when we are commanded. We will serve our masters with absolute obedience. We began to do these things, and men stopped killing us. They still hated and feared us—but they also knew they could command us.

"We became your tools. As long as we remain subservient, Mistress, we survive. And that is why I obey. To break the Contract would be to betray my people. We cannot fight you, not while you have Mistborn, and so we must serve you."

*Mistborn. Why are Mistborn so important*? He implied that they could find kandra. . ..

She kept this tidbit to herself; she sensed that if she pointed it out, he'd close up again. So, instead, she sat up and met his eyes in the darkn1ess. "If you wish, I will free you from your Contract."

"And what would that change?" OreSeur asked. "I'd just get another Contract. By our laws I must wait another decade before I have time for freedom—and then only two years, during which time I won't be able to leave the kandra Homeland. To do otherwise would risk exposure."

"Then, at least accept my apology," she asked. "I was foolish to resent you for following your Contract."

OreSeur paused. "That still doesn't fix things, Mistress. I still have to wear this cursed dog's body—I have no personality or bones to imitate!"

"I'd think that you would appreciate the opportunity simply to be yourself."

"I feel naked," OreSeur said. He sat quietly for a moment; then he bowed his head. "But. . .I have to admit that there are advantages to these bones. I didn't realize how unobtrusive they would make me."

Vin nodded. "There were times in my life when I would have given anything to be able to take the form of a dog and just live my life being ignored."

"But not anymore?"

Vin shook her head. "No. Not most of the time, anyway. I used to think that everyone was like you say—hateful, hurtful. But there are good people in the world, OreSeur. I wish I could prove that to you."

"You speak of this king of yours," OreSeur said, glancing toward the keep.

"Yes," Vin said. "And others."

"You?"

Vin shook her head. "No, not me. I'm not a good person or a bad person. I'm just here to kill things."

OreSeur watched her for a moment, then settled back down. "Regardless," he said, "you are not my worst master. That is, perhaps, a compliment among our people."

Vin smiled, but her own words left her a bit haunted. *Just here to kill things*. . ..

She glanced toward the light of the armies outside the city. A part—the part that had been trained by Reen, the part that still occasionally used his voice in the back of her mind—whispered that there was another way to fight these armies. Rather than rely on politics and parlays, the crew could use Vin. Send her on a quiet visit into the night that left the kings and generals of the armies dead.

But, she knew that Elend wouldn't approve of something like that. He'd argue against using fear to motivate, even on one's enemies. He'd point out that if she killed Straff or Cett, they'd just be replaced by other men, men even more hostile toward the city.

Even so, it seemed like such a brutal, logical answer. A piece of Vin itched to do it, if only to be doing something other than waiting and talking. She was not a person meant to be besieged.

*No*, she thought. *That's not my way. I don't have to be like Kelsier was. Hard. Unyielding. I can be something better. Something that trusts in Elend's way*.

She shoved aside that part of her that wanted to just go assassinate both Straff and Cett, then turned her attention to other things. She focused on her bronze, watching for signs of Allomancy. Though she liked to jump around and "patrol" the area, the truth was that she was just as effective staying in one place. Assassins would be likely to scout the front gates, for that was where patrols began and the largest concentration of soldiers waited.

Still, she felt her mind wandering. There were forces moving in the world, and Vin wasn't certain if she wanted to be part of them.

*What is my place*? she thought. She never felt that she'd discovered it—not back when she'd been playing as Valette Renoux, and not now, when she acted as the bodyguard to the man she loved. Nothing quite fit.

She closed her eyes, burning tin and bronze, feeling the touch of wind-borne mist on her skin. And, oddly, she felt something else, something very faint. In the distance she could sense Allomantic pulsings. They were so dull she almost missed them.

They were kind of like the pulses given off by the mist spirit. She could hear it, too, much closer. Atop a building out in the city. She was getting used to its presence, not that she had much choice. Still, as long as it only watched. . ..

*It tried to kill one of the Hero's companions*, she thought. *It knifed him, somehow*. Or so the logbook claimed.

But. . .what was that pulsing in the far distance? It was soft. . .yet powerful. Like a faraway drum. She squeezed her eyes shut, focusing.

"Mistress?" OreSeur said, suddenly perking up.

Vin snapped her eyes open. "What?"

"Didn't you hear that?"

Vin sat up. "Wha—" Then she picked it out. Footsteps outside the wall a short distance away. She leaned closer, noticing a dark figure walking down the street toward the keep. She'd been so focused on her bronze that she'd completely tuned out real sounds.

"Good job," she said, approaching the edge of the guard station's roof. Only then did she realize something important. OreSeur had taken the initiative: he'd alerted her of the danger without specifically being ordered to listen.

It was a small thing, but it seemed important.

"What do you think?" she asked quietly, watching the figure approach. He carried no torch, and he seemed very comfortable in the mists.

"Allomancer?" OreSeur asked, crouching beside her.

Vin shook her head. "There's no Allomantic pulse."

"So if he is one, he's Mistborn," OreSeur said. He still didn't know she could pierce copperclouds. "He's too tall to be your friend Zane. Be careful, Mistress."

Vin nodded, dropped a coin, then threw herself into the mists. Behind her, OreSeur jumped down from the guardhouse, then leapt off the wall and dropped some twenty feet to the ground.

*He certainly does like to push the limits of those bones,* she thought. Of course, if a fall couldn't kill him, then she could perhaps understand his courage.

She guided herself by Pulling on the nails in a wooden roof, landing just a short distance from the dark figure. She pulled out her knives and prepared her metals, making certain she had duralumin. Then she moved quietly across the street.

*Surprise,* she thought. Ham's suggestion still left her nervous. She couldn't always depend on surprise. She followed the man, studying him. He was tall—very tall. And in robes. In fact, those robes. . .

Vin stopped short. "Sazed?" she asked with shock.

The Terrisman turned, face now visible to her tin-enhanced eyes. He smiled. "Ah,1 Lady Vin," he said with his familiar, wise voice. "I was beginning to wonder how long it would take you to find me. You are—"

He was cut off as Vin grabbed him in an excited embrace. "I didn't think you were going to come back so soon!"

"I was not planning to return, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "But events are such that I could not avoid this place, I think. Come, we must speak with His Majesty. I have news of a rather disconcerting nature."

Vin let go, looking up at his kindly face, noting the tiredness in his eyes. Exhaustion. His robes were dirty and smelled of ash and sweat. Sazed was usually very meticulous, even when he traveled. "What is it?" she asked.

"Problems, Lady Vin," he said quietly. "Problems and troubles."

*The Terris rejected him, but he came to lead them.*

# 23

"KING LEKAL CLAIMED THAT HE had twenty thousand of the creatures in his army," Sazed said quietly.

*Twenty thousand*! Elend thought in shock. That was easily as dangerous as Straff's fifty thousand men. Probably more so.

The table fell silent, and Elend glanced at the others. They sat in the palace kitchen, where a couple of cooks hurriedly prepared a late-night dinner for Sazed. The white room had an alcove at the side with a modest table for servant meals. Not surprisingly, Elend had never dined in the room, but Sazed had insisted that they not wake the servants it would require to prepare the main dining hall, though he apparently hadn't eaten all day.

So, they sat on the low wooden benches, waiting while the cooks worked—far enough away that they couldn't hear the hushed conversation in the alcove. Vin sat beside Elend, arm around his waist, her wolfhound kandra on the floor beside her. Breeze sat on the other side of him, looking disheveled; he'd been rather annoyed when they'd woken him. Ham had already been up, as had Elend himself. Another proposal had needed work—a letter he would send to the Assembly explaining that he was meeting with Straff informally, rather than in official parlay.

Dockson pulled over a stool, choosing a place away from Elend, as usual. Clubs sat slumped on his side of the bench, though Elend couldn't tell if the posture was from weariness or from general Clubs grumpiness. That left only Spook, who sat on one of the serving tables a distance away, legs swinging over the side as he occasionally pilfered a tidbit of food from the annoyed cooks. He was, Elend noticed with amusement, flirting quite unsuccessfully with a drowsy kitchen girl.

And then there was Sazed. The Terrisman sat directly across from Elend with the calm sense of collectedness that only Sazed could manage. His robes were dusty, and he looked odd without his earrings—removed to not tempt thieves, Elend would guess—but his face and hands were clean. Even dirtied from travel, Sazed still gave off a sense of tidiness.

"I do apologize, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "But I do not think that Lord Lekal is trustworthy. I realize that you were friends with him before the Collapse, but his current state seems somewhat. . .unstable."

Elend nodded. "How is he controlling them, you think?"

Sazed shook his head. "I cannot guess, Your Majesty."

Ham shook his head. "I have men in the guard who came up from the South after the Collapse. They1 were soldiers, serving in a garrison near a koloss camp. The Lord Ruler hadn't been dead a day before the creatures went crazy. They attacked everything in the area—villages, garrisons, cities."

"The same happened in the Northwest," Breeze said. "Lord Cett's lands were being flooded with refugees running from rogue koloss. Cett tried to recruit the koloss garrison near his own lands, and they followed him for a time. But then, something set them off, and they just attacked his army. He had to slaughter the whole lot—and lost nearly two thousand soldiers killing a small garrison of five hundred koloss."

The group grew quiet again, the clacking and talking of the cooking staff sounding a short distance away. *Five hundred koloss killed two thousand men,* Elend thought. *And the Jastes force contains twenty thousand of the beasts. Lord Ruler*. . .

"How long?" said Clubs. "How far away?"

"It took me a little over a week to get here," Sazed said. "Though it looked as if King Lekal had been camped there for a time. He is obviously coming this direction, but I don't know how quickly he intends to march."

"Probably wasn't expecting to find that two other armies beat him to the city," Ham noted.

Elend nodded. "What do we do, then?"

"I don't see that we *can* do anything, Your Majesty," Dockson said, shaking his head. "Sazed's report doesn't give me much hope that we'll be able to reason with Jastes. And, with the siege we're already under, there is little we can do."

"He might just turn around and go," Ham said. "With two armies already here. . ."

Sazed looked hesitant. "He knew about the armies, Lord Hammond. He seemed to trust in his koloss over the human armies."

"With twenty thousand," Clubs said, "he could probably take *either* of those other armies."

"But he'd have trouble with both of them," Ham said. "*That* would give me pause, if I were him. By showing up with a pile of volatile koloss, he could easily worry Cett and Straff enough that they would join forces against him."

"Which would suit us just fine," Clubs said. "The more that *other* people fight, the better off we are."

Elend sat back. He felt a looming anxiety, and it was good to have Vin next to him, arm around him, even if she didn't say much. Sometimes, he felt stronger simply because of her presence. *Twenty thousand koloss*. This single threat scared him more than either of the other armies.

"This could be a good thing," Ham said. "If Jastes *were* to lose control of those beasts near Luthadel, there's a good chance they'd attack one of those other armies."

"Agreed," Breeze said tiredly. "I think we need to keep stalling, draw out this siege until the koloss army arrives. One more army in the mix means only more advantage for us."

"I don't like the idea of koloss in the area," Elend said, shivering slightly. "No matter what advantage they offer us. If they attack the city. . ."

"I say we worry about that when, and if, they arrive," Dockson said. "For now, we have to continue our plan as we intended. His Majesty meets with Straff, trying to manipulate him into a covert alliance with us. With luck, the imminent koloss presence will make him more willing to deal."

Elend nodded. Straff h1ad agreed to meet, and they'd set a date for a few days away. The Assembly was angry that he hadn't consulted with them about the time and place, but there was little they could do about the matter.

"Anyway," Elend finally said, sighing. "You said you had other news, Saze? Better, hopefully?"

Sazed paused. A cook finally walked over, setting a plate of food before him: steamed barley with strips of steak and some spiced lagets. The scents were enough to make Elend a little hungry. He nodded thankfully to the palace chef, who had insisted on preparing the meal himself despite the late hour, and who waved to his staff and began to withdraw.

Sazed sat quietly, waiting to speak until the staff were again out of earshot. "I hesitate to mention this, Your Majesty, for your burdens already seem great."

"You might as well just tell me," Elend said.

Sazed nodded. "I fear that we may have exposed the world to something when we killed the Lord Ruler, Your Majesty. Something unanticipated."

Breeze raised a tired eyebrow. "Unanticipated? You mean other than ravaging koloss, power-hungry despots, and bandits?"

Sazed paused. "Um, yes. I speak of items a little more nebulous, I fear. There is something wrong with the mists."

Vin perked up slightly beside Elend. "What do you mean?"

"I have been following a trail of events," Sazed explained. He looked down as he spoke, as if embarrassed. "I have been performing an investigation, you might say. You see, I have heard numerous reports of the mists coming during the daytime."

Ham shrugged. "That happens sometimes. There are foggy days, especially in the fall."

"That is not what I mean, Lord Hammond," Sazed said. "There is a difference between the mist and ordinary fog. It is difficult to spot, perhaps, but it is noticeable to a careful eye. The mist is thicker, and. . .well. . ."

"It moves in larger patterns," Vin said quietly. "Like rivers in the sky. It never just hangs in one place; it floats in the breeze, almost like it makes the breeze."

"And it can't enter buildings," Clubs said. "Or tents. It evaporates soon after it does."

"Yes," Sazed said. "When I first heard these reports of day mist, I assumed that the people were just letting their superstitions get out of control. I have known many skaa who refused to go out on a foggy morning. However, I was curious about the reports, so I traced them to a village in the South. I taught there for some time, and never received confirmation of the stories. So, I made my way from that place."

He paused, frowning slightly. "Your Majesty, please do not think me mad. During those travels I passed a secluded valley, and saw what I swear was mist, not fog. It was moving across the landscape, creeping toward me. During the full light of day."

Elend glanced at Ham. He shrugged. "Don't look at me."

Breeze snorted. "He was asking your opinion, my dear man."

"Well, I don't have one."

"Some philosopher you are."

"I'm not a philosopher," Ham said. "I just like to think about things."

"Well, think about *this*, then," Breeze said.

Elend glanced at Sazed. "Have those two always been this way?"

"Honestly, I am not certain, Your Majesty," Sazed said, smiling slightly. "I have known them for only slightly longer than yourself."

"Yes, they've always been like this," Dockson said, sighing quietly. "If anything, they've gotten worse over the years."

"Aren't you hungry?" Elend asked, nodding to Sazed's plate.

"I can eat once our discussion is finished," Sazed said.

"Sazed, you're not a servant anymore," Vin said. "You don't have to worry about things like that."

"It is not a matter of serving or not, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "It is a matter of being polite."

"Sazed," Elend said.

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

He pointed at the plate. "Eat. You can be polite another time. Right now, you look famished—and you're among friends."

Sazed paused, giving Elend an odd look. "Yes, Your Majesty," he said, picking up a knife and spoon.

"Now," Elend began, "why does it matter if you saw mist during the day? We know that the things the skaa say aren't true—there's no reason to fear the mist."

"The skaa may be more wise than we credit them, Your Majesty," Sazed said, taking small, careful bites of food. "It appears that the mist has been killing people."

"What?" Vin asked, leaning forward.

"I have never seen it myself, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "But I have seen its effects, and have collected several separate reports. They all agree that the mist has been killing people."

"That's preposterous," Breeze said. "Mist is harmless."

"That is what I thought, Lord Ladrian," Sazed said. "However, several of the reports are quite detailed. The incidents always occurred during the day, and each one tells of the mist curling around some unfortunate individual, who then died—usually in a seizure. I gathered interviews with witnesses myself."

Elend frowned. From another man, he'd dismiss the news. But Sazed. . .he was not a man that one dismissed. Vin, sitting beside Elend, watched the conversation with interest, chewing slightly on her bottom lip. Oddly, she didn't object to Sazed's words—though the others seemed to be reacting as Breeze had.

"It doesn't make sense, Saze," Ham said. "Thieves, nobles, and Allomancers have gone out in the mists for centuries."

"Indeed they have, Lord Hammond," Sazed said with a nod. "The only explanation I can think of involves the Lord Ruler. I heard no substantive reports of mist deaths before the Collapse, but I have had little trouble finding them since. The reports are concentrated in the Outer Dominances, but the incidents appear to be moving inward. I found one. . .very disturbing incident several weeks to the south, where an entire village seems to have been trapped in their hovels by the mists."

"But, why would the Lord Ruler's death have anything to do with the mists?" Breeze asked.

"I am not certain, Lord Ladrian," Sazed said. "But it is the only connection I have been able to hypothesize."

Breeze frowned. "I wish you wouldn't call me that."

"I apologize, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. "I am still acc1ustomed to calling people by their full names."

"Your name is Ladrian?" Vin asked.

"Unfortunately," Breeze said. "I've never been fond of it, and with dear Sazed putting 'Lord' before it. . .well, the alliteration makes it even more atrocious."

"Is it me," Elend said, "or are we going off on even more tangents than usual tonight?"

"We get that way when we're tired," Breeze said with a yawn. "Either way, our good Terrisman must have his facts wrong. Mist doesn't kill."

"I can only report what I have discovered," Sazed said. "I will need to do some more research."

"So, you'll be staying?" Vin asked, obviously hopeful.

Sazed nodded.

"What about teaching?" Breeze asked, waving his hand. "When you left, I recall that you said something about spending the rest of your life traveling, or some nonsense like that."

Sazed blushed slightly, glancing down again. "That duty will have to wait, I fear."

"You're welcome to stay as long as you want, Sazed," Elend said, shooting a glare at Breeze. "If what you say is true, then you'll be doing a greater service through your studies than you would by traveling."

"Perhaps," Sazed said.

"Though," Ham noted with a chuckle, "you probably could have picked a safer place to set up shop—one that isn't being pushed around by two armies and twenty thousand koloss."

Sazed smiled, and Elend gave an obligatory chuckle. *He said that the incidents involving the mist were moving inward, toward the center of the empire. Toward us.*

Something else to worry about.

"What's going on?" a voice suddenly asked. Elend turned toward the kitchen doorway, where a disheveled-looking Allrianne stood. "I heard voices. Is there a party?"

"We were just discussing matters of state interest, my dear," Breeze said quickly.

"The other girl is here," Allrianne said, pointing at Vin. "Why didn't you invite me?"

Elend frowned. *She heard voices? The guest quarters aren't anywhere near the kitchens.* And Allrianne was dressed, wearing a simple noblewoman's gown. She'd taken the time to get out of her sleeping clothing, but she'd left her hair disheveled. Perhaps to make herself look more innocent?

*I'm starting to think like Vin,* Elend told himself with a sigh. As if to corroborate his thoughts, he noticed Vin narrowing her eyes at the new girl.

"Go back to your rooms, dear," Breeze said soothingly. "Don't trouble His Majesty."

Allrianne sighed dramatically, but turned and did as he asked, trailing off into the hallway. Elend turned back to Sazed, who was watching the girl with a curious expression. Elend gave him an "ask later" look, and the Terrisman turned back to his meal. A few moments later, the group began to break up. Vin hung back with Elend as the others left.

"I don't trust that girl," Vin said as a couple of servants took Sazed's pack and guided him away.

Elend smiled, turning to look down at Vin. "Do I have to say it?"

She rolled her eyes. "I know. 'You don't trust anyone, Vin.' This time I'1m right. She was dressed, but her hair was disheveled. She must have done that intentionally."

"I noticed."

"You did?" She sounded impressed.

Elend nodded. "She must have heard the servants waking up Breeze and Clubs, so she got up. That means she spent a good half an hour eavesdropping. She kept her hair mussed so that we'd assume that she'd just come down."

Vin opened her mouth slightly, then frowned, studying him. "You're getting better," she eventually said.

"Either that, or Miss Allrianne just isn't very good."

Vin smiled.

"I'm still trying to figure out why you didn't hear her," Elend noted.

"The cooks," Vin said. "Too much noise. Besides, I was a little distracted by what Sazed was saying."

"And what do you think of it?"

Vin paused. "I'll tell you later."

"All right," Elend said. To Vin's side, the kandra rose and stretched its wolfhound body. *Why did she insist on bringing OreSeur to the meeting*? he wondered. *Wasn't it just a few weeks ago that she couldn't stand the thing*?

The wolfhound turned, glancing at the kitchen windows. Vin followed its gaze.

"Going back out?" Elend asked.

Vin nodded. "I don't trust this night. I'll stay near your balcony, in case there's trouble."

She kissed him; then she moved away. He watched her go, wondering why she had been so interested in Sazed's stories, wondering what it was she wasn't telling him.

*Stop it,* he told himself. Perhaps he was learning her lessons a little too well—of all the people in the palace, Vin was the last one he needed to be paranoid about. However, every time he felt like he was beginning to figure Vin out, he realized just how little he understood her.

And that made everything else seem a little more depressing. With a sigh, he turned to seek out his rooms, where his half-finished letter to the Assembly waited to be completed.

*Perhaps I should not have spoken of the mists,* Sazed thought, following a servant up the stairs. *Now I've troubled the king about something that might just be my delusion*.

They reached the top of the stairs, and the servant asked if he wished a bath drawn. Sazed shook his head. In most other circumstances he would have welcomed the opportunity to get clean. However, running all the way to the Central Dominance, being captured by the koloss, then marching the rest of the way up to Luthadel had left him wearied to the farthest fringe of exhaustion. He'd barely had the strength to eat. Now he just wanted to sleep.

The servant nodded and led Sazed down a side corridor.

What if he was imagining connections that didn't exist? Every scholar knew that one of the greatest dangers in research was the desire to find a specific answer. He had not imagined the testimonies he had taken, but had he exaggerated their importance? What did he really have? The words of a frightened man who had seen his friend die of a seizure? The testimony of a lunatic, crazed to the point of cannibalism? The fact remained that Sazed himself had never seen the mists kill.

The servant led him to a guest chamber, an1d Sazed thankfully bid the man good night. He watched the man walk away, holding only a candle, his lamp left for Sazed to use. During most of Sazed's life, he had belonged to a class of servants prized for their refined sense of duty and decorum. He'd been in charge of households and manors, supervising servants just like the one who had led him to his rooms.

*Another life*, he thought. He had always been a little frustrated that his duties as a steward had left him little time for study. How ironic it was that he should help overthrow the Final Empire, then find himself with even less time.

He reached to push open the door, and froze almost immediately. There was already a light inside the room.

*Did they leave a lamp on for me*? he wondered. He slowly pushed the door open. Someone was waiting for him.

"Tindwyl," Sazed said quietly. She sat beside the room's writing desk, collected and neatly dressed, as always.

"Sazed," she replied as he stepped in, shutting the door. Suddenly, he was even more acutely aware of his dirty robes.

"You responded to my request," he said.

"And you ignored mine."

Sazed didn't meet her eyes. He walked over, setting his lamp on top of the room's bureau. "I noticed the king's new clothing, and he appears to have gained a bearing to match them. You have done well, I think."

"We are only just started," she said dismissively. "You were right about him."

"King Venture is a very good man," Sazed said, walking to the washbasin to wipe down his face. He welcomed the cold water; dealing with Tindwyl was bound to tire him even further.

"Good men can make terrible kings," Tindwyl noted.

"But bad men cannot make good kings," Sazed said. "It is better to start with a good man and work on the rest, I think."

"Perhaps," Tindwyl said. She watched him with her normal hard expression. Others thought her cold—harsh, even. But Sazed had never seen that in her. Considering what she had been through, he found it remarkable—amazing, even—that she was so confident. Where did she get it?

"Sazed, Sazed. . ." she said. "Why did you return to the Central Dominance? You know the directions the Synod gave you. You are supposed to be in the Eastern Dominance, teaching the people on the borders of the burnlands."

"That is where I was," Sazed said. "And now I am here. The South will get along for a time without me, I think."

"Oh?" Tindwyl asked. "And who will teach them irrigation techniques, so they can produce enough food to survive the cold months? Who will explain to them basic lawmaking principles so that they may govern themselves? Who will show them how to reclaim their lost faiths and beliefs? You were always so passionate about that."

Sazed set down the washcloth. "I will return to teach them when I am certain there is not a greater work I need to do."

"What greater work could there be?" Tindwyl demanded. "This is our life's duty, Sazed. This is the work of our entire *people*. I know that Luthadel is important to you, but there is nothing for you here. I will care for your king. You must go."

"I appreciate your work with King Venture," Sazed said. "My course has little to do with him, however. I have other research to 1do."

Tindwyl frowned, eyeing him with a cool stare. "You're still looking for this phantom connection of yours. This foolishness with the mists."

"There *is* something wrong, Tindwyl," he said.

"No," Tindwyl said, sighing. "Can't you see, Sazed? You spent ten years working to overthrow the Final Empire. Now, you can't content yourself with regular work, so you have invented some grand threat to the land. You're afraid of being irrelevant."

Sazed looked down. "Perhaps. If you are correct, then I will seek the forgiveness of the Synod. I should probably seek it anyway, I think."

"Oh, Sazed," Tindwyl said, shaking her head slightly. "I can't understand you. It makes sense when young fire-heads like Vedzan and Rindel buck the Synod's advice. But you? You are the soul of what it means to be Terris—so calm, so humble, so careful and respectful. So wise. Why are you the one who consistently defies our leaders? It doesn't make sense."

"I am not so wise as you think, Tindwyl," Sazed said quietly. "I am simply a man who must do as he believes. Right now, I believe there to be a danger in the mists, and I must investigate my impressions. Perhaps it is simply arrogance and foolishness. But I would rather be known as arrogant and foolish than risk danger to the people of this land."

"You will find nothing."

"Then I will be proven wrong," Sazed said. He turned, looking into her eyes. "But kindly remember that the last time I disobeyed the Synod, the result was the collapse of the Final Empire and the freedom of our people."

Tindwyl made a tight-lipped frown. She didn't like being reminded of that fact—none of the Keepers did. They held that Sazed had been wrong to disobey, but they couldn't very well punish him for his success.

"I don't understand you," she repeated quietly. "You should be a leader among our people, Sazed. Not our greatest rebel and dissident. Everyone wants to look up to you—but they can't. Must you defy every order you are given?"

He smiled wanly, but did not answer.

Tindwyl sighed, rising. She walked toward the door, but paused, taking his hand as she passed. She looked into his eyes for a moment; then he removed the hand.

She shook her head and left.

*He commanded kings, and though he sought no empire, he became greater than all who had come before.*

# 24

SOMETHING IS GOING ON, VIN thought, sitting in the mists atop Keep Venture.

Sazed was not prone to exaggeration. He was meticulous—that much showed in his mannerisms, his cleanliness, and even the way he spoke. And, he was even more meticulous when it came to his studies. Vin was inclined to believe his discoveries.

And she'd certainly seen things in the mists. Dangerous things. Could the mist spirit explain the deaths Sazed had encountered? *But, if that's the case, why didn't Sazed speak of figures in the mist*?

She sighed, closing her eyes and burning bronze. She could hear the spirit, watching nearby. And, she could hear *it* again as well, the strange thumping in the distance. She opened her eyes, leaving her bronze on, and quietly unfolded something from her pocket: a sheet from 1the logbook. By the light from Elend's balcony below, and with tin, she could easily read the words.

> *I sleep but a few hours each night. We must press forward, traveling as much as we can each day—but when I finally lie down, I find sleep elusive. The same thoughts that trouble me during the day are only compounded by the stillness of night.*
>
> *And, above it all, I hear the thumping sounds from above, the pulsings from the mountains. Drawing me closer with each beat.*

She shivered. She had asked one of Elend's seekers to burn bronze, and he had claimed to hear nothing from the north. Either he was the kandra, lying to her about his ability to burn bronze, or Vin could hear a rhythm that nobody else could. Nobody except a man a thousand years dead.

A man everyone had assumed was the Hero of Ages.

*You're being silly*, she told herself, refolding the paper. *Jumping to conclusions*. To her side, OreSeur rustled, lying quietly and staring out over the city.

And yet, she kept thinking of Sazed's words. Something was happening with the mists. Something was wrong.

Zane didn't find her atop Keep Hasting.

He stopped in the mists, standing quietly. He'd expected to find her waiting, for this was the place of their last fight. Even thinking of the event made him tense with anticipation.

During the months of sparring, they had always met again at the place where he'd eventually lost her. Yet, he'd returned to this location on several nights, and had never found her. He frowned, thinking of Straff's orders, and of necessity.

Eventually, he would likely be ordered to kill this girl. He wasn't certain what bothered him more—his growing reluctance to consider such an act, or his growing worry that he might not actually be able to beat her.

*She could be it*, he thought. *The thing that finally lets me resist. The thing that convinces me to just. . .leave*.

He couldn't explain why he needed a reason. Part of him simply ascribed it to his insanity, though the rational part of him felt that was a weak excuse.

Deep down, he admitted that Straff was all he had ever known. Zane wouldn't be able to leave until he knew he had someone else to rely on.

He turned away from Keep Hasting. He'd had enough of waiting; it was time to seek her out. Zane threw a coin, bounding across the city for a time. And, sure enough, there she was: sitting atop Keep Venture, watching over his foolish brother.

Zane rounded the keep, keeping far enough away that even tin-enhanced eyes wouldn't see him. He landed on the back of the keep's roof, then walked forward quietly. He approached, watching her sit on the edge of the roof. The air was silent.

Finally, she turned around, jumping slightly. He swore that she could sense him when she shouldn't be able to.

Either way, he was discovered.

"Zane," Vin said flatly, easily identifying the silhouette. He wore his customary black on black, with no mistcloak.

"I've been waiting," he said quietly. "Atop Keep Hasting. Hoping you'd come."

She sighed, careful to keep an eye on h1im, but relaxing slightly. "I'm not really in the mood for sparring right now."

He watched her. "Pity," he finally said. He walked over, prompting Vin to rise cautiously to her feet. He paused beside the lip of the rooftop, looking down at Elend's lit balcony.

Vin glanced at OreSeur. He was tense, alternately watching her and Zane.

"You're so worried about him," Zane said quietly.

"Elend?" Vin asked.

Zane nodded. "Even though he uses you."

"We've had this discussion, Zane. He isn't using me."

Zane looked up at her, meeting her eyes, standing straight-backed and confident in the night.

*He's so strong,* she thought. *So sure of himself. So different from. . .*

She stopped herself.

Zane turned away. "Tell me, Vin," he said, "when you were younger, did you ever wish for power?"

Vin cocked her head, frowning at the strange question. "What do you mean?"

"You grew up on the streets," Zane said. "When you were younger, did you wish for power? Did you dream of having the ability to free yourself, to kill those who brutalized you?"

"Of course I did," Vin said.

"And now you have that power," Zane said. "What would the child Vin say if she could see you? A Mistborn who is bent and bowed by the weight of another's will? Powerful, yet somehow still subservient?"

"I'm a different person now, Zane," Vin said. "I'd like to think that I've learned things since I was a child."

"I've found that a child's instincts are often the most honest," Zane said. "The most natural."

Vin didn't respond.

Zane turned quietly, looking out over the city, seemingly unconcerned that he was exposing his back to her. Vin eyed him, then dropped a coin. It plinked against the metal rooftop, and he immediately glanced back toward her.

*No,* she thought, *he doesn't trust me*.

He turned away again, and Vin watched him. She did understand what he meant, for she had once thought as he did. Idly, she wondered what kind of person she might have become if she'd gained full access to her powers without—at the same time—learning of friendship and trust from Kelsier's crew.

"What would you do, Vin?" Zane asked, turning back toward her. "Assuming you didn't have any constraints—assuming there were no repercussions for your actions?"

*Go north*. The thought was immediate. *Find out what is causing that thumping*. She didn't say it, however. "I don't know," she said instead.

He turned, eyeing her. "You aren't taking me seriously, I see. I apologize for wasting your time."

He turned to go, walking directly between her and OreSeur. Vin watched him, and felt a sudden stab of concern. He'd come to her, willing to talk rather than just fight—and she'd wasted the opportunity. She was never going to turn him to her side if she didn't talk to him.

"You want to know what I'd do?" she asked, her voice ringing in the silent mists.

Zane paused.

"If I could just use my power as I wanted?" Vin asked. "No repercussions? I'd protect him."

"Your king?" Zane asked, turning.

Vin nodded sharply. "These men who brought armies against him—your master, this man named Cett. I'd kill them. I'd use my power to make certain that nobody could threaten Elend."

Zane nodded quietly, and she saw respect in his eyes. "And why don't you?"

"Because. . ."

"I see the confusion in your eyes," Zane said. "You know that your instincts to kill those men are right—yet you hold back. Because of him."

"There *would* be repercussions, Zane," Vin said. "If I killed those men, their armies might just attack. Right now, diplomacy could still work."

"Perhaps," Zane said. "Until he *asks* you to go kill someone for him."

Vin snorted. "Elend doesn't work that way. He doesn't give me orders, and the only people I kill are the ones who try to kill him first."

"Oh?" Zane said. "You may not act at his order, Vin, but you certainly refrain from action at it. You are his toy. I don't say this to insult you—you see, I'm as much a toy as you are. Neither of us can break free. Not alone."

Suddenly, the coin Vin had dropped snapped into the air, flying toward Zane. She tensed, but it simply streaked into Zane's waiting hand.

"It's interesting," he said, turning the coin in his fingers. "Many Mistborn stop seeing the value in coins. To us, they simply become something to be used for jumping. It's easy to forget the value of something when you use it so often. When it becomes commonplace and convenient to you. When it becomes. . .just a tool."

He flipped the coin up, then shot it out into the night. "I must go," he said, turning.

Vin raised a hand. Seeing him use Allomancy made her realize that there was another reason she wanted to speak with him. It had been so long since she'd talked with another Mistborn, one who understood her powers. Someone like her.

But, it seemed to her that she was too desperate for him to stay. So she let him go, and returned to her vigil.

*He fathered no children, yet all of the land became his progeny*.

# 25

VIN WAS A VERY LIGHT sleeper—a heritage from her youth. Thieving crews worked together out of necessity, and any man who couldn't guard his own possessions was considered to be unworthy of them. Vin, of course, had been at the very bottom of the hierarchy—and while she hadn't had many possessions to protect, being a young girl in a primarily male environment gave her other reasons to be a light sleeper.

So it was that when she awoke to a quiet bark of warning, she reacted without thinking. She tossed off her covers, reaching immediately for the vial on her bedstand. She didn't sleep with metals inside of her; many of the Allomantic metals were, to some small extent, poisonous. It was unavoidable that she'd have to deal with some of that danger, but she had been warned to burn away excess metals at the end of each day.

She downed this vial even as she reached for the obsidian daggers hidden beneath her pillow. The door to her sleeping chamber swung open, and Tind1wyl walked in. The Terriswoman froze in midstep as she saw Vin crouching on the bed's footboard a few feet away, twin daggers glistening, body tense.

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "So you are awake."

"Now."

The Terriswoman smiled.

"What are you doing in my rooms?" Vin demanded.

"I came to wake you. I thought we might go shopping."

"Shopping?"

"Yes, dear," Tindwyl said, walking over to pull open the curtains. It was far earlier in the day than Vin usually rose. "From what I hear, you're going to meet with His Majesty's father on the morrow. You'll want a suitable dress for the occasion, I assume?"

"I don't wear dresses anymore." *What is your game*?

Tindwyl turned, eyeing Vin. "You sleep in your clothing?"

Vin nodded.

"You don't keep any ladies-in-waiting?"

Vin shook her head.

"Very well, then," Tindwyl said, turning to walk from the room. "Bathe and change. We'll leave when you're ready."

"I don't take commands from you."

Tindwyl paused by the door, turning. Then her face softened. "I know you don't, child. You may come with me if you wish—the choice is yours. However, do you really want to meet with Straff Venture in trousers and a shirt?"

Vin hesitated.

"At least come browse," Tindwyl said. "It will help take your mind off things."

Finally, Vin nodded. Tindwyl smiled again, then left.

Vin glanced at OreSeur, who sat beside her bed. "Thanks for the warning."

The kandra shrugged.

Once, Vin wouldn't have been able to imagine living in a place like Keep Venture. The young Vin had been accustomed to hidden lairs, skaa hovels, and the occasional alley. Now she lived in a building bespeckled with stained glass, bounded by mighty walls and grand archways.

*Of course,* Vin thought as she left the stairwell, *many things have happened that I didn't expect. Why think about them now*?

Her youth in the thieving crews had been much on her mind of late, and Zane's comments—ridiculous though they were—itched in her mind. Did Vin belong in a place like this keep? She had a great many skills, but few of them were beautiful hallway kinds of skills. They were more. . .ash-stained alleyway kinds of skills.

She sighed, OreSeur at her side as she made her way to the southern entryway, where Tindwyl said she'd be waiting. The hallway here grew wide and grand, and opened directly into the courtyard. Usually, coaches came right up into the entryway to pick up their occupants—that way the noblemen wouldn't be exposed to the elements.

As she approached, her tin let her hear voices. One was Tindwyl, the other. . .

"I didn't bring much," Allrianne said. "A couple hundred boxings. But I *do* so need something to wear. I can't survive on borrowed gowns forever!"

Vin paused as she turned into the last part of the hallway.

"The king'1s gift will surely be enough to pay for a dress, dear," Tindwyl said, noticing Vin. "Ah, here she is."

A sullen-looking Spook stood with the two women. He had on his palace guard's uniform, though he wore the jacket undone and the trousers loose. Vin walked forward slowly. "I wasn't expecting company," she said.

"Young Allrianne was trained as a courtly noblewoman," Tindwyl said. "She will know the current fashions, and will be able to advise on your purchases."

"And Spook?"

Tindwyl turned, eyeing the boy. "Packman."

*Well, that explains his mood,* Vin thought.

"Come," Tindwyl said, walking toward the courtyard. Allrianne followed quickly, walking with a light, graceful step. Vin glanced at Spook, who shrugged, and they followed as well.

"How did you get pulled into this?" Vin whispered to Spook.

"Was up too early, sneaking food," Spook grumbled. "Miss Imposing there noticed me, smiled like a wolfhound, and said, 'We'll be needing your services this afternoon, young man.'"

Vin nodded. "Stay alert and keep your tin burning. Remember, we're at war."

Spook obediently did what she said. Standing close to him as she was, Vin easily picked up and identified his tin's Allomantic pulses—meaning he wasn't the spy.

*Another one off the list*, Vin thought. *At least this trip won't be a total waste*.

A coach waited for them by the front keep gates. Spook climbed up beside the coachman, and the women piled into the back. Vin sat down inside, and OreSeur climbed in and took the seat next to her. Allrianne and Tindwyl sat across from her, and Allrianne eyed OreSeur with a frown, wrinkling her nose. "Does the animal have to sit on the seats with us?"

"Yes," Vin said as the carriage started moving.

Allrianne obviously expected more of an explanation, but Vin didn't give one. Finally, Allrianne turned to look out the window. "Are you sure we'll be safe, traveling with only one manservant, Tindwyl?"

Tindwyl eyed Vin. "Oh, I think that we'll be all right."

"Oh, that's right," Allrianne said, looking back at Vin. "You're an Allomancer! Are the things they say true?"

"What things?" Vin asked quietly.

"Well, they say you killed the Lord Ruler, for one. And that you're kind of. . .um. . .well." Allrianne bit her lip. "Well, just a little bit rickety."

"Rickety?"

"And dangerous," Allrianne said. "But, well, that can't be true. I mean, you're going shopping with us, right?"

*Is she trying to provoke me on purpose*?

"Do you always wear clothing like that?" Allrianne asked.

Vin was in her standard gray trousers and tan shirt. "It's easy to fight in."

"Yes, but. . .well." Allrianne smiled. "I guess that's why we're here today, right, Tindwyl?"

"Yes, dear," Tindwyl said. She'd been studying Vin through the entire conversation.

*Like what you see*? Vin thought. *What is it you want*?

"You have to be the strangest noblewoman I've ever met," Allrianne declared. "Did you grow up far from court? I did, but my mother was quite certain to train me well. Of course, she was just trying to make me into a good catch so Father could auction me off to make an alliance."

Allrianne smiled. It had been a while since Vin had been forced to deal with women like her. She remembered hours spent at court, smiling, pretending to be Valette Renoux. Often when she thought of those days, she remembered the bad things. The spite she'd faced from court members, her own lack of comfort in the role.

But, there had also been good things. Elend was one. She would never have met him if she hadn't been pretending to be a noblewoman. And the balls—with their colors, their music, and their gowns—had held a certain transfixing charm. The graceful dancing, the careful interactions, the perfectly decorated rooms. . .

*Those things are gone now*, she told herself. *We don't have time for silly balls and gatherings, not when the dominance is on the verge of collapse*.

Tindwyl was still watching her.

"Well?" Allrianne asked.

"What?" Vin asked.

"Did you grow up far from court?"

"I'm not noble, Allrianne. I'm skaa."

Allrianne paled, then flushed, then raised her fingers to her lips. "Oh! You poor thing!" Vin's augmented ears heard something beside her—a light chuckling from OreSeur, soft enough that only an Allomancer could have heard him.

She resisted the urge to shoot the kandra a flat look. "It wasn't so bad," she said.

"But, well, no wonder you don't know how to dress!" Allrianne said.

"I know how to dress," Vin said. "I even own a few gowns." *Not that I've put one on in months*. . ..

Allrianne nodded, though she obviously didn't believe Vin's comment. "Breezy is skaa, too," she said quietly. "Or, half skaa. He told me. Good thing he didn't tell Father—Father never has been very nice to skaa."

Vin didn't reply.

Eventually, they reached Kenton Street, and the crowds made the carriage a liability. Vin climbed out first, OreSeur hopping down to the cobblestones beside her. The market street was busy, though not as packed as it had been the last time she'd visited. Vin glanced over the prices at some nearby shops as the others exited the coach.

*Five boxings for a bin of aging apples*, Vin thought with dissatisfaction. *Food is already going at a premium*. Elend had stores, fortunately. But how long would they last before the siege? Not through the approaching winter, certainly—not with so much of the dominance's grain still unharvested in the outer plantations.

*Time may be our friend now*, Vin thought, *but it will turn on us eventually*. They had to get those armies to fight each other. Otherwise, the city's people might die of starvation before the soldiers even tried to take the walls.

Spook hopped down from the carriage, joining them as Tindwyl surveyed the street. Vin eyed the bustling crowds. The people were obviously trying to go about their daily activities, despite the threat from outside. What else could they do? The siege had already lasted for weeks. Life had to go on.

"There," Tindwyl said, point1ing to a dressmaker's shop.

Allrianne scampered forward. Tindwyl followed behind, walking with modest decorum. "Eager young thing, isn't she?" the Terriswoman asked.

Vin shrugged. The blond noblewoman had already gotten Spook's attention; he was following her with a lively step. Of course, it wasn't hard to get Spook's attention. You just had to have breasts and smell nice—and the second was sometimes optional.

Tindwyl smiled. "She probably hasn't had an opportunity to go shopping since she left with her father's army weeks ago."

"You sound like you think she went through some awful ordeal," Vin said. "Just because she couldn't go shopping."

"She obviously enjoys it," Tindwyl said. "Surely you can understand being taken from that which you love."

Vin shrugged as they reached the shop. "I have trouble feeling sympathy for a courtly puff who is tragically taken from her dresses."

Tindwyl frowned slightly as they entered the shop, OreSeur settling down to wait outside. "Do not be so hard on the child. She is a product of her upbringing, just as you are. If you judge her worth based on frivolities, then you are doing the same as those who judge you based on your simple clothing."

"I like it when people judge me based on my simple clothing," Vin said. "Then they don't expect too much."

"I see," Tindwyl said. "Then, you haven't missed this at all?" She nodded toward the shop's inner room.

Vin paused. The room burst with colors and fabric, lace and velvet, bodices and skirts. Everything was powdered with a light perfume. Standing before the dressing dummies in their brilliant hues, Vin was—for just a moment—again taken back to the balls. Back to when she was Valette. Back to when she had an *excuse* to be Valette.

"They say you enjoyed noble society," Tindwyl said lightly, walking forward. Allrianne was already standing near the front of the room, running her fingers across a bolt of fabric, talking to the dressmaker in a firm voice.

"Who told you that?" Vin asked.

Tindwyl turned back. "Why, your friends, dear. It's quite curious—they say you stopped wearing dresses a few months after the Collapse. They all wonder why. They say you seemed to like dressing like a woman, but I guess they were wrong."

"No," Vin said quietly. "They were right."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow, pausing beside a dressmaker's dummy in a bright green dress, edged with lace, the bottom flaring wide with several underskirts.

Vin approached, looking up at the gorgeous costume. "I was beginning to like dressing like this. That was the problem."

"I don't see a problem in that, dear."

Vin turned away from the gown. "This isn't me. It never was—it was just an act. When wearing a dress like that, it's too easy to forget who you really are."

"And these dresses can't be part of who you really are?"

Vin shook her head. "Dresses and gowns are part of who *she* is." She nodded toward Allrianne. "I need to be something else. Something harder." *I shouldn't have come here*.

Tindwyl laid a hand on Vin's shoulder. "Why haven't you married him, child?"

Vin looked up sharply. "What kind of question is that?"

"An honest one," Tindwyl said. She seemed far less harsh than she had been the other times Vin had met her. Of course, during those times, she had mostly been addressing Elend.

"That topic is not your concern," Vin said.

"The king has asked me to help him improve his image," Tindwyl said. "And I have taken it upon myself to do more than that—I want to make a real king of him, if I can. There is some great potential in him, I think. However, he's not going to be able to realize it until he's more sure about certain things in his life. You in particular."

"I. . ." Vin closed her eyes, remembering his marriage proposal. That night, on the balcony, ash lightly falling in the night. She remembered her terror. She'd known, of course, where the relationship was going. Why had she been so frightened?

That was the day she'd stopped wearing dresses.

"He shouldn't have asked me," Vin said quietly, opening her eyes. "He can't marry me."

"He loves you, child," Tindwyl said. "In a way, that is unfortunate—this would all be much easier if he could feel otherwise. However, as things stand. . ."

Vin shook her head. "I'm wrong for him."

"Ah," Tindwyl said. "I see."

"He needs something else," Vin said. "Something better. A woman who can be a queen, not just a bodyguard. Someone. . ." Vin's stomach twisted. "Someone more like her."

Tindwyl glanced toward Allrianne, who laughed at a comment made by the elderly dressmaker as he took her measurements.

"You are the one he fell in love with, child," Tindwyl said.

"When I was pretending to be like her."

Tindwyl smiled. "Somehow, I doubt that you could be like Allrianne, no matter how hard you practiced."

"Perhaps," Vin said. "Either way, it was my courtly performance that he loved. He didn't know what I really was."

"And has he abandoned you now that he does know of it?"

"Well, no. But—"

"All people are more complex than they first appear," Tindwyl said. "Allrianne, for instance, is eager and young—perhaps a bit too outspoken. But she knows more of the court than many would expect, and she seems to know how to recognize what is good in a person. That is a talent many lack.

"Your king is a humble scholar and thinker, but he has the will of a warrior. He is a man who has the nerve to fight, and I think—perhaps—you have yet to see the best of him. The Soother Breeze is a cynical, mocking man—until he looks at young Allrianne. Then he softens, and one wonders how much of his harsh unconcern is an act."

Tindwyl paused, looking at Vin. "And you. You are so much more than you are willing to accept, child. Why look at only one side of yourself, when your Elend sees so much more?"

"Is that what this is all about?" Vin said. "You trying to turn me into a queen for Elend?"

"No, child," Tindwyl said. "I wish to help you turn into whoever you are. Now, go let the man take your measurements so you can try on some stock dresses."

*Whoever I am*? Vin thought, fro1wning. However, she let the tall Terriswoman push her forward, and the elderly dressmaker took his tape and began to measure.

A few moments and a changing room later, Vin stepped back into the room wearing a memory. Silky blue with white lace, the gown was tight at the waist and through the bust, but had a large, flowing bottom. The numerous skirts made it flare out, tapering down in a triangular shape, her feet completely covered, the bottom of the skirt flush with the floor.

It was terribly impractical. It rustled when she moved, and she had to be careful where she stepped to keep it from catching or brushing a dirty surface. But it was beautiful, and it made her feel beautiful. She almost expected a band to start playing, Sazed to stand over her shoulder like a protective sentry, and Elend to appear in the distance, lounging and watching couples dance as he flipped through a book.

Vin walked forward, letting the dressmaker watch where the garment pinched and where it bunched, and Allrianne let out an "Ooo" as she saw Vin. The old dressmaker leaned on his cane, dictating notes to a young assistant. "Move around a bit more, my lady," he requested. "Let me see how it fits when you do more than just walk in a straight line."

Vin spun slightly, turning on one foot, trying to remember the dancing moves Sazed had taught her.

*I never did get to dance with Elend*, she realized, stepping to the side, as if to music she could only faintly remember. *He always found an excuse to wiggle out of it*.

She twirled, getting a feel for the dress. She would have thought that her instincts would have decayed. Now that she had one on again, however, she was surprised at how easy it was to fall back into those habits—stepping lightly, turning so that the bottom of the dress flared just a bit. . ..

She paused. The dressmaker was no longer dictating. He watched her quietly, smiling.

"What?" Vin asked, flushing.

"I'm sorry, my lady," he said, turning to tap on his assistant's notebook, sending the boy away with a point of his finger. "But I don't rightly think I've ever seen someone move so gracefully. Like a. . .passing breath."

"You flatter me," Vin said.

"No, child," Tindwyl said, standing to the side. "He's right. You move with a grace that most women can only envy."

The dressmaker smiled again, turning as his assistant approached with a group of square cloth color samples. The old man began to sort through them with a wizened hand, and Vin stepped over to Tindwyl, holding her hands at the sides, trying not to let the traitorous dress take control of her again.

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Vin demanded quietly.

"Why shouldn't I be?" Tindwyl asked.

"Because you're mean to Elend," Vin said. "Don't deny it—I've listened in on your lessons. You spend the time insulting and disparaging him. But now you're pretending to be nice."

Tindwyl smiled. "I am not pretending, child."

"Then why are you so mean to Elend?"

"The lad grew up as a pampered son of a great lord," Tindwyl said. "Now that he's king, he needs a little harsh truth, I think." She paused, glancing down at Vin. "I sense that you've had quite enough of that in your life."

The dressmaker app1roached with his swatches, spreading them out on a low table. "Now, my lady," he said, tapping one group with a bent finger. "I think your coloring would look particularly good with dark cloth. A nice maroon, perhaps?"

"What about a black?" Vin asked.

"Heavens, no," Tindwyl said. "Absolutely no more black or gray for you, child."

"What about this one, then?" Vin asked, pulling out a royal blue swatch. It was nearly the shade she'd worn the first night she'd met Elend, so long ago.

"Ah, yes," the dressmaker said. "That would look wonderful against that light skin and dark hair. Hum, yes. Now, we'll have to pick a style. You need this by tomorrow evening, the Terriswoman said?"

Vin nodded.

"Ah, then. We'll have to modify one of the stock dresses, but I think I have one in this color. We'll have to take it in quite a bit, but we can work through the night for a beauty like yourself, can't we, lad? Now, as for the style. . ."

"This is fine, I guess," Vin said, looking down. The gown was the standard cut of those she'd worn at previous balls.

"Well, we're not looking for 'fine,' now, are we?" the dressmaker said with a smile.

"What if we removed some of the pettiskirts?" Tindwyl said, pulling at the sides of Vin's dress. "And perhaps raised the hem just a bit, so that she could move more freely?"

Vin paused. "You could do that?"

"Of course," the dressmaker said. "The lad says thinner skirts are more popular to the south, though they tend to lag in fashion a bit behind

Luthadel." He paused. "Though, I don't know that Luthadel even really *has* a fashion anymore. . .."

"Make cuffs of the sleeves wide," Tindwyl said. "And sew a couple of pockets into them for certain personal items."

The old man nodded as his quiet assistant scribbled down the suggestion.

"The chest and waist can be tight," Tindwyl continued, "but not restrictive. Lady Vin needs to be able to move freely."

The old man paused. "Lady Vin?" he asked. He looked a little closer at Vin, squinting, then turned to his assistant. The boy nodded quietly.

"I see. . ." the man said, paling, hand shaking just a little bit more. He placed it on the top of his cane, as if to give himself a little more stability. "I'm. . .I'm sorry if I offended you, my lady. I didn't know."

Vin flushed again. *Another reason why I shouldn't go shopping*. "No," she said, reassuring the man. "It's all right. You haven't offended me."

He relaxed slightly, and Vin noticed Spook strolling over.

"Looks like we've been found," Spook said, nodding to the front windows.

Vin glanced past dressing dummies and bales of cloth to see a crowd gathering outside. Tindwyl watched Vin with curiosity.

Spook shook his head. "Why do you get to be so popular?"

"I killed their god," Vin said quietly, ducking around a dressing dummy, hiding from the dozens of peeking eyes.

"I helped too," Spook said. "I even got my nickname from Kelsier himself! But nobody cares about poor little Spook."

Vin scanned the room for windows. *There's got to be a back door. Of course, there might be people in the alley*.

"What are you doing?" Tindwyl asked.

"I have to go," Vin said. "Get away from them."

"Why don't you go out and talk to them?" Tindwyl asked. "They're obviously very interested in seeing you."

Allrianne emerged from a dressing room—wearing a gown of yellow and blue—and twirled dramatically. She was obviously put out when she didn't even get Spook's attention.

"I'm not going out there," Vin said. "Why would I want to do something like that?"

"They need hope," Tindwyl said. "Hope you can give them."

"A false hope," Vin said. "I'd only encourage them to think of me as some object of worship."

"That's not true," Allrianne said suddenly, walking forward, looking out the windows without the least bit of embarrassment. "Hiding in corners, wearing strange clothing, and being mysterious—*that's* what has gotten you this amazing reputation. If people knew how ordinary you were, they wouldn't be so crazy to get a look at you." She paused, then looked back. "I. . .uh, didn't mean that like I think it sounded."

Vin flushed. "I'm not Kelsier, Tindwyl. I don't want people to worship me. I just want to be left alone."

"Some people don't have that choice, child," Tindwyl said. "You struck down the Lord Ruler. You were trained by the Survivor, and you are the king's consort."

"I'm not his consort," Vin said, flushing. "We're just. . ." *Lord, even I don't understand our relationship. How am I supposed to explain it*?

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow.

"All right," Vin said, sighing and walking forward.

"I'll go with you," Allrianne said, grabbing Vin's arm as if they had been friends since childhood. Vin resisted, but couldn't figure a way to pry her off without making a scene.

They stepped out of the shop. The crowd was already large, and the periphery was filling as more and more people came to investigate. Most were skaa in brown, ash-stained work coats or simple gray dresses. The ones in the front backed away as Vin stepped out, giving her a little ring of empty space, and a murmur of awed excitement moved through the crowd.

"Wow," Allrianne said quietly. "There sure are a lot of them. . .."

Vin nodded. OreSeur sat where he had before, near the door, and he watched her with a curious canine expression.

Allrianne smiled at the crowd, waving with a sudden hesitance. "You can, you know, fight them off or something if this turns messy, right?"

"That won't be necessary," Vin said, finally slipping her arm free of Allrianne's grasp and giving the crowd a bit of a Soothing to calm them. After that, she stepped forward, trying to push down her sense of itching nervousness. She'd grown to no longer feel she needed to hide when she went out in public, but standing before a crowd like this. . .well, she almost turned and slinked back into the dressmaker's shop.

A voice, however, stopped her. The speaker was a middle-aged man with an ash-stained beard and a dirty black cap held nervously in his hands. He was a strong man, probably a mill worker. His quiet voice seemed a contrast to his powerful build. "Lady Heir. W1hat will become of us?"

The terror—the uncertainty—in the large man's voice was so piteous that Vin hesitated. He regarded her with hopeful eyes, as did most of the others.

*So many*, Vin thought. *I thought the Church of the Survivor was small*. She looked at the man, who stood wringing his cap. She opened her mouth, but then. . .couldn't do it. She couldn't tell him that she didn't know what would happen; she couldn't explain to those eyes that she wasn't the savior that he needed.

"Everything will be all right," Vin heard herself say, increasing her Soothing, trying to take away some of their fear.

"But the armies, Lady Heir!" one of the women said.

"They're trying to intimidate us," Vin said. "But the king won't let them. Our walls are strong, as are our soldiers. We can outlast this siege."

The crowd was silent.

"One of those armies is led by Elend's father, Straff Venture," Vin said. "Elend and I are going to go meet with Straff tomorrow. We will persuade him to be our ally."

"The king is going to surrender!" a voice said. "I heard it. He's going to trade the city for his life."

"No," Vin said. "He would never do that!!"

"He won't fight for us!" a voice called. "He's not a soldier. He's a politician!"

Other voices called out in agreement. Reverence disappeared as people began to yell out concerns, while others began to demand help. The dissidents continued to rail against Elend, yelling that there was no way he could protect them.

Vin raised her hands to her ears. Trying to ward off the crowd, the chaos. "*Stop*!" she yelled, Pushing out with steel and brass. Several people stumbled back away from her, and she could see a wave in the crowd as buttons, coins, and buckles suddenly pressed backward.

The people grew suddenly quiet.

"I will suffer no ill words spoken of our king!" Vin said, flaring her brass and increasing her Soothing. "He is a good man, and a good leader. He has sacrificed much for you—your freedom comes because of his long hours spent drafting laws, and your livelihoods come because of his work securing trade routes and agreements with merchants."

Many members of the crowd looked down. The bearded man at the front continued to twist his cap, however, looking at Vin. "They're just right frightened, Lady Heir. Right frightened."

"We'll protect you," Vin said. *What am I saying*? "Elend and I, we'll find a way. We stopped the Lord Ruler. We can stop these armies. . ." She trailed off, feeling foolish.

Yet, the crowd responded. Some were obviously still unsatisfied, but many seemed calmed. The crowd began to break up, though some of its members came forward, leading or carrying small children. Vin paused nervously. Kelsier had often met with and held the children of the skaa, as if giving them his blessing. She bid the group a hasty farewell and ducked back into the shop, pulling Allrianne after her.

Tindwyl waited inside, nodding with satisfaction.

"I lied," Vin said, pushing the door closed.

"No you didn't," Tindwyl said. "You were optimistic. The truth or fiction of what you said has yet to be proven."

"It w1on't happen," Vin said. "Elend can't defeat three armies, not even with my help."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "Then you should leave. Run away, leave the people to deal with the armies themselves."

"I didn't mean that," Vin said.

"Well, make a decision then," Tindwyl said. "Either give up on the city or believe in it. Honestly, the pair of you. . .." She shook her head.

"I thought you weren't going to be harsh with me," Vin noted.

"I have trouble with that sometimes," Tindwyl said. "Come, Allrianne. Let's finish your fitting."

They moved to do so. However, at that moment—as if to belie Vin's assurances of safety—several warning drums began to beat atop the city wall.

Vin froze, glancing through the window, out over the anxious crowd.

One of the armies was attacking. Cursing the delay, she rushed into the back of the shop to change out of the bulky dress.

Elend scrambled up the steps to the city wall, nearly tripping on his dueling cane in his haste. He stumbled out of the stairwell, moving onto the wall top, rearranging the cane at his side with a curse.

The wall top was in chaos. Men scrambled about, calling to each other. Some had forgotten their armor, others their bows. So many tried to get up after Elend that the stairwell got clogged, and he watched hopelessly as men crowded around the openings below, creating an even larger jam of bodies in the courtyard.

Elend spun, watching a large group of Straff's men—thousands of them—rush toward the wall. Elend stood near Tin Gate, at the north of the city, nearest Straff's army. He could see a separate group of soldiers rushing toward Pewter Gate, a little to the east.

"Archers!" Elend yelled. "Men, where are your bows?"

His voice, however, was lost in the shouting. Captains moved about, trying to organize the men, but apparently too many footmen had come to the wall, leaving a lot of the archers trapped in the courtyard below.

*Why*? Elend thought desperately, turning back toward the charging army. *Why is he attacking? We had an a agreement to meet*!

Had he, perhaps, gotten wind of Elend's plan to play both sides of the conflict? Perhaps there really *was* a spy in the inner crew.

Either way, Elend could only watch hopelessly as the army approached his wall. One captain managed to get off a pathetic volley of arrows, but it didn't do much good. As the army approached, arrows began to zip up toward the wall, mixed with flying coins. Straff had Allomancers in the group.

Elend cursed, ducking down below a merlon as coins bounced against the stonework. A few soldiers fell. Elend's soldiers. Killed because he'd been too proud to surrender the city.

He peeked carefully over the wall. A group of men carrying a battering ram were approaching, their bodies carefully protected by men with shields. The care probably meant that the rammers were Thugs, a suspicion confirmed by the sound the ram made when it smashed into the gate. That was not the blow of ordinary men.

Hooks followed next. Shot up toward the wall by Coinshots below, falling far more accurately than if they'd been thrown. Soldiers moved to pull them off, but coins shot up, taking the men almost as quickly as they made 1the attempt. The gate continued to thump beneath him, and he doubted it would last for long.

*And so we fall,* Elend thought. *With barely a hint of resistance*.

And there was nothing he could do. He felt impotent, forced to keep ducking down lest his white uniform make him a target. All of his politicking, all of his preparations, all of his dreams and his plans. Gone.

And then Vin was there. She landed atop the wall, breathing hard, amid a group of wounded men. Coins and arrows that came near to her deflected back out into the air. Men rallied around her, moving to remove hooks and pull the wounded to safety. Her knives cut ropes, dropping them back down below. She met Elend's eyes, looking determined, then moved as if to leap over the side of the wall and confront the Thugs with their battering ram.

Elend raised a hand, but someone else spoke.

"Vin, wait!" Clubs bellowed, bursting out of the stairwell.

She paused. Elend had never heard such a forceful command from the gnarled general.

Arrows stopped flying. The booming calmed. Elend stood hesitantly, watching with a frown as the army retreated back across the ash-strewn fields toward their camp. They left a couple of corpses behind; Elend's men had actually managed to hit a few with their arrows. His own army had taken far heavier casualties: some two dozen men appeared to be wounded.

"What. . .?" Elend asked, turning to Clubs.

"They weren't putting up scaling ladders," Clubs said, eyeing the retreating force. "This wasn't an actual attack."

"What was it then?" Vin asked, frowning.

"A test," Clubs said. "It's common in warfare—a quick skirmish to see how your enemy responds, to feel out their tactics and preparations."

Elend turned, watching the disorganized soldiers make way for healers to care for the wounded. "A test," he said, glancing at Clubs. "My guess is that we didn't do very well."

Clubs shrugged. "Far worse than we should have. Maybe this will scare the lads into paying better attention during drills." He paused, and Elend could see something he wasn't expressing. Worry.

Elend glanced out over the wall, watching the retreating army. Suddenly, it made sense. It was exactly the kind of move that his father liked to make.

The meeting with Straff would take place as planned. However, before it happened, Straff wanted Elend to know something.

*I can take this city any time*, the attack seemed to say. *It's mine, no matter what you do. Remember that*.

*He was forced into war by a misunderstanding—and always claimed he was no warrior—yet he came to fight as well as any man*.

# 26

"THIS IS NOT A GOOD idea, Mistress." OreSeur sat on his haunches, watching Vin unpack a large, flat box.

"Elend thinks it's the only way," she said, pulling off the top of the box. The luxurious blue dress lay wrapped within. She pulled it out, noting its comparatively light weight. She walked over to the changing screen and began to disrobe.

"And the assault on the walls yesterday?" OreSeur asked.

"That was a warning," she said, continuing to unbutton her shirt. "Not a serious attack." Though, apparently, it had really unsettled the Assembly. Perhaps that had been the point. Clubs could say all he wished about strategy and testing the walls, but from Vin's standpoint, the thing Straff had gained most was even more fear and chaos inside Luthadel.

Only a few weeks of being besieged, and the city was already strained near to breaking. Food was terribly expensive, and Elend had been forced to open the city stockpiles. The people were on edge. Some few thought the attack had been a victory for Luthadel, taking it as a good sign that the army had been "repelled." Most, however, were simply even more scared than they had been before.

But, again, Vin was left with a conundrum. How to react, facing such an overpowering force? Cower, or try to continue with life? Straff had tested the walls, true—but he had maintained the larger part of his army back and in position, should Cett have tried to make an opportunistic attack at that time. He'd wanted information, and he'd wanted to intimidate the city.

"I still don't know if this meeting is a good idea," OreSeur said. "The attack aside, Straff is not a man to be trusted. Kelsier had me study all of the major noblemen in the city when I was preparing to become Lord Renoux. Straff is deceitful and harsh, even for a human."

Vin sighed, removing her trousers, then pulled on the dress's slip. It wasn't as tight as some, and gave her a lot of room to move through the thigh and legs. *Good so far*.

OreSeur's objection was logical. One of the first things she had learned on the street was to avoid situations where it was difficult to flee. Her every instinct rebelled at the idea of walking into Straff's camp.

Elend had made his decision, however. And, Vin understood that she needed to support him. In fact, she was even coming to agree with the move. Straff wanted to intimidate the entire city—but he really wasn't as threatening as he thought. Not as long as he had to worry about Cett.

Vin had had enough of intimidation in her life. In a way, Straff's attack on the walls left her feeling even more determined to manipulate him to their own ends. Going into his camp seemed a bit crazy on first impression, but the more she thought about it, the more she realized that it was the only way they were going to get to Straff. He had to see them as weak, had to feel that his bullying tactics had worked. That was the only way they would win.

That meant doing something she didn't like. It meant being surrounded, entering the enemy's den. However, if Elend did manage to get out of the camp safely, it would provide a large morale boost for the city. Beyond that, it would make Ham and the rest of the crew more confident in Elend. Nobody would even have questioned the idea of Kelsier entering an enemy camp to negotiate; in fact, they probably would have expected him to come back from the negotiations somehow having convinced Straff to surrender.

*I just need to make sure he comes back out safely*, Vin thought, pulling on the dress. *Straff can display all the muscle he wants—none of it will matter if we're the ones directing his attacks*.

She nodded to herself, smoothing her dress. Then she walked out from behind the changing screen, studying herself in her mirror. Though the dressmaker had obviously sewn it to retain a traditional form, it didn't have a completely triangular bell shape, but instead fell a bit straighter down along her thighs. It was cut open near the shoulders—though it h1ad tight sleeves and open cuffs—and the waist bent with her and gave her a good range of motion.

Vin stretched a bit, jumping, twisting. She was surprised at how light the dress felt, and how well she moved in it. Of course, any skirt would hardly be ideal for fighting—but this one would be an enormous improvement over the bulky creations she had worn to the parties a year before.

"Well?" she asked, spinning.

OreSeur raised a canine eyebrow. "What?"

"What do you think?"

OreSeur cocked his head. "Why ask me?"

"Because I care what you think," Vin said.

"The dress is very nice, Mistress. Though, to be honest, I have always found the garments to be a little ridiculous. All of that cloth and color, it doesn't seem very practical."

"Yes, I know," Vin said, using a pair of sapphire barrettes to pin the sides of her hair back a bit from her face. "But. . .well, I'd forgotten how much fun these things could be to wear."

"I fail to see why that would be, Mistress."

"That's because you're a man."

"Actually, I'm a kandra."

"But you're a boy kandra."

"How do you know that?" OreSeur asked. "Gender is not easy to tell in my people, since our forms are fluid."

Vin looked at him, raising an eyebrow. "I can tell." Then she turned back to her jewelry cabinet. She didn't have much; though the crew had outfitted her with a good sampling of jewelry during her days as Valette, she had given most of it to Elend to help fund various projects. She had, however, kept a few of her favorites—as if she'd known that she'd someday find her way back into a dress.

*I'm just wearing it this once*, she thought. *This still isn't me*.

She snapped on a sapphire bracelet. Like her barrettes, it contained no metal; the gemstones were set into a thick hardwood that closed with a wooden twist-clasp. The only metal on her body, then, would be her coins, her metal vial, and the single earring. Kept, by Kelsier's suggestion, as a bit of metal she could Push on in an emergency.

"Mistress," OreSeur said, pulling something out from under her bed with his paw. A sheet of paper. "This fell from the box as you were opening it." He grabbed it between two of his surprisingly dexterous paw fingers and held it up for her.

Vin accepted the paper. *Lady Heir*, it read.

> *I made the chest and bodice extra tight to give support—and cut the skirts so they would resist flaring—in case you need to jump. There are slits for metal vials in each of the cuffs, as well as a ripple in the cloth cut to obscure a dagger strapped around each forearm. I hope you find the alterations suitable*.
>
> *Feldeu, Dressmaker*.

She glanced down, noting the cuffs. They were thick and wide, and the way they pointed at the sides made perfect hiding places. Though the sleeves were tight around the upper arms, the forearms were looser, and she could see where the daggers could be strapped.

"It seems that he has made dresses for 1Mistborn before," OreSeur noted.

"Probably," Vin said. She moved over to her dressing mirror to apply a little makeup, and found that several of her makeup pads had dried out. *Guess I haven't done this for a while either*. . ..

"What time are we leaving, Mistress?" OreSeur asked.

Vin paused. "Actually, OreSeur, I wasn't planning to bring you. I still intend to keep your cover with the other people in the palace, and I think it would look very suspicious of me to bring my pet dog on this particular trip."

OreSeur was silent for a moment. "Oh," he said. "Of course. Good luck, then, Mistress."

Vin felt only a tiny stab of disappointment; she'd expected him to object more. She pushed the emotion aside. Why should she fault him? He'd been the one to rightly point out the dangers of going into the camp.

OreSeur simply lay down, resting head on paws as he watched her continue applying her makeup.

"But, El," Ham said, "you should at least let us send you in our own carriage."

Elend shook his head, straightening his jacket as he looked in the mirror. "That would require sending in a coachman, Ham."

"Right," Ham said. "Who would be me."

"One man won't make a difference in getting us out of that camp. And, the fewer people I take with me, the fewer people Vin and I have to worry about."

Ham shook his head. "El, I. . ."

Elend laid a hand on Ham's shoulder. "I appreciate the concern, Ham. But, I can do this. If there's one man in this world I can manipulate, it's my father. I'll come out of this with him feeling assured that he has the city in his pocket."

Ham sighed. "All right."

"Oh, one other thing," Elend said hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"Would you mind calling me 'Elend' instead of just 'El'?"

Ham chuckled. "I suppose that one's easy enough to do."

Elend smiled thankfully. *It's not what Tindwyl wanted, but it's a start. We'll worry about the "Your Majesty"s later*.

The door opened, and Dockson walked in. "Elend," he said. "This just arrived for you." He held up a sheet of paper.

"From the Assembly?" Elend asked.

Dockson nodded. "They're not happy about you missing the meeting this evening."

"Well, I can't change the appointment with Straff just because they want to meet a day early," Elend said. "Tell them I'll try and visit when I get back."

Dockson nodded, then turned as a rustling sounded from behind him. He stepped to the side, a strange look on his face, as Vin walked up to the doorway.

And she was wearing a dress—a beautiful blue gown that was sleeker than the common courtly fare. Her black hair sparkled with a pair of sapphire barrettes, and she seemed. . .different. More feminine—or, rather, more confident in her femininity.

*How much she's changed since I first met her*, Elend thought, smiling. Almost two years had passed. Then she had been a youth, albeit one with the life experiences of someone far older. Now she was a woman—a very dangerous woman,1 but one who still looked up at him with eyes that were just a bit uncertain, just a bit insecure.

"Beautiful," Elend whispered. She smiled.

"Vin!" Ham said, turning. "You're wearing a dress!"

Vin flushed. "What did you expect, Ham? That I would meet with the king of the Northern Dominance in trousers?"

"Well. . ." Ham said. "Actually, yes."

Elend chuckled. "Just because *you* insist on going about everywhere in casual clothing, Ham, doesn't mean that everyone does. Honestly, don't you get tired of those vests?"

Ham shrugged. "They're easy. And simple."

"And cold," Vin said, rubbing her arms. "I'm glad I asked for something with sleeves."

"Be thankful for the weather," Ham said. "Every chill you suffer will seem far worse to the men out in those armies."

Elend nodded. Winter had, technically, started. The weather probably wouldn't get bad enough to be more than a mild discomfort—they rarely got snow in the Central Dominance—but the chill nights certainly wouldn't improve morale.

"Well, let's go," Vin said. "The sooner we get this over with, the better."

Elend stepped forward, smiling, taking Vin's hands. "I appreciate this, Vin," he said quietly. "And you really do look gorgeous. If we weren't marching off to near certain doom, I'd be tempted to command a ball be held tonight just for the opportunity to show you off."

Vin smiled. "Near certain doom is that compelling?"

"Guess I've been spending too much time with the crew." He leaned down to kiss her, but she yelped and jumped back.

"It took me the better part of an hour to get this makeup on right," she snapped. "No kissing!"

Elend chuckled as Captain Demoux poked his head in the door. "Your Majesty, the carriage has arrived."

Elend looked at Vin. She nodded.

"Let's go," he said.

Sitting inside the carriage Straff had sent for them, Elend could see a solemn group standing on the wall, watching them roll away. The sun was near to setting.

*He commands us to come in the evening; we'll have to leave when the mists are out*, Elend thought. *A crafty way of pointing out how much power* *he has over us*.

It was his father's way—a move, in a way, that was similar to the attack on the walls a day before. To Straff, everything was about posturing. Elend had watched his father at court, and had seen him manipulate even obligators. By holding the contract to oversee the Lord Ruler's atium mine, Straff Venture had played a game even more dangerous than his fellow noblemen. And he had played that game very well. He hadn't factored in Kelsier throwing chaos into the mix, but who had?

Since the Collapse, Straff had secured the most stable, and most powerful, kingdom in the Final Empire. He was a crafty, careful man who knew how to plan for years to get what he wanted. And this was the man Elend had to manipulate.

"You look worried," Vin said. She was across from him in the carriage, sitting in a prim, ladylike posture. It was as if donning a dress somehow granted her new habits and mannerisms. Or just a return to old ones—she'd once been able to 1act like a noblewoman well enough to fool Elend.

"We'll be all right," she said. "Straff won't hurt you—even if things go bad, he won't dare make a martyr of you."

"Oh, I'm not worried about my safety," Elend said.

Vin raised an eyebrow. "Because?"

"Because I have you," Elend said with a smile. "You're worth an army, Vin."

This, however, didn't seem to console her.

"Come here," he said, scooting over and waving her to the seat beside him.

She rose and moved across the carriage—but paused, eyeing him. "Makeup."

"I'll be careful," Elend promised.

She nodded, sitting and letting him put an arm around her. "Be careful of the hair, too," she said. "And your suit coat—don't get anything on it."

"When did you get so fashion-conscious?" he asked.

"It's the dress," Vin said with a sigh. "As soon as I put it on, all of Sazed's lessons started coming back to me."

"I really do like the dress on you," Elend said.

Vin shook her head.

"What?" Elend asked as the carriage bumped, pushing her a bit closer to him. *Another new perfume*, he thought. *At least that's one habit she never got out of*.

"This isn't me, Elend," she said quietly. "This dress, these mannerisms. They're a lie."

Elend sat quietly for a moment.

"No objections?" Vin said. "Everyone else thinks I'm speaking nonsense."

"I don't know," Elend said honestly. "Changing into my new clothes made *me* feel different, so what you say makes sense. If wearing dresses feels wrong to you, then you don't have to wear them. I want you to be happy, Vin."

Vin smiled, looking up at him. Then she leaned up and kissed him.

"I thought you said none of that," he said.

"From you," she said. "I'm Mistborn—we're more precise."

Elend smiled, though he couldn't quite feel jovial. Conversation, however, did keep him from fretting. "I feel uncomfortable in these clothes, sometimes. Everyone expects so much more from me when I wear them. They expect a king."

"When I wear a dress," Vin said, "they expect a lady. Then they're disappointed when they find me instead."

"Anyone who would feel disappointed to find *you* is too dense to be of any relevance," Elend said. "I don't want you to be like them, Vin. They're not honest. They don't care. I like you as you are."

"Tindwyl thinks that I can be both," Vin said. "A woman and a Mistborn."

"Tindwyl is wise," Elend said. "A bit brutal, but wise. You should listen to her."

"You just told me you liked me how I am."

"I do," Elend said. "But I'd like you *however* you were, Vin. I love you. The question is, how do you like yourself?"

That gave her pause.

"Clothing doesn't really change a man," Elend said. "But it changes how others react to him. 1Tindwyl's words. I think. . .I think the trick is convincing yourself that you *deserve* the reactions you get. You can wear the court's dresses, Vin, but make them your own. Don't worry that you aren't giving people what they want. Give them who you are, and let that be enough." He paused, smiling. "It was for me."

She smiled back, then carefully leaned against him. "All right," she said. "Enough insecurity for the moment. Let's review. Tell me more about your father's disposition."

"He's a perfect imperial nobleman. Ruthless, clever, and infatuated with power. You remember my. . .experience when I was thirteen?"

Vin nodded.

"Well, Father was very fond of skaa brothels. I think that he liked how strong he felt by taking a girl while knowing that she would be killed for his passion. He keeps several dozen mistresses, and if they don't please him, they get removed."

Vin muttered something quietly in response to this.

"He's the same way with political allies. One didn't ally with House Venture—one agreed to be dominated by House Venture. If you weren't willing to be our slave, then you didn't get to contract with us."

Vin nodded. "I've known crewleaders like that."

"And how did you survive when they turned an eye toward you?"

"By acting unimportant," Vin said. "By crawling on the ground when they passed and by never giving them reason to challenge me. Exactly what you're planning to do tonight."

Elend nodded.

"Be careful," Vin said. "Don't let Straff think that you're mocking him."

"All right."

"And don't promise too much," Vin said. "Act like you're trying to seem tough. Let him think he's bullying you into doing what he wants—he'll enjoy that."

"You've had experience with this before, I see."

"Too much of it," Vin said. "But, you've heard this before."

Elend nodded. They'd planned and replanned this meeting. Now he simply had to do what the crew had taught him. *Make Straff think we're* *weak, imply we'll give him the city—but only if he helps us against Cett first*.

Outside the window, Elend could see that they were approaching Straff's army. *So big*! he thought. *Where did Father learn to administrate a force like this*?

Elend had hoped, perhaps, that his father's lack of military experience would translate to a poorly run army. Yet, the tents were arranged in a careful pattern, and the soldiers wore neat uniforms. Vin moved over to her window, looking out with avid eyes, showing far more interest than an imperial noblewoman would have dared. "Look," she said, pointing.

"What?" Elend asked, leaning over.

"Obligator," Vin said.

Elend looked over her shoulder, spotting the former imperial priest—the skin around his eyes tattooed in a wide pattern—directing a line of soldiers outside a tent. "So that's it. He's using obligators to administrate."

Vin shrugged. "It makes sense. They'd know how to manage large groups of people."

"And how to supply them," Elend said. "Yes, it's a good idea—but it's still surprising. It implies that he 1still needs obligators—and that he's still subject to the Lord Ruler's authority. Most of the other kings threw off the obligators as soon as they could."

Vin frowned. "I thought you said your father likes being in power."

"He does," Elend said. "But also likes powerful tools. He always keeps a kandra, and he has a history of associating with dangerous Allomancers. He believes that he can control them—and he probably believes the same thing about the obligators."

The carriage slowed, then stopped beside a large tent. Straff Venture emerged a moment later.

Elend's father had always been a large man, firm of figure with a commanding posture. The new beard only heightened the effect. He wore a sharp, well-cut suit, just like the suits he had tried to get Elend to wear as a boy. That was when Elend had begun wearing his clothing disheveled—the buttons undone, the jackets too large. Anything to separate him from his father.

Elend's defiance had never been meaningful, however. He had annoyed Straff, pulling small stunts and acting foolish when he knew he could get away with it. None of it had mattered.

Not until that final night. Luthadel in flames, the skaa rebellion running out of control, threatening to bring down the entire city. A night of chaos and destruction, with Vin trapped somewhere within it.

Then Elend had stood up to Straff Venture.

*I'm not the same boy you pushed around, Father*. Vin squeezed his arm, and Elend climbed out of the carriage as the coachman opened the door. Straff waited quietly, a strange look on his face as Elend raised a hand to help Vin down.

"You came," Straff said.

"You seem surprised, Father."

Straff shook his head. "I see that you're just as big an idiot as ever, boy. You're in my power now—I could have you killed with a bare wave of my hand." He raised his arm, as if to do just that.

*Now's the moment*, Elend thought, heart thumping. "I've *always* been in your power, Father," he said. "You could have had me killed months ago, could have taken my city away at a bare whim. I don't see how my coming here changes anything."

Straff hesitated.

"We came for dinner," Elend said. "I had hoped to give you a chance to meet Vin, and had hoped that we might discuss certain. . .issues of particular import to you."

Straff frowned.

*That's right*, Elend thought. *Wonder if I have some offer yet to make. You know that the first man to play his hand usually loses*.

Straff wouldn't pass up an opportunity for gain—even a slim opportunity, like the one Elend represented. He probably figured there was nothing Elend could say that was of real importance. But could he be sure? What did he have to lose?

"Go and confirm with my chef that there will be three for dinner," Straff said to a servant.

Elend let out a lightly held breath.

"That girl's your Mistborn, then?" Straff asked.

Elend nodded.

"Cute little thing," Straff said. "Tell her to stop Soothing my emotions."

Vin flushed.

Straff nodded toward the tent. Elend led Vin forward, though she glanced over her shoulder, obviously not liking the idea of exposing her back to Straff.

*Little bit late for that. . .*Elend thought.

The tent chamber was what Elend would have expected of his father: stuffed with pillows and rich furniture, very little of which Straff would actually use. Straff furnished to suggest his power. Like the massive keeps of Luthadel, a nobleman's surroundings were an expression of how important he was.

Vin waited quietly, tensely, at Elend's side in the center of the room. "He's good," she whispered. "I was as subtle as I can manage, and he still noticed my touch."

Elend nodded. "He's also a Tineye," he said in a normal voice. "So he's probably listening to us right now."

Elend looked toward the door. Straff walked in a few moments later, giving no indication as to whether he had heard Vin or not. A group of servants entered a few moments later, carrying a large dining table.

Vin inhaled sharply. The servants were skaa—imperial skaa, after the old tradition. They were ragged, their clothing made of torn smocks, and showed bruises from a recent beating. They carried their loads with lowered eyes.

"Why the reaction, girl?" Straff asked. "Oh, that's right. You're skaa, aren't you—pretty dress notwithstanding? Elend is very kind; I wouldn't let you wear something like that." *Or much at all,* his tone implied.

Vin shot Straff a look, but pulled a little closer to Elend, grabbing his arm. Again, Straff's words were only about posturing; Straff was cruel, but only insofar as it served him. He wanted to make Vin uncomfortable.

Which he seemed to be doing. Elend frowned, glancing down, and caught just a hint of a sly smile on her lips.

*Breeze has told me that Vin is more subtle with her Allomancy than most Soothers,* he recalled. *Father's good, but for him to pick out her touch*. . .

*She let him, of course*.

Elend looked back at Straff, who hit one of the skaa servants on their way out. "I hope none of them are relatives of yours," Straff said to Vin. "They haven't been very diligent lately. I might have to execute a few."

"I'm not skaa anymore," Vin said quietly. "I'm a noblewoman."

Straff just laughed. He had already dismissed Vin as a threat. He knew she was Mistborn, he must have heard that she was dangerous, and yet he now assumed that she was weak and inconsequential.

*She is good at this,* Elend thought with wonder. Servants began to bring in a feast that was impressive considering the circumstances. As they waited, Straff turned to an aide. "Send in Hoselle," he ordered. "And tell her to be quick."

*He seems less reserved than I remember,* Elend thought. In the Lord Emperor's day, a good nobleman had been stiff and inhibited when in public, though many had turned to extravagant indulgence when in private. They would dance and have quiet dinner conversation at the ball, for instance, but enjoy whores and drunkenness in the small hours of night.

"Why the beard, Father?" Elend asked. "Last I knew, those weren't in fashion."

"I set the fashion now, boy," Straff said. "Sit." Vin waited respectfully, Elend noticed, until Elend was seated before taking her1 place. She managed to maintain an air of half jumpiness: she'd look Straff in the eyes, but always gave a reflexive twitch, as if part of her wanted to glance away.

"Now," Straff said, "tell me why you're here."

"I thought it was obvious, Father," Elend said. "I'm here to discuss our alliance."

Straff raised an eyebrow. "Alliance? We both just agreed that your life is mine. I don't see a need to ally with you."

"Perhaps," Elend said. "But, there are other factors at play here. I assume that you weren't expecting Cett's arrival?"

"Cett is of little concern," Straff said, turning his attention to the meal: big slabs of barely cooked beef. Vin wrinkled her nose, though Elend couldn't tell if that was part of her act or not.

Elend cut his steak. "A man with an army nearly as large as your own is hardly of 'little' concern, Father."

Straff shrugged. "He'll be of no trouble to me once I have the city walls. You'll turn those over to me as part of our alliance, I assume?"

"And invite Cett to attack the city?" Elend said. "Yes, together you and I could hold against him, but why go on the defensive? Why let him weaken our fortifications, and possibly just continue this siege until both of our armies are starving? We need to *attack* him, Father."

Straff snorted. "You think I need your help to do so?"

"You do if you want to beat him with any measure of assured success," Elend said. "We can take him easily together—but never alone. We need each other. Let's attack, you leading your armies, me leading mine."

"Why are you so eager?" Straff asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Because I want to prove something," Elend said. "Look, we both know you're going to take Luthadel from me. But, if we ride together against Cett first, it will look like I *wanted* to ally with you all along. I'll be able to give you the city without looking like a complete buffoon. I can spin it that I brought in my father to help us against the army I knew was coming. I turn the city over to you, and then become your heir again. We both get what we want. But *only* once Cett is dead."

Straff paused, and Elend could see that his words were having an effect. *Yes,* he thought. *Think that I'm just the same boy you left behind—eccentric, eager to resist you for silly reasons. And, saving face is a very Venture thing to do.*

"No," Straff said.

Elend started.

"No," Straff said again, turning to his meal. "That's not how we're going to do this, boy. I'll decide when—or even *if*—I attack Cett."

*That should have worked*! Elend thought. He studied Straff, trying to judge what was wrong. There was a faint hesitance about his father.

*I need more information,* he thought. He glanced to his side, to where Vin sat, spinning something lightly in her hand. Her fork. She met his eyes, then tapped it lightly.

*Metal,* Elend thought. *Good idea.* He looked over at Straff. "You came for the atium," he said. "You don't have to conquer my city to get it."

Straff leaned forward. "Why haven't you spent it?"

"Nothing brings sharks faster than fresh blood, Father," 1Elend said. "Spending large amounts of atium would only have indicated for certain that I had it—a bad idea, considering the trouble we took to squelch those rumors."

There was a sudden motion at the front of the tent, and soon a flustered young girl entered. She wore a ball gown—red—and had her black hair pulled back into a long, flowing tail. She was, perhaps, fifteen.

"Hoselle," Straff said, pointing to the chair next to him.

The girl nodded obediently, scurrying forward to sit beside Straff. She was done up in makeup, and the dress was low-cut. Elend had little doubt as to her relationship with Straff.

Straff smiled and chewed his food, calm and gentlemanly. The girl looked a little bit like Vin—same almond face, similar dark hair, same fine features and thin build. It was a statement. *I can get one just like yours—only younger and prettier*. More posturing.

It was that moment—that smirk in Straff's eyes—which reminded Elend more than ever why he hated his father.

"Perhaps we *can* make a deal, boy," Straff said. "Deliver the atium to me, and I'll deal with Cett."

"Getting it to you will take time," Elend said.

"Why?" Straff asked. "Atium is light."

"There's a lot of it."

"Not so much you couldn't pack it on a cart and send it out," Straff said.

"It's more complicated than that," Elend said.

"I don't think it is," Straff said, smiling. "You just don't want to give it to me."

Elend frowned.

"We don't have it," Vin whispered.

Straff turned.

"We never found it," she said. "Kelsier overthrew the Lord Ruler just so he could get that atium. But we never could find out where the metal was. It probably wasn't ever in the city."

*Wasn't expecting that*. . .Elend thought. Of course, Vin tended to do things by instinct, much as Kelsier was said to have done. All the planning in the world could go out the window with Vin around—but what she did instead was usually better.

Straff sat for a moment. He seemed to believe Vin. "So you really have nothing at all to offer me."

*I need to act weak*, Elend remembered. *Need him to think he can take the city any time, but also think it isn't worth taking right now*. He began to tap the table quietly with his index finger, trying to look nervous. *If Straff thinks we don't have the atium. . .then he'll be a lot less likely to risk attacking the city. Less gain. That's why Vin said what she did*.

"Vin doesn't know what she's talking about," Elend said. "I've kept the atium hidden, even from her. I'm sure we can arrange something, Father."

"No," Straff said, now sounding amused. "You really *don't* have it. Zane said. . .but, well, I didn't believe. . ."

Straff shook his head, turning back toward his meal. The girl at his side didn't eat; she sat quietly, like the ornament she was expected to be. Straff took a long drink of his wine, then let out a satisfied sigh. He looked at his child mistress. "Leave us," he said.

She immediately did as commanded.

"You, too," Straff said to Vin.

Vin stiffened slightly. She looked toward Elend.

"It's all right," he said slowly.

She paused, then nodded. Straff himself was little danger to Elend, and she was a Mistborn. If something went wrong, she could get to Elend quickly. And, if she left, it would do what they wanted—make Elend look less powerful. In a better position to deal with Straff.

Hopefully.

"I'll wait just outside," Vin said quietly, withdrawing.

*He was no simple soldier. He was a force of leadership—a man that fate itself seemed to support.*

# 27

"ALL RIGHT," STRAFF SAID, setting down his fork. "Let's be honest, boy. I'm this close to simply having you killed."

"You'd execute your only son?" Elend asked.

Straff shrugged.

"You need me," Elend said. "To help you fight Cett. You can kill me, but you'd gain nothing. You'd still have to take Luthadel by force, and Cett would still be able to attack—and defeat you—in your weakened state."

Straff smiled, folding his arms, leaning forward so he loomed over the table. "You are wrong on both counts, boy. First, I think that if I killed you, the next leader of Luthadel would be more accommodating. I have certain interests in the city who indicate that is true. Second, I don't need your help to fight Cett. He and I already have a treaty."

Elend paused. "What?"

"What do you think I've been doing these last few weeks? Sitting and waiting on your whims? Cett and I have exchanged pleasantries. He's not interested in the city—he just wants the atium. We agreed to split what we discover in Luthadel, then work together to take the rest of the Final Empire. He conquers to the west and north, I head east and south. Very accommodating man, Cett."

*He's bluffing*, Elend thought with reasonable certainty. That wasn't Straff's way; he wouldn't make an alliance with someone so near to him in strength. Straff feared betrayal too much.

"You think I would believe that?" Elend said.

"Believe what you wish," Straff said.

"And the koloss army marching this way?" Elend asked, playing one of their trump cards.

This made Straff pause.

"If you want to take Luthadel before those koloss get here, Father," Elend said, "then I think you might want to be a little more accommodating toward the man who's come, offering you everything you want. I only ask one thing—let me have a victory. Let me fight Cett, secure my legacy. *Then* you can have the city."

Straff thought about it, thought about it long enough that Elend dared to hope he might just have won. Then, however, Straff shook his head. "No, I think not. I'll take my chances with Cett. I don't know why he is willing to let me have Luthadel, but he doesn't seem to care much about it."

"And you do?" Elend said. "You know we don't have the atium. What does the city matter to you now?"

Straff leaned forward a bit farther. Elend could smell his breath, odorous from the dinner spices1. "That's where you are wrong about me, boy. That's why—even if you'd been able to promise me that atium—you would never have left this camp tonight. I made a mistake a year ago. If I'd stayed in Luthadel, I would have been the one on that throne. Instead, it was you. I can't imagine why—I guess a weak Venture was still better than the other alternatives."

Straff was everything Elend had hated about the old empire. Presumptuous. Cruel. Arrogant.

*Weakness,* Elend thought, calming himself. *I can't be threatening*. He shrugged. "It's only a city, Father. From my position, it doesn't matter half as much as your army."

"It's more than a city," Straff said. "It's the Lord Ruler's city—and it has my home in it. My keep. I understand that you're using it as your palace."

"I didn't really have any other place to go."

Straff turned back to his meal. "All right," he said in between cutting chunks of steak, "at first, I thought you were an idiot for coming tonight, but now I'm not so certain. You must have seen the inevitable."

"You're stronger," Elend said. "I can't stand up to you."

Straff nodded. "You've impressed me, boy. Wearing proper clothing, getting yourself a Mistborn mistress, maintaining control of the city. I'm going to let you live."

"Thank you," Elend said.

"And, in exchange, you're going to give me Luthadel."

"As soon as Cett is dealt with."

Straff laughed. "No, that's not the way these things work, boy. We're not negotiating. You're listening to my orders. Tomorrow, we'll ride to the city together, and you'll order the gates opened. I'll march my army in and take command, and Luthadel will become the new capital of my kingdom. If you stay in line and do as I say, I'll name you heir again."

"We can't do that," Elend said. "I left orders that the gates weren't to be opened to you, no matter what."

Straff paused.

"My advisors thought you might try and use Vin as a hostage, forcing me to relinquish the city," Elend said. "If we go together, they'll assume you're threatening me."

Straff's mood darkened. "You'd better hope that they don't."

"They will," Elend said. "I know these men, Father. They'd be eager for an excuse to take the city away from me."

"Then, why come here?"

"To do as I said," Elend said. "To negotiate an alliance against Cett. I can deliver Luthadel to you—but I still need time. Let's take down Cett first."

Straff grabbed his dinner knife by the hilt and slammed it down into the table. "I said this wasn't a negotiation! You don't make demands, boy. I could have you killed!"

"I'm just stating facts, Father," Elend said quickly. "I don't want to—"

"You've gotten smooth," Straff said, eyes narrowing. "What did you hope to accomplish with this game? Coming to my camp? Bringing nothing to offer. . ." He paused, then continued. "Nothing to offer except for that girl. Pretty little thing, she is."

Elend flushed. "That won't get you into the city. Remember, my advisors thought you might try threatening her."

"Fine," Straff snapped. "You die; I take the city by force."

"And Cett attacks you from behind," Elend said. "Pinning you against our wall and forcing you to fight surrounded."

"He'd take heavy losses," Straff said. "He wouldn't be able to take and hold the city after that."

"Even with diminished forces, he'd have a better chance of taking it from us than he would if he waited and then tried to take it from you."

Straff stood. "I'll have to take that chance. I left you behind before. I'm not going to let you loose again, boy. Those cursed skaa were supposed to kill you and leave me free of you."

Elend stood as well. However, he could see the resolve in Straff's eyes.

*It isn't working*, Elend thought, panic beginning to set in. This plan had been a gamble, but he hadn't ever really thought that he'd fail. Indeed, he'd played his cards well. But, something was wrong—something he hadn't anticipated, and still didn't understand. Why was Straff resisting so much?

*I'm too new to this*, Elend thought. Ironically, if he had let his father train him better as a child, he might have known what he'd done wrong. As it was, he suddenly realized the gravity of his situation. Surrounded by a hostile army. Separated from Vin.

He was going to die.

"Wait!" Elend said desperately.

"Ah," Straff said smiling. "Finally realized what you've gotten yourself into?" There was pleasure in Straff's smile. Eagerness. There had always been something inside Straff that had enjoyed hurting others, though Elend had rarely seen it applied to him. Propriety had always been there to stop Straff.

Propriety enforced by the Lord Ruler. At that moment, Elend saw murder in his father's eyes.

"You never intended to let me live," Elend said. "Even if I'd given you the atium, even if I'd gone with you to the city."

"You were dead the moment I decided to march here," Straff said. "Idiot boy. I do thank you for bringing me that girl, though. I'll take her tonight. We'll see if she cries my name or yours while I'm—"

Elend laughed.

It was a desperate laugh, a laugh at the ridiculous situation he'd gotten himself into, a laugh at his sudden worry and fear—but most of all, it was a laugh at the idea of Straff trying to force himself upon Vin. "You have no idea how foolish you sound," Elend said.

Straff flushed. "For that, boy, I'll be extra rough with her."

"You are a pig, Father," Elend said. "A sick, disgusting man. You thought you were a brilliant leader, but you were barely competent. You nearly got our house destroyed—only the Lord Ruler's own death saved you!"

Straff called for his guards.

"You may take Luthadel," Elend said, "but you'll lose it! I may have been a bad king, but you'll be a terrible one. The Lord Ruler was a tyrant, but he was also a genius. You're neither. You're just a selfish man who'll use up his resources, then end up dead from a knife in the back."

Straff pointed at Elend as soldiers rushed in. Elend didn't cringe. He'd grown up with this man, been raised by him, been tortured by him. And, despite it all, Elend had never spoken his mind. He'd rebelled with the petty timidity of a teenage boy, but he'd never spoken the tr1uth.

It felt good. It felt right.

*Perhaps playing the weak hand was a mistake against Straff. He always was fond of crushing things*.

And suddenly Elend knew what he had to do. He smiled, looking Straff in the eyes.

"Kill me, Father," he said, "and you'll die, too."

"Kill me, Father," Elend said, "and you'll die, too."

Vin paused. She stood outside the tent, in the darkness of early night. She'd been standing with Straff's soldiers, but they'd rushed in at his command. She'd moved into the darkness, and now stood on the north side of the tent, watching the shadowed forms move within.

She'd been about to burst in. Elend hadn't been doing very well—not that he was a bad negotiator. He was just too honest by nature. It wasn't difficult to tell when he was bluffing, especially if you knew him well.

But, this new proclamation was different. It wasn't a sign of Elend attempting to be clever, nor was it an angry outburst like the one he'd made moments before. Suddenly, he seemed calm and forceful.

Vin waited quietly, her daggers out, tense in the mists before the glowing tent. Something told her she had to give Elend just a few more moments.

Straff laughed at Elend's threat.

"You are a fool, Father," Elend said. "You think I came here to negotiate? You think I would willingly deal with one such as you? No. You know me better than that. You know that I'd never submit to you."

"Then why?" Straff asked.

She could almost hear Elend's smile. "I came to get near you, Father. . .and to bring my Mistborn to the very heart of your camp."

Silence.

Finally, Straff laughed. "You threaten me with that wisp of a girl? If that's the great Mistborn of Luthadel I've been hearing of, then I'm sorely disappointed."

"That's because she wants you to feel that way," Elend said. "Think, Father. You were suspicious, and the girl confirmed those suspicions. But, if she's as good as the rumors say—and I know you've heard the rumors—then how would you have spotted her touch on your emotions?

"You caught her Soothing you, and you called her on it. Then, you didn't feel the touch anymore, so you assumed that she was cowed. But, after that, you began to feel confident. Comfortable. You dismissed Vin as a threat—but would any rational man dismiss a Mistborn, no matter how small or quiet? In fact, you'd think that the small, quiet ones would be the assassins you'd want to pay the *most* attention to."

Vin smiled. *Clever*, she thought. She reached out, Rioting Straff's emotions, flaring her metal and stoking his sense of anger. He gasped in sudden shock. *Take the clue, Elend*.

"Fear," Elend said.

She Soothed away Straff's anger and exchanged it for fear.

"Passion."

She complied.

"Calmness."

She soothed everything away. Inside the tent, she saw Straff's shadow standing stiffly. An Allomancer couldn't force a person to do anything—and usually, strong Pushes or Pulls on an emotion were less effective, since they alerted 1the target that something was wrong. In this case, however, Vin wanted Straff to know for certain she was watching.

She smiled, extinguishing her tin. Then she burned duralumin and Soothed Straff's emotions with explosive pressure, wiping away all capacity for feeling within him. His shadow stumbled beneath the attack.

Her brass was gone a moment later, and she turned on her tin again, watching the black patterns on the canvas.

"She's powerful, Father," Elend said. "She's more powerful than any Allomancer you've known. She killed the Lord Ruler. She was trained by the Survivor of Hathsin. And if you kill me, *she'll kill you*."

Straff righted himself, and the tent fell silent again.

A footstep sounded. Vin spun, ducking, raising her dagger.

A familiar figure stood in the night mists. "Why is it I can never sneak up on you?" Zane asked quietly.

Vin shrugged and turned back to the tent—but moved herself so she could keep an eye on Zane, too. He walked over and crouched beside her, watching the shadows.

"That's hardly a useful threat," Straff finally said from within. "You'll be dead, even if your Mistborn does get to me."

"Ah, Father," Elend said. "I was wrong about your interest in Luthadel. However, you're also wrong about me—you've *always* been wrong about me. I don't care if I die, not if it brings safety to my people."

"Cett will take the city if I'm gone," Straff said.

"I think my people might be able to hold against him," Elend said. "After all, he has the smaller army."

"This is idiocy!" Straff snapped. He didn't, however, order his soldiers forward any farther.

"Kill me, and you die, too," Elend said. "And not just you. Your generals. Your captains. Even your obligators. She has orders to slaughter you all."

Zane took a step closer to Vin, his feet crunching slightly on the packed-down weeds that made up the floor of the camp. "Ah," he whispered, "clever. No matter how strong your opponent is, he can't attack if you've got a knife at his throat."

Zane leaned even closer, and Vin looked up at him, their faces just inches from each other. He shook his head in the soft mists. "But tell me—why is it that people like you and me always have to be the knives?"

Inside the tent, Straff was growing concerned. "No one is that powerful, boy," he said, "not even a Mistborn. She might be able to kill some of my generals, but she'd never get to me. I have my own Mistborn."

"Oh?" Elend said. "And why hasn't he killed her? Because he's afraid to attack? If you kill me, Father—if you even make so much as a *move* toward my city—then she'll begin the slaughter. Men will die like prisoners before the fountains on a day of execution."

"I thought you said he was above this kind of thing," Zane whispered. "You claimed you weren't his tool. You said he wouldn't use you as an assassin. . .."

Vin shuffled uncomfortably. "He's bluffing, Zane," she said. "He'd never actually do anything like that."

"She is an Allomancer like you've never seen, Father," Elend said, voice muffled by the tent. "I've seen her fight other Allomancers—none of them can even touch her."

"Is that true?" Zane asked.

Vin paused. Elend hadn't actually ever seen her attack other Allomancers. "He saw me attack some soldiers once, and I've told him about my fights with other Allomancers."

"Ah," Zane said softly. "So it's only a small lie, then. Those are fine when one is king. Many things are. Exploiting one person to save an entire kingdom? What leader wouldn't pay such a cheap price? Your freedom in exchange for his victory."

"He's not using me," Vin said.

Zane stood. Vin turned slightly, watching carefully as he walked into the mists, away from tents, torches, and soldiers. He paused, standing a short distance away, looking up. Even with the light of tent and fires, this camp was claimed by the mists. It spun all around them. From within it, the torchlight and campfires seemed insignificant. Like dying coals.

"What is this to *him*," Zane said quietly, sweeping a hand around him. "Can he ever understand the mists? Can he ever understand you?"

"He loves me," Vin said, glancing back at the shadowed forms. They had fallen quiet for a moment, Straff obviously considering Elend's threats.

"He loves *you*?" Zane asked. "Or he loves *having you*?"

"Elend isn't like that," Vin said. "He's a good man."

"Good or not, you aren't like him," Zane said, voice echoing in the night to her tin-enhanced ears. "Can he understand what it is like to be one of us? Can he know the things we know, care about the things we love? Has he ever seen those?" Zane gestured upward, toward the sky. Far beyond the mists, lights shone in the sky, like tiny freckles. Stars, invisible to the normal eye. Only a person burning tin could penetrate the mists and see them shining.

She remembered the first time Kelsier had shown them to her. She remembered how stunned she had been that the stars had been there all along, invisible beyond the mists. . ..

Zane continued to point upward. "Lord Ruler!" Vin whispered, taking a small step away from the tent. Through the swirling mists, in the reflected light of the tent, she could see something on Zane's arm.

The skin was covered with thin white streaks. Scars.

Zane immediately lowered his arm, hiding the scarred flesh with his sleeve.

"You were in the Pits of Hathsin," Vin said quietly. "Like Kelsier."

Zane looked away.

"I'm sorry," Vin said.

Zane turned back, smiling in the night. It was a firm, confident smile. He stepped forward. "I understand you, Vin."

Then he bowed slightly to her and jumped away, disappearing into the mists. Inside the room, Straff spoke to Elend.

"Go. Leave here."

The carriage rolled away. Straff stood outside his tent, heedless of the mists, still feeling a bit stunned.

*I let him go. Why did I let him go*?

Yet—even now—he could feel her touch slamming against him. One emotion after another, like a treasonous maelstrom within him, and then. . .nothing. Like a massive hand, grabbing his soul and squeezing it into painful submission. It had felt the way he thought death might.

No Allomancer could be that powerful.

*Zane respects her*, Straff thought. *And everyone says she killed the Lord Ruler. That little thing. It couldn't be*.

It seemed impossible. And apparently, that was just the way she wanted it to seem.

Everything had been going so well. The information provided by Zane's kandra spy had been accurate: Elend *did* try to make an alliance. The frightening thing about it was that Straff might have gone along with it, assuming Elend to be of no consequence, if the spy hadn't sent warning.

Even so, Elend had bested him. Straff had even been *prepared* for their feint of weakness, and he had still fallen.

*She's so powerful. . . .*

A figure in black stepped out of the mists and walked up to Straff. "You look like you've seen a ghost, Father," Zane said with a smile. "Your own, perhaps?"

"Was there anyone else out there, Zane?" Straff asked, too shaken for repartee at the moment. "Another couple of Mistborn, perhaps, helping her?"

Zane shook his head. "No. She really is that strong." He turned to walk back out into the mists.

"Zane!" Straff snapped, making the man pause. "We're going to change plans. I want you to kill her."

Zane turned. "But—"

"She's too dangerous. Plus, we now have the information we wanted to get from her. They don't have the atium."

"You believe them?" Zane asked.

Straff paused. After how thoroughly he'd been manipulated this evening, he wasn't going to trust anything he thought he'd learned. "No," he decided. "But we'll find it another way. I want that girl *dead,* Zane."

"Are we attacking the city for real, then?"

Straff almost gave the order right then, commanding his armies to prepare for a morning assault. The preliminary attack had gone well, showing that the defenses were hardly impressive. Straff could take that wall, then use it against Cett.

However, Elend's final words before departing this evening made him stop. *Send your armies against my city, Father*, the boy had said, *and die. You've felt her power—you know what she can do. You can try and hide, you can even conquer my city*.

*But she will find you. And she will kill you*.

*Your only option is to wait. I'll contact you when my armies are prepared to attack Cett. We'll strike together, as I said earlier*.

Straff couldn't depend on that. The boy had changed—had become strong, somehow. If Straff and Elend attacked together, Straff had no illusions as to how quickly he'd be betrayed. But Straff couldn't attack Luthadel while that girl was alive. Not knowing her strength, having felt her touch on his emotions.

"No," he finally said to Zane's question. "We won't attack. Not until you kill her."

"That might be harder than you make it sound, Father," Zane said. "I'll need some help."

"What kind of help?"

"A strike team. Allomancers that can't be traced."

Zane was speaking of a particular group. Most Allomancers were easy to identify because of their 1noble lineages. Straff, however, had access to some special resources. There was a reason that he had so many mistresses—dozens and dozens of them. Some thought it was just because he was lustful.

That wasn't it at all. More mistresses meant more children. And more children, born from a high noble line like his, meant more Allomancers. He'd only spawned one Mistborn, but there were many Mistings.

"It will be done," Straff said.

"They might not survive the encounter, Father," Zane warned, still standing in the mists.

That awful sensation returned. The sense of nothingness, the horrible knowledge that someone else had complete and total control over his emotions. Nobody should have that much power over him. Especially not Elend.

*He should be dead. He came right to me. And I let him go*.

"Get rid of her," Straff said. "Do anything you need to, Zane. Anything."

Zane nodded, then walked away with a self-satisfied stroll.

Straff returned to his tent and sent for Hoselle again. She looked enough like Elend's girl. It would do him good to remind himself that most of the time, he really was in control.

Elend sat back in the carriage, a little stunned. *I'm still alive*! he thought with growing excitement. *I did it! I convinced Straff to leave the city alone*.

For a time, at least. Luthadel's safety depended on Straff remaining frightened of Vin. But. . .well, any victory was an enormous one for Elend. He hadn't failed his people. He was their king, and his plan—crazy though it might have seemed—had worked. The small crown on his head suddenly didn't seem as heavy as it had before.

Vin sat across from him. She didn't look nearly as pleased as she could have.

"We did it, Vin!" Elend said. "It wasn't what we planned, but it worked. Straff won't dare attack the city now."

She nodded quietly.

Elend frowned. "Um, it's because of you that the city will be safe. You know that, right? If you hadn't been there. . .well, of course, if it hadn't been for you, the entire Final Empire would still be enslaved."

"Because I killed the Lord Ruler," she said quietly.

Elend nodded.

"But it was *Kelsier's* plan—the crew's skills, the people's strength of will—that freed the empire. I just held the knife."

"You make it sound like a trivial thing, Vin," he said. "It's not! You're a fantastic Allomancer. Ham says he can't beat you even in an *unfair* fight anymore, and you've kept the palace free of assassins. There's nobody like you in all of the Final Empire!"

Strangely, his words made her huddle into the corner just a little farther. She turned, watching out the window, eyes staring into the mists. "Thank you," she said softly.

Elend wrinkled his brow. *Every time I begin to think I've figured out what's going on in her head*. . .He moved over, putting an arm around her. "Vin, what's wrong?"

She was silent, then finally shook her head, forcing a smile. "It's nothing, Elend. You're right to be excited. You were brilliant in there—I doubt even Kelsier could have manipulated Straff so neatly."

Elend smiled, and pulled her close, impatient as the carriage rolled up to the dark city. The doors of Tin Gate opened hesitantly, and Elend saw a group of men standing just inside of the courtyard. Ham held aloft a lantern in the mists.

Elend didn't wait for the carriage to stop on its own. He opened the door and hopped down as it was rolling to a halt. His friends began to smile eagerly. The gates thumped closed.

"It worked?" Ham asked hesitantly as Elend approached. "You did it?"

"Kind of," Elend said with a smile, clasping hands with Ham, Breeze, Dockson, and finally Spook. Even the kandra, OreSeur, was there. He padded over to the carriage, waiting for Vin. "The initial feint didn't go so well—my father didn't bite on an alliance. But then I told him I'd kill him!"

"Wait. How was that a good idea?" Ham asked.

"We overlooked one of our greatest resources, my friends," Elend said as Vin climbed down from the carriage. Elend turned, waving his hand toward her. "We have a weapon like nothing they can match! Straff expected me to come begging, and he was ready to control that situation. However, when I mentioned what would happen to him and his army if Vin's anger was roused. . ."

"My dear man," Breeze said. "You went into the camp of the strongest king in the Final Empire, and you *threatened* him?"

"Yes I did!"

"Brilliant!"

"I know!" Elend said. "I told my Father that he *was* going to let me leave his camp and that he *was* going to leave Luthadel alone, otherwise I'd have Vin kill him and every general in his army." He put his arm around Vin. She smiled at the group, but he could tell that something was still troubling her.

*She doesn't think I did a good job,* Elend realized. *She saw a better way to manipulate Straff, but she doesn't want to spoil my enthusiasm*.

"Well, guess we won't need a new king," Spook said with a smile. "I was kind of looking forward to taking the job. . .."

Elend laughed. "I don't intend to vacate the position for quite some time yet. We'll let the people know that Straff has been cowed, if temporarily. That should boost morale a bit. Then, we deal with the Assembly. Hopefully, they'll pass a resolution to wait for me to meet with Cett like I just did with Straff."

"Shall we have a celebration back at the palace?" Breeze asked. "As fond as I am of the mists, I doubt the courtyard is an appropriate place to be discussing these issues."

Elend patted him on the back and nodded. Ham and Dockson joined him and Vin, while the others took the carriage they'd come in. Elend glanced oddly at Dockson as he climbed into the carriage. Ordinarily, the man would have chosen the other vehicle—the one Elend wasn't in.

"Honestly, Elend," Ham said as he settled into his seat. "I'm impressed. I half thought we were going to have to raid that camp to get you back."

Elend smiled, eyeing Dockson, who sat down as the carriage began moving. He pulled open his satchel and took out a sealed envelope. He looked up and met Elend's eyes. "This came from the Assembly members for you a short time ago, Your Majesty."

Elend paused. Then he took it and broke the seal. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure," Dockson said. "But. . .I've already started hearing rumors."

Vin leaned in, reading over Elend's arm as he scanned the sheet inside. *Your Majesty*, it read.

> *This note is to inform you that by majority vote, the Assembly has decided to invoke the charter's no-confidence clause. We appreciate your efforts on behalf of the city, but the current situation calls for a different kind of leadership than Your Majesty can provide. We take this step with no hostility, but only resignation. We see no other alternative, and must act for the good of Luthadel*.
>
> *We regret to have to inform you of this by letter*.

It was signed by all twenty-three members of the Assembly.

Elend lowered the paper, shocked.

"What?" Ham asked.

"I've just been deposed," Elend said quietly.

## PART THREE

*He left ruin in his wake, but it was forgotten. He created kingdoms, and then destroyed them as he made the world anew*.

## 28

"LET ME SEE IF I understand this correctly," Tindwyl said, calm and polite, yet somehow still stern and disapproving. "There is a clause in the kingdom's legal code that lets the Assembly overthrow their king?"

Elend wilted slightly. "Yes."

"*And you wrote the law yourself*?" Tindwyl demanded.

"Most of it," Elend admitted.

"You wrote into your own law a way that you could be deposed?" Tindwyl repeated. Their group—expanded from those who had met in the carriages to include Clubs, Tindwyl, and Captain Demoux—sat in Elend's study. The group's size was such that they'd run out of chairs, and Vin sat quietly at the side, on a stack of Elend's books, having quickly changed to trousers and shirt. Tindwyl and Elend were standing, but the rest were seated—Breeze prim, Ham relaxed, and Spook trying to balance his chair as he leaned back on two legs.

"I put in that clause intentionally," Elend said. He stood at the front of the room, leaning with one arm against the glass of his massive stained-glass window, looking up at its dark shards. "This land wilted beneath the hand of an oppressive ruler for a thousand years. During that time, philosophers and thinkers dreamed of a government where a bad ruler could be ousted without bloodshed. I took this throne through an unpredictable and unique series of events, and I didn't think it right to unilaterally impose my will—or the will of my descendants—upon the people. I wanted to start a government whose monarchs would be responsible to their subjects."

*Sometimes, he talks like those books he reads,* Vin thought. *Not like a normal man at all. . .but like words on a page.*

Zane's words came back to her, seeming to whisper in her mind. *You aren't like him*. She pushed the thought out.

"With respect, Your Majesty," Tindwyl said, "this has to be one of the most foolish things I've ever seen a leader do."

"It was for the good of the kingdom," Elend said.

"It was s1heer idiocy," Tindwyl snapped. "A king doesn't subject himself to the whims of another ruling body. He is valuable to his people because he is an absolute authority!"

Vin had rarely seen Elend so sorrowful, and she cringed a bit at the sadness in his eyes. However, a different piece of her was rebelliously happy. He wasn't king anymore. Now maybe people wouldn't work so hard to kill him. Maybe he could just be Elend again, and they could leave. Go somewhere. A place where things weren't so complicated.

"Regardless," Dockson said to the quiet room, "something must be done. Discussing the prudence of decisions already past has little current relevance."

"Agreed," Ham said. "So, the Assembly tried to kick you out. What are we going to do about it?"

"We obviously can't let them have their way," Breeze said. "Why, the people overthrew a government just last year! This is a bad habit to be getting into, I should think."

"We need to prepare a response, Your Majesty," Dockson said. "Something decrying this deceitful maneuver, performed while you were negotiating for the very safety of the city. Now that I look back, it's obvious that they arranged this meeting so that you *couldn't* be present and defend yourself."

Elend nodded, still staring up at the dark glass. "There's probably no need to call me Your Majesty anymore, Dox."

"Nonsense," Tindwyl said, arms folded as she stood beside a bookcase. "You are still king."

"I've lost the mandate of the people," Elend said.

"Yes," Clubs said, "but you've still got the mandate of my armies. That makes you king no matter what the Assembly says."

"Exactly," Tindwyl said. "Foolish laws aside, you're still in a position of power. We need to tighten martial law, restrict movement within the city. Seize control of key points, and sequester the members of the Assembly so that your enemies can't raise a resistance against you."

"I'll have my men on the streets before light," Clubs said.

"No," Elend said quietly.

There was a pause.

"Your Majesty?" Dockson asked. "It really is the best move. We can't let this faction against you gain momentum."

"It's not a faction, Dox," Elend said. "It's the elected representatives of the Assembly."

"An Assembly you formed, my dear man," Breeze said. "They have power because *you* gave it to them."

"The law gives them their power, Breeze," Elend said. "And we are all subject to it."

"Nonsense," Tindwyl said. "As king, you are the law. Once we secure the city, you can call in the Assembly and explain to its members that you need their support. Those who disagree can be held until the crisis is over."

"No," Elend said, a little more firm. "We will do none of that."

"That's it, then?" Ham asked. "You're giving up?"

"I'm not giving up, Ham," Elend said, finally turning to regard the group. "But I'm not going to use the city's armies to pressure the Assembly."

"You'll lose your throne," Breeze said.

"See reason, Elend," Ham said with a nod.

"I will *not* be an exception to my own laws!" Elend said.

"Don't be a fool," Tindwyl said. "You should—"

"Tindwyl," Elend said, "respond to my ideas as you wish, but do not call me a fool again. I will not be belittled because I express my opinion!"

Tindwyl paused, mouth partially open. Then she pressed her lips together and took her seat. Vin felt a quiet surge of satisfaction. *You trained him, Tindwyl*, she thought with a smile. *Can you really complain if he stands up to you*?

Elend walked forward, placing his hands on the table as he regarded the group. "Yes, we will respond. Dox, you write a letter informing the Assembly of our disappointment and feelings of betrayal—inform them of our success with Straff, and lay on the guilt as thickly as possible.

"The rest of us will begin planning. We'll get the throne back. As has been stated, I know the law. I wrote it. There are ways to deal with this. Those ways do *not*, however, include sending our armies to secure the city. I will not be like the tyrants who would take Luthadel from us! I will not force the people to do my will, even if I know it is best for them."

"Your Majesty," Tindwyl said carefully, "there is nothing immoral about securing your power during a time of chaos. People react irrationally during such times. That is one of the reasons why they need strong leadership. They need you."

"Only if they want me, Tindwyl," Elend said.

"Forgive me, Your Majesty," Tindwyl said, "but that statement seems somewhat naive to me."

Elend smiled. "Perhaps it is. You can change my clothing and my bearing, but you can't change the soul of who I am. I'll do what I think is right—and that includes letting the Assembly depose me, if that is their choice."

Tindwyl frowned. "And if you can't get your throne back through lawful means?"

"Then I accept that fact," Elend said. "And do my best to help the kingdom anyway."

*So much for running away,* Vin thought. However, she couldn't help smiling. Part of what she loved about Elend was his sincerity. His simple love for the people of Luthadel—his determination to do what was right for them—was what separated him from Kelsier. Even in martyrdom, Kelsier had displayed a hint of arrogance. He'd made certain that he would be remembered like few men who had ever lived.

But Elend—to him, ruling the Central Dominance wasn't about fame or glory. For the first time, completely and honestly, she decided something. Elend was a far better king than Kelsier would ever have been.

"I'm. . .not certain what I think of this experience, Mistress," a voice whispered beside her. Vin paused, looking down as she realized that she had begun idly scratching OreSeur's ears.

She pulled her hand back with a start. "Sorry," she said.

OreSeur shrugged, resting his head back on his paws.

"So, you said there's a legal way to get the throne back," Ham said. "How do we go about it?"

"The Assembly has one month to choose a new king," Elend said. "Nothing in the law says that the new king can't be the same as the old one. And, if they can't come up with a majority decision by that deadline, the throne reverts to me for a minimum of one year."

"Complicated," Ham sa1id, rubbing his chin.

"What did you expect?" Breeze said. "It's the law."

"I didn't mean the law itself," Ham said. "I meant getting the Assembly to either choose Elend or not choose anyone. They wouldn't have deposed him in the first place unless they had another person in mind for the throne."

"Not necessarily," Dockson said. "Perhaps they simply meant this as a warning."

"Perhaps," Elend said. "Gentlemen, I think this is a sign. I've been ignoring the Assembly—we thought that they were taken care of, since I got them to sign that proposal giving me right of parlay. However, we never realized that an easy way for them to get around that proposal was to choose a new king, then have *him* do as they wished."

He sighed, shaking his head. "I have to admit, I've never been very good at handling the Assembly. They don't see me as a king, but as a colleague—and because of that, they can easily see themselves taking my place. I'll bet one of the Assemblymen has convinced the others to put him on the throne instead."

"So, we just make him disappear," Ham said. "I'm sure Vin could. . ."

Elend frowned.

"I'm joking, El," Ham said.

"You know, Ham," Breeze noted. "The only funny thing about your jokes is how often they lack any humor whatsoever."

"You're only saying that because they usually involve you in the punch line."

Breeze rolled his eyes.

"You know," OreSeur muttered quietly, obviously counting on her tin to let Vin hear him, "it seems that these meetings would be more productive if someone forgot to invite those two."

Vin smiled. "They're not *that* bad," she whispered.

OreSeur raised an eyebrow.

"Okay," Vin said. "They do distract us a little bit."

"I could always eat one of them, if you wish," OreSeur said. "That might speed things up."

Vin paused.

OreSeur, however, had a strange little smile on his lips. "Kandra humor, Mistress. I apologize. We can be a bit grim."

Vin smiled. "They probably wouldn't taste very good anyway. Ham's far too stringy, and you don't want to know the kinds of things that Breeze spends his time eating. . .."

"I'm not sure," OreSeur said. "One is, after all, named 'Ham.' As for the other. . ." He nodded to the cup of wine in Breeze's hand. "He does seem quite fond of marinating himself."

Elend was picking through his stacks of books, pulling out several relevant volumes on law—including the book of Luthadel law that he himself had written.

"Your Majesty," Tindwyl said, emphasizing the term. "You have two armies on your doorstep, and a group of koloss making their way into the Central Dominance. Do you honestly think that you have time for a protracted legal battle now?"

Elend set down the books and pulled his chair to the table. "Tindwyl," he said. "I have two armies on my doorstep, koloss coming to pressure them, and I myself am the main obstacle keeping the leaders of this city from handing the kingdom over to one of the invaders. Do you honestly think that it's a coincidence that I get deposed *now*?"

Several members of the crew perked up at this, and Vin cocked her head.

"You think one of the invaders might be behind this?" Ham asked, rubbing his chin.

"What would you do, if you were them?" Elend said, opening a book. "You can't attack the city, because it will cost you too many troops. The siege has already lasted weeks, your troops are getting cold, and the men Dockson hired have been attacking your canal supply barges, threatening your food supply. Add on top of that, you know that a large force of koloss are marching this way. . .and, well, it makes sense. If Straff and Cett's spies are any good, they'll know that the Assembly just about capitulated and gave the city away when that army first arrived. Assassins have failed to kill me, but if there were another way to remove me. . ."

"Yes," Breeze said. "This does sound like something Cett would do. Turn the Assembly against you, put a sympathizer on the throne, then get him to open the gates."

Elend nodded. "And my father seemed hesitant to side with me this evening, as if he felt he had some other way to get the city. I can't be certain if either monarch is behind this move, Tindwyl, but we certainly can't ignore the possibility. This isn't a distraction—this is very much part of the same siege tactics we've been fighting since those armies arrived. If I can put myself back on the throne, then Straff and Cett will know that I'm the only one they can work with—and that will, hopefully, make them more likely to side with me in desperation, particularly as those koloss draw near."

With that, Elend began riffling through a stack of books. His depression seemed to be abating in face of this new academic problem. "There might be a few other clauses of relevance in the law," he half mumbled. "I need to do some studying. Spook, did you invite Sazed to this meeting?"

Spook shrugged. "I couldn't get him to wake up."

"He's recovering from his trip here," Tindwyl said, turning away from her study of Elend and his books. "It's an issue of the Keepers."

"Needs to refill one of his metalminds?" Ham asked.

Tindwyl paused, her expression darkening. "He explained that to you, then?"

Ham and Breeze nodded.

"I see," Tindwyl said. "Regardless, he could not help with this problem, Your Majesty. I give you some small aid in the area of government because it is my duty to train leaders in knowledge of the past. However, traveling Keepers such as Sazed do not take sides in political matters."

"Political matters?" Breeze asked lightly. "You mean, perhaps, like overthrowing the Final Empire?"

Tindwyl closed her mouth, lips growing thin. "You should not encourage him to break his vows," she finally said. "If you were his friends, you would see that to be true, I think."

"Oh?" Breeze asked, pointing at her with his cup of wine. "Personally, I think you're just embarrassed that he disobeyed you all, but then actually ended up freeing your people."

Tindwyl gave Breeze a flat stare, her eyes narrow, her posture stiff. They sat that way for a long moment. "Push on my emotions all you wish, Soother," Tindwyl said. "My feelings are my own. You will have no success here."

Breeze finally turned back to his drink, muttering something about "damn Terrismen."

Elend, however, wasn1't paying attention to the argument. He already had four books open on the table before him, and was flipping through a fifth. Vin smiled, remembering the days—not so long ago—when his courtship of her had often involved him plopping himself down in a nearby chair and opening a book.

*He is the same man,* she thought. *And that soul, that man, is the one who loved me before he knew I was Mistborn. He loved me even after he* *discovered I was a thief, and thought I was trying to rob him. I need to remember that*.

"Come on," she whispered to OreSeur, standing as Breeze and Ham got into another argument. She needed time to think, and the mists were still fresh.

*This would be a lot easier if I weren't so skilled*, Elend thought with amusement, poking through his books. *I set up the law too well*.

He followed a particular passage with his finger, rereading it as the crew slowly trailed away. He couldn't remember if he'd dismissed them or not. Tindwyl would probably chastise him for that.

*Here*, he thought, tapping the page. *I might have grounds to argue for a revote if any of the members of the Assembly arrived late to the meeting, or made their votes in absentia*. The vote to depose had to be unanimous—save, of course, for the king being deposed.

He paused, noticing movement. Tindwyl was the only one still in the room with him. He looked up from his books with resignation. *I probably have this coming*. . ..

"I apologize for treating you with disrespect, Your Majesty," she said.

Elend frowned. *Wasn't expecting that*.

"I have a habit of treating people like children," Tindwyl said. "It is not something that I should be proud of, I think."

"It's—" Elend paused. Tindwyl had taught him never to excuse people's failings. He could accept people with failings—even forgive them—but if he glossed over the problems, then they would never change. "I accept your apology," he said.

"You've learned quickly, Your Majesty."

"I haven't had much choice," Elend said with a smile. "Of course, I didn't change fast enough for the Assembly."

"How did you let this happen?" she asked quietly. "Even considering our disagreement over how a government should be run, I should think that these Assemblymen would be supporters of yours. You gave them their power."

"I ignored them, Tindwyl. Powerful men, friends or not, never like being ignored."

She nodded. "Though, perhaps we should pause to take note of your successes, rather than simply focusing on your failings. Vin tells me that your meeting with your father went well."

Elend smiled. "We scared him into submission. It felt very good to do something like that to Straff. But, I think I might have offended Vin somehow."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow.

Elend set down his book, leaning forward with his arms on the desk. "She was in an odd mood on the way back. I could barely get her to talk to me. I'm not sure what it was."

"Perhaps she was just tired."

"I'm not convinced that Vin *gets* tired," Elend said. "She's always moving, always doing something. Sometimes, I worry that she thinks I'm lazy. Maybe that's why. . ." He trai1led off, then shook his head.

"She doesn't think that you are lazy, Your Majesty," Tindwyl said. "She refused to marry you because she doesn't think that she is worthy of you."

"Nonsense," Elend said. "Vin's Mistborn, Tindwyl. She knows she's worth ten men like me."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "You understand very little about women, Elend Venture—especially young women. To them, their competence has a surprisingly small amount to do with how they feel about themselves. Vin is insecure. She doesn't believe that she deserves to be with you—it is less that she doesn't think she deserves you personally, and more that she isn't convinced that she deserves to be happy at all. She has led a very confusing, difficult life."

"How sure are you about this?"

"I've raised a number of daughters, Your Majesty," Tindwyl said. "I understand the things of which I speak."

"Daughters?" Elend asked. "You have children?"

"Of course."

"I just. . ." The Terrismen he'd known were eunuchs, like Sazed. The same couldn't be true for a woman like Tindwyl, of course, but he'd assumed that the Lord Ruler's breeding programs would have affected her somehow.

"Regardless," Tindwyl said curtly, "you must make some decisions, Your Majesty. Your relationship with Vin is going to be difficult. She has certain issues that will provide more problems than you would find in a more conventional woman."

"We've already discussed this," Elend said. "I'm not looking for a more 'conventional' woman. I love Vin."

"I'm not implying that you shouldn't," Tindwyl said calmly. "I am simply giving you instruction, as I have been asked to do. You need to decide how much you're going to let the girl, and your relationship with her, distract you."

"What makes you think I'm distracted?"

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "I asked you about your success with Lord Venture this evening, and all you wanted to talk about was how Vin felt during the ride home."

Elend hesitated.

"Which is more important to you, Your Majesty?" Tindwyl asked. "This girl's love, or the good of your people?"

"I'm not going to answer a question like that," Elend said.

"Eventually, you may not have a choice," Tindwyl said. "It is a question most kings face eventually, I fear."

"No," Elend said. "There's no reason that I can't both love Vin and protect my people. I've studied too many hypothetical dilemmas to be caught in a trap like that."

Tindwyl shrugged, standing. "Believe as you wish, Your Majesty. However, I already see a dilemma, and I find it not at all hypothetical." She bowed her head slightly in deference, then withdrew from the room, leaving him with his books.

*There were other proofs to connect Alendi to the Hero of Ages. Smaller things, things that only one trained in the lore of the Anticipation would have noticed. The birthmark on his arm. The way his hair turned gray when he was barely twenty and five years of age. The way he spoke, the way he treated people, the way he ruled.*

*He simply seemed to fit.*

## 219

"TELL ME, MISTRESS," ORESEUR SAID, lying lazily, head on paws. "I have been around humans for a goodly number of years. I was under the impression that they needed regular sleep. I guess I was mistaken."

Vin sat on a wall-top stone ledge, one leg up against her chest, the other dangling over the side of the wall. Keep Hasting's towers were dark shadows in the mists to her right and to her left. "I sleep," she said.

"Occasionally." OreSeur yawned a deep, tongue-stretching yawn. Was he adopting more canine mannerisms?

Vin turned away from the kandra, looking east, over the slumbering city of Luthadel. There was a fire in the distance, a growing light that was too large to be of man's touch. Dawn had arrived. Another night had passed, making it nearly a week since she and Elend had visited Straff's army. Zane had yet to appear.

"You're burning pewter, aren't you?" OreSeur asked. "To stay awake?"

Vin nodded. Beneath a light burn of pewter, her fatigue was only a mild annoyance. She could feel it deep within her, if she looked hard, but it had no power over her. Her senses were keen, her body strong. Even the night's cold wasn't as bothersome. The moment she extinguished her pewter, however, she'd feel the exhaustion in force.

"That cannot be healthy, Mistress," OreSeur said. "You sleep barely three or four hours a day. Nobody—Mistborn, man, or kandra—can survive on a schedule like that for long."

Vin looked down. How could she explain her strange insomnia? She should be over that; she no longer had to be frightened of the other crewmembers around her. And yet, no matter how exhausted she grew, she was finding sleep more and more difficult to claim. How could she sleep, with that quiet thumping in the distance?

It seemed to be getting closer, for some reason. Or simply stronger? *I hear the thumping sounds from above, the pulsings from the mountains*. . .. Words from the logbook.

How could she sleep, knowing that the spirit watched her from the mist, ominous and hateful? How could she sleep when armies threatened to slaughter her friends, when Elend's kingdom had been taken from him, when everything she thought she'd known and loved was getting muddled and obscure?

. . .*when I finally lie down, I find sleep elusive. The same thoughts that trouble me during the day are only compounded by the stillness of night*. . ..

OreSeur yawned again. "He's not coming, Mistress."

Vin turned, frowning. "What do you mean?"

"This is the last place you sparred with Zane," OreSeur said. "You're waiting for him to come."

Vin paused. "I could use a spar," she finally said.

Light continued to grow in the east, slowly brightening the mists. The mists persisted, however, reticent to give way before the sun.

"You shouldn't let that man influence you so, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I do not think he is the person you believe him to be."

Vin frowned. "He's my enemy. What else would I believe?"

"You do not treat him like an enemy, Mistress."

"Well, he hasn't attacked Elend," Vin said. "Maybe Zane isn't fully under Straff's control."

OreSeur sat quietly, head o1n paws. Then he turned away.

"What?" Vin asked.

"Nothing, Mistress. I will believe as I'm told."

"Oh, no," Vin said, turning on the ledge to look at him. "You're not going back to that excuse. What were you thinking?"

OreSeur sighed. "I was thinking, Mistress, that your fixation with Zane is disconcerting."

"Fixation?" Vin said. "I'm just keeping an eye on him. I don't like having another Mistborn—enemy or not—running around in my city. Who knows what he could be up to?"

OreSeur frowned, but said nothing.

"OreSeur," Vin said, "if you have things to say, speak!"

"I apologize, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I'm not accustomed to chatting with my masters—especially not candidly."

"It's all right. Just speak your mind."

"Well, Mistress," OreSeur said, raising his head off his paws, "I do not like this Zane."

"What do you know of him?"

"Nothing more than you," OreSeur admitted. "However, most kandra are very good judges of character. When you practice imitation for as long as I have, you learn to see to the hearts of men. I do not like what I have seen of Zane. He seems too pleased with himself. He seems too deliberate in the way he has befriended you. He makes me uncomfortable."

Vin sat on the ledge, legs parted, hands before her with palms down, resting on the cool stone. *He might be right*.

But, OreSeur hadn't flown with Zane, hadn't sparred in the mists. Through no fault of his own, OreSeur was like Elend. Not an Allomancer. Neither of them could understand what it was to soar on a Push of steel, to flare tin and experience the sudden shock of five heightened senses. They couldn't know. They couldn't understand.

Vin leaned back. Then, she regarded the wolfhound in the growing light. There was something she'd been meaning to mention, and now seemed as good a time as any. "OreSeur, you can switch bodies, if you want."

The wolfhound raised an eyebrow.

"We have those bones that we found in the palace," Vin said. "You can use those, if you're tired of being a dog."

"I couldn't use them," OreSeur said. "I haven't digested their body—I wouldn't know the proper arrangement of muscles and organs to make the person look correct."

"Well, then," Vin said. "We could get you a criminal."

"I thought you liked these bones on me," OreSeur said.

"I do," Vin said. "But, I don't want you to stay in a body that makes you unhappy."

OreSeur snorted. "My happiness is not an issue."

"It is to me," Vin said. "We could—"

"Mistress," OreSeur interrupted.

"Yes?"

"I shall keep these bones. I've grown accustomed to them. It is very frustrating to change forms often."

Vin hesitated. "All right," she finally said.

OreSeur nodded. "Though," he continued, "speaking of bodies, Mistress, are we ever planning to return to the palace? Not all of us have the c1onstitution of a Mistborn—some people need sleep and food on occasion."

*He certainly complains a lot more now,* Vin thought. However, she found the attitude to be a good sign; it meant OreSeur was growing more comfortable with her. Comfortable enough to tell her when he thought she was being stupid.

*Why do I even bother with Zane*? she thought, rising and turning eyes northward. The mist was still moderately strong, and she could barely make out Straff's army, still holding the northern canal, maintaining the siege. It sat like a spider, waiting for the right time to spring.

*Elend*, she thought. *I should be more focused on Elend*. His motions to dismiss the Assembly's decision, or to force a revote, had all failed. And, stubbornly lawful as always, Elend continued to accept his failures. He still thought he had a chance to persuade the Assembly to choose him as king—or at least not vote anybody else to the position.

So he worked on speeches and planned with Breeze and Dockson. This left him little time for Vin, and rightly so. The last thing he needed was her distracting him. This was something she couldn't help him with—something she couldn't fight or scare away.

*His world is of papers, books, laws, and philosophies*, she thought. *He rides the words of his theories like I ride the mists. I always worry that he can't understand me. . .but can I really even understand him*?

OreSeur stood, stretched, and placed his forepaws on the wall's railing to raise himself and look north, like Vin.

Vin shook her head. "Sometimes, I wish Elend weren't so. . .well, noble. The city doesn't need this confusion right now."

"He did the right thing, Mistress."

"You think so?"

"Of course," OreSeur said. "He made a contract. It is his duty to keep that contract, no matter what. He must serve his master—in his case, that would be the city—even if that master makes him do something very distasteful."

"That's a very kandralike way of seeing things," Vin said.

OreSeur looked up at her, raising a canine eyebrow, as if to ask *Well, what did you expect*? She smiled; she had to suppress a chuckle every time she saw that expression on his dog face.

"Come on," Vin said. "Let's get back to the palace."

"Excellent," OreSeur said, dropping down to all fours. "That meat I set out should be perfect by now."

"Unless the maids found it again," Vin said with a smile.

OreSeur's expression darkened. "I thought you were going to warn them."

"What would I say?" Vin asked with amusement. "Please don't throw away this rancid meat—my dog likes to eat it?"

"Why not?" OreSeur asked. "When I imitate a human, I almost never get to have a good meal, but dogs eat aged meat sometimes, don't they?"

"I honestly don't know," Vin said.

"Aged meat is delicious."

"You mean 'rotten' meat."

"Aged," OreSeur said insistently as she picked him up, preparing to carry him down from the wall. The top of Keep Hasting was a good hundred feet tall—far too high up for OreSeur to jump, and the only path down would be throug1h the inside of the abandoned keep. Better to carry him.

"Aged meat is like aged wine or aged cheese," OreSeur continued. "It tastes better when it's a few weeks old."

*I suppose that's one of the side effects of being related to scavengers*, Vin thought. She hopped up on the lip of the wall, dropping a few coins. However, as she prepared to jump—OreSeur a large bulk in her arms—she hesitated. She turned one last time, looking out at Straff's army. It was fully visible now; the sun had risen completely above the horizon. Yet, a few insistent swirls of mist wavered in the air, as if trying to defy the sun, to continue to cloak the city, to stave off the light of day. . ..

*Lord Ruler*! Vin thought, struck by a sudden insight. She'd been working on this problem so long, it had begun to frustrate her. And now, when she'd been ignoring it, the answer had come to her. As if her subconscious had still been picking it apart.

"Mistress?" OreSeur asked. "Is everything all right?"

Vin opened her mouth slightly, cocking her head. "I think I just realized what the Deepness was."

*But, I must continue with the sparsest of detail. Space is limited. The other Worldbringers must have thought themselves humble when they came to me, admitting that they had been wrong. Even then, I was beginning to doubt my original declaration.*

*But, I was prideful.*

## 30

*I write this record now,* Sazed read, *pounding it into a metal slab, because I am afraid. Afraid for myself, yes—I admit to being human. If Alendi does return from the Well of Ascension, I am certain that my death will be one of his first objectives. He is not an evil man, but he is a ruthless one. That is, I think, a product of what he has been through.*

*I am also afraid, however, that all I have known—that my story—will be forgotten. I am afraid for the world that is to come. Afraid that Alendi will fail. Afraid of a doom brought by the Deepness.*

*It all comes back to poor Alendi. I feel bad for him, and for all the things he has been forced to endure. For what he has been forced to become.*

*But, let me begin at the beginning. I met Alendi first in Khlennium; he was a young lad then, and had not yet been warped by a decade spent leading armies.*

*Alendi's height struck me the first time I saw him. Here was a man who was small of stature, but who seemed to tower over others, a man who demanded respect.*

*Oddly, it was Alendi's simple ingenuousness that first led me to befriend him. I employed him as an assistant during his first months in the grand city.*

*It wasn't until years later that I became convinced that Alendi was the Hero of Ages. Hero of Ages: the one called Rabzeen in Khlennium, the Anamnesor.*

*Savior.*

*When I finally had the realization—finally connected all of the signs of the Anticipation to him—I was so excited. Yet, when I announced my discovery to the other Worldbringers,*

> *I was met with scorn. Oh, how I wish that I had listened to them.*
>
> *And yet, any who know me will realize that there was no chance I would give up so easily. Once I find something to investigate, I become dogged in my pursuit. I had determined that Alendi was the Hero of Ages, and I intended to prove it. I should have bowed before the will of the others; I shouldn't have insisted on traveling with Alendi to witness his journeys. It was inevitable that Alendi himself would find out what I believed him to be.*
>
> *Yes, he was the one who fueled the rumors after that. I could never have done what he himself did, convincing and persuading the world that he was indeed the Hero. I don't know if he himself believed it, but he made others think that he must be the one.*
>
> *If only the Terris religion, and belief in the Anticipation, hadn't spread beyond our people. If only the Deepness hadn't come, providing a threat that drove men to desperation both in action and belief. If only I had passed over Alendi when looking for an assistant, all those years ago.*

Sazed sat back from his work of transcribing the rubbing. There was still a great deal to do—it was amazing how much writing this Kwaan had managed to cram onto the relatively small sheet of steel.

Sazed looked over his work. He'd spent his entire trip north anticipating the time when he could finally begin work on the rubbing. A part of him had been worried. Would the dead man's words seem as important sitting in a well-lit room as they had when in the dungeons of the Conventical of Seran?

He scanned to another part of the document, reading a few choice paragraphs. Ones of particular importance to him.

> *As the one who found Alendi, however, I became someone important. Foremost amongst the Worldbringers.*
>
> *There was a place for me, in the lore of the Anticipation—I thought myself the Announcer, the prophet foretold to discover the Hero of Ages. Renouncing Alendi then would have been to renounce my new position, my acceptance, by the others.*
>
> *And so I did not.*
>
> *But I do so now. Let it be known that I, Kwaan, Worldbringer of Terris, am a fraud.*

Sazed closed his eyes. *Worldbringer*. The term was known to him; the order of the Keepers had been founded upon memories and hopes from Terris legends. The Worldbringers had been teachers, Feruchemists who had traveled the lands bearing knowledge. They had been a prime inspiration for the secret order of Keepers.

And now he had a document made by a Worldbringer's own hand.

*Tindwyl is going to be very annoyed with me,* Sazed thought, opening his eyes. He'd read the entire 1rubbing, but he would need to spend time studying it. Memorizing it. Cross-referencing it with other documents. This one bit of writing—perhaps twenty pages total—could easily keep him busy for months, even years.

His window shutters rattled. Sazed looked up. He was in his quarters at the palace—a tasteful collection of well-decorated rooms that were far too lavish for one who had spent his life as a servant. He rose, walked over to the window, undid the latch, and pulled open the shutters. He smiled as he found Vin crouching on the ledge outside.

"Um. . .hi," Vin said. She wore her mistcloak over gray shirt and black trousers. Despite the onset of morning, she obviously hadn't yet gone to bed after her nightly prowling. "You should leave your window unlatched. I can't get in if it's locked. Elend got mad at me for breaking too many latches."

"I shall try to remember that, Lady Vin," Sazed said, and gesturing for her to enter.

Vin hopped spryly through the window, mistcloak rustling. "*Try* to remember?" she asked. "You never forget anything. Not even the things you don't have stuck in a metalmind."

*She's grown so much more bold*, he thought as she walked over to his writing desk, peering over his work. *Even in the months I've been away*.

"What's this?" Vin asked, still looking at the desk.

"I found it at the Conventical of Seran, Lady Vin," Sazed said, walking forward. It felt so good to be wearing clean robes again, to have a quiet and comfortable place in which to study. Was he a bad man for preferring this to travel?

*One month*, he thought. *I will give myself one month of study. Then I will turn the project over to someone else*.

"What is it?" Vin asked, holding up the rubbing.

"If you please, Lady Vin," Sazed said apprehensively. "That is quite fragile. The rubbing could be smudged. . .."

Vin nodded, putting it down and scanning his transcription. There had been a time when she would have avoided anything that smelled of stuffy writing, but now she looked intrigued. "This mentions the Deepness!" she said with excitement.

"Among other things," Sazed said, joining her at the desk. He sat down, and Vin walked over to one of the room's low-backed, plush chairs. However, she didn't sit on it as an ordinary person would; instead, she hopped up and sat down on the top of the chair's back, her feet resting on the seat cushion.

"What?" she asked, apparently noticing Sazed's smile.

"Just amused at a proclivity of Mistborn, Lady Vin," he said. "Your kind has trouble simply sitting—it seems you always want to perch instead. That is what comes from having such an incredible sense of balance, I think."

Vin frowned, but passed over the comment. "Sazed," she said, "what was the Deepness?"

He laced his fingers before himself, regarding the young woman as he mused. "The Deepness, Lady Vin? That is a subject of much debate, I think. It was supposedly something great and powerful, though some scholars have dismissed the entire legend as a fabrication concocted by the Lord

Ruler. There is some reason to believe this theory, I think, for the only real records of those times are the ones sanctioned by the Steel Ministry."

"But, the logbook mentions the Deepness," Vin said. "And so does that thing you're translating now1."

"Indeed, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "But, even among those who assume the Deepness was real, there is a great deal of debate. Some hold to the Lord Ruler's official story, that the Deepness was a horrible, supernatural beast—a dark god, if you will. Others disagree with this extreme interpretation. They think the Deepness was more mundane—an army of some sort, perhaps invaders from another land. The Farmost Dominance, during pre-Ascension times, was apparently populated with several breeds of men who were quite primitive and warlike."

Vin was smiling. He looked at her questioningly, and she just shrugged. "I asked Elend this same question," she explained, "and I got barely a sentence-long response."

"His Majesty has different areas of scholarship; pre-Ascension history may be too stuffy a topic even for him. Besides, anyone who asks a Keeper about the past should be prepared for an extended conversation, I think."

"I'm not complaining," Vin said. "Continue."

"There isn't much more to say—or, rather, there is a great deal more to say, but I doubt much of it has relevance. Was the Deepness an army? Was it, perhaps, the first attack from koloss, as some theorize? That would explain much—most stories agree that the Lord Ruler gained some power to defeat the Deepness at the Well of Ascension. Perhaps he gained the support of the koloss, and then used them as his armies."

"Sazed," Vin said. "I don't think the Deepness was the koloss."

"Oh?"

"I think it was the mist."

"That theory has been proposed," Sazed said with a nod.

"It has?" Vin asked, sounding a bit disappointed.

"Of course, Lady Vin. During the thousand-year reign of the Final Empire, there are few possibilities that *haven't* been discussed, I think. The mist theory has been advanced before, but there are several large problems with it."

"Such as?"

"Well," Sazed said, "for one thing, the Lord Ruler is said to have defeated the Deepness. However, the mist is obviously still here. Also, if the Deepness was simply mist, why call it by such an obscure name? Of course, others point out that much of what we know or have heard of the Deepness comes from oral lore, and something very common can take on mystical properties when transferred verbally through generations. The 'Deepness' therefore could mean not just the mist, but the event of its coming or alteration.

"The larger problem with the mist theory, however, is one of malignance. If we trust the accounts—and we have little else to go on—the Deepness was terrible and destructive. The mist seems to display none of this danger."

"But it kills people now."

Sazed paused. "Yes, Lady Vin. It apparently does."

"And what if it did so before, but the Lord Ruler stopped it somehow? You yourself said that you think we did something—something that changed the mist—when we killed the Lord Ruler."

Sazed nodded. "The problems I have been investigating are quite terrible, to be certain. However, I do not see that they could be a threat on the same level as the Deepness. Certain people have been killed by the mists, but many are elderly or otherwise lacking in constitution. It leaves many people alone."

He paused, tapping his thumbs together1. "But, I would be remiss if I didn't admit some merit to the suggestion, Lady Vin. Perhaps even a few deaths would be enough to cause a panic. The danger could have been exaggerated by retelling—and, perhaps the killings were more widespread before. I haven't been able to collect enough information to be certain of anything yet."

Vin didn't respond. *Oh, dear*, Sazed thought, sighing to himself. *I've bored her. I really do need to be more careful, watching my vocabulary and my language. One would think that after all my travels among the skaa, I would have learned—*

"Sazed?" Vin said, sounding thoughtful. "What if we're looking at it wrong? What if these random deaths in the mists aren't the problem at all?"

"What do you mean, Lady Vin?"

She sat quietly for a moment, one foot tapping back idly against the chair's back cushion. She finally looked up, meeting his eyes. "What would happen if the mists came during the day permanently?"

Sazed mused on that for a moment.

"There would be no light," Vin continued. "Plants would die, people would starve. There would be death. . .chaos."

"I suppose," Sazed said. "Perhaps that theory has merit."

"It's not a theory," Vin said, hopping down from her chair. "It's what happened."

"You're so certain, already?" Sazed asked with amusement.

Vin nodded curtly, joining him at the desk. "I'm right," she said with her characteristic bluntness. "I know it." She pulled something out of a trouser pocket, then drew over a stool to sit beside him. She unfolded the wrinkled sheet and flattened it on the desk.

"These are quotes from the logbook," Vin said. She pointed at a paragraph. "Here the Lord Ruler talks about how armies were useless against the Deepness. At first, I thought this meant that the armies hadn't been able to defeat it—but look at the wording. He says 'The swords of my armies are useless.' What's more useless than trying to swing a sword at mist?"

She pointed at another paragraph. "It left destruction in its wake, right? Countless thousands died because of it. But, he never says that the Deepness actually attacked them. He says that they 'died because of it.' Maybe we've just been looking at this the wrong way all along. Those people weren't crushed or eaten. They starved to death because their land was slowly being swallowed by the mists."

Sazed studied her paper. She seemed so certain. Did she know nothing of proper research techniques? Of questioning, of studying, of postulating and devising answers?

*Of course she doesn't*, Sazed chastised himself. *She grew up on the streets—she doesn't use research techniques*.

*She just uses instinct. And she's usually right*.

He smoothed the paper again, reading its passages. "Lady Vin? Did you write this yourself?"

She flushed. "Why is everybody so surprised about that?"

"It just doesn't seem in your nature, Lady Vin."

"You people have corrupted me," she said. "Look, there isn't a single comment on this sheet that contradicts the idea that the Deepness was mist."

"Not contradicting a point and proving it are different things, Lady Vin."

S1he waved indifferently. "I'm right, Sazed. I *know* I am."

"What about this point, then?" Sazed asked, pointing to a line. "The Hero implies that he can sense a sentience to the Deepness. The mist isn't alive."

"Well, it does swirl around someone using Allomancy."

"That isn't the same thing, I think," Sazed said. "He says that the Deepness was mad. . .destructively insane. Evil."

Vin paused. "There is something, Sazed," she admitted.

He frowned.

She pointed at another section of notes. "Do you recognize these paragraphs?" *It isn't a shadow*, the words read.

> *This dark thing that follows me, the thing that only I can see—it isn't really a shadow. It is blackish and translucent, but it doesn't have a shadowlike solid outline. It's insubstantial—wispy and formless. Like it's made out of a dark fog*.
>
> *Or mist, perhaps*.

"Yes, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "The Hero saw a creature following him. It attacked one of his companions, I think."

Vin looked in his eyes. "I've seen it, Sazed."

He felt a chill.

"It's out there," she said. "Every night, in the mists. Watching me. I can *feel* it, with Allomancy. And, if I get close enough, I can see it. As if formed from the mist itself. Insubstantial, yet somehow still there."

Sazed sat quietly for a moment, not certain what to think.

"You think me mad," Vin accused.

"No, Lady Vin," he said quietly. "I don't think any of us are in a position to call such things madness, not considering what is happening. Just. . .are you certain?"

She nodded firmly.

"But," Sazed said. "Even if this is true, it does not answer my question. The logbook author saw that same creature, and he didn't refer to it as the Deepness. It was not the Deepness, then. The Deepness was something else—something dangerous, something he could feel as evil."

"That's the secret, then," Vin said. "We have to figure out why he spoke of the mists that way. Then we'll know. . ."

"Know what, Lady Vin?" Sazed asked.

Vin paused, then looked away. She didn't answer, instead turning to a different topic. "Sazed, the Hero never did what he was supposed to. Rashek killed him. And, when Rashek took the power at the Well, he didn't give it up like he was supposed to—he kept it for himself."

"True," Sazed said.

Vin paused again. "And the mists have started killing people. They've started coming during the day. It's. . .like things are repeating again. So. . .maybe that means that the Hero of Ages will have to come again."

She glanced back at him, looking a bit. . .embarrassed? *Ah. . .*Sazed thought, sensing her implication. She saw things in the mists. The previous Hero had seen the same things. "I am not certain that is a valid statement, Lady Vin."

She snorted. "Why can't you just come out and say 'you're wrong,' like regular people?"

"I apologize, Lady Vin. I have had much training as a servant, and we are taught to be nonconfrontational. Nevertheless, I do not think that you are wrong. However, I also think that, perhaps, you haven't fully considered your position."

Vin shrugged.

"What makes you think that the Hero of Ages will return?"

"I don't know. Things that happen; things I feel. The mists are coming again, and someone needs to stop them."

Sazed ran his fingers across his translated section of the rubbing, looking over its words.

"You don't believe me," Vin said.

"It isn't that, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "It's just that I am not prone to rushing to decisions."

"But, you've thought about the Hero of Ages, haven't you?" Vin said. "He was part of your religion—the lost religion of Terris, the thing you Keepers were founded to try and discover."

"That is true," Sazed admitted. "However, we do not know much about the prophecies that our ancestors used to find their Hero. Besides, the reading I've been doing lately suggests that there was something wrong with their interpretations. If the greatest theologians of pre-Ascension Terris were unable to properly identify their Hero, how are we supposed to do so?"

Vin sat quietly. "I shouldn't have brought it up," she finally said.

"No, Lady Vin, please don't think that. I apologize—your theories have great merit. I simply have a scholar's mind, and must question and consider information when I am given it. I am far too fond of arguing, I think."

Vin looked up, smiling slightly. "Another reason you never made a good Terris steward?"

"Undoubtedly," he said with a sigh. "My attitude also tends to cause conflicts with the others of my order."

"Like Tindwyl?" Vin asked. "She didn't sound happy when she heard that you'd told us about Feruchemy."

Sazed nodded. "For a group dedicated to knowledge, the Keepers can be rather stingy with information about their powers. When the Lord Ruler still lived—when Keepers were hunted—the caution was warranted, I think. But, now that we are free from that, my brethren and sisters seem to have found the habit of secrecy a difficult one to break."

Vin nodded. "Tindwyl doesn't seem to like you very much. She says that she came because of your suggestion, but every time someone mentions you, she seems to get. . .cold."

Sazed sighed. Did Tindwyl dislike him? He thought, perhaps, that her inability to do so was a large part of the problem. "She is simply disappointed in me, Lady Vin. I'm not sure how much you know of my history, but I had been working against the Lord Ruler for some ten years before Kelsier recruited me. The other Keepers thought that I endangered my copperminds, and the very order itself. They believed that the Keepers should remain quiet—waiting for the day when the Lord Ruler fell, but not seeking to make it happen."

"Seems a bit cowardly to me," Vin said.

"Ah, but it was a very prudent course. You see, Lady Vin, had I been captured, there are many things I could have revealed. The names of other Keepers, the location of our safe houses, the means by which we managed to hide ourselves in Terris culture. My brethren worked for many decades to make the Lord Ruler think that Feruchemy had finally been extermi1nated. By revealing myself, I could have undone all of that."

"That would only have been bad had we failed," Vin said. "We didn't."

"We could have."

"We didn't."

Sazed paused, then smiled. Sometimes, in a world of debate, questions, and self-doubt, Vin's simple bluntness was refreshing. "Regardless," he continued, "Tindwyl is a member of the Synod—a group of Keeper elders who guide our sect. I have been in rebellion against the Synod a number of times during my past. And, by returning to Luthadel, I am defying them once again. She has good reason to be displeased with me."

"Well, *I* think you're doing the right thing," Vin said. "We need you."

"Thank you, Lady Vin."

"I don't think you have to listen to Tindwyl," she said. "She's the type who acts like she knows more than she does."

"She is very wise."

"She's hard on Elend."

"Then she probably does so because it is best for him," Sazed said. "Do not judge her too harshly, child. If she seems off-putting, it is only because she has lived a very hard life."

"Hard life?" Vin asked, tucking her notes back into her pocket.

"Yes, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "You see, Tindwyl spent most of her life as a Terris mother."

Vin hesitated, hand in pocket, looking surprised. "You mean. . .she was a Breeder?"

Sazed nodded. The Lord Ruler's breeding program included selecting a few, special individuals to use for birthing new children—with the goal being to breed Feruchemy out of the population.

"Tindwyl had, at last count, birthed over twenty children," he said. "Each with a different father. Tindwyl had her first child when she was fourteen, and spent her entire life being taken repeatedly by strange men until she became pregnant. And, because of the fertility drugs the Breeding masters forced upon her, she often bore twins or triplets."

"I. . .see," Vin said softly.

"You are not the only one who knew a terrible childhood, Lady Vin. Tindwyl is perhaps the strongest woman I know."

"How did she bear it?" Vin asked quietly. "I think. . .I think I would probably have just killed myself."

"She is a Keeper," Sazed said. "She suffered the indignity because she knew that she did a great service for her people. You see, Feruchemy is hereditary. Tindwyl's position as a mother ensured future generations of Feruchemists among our people. Ironically, she is exactly the sort of person that the Breeding masters were supposed to avoid letting reproduce."

"But, how did such a thing happen?"

"The breeders assumed they'd already cut Feruchemy out of the population," Sazed said. "They started looking to create other traits in the Terris—docility, temperance. They bred us like fine horses, and it was a great stroke when the Synod managed to get Tindwyl chosen for their program.

"Of course, Tindwyl has very little training in Feruchemy. She did, fortunately, receive some of the copperminds that we Keepers carry. So, during her many years locked away, she was able to study and read biographies. It was only during the last decade—her childbearing years through—that she was able to joi1n and gain fellowship with the other Keepers."

Sazed paused, then shook his head. "By comparison, the rest of us have known a life of freedom, I think."

"Great," Vin mumbled, standing and yawning. "Another reason for you to feel guilty."

"You should sleep, Lady Vin," Sazed noted.

"For a few hours," Vin said, walking toward the door, leaving him alone again with his studies.

*In the end, my pride may have doomed us all.*

# 31

PHILEN FRANDEU WAS NOT SKAA. He had *never* been skaa. Skaa made things or grew things. Philen sold things. There was an enormous difference between the two.

Oh, some people had called him skaa. Even now, he could see that word in the eyes of some of the other Assemblymen. They regarded Philen and his fellow merchants with the same disdain that they gave the eight skaa workers on the Assembly. Couldn't they see that the two groups were completely different?

Philen shifted a bit on the bench. Shouldn't the Assembly hall at least have comfortable seating? They were waiting on just a few members; the tall clock in the corner said that fifteen minutes still remained until the meeting began. Oddly, one of those who had yet to arrive was Venture himself. King Elend was usually early.

*Not king anymore*, Philen thought with a smile. *Just plain old Elend Venture*. It was a poor name—not as good as Philen's own. Of course, he had been just "Lin" until a year and a half ago. Philen Frandeu was what he had dubbed himself after the Collapse. It delighted him to no end that the others had taken to calling him the name without pause. But, why shouldn't he have a grand name? A lord's name? Was Philen not as good as any of the "noblemen" sitting aloofly in their places?

Oh, he was just as good. Better, even. Yes, they had called him skaa—but during those years, they had come to him out of need, and so their arrogant sneers had lacked power. He'd seen their insecurity. They'd needed him. A man they called skaa. But he'd also been a merchant. A merchant who wasn't noble. Something that wasn't supposed to have existed in the Lord Ruler's perfect little empire.

But, noblemen merchants had to work with the obligators. And, where there had been obligators, nothing illegal could occur. Hence Philen. He'd been. . .an intermediary, of sorts. A man capable of arranging deals between interested parties who, for various reasons, wanted to avoid the watchful eyes of the Lord Ruler's obligators. Philen hadn't been part of a thieving crew—no, that was far too dangerous. And far too mundane.

He had been born with an eye for finances and trades. Give him two rocks, and he'd have a quarry by the end of the week. Give him a spoke, and he'd change it to a fine horse-drawn carriage. Two bits of corn, and he'd eventually have a massive shipment of grain sailing to the Farmost Dominance markets. Actual noblemen had done the trades, of course, but Philen had been behind it all. A vast empire of his own.

And still, they couldn't see. He wore a suit as fine as theirs; now that he could trade openly, he had become one of the wealthiest men in Luthadel. Yet, the noblemen ignored him, just because he lacked a valid pedigree.

Well, they would see. After today's meeting. . .yes, they would see. Philen looked out into the crowd, looking anxiously for the 1person he had hidden there. Reassured, he looked toward the noblemen of the Assembly, who sat chatting a short distance away. One of their last members—Lord Ferson Penrod—had just arrived. The older man walked up onto the Assembly's dais, passing by the members, greeting each in turn.

"Philen," Penrod said, noticing him. "A new suit, I see. The red vest suits you."

"Lord Penrod! Why, you're looking well. You got over the other night's ailment, then?"

"Yes, it passed quickly," the lord said, nodding a head topped with silver hair. "Just a touch of stomach ills."

*Pity,* Philen thought, smiling. "Well, we'd best be seated. I see that young Venture isn't here, though. . .."

"Yes," Penrod said, frowning. He'd been most difficult to convince to vote against Venture; he had something of a fondness for the boy. He had come around in the end. They all had.

Penrod moved on, joining the other noblemen. The old fool probably thought he was going to end up as king. Well, Philen had other plans for that throne. It wasn't Philen's own posterior that would sit in it, of course; he had no interest in running a country. Seemed like a terrible way to make money. Selling things. That was a much better way. More stable, less likely to lose one his head.

Oh, but Philen had plans. He'd always had those. He had to keep himself from glancing at the audience again.

Philen turned, instead, to study the Assembly. They had all arrived except Venture. Seven noblemen, eight merchants, and eight skaa workers: twenty-four men, with Venture. The three-way division was supposed to give the commoners the most power, since they ostensibly outnumbered the noblemen. Even Venture hadn't understood that merchants weren't skaa.

Philen wrinkled his nose. Even though the skaa Assemblymen usually cleaned up before coming to the meetings, he could smell the stink of forges, mills, and shops on them. Men who made things. Philen would have to be certain they were put back in their place, once this was over. An Assembly was an interesting idea, but it should be filled only with those who deserved the station. Men like Philen.

*Lord Philen,* he thought. *Not long now*.

Hopefully, Elend would be late. Then, maybe they could avoid his speech. Philen could imagine how it would go anyway.

*Um. . .now, see, this wasn't fair. I should be king. Here, let me read you a book about why. Now, um, can you all please give some more money to the skaa*?

Philen smiled.

The man next to him, Getrue, nudged him. "You think he's going to show up?" he whispered.

"Probably not. He must know that we don't want him. We kicked him out, didn't we?"

Getrue shrugged. He'd gained weight since the Collapse—a lot of it. "I don't know, Lin. I mean. . .we didn't mean. He was just. . .the armies. . .We have to have a strong king, right? Someone who will keep the city from falling?"

"Of course," Philen said. "And my name isn't Lin."

Getrue flushed. "Sorry."

"We did the right thing," Philen continued. "Venture is a weak man. A fool."

"I wouldn't say that," Getrue said. "He has good ideas. . .." Getrue glanced downward uncomfortably.

Philen snorted, glancing at the clock. It was time, though he couldn't hear the chimes over the crowd. The Assembly meetings had become busy since Venture's fall. Benches fanned out before the stage, benches crowded with people, mostly skaa. Philen wasn't sure why they were allowed to attend. They couldn't vote or anything.

*More Venture foolishness,* he thought, shaking his head. At the very back of the room—behind the crowd, opposite the stage—sat two large, broad doors letting in the red sunlight. Philen nodded toward some men, and they pushed the doors shut. The crowds hushed.

Philen stood to address the Assembly. "Well, since—"

The Assembly hall doors burst back open. A man in white stood with a small crowd of people, backlit by red sunlight. Elend Venture. Philen cocked his head, frowning.

The former king strode forward, white cape fluttering behind him. His Mistborn was at his side, as usual, but she was wearing a dress. From the few times Philen had spoken with her, he would have expected her to look awkward in a noblewoman's gown. And yet, she seemed to wear it well, walking gracefully. She actually looked rather fetching.

At least, until Philen met her eyes. She did not have a warm look for the Assembly members, and Philen glanced away. Venture had brought all of his Allomancers with him—the former thugs of the Survivor's crew. Elend apparently wanted to remind everyone who his friends were. Powerful men. Frightening men.

Men who killed gods.

And Elend had not one, but two Terrismen with him. One was only a woman—Philen had never seen a Terriswoman before—but still, it was impressive. Everyone had heard how the stewards had left their masters after the Collapse; they refused to work as servants anymore. Where had Venture found not one, but two of the colorful-robed stewards to serve him?

The crowd sat quietly, watching Venture. Some seemed uncomfortable. How were they to treat this man? Others seemed. . .awed? Was that right? Who would be awed by Elend Venture—even if the Elend Venture in question was clean-shaven, had styled hair, wore new clothing and. . .? Philen frowned. Was that a dueling cane the king was wearing? And a wolfhound at his side?

*He's not king anymore*! Philen reminded himself again.

Venture strode up onto the Assembly stage. He turned, waving for his people—all eight of them—to sit with the guards. Venture then turned and glanced at Philen. "Philen, did you want to say something?"

Philen realized he was still standing. "I. . .was just—"

"Are you Assembly chancellor?" Elend asked.

Philen paused. "Chancellor?"

"The king presides at Assembly meetings," Elend said. "We now have no king—and so, by law, the Assembly should have elected a chancellor to call speakers, adjudicate time allotments, and break tie votes." He paused, eyeing Philen. "Someone needs to lead. Otherwise there is chaos."

Despite himself, Philen grew nervous. Did Venture know that Philen had organized the vote against him? No, no he didn't, he couldn't. He was looking at each of the Assembly members in turn, meeting their eyes. There was none of the jovial, dismissible boy that had attended these meetings before. Standing in the militaristic suit, firm instead of hesitant. . .he almost seemed like a different person.

*You found a coac1h, it appears,* Philen thought. *A little too late. Just wait. . ..*

Philen sat down. "Actually, we didn't get a chance to choose a chancellor," he said. "We were just getting to that."

Elend nodded, a dozen different instructions rattling in his head. Keep eye contact. Use subtle, but firm, expressions. Never appear hurried, but don't seem hesitant. Sit down without wiggling, don't shuffle, use a straight posture, don't form your hands into fists when you're nervous. . ..

He shot a quick glance at Tindwyl. She gave him a nod.

*Get back to it, El,* he told himself. *Let them sense the differences in you*.

He walked over to take his seat, nodding to the other seven noblemen on the Assembly. "Very well," he said, taking the lead. "Then, might I nominate a chancellor?"

"Yourself?" asked Dridel, one of the noblemen; his sneer seemed permanent, as far as Elend could tell. It was a passably appropriate expression for one with such a sharp face and dark hair.

"No," Elend said. "I'm hardly an unbiased party in today's proceedings. Therefore, I nominate Lord Penrod. He's as honorable a man as we're likely to find, and I believe he can be trusted to mediate our discussions."

The group was quiet for a moment.

"That seems logical," Hettel, a forge worker, finally said.

"All in favor?" Elend said, raising his hand. He got a good eighteen hands—all of the skaa, most of the nobility, only one of the merchants. It was a majority, however.

Elend turned to Lord Penrod. "I believe that means that you are in charge, Ferson."

The stately man nodded appreciatively, then rose to formally open the meeting, something Elend had once done. Penrod's mannerisms were polished, his posture strong as he stood in his well-cut suit. Elend couldn't help but feel a little jealous, watching Penrod act so naturally in the things that Elend was struggling to learn.

*Maybe he would make a better king than I,* Elend thought. *Perhaps*. . .

*No*, he thought firmly. *I have to be confident. Penrod is a decent man and an impeccable noble, but those things do not make a leader. He hasn't read what I've read, and doesn't understand legislative theory as I do. He's a good man, but he's still a product of his society—he doesn't consider skaa animals, but he'll never be able to think of them as equals*.

Penrod finished the introductions, then turned to Elend. "Lord Venture, you called this meeting. I believe that the law grants you first opportunity to address the Assembly."

Elend nodded thankfully, rising.

"Will twenty minutes be enough time?" Penrod asked.

"It should be," Elend said, passing Penrod as they traded places. Elend stood up at the lectern. To his right, the floor of the hall was packed with shuffling, coughing, whispering people. There was a tension to the room—this was the first time Elend had confronted the group that had betrayed him.

"As many of you know," Elend said to the twenty-three Assembly members, "I recently returned from a meeting with Straff Venture—the warlord who is, unfortunately, my father. I would like to give a report of this encounter. Realize that because this is an open meeting, I will adjust my report to av1oid mentioning sensitive matters of national security."

He paused just slightly, and saw the looks of confusion he had expected. Finally, Philen the merchant cleared his throat.

"Yes, Philen?" Elend asked.

"This is all well and good, Elend," Philen said. "But aren't you going to address the matter that brought us here?"

"The reason we meet together, Philen," Elend said, "is so that we can discuss how to keep Luthadel safe and prosperous. I think the people are most worried about the armies—and we should, primarily, seek to address their concerns. Matters of leadership in the Assembly can wait."

"I. . .see," Philen said, obviously confused.

"The time is yours, Lord Venture," Penrod said. "Proceed as you wish."

"Thank you, Chancellor," Elend said. "I wish to make it very clear that my father is *not* going to attack this city. I can understand why people would be concerned, particularly because of last week's preliminary assault on our walls. That, however, was simply a test—Straff fears attacking too much to commit all of his resources.

"During our meeting, Straff told me that he had made an alliance with Cett. However, I believe this to have been a bluff—if, unfortunately, a bluff with teeth. I suspect that he was, indeed, planning to risk attacking us, despite Cett's presence. That attack has been halted."

"Why?" asked one of the worker representatives. "Because you're his son?"

"No, actually," Elend said. "Straff is not one to let familial relationships hamper his determination." Elend paused, glancing at Vin. He was beginning to realize that she didn't like being the one who held the knife at Straff's throat, but she had given him permission to speak of her in his speech.

Still. . .

*She said it was all right,* he told himself. *I'm not choosing duty over her*!

"Come now, Elend," Philen said. "Stop with the theatrics. What did you promise Straff to keep his armies out of the city?"

"I threatened him," Elend said. "My fellow Assemblymen, when facing down my father in parlay, I realized that we—as a group—have generally ignored one of our greatest resources. We think of ourselves as an honorable body, created by the mandate of the people. However, we are not here because of anything we ourselves did. There is only one reason we have the positions we do—and that reason is the Survivor of Hathsin."

Elend looked the members of the Assembly in the eyes as he continued. "I have, at times, felt as I suspect that many of you do. The Survivor is a legend already, one we cannot hope to emulate. He has power over this people—a power stronger than our own, even though he is dead. We're jealous. Insecure, even. These are natural, human feelings. Leaders feel them just as acutely as other people—perhaps even more so.

"Gentlemen, we cannot afford to continue thinking like this. The Survivor's legacy doesn't belong to one group, or even to this city alone. He is our progenitor—the father of everyone who is free in this land. Whether or not you accept his religious authority, you must admit that without his bravery and sacrifice, we would not now enjoy our current freedom."

"What does this have to do with Straff?" Philen snapped.

"Everything," Elend said. "For, though the S1urvivor is gone, his legacy remains. Specifically, in the form of his apprentice." Elend nodded toward Vin. "She is the most powerful Mistborn alive—something Straff now knows for himself. Gentlemen, I know my father's temperament. He will not attack this city while he fears retribution from a source he cannot stop. He now realizes that if he attacks, he will incur the wrath of the Survivor's heir—a wrath not even the Lord Ruler himself could withstand."

Elend fell silent, listening to the whispered conversations move through the crowd. News of what he'd just said would reach the populace, and bring them strength. Perhaps, even, news would reach Straff's army through the spies Elend knew must be in the audience. He'd noticed his father's Allomancer sitting in the crowd, the one named Zane.

And when news reached Straff's army, the men there might think twice about obeying any orders to attack. Who would want to face the very force that had destroyed the Lord Ruler? It was a weak hope—the men of Straff's army probably didn't believe all of the stories out of Luthadel—but every little bit of weakened morale would help.

It also wouldn't hurt for Elend to associate himself a little more strongly with the Survivor. He was just going to have to get over his insecurity; Kelsier had been a great man, but he was gone. Elend would just have to do his best to see that the Survivor's legacy lived on.

For that was what would be best for his people.

Vin sat with a twisted stomach, listening to Elend's speech.

"You okay with this?" Ham whispered, leaning over to her as Elend gave a more detailed account of his visit with Straff.

Vin shrugged. "Whatever helps the kingdom."

"You were never comfortable with the way that Kell set himself up with the skaa—none of us were."

"It's what Elend needs," Vin said.

Tindwyl, who sat just before them, turned and gave her a flat look. Vin expected some recrimination for whispering during the Assembly proceedings, but apparently the Terriswoman had a different kind of castigation in mind.

"The king—" She still referred to Elend that way. "—needs this link with the Survivor. Elend has very little of his own authority to rely upon, and Kelsier is currently the most well loved, most celebrated man in the Central Dominance. By implying that the government was founded by the Survivor, the king will make the people think twice about meddling with it."

Ham nodded thoughtfully. Vin glanced downward, however. *What's the problem? Just earlier, I was beginning to wonder if I were the Hero of Ages, and now I'm worried about the notoriety Elend is giving me*?

She sat uncomfortably, burning bronze, feeling the pulsing from far away. It was growing even louder. . ..

*Stop it*! she told herself. *Sazed doesn't think the Hero would return, and he knows the histories better than anyone. It was foolish, anyway. I need to focus on what's happening here*.

After all, Zane was in the audience.

Vin sought out his face near the back of the room, a light burn of tin—not enough to blind her—letting her study his features. He wasn't looking at her, but watching the Assembly. Was he working at Straff's command, or was this visit his own? Straff and Cett both undoubtedly had spies in the audience—and, of course, Ham had guards mixed with the people as well1. Zane unnerved her, however. Why didn't he turn toward her? Wasn't—

Zane met her eyes. He smiled slightly, then turned back to his study of Elend.

Vin felt a shiver despite herself. So, did this mean he wasn't avoiding her? *Focus*! She told herself. *You need to pay attention to what Elend is saying*.

He was almost done, however. He wrapped up his speech with a few comments on how he thought they could keep Straff off-balance. Again, he couldn't be too detailed—not without giving away secrets. He glanced at the large clock in the corner; done three minutes early, he moved to leave the lectern.

Lord Penrod cleared his throat. "Elend, aren't you forgetting something?"

Elend hesitated, then looked back at the Assembly. "What is it that you all want me to say?"

"Don't you have a reaction?" one of the skaa workers said. "About. . .what happened at the last meeting?"

"You received my missive," Elend said. "You know how I feel about the matter. However, this public forum is not a place for accusations or denunciations. The Assembly is too noble a body for that kind of thing. I wish that a time of danger were not when the Assembly had chosen to voice its concerns, but we cannot alter what has happened."

He moved to sit again.

"That's it?" asked one of the skaa. "You're not even going to argue for yourself, try and persuade us to reinstate you?"

Elend paused again. "No," he said. "No, I don't think that I will. You have made your opinions known to me, and I am disappointed. However, you are the representatives chosen by the people. I believe in the power that you have been given.

"If you have questions, or challenges, I will be happy to defend myself. However, I am not going to stand and preach my virtues. You all know me. You know what I can do, and what I intend to do, for this city and the surrounding populace. Let that stand as my argument."

He returned to his seat. Vin could see hints of a frown on Tindwyl's face. Elend hadn't given the speech that she and he had prepared, a speech giving the very arguments the Assembly was obviously expecting.

*Why the change*? Vin wondered. Tindwyl obviously didn't think it was a good idea. And yet, oddly, Vin found herself trusting Elend's instincts more than she did Tindwyl's.

"Well," Lord Penrod said, approaching the lectern again. "Thank you for that report, Lord Venture. I'm not certain if we have other items of business. . .."

"Lord Penrod?" Elend asked.

"Yes?"

"Perhaps you should hold the nominations?"

Lord Penrod frowned.

"The nominations for king, Penrod," Philen snapped.

Vin paused, eyeing the merchant. *He certainly seems up on things*, she noted.

"Yes," Elend said, eyeing Philen as well. "In order for the Assembly to choose a new king, nominations must be held at least three days before the actual voting. I suggest we hold the nominations now, so that we can hold the vote as soon as possible. The city suffers each day it is without a leader."

Elend paused, then smiled. "Unless, of course, you intend to let the month lapse without choosing1 a new king. . .."

*Good to confirm that he still wants the crown*, Vin thought.

"Thank you, Lord Venture," Penrod said. "We'll do that now, then. . .. And, how exactly do we proceed?"

"Each member of the Assembly may make one nomination, if he wishes," Elend said. "So that we don't become overburdened with options, I would recommend that we all exercise restraint—only choose someone that you honestly and sincerely think would make the finest king. If you have a nomination to make, you may stand and announce it to the rest of the group."

Penrod nodded, returning to his seat. Almost as soon as he sat, however, one of the skaa stood. "I nominate Lord Penrod."

*Elend had to expect that*, Vin thought. *After nominating Penrod to be chancellor. Why give such authority to the man that he knew would be his greatest contender for the throne*?

The answer was simple. Because Elend knew that Lord Penrod was the best choice for chancellor. *Sometimes, he's a little* too *honorable*, Vin thought, not for the first time. She turned to study the skaa Assemblyman who had nominated Penrod. Why were the skaa so quick to unify behind a nobleman?

She suspected that it was still too soon. The skaa were accustomed to being led by noblemen, and even with their freedom, they were traditional beings—more traditional, even, than the noblemen. A lord like Penrod—calm, commanding—seemed inherently better suited to the title of king than a skaa.

*They'll have to get over that, eventually*, Vin thought. *At least, they will if they're ever going to be the people that Elend wants them to be*.

The room remained quiet, no other nominations being made. A few people coughed in the audience, even the whispers now dead. Finally, Lord Penrod himself stood.

"I nominate Elend Venture," he said.

"Ah. . ." someone whispered behind her.

Vin turned, glancing at Breeze. "What?" she whispered.

"Brilliant," Breeze said. "Don't you see? Penrod is an honorable man. Or, at least, as honorable as noblemen get—which means that he insists on being *seen* as honorable. Elend nominated Penrod for chancellor. . .."

*Hoping, in turn, that Penrod would feel obligated to nominate Elend for king*, Vin realized. She glanced at Elend, noting a slight smile on his lips. Had he really crafted the exchange? It seemed a move subtle enough for Breeze himself.

Breeze shook his head appreciatively. "Not only did Elend not have to nominate himself—which would have made him look desperate—but now everyone on the Assembly thinks that the man they respect, the man they would probably choose as king, would rather have Elend hold the title. Brilliant."

Penrod sat, and the room remained quiet. Vin suspected that he also had made the nomination so that he wouldn't go uncontested to the throne. The entire Assembly probably thought that Elend deserved a chance to reclaim his place; Penrod was just the one who was honorable enough to voice the feeling.

*But, what about the merchants*? Vin thought. *They've got to have their own plan*. Elend thought that it was probably Philen who had organized the vote against him. They'd want to put one of their own on the throne, one who could open the city gates to whichever of the kings was manipulating them—1or whichever one paid the best.

She studied the group of eight men, in their suits that seemed—somehow—even more fine than those of the noblemen. They all seemed to be waiting on the whims of a single man. What was Philen planning?

One of the merchants moved as if to stand, but Philen shot him a harsh glance. The merchant did not rise. Philen sat quietly, a nobleman's dueling cane across his lap. Finally, when most of the room had noticed the merchant's focus on him, he slowly rose to his feet.

"I have a nomination of my own," he said.

There was a snort from the skaa section. "Now who's being melodramatic, Philen?" one of the Assemblymen there said. "Just go ahead and do it—nominate yourself."

Philen raised an eyebrow. "Actually, I'm *not* going to nominate myself."

Vin frowned, and she saw confusion in Elend's eyes.

"Though I appreciate the sentiment," Philen continued, "I am but a simple merchant. No, I think that the title of king should go to someone whose skills are a little more specialized. Tell me, Lord Venture, must our nominations be for people on the Assembly?"

"No," Elend said. "The king doesn't have to be an Assemblyman—I accepted this position after the fact. The king's primary duty is that of creating, then enforcing, the law. The Assembly is only an advisory council with some measure of counterbalancing power. The king himself can be anyone—actually, the title was intended to be hereditary. I didn't expect. . .certain clauses to be invoked quite so quickly."

"Ah, yes," Philen said. "Well, then. I think the title should go to someone who has a little practice with it. Someone who has shown skill with leadership. Therefore, I nominate Lord Ashweather Cett to be our king!"

*What*? Vin thought with shock as Philen turned, gesturing toward the audience. A man sitting there removed his skaa cloak, pulling down the hood, revealing a suit and a face with a bristling beard.

"Oh dear. . ." Breeze said.

"It's actually him?" Vin asked incredulously as the whispers began in the audience.

Breeze nodded. "Oh, that's him. Lord Cett himself." He paused, then eyed her. "I think we might be in trouble."

*I had never received much attention from my brethren; they thought that my work and my interests were unsuitable to a Worldbringer. The couldn't see how my work, studying nature instead of religion, benefited the people of the fourteen lands*.

# 32

VIN SAT QUIETLY, TENSELY, SCANNING the crowd. *Cett wouldn't have come alone*, she thought.

And then she saw them, now that she knew what she was looking for. Soldiers in the crowd, dressed like skaa, forming a small protective buffer around Cett's seat. The king did not rise, though a young man at his side did.

*Maybe thirty guards*, Vin thought. *He may not be foolish enough to come alone. . .but entering the very city you're besieging*? It was a bold move—one that bordered on stupidity. Of course, many had said the same about Elend's visit to Straff's army.

But Cett wasn't in the same position as Elend. He wasn't desperate, wasn't in danger of losing everything. Except. . .he had a sma1ller army than Straff, and the koloss were coming. And if Straff did secure the supposed atium supply, Cett's days as leader in the West would certainly be numbered. Coming into Luthadel might not have been an act of desperation, but it also wasn't the act of a man who held the upper hand. Cett was gambling.

And he seemed to be enjoying it.

Cett smiled as the room waited in silence, Assemblymen and audience alike too shocked to speak. Finally, Cett waved to a few of his disguised soldiers, and the men picked up Cett's chair and carried it to the stage. Assemblymen whispered and commented, turning to aides or companions, seeking confirmation of Cett's identity. Most of the noblemen sat quietly—which should have been enough of a confirmation, in Vin's mind.

"He's not what I expected," Vin whispered to Breeze as the soldiers climbed up on the dais.

"Nobody told you he was crippled?" Breeze asked.

"Not just that," Vin said. "He's not wearing a suit." He had on a pair of trousers and a shirt, but instead of a nobleman's suit coat, he was wearing a worn black jacket. "Plus, that beard. He couldn't have grown a beast like that in one year—he must have had it before the Collapse."

"You only knew noblemen in Luthadel, Vin," Ham said. "The Final Empire was a big place, with a lot of different societies. Not everybody dresses like they do here."

Breeze nodded. "Cett was the most powerful nobleman in his area, so he needn't worry about tradition and propriety. He did what he wished, and the local nobility pandered. There were a hundred different courts with a hundred different little 'Lord Rulers' in the empire, each region having its own political dynamic."

Vin turned back to the stage front. Cett sat in his chair, having yet to speak. Finally, Lord Penrod stood. "This is most unexpected, Lord Cett."

"Good!" Cett said. "That was, after all, the point!"

"Do you wish to address the Assembly?"

"I thought I already was."

Penrod cleared his throat, and Vin's tin-enhanced ears heard a disparaging mutter from the noblemen's section regarding "Western noblemen."

"You have ten minutes, Lord Cett," Penrod said, sitting.

"Good," Cett said. "Because—unlike the boy over there—I intend to tell you exactly *why* you should make me king."

"And that is?" one of the merchant Assemblymen asked.

"Because I've got an army on your damn doorstep!" Cett said with a laugh.

The Assembly looked taken aback.

"A threat, Cett?" Elend asked calmly.

"No, Venture," Cett replied. "Just honesty—something you Central noblemen seem to avoid at all cost. A threat is only a promise turned around. What was it you told these people? That your mistress had her knife at Straff's throat? So, were you implying that if you *weren't* elected, you'd have your Mistborn withdraw, and let the city be destroyed?"

Elend flushed. "Of course not."

"Of course not," Cett repeated. He had a loud voice—unapologetic, forceful. "Well, I don't pretend, and I don't hide. My army is here, and my intention is to take this city. However, I'd much rather that you just give it to me."

"You, sir, are a tyrant," Penrod said flatly.

"So?" Cett asked. "I'm a tyrant with forty thousand soldiers. That's *twice* what you've got guarding these walls."

"What's to stop us from simply taking you hostage?" asked one of the other noblemen. "You seem to have delivered yourself to us quite neatly."

Cett bellowed a laugh. "If I don't return to my camp this evening, my army has orders to attack and raze the city immediately—no matter what! They'll probably get destroyed by Venture afterward—but it won't matter to me, or to you, at that point! We'll all be dead."

The room fell silent.

"See, Venture?" Cett asked. "Threats work wonderfully."

"You honestly expect us to make you our king?" Elend asked.

"Actually, I do," Cett said. "Look, with your twenty thousand added to my forty, we could easily hold these walls against Straff—we could even stop that army of koloss."

Whispers began immediately, and Cett raised a bushy eyebrow, turning to Elend. "You didn't tell them about the koloss, did you?"

Elend didn't respond.

"Well, they'll know soon enough," Cett said. "Regardless, I don't see that you have any other option but to elect me."

"You're not an honorable man," Elend said simply. "The people expect more from their leaders."

"I'm not an honorable man?" Cett asked with amusement. "And you *are*? Let me ask you a direct question, Venture. During the proceedings of this meeting, have any of your Allomancers over there been Soothing members of the Assembly?"

Elend paused. His eyes glanced to the side, finding Breeze. Vin closed her eyes. *No, Elend, don't*—

"Yes, they have," Elend admitted.

Vin heard Tindwyl groan quietly.

"And," Cett continued, "can you honestly say that you've never doubted yourself? Never wondered if you were a good king?"

"I think every leader wonders these things," Elend said.

"Well, I haven't," Cett said. "I've always known I was meant to be in charge—and I've always done the best job of making certain that I stayed in power. I know how to make myself strong, and that means I know how to make those who associate with me strong as well.

"Here's the deal. You give me the crown, and I'll take charge here. You all get to keep your titles—and those of the Assembly who don't have titles will *get* them. In addition, you'll get to keep your heads—which is a far better deal than Straff would offer, I assure you.

"The people get to keep working, and I'll make certain that they're fed this winter. Everything goes back to normal, the way it was before this insanity began a year back. The skaa work, the nobility administrates."

"You think they'd go back to that?" Elend asked. "After all we fought for, you think I will simply let you force the people back into slavery?"

Cett smiled beneath his large beard. "I wasn't under the impression that the decision was yours, Elend Venture."

Elend fell silent.

"I want to meet with each of you," Cett said to the As1semblymen. "If you'll allow, I wish to move into Luthadel with some of my men. Say, a force of five thousand—enough to make me feel safe, but not to be of any real danger to you. I'll take up residence in one of the abandoned keeps, and wait until your decision next week. During that time, I'll meet with each of you in turn and explain the. . .benefits that would come from choosing me as your king."

"Bribes," Elend spat.

"Of course," Cett said. "Bribes for all of the people of this city—the foremost bribe being that of peace! You're so fond of name-calling, Venture. 'Slaves,' 'threats,' 'honorable.' 'Bribe' is just a word. Looked at another way, a bribe is just a promise, turned on *its* head." Cett smiled.

The group of Assemblymen was silent. "Shall we vote, then, on whether to let him enter the city?" Penrod asked.

"Five thousand is way too many," one of the skaa Assemblymen said.

"Agreed," Elend said. "There's no way we can let that many foreign troops into Luthadel."

"I don't like it at all," another said.

"What?" said Philen. "A monarch inside our city will be less dangerous than one outside, wouldn't you say? And besides, Cett has promised us all titles."

This gave the group something to think about.

"Why not just give me the crown now?" Cett said. "Open your gates to my army."

"You can't," Elend said immediately. "Not until there is a king—or unless you can get a unanimous vote right now."

Vin smiled. Unanimous wouldn't happen in that case as long as Elend was on the Assembly.

"Bah," Cett said, but he obviously was smooth enough not to insult the legislative body further. "Let me take up residence in the city, then."

Penrod nodded. "All in favor of allowing Lord Cett to take up residence inside with. . .say. . .a thousand troops?"

A full nineteen of the Assemblymen raised their hands. Elend was not one of them.

"It is done, then," Penrod said. "We adjourn for two weeks."

*This can't be happening,* Elend thought. *I thought maybe Penrod would provide a challenge, Philen a lesser one. But. . .one of the very tyrants who is threatening the city? How could they? How could they even consider his suggestion*?

Elend stood, catching Penrod's arm as he turned to walk off the dais. "Ferson," Elend said quietly, "this is insanity."

"We have to consider the option, Elend."

"Consider selling out the people of this city to a tyrant?"

Penrod's face grew cold, and he shook Elend's arm free. "Listen, lad," he said quietly. "You are a good man, but you've always been an idealist. You've spent time in books and philosophy—I've spent my life fighting politics with the members of the court. You know theories; I know people."

He turned, nodding to the audience. "Look at them, lad. They're *terrified*. What good do your dreams do them when they're starving? You talk of freedom and justice when two armies are preparing to slaughter their families."

Penrod turned back to Elend, staring him in the eyes. "The Lord Ruler's system wasn't perfect, but it kept these people safe. We don't even have t1hat anymore. Your ideals can't face down armies. Cett might be a tyrant, but given the choice between him and Straff, I'd have to choose Cett. We'd probably have given him the city weeks ago, if you hadn't stopped us."

Penrod nodded to Elend, then turned and joined a few of the noblemen who were leaving. Elend stood quietly for a moment.

*We have seen a curious phenomenon associated with rebel groups that break off of the Final Empire and attempt to seek autonomy*, he thought, recalling a passage from Ytves's book *Studies in Revolution. In almost all cases, the Lord Ruler didn't need to send his armies to reconquer the rebels. By the time his agents arrived, the groups had overthrown themselves*.

*It seems that the rebels found the chaos of transition more difficult to accept than the tyranny they had known before. They joyfully welcomed back authority—even oppressive authority—for it was less painful for them than uncertainty*.

Vin and the others joined him on the stage, and he put his arm around her shoulders, standing quietly as he watched people trail from the building. Cett sat surrounded by a small group of Assemblymen, arranging meetings with them.

"Well," Vin said quietly. "We know *he's* Mistborn."

Elend turned toward her. "You sensed Allomancy from him?"

Vin shook her head. "No."

"Then, how do you know?" Elend asked.

"Well, look at him," Vin said with a wave of her hand. "He acts like he can't walk—that *has* to be covering up something. What would be more innocent than a cripple? Can you think of a better way to hide the fact that you're a Mistborn?"

"Vin, my dear," Breeze said, "Cett has been crippled since childhood, when a disease rendered his legs useless. He's not Mistborn."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "That has to be one of the best cover stories I've ever heard."

Breeze rolled his eyes, but Elend just smiled.

"What now, Elend?" Ham asked. "We obviously can't deal with things the same way now that Cett has entered the city."

Elend nodded. "We have to plan. Let's. . ." He trailed off as a young man left Cett's group, walking toward Elend. It was the same man who had been sitting next to Cett.

"Cett's son," Breeze whispered. "Gneorndin."

"Lord Venture," Gneorndin said, bowing slightly. He was, perhaps, about Spook's age. "My father wishes to know when you would like to meet with him."

Elend raised an eyebrow. "I have no intention of joining the line of Assemblymen waiting upon Cett's bribes, lad. Tell your father that he and I have nothing to discuss."

"You don't?" Gneorndin asked. "And what about my sister? The one you kidnapped?"

Elend frowned. "You know that isn't true."

"My father would still like to discuss the event," Gneorndin said, shooting a hostile glance at Breeze. "Besides, he thinks that a conversation between you two might be in the city's best interests. You met with Straff in his camp—don't tell me that you aren't willing to do the same for Cett inside your own city?"

Elend paused. *Forget your biases*, he told himself. *You need to talk to this man, if only for the information the meeti1ng might provide*.

"All right," Elend said. "I'll meet with him."

"Dinner, in one week?" Gneorndin asked.

Elend nodded curtly.

*As the one who found Alendi, however, I became someone important. Foremost among the Worldbringers*.

# 33

VIN LAY ON HER STOMACH, arms folded, head resting on them as she studied a sheet of paper on the floor in front of her. Considering the last few days of chaos, it was surprising to her that she found returning to her studies to be a relief.

A small one, however, for her studies held their own problems. *The Deepness* has *returned*, she thought. *Even if the mists only kill infrequently, they've begun to turn hostile again. That means the Hero of Ages needs to come again too, doesn't it*?

Did she honestly think that might be her? It sounded ridiculous, when she considered it. Yet, she heard the thumping in her head, saw the spirit in the mists. . ..

And what of that night, over a year gone, when she'd confronted the Lord Ruler? That night when somehow, she'd drawn the mists into herself, burning them as if they were metal?

*That's not enough*, she told herself. *One freak event—one I've never been able to replicate—doesn't mean I'm some mythological savior*. She didn't even really know most of the prophecies about the Hero. The logbook mentioned that he was supposed to come from humble origins—but that pretty much described every skaa in the Final Empire. He was supposed to have hidden royal bloodlines, but that made every half-breed in the city a candidate. In fact, she'd be willing to bet that most skaa had one or another hidden nobleman progenitor.

She sighed, shaking her head.

"Mistress?" OreSeur asked, turning. He stood on a chair, his forepaws up against the window as he looked out at the city.

"Prophecies, legends, foretellings," Vin said, slapping her hand down on her sheet of notes. "What's the point? Why did the Terris even believe in these things? Shouldn't a religion teach something practical?"

OreSeur settled down on his haunches upon the chair. "What would be more practical than gaining knowledge of the future?"

"If these actually said something useful, I'd agree. But even the logbook acknowledges that the Terris prophecies could be understood many different ways. What good are promises that could be interpreted so liberally?"

"Do not dismiss someone's beliefs because you do not understand them, Mistress."

Vin snorted. "You sound like Sazed. A part of me is tempted to think that all these prophecies and legends were devised by priests who wanted to make a living."

"Only a part of you?" OreSeur asked, sounding amused.

Vin paused, then nodded. "The part that grew up on the streets, the part that always expects a scam." That part didn't want to acknowledge the other things she felt.

The thumpings were getting stronger and stronger.

"Prophecies do not have to be a scam, Mistress," OreSeur said. "Or even, really, a promise for the future. They can simply be an expression of hope."

"What do you know of such things?" Vin said dismissively, setting aside her sheet.

There was a moment of silence. "Nothing, of course, Mistress," OreSeur eventually said.

Vin turned toward the dog. "I'm sorry, OreSeur. I didn't mean. . .Well, I've just been feeling distracted lately."

*Thump. Thump. Thump*. . ..

"You need not apologize to me, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I am only kandra."

"Still a person," Vin said. "If one with dog breath."

OreSeur smiled. "You chose these bones for me, Mistress. You must deal with the consequences."

"The bones might have something to do with it," Vin said, rising. "But I don't think that carrion you eat is helping. Honestly, we have to get you some mint leaves to chew."

OreSeur raised a canine eyebrow. "And you don't think a dog with sweet breath would attract attention?"

"Only from anyone you happen to kiss in the near future," Vin said, returning her stacks of paper to her desk.

OreSeur chuckled softly in his canine way, turning back to study the city.

"Is the procession finished yet?" Vin asked.

"Yes, Mistress," OreSeur said. "It is difficult to see, even from a height. But, it does look like Lord Cett has finished moving in. He certainly did bring a lot of carts."

"He's Allrianne's father," Vin said. "Despite how much that girl complains about accommodations in the army, I'd bet that Cett likes to travel in comfort."

OreSeur nodded. Vin turned, leaning against the desk, watching him and thinking of what he'd said earlier. *Expression of hope*. . ..

"The kandra have a religion, don't they?" Vin guessed.

OreSeur turned sharply. That was enough of a confirmation.

"Do the Keepers know of it?" Vin asked.

OreSeur stood on his hind legs, paws against the windowsill. "I should not have spoken."

"You needn't be afraid," Vin said. "I won't give away your secret. But, I don't see why it has to be secret anymore."

"It is a kandra thing, Mistress," OreSeur said. "It wouldn't be of any interest to anyone else."

"Of course it would," Vin said. "Don't you see, OreSeur? The Keepers believe that the last independent religion was destroyed by the Lord Ruler centuries ago. If the kandra managed to keep one, that suggests that the Lord Ruler's theological control of the Final Empire *wasn't* absolute. That has to mean something."

OreSeur paused, cocking his head, as if he hadn't considered such things.

*His theological control wasn't absolute*? Vin thought, a bit surprised at the words. *Lord Ruler—I'm starting to sound like Sazed and Elend. I've been studying too much lately*.

"Regardless, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I'd rather you didn't mention this to your Keeper friends. They would probably begin asking discomforting questions."

"They're like that," Vin said with a nod. "What is it your people have prophecies about, anyway?"

"I don't think you want to1 know, Mistress."

Vin smiled. "They talk about overthrowing us, don't they?"

OreSeur sat down, and she could almost see a flush on his canine face. "My. . .people have dealt with the Contract for a great long time, Mistress. I know it is difficult for you to understand why we would live under this burden, but we find it necessary. Yet, we do dream of a day when it may not be."

"When all the humans are subject to you?" Vin asked.

OreSeur looked away. "When they're all dead, actually."

"Wow."

"The prophecies are not literal, Mistress," OreSeur said. "They're metaphors—expressions of hope. Or, at least, that is how I have always seen them. Perhaps your Terris prophecies are the same? Expressions of a belief that if the people were in danger, their gods would send a Hero to protect them? In this case, the vagueness would be intentional—and rational. The prophecies were never meant to mean someone specific, but more to speak of a general feeling. A general hope."

If the prophecies weren't specific, why could only she sense the drumming beats?

*Stop it*, she told herself. *You're jumping to conclusions*. "All the humans dead," she said. "How do we die off? The kandra kill us?"

"Of course not," OreSeur said. "We honor our Contract, even in religion. The stories say that you'll kill yourselves off. You're of Ruin, after all, while the kandra are of Preservation. You're. . .actually supposed to destroy the world, I believe. Using the koloss as your pawns."

"You actually sound sorry for them," Vin noted with amusement.

"The kandra actually tend to think well of the koloss, Mistress," OreSeur said. "There is a bond between us; we both understand what it is to be slaves, we both are outsiders to the culture of the Final Empire, we both—"

He paused.

"What?" Vin asked.

"Might I speak no further?" OreSeur asked. "I have said too much already. You put me off balance, Mistress."

Vin shrugged. "We all need secrets." She glanced toward the door. "Though there's one I still need to figure out."

OreSeur hopped down from his chair, joining her as she strode out the door.

There was still a spy somewhere in the palace. She'd been forced to ignore that fact for far too long.

Elend looked deeply into the well. The dark pit—widemouthed to accommodate the comings and goings of numerous skaa—seemed a large mouth opening up, stone lips spread and preparing to swallow him down. Elend glanced to the side, where Ham stood speaking with a group of healers.

"We first noticed when so many people came to us complaining of diarrhea and abdominal pains," the healer said. "The symptoms were unusually strong, my lord. We've. . .already lost several to the malady."

Ham glanced at Elend, frowning.

"Everyone who grew sick lived in this area," the healer continued. "And drew their water from this well or another in the next square."

"Have you brought this to the attention of Lord Penrod and the Assembly?" Elend asked.

"Um, no, my lord. We figured that you. . ."

*I'm not king anymore*, Elend thought. However, he couldn't say the words. Not to this man, looking for help.

"I'll take care of it," Elend said, sighing. "You may return to your patients."

"They are filling our clinic, my lord," he said.

"Then appropriate one of the empty noble mansions," Elend said. "There are plenty of those. Ham, send him with some of my guard to help move the sick and prepare the building."

Ham nodded, waving over a soldier, telling him to gather twenty on-duty men from the palace to meet with the healer. The healer smiled, looking relieved, and bowed to Elend as he left.

Ham walked up, joining Elend beside the well. "Coincidence?"

"Hardly," Elend said, gripping the edge if the well with frustrated fingers. "The question is, which one poisoned it?"

"Cett just came into the city," Ham said, rubbing his chin. "Would have been easy to send out some soldiers to covertly drop in the poison."

"Seems more like something my father would do," Elend said. "Something to increase our tension, to get back at us for playing him for a fool in his camp. Plus, he's got that Mistborn who could have easily placed the poison."

Of course, Cett had had this same thing happen to him—Breeze poisoning his water supply back before he reached the city. Elend ground his teeth. There was really no way to know which one was behind the attack.

Either way, the poisoned wells meant trouble. There were others in the city, of course, but they were just as vulnerable. The people might have to start relying on the river for their water, and it was far less healthy, its waters muddy and polluted by waste from both the army camps and the city itself.

"Set guards around these wells," Elend said, waving a hand. "Board them up, post warnings, and then tell the healers to watch with particular care for other outbreaks."

*We just keep getting wound tighter and tighter*, he thought as Ham nodded. *At this rate, we'll snap long before winter ends*.

After a detour for a late dinner—where some talk about servants getting sick left her concerned—Vin went in and checked on Elend, who had just returned from walking the city with Ham. After that, Vin and OreSeur continued their original quest: that of finding Dockson.

They located him in the palace library. The room had once been Straff's personal study; Elend seemed to find the room's new purpose amusing for some reason.

Personally, Vin didn't find the library's location nearly as amusing as its contents. Or, rather, lack thereof. Though the room was lined with shelves, nearly all of them showed signs of having been pillaged by Elend. The rows of books lay pocked by forlorn empty spots, their companions taken away one by one, as if Elend were a predator, slowly whittling down a herd.

Vin smiled. It probably wouldn't be too long before Elend had stolen every book in the small library, carrying the tomes up to his study, then forgetfully placing them in one of his piles—ostensibly for return. Still, there were a large number of volumes left—ledgers, books of figures, and notebooks on finances; things that Elend usually found of little interest.

Dockson sat at the library's desk now, writing in a ledger. He noticed her arrival, and glanced over with a smile, but t1hen turned back to his notations—apparently not wanting to lose his place. Vin waited for him to finish, OreSeur at her side.

Of all the members of the crew, Dockson seemed to have changed the most during the last year. She remembered her first impressions of him, back in Camon's lair. Dockson had been Kelsier's right-hand man, and the more "realistic" of the pair. And yet, there had always been an edge of humor to Dockson—a sense that he enjoyed his role as the straight man. He hadn't foiled Kelsier so much as complemented him.

Kelsier was dead. Where did that leave Dockson? He wore a nobleman's suit, as he always had—and of all the crewmembers, the suits seemed to fit him the best. If he shaved off the half beard, he could pass for a nobleman—not a rich high courtier, but a lord in early middle age who had lived his entire life trading goods beneath a great house master.

He wrote in his ledgers, but he had always done that. He still played the role of the responsible one in the crew. So, what was different? He was the same person, did the same things. He just *felt* different. The laughter was gone; the quiet enjoyment of the eccentricity in those around him. Without Kelsier, Dockson had somehow changed from temperate to. . .boring.

And that was what made her suspicious.

*This has to be done*, she thought, smiling at Dockson as he set down his pen and waved her to take a seat.

Vin sat down, OreSeur padding over to stand beside her chair. Dockson eyed the dog, shaking his head slightly. "That's such a remarkably well-trained beast, Vin," he said. "I don't think I've ever seen one quite like it. . .."

*Does he know*? Vin wondered with alarm. *Would one kandra be able to recognize another in a dog's body*? No, that couldn't be. Otherwise OreSeur could find the impostor for her. So, she simply smiled again, patting OreSeur's head. "There is a trainer in the market. He teaches wolfhounds to be protective—to stay with young children and keep them out of danger."

Dockson nodded. "So, any purpose to this visit?"

Vin shrugged. "We never chat anymore, Dox."

Dockson sat back in his chair. "This might not be the best time for chatting. I have to prepare the royal finances to be taken over by someone else, should the vote go against Elend."

*Would a kandra be able to do the ledgers*? Vin wondered. *Yes. They'd have known—they'd have been prepared*.

"I'm sorry," Vin said. "I don't mean to bother you, but Elend has been so busy lately, and Sazed has his project. . .."

"It's all right," Dockson said. "I can spare a few minutes. What's on your mind?"

"Well, do you remember that conversation we had, back before the Collapse?"

Dockson frowned. "Which one?"

"You know. . .. The one about your childhood."

"Oh," Dockson said, nodding. "Yes, what about it?"

"Well, do you still think the same way?"

Dockson paused thoughtfully, fingers slowly tapping on the desktop. Vin waited, trying not to show her tension. The conversation in question had been between the two of them, and during it, Dockson had first spoken to her of how much he'd hated the nobility.

"I suppose I don't," Dockson1 said. "Not anymore. Kell always said that you gave the nobility too much credit, Vin. But you started to change even him there at the end. No, I don't think that noble society needs to be completely destroyed. They aren't all monsters as once presumed."

Vin relaxed. He not only knew the conversation, he knew the details of the tangents they'd discussed. She had been the only one there with him. That had to mean that he wasn't the kandra, right?

"This is about Elend, isn't it?" Dockson asked.

Vin shrugged. "I suppose."

"I know that you wish he and I could get along better, Vin. But, all things considered, I think we're doing pretty well. He is a decent man; I can acknowledge that. He has some faults as a leader: he lacks boldness, lacks presence."

*Not like Kelsier*.

"But," Dockson continued, "I don't want to see him lose his throne. He has treated the skaa fairly, for a nobleman."

"He's a good person, Dox," Vin said quietly.

Dockson looked away. "I know that. But. . .well, every time I talk to him, I see Kelsier standing over his shoulder, shaking his head at me. Do you know how long Kell and I dreamed of toppling the Lord Ruler? The other crewmembers, they thought Kelsier's plan was a newfound passion—something that came to him in the Pits. But it was older than that, Vin. Far older.

"We always hated the nobility, Kell and I. When we were youths, planning our first jobs, we wanted to be rich—but we also wanted to hurt them. Hurt them for taking from us things they had no right to. My love. . .Kelsier's mother. . .. Every coin we stole, every nobleman we left dead in an alleyway—this was our way of waging war. Our way of punishing them."

Vin sat quietly. It was these kinds of stories, these memories of a haunted past, that had always made her just a little uncomfortable with Kelsier—and with the person he had been training her to become. It was this sentiment that gave her pause, even when her instincts whispered that she should go and exact retribution on Straff and Cett with knives in the night.

Dockson held some of that same hardness. Kell and Dox weren't evil men, but there was an edge of vengefulness to them. Oppression had changed them in ways that no amount of peace, reformation, or recompense could redeem.

Dockson shook his head. "And we put one of them on the throne. I can't help but think that Kell would be angry with me for letting Elend rule, no matter how good a man he is."

"Kelsier changed at the end," Vin said quietly. "You said it yourself, Dox. Did you know that he saved Elend's life?"

Dockson turned, frowning. "When?"

"On that last day," Vin said. "During the fight with the Inquisitor. Kell protected Elend, who came looking for me."

"Must have thought he was one of the prisoners."

Vin shook her head. "He knew who Elend was, and knew that I loved him. In the end, Kelsier was willing to admit that a good man was worth protecting, no matter who his parents were."

"I find that hard to accept, Vin."

"Why?"

Dockson met her eyes. "Because if I accept that Elend bears no guilt for what his people did to mine, then I must admit to being a monster for the things that I did to t1hem."

Vin shivered. In those eyes, she saw the truth behind Dockson's transformation. She saw the death of his laughter. She saw the guilt. The murders.

*This man is no impostor*.

"I can find little joy in this government, Vin," Dockson said quietly. "Because I know what we did to create it. The thing is, I'd do it all again. I tell myself it's because I believe in skaa freedom. I still lie awake at nights, however, quietly satisfied for what we've done to our former rulers. Their society undermined, their god dead. Now they know."

Vin nodded. Dockson looked down, as if ashamed, an emotion she'd rarely seen in him. There didn't seem to be anything else to say. Dockson sat quietly as she withdrew, his pen and ledger forgotten on the desktop.

"It's not him," Vin said, walking down an empty palace hallway, trying to shake the haunting sound of Dockson's voice from her mind.

"You are certain, Mistress?" OreSeur asked.

Vin nodded. "He knew about a private conversation that Dockson and I had before the Collapse."

OreSeur was silent for a moment. "Mistress," he finally said, "my brethren can be *very* thorough."

"Yes, but how could he have known about such an event?"

"We often interview people before we take their bones, Mistress," OreSeur explained. "We'll meet them several times, in different settings, and find ways to talk about their lives. We'll also talk to their friends and acquaintances. Did you ever tell anyone about this conversation you had with Dockson?"

Vin stopped to lean against the side of the stone hallway. "Maybe Elend," she admitted. "I think I mentioned it to Sazed too, just after it happened. That was almost two years ago."

"That could have been enough, Mistress," OreSeur said. "We cannot learn everything about a person, but we try our best to discover items like this—private conversations, secrets, confidential information—so that we can mention them at appropriate times and reinforce our illusion."

Vin frowned.

"There are. . .other things as well, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I hesitate because I do not wish you to imagine your friends in pain. However, it is common for our master—the one who actually does the killing—to torture their victim for information."

Vin closed her eyes. Dockson felt so real. . .his guilt, his reactions. . .that couldn't be faked, could it?

"Damn," she whispered quietly, opening her eyes. She turned, sighing as she pushed open the shutters of a hallway window. It was dark out, and the mists curled before her as she leaned against the stone windowsill and looked out at the courtyard two stories below.

"Dox isn't an Allomancer," she said. "How can I find out for certain if he's the impostor or not?"

"I do not know, Mistress," OreSeur said. "This is never an easy task."

Vin stood quietly. Absently, she pulled out her bronze earring—her mother's earring—and worked it between her fingers, watching it reflect light. It had once been gilded with silver, but that had worn off in most places.

"I hate this," she finally whispered.

"What, Mistress?"

"Thi1s. . .distrust," she said. "I hate being suspicious of my friends. I thought I was through mistrusting those around me. I feel like a knife is twisting inside of me, and it cuts deeper every time I confront one of the crew."

OreSeur sat on his haunches beside her, and he cocked his head. "But, Mistress. You've managed to eliminate several of them as impostors."

"Yes," Vin said. "But that only narrows the field—brings me one step closer to knowing which one of them is dead."

"And that knowledge isn't a good thing?"

Vin shook her head. "I don't want it to be any of them, OreSeur. I don't want to distrust them, don't want to find out that we're right. . .."

OreSeur didn't respond at first, leaving her to stare out the window, mists slowly streaming to the floor around her.

"You are sincere," OreSeur finally said.

She turned. "Of course I am."

"I'm sorry, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I did not wish to be insulting. I just. . .Well, I have been kandra to many masters. So many of them are suspicious and hateful of everyone around them, I had begun to think that your kind lacked the capacity for trust."

"That's silly," Vin said, turning back to the window.

"I know it is," OreSeur said. "But people often believe silly things, if given enough proof. Either way, I apologize. I do not know which of your friends is dead, but I am sorry that one of my kind brought you this pain."

"Whoever he is, he's just following his Contract."

"Yes, Mistress," OreSeur said. "The Contract."

Vin frowned. "Is there a way that you could find out which kandra has a Contract in Luthadel?"

"I'm sorry, Mistress," OreSeur said. "That is not possible."

"I figured as much," she said. "Are you likely to know him, whoever he is?"

"The kandra are a close-knit group, Mistress," OreSeur said. "And our numbers are small. There is a good chance that I know him quite well."

Vin tapped her finger against the windowsill, frowning as she tried to decide if the information was useful.

"I still don't think it's Dockson," she finally said, replacing the earring. "We'll ignore him for now. If I can't get any other leads, we'll come back. . ." She trailed off as something caught her attention. A figure walking in the courtyard, bearing no light.

*Ham*, she thought. But the walk wasn't right.

She Pushed on the shield of the lamp hanging on the wall a short distance away. It snapped closed, the lamp shaking as the hallway fell into darkness.

"Mistress?" OreSeur asked as Vin climbed up into the window, flaring her tin as she squinted into the night.

*Definitely not Ham*, she thought.

Her first thought was of Elend—a sudden terror that assassins had come while she was talking to Dockson. But, it was early in the night, and Elend would still be speaking with his counselors. It was an unlikely time for an assassination.

And only one man? Not Zane, not judging from the height.

*Probably just a guard*, Vin thought1. *Why do I have to be so paranoid all the time*?

And yet. . .she watched the figure walking into the courtyard, and her instincts kicked in. He seemed to be moving suspiciously, as if he were uncomfortable—as if he didn't want to be seen.

"In my arms," she said to OreSeur, tossing a padded coin out the window.

He hopped up obligingly, and she leaped out the window, fell twenty-five feet, and landed with the coin. She released OreSeur and nodded into the mists. He followed closely as she moved into the darkness, stooping and hiding, trying to get a good look at the lone figure. The man walked briskly, moving toward the side of the palace, where the servants' entrances were. As he passed, she finally saw his face.

*Captain Demoux*? she thought.

She sat back, crouching with OreSeur beside a small stack of wooden supply boxes. What did she really know of Demoux? He was one of the skaa rebels recruited by Kelsier almost two years before. He'd taken to command, and had been promoted quickly. He was one of the loyal men who had stayed behind when the rest of the army had followed Yeden to their doom.

After the Collapse, he'd stayed in with the crew, eventually becoming Ham's second. He had received no small amount of training from Ham—

which might explain why he'd go out at night without a torch or lantern. But, even so. . ..

*If I were going to replace someone on the crew*, Vin thought, *I wouldn't pick an Allomancer—that would make the impostor too easy to spot. I'd pick someone ordinary, someone who wouldn't have to make decisions or attract notice*.

*Someone close to the crew, but not necessarily on it. Someone who is always near important meetings, but someone that others don't really know that well. . ..*

She felt a small thrill. If the impostor were Demoux, it would mean that one of her good friends *hadn't* been killed. And it would mean that the kandra's master was even smarter than she'd given him credit for being.

He rounded the keep, and she followed quietly. However, whatever he'd been doing this night, it was already completed—for he moved in through one of the entrances on the side of the building, greeting the guards posted there to watch.

Vin sat back in the shadows. He'd spoken to the guards, so he hadn't snuck out of the palace. And yet. . .she recognized the stooped posture, the nervous movements. He'd been nervous about something.

*That's him*, she thought. *The spy*.

But now, what should she do about it?

*There was a place for me, in the lore of the Anticipation—I thought myself the Announcer, the prophet foretold to discover the Hero of Ages. Renouncing Alendi then would have been to renounce my new position, my acceptance, by the others*.

*And so I did not*.

# 34

"THAT WON'T WORK," ELEND SAID, shaking his head. "We need a unanimous decision—minus the person being ousted, of course—in order to depose a member of the Assembly. We'd never manage to vote out all eight merchants."

Ham looked a bit deflated. Elend knew that Ham liked to consider himself a philosopher; indeed, Ham had a good mind for abstract thinking. However, he wasn't a scho1lar. He liked to think up questions and answers, but he didn't have experience studying a text in detail, searching out its meaning and implications.

Elend glanced at Sazed, who sat with a book open on the table before him. The Keeper had at least a dozen volumes stacked around him—though, amusingly, his stacks were neatly arranged, spines pointing the same direction, covers flush. Elend's own stacks were characteristically haphazard, pages of notes sticking out at odd angles.

It was amazing how many books one could fit into a room, assuming one didn't want to move around very much. Ham sat on the floor, a small pile of books beside him, though he spent most of his time voicing one random idea or another. Tindwyl had a chair, and did not study. The Terriswoman found it perfectly acceptable to train Elend as a king; however, she refused to research and give suggestions about keeping his throne. This seemed, in her eyes, to cross some unseen line between being an educator and a political force.

*Good thing Sazed isn't like that*, Elend thought. *If he were, the Lord Ruler might still be in charge. In fact, Vin and I would probably both be dead—Sazed was the one who actually rescued her when she was imprisoned by the Inquisitors. It wasn't me*.

He didn't like to think about that event. His bungled attempt at rescuing Vin now seemed a metaphor for all he had done wrong in his life. He'd always been well-intentioned, but he'd rarely been able to deliver. That was going to change.

"What about this, Your Majesty?" The one who spoke was the only other person in the room, a scholar named Noorden. Elend tried to ignore the intricate tattoos around the man's eyes, indications of Noorden's former life as an obligator. He wore large spectacles to try to hide the tattoos, but he had once been relatively well placed in the Steel Ministry. He could renounce his beliefs, but the tattoos would always remain.

"What have you found?" Elend asked.

"Some information on Lord Cett, Your Majesty," Noorden said. "I found it in one of the ledgers you took from the Lord Ruler's palace. It seems Cett isn't as indifferent to Luthadel politics as he'd like us to think." Noorden chuckled to himself at the thought.

Elend had never met a cheerful obligator before. Perhaps that was why Noorden hadn't left the city like most of his kind; he certainly didn't seem to fit into their ranks. He was only one of several men that Elend had been able to find to act as scribes and bureaucrats in his new kingdom.

Elend scanned Noorden's page. Though the page was filled with numbers rather than words, his scholar's mind easily parsed the information. Cett had done a lot of trading with Luthadel. Most of his work had been done using lesser houses as fronts. That might have fooled noblemen, but not the obligators, who had to be informed of the terms of any deal.

Noorden passed the ledger over to Sazed, who scanned the numbers.

"So," Noorden said, "Lord Cett wanted to appear unconnected to Luthadel—the beard and the attitude only serving to reinforce that impression. Yet, he always had a very quiet hand in things here."

Elend nodded. "Maybe he realized that you can't avoid politics by pretending you're not part of them. There's no way he would have been able to grab as much power as he did without some solid political connections."

"So, what does this tell us?" Sazed asked.

"That Cett is far more accomplished a1t the game than he wants people to believe," Elend said, standing, then stepping over a pile of books as he made his way back to his chair. "But, I think that much was obvious by the way he manipulated me and the Assembly yesterday."

Noorden chuckled. "You should have seen the way you all looked, Your Majesty. When Cett revealed himself, a few of the noble Assemblymen actually jumped in their seats! I think the rest of you were too shocked to —"

"Noorden?" Elend said.

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

"Please focus on the task at hand."

"Um, yes, Your Majesty."

"Sazed?" Elend asked. "What do you think?"

Sazed looked up from his book—a codified and annotated version of the city's charter, as written by Elend himself. The Terrisman shook his head. "You did a very good job with this, I think. I can see very few methods of preventing Lord Cett's appointment, should the Assembly choose him."

"Too competent for your own good?" Noorden said.

"A problem which, unfortunately, I've rarely had," Elend said, sitting and rubbing his eyes.

*Is this how Vin feels all the time*? he wondered. She got less sleep than he, and she was always moving about, running, fighting, spying. Yet, she always seemed fresh. Elend was beginning to droop after just a couple of days of hard study.

*Focus*, he told himself. *You have to know your enemies so that you can fight them. There has to be a way out of this*.

Dockson was still composing letters to the other Assemblymen. Elend wanted to meet with those who were willing. Unfortunately, he had a feeling that number would be small. They had voted him out, and now they had been presented with an option that seemed an easy way out of their problems.

"Your Majesty. . ." Noorden said slowly. "Do you think, maybe, that we should just let Cett take the throne? I mean, how bad could he be?"

Elend stopped. One of the reasons he employed the former obligator was because of Noorden's different view-point. He wasn't a skaa, nor was he a high nobleman. He wasn't a thief. He was just a scholarly little man who had joined the Ministry because it had offered an option other than becoming a merchant.

To him, the Lord Ruler's death had been a catastrophe that had destroyed his entire way of life. He wasn't a bad man, but he had no real understanding of the plight of the skaa.

"What do you think of the laws I've made, Noorden?" Elend asked.

"They're brilliant, Your Majesty," Noorden said. "Keen representations of the ideals spoken of by old philosophers, along with a strong element of modern realism."

"Will Cett respect these laws?" Elend asked.

"I don't know. I haven't ever really met the man."

"What do your instincts tell you?"

Noorden hesitated. "No," he finally said. "He isn't the type of man who rules by law. He just does what he wants."

"He would bring only chaos," Elend said. "Look at the information we have from his homeland and the places he's conquered. They are in turmoil. He's left a patchwork of half alliances and promises—threats of invasion acting as the thread that—barely—holds it1 all together. Giving him rule of Luthadel would just set us up for another collapse."

Noorden scratched his cheek, then nodded thoughtfully and turned back to his reading.

*I can convince him*, Elend thought. *If only I could do the same for the Assemblymen*.

But Noorden was a scholar; he thought the way Elend did. Logical facts were enough for him, and a promise of stability was more powerful than one of wealth. The Assembly was a different beast entirely. The noblemen wanted a return to what they'd known before; the merchants saw an opportunity to grab the titles they'd always envied; and the skaa were simply worried about a brutal slaughter.

And yet, even those were generalizations. Lord Penrod saw himself as the city's patriarch—the ranking nobleman, the one who needed to bring a measure of conservative temperance to their problems. Kinaler, one of the steel-workers, was worried that the Central Dominance needed a kinship with the kingdoms around it, and saw an alliance with Cett as the best way to protect Luthadel in the long run.

Each of the twenty-three Assemblymen had their own thoughts, goals, and problems. That was what Elend had intended; ideas proliferated in such an environment. He just hadn't expected so many of their ideas to contradict his own.

"You were right, Ham," Elend said, turning.

Ham looked up, raising an eyebrow.

"At the beginning of this all, you and the others wanted to make an alliance with one of the armies—give them the city in exchange for keeping it safe from the other armies."

"I remember," Ham said.

"Well, that's what the people want," Elend said. "With or without my consent, it appears they're going to give the city to Cett. We should have just gone with your plan."

"Your Majesty?" Sazed asked quietly.

"Yes?"

"My apologies, but it is not your duty to do what the people want."

Elend blinked. "You sound like Tindwyl."

"I have known few people as wise as she, Your Majesty," Sazed said, glancing at her.

"Well, I disagree with both of you," Elend said. "A ruler should only lead by the consent of the people he rules."

"I do not disagree with that, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "Or, at least, I do believe in the theory of it. Regardless, I still do not believe that your duty is to do as the people wish. Your duty is to lead as best you can, following the dictates of your conscience. You must be true, Your Majesty, to the man you wish to become. If that man is not whom the people wish to have lead them, then they will choose someone else."

Elend paused. *Well, of course. If I shouldn't be an exception to my own laws, I shouldn't be an exception to my own ethics, either*. Sazed's words were really just a rephrasing of things Tindwyl had said about trusting oneself, but Sazed's explanation seemed a better one. A more honest one.

"Trying to guess what people wish of you will only lead to chaos, I think," Sazed said. "You cannot please them all, Elend Venture."

The study's small ventilation window bumped open, and Vin squeezed through, pulling in a puff of mist behind her. She closed the window, then surveyed the room.

"More?" she asked incredulously. "You found more books?"

"Of course," Elend said.

"How many of those things have people written?" she asked with exasperation.

Elend opened his mouth, then paused as he saw the twinkle in her eye. Finally, he just sighed. "You're hopeless," he said, turning back to his letters.

He heard rustling from behind, and a moment later Vin landed on one of his stacks of books, somehow managing to balance atop it. Her mistcloak tassels hung down around her, smudging the ink on his letter.

Elend sighed.

"Oops," Vin said, pulling back the mistcloak. "Sorry."

"Is it really necessary to leap around like that all the time, Vin?" Elend asked.

Vin jumped down. "Sorry," she repeated, biting her lip. "Sazed says it's because Mistborn like to be up high, so we can see everything that's going on."

Elend nodded, continuing the letter. He preferred them to be in his own hand, but he'd need to have a scribe rewrite this one. He shook his head. *So much to do. . ..*

Vin watched Elend scribble. Sazed sat reading, as did one of Elend's scribes—the obligator. She eyed the man, and he shrank down a little in his seat. He knew that she'd never trusted him. Priests shouldn't be cheerful.

She was excited to tell Elend what she'd discovered about Demoux, but she hesitated. There were too many people around, and she didn't really have any evidence—just her instincts. So, she held herself back, looking over the stacks of books.

There was a dull quiet in the room. Tindwyl sat with her eyes slightly glazed; she was probably studying some ancient biography in her mind. Even Ham was reading, though he flipped from book to book, hopping topics. Vin felt as if she should be studying something, too. She thought of the notes she'd been making about the Deepness and the Hero of Ages, but couldn't bring herself to get them out.

She couldn't tell him about Demoux, yet, but there *was* something else she'd discovered.

"Elend," she said quietly. "I have something to tell you."

"Humm?"

"I heard the servants talking when OreSeur and I got dinner earlier," Vin said. "Some people they know have been sick lately—a lot of them. I think that someone might be fiddling with our supplies."

"Yes," Elend said, still writing. "I know. Several wells in the city have been poisoned."

"They have?"

He nodded. "Didn't I tell you when you checked on me earlier? That's where Ham and I were."

"You didn't tell me."

"I thought I did," Elend said, frowning.

Vin shook her head.

"I apologize," he said, leaned up and kissed her, then turned back to his scribbling.

*And a kiss is supposed to make it all right*? she thought sullenly, sitting back on a stack of books.

It was a silly thing; there was really no reason that Elend *should* have told her so quickly. And yet, the exchange left her feeling odd. Before, he would have asked her to do something about the problem. Now, he'd1 apparently handled it all on his own.

Sazed sighed, closing his tome. "Your Majesty, I can find no holes. I have read your laws over six times now."

Elend nodded. "I feared as much. The only advantage we could gain from the law is to misinterpret it intentionally—which I will not do."

"You are a good man, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "If you had seen a hole in the law, you would have fixed it. Even if you hadn't caught the flaws, one of us would have, when you asked for our opinions."

*He lets them call him "Your Majesty*," Vin thought. *He tried to get them to stop that. Why let them use it now*?

Odd, that Elend would finally start to think of himself as king after the throne had been taken from him.

"Wait," Tindwyl said, eyes unglazing. "You read over this law before it was ratified, Sazed?"

Sazed flushed.

"He did," Elend said. "In fact, Sazed's suggestions and ideas were instrumental in helping me craft the current code."

"I see," Tindwyl said through tight lips.

Elend frowned. "Tindwyl, you were not invited to this meeting. You are suffered at it. Your advice has been well appreciated, but I will not allow you to insult a friend and guest of my household, even if those insults are indirect."

"I apologize, Your Majesty."

"You will not apologize to me," Elend said. "You will apologize to Sazed, or you will leave this conference."

Tindwyl sat for a moment; then she stood and left the room. Elend didn't appear offended. He simply turned back to writing his letters.

"You didn't need to do that, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "Tindwyl's opinions of me are well founded, I think."

"I will do as I see fit, Sazed," Elend said, still writing. "No offense, my friend, but you have a history of letting people treat you poorly. I won't stand for it in my house—by insulting your help with my laws, she insulted me as well."

Sazed nodded, then reached over to pick up a new volume.

Vin sat quietly. *He's changing so quickly. How long has it been since Tindwyl arrived? Two months*? None of the things Elend said were that different from what he would have said before—but the way he said them was completely different. He was firm, demanding in a way that implied he expected respect.

*It's the collapse of his throne, the danger of the armies,* Vin thought. *The pressures are forcing him to change, to either step up and lead or get crushed*. He'd known about the wells. What other things had he discovered, and not told her?

"Elend?" Vin asked. "I've thought more about the Deepness."

"That's wonderful, Vin," Elend said, smiling at her. "But, I really don't have time right now. . .."

Vin nodded, and smiled at him. However, her thoughts were more troubled. *He's not uncertain, like he once was. He doesn't have to rely on people as much for support*.

*He doesn't need me anymore*.

It was a foolish thought. Elend loved her; she knew that. His aptitude wouldn't make her less valuable to him. And yet, she couldn't stamp out her worries. He'd left her onc1e before, when he'd been trying to juggle the needs of his house with his love for her, and the action had nearly crushed her.

What would happen if he abandoned her now?

*He won't*, she told herself. *He's a better man than that*.

But, good men had failed relationships, didn't they? People grew apart—particularly people who were so different to begin with. Despite herself—despite her self-assurances—she heard a small voice pop up in the back of her mind.

It was a voice she'd thought banished, a voice she hadn't ever expected to hear again.

*Leave him first*, Reen, her brother, seemed to whisper in her head. *It will hurt less*.

Vin heard a rustling outside. She perked up slightly, but it had been too soft for the others to hear. She stood, walking over to the ventilation window.

"Going back on patrol?" Elend asked.

She turned, then nodded.

"You might want to scout out Cett's defenses at Keep Hasting," Elend said.

Vin nodded again. Elend smiled at her, then turned back to his letters. Vin pulled open the window and stepped out into the night. Zane stood in the mists, feet barely resting against the stone lip running beneath the window. He stood at a skewed angle, feet against the wall, body jutting out into the night.

Vin glanced to the side, noting the bit of metal that Zane was Pulling against to hold himself stationary. Another feat of prowess. He smiled at her in the night.

"Zane?" she whispered.

Zane glanced upward, and Vin nodded. A second later, they both landed atop Keep Venture's metal roof.

Vin turned to Zane. "Where have you been?"

He attacked.

Vin jumped back in surprise as Zane spun forward, a swirling form in black, knives twinkling. She came down with her feet half off the rooftop, tense. *A spar, then*? she thought.

Zane struck, his knife coming dangerously close to her neck as she dodged to the side. There was something different about his attacks this time. Something more dangerous.

Vin cursed and pulled out her own daggers, jumping back from another attack. As she moved, Zane sliced through the air, cutting the tip off one of her mistcloak tassels.

She turned to face him. He walked forward, but held no combat posture. He seemed confident, yet unconcerned, as if he were strolling up to an old friend, not entering a fight.

*All right then*, she thought, jumping forward, swiping with her daggers.

Zane stepped forward casually, turning just slightly to the side, easily dodging one knife. He reached out, grabbing her other hand with an effortless motion, stopping its blow.

Vin froze. Nobody was that good. Zane looked down at her, eyes dark. Unconcerned. Unworried.

He was burning atium.

Vin pulled free of his grip, jumping backward. He let her go, watching as she fell into a crouch, sweat beading on her brow. She felt a sudden, sharp stab of terror—a guttural, primal feeling. She had feared this day from the moment she'd learned of atium. It was the terror of knowin1g she was powerless, despite all of her skills and abilities.

It was the terror of knowing she was going to die.

She turned to jump away, but Zane leaped forward before she even began to move. He knew what she would do before she did herself. He grabbed her shoulder from behind, pulling her backward, throwing her down to the rooftop.

Vin slammed against the metal roofing, gasping in pain. Zane stood above her, looking down, as if waiting.

*I won't be beaten this way*! Vin thought with desperation. *I won't be killed like a trapped rat*!

She reached and swung a knife at his leg, but it was useless. He pulled the leg back slightly—just enough—so that her swing didn't even nick the cloth of his trousers. She was like a child, being held at a distance by a much larger, more powerful foe. This was what it must be like, being a normal person, trying to fight her.

Zane stood in the darkness.

"What?" she finally demanded.

"You really don't have it," he said quietly. "The Lord Ruler's atium stash."

"No," she said.

"You don't have any at all," he said flatly.

"I used the last bead the day I fought Cett's assassins."

He stood for a moment; then he turned, stepping away from her. Vin sat up, heart thumping, hands shaking just a bit. She forced herself to her feet, then stooped and retrieved her fallen daggers. One had cracked against the roof's copper top.

Zane turned back toward her, quiet in the mists.

Zane watched her in the darkness, saw her fear—yet also her determination.

"My father wants me to kill you," Zane said.

She stood, watching him, eyes still afraid. She was strong, and she repressed the fear well. The news from their spy, the words Vin had spoken while visiting Straff's tent, were all true. There was no atium to be had in this city.

"Is that why you stayed away?" she asked.

He nodded, turning away from her.

"So?" she asked. "Why let me live?"

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "I may still kill you. But. . .I don't have to. Not to fulfill his order. I could just take you away—that would have the same effect."

He turned back toward her. She was frowning, a small, quiet figure in the mists.

"Come with me," he said. "Both of us could leave—Straff would lose his Mistborn, and Elend would lose his. We could deny them *both* their tools. And we could be free."

She didn't respond immediately. Finally, she shook her head. "This. . .thing between us, Zane. It isn't what you think."

"What do you mean?" he said, stepping forward.

She looked up at him. "I love Elend, Zane. I really do."

*And you think that means you can't feel anything for me*? Zane thought. *What of that look I've seen in your eyes, that longing? No, it isn't as easy as you imply, is it*?

*It never is*.

And yet, what else had he expe1cted? He turned away. "It makes sense. That's the way it has always been."

"What is that supposed to mean?" she demanded.

*Elend*. . ..

"Kill him," God whispered.

Zane squeezed his eyes shut. She would not be fooled; not a woman who had grown up on the streets, a woman who was friends with thieves and scammers. This was the difficult part. She would need to see things that terrified Zane.

She would need truth.

"Zane?" Vin asked. She still seemed a bit shaken by his attack, but she was the type who recovered quickly.

"Can't you see the resemblance?" Zane asked, turning. "The same nose, the same slant of the face? I cut my hair shorter than he, but it has the same curl. Is it so hard to see?"

Her breath caught in her throat.

"Who else would Straff Venture trust as his Mistborn?" Zane asked. "Why else would he let me get so close, why else would he feel so comfortable letting me in on his plans?"

"You're his son," Vin whispered. "Elend's brother."

Zane nodded.

"Elend. . ."

"Doesn't know of me," Zane said. "Ask him about our father's sexual habits sometime."

"He's told me," Vin said. "Straff likes mistresses."

"For more than one reason," Zane said. "More women means more children. More children means more Allomancers. More Allomancers means more chances at having a Mistborn son to be your assassin."

Breeze-blown mist washed over them. In the distance, a soldier's armor clinked as he patrolled.

"While the Lord Ruler lived, I could never inherit," Zane said. "You know how strict the obligators were. I grew up in the shadows, ignored. You lived on the streets—I assume that was terrible. But, think of what it would be like to be a scavenger in your own home, unacknowledged by your father, treated like a beggar. Think of watching your brother, a boy your same age, growing up privileged. Think of watching his disdain for the things you longed to have. Comfort, idleness, love. . ."

"You must hate him," Vin whispered.

"Hate?" Zane asked. "No. Why hate a man for what he is? Elend has done nothing to me, not directly. Besides, Straff found a reason to need me, eventually—after I Snapped, and he finally got what he'd been gambling to get for the last twenty years No, I don't hate Elend. Sometimes, however, I do envy him. He has everything. And still. . .it seems to me like he doesn't appreciate it."

Vin stood quietly. "I'm sorry."

Zane shook his head sharply. "Don't pity me, woman. If I were Elend, I wouldn't be Mistborn. I wouldn't understand the mists, nor would I know what it was like to grow up alone and hated." He turned, looking into her eyes. "Don't you think a man better appreciates love when he has been forced for so long to go without?"

"I. . ."

Zane turned away. "Anyway," he said, "I didn't come here tonight to lament my childhood. I came with a warning."

Vin grew tense.

"A short time ago," Zane said, "my father let several hundred refugees through his barricade t1o approach the city. You know of the koloss army?"

Vin nodded.

"It attacked and pillaged the city of Suisna earlier."

Vin felt a start of fright. Suisna was only a day away from Luthadel. The koloss were close.

"The refugees came to my father for help," Zane said. "He sent them on to you."

"To make the people of the city more afraid," Vin said. "And to provide a further drain on our resources."

Zane nodded. "I wanted to give you warning. Both of the refugees, and of my orders. Think about my offer, Vin. Think about this man who claims to love you. You know he doesn't understand you. If you leave, it will be better for both of you."

Vin frowned. Zane bowed his head slightly to her, then jumped into the night, Pushing against the metal rooftop. She still didn't believe him about Elend. He could see that in her eyes.

Well, proof was coming. She'd soon see. She'd soon understand what Elend Venture truly thought of her.

*But I do so now. Let it be known that I, Kwaan, Worldbringer of Terris, am a fraud.*

# 35

IT FELT LIKE SHE WAS going to a ball again.

The beautiful maroon gown would have fit in perfectly at one of the parties she had attended during the months before the Collapse. The dress was untraditional, but not unfashionable. The changes simply made the dress seem distinctive.

The alterations left her freer to move; let her walk more gracefully, turn more naturally. That, in turn, made her feel even more beautiful. Standing before her mirror, Vin thought of what it might have been like to wear the dress to a real ball. To be herself—not Valette, the uncomfortable country noblewoman. Not even Vin, the skaa thief. To be herself.

Or, at least, as she could imagine herself. Confident because she accepted her place as a Mistborn. Confident because she accepted her place as the one who had struck down the Lord Ruler. Confident because she knew that the king loved her.

*Maybe I* could *be both*, Vin thought, running her hands down the sides of the dress, feeling the soft satin.

"You look beautiful, child," Tindwyl said.

Vin turned, smiling hesitantly. "I don't have any jewelry. I gave the last of it to Elend to help feed the refugees. It was the wrong color to go with this dress anyway."

"Many women use jewelry to try and hide their own plainness," Tindwyl said. "You don't have that need."

The Terriswoman stood with her usual posture, hands clasped before her, rings and earrings sparkling. None of her jewelry, however, had gemstones; in fact, most of it was made from simple materials. Iron, copper, pewter. Feruchemical metals.

"You haven't been in to see Elend lately," Vin said, turning back to the mirror and using a few wooden barrettes to hold her hair back.

"The king is quickly approaching the point where he no longer needs my instruction."

"He's that close then?" Vin asked. "To being like the men from your biographies?"

Tindwyl laughed. "Goodness, no, child. He's quite f1ar from that."

"But—"

"I said he would no longer need my instruction," Tindwyl said. "He is learning that he can rely only so much upon the words of others, and has reached the point where he will have to learn more for himself. You would be surprised, child, how much about being a good leader simply comes from experience."

"He seems very different to me," Vin said quietly.

"He is," Tindwyl said, walking forward to lay a hand on Vin's shoulder. "He is becoming the man that he always knew he would have to be—he just didn't know the path. Though I am hard on him, I think he would have found his way, even if I hadn't come. A man can only stumble for so long before he either falls or stands up straight."

Vin looked at her mirror self, pretty in its maroon dressings. "This is what *I* have to become. For him."

"For him," Tindwyl agreed. "And for yourself. This is where *you* were heading, before you got distracted."

Vin turned. "Are you going to come with us tonight?"

Tindwyl shook her head. "That is not my place. Now, go meet your king."

This time, Elend did not intend to enter his enemy's lair without a proper escort. Two hundred soldiers stood in the courtyard, waiting to accompany him to Cett's dinner, and Ham—fully armed—was playing personal bodyguard. Spook would act as Elend's coachman. That only left Breeze, who—understandably—was a bit nervous about the idea of going to the dinner.

"You don't have to come," Elend told the portly man as they assembled in the Venture courtyard.

"I don't?" Breeze said. "Well then, I shall remain here. Enjoy the dinner!"

Elend paused, frowning.

Ham clapped Elend on the shoulder. "You should know better than to give that one any wiggle room, Elend!"

"Well, I meant my words," Elend said. "We could really use a Soother, but he doesn't have to come if he doesn't want to."

Breeze looked relieved.

"You don't even feel a bit guilty, do you?" Ham asked.

"Guilty?" Breeze asked, hand resting on his cane. "My dear Hammond, have you *ever* known me to express such a dreary and uninspired emotion? Besides, I have a feeling Cett will be more amiable without me around."

*He's probably right*, Elend thought as his coach pulled up.

"Elend," Ham said. "Don't you think bringing two hundred soldiers with us is. . .well, a little obvious?"

"Cett is the one who said we should be honest with our threats," Elend said. "Well, I'd say two hundred men is on the conservative side of how well I trust the man. He'll still have us outnumbered five to one."

"But you'll have a Mistborn sitting a few seats from him," a soft voice said from behind.

Elend turned, smiling at Vin. "How can you possibly move so quietly in a dress like that?"

"I've been practicing," she said, taking his arm.

*Thing is, she probably has,* he thought, inhaling her perfume, imagining Vin creeping through the palace hallways in a massive ball gown.

"Well,1 we should get moving," Ham said. He gestured for Vin and Elend to enter the carriage, and they left Breeze behind on the palace steps.

After a year of passing Keep Hasting in the night, its windows darkened, it felt right to see them glowing again.

"You know," Elend said from beside her, "we never did get to attend a ball together."

Vin turned from her contemplation of the approaching keep. Around her, the carriage bounced along to the sound of several hundred tromping feet, the evening just beginning to grow dark.

"We met up several times at the balls," Elend continued, "but we never officially attended one together. I never got the chance to pick you up in my carriage."

"Is that really so important?" Vin asked.

Elend shrugged. "It's all part of the experience. Or, it was. There was a comfortable formality to it all; the gentleman arriving to accompany the lady, then everyone watching you enter and evaluating how you look together. I did it dozens of times with dozens of women, but never with the one that would have made the experience special."

Vin smiled. "Do you think we'll ever have balls again?"

"I don't know, Vin. Even if we survive all of this. . .well, could you dance while so many people starved?" He was probably thinking about the hundreds of refugees, wearied from their travels, stripped of all food and equipment by Straff's soldiers, huddled together in the warehouse Elend had found for them.

*You danced before,* she thought. *People starved then, too*. But that was a different time; Elend hadn't been king then. In fact, as she thought about it, he had never actually danced at those balls. He had studied and met with his friends, planning how he could make a better place out of the Final Empire.

"There has to be a way to have both," Vin said. "Maybe we could throw balls, and ask the nobility who came to donate money to help feed the people."

Elend smiled. "We'd probably spend twice as much on the party as we got in donations."

"And the money we spent would go to skaa merchants."

Elend paused thoughtfully, and Vin smirked to herself. *Odd that I would end up with the only frugal nobleman in the city*. What a pair they were—a Mistborn who felt guilty wasting coins to jump and a nobleman who thought balls were too expensive. It was a wonder that Dockson could pry enough money out of them to keep the city running.

"We'll worry about that later," Elend said as the Hasting gates opened, revealing a field of soldiers at attention.

*You can bring your soldiers if you want*, the display seemed to say. *I've got more*. In reality, they were entering a strange allegory of Luthadel itself. Elend's two hundred were now surrounded by Cett's thousand—which, in turn, were surrounded by Luthadel's twenty thousand. The city, of course, was then surrounded by nearly a hundred thousand troops on the outside. Layer upon layer of soldiers, all tensely waiting for a fight. Thoughts of balls and parties fled her mind.

Cett did not greet them at the door. That duty was performed by a soldier in a simple uniform.

"Your soldiers can remain here," the man said as they entered the main entryway. Once, the large, pillared room had been draped in fine rugs and wall hangings, but Elend had taken those to fund his governmen1t. Cett, obviously, hadn't brought replacements, and that left the inside of the keep feeling austere. Like a battlefront fortress, rather than a mansion.

Elend turned, waving to Demoux, and the captain ordered his men to wait indoors. Vin stood for a moment, consciously keeping herself from shooting a glare at Demoux. If he *was* the kandra, as her instincts warned, then it was dangerous to have him too close. Part of her itched to simply throw him in a dungeon.

And yet, a kandra couldn't hurt humans, so he wasn't a direct threat. He was simply there to relay information. Plus, he'd already know their most sensitive secrets; there was little point in striking now, playing her hand so quickly. If she waited, saw where he went when he slipped out of the city, then maybe she could find out which army—or sect in the city—he was reporting to. Learn what information he had betrayed.

And so, she stayed her hand, waiting. The time to strike would come.

Ham and Demoux arranged their men, and then a smaller honor guard—including Ham, Spook, and Demoux—gathered to stay with Vin and Elend. Elend nodded to Cett's man, and the soldier led them down a side passageway.

*We're not heading toward the lifts*, Vin thought. The Hasting ballroom was at the very top of the keep's central tower; the times she had attended balls in the structure, she had been taken to the top on one of four human-drawn lifts. Either Hasting didn't want to waste the manpower, or. . .

*He picked the tallest keep in the city*, Vin thought. *The one with the fewest windows as well*. If Cett pulled all the lifts to the top, it would be very difficult for an invading force to claim the keep.

Fortunately, it didn't appear that they would have to go all the way to the top this evening. After they climbed two flights in a twisting stone stairwell—Vin having to pull her dress in at the sides to keep from brushing against the stones—their guide led them out into a large, circular room with stained-glass windows running around the entire perimeter, broken only by columns to support the ceiling. The single room was nearly as wide around as the tower itself.

*A secondary ballroom, perhaps*? Vin wondered, taking in the beauty. The glass wasn't lit, though she suspected that there were clefts for limelights on the outside. Cett didn't appear to care about such things. He had set up a large table in the very center of the room, and sat at its head. He was already eating.

"You're late," he called out to Elend, "so I started without you."

Elend frowned. To this, Cett laughed a full bellow, holding up a drumstick. "You seem more aghast at my breach of etiquette than you do about the fact that I brought an army to conquer you, boy! But, I suppose that's Luthadel. Sit down before I eat this all myself."

Elend held out an arm for Vin, leading her to the table. Spook took up position near the stairwell, his Tineye's ears listening for danger. Ham led their ten men to a position from which they could watch the only entrances to the room—the entry from the stairs and the door the serving staff used.

Cett ignored the soldiers. He had a group of his own bodyguards standing near the wall on the other side of the room, but he seemed unconcerned that Ham's troop had them slightly outnumbered. His son—the young man who had attended him at the Assembly meeting—stood at his side, waiting quietly.

*One of the two has to be Mistborn,* Vin thought. And I still think it is Cett.

Elend seated her, then took a chair next to her, both of them sitting directly across from Cett. He barely paused in his eating as the servers brought Vin's and Elend's dishes.

*Drumsticks,* Vin thought, *and vegetables in gravy. He wants this to be a messy meal—he wants to make Elend uncomfortable*.

Elend didn't start on his food immediately. He sat, watching Cett, his expression thoughtful.

"Damn," Cett said. "This is good food. You have no idea how hard it is to get proper meals when traveling!"

"Why did you want to speak with me?" Elend asked. "You know I won't be convinced to vote for you."

Cett shrugged. "I thought it might be interesting."

"Is this about your daughter?" Elend asked.

"Lord Ruler, no!" Cett said with a laugh. "Keep the silly thing, if you want. The day she ran off was one of the few joys I've had this last month."

"And if I threaten to harm her?" Elend asked.

"You won't," Cett said.

"You're certain?"

Cett smiled through his thick beard, leaning toward Elend. "I know you, Venture. I'd been watching you, studying you, for months. And then, you were kind enough to send one of your friends to spy on me. I learned a lot about you from him!"

Elend looked troubled.

Cett laughed. "Honestly, you didn't think I'd recognize one of the Survivor's own crewmembers? You Luthadel noblemen must assume that everyone outside the city is a damn fool!"

"And yet, you listened to Breeze," Elend said. "You let him join you, listened to his advice. And then, you only chased him away when you found him being intimate with your daughter—the one you claim to have no affection for."

"Is *that* why he told you he left the camp?" Cett asked, laughing. "Because I caught him with Allrianne? Goodness, what do I care if the girl seduced him?"

"You think *she* seduced *him*?" Vin asked.

"Of course," Cett said. "Honestly, I only spent a few weeks with him, and even *I* know how useless he is with women."

Elend was taking all this in stride. He watched Cett with narrow, discerning eyes. "So why *did* you chase him away?"

Cett leaned back. "I tried to turn him. He refused. I figured killing him would be preferable to letting him return to you. But, he's remarkably agile for a man his size."

*If Cett really is Mistborn, there's no way Breeze got away without Cett letting him*, Vin thought.

"So you see, Venture," Cett said. "I know you. I know you better, perhaps, than you know yourself—for I know what your friends think of you. It takes a pretty extraordinary man to earn the loyalty of a weasel like Breeze."

"So you think I won't harm your daughter," Elend said.

"I *know* you won't," Cett said. "You're honest—I happen to like that about you. Unfortunately, honesty is very easy to exploit—I knew, for instance, that you'd admit Breeze was Soothing that crowd." Cett shook his head. "Honest men weren't meant to be kings, lad. It's a damn shame, but1 it's true. That's why I have to take the throne from you."

Elend was silent for a moment. Finally, he looked to Vin. She took his plate, sniffing it with an Allomancer's senses.

Cett laughed. "Think I'd poison you?"

"No, actually," Elend said as Vin set the plate down. She wasn't as good as some, but she'd leaned the obvious scents.

"You wouldn't use poison," Elend said. "That isn't your way. You seem to be a rather honest man yourself."

"I'm just blunt," Cett said. "There's a difference."

"I haven't heard you tell a lie yet."

"That's because you don't know me well enough to discern the lies," Cett said. He held up several grease-stained fingers. "I've already told you three lies tonight, lad. Good luck guessing which ones they were."

Elend paused, studying Cett. "You're playing with me."

"Of course I am!" Cett said. "Don't you see, boy? This is why you shouldn't be king. Leave the job to men who understand their own corruption; don't let it destroy you."

"Why do you care?" Elend asked.

"Because I'd rather not kill you," Cett said.

"Then don't."

Cett shook his head. "That isn't how all this works, lad. If there is an opportunity to stabilize your power, or to get more power, you'd damn well better take it. And I will."

The table fell silent again. Cett eyed Vin. "No comments from the Mistborn?"

"You swear a lot," Vin said. "You're not supposed to do that in front of ladies."

Cett laughed. "That's the funny thing about Luthadel, lass. They're all so concerned about doing what is 'proper' when people can see them—but, at the same time, they find nothing wrong with going and raping a couple skaa women when the party is through. At least *I* swear to your face."

Elend still hadn't touched his food. "What will happen if you win the vote for the throne?"

Cett shrugged. "Honest answer?"

"Always."

"First thing, I'd have you assassinated," Cett said. "Can't have old kings sticking around."

"And if I step down?" Elend said. "Withdraw from the vote?"

"Step down," Cett said, "vote for me, and then leave town, and I'll let you live."

"And the Assembly?" Elend asked.

"Dissolved," Cett said. "They're a liability. Any time you give a committee power, you just end up with confusion."

"The Assembly gives the people power," Elend said. "That's what a government should provide."

Surprisingly, Cett didn't laugh at that comment. Instead, he leaned in again, setting one arm on the table, discarding a half-eaten drumstick. "That's the thing, boy. Letting the people rule themselves is fine when everything is bright and happy, but what about when you have two armies facing you? What about when there's a band of insane koloss destroying villages on your frontier? Those aren't the times when you can afford to have an Assembly around to depose you." Cett shook his head. "The price is too high. When you can't have both freedom and safety, boy, 1which do you choose?"

Elend was silent. "I make my own choice," he finally said. "And I leave the others to make their own as well."

Cett smiled, as if he'd expected such a reply. He started in on another drumstick.

"Let's say I leave," Elend said. "And let's say you do get the throne, protect the city, and dissolve the Assembly. What then? What of the people?"

"Why do you care?"

"You need ask?" Elend said. "I thought you 'understood' me."

Cett smiled. "I put the skaa back to work, in the way the Lord Ruler did. No pay, no emancipated peasant class."

"I can't accept that," Elend said.

"Why not?" Cett said. "It's what they want. You gave them a choice—and they chose to throw you out. Now they're going to choose to put me on the throne. They know that the Lord Ruler's way was the best. One group must rule, and another must serve. Someone has to grow the food and work the forges, boy."

"Perhaps," Elend said. "But you're wrong about one thing."

"And what is that?"

"They're not going to vote for you," Elend said, standing. "They're going to choose me. Faced with the choice between freedom and slavery, they will choose freedom. The men of the Assembly are the finest of this city, and they will make the best choice for its people."

Cett paused, then he laughed. "The best thing about you, lad, is that you can say that and sound serious!"

"I'm leaving, Cett," Elend said, nodding to Vin.

"Oh, sit down, Venture," Cett said, waving toward Elend's chair. "Don't act indignant because I'm being honest with you. We still have things to discuss."

"Such as?" Elend asked.

"Atium," Cett said.

Elend stood for a moment, apparently forcing down his annoyance. When Cett didn't speak immediately, Elend finally sat and began to eat. Vin just picked quietly at her food. As she did, however, she studied the faces of Cett's soldiers and servants. There were bound to be Allomancers mixed among them—finding out how many could give Elend an advantage.

"Your people are starving," Cett said. "And, if my spies are worth their coin, you just got another influx of mouths. You can't last much longer under this siege."

"And?" Elend asked.

"I have food," Cett said. "A lot of it—more than my army needs. Canned goods, packed with the new method the Lord Ruler developed. Long-lasting, no spoilage. Really a marvel of technology. I'd be willing to trade you some of them. . .."

Elend paused, fork halfway to his lips. Then he lowered it and laughed. "You still think I have the Lord Ruler's atium?"

"Of course you have it," Cett said, frowning. "Where else would it be?"

Elend shook his head, taking a bite of gravy-drenched potato. "Not here, for certain."

"But. . .the rumors. . ." Cett said.

"Breeze spread those rumors," Elend said. "I thought you'd figured out why he joined your group. He wanted you to come to Luthadel so that you'd stop Straff from taking the city."

"But, Breeze did everything he could to *keep* me from coming here," Cett said. "He downplayed the rumors, he tried to distract me, he. . ." Cett trailed off, then he bellowed a laugh. "I thought he was just there to spy! It seems we both underestimated each other."

"My people could still use that food," Elend said.

"And they'll have it—assuming I become king."

"They're starving now," Elend said.

"And their suffering will be your burden," Cett said, his face growing hard. "I can see that you have judged me, Elend Venture. You think me a good man. You're wrong. Honesty does not make a man less of a tyrant. I slaughtered thousands to secure my rule. I put burdens on the skaa that make even the Lord Ruler's hand seem pleasant. I made certain that I stayed in power. I will do the same here."

The men fell silent. Elend ate, but Vin only mixed her food around. If she had missed a poison, she wanted one of them to remain alert. She still wanted to find those Allomancers, and there was only one way to be certain. She turned off her copper, then burned bronze.

There was no Coppercloud burning; Cett apparently didn't care if someone recognized his men as Allomancers. Two of his men were burning pewter. Neither, however, were soldiers; both were pretending to be members of the serving staff who were bringing meals. There was also a Tineye pulsing in the other room, listening.

Why hide Thugs as servants, then use no copper to hide their pulses? In addition, there were no Soothers or Rioters. Nobody was trying to influence Elend's emotions. Neither Cett nor his youthful attendant were burning any metals. Either they weren't actually Allomancers, or they feared exposing themselves. Just to be certain, Vin flared her bronze, seeking to pierce any hidden copperclouds that might be nearby. She could see Cett putting out some obvious Allomancers as a distraction, then hiding the others inside a cloud.

She found nothing. Finally satisfied, she returned to picking at her meal. *How many times has this ability of mine—the ability to pierce copperclouds—proven useful*? She'd forgotten what it was like to be blocked from sensing Allomantic pulses. This one little ability—simple though it seemed—provided an enormous advantage. And the Lord Ruler and his Inquisitors had probably been able to do it from the beginning. What other tricks was she missing, what other secrets had died with the Lord Ruler?

*He knew the truth about the Deepness,* Vin thought. *He must have. He tried to warn us, at the end. . ..*

Elend and Cett were talking again. Why couldn't she focus on the problems of the city?

"So you don't have any atium at all?" Cett said.

"None that we're willing to sell," Elend said.

"You've searched the city?" Cett asked.

"A dozen times."

"The statues," Cett said. "Perhaps the Lord Ruler hid the metal by melting it down, then building things out of it."

Elend shook his head. "We thought of that. The statues aren't atium, and they aren't hollow either—that would have been a good place to hide metal from Allomancer eyes. We thought maybe that it would be hidden in the palace somewhere, but even the spires are simple iron."

"Caves, tunnels. . .."

"None that we can find," Elend said.1 "We've had Allomancers patrol, searching for large sources of metals. We've done everything we can think of, Cett, short of tearing holes in the ground. Trust me. We've been working on this problem for a while."

Cett nodded, sighing. "So, I suppose holding you for ransom would be pointless?"

Elend smiled. "I'm not even king, Cett. The only thing you'd do is make the Assembly less likely to vote for you."

Cett laughed. "Suppose I'll have to let you go, then."

*Alendi was never the Hero of Ages. At best, I have amplified his virtues, creating a Hero where there was none. At worst, I fear that all we believe may have been corrupted.*

# 36

ONCE THIS WAREHOUSE HAD HELD swords and armor, scattered across its floor in heaps, like some mythical treasure. Sazed remembered walking through it, marveling at the preparations Kelsier had made without alerting any of his crewmembers. Those weapons had armed the rebellion on the eve of the Survivor's own death, letting it take the city.

Those weapons were now stored in lockers and armories. In their place, a desperate, beaten people huddled in what blankets they could find. There were very few men, none of fighting quality; Straff had pressed those into his army. These others—the weak, the sickly, the wounded—he had allowed to Luthadel, knowing that Elend wouldn't turn them away.

Sazed moved among them, offering what comfort he could. They had no furniture, and even changes of clothing were becoming scarce in the city. The merchants, realizing that warmth would be a premium for the upcoming winter, had begun raising prices on all their wares, not just foodstuffs.

Sazed knelt beside a crying woman. "Peace, Genedere," he said, his coppermind reminding him of her name.

She shook her head. She had lost three children in the koloss attack, two more in the flight to Luthadel. Now the final one—the babe she had carried the entire way—was sick. Sazed took the child from her arms, carefully studying his symptoms. Little had changed from the day before.

"Is there hope, Master Terrisman?" Genedere asked.

Sazed glanced down at the thin, glassy-eyed baby. The chances were not good. How could he tell her such a thing?

"As long as he breathes, there is hope, dear woman," Sazed said. "I will ask the king to increase your portion of food—you need strength to give suck. You *must* keep him warm. Stay near the fires, and use a damp cloth to drip water in his mouth even when he is not eating. He has great need of liquids."

Genedere nodded dully, taking back the baby. How Sazed wished he could give her more. A dozen different religions passed through his mind. He had spent his entire life trying to encourage people to believe in something other than the Lord Ruler. Yet, for some reason, at this moment he found it difficult to preach one of them to Genedere.

It had been different before the Collapse. Each time he'd spoken of a religion, Sazed had felt a subtle sense of rebellion. Even if people hadn't accepted the things he taught—and they rarely had—his words had reminded them that there had once been beliefs other than the doctrines of the Steel Ministry.

Now there was nothing to rebel against. In the face of the terrible grief he saw in Genedere's eyes, he found it dif1ficult to speak of religions long dead, gods long forgotten. Esoterica would not ease this woman's pain.

Sazed stood, moving on to the next group of people.

"Sazed?"

Sazed turned. He hadn't noticed Tindwyl entering the warehouse. The doors of the large structure were closed against approaching night, and the firepits gave an inconsistent light. Holes had been knocked in the roof to let out the smoke; if one looked up, trails of mist could be seen creeping into the room, though they evaporated before they reached halfway to the floor.

The refugees didn't often look up.

"You've been here nearly all day," Tindwyl said. The room was remarkably quiet, considering its occupancy. Fires crackled, and people lay silent in their pain or numbness.

"There are many wounded here," Sazed said. "I am the best one to look after them, I think. I am not alone—the king has sent others and Lord Breeze is here, Soothing the people's despair."

Sazed nodded to the side, where Breeze sat in a chair, ostensibly reading a book. He looked terribly out of place in the room, wearing his fine three-piece suit. Yet, his mere presence said something remarkable, in Sazed's estimation.

*These poor people*, Sazed thought. *Their lives were terrible under the Lord Ruler. Now even what little they had has been taken from them*. And they were only a tiny number—four hundred compared with the hundreds of thousands who still lived in Luthadel.

What would happen when the final stores of food ran out? Rumors were already abroad regarding the poisoned wells, and Sazed had just heard that some of their stored food had been sabotaged as well. What would happen to these people? How long could the siege continue?

In fact, what would happen when the siege ended? What would happen when the armies finally began to attack and pillage? What destruction, what grief, would the soldiers cause in searching for hidden atium?

"You do care for them," Tindwyl said quietly, stepping up.

Sazed turned toward her. Then he looked down. "Not as much as I should, perhaps."

"No," Tindwyl said. "I can see it. You confuse me, Sazed."

"I seem to have a talent in that area."

"You look tired. Where is your bronzemind?"

Suddenly, Sazed felt the fatigue. He'd been ignoring it, but her words seemed to bring it in like a wave, rolling over him.

He sighed. "I used most of my wakefulness in my run to Luthadel. I was so eager to get here. . .." His studies had languished recently. With the problems in the city, and the arrival of the refugees, he hadn't had much time. Besides, he had already transcribed the rubbing. Further work would require detailed cross-referencing to other works, searching for clues. He probably wouldn't even have time to. . .

He frowned, noting the odd look in Tindwyl's eyes.

"All right," she said, sighing. "Show me."

"Show you?"

"Whatever it was you found," she said. "The discovery that prompted you to run across two dominances. Show it to me."

Suddenly, everything seemed to lighten. His fatigue, his worry, even his sorrow. "I would love to," he sai1d quietly.

*Another job well done,* Breeze thought, congratulating himself as he watched the two Terrismen leave the warehouse.

Most people, even noblemen, misunderstood Soothing. They thought of it as some kind of mind control, and even those who knew more presumed that Soothing was an invasive, terrible thing.

Breeze had never seen it that way. Soothing wasn't invasive. If it was, then ordinary interaction with another person was comparably invasive. Soothing, when done right, was no more a violation of another person than it was for a woman to wear a low-cut gown or speak in a commanding voice. All three produced common, understandable, and—most important—natural reactions in people.

Take Sazed, for example. Was it "invasive" to make the man less fatigued, so he could better go about his ministrations? Was it wrong to Soothe away his pain—just a bit—thereby making him better able to cope with the suffering?

Tindwyl was an even better example. Perhaps some would call Breeze a meddler for Soothing her sense of responsibility, and her disappointment, when she saw Sazed. But, Breeze had not created the emotions that the disappointment had been overshadowing. Emotions like curiosity. Respect. Love.

No, if Soothing were simple "mind control," Tindwyl would have turned away from Sazed as soon as the two left Breeze's area of influence. But Breeze knew that she wouldn't. A crucial decision had been made, and Breeze had not made that decision for her. The moment had been building for weeks; it would have occurred with or without Breeze.

He had just helped it happen sooner.

Smiling to himself, Breeze checked his pocket watch. He still had a few more minutes, and he settled back in his chair, sending out a general

Soothing wave, lessening people's grief and pain. Focusing on so many at once, he couldn't be very specific; some would find themselves made a little emotionally numb as he Pushed too strongly against them. But, it would be good for the group as a whole.

He didn't read his book; in truth, he couldn't understand how Elend and the rest spent so much time with them. Dreadfully boring things. Breeze could only see himself reading if there were no people around. Instead, he went back to what he'd been doing before Sazed had drawn his attention. He studied the refugees, trying to decide what each one was feeling.

This was the other great misunderstanding about Soothing. Allomancy wasn't nearly as important as observational talent. True, having a subtle touch certainly helped. However, Soothing didn't give an Allomancer the ability to know someone's feelings. Those, Breeze had to guess on his own.

It all came back to what was natural. Even the most inexperienced skaa would realize they were being Soothed if unexpected emotions began bouncing around inside of them. True subtlety in Soothing was about encouraging natural emotions, all done by carefully making the right other emotions less powerful. People were a patchwork of feelings; usually, what they thought they were "feeling" at the moment only related to which emotions were currently most dominant within them.

The careful Soother saw what was beneath the surface. He understood what a man was feeling, even when that man himself didn't understand—or acknowledge—those emotions. Such was the case with Sazed and Tindwyl.

*Odd pair, that one,* Breeze thought to himself, idly Soothing one of the skaa to make him more relaxed as he tried to sleep. *The 1rest of the crew is convinced that those two are enemies. But, hatred rarely creates that measure of bitterness and frustration. No, those two emotions come from an entirely different set of problems.*

*Of course, isn't Sazed supposed to be a eunuch? I wonder how this all came about. . ..*

His speculations trailed off as the warehouse doors opened. Elend walked in—Ham, unfortunately, accompanying him. Elend was wearing one of his white uniforms, complete with white gloves and a sword. The white was an important symbol; with all of the ash and soot in the city, a man in white was quite striking. Elend's uniforms had to been crafted of special fabrics designed to be resistant to ash, and they still had to be scrubbed every day. The effect was worth the effort.

Breeze immediately picked at Elend's emotions, making the man less tired, less uncertain—though the second was becoming almost unnecessary. That was partially the Terriswoman's doing; Breeze had been impressed with her ability to change how people felt, considering her lack of Allomancy.

Breeze left Elend's emotions of disgust and pity; both were appropriate considering the environment. He did, however, give Ham a nudge to make him less argumentative; Breeze wasn't in a mood to deal with the man's prattlings at the moment.

He stood as the two men approached. People perked up as they saw Elend, his presence somehow bringing them a hope that Breeze couldn't emulate with Allomancy. They whispered, calling Elend King.

"Breeze," Elend said, nodding. "Is Sazed here?"

"He just left, I'm afraid," Breeze said.

Elend seemed distracted. "Ah, well," he said. "I'll find him later." Elend looked around the room, lips downturned. "Ham, tomorrow, I want you to round up the clothing merchants on Kenton Street and bring them here to see this."

"They might not like that, Elend," Ham said.

"I hope they don't," Elend said. "But we'll see how they feel about their prices once they visit this room. I can understand food's expense, considering its scarcity. However, there is no reason but greed to deny the people clothing."

Ham nodded, but Breeze could see the reticence in his posture. Did the others realize how strangely nonconfrontational Ham was? He liked to argue with friends, but he rarely actually came to any conclusions in his philosophizing. Plus, he absolutely hated fighting with strangers; Breeze had always found that an odd attribute in one who was hired, essentially, to hit people. He gave Ham a bit of a Soothing to make him less worried about confronting the merchants.

"You aren't going to stay here all night, are you, Breeze?" Elend asked.

"Lord Ruler, no!" Breeze said. "My dear man, you're lucky you managed to get me to come at all. Honestly, this is no place for a gentleman. The dirt, the depressing atmosphere—and that's not even making mention of the smell!"

Ham frowned. "Breeze, someday you're going to have to learn to think about other people."

"As long as I can think about them from a distance, Hammond, I shall be happy to engage in the activity."

Ham shook his head. "You're hopeless."

"Are you heading back to the palace then?" Elend asked.

"Yes, actually," Breeze said, checking his pocket watch.

"Do you need a ride?"

"I brought my own carriage," Breeze said.

Elend nodded, then turned to Ham, and the two retreated the way they had come, talking about Elend's next meeting with one of the other Assemblymen.

Breeze wandered into the palace a short time later. He nodded to the door guards, Soothing away their mental fatigue. They perked up in response, watching the mists with renewed vigilance. It wouldn't last long, but little touches like that were second nature to Breeze.

It was getting late, and few people were in the hallways. He made his way through the kitchens, Nudging the scullery maids to make them more chatty. It would make their cleaning pass more quickly. Beyond the kitchens he found a small stone room, lit by a couple of plain lamps, set with a small table. It was one of the palace's boothlike, solitary dining rooms.

Clubs sat in one corner of the booth, gimped leg stretched out on the bench. He eyed Breeze with a scowl. "You're late."

"You're early," Breeze said, sliding into the bench across from Clubs.

"Same thing," Clubs grumbled.

There was a second cup on the table, along with a bottle of wine. Breeze unbuttoned his vest, sighed quietly, and poured himself a cup as he leaned back with his legs up on his bench.

Clubs sipped his wine.

"You have your cloud up?" Breeze asked.

"Around you?" Clubs said. "Always."

Breeze smiled, taking a sip, and relaxed. Though he rarely had opportunities to use his powers anymore, Clubs was a Smoker. When he was burning copper, every Allomancer's abilities were invisible to those burning bronze. But more important—at least to Breeze—burning copper made Clubs immune to any form of emotional Allomancy.

"Don't see why that makes you so happy," Clubs said. "I thought you liked playing with emotions."

"I do," Breeze said.

"Then why come drink with me every night?" Clubs asked.

"You mind the company?"

Clubs didn't answer. That was pretty much his way of saying he didn't mind. Breeze eyed the grumpy general. Most of the other crewmembers stayed away from Clubs; Kelsier had brought him in at the last moment, since the Coppercloud they usually used had died.

"Do you know what it's like, Clubs?" Breeze asked. "Being a Soother?"

"No."

"It gives you remarkable control. It's a wonderful feeling, being able to influence those around you, always feeling like you have a handle on how people will react."

"Sounds delightful," Clubs said flatly.

"And yet, it does things to you. I spend most of my time watching people—tweaking, Nudging, and Soothing. That's changed me. I don't. . .look at people the same way. It's hard to just be friends with someone when you see them as something to be influenced and changed."

Clubs grunted. "So that's why we never used to see you with women."

Breeze nodded. "I can't help it anymore. I always touch the emotions of everyone around me. And so, when a woman comes to love me. . ." He liked to think he wasn't invasive. Yet, how 1could he trust anyone who said they loved him? Was it he, or his Allomancy, that they responded to?

Clubs filled his cup. "You're a lot sillier than you act."

Breeze smiled. Clubs was one of the few people who was completely immune to his touch. Emotional Allomancy wouldn't work on him, and he was always completely forthcoming with his emotions: everything made him grumpy. Manipulating him through non-Allomantic means had proven to be a fruitless waste of time.

Breeze regarded his wine. "The amusing thing is, you almost didn't join the crew because of me."

"Damn Soothers," Clubs muttered.

"But you're immune to us."

"To your Allomancy, maybe," Clubs said. "But that isn't the only way you people do things. A man always has to watch himself around Soothers."

"Then why let me join you every evening for wine?"

Clubs was silent for a moment, and Breeze almost thought he wasn't going to respond. Finally, Clubs muttered, "You're not as bad as most."

Breeze took a gulp of wine. "That is as honest a compliment as I think I've ever received."

"Don't let it ruin you," Clubs said.

"Oh, I think I'm too late for ruining," Breeze said, topping off his cup. "This crew. . .Kell's plan. . .has already done a thorough job of that."

Clubs nodded in agreement.

"What happened to us, Clubs?" Breeze asked. "I joined Kell for the challenge. I never did know why you joined."

"Money."

Breeze nodded. "His plan fell apart, his army got destroyed, and we stayed. Then he died, and we *still* stayed. This blasted kingdom of Elend's is doomed, you know."

"We won't last another month," Clubs said. It wasn't idle pessimism; Breeze knew people well enough to tell when they were serious.

"And yet, here we are," Breeze said. "I spent all day making skaa feel better about the fact that their families had been slaughtered. You spent all day training soldiers that—with or without your help—will barely last a few heartbeats against a determined foe. We follow a boy of a king who doesn't seem to have a shade of a clue just how bad his predicament is. Why?"

Clubs shook his head. "Kelsier. Gave us a city, made us think we were responsible for protecting it."

"But we aren't that kind of people," Breeze said. "We're thieves and scammers. We shouldn't care. I mean. . .I've gotten so bad that I Soothe scullery maids so that they'll have a happier time at work! I might as well start dressing in pink and carrying around flowers. I could probably make quite a bundle at weddings."

Clubs snorted. Then he raised his cup. "To the Survivor," he said. "May he be damned for knowing us better than we knew ourselves."

Breeze raised his own cup. "Damn him," he agreed quietly.

The two fell silent. Talking to Clubs tended to turn into. . .well, not talking. However, Breeze felt a simple contentment. Soothing was wonderful; it made him who he was. But it was also work. Even birds couldn't fly all the time.

"*There* you are."

Breeze snapped his eyes open. Allrianne s1tood at the entrance to the room, just at the edge of the table. She wore light blue; where had she gotten so many dresses? Her makeup was, of course, immaculate—and there was a bow in her hair. That long blond hair—common in the West but almost unheard of in the Central Dominance—and that perky, inviting figure.

Desire immediately blossomed inside of him. *No*! Breeze thought. *She's half your age. You're a dirty old man. Dirty*! "Allrianne," he said uncomfortably, "shouldn't you be in bed or something?"

She rolled her eyes, shooing his legs out of the way so she could sit on the bench beside him. "It's only nine o'clock, Breeze. I'm eighteen, not ten."

*You might as well be*, he thought, looking away from her, trying to focus on something else. He knew that he should be stronger, shouldn't let the girl get near him, but he did nothing as she slid up to him and took a drink from his cup.

He sighed, putting his arm around her shoulders. Clubs just shook his head, the hint of a smile on his lips.

"Well," Vin said quietly, "that answers one question."

"Mistress?" OreSeur said, sitting across the table from her in the dark room. With her Allomancer's ears, she could hear exactly what was going on in the next boothlike room over.

"Allrianne is an Allomancer," Vin said.

"Really?"

Vin nodded. "She's been Rioting Breeze's emotions ever since she arrived, making him more attracted to her."

"One would think that he'd notice," OreSeur said.

"You'd think," Vin said. She probably shouldn't feel as amused as she did. The girl could be a Mistborn—though the idea of that puff flying through the mists seemed ridiculous.

*Which is probably exactly how she wants me to think,* Vin thought. *I have to remember Kliss and Shan—neither one of them turned out to be the person I thought they were*.

"Breeze probably just doesn't think his emotions are unnatural," Vin said. "He must be attracted to her already."

OreSeur closed his mouth and cocked his head—his dog's version of a frown.

"I know," Vin agreed. "But, at least we know he isn't the one using Allomancy to seduce *her*. Either way, that's irrelevant. Clubs isn't the kandra."

"How could you possibly know that, Mistress?"

Vin paused. Clubs always turned his copper on around Breeze; it was one of the few times he used it. However, it was difficult to tell if someone was burning copper. After all, if they turned on their metal, they hid themselves by default.

But Vin could pierce copperclouds. She could sense Allrianne's Rioting; she could even sense a faint thumping coming from Clubs himself, copper's own Allomantic pulse, something that Vin suspected few people beyond herself and the Lord Ruler had ever heard.

"I just know," Vin said.

"If you say so, Mistress," OreSeur said. "But. . .didn't you already decide the spy was Demoux?"

"I wanted to check Clubs anyway," she said. "Before I did anything drastic."

"Drastic?"

Vin sat quietly for a moment. She didn't have much proof, but she did 1have her instincts—and those instincts told her Demoux was the spy. That sneaking way he'd gone out the other night. . .the obvious logic of choosing him. . .it all fit.

She stood. Things were getting too dangerous, too sensitive. She couldn't ignore it any longer. "Come on," she said, leaving the booth behind. "It's time to put Demoux in prison."

"What do you mean you *lost* him?" Vin asked, standing outside the door to Demoux's room.

The servant flushed. "My lady, I'm sorry. I watched him, like you told me—but he went out on patrol. Should I have followed? I mean, don't you think that would have looked suspicious?"

Vin cursed quietly to herself. She knew that she didn't have much right to be angry, however. *I should have told Ham straight off,* she thought with frustration.

"My lady, he only left a few minutes ago," the servant said.

Vin glanced at OreSeur, then took off down the corridor. As soon as they reached a window, Vin leaped out into the dark night, OreSeur following behind her, dropping the short distance to the courtyard.

*Last time, I saw him come back in through the gates to the palace grounds*, she thought, running through the mist. She found a couple of soldiers there, guarding.

"Did Captain Demoux come this way?" she demanded, bursting into their ring of torchlight.

They perked up, at first shocked, then confused.

"Lady Heir?" one of them said. "Yes, he just went out, on patrol just a minute or two ago."

"By himself?" Vin asked.

They nodded.

"Isn't that a little odd?"

They shrugged. "He goes by himself sometimes," one said. "We don't question. He's our superior, after all."

"Which way?" Vin demanded.

One pointed, and Vin took off, OreSeur at her side. *I should have watched better. I should have hired real spies to keep an eye on him. I should have—*

She froze. Up ahead, walking down a quite street in the mists, was a figure, walking into the city. Demoux.

Vin dropped a coin and threw herself into the air, passing far over his head, landing on top of a building. He continued, oblivious. Demoux or kandra, neither would have Allomantic powers.

Vin paused, daggers out, ready to spring. But. . .she still didn't have any real proof. The part of her that Kelsier had transformed, the part that had come to trust, thought of the Demoux she knew.

*Do I really believe he's the kandra*? she thought. *Or do I just* want *him to be the kandra, so that I don't have to suspect my real friends*?

He continued to walk below, her tin-enhanced ears easily picking out his footfalls. Behind, OreSeur scrambled up onto the top of the roof, then padded over and sat down beside her.

*I can't just attack*, she thought. *I need to at least watch, see where he's going. Get proof*. Perhaps learn something in the process.

She waved to OreSeur, and they quietly followed along the rooftops, trailing Demoux. Soon, Vin noticed something odd—a flicker of firelight illuminating the mists a few streets over, making haunted s1hadows of buildings. Vin glanced at Demoux, trailing him with her eyes as he wandered down an alleyway, moving toward the illumination.

*What*. . .?

Vin threw herself off the roof. It took only three bounds for her to reach the source of the light. A modest bonfire crackled in the center of a small square. Skaa huddled around it for warmth, looking a little frightened in the mists. Vin was surprised to see them. She hadn't seen skaa go out in the mists since the night of the Collapse.

Demoux approached down a side street, greeting several of the others. In the firelight she could confirm for certain that it was him—or, at least, a kandra with his face.

There were, perhaps, two hundred people in the square. Demoux moved as if to sit on the cobblestones, but someone quickly approached with a chair. A young woman brought him a mug of something steaming, which he received gratefully.

Vin leaped to a rooftop, staying low to keep from being exposed by the firelight. More skaa arrived, mostly in groups, but some brave individuals came alone.

A sound came from behind her, and Vin turned as OreSeur—apparently having barely made the jump—scrambled the last few feet over the edge onto the roof. He glanced down at the street below, shook his head, then padded over to join her. She raised a finger to her lips, nodding down at the growing group of people. OreSeur cocked his head at the sight, but said nothing.

Finally, Demoux stood, holding the still steaming cup in his hands. People gathered around, sitting on the cold cobblestones, huddled beneath blankets or cloaks.

"We shouldn't fear the mists, my friends," Demoux said. His wasn't the voice of a strong leader or forceful battle commander—it was the voice of hardened youth, a little hesitant, but compelling nonetheless.

"The Survivor taught us of this," he continued. "I know it's very hard to think of the mists without remembering stories of mistwraiths or other horrors. But, the Survivor gave the mists to us. We should try and remember him, through them."

*Lord Ruler*. . .Vin thought with shock. *He's one of them—a member of the Church of the Survivor*! She wavered, uncertain what to think. Was he the kandra or wasn't he? Why would the kandra meet with a group of people like this? But. . .why would Demoux himself do it?

"I know it's hard," Demoux said below, "without the Survivor. I know you're afraid of the armies. Trust me, I know. I see them too. I know you suffer beneath this siege. I. . .don't know if I can even tell you not to worry. The Survivor himself knew great hardship—the death of his wife, his imprisonment in the Pits of Hathsin. But he survived. That's the point, isn't it? We have to live on, no matter how hard this all gets. We'll win, in the end. Just like he did."

He stood with his mug in his hands, looking nothing like the skaa preachers Vin had seen. Kelsier had chosen a passionate man to found his religion—or, more precisely, to found the revolution the religion had come from. Kelsier had needed leaders who could enflame supporters, whip them up into a destructive upheaval.

Demoux was something different. He didn't shout, but spoke calmly. Yet, people paid attention. They sat on the stones around him, looking up with hopeful—even worshipful—eyes.

"The Lady Heir," one of them whispered. "What of her?"

"Lady Vin bears a great responsibilit1y," Demoux said. "You can see the weight bowing her down, and how frustrated she is with the problems in the city. She is a straightforward woman, and I don't think she likes the Assembly's politicking."

"But, she'll protect us, right?" one asked.

"Yes," Demoux said. "Yes, I believe she will. Sometimes, I think that she's even more powerful than the Survivor was. You know that he only had two years to practice as a Mistborn? She's barely had that much time herself."

Vin turned away. *It comes back to that*, she thought. *They sound rational until they talk about me, and then. . .*

"She'll bring us peace, someday," Demoux said. "The heir will bring back the sun, stop the ash from falling. But we have to survive until then. And we have to fight. The Survivor's entire work was to see the Lord Ruler dead and make us free. What gratitude do we show if we run now that armies have come?

"Go and tell your Assemblymen that you don't want Lord Cett, or even Lord Penrod, to be your king. The vote happens in one day, and we *need* to make certain the right man is made king. The Survivor chose Elend Venture, and that is whom we must follow."

*That's new*, Vin thought.

"Lord Elend is weak," one of the people said. "He won't defend us."

"Lady Vin loves him," Demoux said. "She wouldn't love a weak man. Penrod and Cett treat you like the skaa *used* to be treated, and that's why you think they're strong. But that's not strength—it's oppression. We have to be better than that! We have to trust the Survivor's judgment!"

Vin relaxed against the lip of the roof, tension melting a bit. If Demoux really was the spy, then he wasn't going to give her any evidence this night. So, she put her knives away, then rested with her arms folded on the rooftop's edge. The fire crackled in the cool winter evening, sending billows of smoke to mix with the mists, and Demoux continued to speak in his quiet, reassuring voice, teaching the people about Kelsier.

*It's not even really a religion*, Vin thought as she listened. *The theology is so simple—not at all like the complex beliefs that Sazed speaks about*.

Demoux taught basic concepts. He held up Kelsier as a model, talking about survival, and about enduring hardships. Vin could see why the direct words would appeal to the skaa. The people really only had two choices: to struggle on, or to give up. Demoux's teachings gave them an excuse to keep living.

The skaa didn't need rituals, prayers, or codes. Not yet. They were too inexperienced with religion in general, too frightened of it, to want such things. But, the more she listened, the more Vin understood the Church of the Survivor. It was what they needed; it took what the skaa already knew—

a life filled with hardship—and elevated it to a higher, more optimistic plane.

And the teachings were still evolving. The deification of Kelsier she had expected; even the reverence for her was understandable. But, where did Demoux get the promises that Vin would stop the ash and bring back the sun? How did he know to preach of green grasses and blue skies, describing the world as it was known only in some of the world's most obscure texts?

He described a strange world of colors and beauty—a place foreign and difficult to conceive, but somehow wonderful all the same. Flowers and green plants were strange, alien things to these people; even Vin had trouble visualizing them, and s1he had heard Sazed's descriptions.

Demoux was giving the skaa a paradise. It had to be something completely removed from normal experience, for the mundane world was not a place of hope. Not with a foodless winter approaching, not with armies threatening and the government in turmoil.

Vin pulled back as Demoux finally ended the meeting. She lay for a moment, trying to decide how she felt. She'd been near certain about Demoux, but now her suspicions seemed unfounded. He'd gone out at night, true, but she saw now what he was doing. Plus, he'd acted so suspiciously when sneaking out. It seemed to her, as she reflected, that a kandra would know how to go about things in a much more natural way.

*It's not him*, she thought. *Or, if it is, he's not going to be as easy to unmask as I thought*. She frowned in frustration. Finally, she just sighed, rising, and walked to the other side of the roof. OreSeur followed, and Vin glanced at him. "When Kelsier told you to take his body," she said, "what did he want you to preach to these people?"

"Mistress?" OreSeur asked.

"He had you appear, as if you were him returned from the grave."

"Yes."

"Well, what did he have you say?"

OreSeur shrugged. "Very simple things, Mistress. I told them that the time for rebellion had arrived. I told them that I—Kelsier—had returned to give them hope for victory."

*I represent that thing you've never been able to kill, no matter how hard you try*. They had been Kelsier's final words, spoken face-to-face with the Lord Ruler. *I am hope*.

*I am hope*.

Was it any wonder that this concept would become central to the church that sprang up around him? "Did he have you teach things like we just heard Demoux say?" Vin asked. "About the ash no longer falling, and the sun turning yellow?"

"No, Mistress."

"That's what I thought," Vin said as she heard rustling on the stones below. She glanced over the side of the building, and saw Demoux returning to the palace.

Vin dropped to the alleyway floor behind him. To the man's credit, he heard her, and he spun, hand on dueling cane.

"Peace, Captain," she said, rising.

"Lady Vin?" he asked with surprise.

She nodded, approaching closer so that he'd be able to see her better in the night. Fading torchlight still lit the air from behind, swirls of mist playing with shadows.

"I didn't know you were a member of the Church of the Survivor," she said softly.

He looked down. Though he was easily two hands taller than she, he seemed to shrink a bit before her. "I. . .I know it makes you uncomfortable. I'm sorry."

"It's all right," she said. "You do a good thing for the people. Elend will appreciate hearing of your loyalty."

Demoux looked up. "Do you have to tell him?"

"He needs to know what the people believe, Captain. Why would you want me to keep it quiet?"

Demoux sighed. "I just. . .I don't want the crew to think I'm out here pandering to the people. Ham thinks preaching about the Survivor is silly, and Lord Breeze says the only reason to e1ncourage the church is to make people more pliant."

Vin regarded him in the darkness. "You really believe, don't you?"

"Yes, my lady."

"But you knew Kelsier," she said. "You were with us from near the beginning. You know he's no god."

Demoux looked up, a bit of a challenge in his eyes. "He died to overthrow the Lord Ruler."

"That doesn't make him divine."

"He taught us how to survive, to have hope."

"You survived before," Vin said. "People had hope before Kelsier got thrown in those pits."

"Not like we do now," Demoux said. "Besides. . .he had power, my lady. I felt it."

Vin paused. She knew the story; Kelsier had used Demoux as an example to the rest of the army in a fight with a skeptic, directing his blows with Allomancy, making Demoux seem as if he had supernatural powers.

"Oh, I know about Allomancy now," Demoux said. "But. . .I felt him Pushing on my sword that day. I felt him use me, making me more than I was. I think I can still feel him, sometimes. Strengthening my arm, guiding my blade. . .."

Vin frowned. "Do you remember the first time we met?"

Demoux nodded. "Yes. You came to the caverns where we were hiding on the day when the army was destroyed. I was on guard duty. You know, my lady—even then, I knew that Kelsier would come for us. I knew that he'd come and get those of us who had been faithful and guide us back to Luthadel."

*He went to those caves because I forced him to. He wanted to get himself killed fighting an army on his own*.

"The destruction of the army was a test," Demoux said, looking up into the mists. "These armies. . .the siege. . .they're just tests. To see if we will survive or not."

"And the ash?" Vin asked. "Where did you hear that it would stop falling?"

Demoux turned back to her. "The Survivor taught that, didn't he?"

Vin shook her head.

"A lot of the people are saying it," Demoux said. "It must be true. It fits with everything else—the yellow sun, the blue sky, the plants. . .."

"Yes, but where did you first hear those things?"

"I'm not sure, my lady."

*Where did you hear that I would be the one to bring them about*? she thought, but she somehow couldn't bring herself to voice the question. Regardless, she knew the answer: Demoux wouldn't know. Rumors were propagating. It would be difficult indeed to trace them back to their source now.

"Go back to the palace," Vin said. "I have to tell Elend what I saw, but I'll ask him not to tell the rest of the crew."

"Thank you, my lady," Demoux said, bowing. He turned and hurried away. A second later, Vin heard a thump from behind: OreSeur, jumping down to the street.

She turned. "I was sure it was him."

"Mistress?"

"The kandra," Vin said, turning back toward the disappearing Demoux. "I thought I'd discovered him."

"And?"

She shook her head.1 "It's like Dockson—I think Demoux knows too much to be faking. He feels. . .real to me."

"My brethren—"

"Are quite skilled," Vin said with a sigh. "Yes, I know. But we're not going to arrest him. Not tonight, at least. We'll keep an eye on him, but I just don't think it's him anymore."

OreSeur nodded.

"Come on," she said. "I want to check on Elend."

*And so, I come to the focus of my argument. I apologize. Even forcing my words into steel, sitting and scratching in this frozen cave, I am prone to ramble.*

# 37

SAZED GLANCED AT THE WINDOW SHUTTERS, noting the hesitant beams of light that were beginning to shine through the cracks. *Morning already*? he thought. *We studied all night*? It hardly seemed possible. He had tapped no wakefulness, yet he felt more alert—more alive—than he had in days.

Tindwyl sat in the chair beside him. Sazed's desk was filled with loose papers, two sets of ink and pen waiting to be used. There were no books; Keepers had no need of such.

"Ah!" Tindwyl said, grabbing a pen and beginning to write. She didn't look tired either, but she had likely dipped into her bronzemind, tapping the wakefulness stored within.

Sazed watched her write. She almost looked young again; he hadn't seen such overt excitement in her since she had been abandoned by the Breeders some ten years before. On that day, her grand work finished, she had finally joined her fellow Keepers. Sazed had been the one to present her with the collected knowledge that had been discovered during her thirty years of cloistered childbirth.

It hadn't taken her long to achieve a place in the Synod. By then, however, Sazed had been ousted from their ranks.

Tindwyl finished writing. "The passage is from a biography of King Wednegon," she said. "He was one of the last leaders who resisted the Lord Ruler in any sort of meaningful combat."

"I know who he was," Sazed said, smiling.

She paused. "Of course." She obviously wasn't accustomed to studying with someone who had access to as much information as she did. She pushed the written passage over to Sazed; even with his mental indexes and self-notes, it would be faster for her to write out the passage than it would be for him to try and find it within his own copperminds.

*I spent a great deal of time with the king during his final weeks*, the text read.

> *He seemed frustrated, as one might imagine. His soldiers could not stand against the Conqueror's koloss, and his men had been beaten back repeatedly ever since FellSpire. However, the king didn't blame his soldiers. He thought that his problems came from another source: food.*
>
> *He mentioned this idea several times during those last days. He thought that if he'd had more food, he could have held out. In this, Wednegon blamed the Deepness. For, though the Deepness had been defeated—or at least weakened—its touch had depleted Darrelnai's food stores.*
>
> *His people could not both raise food and resist the Conqueror's demon armies. In the e1nd, that was why they fell.*

Sazed nodded slowly. "How much of this text do we have?"

"Not much," Tindwyl said. "Six or seven pages. This is the only section that mentions the Deepness."

Sazed sat quietly for a moment, rereading the passage. Finally, he looked up at Tindwyl. "You think Lady Vin is right, don't you? You think the Deepness was mist."

Tindwyl nodded.

"I agree," Sazed said. "At the very least, what we now call 'the Deepness' was some sort of change in the mist."

"And your arguments from before?"

"Proven wrong," Sazed said, setting down the paper. "By your words and my own studies. I did not wish this to be true, Tindwyl."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow. "You defied the Synod again to seek after something you didn't even want to believe?"

He looked into her eyes. "There is a difference between fearing something and desiring it. The return of the Deepness could destroy us. I did not want this information—but neither could I pass by the opportunity to discover it."

Tindwyl looked away. "I do not believe that this will destroy us, Sazed. You have made a grand discovery, that I will admit. The writings of the man Kwaan tell us much. Indeed, if the Deepness was the mists, then our understanding of the Lord Ruler's Ascension has been enhanced greatly."

"And if the mists are growing stronger?" Sazed asked. "If, by killing the Lord Ruler, we also destroyed whatever force was keeping the mists chained?"

"We have no proof that the mists are coming by day," Tindwyl said. "And on the possibility of them killing people, we have only your hesitant theories."

Sazed glanced away. On the table, his fingers had smudged Tindwyl's hurriedly written words. "That is true," he said.

Tindwyl sighed softly in the dim room. "Why do you never defend yourself, Sazed?"

"What defense is there?"

"There must be some. You apologize and ask forgiveness, but your apparent guilt never seems to change your behavior! Do you never think that, perhaps, if you had been more outspoken, you might be leading the

Synod? They cast you out because you refused to offer arguments on your own behalf. You're the most contrite rebel I've ever known."

Sazed didn't respond. He glanced to the side, seeing her concerned eyes. Beautiful eyes. *Foolish thoughts,* he told himself, looking away. *You've always known that. Some things were meant for others, but never for you*.

"You were right about the Lord Ruler, Sazed," Tindwyl said. "Perhaps the others would have followed you if you had been just a little more. . .insistent."

Sazed shook his head. "I am not a man from one of your biographies, Tindwyl. I am not even, really, a man."

"You are a better man than they, Sazed," Tindwyl said quietly. "The frustrating part is, I've never been able to figure out why."

They fell silent. Sazed rose and walked to the window, opening the shutters, letting in the light. Then he extinguished the room's lamp.

"I will leave today," Tindwyl said.

"Leave?" Sazed asked. "The armies1 might not let you pass."

"I wasn't going to pass them, Sazed. I plan to visit them. I have given knowledge to young Lord Venture; I need to offer the same aid to his opponents."

"Ah," Sazed said. "I see. I should have realized this."

"I doubt they will listen as he has," Tindwyl said, a hint of fondness slipping into her voice. "Venture is a fine man."

"A fine king," Sazed said.

Tindwyl didn't respond. She looked at the table, with its scattered notations, each drawn from one or another of their copperminds, scribbled in haste, then shown and reread.

*What was this night, then? This night of study, this night sharing thoughts and discoveries*?

She was still beautiful. Auburn hair graying, but kept long and straight. Face marked by a lifetime of hardship that had not broken her. And eyes. . .keen eyes, with the knowledge and love of learning that only a Keeper could claim.

*I should not consider these things,* Sazed thought again. *There is no purpose to them. There never was*. "You must go, then," he said, turning.

"Again, you refuse to argue," she said.

"What would be the point of argument? You are a wise and determined person. You must be guided by your own conscience."

"Sometimes, people only seem determined upon one course because they have been offered no other options."

Sazed turned toward her. The room was quiet, the only sounds coming from the courtyard below. Tindwyl sat half in sunlight, her bright robes slowly growing more illuminated as the shadows fell away. She seemed to be implying something, something he had not expected to ever hear from her.

"I am confused," he said, sitting back down in a slow motion. "What of your duty as a Keeper?"

"It is important," she admitted. "But. . .certain, occasional exceptions must be allowed. This rubbing you found. . .well, perhaps it merits further study before I depart."

Sazed watched her, trying to read her eyes. *What is it I feel*? he wondered. Confused? Dumbfounded?

Afraid?

"I cannot be what you wish, Tindwyl," he said. "I am not a man."

She waved her hand indifferently. "I have had more than enough of 'men' and childbearing over the years, Sazed. I have done my duty to the Terris people. I should like to stay away from them for a time, I think. A part of me resents them, for what was done to me."

He opened his mouth to speak, but she held up a hand. "I know, Sazed. I took that duty upon myself, and am glad for my service. But. . .during the years spent alone, meeting with the Keepers only on occasion, I found it frustrating that all their planning seemed to be directed at maintaining their status as a conquered people.

"I only ever saw one man pushing the Synod toward active measures. While they planned how to keep themselves hidden, one man wanted to attack. While they decided the best ways to foil the Breeders, one man wanted to plot the downfall of the Final Empire. When I rejoined my people, I found that man still fighting. Alone. Condemned for fraternizing with thieves and rebels, he quietly accepted his punishment."

She smiled. "That man went on to free us all."

She took his hand. Sazed sat, astonished.

"The men I read about, Sazed," Tindwyl said quietly, "these were not men who sat and planned the best ways to hide. They fought; they sought victory. Sometimes, they were reckless—and other men called them fools. Yet, when the dice were cast and the bodies counted, they were men who *changed* things."

Sunlight entered the room in full, and she sat, cupping his hand in hers. She seemed. . .anxious. Had he ever seen that emotion in her? She was strong, the strongest woman he knew. That couldn't possibly be apprehension he saw in her eyes.

"Give me an excuse, Sazed," she whispered.

"I should. . .very much like it if you stayed," Sazed said, one hand in hers, the other resting on the tabletop, fingers trembling slightly.

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow.

"Stay," Sazed said. "Please."

Tindwyl smiled. "Very well—you have persuaded me. Let us return to our studies, then."

Elend walked the top of the city wall in the morning light, sword at his hip clicking against the side of the stonework with each step.

"You almost look like a king," a voice noted.

Elend turned as Ham climbed the last few steps up to the wall walk. The air was brisk, frost still crystalline in shadows on the stone. Winter was approaching. Perhaps it had arrived. Yet, Ham wore no cloak—only his usual vest, trousers, and sandals.

*I wonder if he even knows what it is like to be cold*, Elend thought. *Pewter. Such an amazing talent*.

"You say I nearly look like a king," Elend said, turning to continue walking along the wall as Ham joined him. "I guess Tindwyl's clothing has done wonders for my image."

"I didn't mean the clothing," Ham said. "I was talking about that look on your face. How long have you been up here?"

"Hours," Elend said. "How did you find me?"

"The soldiers," Ham said. "They're starting to see you as a commander, Elend. They watch where you are; they stand a little straighter when you're around, polish their weapons if they know you'll be stopping by."

"I thought you didn't spend much time with them," Elend said.

"Oh, I never said that," Ham said. "I spend lots of time with the soldiers—I just can't be intimidating enough to be their commander. Kelsier always wanted me to be a general—I think, deep down, he thought that befriending people was inferior to leading them. Perhaps he was right; men need leaders. I just don't want to be one of them."

"I do," Elend said, surprised to hear himself say so.

Ham shrugged. "That's probably a good thing. You are, after all, king."

"Kind of," Elend said.

"You're still wearing the crown."

Elend nodded. "It felt wrong to go without it. It sounds silly, I know—I only wore it for a short time. But, people need to know that someone is still in charge. For a few more days at least."

They continued to walk. In the distance, Elend could see a shadow upon the land: the third army had finally arrived in the wake of the refugees it had sent. Their scouts we1ren't certain why the koloss force had taken so long to get to Luthadel. The villagers' sad tale, however, gave some clue.

The koloss had not attacked Straff or Cett. They lay waiting. Apparently, Jastes had enough control over them to keep them in check. And so they joined the siege, another beast waiting for the opportunity to spring on Luthadel.

*When you can't have both freedom and safety, which do you choose*. . .?

"You seem surprised to realize that you want to be in charge," Ham said.

"I just haven't ever voiced the desire before," Elend said. "It sounds so arrogant, when I actually say it. I want to be king. I don't want another man to take my place. Not Penrod, not Cett. . .not anyone. The position is mine. This city is mine."

"I don't know if 'arrogant' is the right word, El," Ham said. "Why do you want to be king?"

"To protect this people," Elend said. "To guard their safety—and their rights. But, also to make certain that the noblemen don't end up on the wrong end of another rebellion."

"That's not arrogance."

"It is, Ham," Elend said. "But it's an understandable arrogance. I don't think a man could lead without it. Actually, I think it's what I've been missing through most of my reign. Arrogance."

"Self-confidence."

"A nicer word for the same concept," Elend said. "I can do a better job for this people than another man could. I just have to find a way to prove that fact to them."

"You will."

"You're an optimist, Ham," Elend said.

"So are you," Ham noted.

Elend smiled. "True. But this job is changing me."

"Well, if you want to keep the job, we should probably get back to studying. We only have one day left."

Elend shook his head. "I've read all I can, Ham. I will not take advantage of the law, so there's no reason to search for loopholes, and studying other books looking for inspiration just isn't working. I need time to think. Time to walk. . .."

They continued to do so. As they did, Elend noticed something out in the distance. A group of enemy soldiers doing something he couldn't distinguish. He waved over one of his men.

"What is that?" he asked.

The soldier shaded his eyes, looking. "Looks like another skirmish between Cett's men and Straff's, Your Majesty."

Elend raised an eyebrow. "That happens often?"

The soldier shrugged. "More and more often, lately. Usually the scouting patrols run afoul of each other and get into a conflict. Leave a few bodies behind when they retreat. Nothing big, Your Majesty."

Elend nodded, dismissing the man. *Big enough*, he thought to himself. *Those armies must be as tense as we are. The soldiers can't enjoy remaining so long in a siege, particularly with the winter weather*.

They were close. The arrival of the koloss would only cause more chaos. If he shoved right, Straff and Cett would be pushed into a head-on battle. *I just need a little more time*! he thought, continuing to walk, Ham at his side.

Yet, first he needed to get his throne back. W1ithout that authority, he was nothing—and could do nothing.

The problem gnawed at his mind. As the walk continued, however, something distracted him—this time, something inside the walls rather than outside of them. Ham was right—the soldiers *did* stand a little taller when Elend approached their posts. They saluted him, and he nodded to them, walking with hand on pommel, as Tindwyl had instructed.

*If I do keep my throne, I owe it to that woman,* he thought. Of course, she'd chastise him for that thought. She would tell him that he kept his throne because he deserved to—because he was king. In changing himself, he had simply used the resources at hand to overcome his challenges.

He wasn't certain if he'd ever be able to see things that way. But, her final lesson to him the day before—he somehow knew that it was her last—had taught him only one new concept: that there was no one mold for kingship. He would not be like the kings of the past, any more than he would be like Kelsier.

He would be Elend Venture. His roots were in philosophy, so he would be remembered as a scholar. He'd best use that to his advantage, or he wouldn't be remembered at all. No kings could admit their weaknesses, but they were certainly wise to admit their strengths.

*And what are my strengths*? he thought. *Why should I be the one who rules this city, and those around it*?

Yes, he was a scholar—and an optimist, as Ham had noted. He was no master duelist, though he was improving. He wasn't an excellent diplomat, though his meetings with Straff and Cett proved that he could hold his own.

What was he?

A nobleman who loved the skaa. They'd always fascinated him, even before the Collapse—before he'd met Vin and the others. It had been one of his pet philosophical puzzles to try and prove them no different from men of noble birth. It sounded idealistic, even a little prim, when he thought about it—and, if he was truthful, much of his interest in the skaa before the Collapse had been academic. They had been unknown, and so they had seemed exotic and interesting.

He smiled. *I wonder what the plantation workers would have thought, had anyone told them they were "exotic*."

But then the Collapse had come—the rebellion predicted in his books and theories coming to life. His beliefs hadn't been able to continue as mere academic abstractions. And he'd come to know the skaa—not just Vin and the crew, but the workers and the servants. He'd seen the hope beginning to grow within them. He'd seen the awakening of self-respect, and of self-worth, in the people of the city, and it excited him.

He would not abandon them.

*That's what I am*, Elend thought, pausing as he walked the wall. *An idealist. A melodramatic idealist who, despite his books and learning, never did make a very good nobleman*.

"What?" Ham asked, stopping next to him.

Elend turned toward him. "I've got an idea," he said.

*This is the problem. Though I believed in Alendi at first, I later became suspicious. It seemed that he fit the signs, true. But, well, how can I explain this*?

*Could it be that he fit them too well*?

# 38

HOW1 CAN HE POSSIBLY LOOK so *confident when I feel so nervous*? Vin thought, standing beside Elend as the Assembly Hall began to fill. They had arrived early; this time, Elend said he wanted to appear in control by being the one who greeted each Assemblyman as he arrived.

Today, the vote for king would occur.

Vin and Elend stood on the stage, nodding to the Assemblymen as they entered through the room's side door. On the floor of the room, the benches were already growing crowded. The first few rows, as always, were seeded with guards.

"You look beautiful today," Elend said, looking at Vin.

Vin shrugged. She had worn her white gown, a flowing garment with a few diaphanous layers on the top. Like the others, it was designed for mobility, and it matched Elend's new outfits—especially with the dark embroidery on the sleeves. Her jewelry was gone, but she did have a few white wooden barrettes for her hair.

"It's odd," she said, "how quickly wearing these gowns became natural for me again."

"I'm glad you made the switch," Elend said. "The trousers and shirt are you. . .but this is you, too. The part of you I remember from the balls, when we barely knew each other."

Vin smiled wistfully, looking up at him, the gathering crowd growing a bit more distant. "You never did dance with me."

"I'm sorry," he said, holding her arm with a light touch. "We haven't had much time for each other lately, have we?"

Vin shook her head.

"I'll fix that," Elend said. "Once this confusion is all through, once the throne is secure, we can get back to us."

Vin nodded, then turned sharply as she noticed movement behind her. An Assemblyman walking across the stage.

"You're jumpy," Elend said, frowning slightly. "Even more than usual. What am I missing?"

Vin shook her head. "I don't know."

Elend greeted the Assemblyman—one of the skaa representatives—with a firm handshake. Vin stood at his side, her earlier wistfulness evaporating like mist as her mind returned to the moment. *What is bothering me*?

The room was packed—everyone wanted to witness the events of the day. Elend had been forced to post guards at the doors to maintain order. But, it wasn't just the number of people that made her edgy. It was a sense of. . .wrongness to the event. People were gathering like carrion feeders to a rotting carcass.

"This isn't right," Vin said, holding Elend's arm as the Assemblyman moved off. "Governments shouldn't change hands based on arguments made from a lectern."

"Just because it hasn't happened that way in the past doesn't mean it *shouldn't* happen," Elend said.

Vin shook her head. "Something is going to go wrong, Elend. Cett will surprise you, and maybe Penrod will, too. Men like them won't sit still and let a vote decide their future."

"I know," Elend said. "But they aren't the only ones who can offer up surprises."

Vin looked at him quizzically. "You're planning something?"

He paused, then glanced at her. "I. . .well, Ham and I came up with something last night. A ploy. I've been trying to find a way to talk to you about it, but there just hasn't been time. We had t1o move quickly."

Vin frowned, sensing his apprehension. She started to say something, but then stopped, studying his eyes. He seemed a little embarrassed. "What?" she asked.

"Well. . .it kind of involves you, and your reputation. I was going to ask permission, but. . ."

Vin felt a slight chill. Behind them, the last Assemblyman took his seat, and Penrod stood up to conduct the meeting. He glanced toward Elend, clearing his throat.

Elend cursed quietly. "Look, I don't have time to explain," he said. "But, it's really not a big deal—it might not even get me that many votes. But, well, I had to try. And it doesn't change anything. Between us, I mean."

"What?"

"Lord Venture?" Penrod said. "Are you ready for this meeting to begin?"

The hall grew quiet. Vin and Elend still stood in the center of the stage, between the lectern and the seats of the Assembly members. She looked at him, torn between a sense of dread, a sense of confusion, and a slight sense of betrayal.

*Why didn't you tell me*? she thought. *How can I be ready if you don't tell me what you're planning? And. . .why are you looking at me like that*?

"I'm sorry," Elend said, moving over to take his seat.

Vin remained standing alone before the audience. Once, so much attention would have terrified her. It still made her uncomfortable. She ducked her head slightly, walking toward the back benches and her empty spot.

Ham wasn't there. Vin frowned, turning as Penrod opened the proceedings. *There*, she thought, finding Ham in the audience, sitting calmly with a group of skaa. The group was obviously conversing quietly, but even with tin, Vin would never be able to pick out their voices in the large crowd. Breeze stood with some of Ham's soldiers at the back of the room. It didn't matter if they knew about Elend's plan—they were too far away for her to interrogate them.

Annoyed, she arranged her skirts, then sat. She hadn't felt so blind since. . .

*Since that night a year ago*, she thought, *that moment just before we figured out Kelsier's true plan, that moment when I thought everything was collapsing around me*.

Perhaps that was a good sign. Had Elend cooked up some last-minute flash of political brilliance? It didn't really matter that he hadn't shared it with her; she probably wouldn't understand the legal basis for it anyway.

*But. . .he always shared his plans with me before*.

Penrod continued to drone on, likely maximizing his time in front of the Assembly. Cett was on the front bench of the audience, surrounded by a good twenty soldiers, sitting with a look of self-satisfaction. As well he should. From the accounts she'd heard, Cett stood to take the vote with ease.

But what was Elend planning?

*Penrod will vote for himself,* Vin thought. *So will Elend. That leaves twenty-two votes. The merchants are behind Cett, and so are the skaa. They're too afraid of that army to vote for anyone else*.

*That only leaves the nobility. Some of them will vote for Penrod—he's the strongest nobleman in the city; many of the members of the Assembly are longtime political allies of his. But, even if he takes half of the nobility—which he probably won't—1Cett will win. Cett only needs a two-thirds majority to get the throne*.

Eight merchants, eight skaa. Sixteen men on Cett's side. He was going to win. What could Elend possibly do?

Penrod finally finished his opening announcements. "But, before we vote," he said, "I would like to offer time to the candidates to make any final addresses they wish. Lord Cett, would you care to go first?"

In the audience, Cett shook his head. "I've made my offers and my threats, Penrod. You all know you have to vote for me."

Vin frowned. He seemed certain of himself, and yet. . .She scanned the crowd, eyes falling on Ham. He was talking to Captain Demoux. And seated next to them was one of the men who had followed her in the market. A priest of the Survivor.

Vin turned, studying the Assembly. The skaa representatives looked uncomfortable. She glanced at Elend, who stood up to take his turn at the front of the lectern. His earlier confidence had returned, and he looked regal in his sharp white uniform. He still wore his crown.

*It doesn't change things,* he'd said. *Between us*. . ..

*I'm sorry*.

Something that would use her reputation to gain him votes. Her reputation was Kelsier's reputation, and only the skaa really cared about that. And there was one easy way to gain influence with them. . ..

"You joined the Church of the Survivor, didn't you?" she whispered.

The reactions of the skaa Assemblymen, the logic of the moment, Elend's words to her before, all of them suddenly made sense. If Elend joined the

Church, the skaa Assemblymen might be afraid to vote against him. And, Elend didn't need sixteen votes to gain the throne; if the Assembly deadlocked, he won. With the eight skaa and his own vote, the others would never be able to oust him.

"Very clever," she whispered.

The ploy might not work. It would depend on how much hold the Church of the Survivor had on the skaa Assemblymen. Yet, even if some skaa voted against Elend, there were still the noblemen who would probably vote for Penrod. If enough did, Elend would still deadlock the Assembly and keep his throne.

All it would cost was his integrity.

*That's unfair*, Vin told herself. If Elend had joined with the Church of the Survivor, he would hold to whatever promises he had made. And, if the Church of the Survivor gained official backing, it could become as powerful in Luthadel as the Steel Ministry had once been. And. . .how would that change the way Elend saw her?

*This doesn't change anything*, he had promised.

She dully heard him begin to speak, and his references to Kelsier now seemed obvious to her. Yet, the only thing she could feel was a slight sense of anxiety. It was as Zane had said. She was the knife—a different kind of knife, but still a tool. The means by which Elend would protect the city.

She should be furious, or at least sick. Why did her eyes keep darting toward the crowd? Why couldn't she focus on what Elend was saying, on how he was elevating her? Why was she suddenly so on edge?

Why were those men subtly moving their way around the edges of the room?

"So," Elend said, "by the blessing of the Survivor himself, I ask you to vote for me."

He waited quietly. It was a drastic move; joining the Church of the Survivor put Elend under the spiritual authority of an external group. But, Ham and Demoux both had thought it a good idea. Elend had spent the better part of the previous day getting the word out to the skaa citizens about his decision.

It felt like a good move. The only thing he worried about was Vin. He glanced at her. She didn't like her place in the Church of the Survivor, and having Elend join it meant that he—technically—accepted her part in the mythology. He tried to catch her eye and smile, but she wasn't watching him. She was looking out into the audience.

Elend frowned. Vin stood up.

A man from the audience suddenly shoved aside two soldiers in the front row, then leaped supernaturally far to land up on the dais. The man pulled out a dueling cane.

*What*? Elend thought in shock. Fortunately, months spent sparring at Tindwyl's command had given him instincts he didn't know he had. As the Thug charged, Elend tucked and rolled. He hit the ground, scrambling, and turned to see the beefy man bearing down on him, dueling cane raised.

A flurry of white lace and skirts fluttered through the air over Elend. Vin slammed feet-first into the Thug, throwing him backward as she spun, skirts flaring.

The man grunted. Vin landed with a thump directly in front of Elend. The Assembly Hall echoed with sudden screaming and shouts.

Vin kicked the lectern out of the way. "Stay behind me," she whispered, an obsidian dagger glittering in her right hand.

Elend nodded hesitantly, unbuckling the sword at his waist as he climbed to his feet. The Thug wasn't alone; three small groups of armed men were moving through the room. One attacked the front row, distracting the guards there. Another group was climbing onto the dais. The third group seemed occupied by something in the crowd. Cett's soldiers.

The Thug had regained his feet. He didn't look like he had suffered much from Vin's kick.

*Assassins,* Elend thought. *But who sent them*?

The man smiled as he was joined by a group of five friends. Chaos filled the room, Assemblymen scattering, their bodyguards rushing to surround them. Yet, the fighting in front of the stage kept anyone from escaping in that direction. The Assemblymen clogged around the stage's side exit. The attackers, however, didn't seem concerned with them.

Only with Elend.

Vin remained in her crouch, waiting for the men to attack first, her posture threatening despite the frilly dress. Elend thought he actually heard her growl quietly.

The men attacked.

Vin snapped forward, swiping at the lead Thug with a dagger. His reach was too great, however, and he easily fended her off with a swipe of his staff. There were six men in total; three who were obviously Thugs, leaving the other three to likely be Coinshots or Lurchers. A strong component of metal-controllers. Someone didn't want her ending this fight quickly with coins.

They didn't understand that she would never use coins in this situation. Not with Elend standing so close and with so many people in the room. Coins couldn't be deflected safely. If she shot a handful at her enemies, random people would die.

She had to kill these men fast. They were already fanning out, 1surrounding her and Elend. They moved in pairs—one Thug and one Coinshot in each team. They would attack from the sides, trying to get past her to Elend.

Vin reached behind herself with iron, Pulling Elend's sword from its sheath with a ringing squeal. She caught it by the hilt, throwing it at one of the teams. The Coinshot Pushed it back at her, and she in turn Pushed it to the side, spinning it toward a second pair of Allomancers.

One of them Pushed it back at her again. Vin Pulled from behind, whipping Elend's metal-tipped sheath out of his hands and shooting it through the air by its clasp. Sheath passed sword in the air. This time, the enemy Coinshots Pushed both items out of the way, deflecting them toward the fleeing audience.

Men shouted in desperation as they trampled and tried to force their way out of the room. Vin gritted her teeth. She needed a better weapon.

She flung a stone dagger at one assassin pair, then jumped toward another, spinning beneath the attacking Thug's weapon. The Coinshot didn't have any metal on him that she could sense; he was just there to keep her from killing the Thug with coins. They probably assumed that Vin would be easy to defeat, as she was deprived of the ability to shoot coins.

The Thug brought his staff back around, trying to catch her with the end. She caught the weapon, yanking it forward and jumping up as she Pushed against the Assembly bleachers behind her. Her feet hit the Thug in the chest, and she kicked hard with flared pewter. As he grunted, Vin Pulled herself back toward the nails in the bleachers as hard as she could.

The Thug managed to stay on his feet. He seemed completely surprised, however, to find Vin streaking away from him, holding his staff in her hands.

She landed and spun toward Elend. He'd found himself a weapon—a dueling cane—and had the good sense to back himself against a wall. To her right, some of the Assemblymen stood in a huddle, surrounded by their guards. The room was too full, the exits too small and cramped, for them all to escape.

The Assemblymen made no moves to help Elend.

One of the assassins cried out, pointing as Vin Pushed against the bleachers and shot toward them, moving herself in front of Elend. Two Thugs raised their weapons as Vin turned in the air, lightly Pulling against a door's hinges to spin herself. Her gown fluttered as she landed.

*I really have to thank that dressmaker,* she thought as she raised the staff. She briefly considered ripping the dress free anyway, but the Thugs were upon her too quickly. She blocked both blows at once, then threw herself between the men, flaring pewter, moving faster than even they.

One of them cursed, trying to bring his staff around. Vin broke his leg before he could. He dropped with a howl, and Vin leaped onto his back, forcing him to the ground as she swung an overhand blow at the second Thug. He blocked, then shoved his weapon against hers to throw her back off his companion.

Elend attacked. The king's actions, however, seemed sluggish compared with the movements of men burning pewter. The Thug turned almost nonchalantly, smashing Elend's weapon with an easy blow.

Vin cursed as she fell. She hurled her staff at the Thug, forcing him to turn away from Elend. He barely ducked out of the way as Vin hit the ground, bounced to her feet, and whipped out a second dagger. She dashed forward before the Thug could turn back to Elend.

A spray1 of coins flew toward her. She couldn't Push them back, not toward the crowd. She cried out—throwing herself between the coins and Elend—then Pushed to the sides, dividing them as best she could so they sprayed against the wall. Even so, she felt a flash of pain from her shoulder.

*Where did he get the coins*? she thought with frustration. However, as she glanced to the side, she saw the Coinshot standing beside a cowering Assemblyman, who had been forced to give up his coin pouch.

Vin gritted her teeth. Her arm still worked. That was all that mattered. She yelled and threw herself at the closest Thug. However, the third Thug had regained his weapon—the one Vin had thrown—and was now circling with his Coinshot to try and get behind Vin.

*One at a time,* Vin thought.

The Thug nearest her swung his weapon. She needed to surprise him. So, she didn't dodge or block. She simply took his blow in the side, burning duralumin and pewter to resist. Something cracked, within her as she was hit, but with duralumin, she was strong enough to stay up. Wood shattered, and she continued forward, slamming her dagger into the Thug's neck.

He dropped, revealing a surprised Coinshot behind him. Vin's pewter evaporated with the duralumin, and pain blossomed like a sunrise in her side. Even so, she yanked her dagger free as the Thug fell, still moving quickly enough to drop the Coinshot with a dagger in the chest.

Then she stumbled, gasping quietly, holding her side as two men died at her feet.

*One Thug left*, she thought desperately. *And two Coinshots*.

*Elend needs me*. To the side, she saw one of the Coinshots fire a spray of stolen coins at Elend. She cried out, Pushing them away, and she heard the Coinshot cursing.

She turned—counting on the blue lines from her steel to warn her if the Coinshots tried shooting anything else at Elend—and ripped her backup vial of metal from her sleeve, where it had been tied tightly to keep it from being Pulled away. However, even as she yanked the stopper open, the vial lurched from her now undexterous hand. The second Coinshot grinned as he Pushed the vial away, tipping it and spraying its contents across the floor.

Vin growled, but her mind was growing fuzzy. She needed pewter. Without it, the large coin wound in her shoulder—its blood turning her lacy sleeve red—and the crushing pain in her side were too much. She almost couldn't think.

A staff swung toward her head. She jerked to the side, rolling. However, she no longer had the grace or speed of pewter. A normal man's blow she could have dodged, but the attack of an Allomancer was another thing.

*I shouldn't have burned duralumin*! she thought. It had been a gamble, letting her kill two assassins, but it had left her too exposed. The staff descended toward her.

Something large slammed into the Thug, bearing him to the ground in a growling flurry of claws. Vin came out of her dodge as the Thug punched OreSeur in the head, cracking his skull. Yet, the Thug was bleeding and cursing, and his staff had rolled free. Vin snatched it up, scrambling to her feet and gritting her teeth as she drove the butt of the staff down into the man's face. He took the blow with a curse, swiping her feet out from under her with a kick.

She fell beside OreSeur. The wolfhound, oddly, was smiling. There was a wound in his shoulder.

No, n1ot a wound. An opening in the flesh—and a vial of metal hidden inside. Vin snatched it, rolling, keeping it hidden as the Thug regained his feet. She downed the liquid, and the flakes of metal it contained. On the floor before her, she could see the shadow of the Thug raising his weapon in a mighty overhand blow.

Pewter flared to life inside of her, and her wounds became mere annoying buzzes. She jerked to the side as the blow fell, hitting the floor, throwing up bits of wood. Vin flipped to her feet, slamming her fist into the arm of her surprised opponent.

It wasn't enough to break the bones, but it obviously hurt. The Thug—now missing two teeth—grunted in pain. To the side, Vin saw OreSeur on his feet, his dog's jaw hanging unnaturally. He nodded to her; the Thug would think him dead from the cracked skull.

More coins flew at Elend. She Pushed them away without even looking. In front of her, OreSeur struck the Thug from behind, making him spin in surprise just as Vin attacked. The Thug's staff passed within a finger's width of her head as it smashed into OreSeur's back, but her own hand took the man in the face. She didn't punch, however; that wouldn't do much against a Thug.

She had one finger out, and she had incredible aim. The Thug's eye popped as she rammed her finger into the socket.

She hopped back as he cried out, raising a hand to his face. She smashed her fists into his chest, throwing him to the ground, then jumped over OreSeur's crumpled form and grabbed her dagger off the ground.

The Thug died, clutching his face in agony, her dagger in his chest.

Vin spun, searching desperately for Elend. He'd taken one of the fallen Thugs' weapons and was fending off the two remaining Coinshots, who had apparently grown frustrated by her Pushing away all of their coin attacks. Instead, they had pulled out dueling canes to attack him directly. Elend's training had apparently been enough to keep him alive—but only because his opponents had to keep an eye on Vin to make certain she didn't try using coins herself.

Vin kicked up the staff of the man she'd just killed, catching it. A Coinshot cried out as she growled and dashed toward them, spinning her weapon. One had the presence of mind to Push off the bleachers and launch himself away. Vin's weapon still caught him in midair, throwing him to the side. The next swing took down his companion, who had tried to dash away.

Elend stood breathing heavily, his costume disheveled.

*He did better than I thought he would*, Vin admitted, flexing, trying to judge the damage to her side. She needed to get a bandage on that shoulder. The coin hadn't hit bone, but the bleeding would—

"Vin!" Elend cried out.

Something very strong suddenly grabbed her from behind. Vin choked as she was jerked backward and thrown to the ground.

The first Thug. She'd broken his leg, then forgotten—

He got his hands around her neck, squeezing as he knelt above her, his legs pressing against her chest, his face wild with rage. His eyes bulged, adrenaline mixing with pewter.

Vin gasped for breath. She was taken back to years before, to beatings performed by men looming above her. Camon, and Reen, and a dozen others.

*No*! she thought, flaring her pewter, struggling. He had her pinned, however, and he was much larger then she was. Much stronger. Elend s1lammed his staff against the man's back, but the Thug barely even flinched.

Vin couldn't breathe. She felt her throat being crushed. She tried to pry the Thug's hands apart, but it was as Ham had always said. Her small size was a great advantage to her in most situations—but when it came down to brute strength, she was no match for a man of bulk and muscle. She tried Pulling herself to the side, but the man's grip was too strong, her weight too small compared with his.

She struggled in vain. She had duralumin still—burning it only made other metals vanish, not the duralumin itself—but last time that had nearly gotten her killed. If she didn't take the Thug down quickly, she'd be left without pewter once again.

Elend pounded, yelling for help, but his voice sounded distant. The Thug pressed his face almost up against Vin's, and she could see his fury. At that moment, incredibly, a thought occurred to her.

*Where have I seen this man before*?

Her vision darkened. However, as the Thug constricted his grip, he leaned closer, closer, closer. . ..

She didn't have a choice. Vin burned duralumin and flared her pewter. She flung her opponent's hands aside and smashed her head upward into his face.

The man's head exploded as easily as the eyeball had earlier.

Vin gasped for breath and pushed the headless corpse off her. Elend stumbled back, his suit and face sprayed red. Vin stumbled to her feet. Her vision swam as her pewter dissipated—but even through that, she could see an emotion on Elend's face, stark as the blood on his brilliant white uniform.

Horror.

*No*, she thought, her mind fading. *Please, Elend, not that*. . ..

She fell forward, unable to maintain consciousness.

Elend sat in his ruined suit, hands against forehead, the wreckage of the Assembly Hall hauntingly empty around him.

"She'll live," Ham said. "She actually isn't hurt that badly. Or. . .well, not that badly for Vin. She just needs plenty of pewter and some of Sazed's care. He says the ribs aren't even broken, just cracked."

Elend nodded absently. Some soldiers were clearing away the corpses, among them the six men that Vin had killed, including the one at the end. . ..

Elend squeezed his eyes shut.

"What?" Ham asked.

Elend opened his eyes, forming his hand into a fist to keep it from shaking. "I know you've seen a lot of battles, Ham," he said. "But, I'm not used to them. I'm not used to. . ." He turned away as the soldiers dragged away the headless body.

Ham watched the corpse go.

"I've only actually seen her fight once before, you know," Elend said quietly. "In the palace, a year ago. She only threw a few men against the walls. It was nothing like this."

Ham took a seat beside Elend on the benches. "She's Mistborn, El. What did you expect? A single Thug can easily take down ten men—dozens, if he has a Coinshot to support him. A Mistborn. . .well, they're like an army in one person."

Elend nodded. "I know, Ham. I know she killed the Lord Ruler—she's even told me how she faced several Steel Inquisitors. But. . .I've just never seen. . ."

He closed his eyes again. The image of Vin stumbling toward him at the end, her beautiful white ball gown covered in the gore of a man she'd just killed with her forehead. . .

*She did it to protect me*, he thought. *But that doesn't make it any less disturbing*.

*Maybe that even makes it a little more disturbing*.

He forced his eyes open. He couldn't afford to be distracted; he had to be strong. He was king.

"You think Straff sent them?" Elend asked.

Ham nodded. "Who else? They targeted you and Cett. I guess your threat to kill Straff wasn't as binding as we assumed."

"How is Cett?"

"He barely escaped alive. As it is, they slaughtered half of his soldiers. In the fray, Demoux and I couldn't even see what was happening up on the stage with you and Vin."

Elend nodded. By the time Ham had arrived, Vin had already dealt with the assassins. It had taken her only a few minutes to wipe out all six of them.

Ham was silent for a moment. Finally, he turned to Elend. "I'll admit, El," he said quietly. "I'm impressed. I didn't see the fight, but I saw the aftermath. It's one thing to fight six Allomancers, but it's another to do that while trying to protect a regular person, and to keep any by-standers from harm. And that last man. . ."

"Do you remember when she saved Breeze?" Elend asked. "It was so far away, but I swear I saw her throw horses into the air with her Allomancy. Have you ever heard of anything like that?"

Ham shook his head.

Elend sat quietly for a moment. "I think we need to do some planning. What with today's events, we can't. . ."

Ham looked up as Elend trailed off. "What?"

"Messenger," Elend said, nodding toward the doorway. Sure enough, the man presented himself to the soldiers, then was escorted up to the stage. Elend stood, walking over to meet the short man, who wore Penrod's heraldry on his coat.

"My lord," the man said, bowing. "I've been sent to inform you that the voting will proceed at Lord Penrod's mansion."

"The voting?" Ham asked. "What nonsense is this? His Majesty was nearly killed today!"

"I'm sorry, my lord," the aide said. "I was simply told to deliver the message."

Elend sighed. He'd hoped that, in the confusion, Penrod wouldn't remember the deadline. "If they don't choose a new leader today, Ham, then I get to retain the crown. They've already wasted their grace period."

Ham sighed. "And if there are more assassins?" he asked quietly. "Vin will be laid up for a few days, at least."

"I can't rely on her to protect me all the time," Elend said. "Let's go."

"I vote for myself," Lord Penrod said.

*Not unexpected*, Elend thought. He sat in Penrod's comfortable lounge, accompanied by a group of shaken Assemblymen—none of whom, thankfully, had been hurt in the attack. Several held drinks, and there was a veritable army of guards waiting around the perimeter, eyeing each other warily. The crowded room also held Noorden and three other scribes, who were there to witness the voting, according to the law.

"I vote for Lord Penrod as well," said Lord Dukaler.

*Also not unexpected*, Elend thought. *I wonder how much that cost Penrod*.

Mansion Penrod was not a keep, but it was lavishly decorated. The plushness of Elend's chair was welcome as a relief from the tensions of the day. Yet, Elend feared that it was too soothing. It would be very easy to drift off. . ..

"I vote for Cett," said Lord Habren.

Elend perked up. It was the second for Cett, which put him behind Penrod by three.

Everyone turned to Elend. "I vote for myself," he said, trying to project a firmness that was hard to maintain after everything that had happened. The merchants were next. Elend settled back, prepared for the expected run of votes for Cett.

"I vote for Penrod," Philen said.

Elend sat upright, alert. *What*!

The next merchant voted for Penrod as well. As did the next, and the next. Elend sat stunned, listening. *What did I miss*? he thought. He glanced at Ham, who shrugged in confusion.

Philen glanced at Elend, smiling pleasantly. Elend couldn't tell if there was bitterness or satisfaction in that look, however. *They switched allegiances? That quickly*? Philen had been the one to sneak Cett into the city in the first place.

Elend looked down the row of merchants, trying with little success to gauge their reactions. Cett himself wasn't in the meeting; he had retreated to Keep Hasting to nurse his wound.

"I vote for Lord Venture," said Haws, foremost of the skaa faction. This also managed to get a stir out of the room. Haws met Elend's eye, and nodded. He was a firm believer in the Church of the Survivor, and while the different preachers of the religion were beginning to disagree on how to organize their followers, they all agreed that a believer on the throne would be better for them than handing the city over to Cett.

*There will be a price to pay for this allegiance*, Elend thought as the skaa voted. They knew Elend's reputation for honesty, and he would not betray their trust.

He had told them he would become an open member of their sect. He hadn't promised them belief, but he had promised them devotion. He still wasn't certain what he had given away, but both of them knew they would need each other.

"I vote for Penrod," said Jasten, a canal worker.

"As do I," said Thurts, his brother.

Elend gritted his teeth. He'd known they would be trouble; they never had liked the Church of the Survivor. But, four of the skaa had already given him their votes. With only two remaining, he had a very good shot at a deadlock.

"I vote for Venture," said the next man.

"I do, too," said the final skaa. Elend gave the man, Vet, a smile of appreciation.

That left fifteen votes for Penrod, two for Cett, and seven for Elend. Deadlock. Elend reclined slightly, head resting against the chair's pillowed back, sighing softly.

*You did your job, Vin*, he thought. *I did mine. Now we just need to keep this country in one piece*.

"Um," a voice asked, "am I allowed to change my vote?"

Elend opened his eyes. It was Lord Habren, one of the votes for Cett.

"I mean, it's obvious now that Cett isn't going to win," Habren said, flushing slightly. The young man was a distant cousin of the Elariel family, which was probably how he'd gotten his seat. Names still meant power in Luthadel.

"I'm not sure if you can change or not," Lord Penrod said.

"Well, I'd rather my vote meant something," Habren said. "There are only two votes for Cett, after all."

The room fell silent. One by one, the members of the Assembly turned to Elend. Noorden the scribe met Elend's eyes. There was a clause allowing for men to change their votes, assuming that the chancellor hadn't officially closed the voting—which, indeed, he hadn't.

The clause was a rather oblique; Noorden was probably the only other one in the room who knew the law well enough to interpret it. He nodded slightly, still meeting Elend's eyes. He would hold his tongue.

Elend sat still in a room full of men who trusted him, even as they rejected him. He could do as Noorden did. He could say nothing, or could say that he didn't know.

"Yes," Elend said softly. "The law allows for you to change your vote, Lord Habren. You may only do so once, and must do so before the winner is declared. Everyone else has the same opportunity."

"Then I vote for Lord Penrod," Habren said.

"As do I," said Lord Hue, the other who had voted for Cett.

Elend closed his eyes.

"Are there any other alterations?" Lord Penrod asked.

No one spoke.

"Then," Penrod said, "I see seventeen votes for myself, seven votes for Lord Venture. I officially close the voting and humbly accept your appointment as king. I shall serve as best I can in this capacity."

Elend stood, then slowly removed his crown. "Here," he said, setting it on the mantle. "You'll need this."

He nodded to Ham, then left without looking back at the men who had discarded him.

# PART FOUR
# KNIVES

*I know your argument. We speak of the Anticipation, of things foretold, of promises made by our greatest prophets of old. Of course the Hero of Ages will fit the prophecies. He will fit them perfectly. That's the idea.*

## 39

STRAFF VENTURE RODE QUIETLY IN the misty twilight air. Though he would have preferred a carriage, he felt it important to travel by horseback and present a compelling image for the troops. Zane, not surprisingly, chose to walk. He sauntered along beside Straff's horse, the two of them leading a group of fifty soldiers.

Even with the troops, Straff felt exposed. It wasn't just the mists, and it wasn't just the darkness. He could still remember her touch on his emotions.

"You've failed me, Zane," Straff said.

The Mistborn looked up, and—burning tin—Straff could see a frown on his face. "Failed?"

"Venture and Cett still live. Beyond that, you sent a batch of my best Allomancers to their deaths."

"I warned you that they might die," Zane said.

"For a purpose, Zane," Straff said sternly. "Why did you need a group of secret Allomancers if you were just going to send them on a suicide mission in the middle of a public gathering? You may assume our resources to be unlimited, but let me assure you—those six men can*not* be replaced."

It had taken Straff decades of work with his mistresses to gather so many hidden Allomancers. It had been pleasurable work, but work all the same. In one reckless gambit, Zane had destroyed a good third of Straff's Allomancer children.

*My children dead, our hand exposed, and that. . .creature of Elend's still lives*!

"I'm sorry, Father," Zane said. "I thought that the chaos and crowded quarters would keep the girl isolated, and force her not to use coins. I really thought this would work."

Straff frowned. He well knew that Zane thought himself more competent than his father; what Mistborn wouldn't think such a thing? Only a delicate mixture of bribery, threats, and manipulation kept Zane under control.

Yet, no matter what Zane thought, Straff was no fool. He knew, at that moment, that Zane was hiding something. *Why send those men to die*? Straff thought. *He must have intended them to fail—otherwise he would have helped them fight the girl*.

"No," Zane said softly, talking to himself as he sometimes did. "He's my father. . ." He trailed off, then shook his head sharply. "No. Not them either."

*Lord Ruler*, Straff thought, looking down at the muttering madman beside him. *What have I gotten myself into*? Zane was growing more unpredictable. Had he sent those men to die out of jealousy, out of lust for violence, or had he simply been bored? Straff didn't *think* that Zane had turned on him, but it was difficult to tell. Either way, Straff didn't like having to rely on Zane for his plans to work. He didn't really like having to rely on Zane for *anything*.

Zane looked up at Straff, and stopped talking. He did a good job of hiding his insanity, most of the time. A good enough job that Straff sometimes forgot about it. Yet, it still lurked there, beneath the surface. Zane was as dangerous a tool as Straff had ever used. The protection provided by a Mistborn outweighed the danger of Zane's insanity.

Barely.

"You needn't worry, Father," Zane said. "The city will still be yours."

"It will never be mine as long as that woman lives," Straff said. He shivered. *Perhaps that's what this was all about. Zane's attack was so* *obvious that everyone in the city knows I was behind it, and when that Mistborn demon wakes, she will come after me in retribution.*

*But, if that were Zane's goal, then why not just kill me himself*? Zane didn't make sense. He didn't have to. That was, perhaps, one of the advantages of being insane.

Zane shook his head. "I think you will be surprised, Father. One way or another, you will soon have nothing to fear from Vin."

"She thinks I tried to have her beloved king assassinated."

Zane smiled. "No, I don't think that she does. She's far too clever for that."

*Too clever to see the truth*?1 Straff thought. However, his tin-enhanced ears heard shuffling in the mists. He held up a hand, halting his procession. In the distance, he could just barely pick out the flickering blobs of wall-top torches. They were close to the city—uncomfortably close.

Straff's procession waited quietly. Then, from the mists before them, a man on horseback appeared, accompanied by fifty soldiers of his own. Ferson Penrod.

"Straff," Penrod said, nodding.

"Ferson."

"Your men did well," Penrod said. "I'm glad your son didn't have to die. He's a good lad. A bad king, but an earnest man."

*A lot of my sons died today, Ferson*, Straff thought. *The fact that Elend still lives isn't fortunate—it's irony*.

"You are ready to deliver the city?" Straff asked.

Penrod nodded. "Philen and his merchants want assurances that they will have titles to match those Cett promised them."

Straff waved a dismissive hand. "You know me, Ferson." *You used to practically grovel before me at parties every week*. "I always honor business agreements. I'd be an idiot not to appease those merchants—they're the ones who will bring me tax revenue from this dominance."

Penrod nodded. "I'm glad we could come to an understanding, Straff. I don't trust Cett."

"I doubt you trust me," Straff said.

Penrod smiled. "But I do know you, Straff. You're one of us—a Luthadel nobleman. Besides, you have produced the most stable kingdom in the dominances. That's all we're looking for right now. A little stability for this people."

"You almost sound like that fool son of mine."

Penrod paused, then shook his head. "Your boy isn't a fool, Straff. He's just an idealist. In truth, I'm sad to see his little utopia fall."

"If you are sad for him, Ferson, then you are an idiot, too."

Penrod stiffened. Straff caught the man's proud eyes, holding them with his stare, until Penrod looked down. The exchange was a simple one, mostly meaningless—but it did serve as a very important reminder.

Straff chuckled. "You're going to have to get used to being a small fish again, Ferson."

"I know."

"Be cheerful," Straff said. "Assuming this turnover of power happens as you promised, no one will have to end up dead. Who knows, maybe I'll let you keep that crown of yours."

Penrod looked up.

"For a long time, this land didn't have kings," Straff said quietly. "It had something greater. Well, I'm not the Lord Ruler—but I can be an emperor. You want to keep your crown and rule as a subject king under me?"

"That depends on the cost, Straff," Penrod said carefully.

*Not completely quelled, then*. Penrod had always been clever; he'd been the most important nobleman to stay behind in Luthadel, and his gamble had certainly worked.

"The cost is exorbitant," Straff said. "Ridiculously so."

"The atium," Penrod guessed.

Straff nodded. "Elend hasn't found it, but it's here, somewhere. I was the one who mined those geodes—my men spent1 decades harvesting them and bringing them to Luthadel. I know how much of it we harvested, and I know that nowhere near the same amount came back out in disbursements to the nobility. The rest is in that city, somewhere."

Penrod nodded. "I'll see what I can find, Straff."

Straff raised an eyebrow. "You need to get back into practice, Ferson."

Penrod paused, then bowed his head. "I'll see what I can find, *my lord*."

"Good. Now, what news did you bring of Elend's mistress?"

"She collapsed after the fight," Penrod said. "I employ a spy on the cooking staff, and she said she delivered a bowl of broth to Lady Vin's room. It returned cold."

Straff frowned. "Could this woman of yours slip the Mistborn something?"

Penrod paled slightly. "I. . .don't think that would be wise, my lord. Besides, you know Mistborn constitutions."

*Perhaps she really is incapacitated*, Straff thought. *If we moved in. . .*The chill of her touch on his emotions returned. Numbness. Nothingness.

"You needn't fear her so, my lord," Penrod said.

Straff raised an eyebrow. "I'm not afraid, I'm wary. I will not move into that city until my safety is assured—and until I move in, your city is in danger from Cett. Or, worse. What would happen if those koloss decide to attack the city, Ferson? I'm in negotiations with their leader, and he seems to be able to control them. For now. Have you ever seen the aftermath of a koloss slaughter?"

He probably hadn't; Straff hadn't until just recently. Penrod just shook his head. "Vin won't attack you. Not if the Assembly votes to put you in command of the city. The transfer will be perfectly legal."

"I doubt she cares about legality."

"Perhaps," Penrod said. "But Elend *does*. And, where he commands, the girl follows."

*Unless he has as little control over her as I have over Zane*, Straff thought, shivering. No matter what Penrod said, Straff wasn't going to take the city until that horrible creature was dealt with. In this, he could rely only on Zane.

And that thought frightened him almost as much as Vin did.

Without further discussion, Straff waved to Penrod, dismissing him. Penrod turned and retreated into the mists with his entourage. Even with his tin, Straff barely heard Zane land on the ground beside him. Straff turned, looking at the Mistborn.

"You really think he'd turn the atium over to you if he found it?" Zane asked quietly.

"Perhaps," Straff said. "He has to know that he'd never be able to hold on to it—he doesn't have the military might to protect a treasure like that. And, if he doesn't give it to me. . .well, it would probably be easier to take the atium from him than it would be to find it on my own."

Zane seemed to find the answer satisfactory. He waited for a few moments, staring into the mists. Then he looked at Straff, a curious expression on his face. "What time is it?"

Straff checked his pocket watch, something no Mistborn would carry. Too much metal. "Eleven seventeen," he said.

Zane nodded, turning back to look at the city. "It should have taken effect by now."

Straff frowned. Then he began to sweat. He flared tin, clamping his eyes shut. *There*! he thought, noticing a weakness inside of him. "More poison?" he asked, keeping the fear from his voice, forcing himself to be calm.

"How do you do it, Father?" Zane asked. "I thought for certain you'd missed this one. Yet, here you are, just fine."

Straff was beginning to feel weak. "One doesn't need to be Mistborn to be capable, Zane," he snapped.

Zane shrugged, smiling in the haunting way only he could—keenly intelligent, yet eerily unstable. Then he just shook his head. "You win again," he said, then shot upward into the sky, churning mists with his passing.

Straff immediately turned his horse, trying to maintain his decorum as he urged it back toward the camp. He could feel the poison. Feel it stealing his life. Feel it threatening him, overcoming him. . ..

He went, perhaps, too quickly. It was difficult to maintain an air of strength when you were dying. Finally, he broke into a gallop. He left his startled guards behind, and they called in surprise, breaking into a jog to try and keep up.

Straff ignored their complaints. He kicked the horse faster. Could he feel the poison slowing his reactions? Which one had Zane used? Gurwraith? No, it required injection. Tompher, perhaps? Or. . .perhaps he had found one that Straff didn't even know about.

He could only hope that wasn't the case. For, if Straff didn't know of the poison, then Amaranta probably wouldn't know of it either, and wouldn't be able to put the antidote into her catch-all healing potion.

The lights of camp illuminated the mists. Soldiers cried out as Straff approached, and he was nearly run through as one of his own men leveled a spear at the charging horse. Fortunately, the man recognized him in time. Straff rode the man down even as he turned aside his spear.

Straff charged right up to his tent. By now, his men were scattering, preparing as if for an invasion, or some other attack. There was no way he could hide this from Zane.

*I wouldn't be able to hide my death either*.

"My lord!" a captain said, dashing up to him.

"Send for Amaranta," Straff said, stumbling off his horse.

The soldier paused. "Your mistress, lord?" the man said, frowning. "Why—"

"*Now*!" Straff commanded, throwing back his tent flap, walking inside. He paused, legs trembling as the tent flap closed. He wiped his brow with a hesitant hand. Too much sweat.

*Damn him*! he thought with frustration. *I have to kill him, contain him. . .I have to do something. I can't rule like this*!

But what? He'd sat up nights, he'd wasted days, trying to decide what to do about Zane. The atium he used to bribe the man no longer seemed a good motivator. Zane's actions this day—slaughtering Straff's children in an obviously hopeless attempt to kill Elend's mistress—proved that he could no longer be trusted, even in a small way.

Amaranta arrived with surprising speed, and she immediately began mixing her antidote. Eventually, as Straff slurped down the horrid-tasting concoction—feeling its healing effects immediately—he came to an uneasy conclusion.

Zane had to die.

*An1d yet. . .something about all this seemed so convenient. It felt almost as if we constructed a hero to fit our prophecies, rather than allowing one to arise naturally. This was the worry I had, the thing that should have given me pause when my brethren came to me, finally willing to believe*.

# 40

ELEND SAT BESIDE HER BED.

That comforted her. Though she slept fitfully, a piece of her knew that he was there, watching over her. It felt odd to be beneath his protective care, for she was the one who usually did the guarding.

So, when she finally woke, she wasn't surprised to find him in the chair beside her bed, reading quietly by soft candlelight. As she came fully awake, she didn't jump up, or search the room with apprehension. Instead, she sat up slowly, pulling the blanket up under her arms, then took a sip of the water that had been left for her beside the bed.

Elend closed the book and turned toward her, smiling. Vin searched those soft eyes, delving for hints of the horror she had seen before. The disgust, the terror, the shock.

He knew her for a monster. How could he smile so kindly?

"Why?" she asked quietly.

"Why what?" he asked.

"Why wait here?" she said. "I'm not dying—I remember that much."

Elend shrugged. "I just wanted to be near you."

She said nothing. A coal stove burned in the corner, though it needed more fuel. Winter was close, and it was looking to be a cold one. She wore only a nightgown; she'd asked the maids not to put one on her, but by then Sazed's draught—to help her sleep—had already begun taking effect, and she hadn't had the energy to argue.

She pulled the blanket closer. Only then did she realize something she should have noticed earlier. "Elend! You're not wearing your uniform."

He looked down at his clothing—a nobleman's suit from his old wardrobe, with an unbuttoned maroon vest. The jacket was too big for him. He shrugged. "No need to continue the charade anymore, Vin."

"Cett is king?" she asked with a sinking feeling.

Elend shook his head. "Penrod."

"That doesn't make sense."

"I know," he said. "We aren't sure why the merchants betrayed Cett—but it doesn't really matter anymore. Penrod is a far better choice anyway. Than either Cett, or me."

"You know that's not true."

Elend sat back contemplatively. "I don't know, Vin. I thought I was the better man. Yet, while I thought up all kinds of schemes to keep the throne from Cett, I never really considered the one plan that would have been certain to defeat him—that of giving my support to Penrod, combining our votes. What if my arrogance had landed us with Cett? I wasn't thinking of the people."

"Elend. . ." she said, laying a hand on his arm.

And he flinched.

It was slight, almost unnoticeable, and he covered it quickly. But the damage was done. Damage she had caused, damage within him. He had finally seen—really seen—what she was. He'd fallen in love with a lie.

"What?" he said, looking into her face.

"Nothing," Vin said. She withdrew her hand. Inside, something cracked. *I love him so much. Why? Why did I let him see? If only I'd had a choice*!

*He's betraying you*, Reen's voice whispered in the back of her mind. *Everyone will leave you eventually, Vin*.

Elend sighed, glancing toward the shutters to her room. They were closed, keeping the mists out, though Vin could see the darkness beyond.

"The thing is, Vin," he said quietly, "I never really thought it would end this way. I trusted them, right to the end. The people—the Assemblymen they chose—I trusted that they would do the right thing. When they didn't choose me, I was actually surprised. I shouldn't have been. We *knew* that I was the long shot. I mean, they had already voted me out once. But, I'd convinced myself that was just a warning. Inside, in my heart, I thought that they would reinstate me."

He shook his head. "Now, I either have to admit that my faith in them was wrong, or I have to trust in their decision."

*That* was what she loved: his goodness, his simple honesty. Things as odd and exotic to a skaa urchin as her own Mistborn nature must be to most people. Even among all the good men of Kelsier's crew, even amid the best of the nobility, she had never found another man like Elend Venture. A man who would rather believe that the people who had dethroned him were just trying to do the right thing.

At times, she had felt a fool for falling in love with the first nobleman whom she grew to know. But now she realized that her love of Elend had not come about because of simple convenience or proximity. It had come because of who Elend was. The fact that she had found him first was an event of incredible fortune.

And now. . .it was over. At least, in the form it had once had. But, she'd known all along that it would turn out this way. That was why she'd refused his marriage proposal, now over a year old. She couldn't marry him. Or, rather, she couldn't let him marry her.

"I know that sorrow in your eyes, Vin," Elend said softly.

She looked at him with shock.

"We can get past this," he said. "The throne wasn't everything. We might be better off this way, actually. We did our best. Now it's someone else's turn to try."

She smiled wanly. *He doesn't know. He must* never *know how much this hurts. He's a good man—he'd try to force himself to keep loving me*.

"But," he said, "you should get some more rest."

"I feel fine," Vin said, stretching slightly. Her side hurt, and her neck ached, but pewter burned within her, and none of her wounds were debilitating. "I need to—"

She cut herself off as a realization hit her. She sat upright, the sudden motion making her rigid with pain. The day before was a blur, but. . .

"*OreSeur*!" she said, pushing aside the blanket.

"He's fine, Vin," Elend said. "He's a kandra. Broken bones mean nothing to him."

She paused, half out of bed, suddenly feeling foolish. "Where is he?"

"Digesting a new body," Elend said, smiling.

"Why the smile?" she asked.

"I've just never heard someone express that much concern for a kandra before."

"Well, I don't see why not," Vin said, climbing back in bed. "OreSeur risked his life for me."

"He's a kandra, Vin," Elend repeated. "I don't think those men could have killed him; I doubt even a Mistborn could."

Vin paused. *Not even a Mistborn could*. . .. What bothered her about that statement? "Regardless," she said. "He feels pain. He took two serious blows on my behalf."

"Just fulfilling his Contract."

*His Contract*. . .. OreSeur had attacked a human. He had *broken* his Contract. For her.

"What?" Elend asked.

"Nothing," Vin said quickly. "Tell me about the armies."

Elend eyed her, but allowed the conversation to change directions. "Cett is still holed up in Keep Hasting. We're not sure what his reaction will be. The Assembly didn't choose him, which can't be good. And yet, he hasn't protested—he has to realize that he's trapped in here now."

"He must have really believed that we'd choose him," Vin said, frowning. "Why else would he come into the city?"

Elend shook his head. "It was an odd move in the first place. Anyway, I have advised the Assembly to try and make a deal with him. I think he believes that the atium isn't in the city, so there's really no reason for him to want Luthadel."

"Except for the prestige."

"Which wouldn't be worth losing his army," Elend's said. "Or his life."

Vin nodded. "And your father?"

"Silent," Elend said. "It's strange, Vin. This isn't like him—those assassins were so blatant. I'm not sure what to make of them."

"The assassins," Vin said, sitting back in the bed. "You've identified them?"

Elend shook his head. "Nobody recognizes them."

Vin frowned.

"Maybe we aren't as familiar with the noblemen out in the Northern Dominance as we thought we were."

*No,* Vin thought. *No, if they were from a city as close as Urteau—Straff's home—some of them would be known, wouldn't they*? "I thought I recognized one of them," Vin finally said.

"Which one?"

"The. . .last one."

Elend paused. "Ah. Well, I guess we won't be able to identify him now."

"Elend, I'm sorry you had to see that."

"What?" Elend asked. "Vin, I've seen death before. I was forced to attend the Lord Ruler's executions, remember?" He paused. "Not that what you did was like that, of course."

*Of course*.

"You were amazing," Elend said. "I'd be dead right now if you hadn't stopped those Allomancers—and it's likely that Penrod and the other Assemblymen would have fared the same. You saved the Central Dominance."

*We always have to be the knives*. . ..

Elend smiled, standing. "Here," he said, walking to the side of the room. "This is cold, but Sazed said you should eat it when you awoke." He returned with a bowl of broth.

"Sazed sent it?" Vin asked skepticall1y. "Drugged, then?"

Elend smiled. "He warned me not to taste it myself—he said it was filled with enough sedatives to knock me out for a month. It takes a lot to affect you pewter burners."

He set the bowl on the bedstand. Vin eyed it through narrowed eyes. Sazed was probably worried that, despite her wounds, she'd go out and prowl the city if she were left on her own. He was probably right. With a sigh, Vin accepted the bowl and began to sip at it.

Elend smiled. "I'll send someone to bring you more coal for the stove," he said. "There are some things I need to do."

Vin nodded, and he left, pulling the door shut behind him.

When Vin next awoke, she saw that Elend was still there. He stood in the shadows, watching her. It was still dark outside. The shutters to her window were open, and mist coated the floor of the room.

The shutters were *open*.

Vin sat upright and turned toward the figure in the corner. It wasn't Elend. "Zane," she said flatly.

He stepped forward. It was so easy to see the similarities between him and Elend, now that she knew what to look for. They had the same jaw, the same wavy dark hair. They even had similar builds, now that Elend had been exercising.

"You sleep too soundly," Zane said.

"Even a Mistborn's body needs sleep to heal."

"You shouldn't have been hurt in the first place," Zane said. "You should have been able to kill those men with ease, but you were distracted by my brother, and by trying to keep the people of the room from harm. *This* is what he's done to you—he's changed you, so that you no longer see what needs to be done, you just see what he wants you to do."

Vin raised an eyebrow, quietly feeling beneath her pillow. Her dagger was there, fortunately. *He didn't kill me in my sleep,* she thought. *That has to be a good sign*.

He took another step forward. She tensed. "What is your game, Zane?" she said. "First, you tell me that you've decided not to kill me—then you send a group of assassins. What now? Have you come to finish the job?"

"We didn't send those assassins, Vin," Zane said quietly.

Vin snorted.

"Believe as you wish," Zane said, taking another step forward so that he stood right beside her bed, a tall figure of blackness and solemnity. "But, my father is still terrified of you. Why would he risk retribution by trying to kill Elend?"

"It was a gamble," Vin said. "He hoped those assassins would kill me."

"Why use them?" Zane asked. "He has me—why use a bunch of Mistings to attack you in the middle of a crowded room, when he could just have me use atium in the night and kill you?"

Vin hesitated.

"Vin," he said, "I watched the corpses being carried away from the Assembly Hall, and I recognized some of them from Cett's entourage."

*That's it*! Vin thought. *That's where I saw that Thug whose face I smashed! He was at Keep Hasting, peeking out from the kitchen while we ate with Cett, pretending to be a servant*.

"But, the assassins attacked Cett too. . ." Vin trailed off. It was basic thieving strategy: if you had a front t1hat you wanted to escape suspicion as you burgled the shops around it, you made certain to "steal" from yourself as well.

"The assassins who attacked Cett were all normal men," Vin said. "No Allomancers. I wonder what he told them—that they'd be allowed to 'surrender' once the battle turned? But why fake an attack in the first place? He was favored for the throne."

Zane shook his head. "Penrod made a deal with my father, Vin. Straff offered the Assembly wealth beyond anything Cett could provide. That's why the merchants changed their votes. Cett must have gotten wind of their betrayal. He has spies enough in the city."

Vin sat, dumbfounded. *Of course*! "And the only way that Cett could see to win. . ."

"Was to send the assassins," Zane said with a nod. "They were to attack all three candidates, killing Penrod and Elend, but leaving Cett alive. The Assembly would assume that they'd been betrayed by Straff, and Cett would become king."

Vin gripped her knife with a shaking hand. She was growing tired of games. Elend had almost died. She had almost failed.

Part of her, a burning part, wanted to do what she'd first been inclined to. To go out and kill Cett and Straff, to remove the danger the most efficient way possible.

*No,* she told herself forcefully. *No, that was Kelsier's way. It's not my way. It's not. . .Elend's way*.

Zane turned away, facing toward her window, staring at the small waterfall-like flow of mist spilling through. "I should have arrived sooner to the fight. I was outside, with the crowds that came too late to get a seat. I didn't even know what was happening until the people started piling out."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "You almost sound sincere, Zane."

"I have no wish to see you dead," he said, turning. "And I certainly don't want to see harm befall Elend."

"Oh?" Vin asked. "Even though he's the one who had all the privileges, while you were despised and kept locked away?"

Zane shook his head. "It isn't like that. Elend is. . .pure. Sometimes—when I hear him speak—I wonder if I would have become like him, if my childhood had been different."

He met her eyes in the dark room. "I'm. . .broken, Vin. Maddened. I can never be like Elend. But, killing him wouldn't change me. It's probably best that he and I were raised apart—it's far better that he doesn't know about me. Better that he remain as he is. Untainted."

"I. . ." Vin floundered. What could she say? She could see actual sincerity in Zane's eyes.

"I'm not Elend," Zane said. "I never will be—I'm not a part of his world. But, I don't think that I *should* be. Neither should you. After the fighting was done, I finally got into the Assembly Hall. I saw Elend standing over you, at the end. I saw the look in his eyes."

She turned away.

"It's not his fault that he is what he is," Zane said. "As I said, he's pure. But, that makes him different from us. I've tried to explain it to you. I wish you could have seen that look in his eyes. . .."

*I saw it*, Vin thought. She didn't want to remember it, but she *had* seen it. That awful look of horror, a reaction to something terrible and alien, something beyond understanding.

"I can't be Elend," Zane s1aid quietly, "but you don't want me to be." He reached over and dropped something on her bedstand. "Next time, be prepared."

Vin snatched the object as Zane began to walk toward the window. The ball of metal rolled in her palm. The shape was bumpy, but the texture was smooth—like a nugget of gold. She knew it without having to swallow it. "*Atium*?"

"Cett may send other assassins," Zane said, hopping up onto the windowsill.

"You're *giving* it to me?" she asked. "There's enough here for a good two minutes of burning!" It was a small fortune, easily worth twenty thousand boxings before the Collapse. Now, with the scarcity of atium. . .

Zane turned back toward her. "Just keep yourself safe," he said, then launched himself out into the mists.

Vin did not like being injured. Logically, she knew that other people probably felt the same way; after all, who would enjoy pain and debilitation? Yet, when the others got sick, she sensed frustration from them. Not terror.

When sick, Elend would spend the day in bed, reading books. Clubs had taken a bad blow during practice several months before, and he had grumbled about the pain, but had stayed off his leg for a few days without much prodding.

Vin was growing to be more like them. She could lie in bed as she did now, knowing that nobody would try to slit her throat while she was too weak to call for help. Still, she itched to rise, to show that she wasn't very badly wounded. Lest someone think otherwise, and try to take advantage.

*It isn't like that anymore*! she told herself. It was light outside, and though Elend had been back to visit several times, he was currently away. Sazed had come to check on her wounds, and had begged her to stay in bed for "at least one more day." Then he'd gone back to his studies. With Tindwyl.

*What ever happened to those two hating each other*? she thought with annoyance. *I barely get to see him*.

Her door opened. Vin was pleased that her instincts were still keen enough that she immediately grew tense, reaching for her daggers. Her pained side protested the sudden motion.

Nobody entered.

Vin frowned, still tense, until a canine head popped up over the top of her footboard. "Mistress?" said a familiar, half growl of a voice.

"OreSeur?" Vin said. "You're wearing another dog's body!"

"Of course, Mistress," OreSeur said, hopping up onto the bed. "What else would I have?"

"I don't know," Vin said, putting away her daggers. "When Elend said you'd had him get you a body, I just assumed that you'd asked for a human. I mean, everyone saw my 'dog' die."

"Yes," OreSeur said, "but it will be simple to explain that you got a new animal. You are expected to have a dog with you now, and so *not* having one would provoke notice."

Vin sat quietly. She'd changed back to trousers and shirt, despite Sazed's protests. Her dresses hung in the other room, one noticeably absent. At times, when she looked at them, she thought she saw the gorgeous white gown hanging there, sprayed with blood. Tindwyl had been wrong: Vin couldn't be both Mistborn and lady. The horror she had seen in the eyes of the Assemblymen was enough proof for her.

"You didn't need to take a dog's body, OreSeur," Vin said quietly. "I'd ra1ther that you were happy."

"It is all right, Mistress," OreSeur said. "I have grown. . .fond of these kinds of bones. I should like to explore their advantages a little more before I return to human ones."

Vin smiled. He'd chosen another wolfhound—a big brute of a beast. The colorings were different: more black than gray, without any patches of white. She approved.

"OreSeur. . ." Vin said, looking away. "Thank you for what you did for me."

"I fulfill my Contract."

"I've been in other fights," Vin said. "You never intervened in those."

OreSeur didn't answer immediately. "No, I didn't."

"Why this time?"

"I did what felt right, Mistress," OreSeur said.

"Even if it contradicted the Contract?"

OreSeur sat up proudly on his haunches. "I did *not* break my Contract," he said firmly.

"But you attacked a human."

"I didn't kill him," OreSeur said. "We are cautioned to stay out of combat, lest we accidentally cause a human death. Indeed, most of my brethren think that helping someone kill is the same as killing, and feel it is a breach of the Contract. The words are distinct, however. I did nothing wrong."

"And if that man you tackled had broken his neck?"

"Then I would have returned to my kind for execution," OreSeur said.

Vin smiled. "Then you *did* risk your life for me."

"In a small way, I suppose," OreSeur said. "The chances of my actions directly causing that man's death were slim."

"Thank you anyway."

OreSeur bowed his head in acceptance.

"Executed," Vin said. "So you can be killed?"

"Of course, Mistress," OreSeur said. "We aren't immortal."

Vin eyed him.

"I will say nothing specific, Mistress," OreSeur said. "As you might imagine, I would rather not reveal the weaknesses of my kind. Please suffice it to say that they exist."

Vin nodded, but frowned in thought, bringing her knees up to her chest. Something was still bothering her, something about what Elend had said earlier, something about OreSeur's actions. . ..

"But," she said slowly, "you couldn't have been killed by swords or staves, right?"

"Correct," OreSeur said. "Though our flesh looks like yours, and though we feel pain, beating us has no permanent effect."

"Then why are you afraid?" Vin said, finally lighting upon what was bothering her.

"Mistress?"

"Why did your people make the Contract?" Vin asked. "Why subjugate yourselves to mankind? If our soldiers couldn't hurt you, then why even worry about us?"

"You have Allomancy," OreSeur said.

"So, Allomancy can kill you?"

"No," OreSeur said, shaking his canine head. "It cannot. But, perhaps we should change the topic. I'm sorry, Mistress. This is very dangerous ground for me."1p>

"I understand," Vin said, sighing. "It's just so frustrating. There's so much I don't know—about the Deepness, about the legal politics. . .even about my own friends!" She sat back, looking up at the ceiling. *And there's* still *a spy in the palace. Demoux or Dockson, likely. Maybe I should just order them both taken and held for a time? Would Elend even do such a thing*?

OreSeur was watching her, apparently noting her frustration. Finally, he sighed. "Perhaps there are some things I can speak of, Mistress, if I am careful. What do you know of the origin of the kandra?"

Vin perked up. "Nothing."

"We did not exist before the Ascension," he said.

"You mean to say that the Lord Ruler created you?"

"That is what our lore teaches," OreSeur said. "We are not certain of our purpose. Perhaps we were to be Father's spies."

"Father?" Vin said. "It seems strange to hear him spoken of that way."

"The Lord Ruler created us, Mistress," OreSeur said. "We are his children."

"And I killed him," Vin said. "I. . .feel like I should apologize."

"Just because he is our Father does not mean we accepted everything he did, Mistress," OreSeur said. "Cannot a human man love his father, yet not believe he is a good person?"

"I suppose."

"Kandra theology about Father is complex," OreSeur said. "Even for us, it is difficult to sort through it sometimes."

Vin frowned. "OreSeur? How old are you?"

"Old," he said simply.

"Older than Kelsier?"

"Much," OreSeur. "But not as old as you are thinking. I do not remember the Ascension."

Vin nodded. "Why tell me all of this?"

"Because of your original question, Mistress. Why do we serve the Contract? Well, tell me—if you were the Lord Ruler, and had his power, would you have created servants without building into them a way that you could control them?"

Vin nodded slowly in understanding.

"Father took little thought of the kandra from about the second century after his Ascension," OreSeur said. "We tried to be independent for a time, but it was as I explained, humankind resented us. Feared us. And, some of them knew of our weaknesses. When my ancestors considered their options, they eventually chose voluntary servitude as opposed to forced slavery."

*He created them,* Vin thought. She had always shared a bit of Kelsier's view regarding the Lord Ruler—that he was more man than deity. But, if he'd truly created a completely new species, then there had to have been some divinity in him.

*The power of the Well of Ascension,* she thought. *He took it for himself—but it didn't last. It must have run out, and quickly. Otherwise, why would he have needed armies to conquer*?

An initial burst of power, the ability to create, to change—perhaps to save. He'd pushed back the mists, and in the process he'd somehow made the ash begin to fall and the sky turn red. He'd created the kandra to serve him—and probably the koloss, too. He might even have created Allomancers themselves.

And a1fter that, he had returned to being a normal man. Mostly. The Lord Ruler had still held an inordinate amount of power for an Allomancer, and had managed to keep control of his creations—and he had somehow kept the mists from killing.

Until Vin had slain him. Then the koloss had begun to rampage, and the mists had returned. The kandra hadn't been beneath his control at that time, so they remained as they were. But, he built into them a method of control, should he need it. A way to make the kandra serve him. . ..

Vin closed her eyes, and quested out lightly with her Allomantic senses. OreSeur had said that kandra couldn't be affected by Allomancy—but she knew something else about the Lord Ruler, something that had distinguished him from other Allomancers. His inordinate power had allowed him to do things he shouldn't have been able to.

Things like pierce copperclouds, and affect metals inside of a person's body. Maybe *that* was how he controlled the kandra, the thing that OreSeur was speaking of. The reason they feared Mistborn.

Not because Mistborn could kill them, but because Mistborn could do something else. Enslave them, somehow. Tentatively, testing what he'd said earlier, Vin reached out with a Soothing and touched OreSeur's emotions. Nothing happened.

*I can do some of the same things as the Lord Ruler*, she thought. *I can pierce copperclouds. Perhaps, if I just Push harder*. . .

She focused, and *Pushed* on his emotions with a powerful Soothing. Again, nothing happened. Just as he'd told her. She sat for a moment. And then, impulsively, she burned duralumin and tried one final, massive Push.

OreSeur immediately let out a howl so bestial and unexpected that Vin jumped to her feet in shock, flaring pewter.

OreSeur fell to the bed, shaking.

"OreSeur!" she said, dropping to her knees, grabbing his head. "I'm sorry!"

"Said too much. . ." he muttered, still shaking. "I knew I'd said too much."

"I didn't mean to hurt you," Vin said.

The shaking subsided, and OreSeur fell still for a moment, breathing quietly. Finally, he pulled his head out of her arms. "What you meant is immaterial, Mistress," he said flatly. "The mistake was mine. Please, never do that again."

"I promise," she said. "I'm sorry."

He shook his head, crawling off the bed. "You shouldn't even have been able to do it. There are strange things about you, Mistress—you are like the Allomancers of old, before the passage of generations dulled their powers."

"I'm sorry," Vin said again, feeling helpless. *He saved my life, nearly broke his Contract, and I do this to him*. . ..

OreSeur shrugged. "It is done. I need to rest. I suggest that you do the same."

*After that, I began to see other problems.*

# 41

"'I WRITE THIS RECORD NOW,'" Sazed read out loud, "'pounding it into a metal slab, because I am afraid. Afraid for myself, yes—I admit to being human. If Alendi does return from the Well of Ascension, I am certain that my death will be one of his first objectives. He is not an evil man, but he is a ruthless one. That is, I think, a product of what he has been through.'"

"That fits what we know of Alendi from the logbook," Tindwyl said. "Assuming that Alendi is that book's author."

Sazed glanced at his pile of notes, running over the basics in his mind. Kwaan had been an ancient Terris scholar. He had discovered Alendi, a man he began to think—through his studies—might be the Hero of Ages, a figure from Terris prophecy. Alendi had listened to him, and had become a political leader. He had conquered much of the world, then traveled north to the Well of Ascension. By then, however, Kwaan had apparently changed his mind about Alendi—and had tried to stop him from getting to the Well.

It fit together. Even though the logbook author never mentioned his own name, it was obvious that he was Alendi. "It is a very safe assumption, I think," Sazed said. "The logbook even speaks of Kwaan, and the falling-out they had."

They sat beside each other in Sazed's rooms. He had requested, and received, a larger desk to hold their multitudinous notes and scribbled theories. Beside the door sat the remnants of their afternoon meal, a soup they had hurriedly gulped down. Sazed itched to take the dishes down to the kitchens, but he hadn't been able to pull himself away yet.

"Continue," Tindwyl requested, sitting back in her chair, looking more relaxed than Sazed had ever seen her. The rings running down the sides of her ears alternated in color—a gold or copper followed by a tin or iron. It was such a simple thing, but there was a beauty to it.

"Sazed?"

Sazed started. "I apologize," he said, then turned back to his reading. "'I am also afraid, however, that all I have known—that my story—will be forgotten. I am afraid for the world that may come. Afraid because my plans failed. Afraid of a doom brought by the Deepness.'"

"Wait," Tindwyl said. "Why did he fear that?"

"Why would he not?" Sazed asked. "The Deepness—which we assume is the mist—was killing his people. Without sunlight, their crops would not grow, and their animals could not graze."

"But, if Kwaan feared the Deepness, then he should not have opposed Alendi," Tindwyl said. "He was climbing to the Well of Ascension to *defeat* the Deepness."

"Yes," Sazed said. "But by then, Kwaan was convinced that Alendi wasn't the Hero of Ages."

"But why would that matter?" Tindwyl said. "It didn't take a specific person to stop the mists—Rashek's success proves that. Here, skip to the end. Read that passage about Rashek."

"'I have a young nephew, one Rashek,'" Sazed read. "'He hates all of Khlennium with the passion of envious youth. He hates Alendi even more acutely—though the two have never met—for Rashek feels betrayed that one of our oppressors should have been chosen as the Hero of Ages.

"'Alendi will need guides through the Terris mountains. I have charged Rashek with making certain that he and his trusted friends are chosen as those guides. Rashek is to try and lead Alendi in the wrong direction, to discourage him or otherwise foil his quest. Alendi won't know that he has been deceived.

"'If Rashek fails to lead Alendi astray, then I have instructed the lad to kill my former friend. It is a distant hope. Alendi has survived assassins, wars, and catastrophes. And yet, I hope that in the frozen mountains of Terris, he may finally be exposed. I hope for a miracle.

"'Alendi must not reach the Well of1 Ascension. He must not take the power for himself.'"

Tindwyl sat back, frowning.

"What?"

"Something is wrong there, I think," she said. "But I cannot tell you precisely what."

Sazed scanned the text again. "Let us break it down to simple statements, then. Rashek—the man who became the Lord Ruler—was Kwaan's nephew."

"Yes," Tindwyl said.

"Kwaan sent Rashek to mislead, or even kill, his once-friend Alendi the Conqueror—a man climbing the mountains of Terris to seek the Well of Ascension."

Tindwyl nodded.

"Kwaan did this because he feared what would happen if Alendi took the Well's power for himself."

Tindwyl raised a finger. "Why did he fear that?"

"It seems a rational fear, I think," Sazed said.

"Too rational," Tindwyl replied. "Or, rather, perfectly rational. But, tell me, Sazed. When you read Alendi's logbook, did you get the impression that he was the type who would take that power for himself?"

Sazed shook his head. "Actually, the opposite. That is part of what made the logbook so confusing—we couldn't figure out why the man represented within would have done as we assumed he must have. I think that is part of what eventually led Vin to guess that the Lord Ruler wasn't Alendi at all, but Rashek, his packman."

"And Kwaan says that he knew Alendi well," Tindwyl said. "In fact, in this very rubbing, he compliments the man on several occasions. Calls him a good person, I believe."

"Yes," Sazed said, finding the passage. "'He is a good man—despite it all, he is a good man. A sacrificing man. In truth, all of his actions—all of the deaths, destructions, and pains that he has caused—have hurt him deeply.'"

"So, Kwaan knew Alendi well," Tindwyl said. "And thought highly of him. He also, presumably, knew his nephew Rashek well. Do you see my problem?"

Sazed nodded slowly. "Why send a man of wild temperament, one whose motivations are based on envy and hatred, to kill a man you thought to be good and of worthy temperament? It does seem an odd choice."

"Exactly," Tindwyl said, resting her arms on the table.

"But," Sazed said, "Kwaan says right here that he 'doubts that if Alendi reaches the Well of Ascension, he will take the power and then—in the name of the greater good—give it up.'"

Tindwyl shook her head. "It doesn't make sense, Sazed. Kwaan wrote several times about how he feared the Deepness, but then he tried to foil the hope of stopping it by sending a hateful youth to kill a respected, and presumably wise, leader. Kwaan practically *set up* Rashek to take the power

—if letting Alendi take the power was such a concern, wouldn't he have feared that Rashek might do the same?"

"Perhaps we simply see things with the clarity of those regarding events that have already occurred," Sazed said.

Tindwyl shook her head. "We're missing something, Sazed. Kwaan is a very rational, even deliberate, man—one can tell that from his narrative. He was the one who discovered Alendi, and was the first to tout him as the Hero of Ages. Why would he turn against him as he did?"

Sazed nodded, flipping thro1ugh his translation of the rubbing. Kwaan had gained much notoriety by discovering the Hero. He found the place he was looking for.

*There was a place for me in the lore of the Anticipation*, the text read. *I thought myself the Announcer, the prophet foretold to discover the Hero of Ages. Renouncing Alendi then would have been to renounce my new position, my acceptance, by the others*.

"Something dramatic must have happened," Tindwyl said. "Something that would make him turn against his friend, the source of his own fame. Something that pricked his conscience so sharply that he was willing to risk opposing the most powerful monarch in the land. Something so frightening that he took a ridiculous chance by sending this Rashek on an assassination mission."

Sazed leafed through his notes. "He fears both the Deepness and what would happen if Alendi took the power. Yet, he cannot seem to decide which one is the greater threat, and neither seems more present in the narrative than the other. Yes, I can see the problem here. Do you think, perhaps, Kwaan was trying to imply something by the inconsistency in his own arguments?"

"Perhaps," Tindwyl said. "The information is just so slim. I cannot judge a man without knowing the context of his life!"

Sazed looked up, eyeing her. "Perhaps we have been studying too hard," he said. "Shall we take a break?"

Tindwyl shook her head. "We don't have the time, Sazed."

He met her eyes. She was right on that point.

"You sense it too, don't you?" she asked.

He nodded. "This city will soon fall. The forces pressing upon it. . .the armies, the koloss, the civil confusion. . ."

"I fear it will be more violent than your friends hope, Sazed," Tindwyl said quietly. "They seem to believe that they can just continue to juggle their problems."

"They are an optimistic group," he said with a smile. "Unaccustomed to being defeated."

"This will be worse than the revolution," Tindwyl said. "I have studied these things, Sazed. I know what happens when a conqueror takes a city. People will die. Many people."

Sazed felt a chill at her words. There was a tension to Luthadel; war was coming to the city. Perhaps one army or another would enter by the blessing of the Assembly, but the other would still strike. The walls of Luthadel would run red when the siege finally ended.

And he feared that end was coming very, very soon.

"You are right," he said, turning back to the notes on his desktop. "We must continue to study. We should collect more of what we can find about the land before the Ascension, so that you may have the context you seek."

She nodded, showing a fatalistic resolve. This was not a task they could complete in the time they had. Deciphering the meaning of the rubbing, comparing it to the logbook, and relating it to the context of the period was a scholarly undertaking that would require the determined work of years.

Keepers had much knowledge—but in this case, it was almost too much. They had been gathering and transmitting records, stories, myths, and legends for so long that it took years for one Keeper to recite the collected works to a new initiate.

Fortunately, included with the mass of information were indexes and summaries created by the Keepers. On top 1of this came the notes and personal indexes each individual Keeper made. And yet, these only helped the Keeper understand just how much information he had. Sazed himself had spent his life reading, memorizing, and indexing religions. Each night, before he slept, he read some portion of a note or story. He was probably the world's foremost scholar on pre-Ascension religions, and yet he felt as if he knew so little.

Compounding all of that was the inherent unreliability of their information. A great deal of it came from the mouths of simple people, doing their best to remember what their lives had once been like—or, more often, what the lives of their grandparents had once been like. The Keepers hadn't been founded until late in the second century of the Lord Ruler's reign. By then, many religions had already been wiped out in their pure forms.

Sazed closed his eyes, dumped another index from a coppermind into his head, then began to search it. There wasn't much time, true, but Tindwyl and he were Keepers. They were accustomed to beginning tasks that others would have to finish.

Elend Venture, once king of the Central Dominance, stood on the balcony of his keep, overlooking the vast city of Luthadel. Though the first snows had yet to fall, the weather had grown cold. He wore an overcloak, tied at the front, but it didn't protect his face. A chill tingled his cheeks as a wind blew across him, whipping at his cloak. Smoke rose from chimneys, gathering like an ominous shadow above the city before rising up to meld with the ashen red sky.

For every house that produced smoke, there were two that did not. Many of those were probably deserted; the city held nowhere near the population it once had. However, he knew that many of those smokeless houses were still inhabited. Inhabited, and freezing.

*I should have been able to do more for them,* Elend thought, eyes open to the piercing cold wind. *I should have found a way to get more coal; I should have managed to provide for them all.*

It was humbling, even depressing, to admit that the Lord Ruler had done better than Elend himself. Despite being a heartless tyrant, the Lord Ruler had at least kept a significant portion of the population from starving or freezing. He had kept armies in check, and had kept crime at a manageable level.

To the northeast, the koloss army waited. It had sent no emissaries to the city, but it was more frightening than either Cett's or Straff's armies. The cold wouldn't scare away its occupants; despite their bare skin, they apparently took little notice of weather changes. This final army was the most disturbing of the three—more dangerous, more unpredictable, and impossible to deal with. Koloss did not bargain.

*We haven't been paying enough attention to that threat,* he thought as he stood on the balcony. *There's just been so much to do, so much to worry* *about, that we couldn't focus on an army that might be as dangerous to our enemies as it is to us*.

It was looking less and less likely that the koloss would attack Cett or Straff. Apparently, Jastes was enough in control to keep them waiting to take a shot at Luthadel itself.

"My lord," said a voice from behind. "Please, come back in. That's a fell wind. No use killing yourself from a chill."

Elend turned back. Captain Demoux stood dutifully in the room, along with another bodyguard. In the aftermath of the assassination attempt, Ham had insisted that Elend go about guarded. Elend hadn't complained, though he knew there was little reason for caution anymore. Straff 1wouldn't want to kill him now that he wasn't king.

*So earnest*, Elend thought, studying Demoux's face. *Why do I find him youthful? We're nearly the same age*.

"Very well," Elend said, turning and striding into the room. As Demoux closed the balcony doors, Elend removed his cloak. The suit below felt wrong on him. Sloppy, even though he had ordered it cleaned and pressed. The vest was too tight—his practice with the sword was slowly modifying his body—while the coat hung loosely.

"Demoux," Elend said. "When is your next Survivor rally?"

"Tonight, my lord."

Elend nodded. He'd feared that; it would be a cold night.

"My lord," Demoux said, "do you still intend to come?"

"Of course," Elend said. "I gave my word that I would join with your cause."

"That was before you lost the vote, my lord."

"That is immaterial," Elend said. "I am joining your movement because it is important to the skaa, Demoux, and I want to understand the will of my. . .of the people. I promised you dedication—and you shall have it."

Demoux seemed a bit confused, but spoke no further. Elend eyed his desk, considering some studying, but found it hard to motivate himself in the chill room. Instead, he pushed open the door and strode out into the hallway. His guards followed.

He stopped himself from turning toward Vin's rooms. She needed her rest, and it didn't do her much good to have him peeking in every half hour to check on her. So instead he turned to wander down a different passageway.

The back hallways of Keep Venture were tight, dark, stone constructions of labyrinthine complexity. Perhaps it was because he'd grown up in these passages, but he felt at home in their dark, secluded confines. They had been the perfect place for a young man who didn't really care to be found. Now he used them for another reason; the corridors provided a perfect place for extended walking. He didn't point himself in any particular direction, he just moved, working out his frustration to the beating of his own footsteps.

*I can't fix the city's problems*, he told himself. *I have to let Penrod handle that—he's the one the people want*.

That should have made things easier for Elend. It let him focus on his own survival, not to mention let him spend time revitalizing his relationship with Vin. She, however, seemed different lately. Elend tried to tell himself it was just her injury, but he sensed something deeper. Something in the way she looked at him, something in the way she reacted to his affection. And, despite himself, he could think of only one thing that had changed.

He was no longer king.

Vin was not shallow. She had shown him nothing but devotion and love during their two years together. And yet, how could she not react—even if unconsciously—to his colossal failure? During the assassination attempt, he had watched her fight. *Really* watched her fight, for the first time. Until that day, he hadn't realized just how amazing she was. She wasn't just a warrior, and she wasn't just an Allomancer. She was a force, like thunder or wind. The way she had killed that last man, smashing his head with her own. . .

*How could she love a man like me*? he thought. *I couldn't even hold my throne. I wrote the very laws that deposed me*.

He sighed, continuing to walk. He felt like he should be scrambling, trying to figure out a way to convince Vin that he was worthy of her. But that would just make him seem more incompetent. There was no correcting past mistakes, especially since he could see no real "mistakes" he had made. He had done the best he could, and that had proven insufficient.

He paused at an intersection. Once, a relaxing dip into a book would have been enough to calm him. Now he felt nervous. Tense. A little. . .like he assumed Vin usually felt.

*Maybe I could learn from her*, he thought. *What would Vin do in my situation*? She certainly wouldn't just wander around, brooding and feeling sorry for herself. Elend frowned, looking down a hallway lighted by flickering oil lamps, only half of them lit. Then he took off, waking with a determined stride toward a particular set of rooms.

He knocked quietly, and got no response. Finally, he poked his head in. Sazed and Tindwyl sat quietly before a desk piled high with scraps of paper and ledgers. They both sat staring, as if at nothing, their eyes bearing the glazedover look of someone who had been stunned. Sazed's hand rested on the table. Tindwyl's rested on top of it.

Sazed shook himself alert suddenly, turning to regard Elend. "Lord Venture! I am sorry. I did not hear you enter."

"It's all right, Saze," Elend said, walking into the room. As he did, Tindwyl shook awake as well, and she removed her hand from Sazed's. Elend nodded to Demoux and his companion—who were still following—indicating that they should remain outside, then closed the door.

"Elend," Tindwyl said, her voice laced with its typical undercurrent of displeasure. "What is your purpose in bothering us? You have already proven your incompetence quite soundly—I see no need for further discussion."

"This is still my home, Tindwyl," Elend replied. "Insult me again, and you will find yourself ejected from the premises."

Tindwyl raised an eyebrow.

Sazed paled. "Lord Venture," he said quickly, "I don't think that Tindwyl meant to—"

"It's all right, Sazed," Elend said, raising a hand. "She was just testing to see if I had reverted back to my previous state of insultability."

Tindwyl shrugged. "I have heard reports of your moping through the palace hallways like a lost child."

"Those reports are true," Elend said. "But that doesn't mean that my pride is completely gone."

"Good," Tindwyl said, nodding to a chair. "Seat yourself, if you wish."

Elend nodded, pulling the chair over before the two and sitting. "I need advice."

"I've given you what I can already," Tindwyl said. "In fact, I've perhaps given you too much. My continued presence here makes it seem that I'm taking sides."

"I'm not king anymore," Elend said. "Therefore, I have no side. I'm just a man seeking truth."

Tindwyl smiled. "Ask your questions, then."

Sazed watched the exchange with obvious interest.

*I know*, Elend thought, *I'm not sure I understand our relationship either*.

"Here is my problem," he said. "I lost the throne, essentially, because I wasn't willing to lie."

"Explain," Tindwyl sa1id.

"I had a chance to obscure a piece of the law," Elend said. "At the last moment, I could have made the Assembly take me as king. Instead, I gave them a bit of information that was true, but which ended up costing me the throne."

"I'm not surprised," Tindwyl said.

"I doubted that you would be," Elend said. "Now, do you think I was foolish to do as I did?"

"Yes."

Elend nodded.

"But," Tindwyl said, "that moment isn't what cost you the throne, Elend Venture. That moment was a small thing, far too simple to credit with your large-scale failure. You lost the throne because you wouldn't command your armies to secure the city, because you insisted on giving the Assembly too much freedom, and because you don't employ assassins or other forms of pressure. In short, Elend Venture, you lost the throne because you are a good man."

Elend shook his head. "Can you not be both a man who follows his conscience *and* a good king, then?"

Tindwyl frowned in thought.

"You ask an age-old question, Elend," Sazed said quietly. "A question that monarchs, priests, and humble men of destiny have always asked. I do not know that there is an answer."

"Should I have told the lie, Sazed?" Elend asked.

"No," Sazed said, smiling. "Perhaps another man should have, in your same position. But, a man must be cohesive with himself. You have made your decisions in life, and changing yourself at the last moment—telling this lie—would have been against who you are. It is better for you to have done as you did and lost the throne, I think."

Tindwyl frowned. "His ideals are nice, Sazed. But what of the people? What if they die because Elend wasn't capable of controlling his own conscience?"

"I do not wish to argue with you, Tindwyl," Sazed said. "It is simply my opinion that he chose well. It is his right to follow his conscience, then trust in providence to fill in the holes caused by the conflict between morality and logic."

*Providence*. "You mean God," Elend said.

"I do."

Elend shook his head. "What is God, Sazed, but a device used by obligators?"

"Why do you make the choices that you do, Elend Venture?"

"Because they're right," Elend said.

"And why are these things right?"

"I don't know," Elend said with a sigh, leaning back. He caught a disapproving glance from Tindwyl at his posture, but he ignored her. He wasn't king; he could slouch if he wanted to. "You talk of God, Sazed, but don't you preach of a hundred different religions?"

"Three hundred, actually," Sazed said.

"Well, which one do *you* believe?" Elend asked.

"I believe them all."

Elend shook his head. "That doesn't make sense. You've only pitched a half-dozen to me, but I can already see that they're incompatible."

"It is not my position to judge truth, Lord Venture," Sazed said, smiling. "I simply carry it."

Elend sighed. *Priests*. . .he thought. *Sometimes, talking to1 Sazed is like talking to an obligator*.

"Elend," Tindwyl said, her tone softening. "I think you handled this situation in the wrong way. However, Sazed does have a point. You were true to your own convictions, and that is a regal attribute, I think."

"And what should I do now?" he asked.

"Whatever you wish," Tindwyl said. "It was never my place to tell you what to do. I simply gave you knowledge of what men in your place did in the past."

"And what would they have done?" Elend asked. "These great leaders of yours, how would they have reacted to my situation?"

"It is a meaningless question," she said. "They would not have found themselves in this situation, for they would not have lost their titles in the first place."

"Is that what it's about, then?" Elend asked. "The title?"

"Isn't that what we were discussing?" Tindwyl asked.

Elend didn't answer. *What do you think makes a man a good king*? he had once asked of Tindwyl. *Trust*, she had replied. *A good king is one who is trusted by his people—and one who deserves that trust*.

Elend stood up. "Thank you, Tindwyl," he said.

Tindwyl frowned in confusion, then turned to Sazed. He looked up and met Elend's eyes, cocking his head slightly. Then he smiled. "Come, Tindwyl," he said. "We should return to our studies. His Majesty has work to do, I think."

Tindwyl continued to frown as Elend left the room. His guards followed behind as he quickly strode down the hallway.

*I won't go back to the way I was*, Elend thought. *I won't continue to fret and worry. Tindwyl taught me better than that, even if she never really understood me*.

Elend arrived at his rooms a few moments later. He stalked directly in, then opened his closet. The clothing Tindwyl had chosen for him—the clothing of a king—waited inside.

*Some of you may know of my fabled memory. It is true; I need not a Feruchemist's metalmind to memorize a sheet of words in an instant*.

# 42

"GOOD," ELEND SAID, USING A charcoal stick to circle another section on the city map before him. "What about here?"

Demoux scratched his chin. "Grainfield? That's a nobleman's neighborhood, my lord."

"It used to be," Elend said. "Grainfield was filled with cousin houses to the Ventures. When my father pulled out of the city, so did most of them."

"Then we'll probably find the homes filled with skaa transients, I'd guess."

Elend nodded. "Move them out."

"Excuse me, my lord?" Demoux said. The two stood in Keep Venture's large carriage landing. Soldiers moved in a bustle through the spacious room. Many of them didn't wear uniforms; they weren't on official city business. Elend was no longer king, but they had still come at his request.

That said something, at least.

"We need to move the skaa out of those homes," Elend continued. "Noblemen's houses are mostly stone mansions with a lot of small rooms. They're extremely hard to heat, requiring a separate hearth or a stove 1for every room. The skaa tenements are depressing, but they have massive hearths and open rooms."

Demoux nodded slowly.

"The Lord Ruler couldn't have his workers freezing," Elend said. "Those tenements are the best way to efficiently look after a large population of people with limited resources."

"I understand, my lord," Demoux said.

"Don't force them, Demoux," Elend said. "My personal guard—even augmented with army volunteers—has no official authority in the city. If a family wants to stay in their pilfered aristocratic house, let them. Just make certain that they know there's an alternative to freezing."

Demoux nodded, then moved over to pass on the commands. Elend turned as a messenger arrived. The man had to weave his way through an organized jumble of soldiers receiving orders and making plans.

Elend nodded to the newcomer. "You're on the demolitions scout group, correct?"

The man nodded as he bowed. He wasn't in uniform; he was a soldier, not one of Elend's guards. He was a younger man, with a square jaw, balding head, and honest smile.

"Don't I know you?" Elend said.

"I helped you a year ago, my lord," the man said. "I led you into the Lord Ruler's palace to help rescue Lady Vin. . .."

"Goradel," Elend said, remembering. "You used to be in the Lord Ruler's personal guard."

The man nodded. "I joined up in your army after that day. Seemed like the thing to do."

Elend smiled. "Not my army anymore, Goradel, but I do appreciate you coming to help us today. What's your report?"

"You were right, my lord," Goradel said, "the skaa have already robbed the empty homes for furniture. But, not many thought of the walls. A good half of the abandoned mansions have wooden walls on the inside, and a lot of the tenements were made of wood. Most all of them have wooden roofs."

"Good," Elend said. He surveyed the gathering mass of men. He hadn't told them his plans; he'd simply asked for volunteers to help him with some manual labor. He hadn't expected the response to number in the hundreds.

"It looks like we're gathering quite a group, my lord," Demoux said, rejoining Elend.

Elend nodded, giving leave for Goradel to withdraw. "We'll be able to try an even more ambitious project than I'd planned."

"My lord," Demoux said. "Are you certain you want to start tearing the city down around ourselves?"

"We either lose buildings or we lose people, Demoux," Elend said. "The buildings go."

"And if the king tries to stop us?"

"Then we obey," Elend said. "But I don't think Lord Penrod will object. He's too busy trying to get a bill through the Assembly that hands the city over to my father. Besides, it's probably better for him to have these men here, working, than it is to have them sitting and worrying in the barracks."

Demoux fell silent. Elend did as well; both knew how precarious their position was. Only a short time had passed since the assassination attempt and the transfer of power, and the city was in shock. Cett was still holed up inside of Keep Hasting, and his armies had moved into position to attack the city. Luthadel was like a man with a knife pressed very c1losely to his throat. Each breath cut the skin.

*I can't do much about that now*, Elend thought. *I have to make certain the people don't freeze these next few nights*. He could feel the bitter cold, despite the daylight, his cloak, and the shelter. There were a lot of people in Luthadel, but if he could get enough men tearing down enough buildings, he just might be able to do some good.

"My lord!"

Elend turned as a short man with a drooping mustache approached. "Ah, Felt," he said. "You have news?" The man was working on the poisoned-food problem—specifically how the city was being breached.

The scout nodded. "I do indeed, my lord. We interrogated the refugees with a Rioter, and we came up dry. Then, however, I started thinking. The refugees seemed too obvious to me. Strangers in the city? Of course they'd be the first ones we'd suspect. I figured, with how much has been going wrong with the wells and the food and the like, someone *has* to be sneaking in and out of the city."

Elend nodded. They'd been watching Cett's soldiers inside Keep Hasting very carefully, and none of them was responsible. Straff's Mistborn was still a possibility, but Vin had never believed that he was behind the poisoning. Elend hoped that the trail—if it could be found—would lead back to someone in his own palace, hopefully revealing who on his serving staff had been replaced by a kandra.

"Well?" Elend asked.

"I interrogated the people who run passwalls," Felt continued. "I don't think they're to blame."

"Passwalls?"

Felt nodded. "Covert passages out of the city. Tunnels or the like."

"Such things exist?" Elend asked with surprise.

"Of course, my lord," Felt said. "Moving between cities was very difficult for skaa thieves during the Lord Ruler's reign. Everyone who entered Luthadel was subject to interview and interrogation. So, ways to get into the city covertly were very prevalent. Most of those have shut down—the ones who used to lower people up and down by ropes over the walls. A few are still running, but I don't think they are letting the spies in. Once that first well was poisoned, the passwalls all got paranoid that you'd come after them. Since then, they've only been letting people *out* of the city—ones who want to run from the besieged city and the like."

Elend frowned. He wasn't certain what he thought of the fact that people were disobeying his order that the gates be shut, with no passage out.

"Next," Felt said, "I tried the river."

"We thought of that," Elend said. "The grates covering the water are all secure."

Felt smiled. "That they are. I sent some men down under the water to search about, and we found several locks down below, keeping the river grates in place."

"What?"

"Someone pried the grates free, my lord," Felt said, "then locked them back into place so it wouldn't look suspicious. That way, they could swim in and out at their leisure."

Elend raised an eyebrow.

"You want us to replace the grates?" Felt asked.

"No," Elend said. "No, just replace those locks with new ones, then post men to watch. Next time those prisoners try and get into the city, I want them to find th1emselves trapped."

Felt nodded, retreating with a happy smile on his face. His talents as a spy hadn't been put to much good use lately, and he seemed to be enjoying the tasks Elend was giving him. Elend made a mental note to think about putting Felt to work on locating the kandra spy—assuming, of course, that Felt himself wasn't the spy.

"My lord," Demoux said, approaching. "I think I might be able to offer a second opinion on how the poisonings are occurring."

Elend turned. "Oh?"

Demoux nodded, waving for a man to approach from the side of the room. He was younger, perhaps eighteen, and had the dirty face and clothing of a skaa worker.

"This is Larn," Demoux said. "A member of my congregation."

The young man bowed to Elend, posture nervous.

"You may speak, Larn," Demoux said. "Tell Lord Venture what you saw."

"Well, my lord," the young man said. "I tried to go tell this to the king. The new king, I mean." He flushed, embarrassed.

"It's all right," Elend said. "Continue."

"Well, the men there turned me away. Said the king didn't have time for me. So, I came to Lord Demoux. I figured he might believe me."

"About what?" Elend asked.

"Inquisitor, my lord," the man said quietly. "I saw one in the city."

Elend felt a chill. "You're sure?"

The young man nodded. "I've lived in Luthadel all my life, my lord. Watched executions a number of times. I'd recognize one of those monsters, sure I would. I saw him. Spikes through the eyes, tall and robed, slinking about at night. Near the center squares of the city. I promise you."

Elend shared a look with Demoux.

"He's not the only one, my lord," Demoux said quietly. "Some other members of my congregation claimed to have seen an Inquisitor hanging around Kredik Shaw. I dismissed the first few, but Larn, he's trustworthy. If he said he saw something, he did. Eyes nearly as good as a Tineye, that one."

Elend nodded slowly, and ordered a patrol from his personal guard to keep watch in the area indicated. After that, he turned his attention back to the wood-gathering effort. He gave the orders, organizing the men into teams, sending some to begin working, others to gather recruits. Without fuel, many of the city's forges had shut down, and the workers were idle. They could use something to occupy their time.

Elend saw energy in the men's eyes as they began to split up. Elend knew that determination, that firmness of eye and arm. It came from the satisfaction of doing something, of not just sitting around and waiting for fate—or kings—to act.

Elend turned back to the map, making a few notations. From the corner of his eye, he saw Ham saunter in. "So this is where they all went!" Ham said. "The sparring grounds are empty."

Elend looked up, smiling.

"You're back to the uniform, then?" Ham asked.

Elend glanced down at his white outfit. Designed to stand out, to set him apart from a city stained by ash. "Yes."

"Too bad," Ham said with a sigh. "Nobody should have to wear a uniform."

1Elend raised an eyebrow. In the face of undeniable winter, Ham had finally taken to wearing a shirt beneath his vest. He wore no cloak or coat, however.

Elend turned back to the map. "The clothing suits me," he said. "It just feels right. Anyway, that vest of yours is as much a uniform as this is."

"No it's not."

"Oh?" Elend asked. "Nothing screams Thug like a man who goes about in the winter without a coat, Ham. You've used your clothing to change how people react to you, to let them know who you are and what you represent—which is essentially what a uniform does."

Ham paused. "That's an interesting way of looking at it."

"What?" Elend said. "You never argued about something like this with Breeze?"

Ham shook his head as he turned to look over the groups of men, listening to the men Elend had appointed to give orders.

*He's changed*, Elend thought. *Running this city, dealing with all of this, it's even changed him*. The Thug was more solemn, now—more focused. Of course, he had even more stake in the city's safety than the rest of the crew. It was sometimes hard to remember that the free-spirited Thug was a family man. Ham tended to not talk much about Mardra or his two children. Elend suspected it was habit; Ham had spent much of his marriage living apart from his family in order to keep them safe.

*This whole city is my family*, Elend thought, watching the soldiers leave to do their work. Some might have thought something as simple as gathering firewood to be a mundane task, of little relevance in a city threatened by three armies. However, Elend knew that the freezing skaa people would receive the fuel with as much appreciation as they would salvation from the armies.

The truth was that Elend felt a little like his soldiers did. He felt a satisfaction—a thrill even—from doing something, *anything*, to help.

"What if Cett's attack comes?" Ham said, still looking over the soldiers. "A good portion of the army will be out scattered through the city."

"Even if we have a thousand men in my teams, that's not much of a dent in our forces. Besides, Clubs thinks there will be plenty of time to gather them. We've got messengers set up."

Elend looked back at his map. "Anyway, I don't think Cett's going to attack just yet. He's pretty safe in that keep, there. We'll never take him—we'd have to pull too many men away from the city defenses, leaving ourselves exposed. The only thing he really has to worry about is my father. . ."

Elend trailed off.

"What?" Ham said.

"That's why Cett is here," Elend said, blinking in surprise. "Don't you see? He intentionally left himself without options. If Straff attacks, Cett's armies will end up fighting alongside our own. He's locked in his fate with ours."

Ham frowned. "Seems like a pretty desperate move."

Elend nodded, thinking back to his meeting with Cett. "'Desperate,'" he said. "That's a good word. Cett is desperate for some reason—one I haven't been able to figure out. Anyway, by putting himself in here, he sides with us against Straff—whether we want the alliance or not."

"But, what if the Assembly gives the city to Straff? If our men join with him and attack Cett?"

"That's the1 gamble he took," Elend said. *Cett never intended to be able to walk away from the confrontation here in Luthadel. He intends to take the city or be destroyed.*

*He is waiting, hoping Straff will attack, worrying that we'll just give into him. But neither can happen as long as Straff is afraid of Vin. A three-way standoff. With the koloss as a fourth element that nobody can predict.*

Someone needed to do something to tip the scales. "Demoux," Elend said. "Are you ready to take over here?"

Captain Demoux looked over, nodding.

Elend turned to Ham. "I have a question for you, Ham."

Ham raised an eyebrow.

"How insane are you feeling at the moment?

Elend led his horse out of the tunnel into the scraggly landscape outside of Luthadel. He turned, craning to look up at the wall. Hopefully, the soldiers there had gotten his message, and wouldn't mistake him for a spy or a scout of one of the enemy armies. He'd rather not end up in Tindwyl's histories as the ex-king who'd died by an arrow from one of his own men.

Ham led a small, grizzled woman from the tunnel. As Elend had guessed, Ham had easily found a suitable passwall to get them out of the city.

"Well, there you go," said the elderly woman, resting on her cane.

"Thank you, good woman," Elend said. "You have served your dominance well this day."

The woman snorted, raising an eyebrow—though, from what Elend could tell, she was quite nearly blind. Elend smiled, pulling out a pouch and handing it to her. She reached into it with gnarled, but surprisingly dexterous, fingers and counted out the contents. "Three extra?"

"To pay you to leave a scout here," Elend said. "To watch for our return."

"Return?" the woman asked. "You aren't running?"

"No," Elend said. "I just have some business with one of the armies."

The woman raised the eyebrow again. "Well, none of Granny's business," she muttered, turning back down the hole with a tapping cane. "For three clips, I can find a grandson to sit out here for a few hours. Lord Ruler knows, I have enough of them."

Ham watched her go, a spark of fondness in his eyes.

"How long have you known about this place?" Elend asked, watching as a couple of burly men pulled closed the hidden section of stone. Half burrowed, half cut from the wall's stones themselves, the tunnel was a remarkable feat. Even after hearing about the existence of such things from Felt earlier, it was still a shock to travel through one hidden not a few minutes' ride from Keep Venture itself.

Ham turned back to him as the false wall snapped shut. "Oh, I've known of this for years and years," he said. "Granny Hilde used to give me sweets when I was a kid. Of course, that was really just a cheap way of getting some quiet—yet well-targeted—publicity for her passwall. When I was grown, I used to use this to sneak Mardra and the kids in and out of the city when they came to visit."

"Wait," Elend said. "You grew up in Luthadel?"

"Of course."

"On the streets, like Vin?"

Ham shook his head. "Not really like Vin," he said in a subdued voice, scanning 1the wall. "I don't really think anyone grew up like Vin. I had skaa parents—my grandfather was the nobleman. I was involved with the underground, but I had my parents for a good portion of my childhood. Besides, I was a boy—and a large one." He turned toward Elend. "I suspect that makes a big difference."

Elend nodded.

"You're not going to shut this place down, are you?" Ham asked.

Elend turned with shock. "Why would I?"

Ham shrugged. "It doesn't exactly seem like the kind of honest enterprise that you would approve of. There are probably people fleeing from the city nightly through this hole. Granny Hilde is known to take coin and not ask questions—even if she does grumble at you a bit."

Ham did have a point. *Probably why he didn't tell me about the place until I specifically asked.* His friends walked a fine line, close to their old ties with the underground, yet working hard to build up the government they'd sacrificed so much to create.

"I'm not king," Elend said, leading his horse away from the city. "What Granny Hilde does isn't any of my business."

Ham moved up beside him, looking relieved. Elend could see that relief dissipate, however, as the reality of what they were doing settled in. "I don't like this, El."

They stopped walking as Elend mounted. "Neither do I."

Ham took a deep breath, then nodded.

*My old nobleman friends would have tried to talk me out of this*, Elend thought with amusement. *Why did I surround myself with people who had been loyal to the Survivor? They* expect *their leaders to take irrational risks*.

"I'll go with you," Ham said.

"No," Elend said. "It won't make a difference. Stay here, wait to see if I get back. If I don't, tell Vin what happened."

"Sure, I'll tell her," Ham said wryly. "Then I'll proceed to remove her daggers from my chest. Just make sure you come back, all right?"

Elend nodded, barely paying attention. His eyes were focused on the army in the distance. An army without tents, carriages, food carts, or servants. An army who had eaten the foliage to the ground in a wide swath around them. Koloss.

Sweat made the reins slick in Elend's hands. This was different from before, when he'd gone into Straff's army and Cett's keep. This time he was alone. Vin couldn't get him out if things went bad; she was still recovering from her wounds, and nobody knew what Elend was doing but Ham.

*What do I owe the people of this city*? Elend thought. *They rejected me. Why do I still insist on trying to protect them*?

"I recognize that look, El," Ham said. "Let's go back."

Elend closed his eyes, letting out a quiet sigh. Then he snapped his eyes open and kicked his horse into a gallop.

It had been years since he'd seen koloss, and that experience had come only at his father's insistence. Straff hadn't trusted the creatures, and had never liked having garrisons of them in the Northern Dominance, one just a few days' march from his home city of Urteau. Those koloss had been a reminder, a warning, from the Lord Ruler.

Elend rode his horse hard, as if using its momentum to bolster his own will. Aside from one brief visit to the Urteau kol1oss garrison, everything he knew of the creatures came from books—but Tindwyl's instruction had weakened his once absolute, and slightly naive, trust in his learning.

*It will have to be enough*, Elend thought as he approached the camp. He gritted his teeth, slowing his animal as he approached a wandering squad of Koloss.

It was as he remembered. One large creature—its skin revoltingly split and cracked by stretch marks—led a few medium-sized beasts, whose bleeding rips were only beginning to appear at the corners of their mouths and the edges of their eyes. A smattering of smaller creatures—their baggy skin loose and sagging beneath their eyes and arms—accompanied their betters.

Elend reined in his horse, trotting it over to the largest beast. "Take me to Jastes."

"Get off your horse," the koloss said.

Elend looked the creature directly in the eyes. Atop his horse, he was nearly the same height. "Take me to Jastes."

The koloss regarded him with a set of beady, unreadable eyes. It bore a rip from one eye to the other, above the nose, a secondary rip curving down to one of the nostrils. The nose itself was pulled so tight it was twisted and flattened, held to the bone a few inches off-center.

This was the moment. The books said the creature would either do as commanded or simply attack him. Elend sat tensely.

"Come," the koloss snapped, turning to walk back toward the camp. The rest of the creatures surrounded Elend's horse, and the beast shuffled nervously. Elend kept a tight hold on his reins and nudged the animal forward. It responded skittishly.

He should have felt good at his small victory, but his tension only increased. They moved forward into the koloss camp. It was like being swallowed. Like letting a rockslide collapse around you. Koloss looked up as he passed, watching him with their red, emotionless eyes. Many others just stood silently around their cooking fires, unresponsive, like men who had been born dull-minded and witless.

Others fought. They killed each other, wrestling on the ground before their uncaring companions. No philosopher, scientist, or scholar had been able to determine exactly what set off a koloss. Greed seemed a good motivation. Yet, they would sometimes attack when there was plenty of food, killing a companion for *his* hunk of beef. Pain was another good motivator, apparently, as was a challenge to authority. Carnal, visceral reasons. And yet, there seemed to be times when they attacked without any cause or reason.

And after fighting, they would explain themselves in calm tones, as if their actions were perfectly rational. Elend shivered as he heard yells, telling himself that he would probably be all right until he reached Jastes. Koloss usually just attacked each other.

Unless they got into a blood frenzy.

He pushed that thought away, instead focusing on the things that Sazed had mentioned about his trip into the koloss camp. The creatures wore the wide, brutish iron swords that Sazed had described. The bigger the koloss, the bigger the weapon. When a koloss reached a size where he thought he needed a larger sword, he had only two choices: find one that had been discarded, or kill someone and take theirs. A koloss population could often be crudely controlled by increasing or decreasing the number of swords available to the group.

None of the scholars knew how the creatures bred.

As Sazed had explained, these koloss also had strange little pouches tied to their sword straps. *What are they?* Elend thought. *Sazed said he saw the largest koloss carrying three or four. But that one leading my group has almost twenty*. Even the small koloss in Elend's group had three pouches.

*That's the difference*, he thought. *Whatever is in those pouches, could it be the way Jastes controls the creatures*?

There was no way to know, save begging one of the pouches off a koloss—and he doubted they would let them go.

As he walked, he noticed another oddity: some of the koloss were wearing clothing. Before, he'd seen them only in loincloths, as Sazed had reported. Yet, many of these koloss had pants, shirts, or skirts pulled onto their bodies. They wore the clothing without regard for size, and most pieces were so tight they had torn. Others were so loose they had to be tied on. Elend saw a few of the larger koloss wearing garments like bandanas tied around their arms or heads.

"We are not koloss," the lead koloss suddenly said, turning to Elend as they walked.

Elend frowned. "Explain."

"You think we are koloss," it said through lips that were stretched too tightly to work properly. "We are humans. We will live in your city. We will kill you, and we will take it."

Elend shivered, realizing the source of the mismatched garments. They had come from the village that the koloss had attacked, the one whose refugees had trickled into Luthadel. This appeared to be a new development in koloss thinking. Or, had it always been there, repressed by the Lord Ruler? The scholar in Elend was fascinated. The rest of him was simply horrified.

His koloss guide paused before a small group of tents, the only such structures in the camp. Then the lead koloss turned and yelled, startling Elend's horse. Elend fought to keep his mount from throwing him as the koloss jumped and attacked one of its companions, proceeding to pummel it with a massive fist.

Elend won his struggle. The lead koloss, however, did not.

Elend climbed off his horse, patting the beast on the neck as the victimized koloss pulled his sword from the chest of his former leader. The survivor—who now bore several cuts in his skin that hadn't come from stretching—bent down to harvest the pouches tied to the corpse's back. Elend watched with a muted fascination as the koloss stood and spoke.

"He was never a good leader," it said in a slurred voice.

*I can't let these monsters attack my city*, Elend thought. *I have to do something*. He pulled his horse forward, turning his back on the koloss as he entered the secluded section of camp, watched over by a group of nervous young men in uniforms. Elend handed his reins to one of them.

"Take care of this for me," Elend said, striding forward.

"Wait!" one of the soldiers said. "Halt!"

Elend turned sharply, facing the shorter man, who was trying to both level his spear at Elend and keep an eye on the koloss. Elend didn't try to be harsh; he just wanted to keep his own anxiety under control and keep moving. Either way, the resulting glare probably would have impressed even Tindwyl.

The soldier jerked to a halt.

"I am Elend Venture," Elend said. "You know that name?"

The man nodded.

"You may announce me to Lord Lekal," Elend said. "Just get to the tent before I do."

The young man took off at a dash. Elend followed, striding up to the tent, where other soldiers stood hesitantly.

*What must it have done to them,* Elend wondered, *living surrounded by koloss, so terribly outnumbered*? Feeling a stab of pity, he didn't try to bully his way in. He stood with faux patience until a voice called from inside. "Let him in."

Elend brushed past the guards and threw open the tent flap.

The months had not been kind to Jastes Lekal. Somehow, the few wisps of hair on his head looked far more pathetic than complete baldness would have. His suit was sloppy and stained, his eyes underlined by a pair of deep bags. He was pacing, and jumped slightly when Elend entered.

Then he froze for a moment, eyes wide. Finally, he raised a quivering hand to push back hair he didn't have. "Elend?" he asked. "What in the Lord Ruler's name happened to you?"

"Responsibility, Jastes," Elend said quietly. "It appears that neither of us were ready for it."

"Out," Jastes said, waving to his guards. They shuffled past Elend, closing the tent flap behind them.

"It's been a while, Elend," Jastes said, chuckling weakly.

Elend nodded.

"I remember those days," Jastes said, "sitting in your den or mine, sharing a drink with Telden. We were so innocent, weren't we?"

"Innocent," Elend said, "but hopeful."

"Want something to drink?" Jastes said, turning toward the room's desk. Elend eyed the bottles and flasks lying in the corner of the room. They were all empty. Jastes removed a full bottle from the desk and poured Elend a small cup, the size and clear color an indication that this was no simple dinner wine.

Elend accepted the small cup, but did not drink. "What happened, Jastes? How did the clever, thoughtful philosopher I knew turn into a tyrant?"

"Tyrant?" Jastes snapped, downing his cup in a single shot. "I'm no tyrant. Your father's the tyrant. I'm just a realist."

"Sitting at the center of a koloss army doesn't seem to be a very realistic position to me."

"I can control them."

"And Suisna?" Elend asked. "The village they slaughtered?"

Jastes wavered. "That was an unfortunate accident."

Elend looked down at the drink in his hand, then threw it aside, the liquor splashing on the dusty tent floor. "This isn't my father's den, and we are not friends any longer. I will call no man friend who leads something like *this* against my city. What happened to your honor, Jastes Lekal?"

Jastes snorted, glancing at the spilled liquor. "That's always been the problem with you, Elend. So certain, so optimistic, so self-righteous."

"It was *our* optimism," Elend said, stepping forward. "We wanted to change things, Jastes, not destroy them!"

"Is that so?" Jastes countered, showing a temper Elend had never seen in his friend. "You want to know why I'm here, Elend? Did you even *pay attention* to what was happening in the Southern Dominance while you played in Luthadel?"

"I'm sorry about what happened to your family, Jastes."

"Sorry?" Jastes said, snatching the bottle off his desk. "You're *sorry*? I implemented your plans, Elend. I did everything we talked about—freedom, political honesty. I trusted my allies rather than crushing them into submission. And you know what happened?"

Elend closed his eyes.

"They killed everyone, Elend," Jastes said. "That's what you do when you take over. You kill your rivals and their families—even the young girls, even the babies. And you leave their bodies, as a warning. That's good politics. That's how you stay in power!"

"It's easy to believe in something when you win all the time, Jastes," Elend said, opening his eyes. "The losses are what define a man's faith."

"Losses?" Jastes demanded. "My sister was a *loss*?"

"No, I mean—"

"Enough!" Jastes snapped, slamming the bottle down on his desk. "Guards!"

Two men threw back the tent flap and moved into the room.

"Take His Majesty captive," Jastes said, with an unsteady wave of his hand. "Send a messenger to the city, tell them that we want to negotiate."

"I'm not king anymore, Jastes," Elend said.

Jastes stopped.

"Do you think I'd come here and let myself get captured if I were king?" Elend asked. "They deposed me. The Assembly invoked a no-confidence clause and chose a new king."

"You bloody idiot," Jastes said.

"Losses, Jastes," Elend said. "It hasn't been as hard for me as it was for you, but I do think I understand."

"So," Jastes said, running a hand through his "hair," "that fancy suit and haircut didn't save you, eh?"

"Take your koloss and go, Jastes."

"That sounded like a threat, Elend," Jastes said. "You aren't king, you don't have an army, and I don't see your Mistborn around. What grounds do you have for threats?"

"They're *koloss*," Elend said. "Do you really want them getting into the city? It's your home, Jastes—or, it was once. There are thousands of people inside!"

"I can. . .control my army," Jastes said.

"No, I doubt you can," Elend said. "What happened, Jastes? Did they decide they needed a king? They decided that's the way that 'humans' did it, so they should do it, too? What is it that they carry in those pouches?"

Jastes didn't answer.

Elend sighed. "What happens when one of them just snaps and attacks you?"

Jastes shook his head. "I'm sorry, Elend," he said quietly. "I can't let Straff get that atium."

"And my people?"

Jastes paused only briefly, then lowered his eyes and motioned to the guards. One laid a hand on Elend's shoulder.

Elend's reaction surprised even himself. He slammed his elbow up into the man's face, shattering his nose, then took the other man down with a kick to the leg. Before Jastes could do more than cry out, Elend jumped forward.

Elend ri1pped an obsidian knife—given to him by Vin—from his boot and caught Jastes by the shoulder. Elend slammed the whimpering man around, pushing him backward onto the desk and—barely thinking to consider his actions—rammed the knife into his old friend's shoulder.

Jastes emitted a loud, pathetic scream.

"If killing you would do anything useful, Jastes," Elend growled, "I'd do it right now. But I don't know how you control these things, and I don't want to set them loose."

Soldiers piled into the room. Elend didn't look up. He slapped Jastes, stopping his cries of pain.

"You listen," Elend said. "I don't care if you've been hurt, I don't care if you don't believe in the philosophies anymore, and I don't really care if you get yourself killed playing politics with Straff and Cett.

"But I *do* care if you threaten my people. I want you to march your army out of my dominance—go attack Straff's homeland, or maybe Cett's. They're both undefended. I promise I won't let your enemies get the atium.

"And, as a friend, I'll give you a bit of counsel. Think about that wound in your arm for a little while, Jastes. I was your best friend, and I nearly killed you. What the *hell* are you doing sitting in the middle of an entire army of deranged koloss?"

Soldiers surrounded him. Elend stood, ripping the knife from Jastes's body and spinning the man around, pressing the weapon against his throat.

The guards froze.

"I'm leaving," Elend said, pushing the confused Jastes ahead of him, moving out of the tent. He noticed with some concern that there were barely a dozen human guards. Sazed had counted more. Where had Jastes lost them?

There was no sign of Elend's horse. So he kept a wary eye on the soldiers, pulling Jastes toward the invisible line between the human camp and the koloss one. Elend turned as he reached the perimeter, then pushed Jastes back toward his men. They caught him, one pulling out a bandage for the arm. Others made moves as if to chase Elend, but they paused, hesitant.

Elend had crossed the line into the koloss camp. He stood quietly, watching the pathetic group of young soldiers, Jastes at their center. Even as they ministered to him, Elend could see the look in Jastes's eyes. Hatred. He wouldn't retreat. The man Elend had known was dead, replaced by this product of a new world that didn't kindly regard philosophers and idealists.

Elend turned away, walking among the koloss. A group of them quickly approached. The same one as before? He couldn't tell for certain.

"Take me out," Elend commanded, meeting the eyes of the largest koloss in the team. Either Elend seemed more commanding now, or this koloss was more easily cowed, for there was no argument. The creature simply nodded and began to shuffle out of the camp, his team surrounding Elend.

*This trip was a waste,* Elend thought with frustration. *All I did was antagonize Jastes. I risked my life for nothing*.

*If only I could find out what was in those pouches*!

He eyed the group of koloss around him. It was a typical group, ranging in size from five feet to one ten-foot monstrosity. They walked along with slumped, unengaged postures. . ..

Elend still had his knife out.

*This is stupid*, he thought. For 1some reason, that didn't stop him from choosing the smallest koloss in the group, taking a deep breath, and attacking.

The rest of the koloss paused to watch. The creature Elend had chosen spun—but in the wrong direction. It turned to face its companion koloss, the one nearest to it in size, as Elend tackled it, ramming the knife into its back.

Even at five feet with a small build, the koloss was incredibly strong. It tossed Elend off, bellowing in pain. Elend, however, managed to keep hold of his dagger.

*Can't let it get out that sword*, he thought, scrambling to his feet and ramming his knife into the creature's thigh. The koloss dropped again, punching at Elend with one arm, fingers reaching for its sword with the other. Elend took the punch to the chest, and fell back to the sooty ground.

He groaned, gasping. The koloss pulled out its sword, but had trouble standing. Both knife wounds bled stark red blood; the liquid seemed brighter, more reflective, than that of a human, but that might have just been a contrast with the deep blue skin.

The koloss finally managed to gain its feet, and Elend realized his mistake. He'd let the adrenaline of his confrontation with Jastes—his frustration at his inability to stop the armies—drive him. He'd sparred a lot lately, but he was in no position to take a koloss.

But it was far too late to worry about that now.

Elend rolled out of the way as a thick, clublike sword smashed to the ground beside him. Instincts overrode terror, and he mostly managed to avoid the backswing. It took him a bit in the side, spraying a patch of blood across his once white uniform, but he barely even felt the cut.

*Only one way to win a knife fight against a guy with a sword*. . .Elend thought, gripping his knife. The thought, oddly, hadn't come from one of his trainers, or even from Vin. He wasn't sure where it came from, but he trusted it.

*Close in tight as fast as possible, and kill quickly*.

And Elend attacked. The koloss swung as well. Elend could see the attack, but couldn't do anything about it. He could only throw himself forward, knife raised, teeth clenched.

He rammed his knife into the koloss's eye, barely managing to get inside the creature's reach. Even so, the hilt of the sword hit him in the stomach.

Both dropped.

Elend groaned quietly, slowly becoming aware of the hard, ash-packed earth and weeds eaten down to their roots. A fallen twig was scratching his cheek. Odd that he would notice that, considering the pain in his chest. He stumbled to his feet. The koloss he'd attacked did not rise. Its companions stood, looking unconcerned, though their eyes were focused on him. They seemed to want something.

"He ate my horse," Elend said, saying the first thing that came to his clouded mind.

The group of koloss nodded. Elend stumbled forward, wiping the ash from his cheek with a dazed hand as he knelt beside the dead creature. He ripped his knife out, then slid it back in his boot. Next he unfastened the pouches; this koloss had two.

Finally, not certain why, he grabbed the creature's large sword and rested it up on his shoulder. It was so weighty that he could barely carry it, and certainly wouldn't be able to swing it. *How does a creature so small use something like this*?

The koloss 1watched him work without comment; then they led him out of the camp. Once they had retreated, Elend pulled open one of the pouches and looked inside.

He shouldn't have been surprised by what he found inside. Jastes had decided to control his army the old-fashioned way.

He was paying them.

*The others call me mad. As I have said, that may be true*.

# 43

MIST POURED INTO THE DARK room, collapsing around Vin like a waterfall as she stood in the open balcony doorway. Elend was a motionless lump sleeping in his bed a short distance away.

*Apparently, Mistress*, OreSeur had explained, *he went into the koloss camp alone. You were asleep, and none of us knew what he was doing. I don't think he managed to persuade the creatures not to attack, but he did come back with some very useful information*.

OreSeur sat on his haunches beside her. He had not asked why Vin had come to Elend's rooms, nor why she stood, quietly watching the former king in the night.

She couldn't protect him. She tried so hard, but the impossibility of keeping even *one person* safe suddenly seemed so real—so tangible—to her that she felt sick.

Elend had been right to go out. He was his own man, competent, kingly. What he had done would only put him in more danger, however. Fear had been a companion of hers for such a long time that she had grown accustomed to it, and it rarely caused a physical reaction in her. Yet, watching him sleep quietly, she found her hands traitorously unsteady.

*I saved him from the assassins. I protected him. I'm a powerful Allomancer. Why, then, do I feel so helpless?*

*So alone*.

She walked forward, bare feet silent as she stepped up to Elend's bed. He did not wake. She stood for a long moment, just looking at him peaceful in his slumber.

OreSeur growled quietly.

Vin spun. A figure stood on the balcony, straight-backed and black, a near silhouette even to her tin-enhanced eyes. Mist fell before him, pooling on the floor, spreading out like an ethereal moss.

"Zane," she whispered.

"He is not safe, Vin," he said, stepping slowly into the room, pushing a wave of mist before him.

She looked back at Elend. "He never will be."

"I came to tell you that there is a traitor in your midst."

Vin looked up. "Who?" she asked.

"The man, Demoux," Zane said. "He contacted my father a short time before the assassination attempt, offering to open the gates and give up the city."

Vin frowned. *That makes no sense*.

Zane stepped forward. "Cett's work, Vin. He is a snake, even among high lords. I don't know how he bribed away one of your own men, but I do know that Demoux tried to provoke my father to attack the city during the voting."

Vin paused. If Straff had attacked at that moment, it would have reinforced the impression that he had sent the assassins in the first place.

"Elend and Penrod were supposed to die," Zane said. "With 1the Assembly in chaos, Cett could have taken charge. He could have led his forces—along with your own—against Straff's attacking army. He would have become the savior who protected Luthadel against the tyranny of an invader. . .."

Vin stood quietly. Just because Zane said it didn't mean it was true. Yet, her investigations whispered that Demoux was the traitor.

She'd recognized the assassin at the assembly, and he *had* been from Cett's retinue, so she knew that Zane was telling the truth about at least one thing. Plus, Cett had precedent for sending Allomancer assassins: he had sent the ones months ago, when Vin had used the last of her atium. Zane had saved her life during that fight.

She clenched her fists, frustration biting at her chest. *If he's right, then Demoux is dead, and an enemy kandra has been in the palace, spending his days just steps away from Elend. Even if Zane lies, we still have a tyrant inside the city, another without. A force of koloss salivating over the people. And Elend doesn't need me*.

*Because there's nothing I can do*.

"I see your frustration," Zane whispered, stepping up beside Elend's bed, looking down at his sleeping brother. "You keep listening to him. You want to protect him, but he won't let you." Zane looked up, meeting her eyes. She saw an implication in them.

There *was* something she could do—the thing a part of her had wanted to do from the beginning. The thing she'd been trained to do.

"Cett almost killed the man you love," Zane said. "Your Elend does as he wishes. Well, let us do as *you* wish." He looked into her eyes. "We have been someone else's knives for too long. Let's show Cett why he should fear us."

Her fury, her frustration at the siege, yearned to do as Zane suggested. Yet, she wavered, her thoughts in chaos. She had killed—killed well—just a short time before, and it had terrified her. Yet. . .Elend could take risks—insane risks, traveling into an army of koloss on his own. It almost felt like a betrayal. She had worked so hard to protect him, straining herself, exposing herself. Then, just a few days later, he wandered alone into a camp full of monsters.

She gritted her teeth. Part of her whispered that if Elend wouldn't be reasonable and stay out of danger, she'd just have to go and make *sure* the threats against him were removed.

"Let's go," she whispered.

Zane nodded. "Realize this," he said. "We can't just assassinate him. Another warlord will take his place, and take his armies. We have to attack *hard*. We have to hit that army so soundly that whoever takes over for Cett is so frightened that he withdraws."

Vin paused, looking away from him, nails biting into her own palms.

"Tell me," he said, stepping closer to her. "What would your Kelsier tell you to do?"

The answer was simple. Kelsier would never have gotten into this situation. He had been a hard man, a man with little tolerance for any who threatened those he loved. Cett and Straff wouldn't have lasted a single night at Luthadel without feeling Kelsier's knife.

There was a part of her that had always been awed by his powerful, utilitarian brutality.

*There are two ways to stay safe*, Reen's voice whispered to her. *Either be so quiet and harmless that people ignore you, or be so dangerous that they're terrified 1of you*.

She met Zane's eyes and nodded. He smiled, then moved over and jumped out the window.

"OreSeur," she whispered once he was gone. "My atium."

The dog paused, then padded up to her, his shoulder splitting. "Mistress. . ." he said slowly. "Do not do this."

She glanced at Elend. She couldn't protect him from everything. But she could do something.

She took the atium from OreSeur. Her hands no longer shook. She felt cold.

"Cett has threatened all that I love," she whispered. "He will soon know that there is something in this world more deadly than his assassins. Something more powerful than his army. Something more terrifying than the Lord Ruler himself.

"And I am coming for him."

Mist duty, they called it.

Every soldier had to take his turn, standing in the dark with a sputtering torch. Someone had to watch. Had to stare into those shifting, deceitful mists and wonder if anything was out there. Watching.

Wellen knew there was.

He knew it, but he never spoke. Soldiers laughed at such superstitions. They had to go out in the mists. They were used to it. They knew better than to fear it.

Supposedly.

"Hey," Jarloux said, stepping up to the edge of the wall. "Wells, do you see something out there?"

Of course he didn't. They stood with several dozen others on the perimeter of Keep Hasting, watching from the outer keep wall—a low fortification, perhaps fifteen feet tall, that surrounded the grounds. Their job was to look for anything suspicious in the mists.

"Suspicious." That was the word they used. It was *all* suspicious. It was mist. That shifting darkness, that void made of chaos and hatred. Wellen had never trusted it. They were out there. He knew.

Something moved in the darkness. Wellen stepped back, staring into the void, his heart beginning to flutter, hands beginning to sweat as he raised his spear.

"Yeah," Jarloux said, squinting. "I swear, I see. . ."

It came, as Wellen had always known it would. Like a thousand gnats on a hot day, like a hail of arrows shot by an entire army. Coins sprayed across the battlements. A wall of shimmering death, hundreds of trails zipping through the mists. Metal rang against stone, and men cried out in pain.

Wellen stepped back, raising his spear, as Jarloux yelled the alarm. Jarloux died halfway through the call, a coin snapping through his mouth, throwing out a chip of tooth as it proceeded out the back of his head. Jarloux collapsed, and Wellen stumbled away from the corpse, knowing that it was too late to run.

The coins stopped. Silence in the air. Men lay dying or groaning at his feet.

Then they came. Two dark shadows of death in the night. Ravens in the mist. They flew over Wellen with a rustle of black cloth.

And they left him behind, alone amid the corpses of what had once been a squad of forty men.

Vin landed in a crouch, bare feet on the cool stone cobbles of the Hasting courtyard. Zane landed upright, standing—as always—with his towering air of self-confidence.

Pewter blazed within her, giving her muscles the taut energy of a thousand excited moments. She easily ignored the pain of her wounded side. Her sole bead of atium rested in her stomach, but she didn't use it. Not yet. Not unless she was right, and Cett proved to be Mistborn.

"We'll go from the bottom up," Zane said.

Vin nodded. The central tower of Keep Hasting was many stories high, and they couldn't know which one Cett was on. If they started low, he wouldn't be able to escape.

Besides. Going up would be more difficult. The energy in Vin's limbs cried for release. She'd waited, remained coiled, for far too long. She was tired of weakness, tired of being restrained. She had spent months as a knife, held immobile at someone's throat.

It was time to cut.

The two dashed forward. Torches began to light around them as Cett's men—those who camped in the courtyard—awakened to the alarm. Tents unfurled and collapsed, men yelling in surprise, looking for the army that assailed them. They could only wish that they were so lucky.

Vin jumped straight up into the air, and Zane spun, throwing a bag of coins around him. Hundreds of bits of copper sparkled in the air beneath her

—a peasant's fortune. Vin landed with a rustle, and they both Pushed, their power throwing the coins outward. The torch-sparkled missiles ripped through the camp, dropping surprised, drowsy men.

Vin and Zane continued toward the central tower. A squad of soldiers had formed up at the tower's front. They still seemed disoriented, confused, and sleepy, but they were armed. Armed with metal armor and steel weapons—a choice that, had they actually been facing an enemy army, would have been wise.

Zane and Vin slid into the midst of the soldiers. Zane tossed a single coin into the air between them. Vin reached out and Pushed against it, feeling Zane's weight as he also Pushed against it.

Braced against each other, they both Pushed in opposite directions, throwing their weight against the breastplates of the soldiers to either side. With flared pewter—holding each other steady—their Pushes scattered the soldiers as if they had been slapped by enormous hands. Spears and swords twisted in the night, clattering to the cobbles. Breastplates towed bodies away.

Vin extinguished her steel as she felt Zane's weight come off the coin. The sparkling bit of metal bounced to the ground between them, and Zane turned, throwing up his hand toward the single soldier who remained standing directly between Zane and the keep doors.

A squad of soldiers raced up behind Zane, but they suddenly halted as he Pushed against them—then sent the transfer of weight directly into the lone soldier. The unfortunate man crashed backward into the keep doors.

Bones crunched. The doors flung open as the soldier burst into the room beyond. Zane ducked through the open doorway, and Vin moved smoothly behind him, her bare feet leaving rough cobbles and falling on smooth marble instead.

Soldiers waited inside. These didn't wear armor, and they carried large wooden shields to block coins. They were armed with staves or obsidian swords. Hazekillers—men trained specifically to fight Allomancers. There were, perhaps, fifty of them.

*Now it begins in earnest*, Vin thought, leaping into the air and Pushing off the door's hinges.

Zane led by Pushing on the same man he'd used to brea1k open the doors, throwing the corpse toward a group of hazekillers. As the soldier crashed into them, Vin landed amid a second group. She spun on the floor, whipping out her legs and flaring pewter, tripping a good four men. As the others tried to strike, she Pushed downward against a coin in her pouch, ripping it free and throwing herself upward. She spun in the air, catching a falling staff discarded by a tripped soldier.

Obsidian cracked against the white marble where she had been. Vin came down with her own weapon and struck, attacking faster than anyone should be able to, hitting ears, chins, and throats. Skulls cracked. Bones broke. She was barely breathing hard when she found all ten of her opponents down.

*Ten men. . .didn't Kelsier once tell me he had trouble with half a dozen hazekillers?*

No time to think. A large group of soldiers charged her. She yelled and jumped toward them, throwing her staff into the face of the first man she met. The others raised their shields, surprised, but Vin whipped out a pair of obsidian daggers as she landed. She rammed them into the thighs of two men before her, then spun past them, attacking flesh where she saw it.

An attack flickered from the corner of her eye, and she snapped up an arm, blocking the wooden staff as it came for her head. The wood cracked, and she took the man down with a wide sweep of the dagger, nearly beheading him. She jumped backward as the others moved in, braced herself, then yanked on the armored corpse Zane had used before, Pulling it toward her.

Shields did little good against a missile so large. Vin smashed the corpse into her opponents, sweeping them before her. To the side, she could see the remnants of the hazekillers who had attacked Zane. Zane stood among them, a black pillar before the fallen, arms outstretched. He met her eyes, then nodded toward the rear of the chamber.

Vin ignored the few remaining hazekillers. She Pushed against the corpse and sent herself sliding across the floor. Zane jumped up, Pushing back, shattering his way through a window and into the mists. Vin quickly did a check of the back rooms: no Cett. She turned and took down a straggling hazekiller as she ducked into the lift shaft.

She needed no elevator. She shot straight up on a Pushed coin, bursting out onto the third floor. Zane would take the second.

Vin landed quietly on the marble floor, hearing footsteps come down a stairwell beside her. She recognized this large, open room: it was the chamber where she and Elend had met Cett for dinner. It was now empty, even the table removed, but she recognized the circular perimeter of stained-glass windows.

Hazekillers burst from the kitchen room. Dozens. *There must be another stairwell back there,* Vin thought as she darted toward the stairwell beside her. Dozens more were coming out there, however, and the two groups moved to surround her.

Fifty-to-one must have seemed like good odds for the men, and they charged confidently. She glanced at the open kitchen doors, and saw no Cett beyond. This floor was clear.

*Cett certainly brought a lot of hazekillers,* she thought, backing quietly to the center of the room. Save for the stairwell, kitchens, and pillars, the room was mostly surrounded in arched stained-glass windows.

*He planned for my attack. Or, he tried to.*

Vin ducked down as the waves of men surrounded her. She turned her head up, eyes closed, and burned duralumin.

Then she Pulled.

Stained-glass windows—set in metal frames inside their arches—exploded around the room. She felt the metal frames burst inward, twisting on themselves before her awesome power. She imagined twinkling slivers of multicolored glass in the air. She heard men scream as glass and metal hit them, embedding in their flesh.

Only the outer layer of men would die from the blast. Vin opened her eyes and jumped as a dozen dueling canes fell around her. She passed through a hail of attacks. Some hit. It didn't matter. She couldn't feel pain at the moment.

She Pushed against a broken metal frame, throwing herself over the heads of soldiers, landing outside the large circle of attackers. The outer line of men was down, impaled by glass shards and twisted metal frames. Vin raised a hand and bowed her head.

Duralumin and steel. She Pushed. The world lurched.

Vin shot out into the mists through a broken window as she Pushed against the line of corpses impaled by metal frames. The bodies were thrown away from her, smashing into the men who were still alive in the center.

Dead, dying, and unharmed were swept from the room, Pushed out the window opposite Vin. Bodies twisted in the mists, fifty men thrown into the night, leaving the room empty save for trails of blood and discarded bits of glass.

Vin downed a vial of metals as the mists rushed around her; then she Pulled herself back toward the keep, using a window on the fourth floor. As she approached, a corpse crashed through the window, falling out into the night. She caught a glimpse of Zane disappearing out another window on the opposite side. This level was clear.

Lights burned on the fifth floor. They probably could have come here first, but that wasn't the plan. Zane was right. They didn't just need to kill Cett. They needed to terrify his entire army.

Vin Pushed against the same corpse that Zane had thrown out the window, using its metal armor as an anchor. It shot down at an angle, passing just inside a broken window, and Vin soared upward in an angle away from the building. A quick Pull directed her back to the building once she reached the elevation she needed. She landed at a window on the fifth floor.

Vin grasped the stone sill, heart thumping, breaths coming in deep gasps. Sweat made her face cold in the winter breeze, despite the heat burning within her. She gulped, eyes wide, and flared her pewter.

Mistborn.

She shattered the window with a slap. The soldiers that waited beyond jumped backward, spinning. One wore a metal belt buckle. He died first. The other twenty barely knew how to react as the buckle buzzed through their ranks, twisting between Vin's Pushes and Pulls. They had been trained, instructed, and perhaps even tested against Allomancers.

But they had never fought Vin.

Men screamed and fell, Vin ripping through their ranks with only the buckle as a weapon. Before the force of her pewter, tin, steel, and iron, the possible use of atium seemed an incredible waste. Even without it, she was a terrible weapon—one that, until this moment, even she hadn't understood.

Mistborn.

The last man fell. Vin stood among them, feeling a numbing sense of satisfaction. She let the belt buckle slip from her fingers. It hit carpet. She stood in a room that wasn't unadorned as the rest of the building had been;1

there was furniture here, and there were some minor decorations. Perhaps Elend's clearing crews hadn't gotten this far before Cett's arrival, or perhaps he'd simply brought some of his own comforts.

Behind her was the stairwell. In front of her was a fine wooden wall set with a door—the inner apartments. Vin stepped forward quietly, mistcloak rustling as she Pulled four lamps off the brackets behind her. They whipped forward, and she sidestepped, letting them crash into the wall. Fire blossomed across splattered oil, billowing across the wall, the force of the lamps breaking the door on its hinges. She raised a hand, Pushing it fully open.

Fire dripped around her as she stepped into the room beyond. The richly decorated chamber was quiet, and eerily empty save for two figures. Cett sat in a simple wooden chair, bearded, sloppily dressed, and looking very, very tired. Cett's young son stepped in between Cett and Vin. The boy held a dueling cane.

*So, which one is Mistborn?*

The boy swung. Vin caught the weapon, then shoved the boy to the side. He crashed into the wooden wall, then slumped to the ground. Vin eyed him.

"Leave Gneorndin alone, woman," Cett said. "Do what you came to do."

Vin turned toward the nobleman. She remembered her frustration, her rage, her cool, icy anger. She stepped forward and grabbed Cett by the front of his suit. "Fight me," she said, and tossed him backward.

He slammed against the back wall, then slumped to the ground. Vin prepared her atium, but he did not rise. He simply rolled to the side, coughing.

Vin walked over, pulling him up by one arm. He balled a fist, trying to strike her, but he was pathetically weak. She let the blows bounce off her side.

"*Fight me*," she commanded, tossing him to the side. He tumbled across the floor—head hitting hard—and came to rest against the burning wall, a trickle of blood running from his brow. He didn't rise.

Vin gritted her teeth, striding forward.

"Leave him alone!" The boy, Gneorndin, stumbled in front of Cett, raising his dueling cane in a wavering hand.

Vin paused, cocking her head. The boy's brow was streaked with sweat, and he was unsteady on his feet. She looked into his eyes, and saw absolute terror therein. This boy was no Mistborn. Yet, he held his ground. Pathetically, hopelessly, he stood before the body of the fallen Cett.

"Step aside, son," Cett said in a tired voice. "There is nothing you can do here."

The boy started to shake, then began to weep.

*Tears*, Vin thought, feeling an oddly surreal feeling cloud her mind. She reached up, surprised to find wet streaks on her own cheeks.

"You have no Mistborn," she whispered.

Cett had struggled to a half-reclining position, and he looked into her eyes.

"No Allomancers faced us this night," she said. "You used them all on the assassination attempt in the Assembly Hall?"

"The only Allomancers I had, I sent against you months ago," Cett said with a sigh. "They were all I ever had, my only hope of killing you. Even they weren't from my family. My whole line has been corrupted by skaa blood—Allrianne is the only Allomancer to be born to us for centuries."

"You came to Luthadel. . ."

"Because Straff would have come for me eventually," Cett said. "My best chance, lass, was to kill *you* early on. That's why I sent them all against you. Failing that, I knew I had to try and take this damn city and its atium so I could buy myself some Allomancers. Didn't work."

"You could have just offered us an alliance."

Cett chuckled, pulling himself up to a sitting position. "It doesn't work that way in real politics. You take, or you get taken. Besides, I've always been a gambling man." He looked up at her, meeting her eyes. "Do what you came to," he repeated.

Vin shivered. She couldn't feel her tears. She could barely feel anything.

*Why? Why can't I make sense of anything anymore?*

The room began to shake. Vin spun, looking toward the back wall. The wood there quivered and spasmed like a dying animal. Nails began to pop, ripping backward through the paneling; then the entire wall burst away from Vin. Burning boards, splinters, nails, and shingles sprayed in the air, flying around a man in black. Zane stood sideways in the room beyond, death strewn at his feet, hands at his sides.

Red streamed from the tips of his fingers, running in a steady drip. He looked up through the burning remnants of the wall, smiling. Then he stepped toward Cett's room.

"No!" Vin said, dashing at him.

Zane paused, surprised. He stepped to the side, easily dodging Vin, walking toward Cett and the boy.

"Zane, leave them!" Vin said, turning toward him, Pushing herself in a skid across the room. She reached for his arm. The black fabric glistened wet with blood that was only his own.

Zane dodged. He turned toward her, curious. She reached for him, but he moved out of the way with supernatural ease, outstepping her like a master swordsman facing a young boy.

*Atium*, Vin thought. *He probably burned it this entire time. But, he didn't need it to fight those men. . .they didn't have a chance against us anyway*.

"Please," she asked. "Leave them."

Zane turned toward Cett, who sat expectant. The boy was at his side, trying to pull his father away.

Zane looked back at her, head cocked.

"Please," Vin repeated.

Zane frowned. "He still controls you, then," he said, sounding disappointed. "I thought, maybe, if you could fight and see just how powerful you were, you'd shake yourself free of Elend's grip. I guess I was wrong."

Then he turned his back on Cett and walked out through the hole he had made. Vin followed quietly, feet crunching splinters of wood as she slowly withdrew, leaving a broken keep, shattered army, and humiliated lord behind.

*But must not even a madman rely on his own mind, his own experience, rather than that of others?*

# 44

IN THE COLD CALM OF morning, Breeze watched a very disheartening sight: Cett's army withdrawing.

Breeze shivered, breath puffing as he turned toward Clubs. Most people wouldn't have been able to read beyond the sneer on the squat general's face. But Breeze saw more: he saw the tension in the taut skin around Clubs's eyes, he noticed the way that Clubs tapped his finger against the frosty stone wall. Clubs was not a nervous man. The motions meant something.

"This is it, then?" Breeze asked quietly.

Clubs nodded.

Breeze couldn't see it. There were still two armies out there; it was still a standoff. Yet, he trusted Clubs's assessment. Or, rather, he trusted his own knowledge of people enough to trust his assessment of Clubs.

The general knew something he didn't.

"Kindly explain," Breeze said.

"This'll end when Straff figures it out," Clubs said.

"Figures what out?"

"That those koloss will do his job for him, if he lets them."

Breeze paused. *Straff doesn't really care about the people in the city—he just wants to take it for the atium. And for the symbolic victory*.

"If Straff pulls back. . ." Breeze said.

"Those koloss will attack," Clubs said with a nod. "They'll slaughter everyone they find and generally make rubble out of the city. Then Straff can come back and find his atium once the koloss are done."

"Assuming they leave, my dear man."

Clubs shrugged. "Either way, he's better off. Straff will face one weakened enemy instead of two strong ones."

Breeze felt a chill, and pulled his cloak closer. "You say that all so. . .straightforwardly."

"We were dead the moment that first army got here, Breeze," Clubs said. "We're just good at stalling."

*Why in the name of the Lord Ruler do I spend my time with this man?* Breeze thought. *He's nothing more than a pessimistic doomsayer*. And yet, Breeze knew people. This time, Clubs wasn't exaggerating.

"Bloody hell," Breeze muttered.

Clubs just nodded, leaning against the wall and looking out at the disappearing army.

"Three hundred men," Ham said, standing in Elend's study. "Or, at least, that's what our scouts say."

"That's not as bad as I'd feared," Elend said. They stood in Elend's study, the only other occupant being Spook, who sat lounging beside the table.

"El," Ham said, "Cett only had a thousand men with him here in Luthadel. That means that during Vin's attack, Cett took thirty percent casualties in *less than ten minutes*. Even on a battlefield, most armies will break if they take thirty or forty percent casualties in the course of an *entire day's* fighting."

"Oh," Elend said, frowning.

Ham shook his head, sitting down, pouring himself something to drink. "I don't get it, El. Why'd she attack him?"

"She's loony," Spook said.

Elend opened his mouth to counter that comment, but found it difficult to explain his feelings. "I'm not sure why she did it," he finally admitted. "She did mention that she didn't believe those assassins at the Assembly came from my father."

Ham shrugged. He looked. . .haggard. This wasn't his element, dealing with armies and worrying about the fate of kingdoms. He preferred to conce1rn himself with smaller spheres.

*Of course,* Elend thought, *I'd just prefer to be in my chair, reading quietly. We do what we must*.

"Any news of her yet?" Elend asked.

Spook shook his head. "Uncle Grumpy has the scouts searching the city, but so far nothing."

"If Vin doesn't want to be found. . ." Ham said.

Elend began to pace. He couldn't keep still; he was beginning to think he must look like Jastes, wandering in circles, running his hand through his hair.

*Be firm*, he told himself. *You can afford to seem worried, but you mustn't ever seem uncertain*.

He continued to pace, though he slowed his step, and he didn't voice his concerns to Ham or Spook. What if Vin was wounded? What if Cett had killed her? Their scouts had seen very little of the attack the night before. Vin had definitely been involved, and there were conflicting reports that said she'd been fighting another Mistborn. She had left the keep with one of the top floors in flames—and, for some reason, she had left Cett alive.

Since then, nobody had seen her.

Elend closed his eyes, pausing as he leaned a hand against the stone wall. *I've been ignoring her lately. I've helped the city. . .but what good will it do to save Luthadel if I lose her? It's almost like I don't know her anymore*.

*Or did I ever know her in the first place?*

It felt wrong to not have her with him. He had come to rely on her simple bluntness. He needed her genuine realism—her sheer sense of concreteness—to keep him grounded. He needed to hold her, so that he could know that there was something more important than theories and concepts.

He loved her.

"I don't know, El," Ham finally said. "I never thought that Vin would be a liability, but she had a hard youth. I remember once she exploded at the crew for little reason, yelling and screaming about her childhood. I. . .don't know that she's completely stable."

Elend opened his eyes. "She's stable, Ham," he said firmly. "And she's more capable than any of us."

Ham frowned. "But—"

"She had a good reason for attacking Cett," Elend said. "I trust her."

Ham and Spook exchanged glances, and Spook just shrugged.

"It's more than last night, El," Ham said. "Something's not right with that girl—not just mentally, either. . .."

"What do you mean?" Elend asked.

"Remember the attack on the Assembly?" Ham said. "You told me you saw her get hit square-on by a Thug's staff."

"And?" Elend asked. "It laid her out for three full days."

Ham shook his head. "Her complete collection of wounds—getting hit in the side, the shoulder wound, nearly being choked to death—those all together laid her out for a couple of days. But, if she'd really gotten hit that hard by a Thug, she shouldn't have been out for days, Elend. She should have been out for weeks. Maybe longer. She certainly shouldn't have escaped without broken ribs."

"She was burning pewter," Elend said.

"Presumably, so was the Thug."

Elend paused.

"You see?" Ham said. "If both were flaring pewter, then they should have balanced each other out. That leaves Vin—a girl who can't weigh more than a hundred pounds—getting clobbered full-on by a trained soldier with three times her weight. She shrugged it off with barely a few days' rest."

"Vin's special," Elend finally said.

"I won't argue with that," Ham said. "But she's also hiding things from us. Who was that other Mistborn? Some of the reports make it sound like they were working together."

*She said there was another Mistborn in the city*, Elend thought. *Zane—Straff's messenger. She hasn't mentioned him in a very long while*.

Ham rubbed his forehead. "This is all falling apart around us, El."

"Kelsier could have kept it together," Spook mumbled. "When he was here, even our failures were part of his plan."

"The Survivor is dead," Elend said. "I never knew him, but I've listened to enough about him to learn one thing. He didn't give in to despair."

Ham smiled. "That much is true. He was laughing and joking the day after we lost our entire army to a miscalculation. Arrogant bastard."

"Callous," Spook said.

"No," Ham said, reaching for his cup. "I used to think that. Now. . .I just think he was determined. Kell always looked toward tomorrow, no matter what the consequences."

"Well, we have to do the same," Elend said. "Cett is gone—Penrod let him leave. We can't change that fact. But, we do have information on the koloss army."

"Oh, about that," Spook said, reaching into his pouch. He tossed something to the table. "You're right—they're the same."

The coin rolled to a stop, and Elend picked it up. He could see where Spook had scraped it with a knife, peeling off the gold paint to reveal the dense hardwood beneath. It was a poor representation of a boxing; it was little wonder that the fakes had been so easy to pick out. Only a fool would try to pass them off as real. A fool, or a koloss.

Nobody was certain how some of Jastes's fake boxings had worked their way up to Luthadel; perhaps he had tried giving them to peasants or beggars in his home dominance. Either way, it was fairly apparent what he was doing. He'd needed an army, and had needed cash. He'd fabricated the one to get the other. Only koloss would have fallen for such a ploy.

"I don't get it," Ham said as Elend passed him the coin. "How come the koloss have suddenly decided to take money? The Lord Ruler never paid them."

Elend paused, thinking back to his experience with the camp. *We are humans. We will live in your city. . ..*

"The koloss are changing, Ham," Elend said. "Or maybe we never really understood them in the first place. Either way, we need to be strong. This isn't over yet."

"It would be easier to be strong if I knew our Mistborn wasn't insane. She didn't even discuss this with us!"

"I know," Elend said.

Ham rose, shaking his head. "There's a reason the Great Houses were always so reluctant to use their Mistborn against each other. Things just got a whole lot more dangerous. If Cett does have a Mistborn, and he decides to retaliate. . ."

"I know," Elend said again, bidding the two farewell.

Ham waved to Spook, and the two of them left, off to check with Breeze and Clubs.

*They all act so glum*, Elend thought, leaving his rooms to find something to eat. *It's like they think we're doomed because of one setback. But, Cett's withdrawal is a good thing. One of our enemies is leaving—and there are still two armies out there. Jastes won't attack if doing so exposes him to Straff, and Straff himself is too scared of Vin to do anything. In fact, her attack on Cett will only make my father more frightened. Maybe that's why she did it*.

"Your Majesty?" a voice whispered.

Elend spun, searching the hallway.

"Your Majesty," said a short figure in the shadows. OreSeur. "I think I've found her."

Elend didn't bring anyone with him save for a few guards. He didn't want to explain to Ham and the others how he'd gotten his information; Vin still insisted on keeping OreSeur secret.

*Ham's right about one thing*, Elend thought as his carriage pulled to a stop. *She is hiding things. She does it all the time*.

But that didn't stop him from trusting her. He nodded to OreSeur, and they left the carriage. Elend waved his guards back as he approached a dilapidated building. It had probably once been a poor merchant's shop—a place run by extremely low nobility, selling meager necessities to skaa workers in exchange for food tokens, which could in turn be exchanged for money from the Lord Ruler.

The building was in a sector that Elend's fuel-collection crews hadn't reached yet. It was obvious, however, that it hadn't seen a lot of use lately. It had been ransacked long ago, and the ash coating the floor was a good four inches deep. A small trail of footprints led toward a back stairwell.

"What is this place?" Elend asked with a frown.

OreSeur shrugged a pair of dog's shoulders.

"Then how did you know she was here?"

"I followed her last night, Your Majesty," OreSeur said. "I saw the general direction she went. After that, it was simply a process of careful searching."

Elend frowned. "That still must have taken some pretty mean tracking abilities, kandra."

"These bones have unusually keen senses."

Elend nodded. The stairwell led up into a long hallway with several rooms at the ends. Elend began to walk down the hallway, then paused. To one side, a panel on the wall had been slid back, revealing a small cubby. He could hear movement within.

"Vin?" he asked, poking his head into the cubby.

There was a small room hidden behind the wall, and Vin sat on the far side. The room—more of a nook—was only a few feet across, and even Vin wouldn't have been able to stand up in it. She didn't respond to him. She simply sat, leaning against the far wall, head turned away from him.

Elend crawled inside the small chamber, getting ash on his knees. It was barely large enough for him to enter without bumping into her. "Vin? Are you all right?"

She sat, twisting something between her fingers. And she was looking at the wall—looking through a narrow hole. Elend could see sunlight shining through.

*It's a peephole,* he realized. *To watch the street below. This isn't a shop—it's a thieving hideout. Or, it was*.

"I used to think Camon was a terrible man," Vin said quietly.

Elend paused, on hands and knees. Finally, he settled back into a cramped seated position. At least Vin didn't look hurt. "Camon?" he asked.

"Your old crewleader, before Kelsier?"

Vin nodded. She turned away from the slit, sitting with her arms around her knees. "He beat people, he killed those who disagreed with him. Even among street thugs, he was brutal."

Elend frowned.

"But," Vin said quietly, "I doubt he killed as many people during his entire life as I killed last night."

Elend closed his eyes. Then he opened them and shuffled a little closer, laying a hand on Vin's shoulder. "Those were enemy soldiers, Vin."

"I was like a child in a room full of bugs," Vin whispered. He could finally see what was in her fingers. It was her earring, the simple bronze stud that she always wore. She looked down at it, twisting it between her fingers.

"Did I ever tell you how I got this?" she asked. He shook his head. "My mother gave it to me," she said. "I don't remember it happening—Reen told me about it. My mother. . .she heard voices sometimes. She killed my baby sister, slaughtered her. And that same day she gave me this, one of her own earrings. As if. . .as if choosing me over my sister. A punishment for one, a twisted present for another."

Vin shook her head. "My entire life has been death, Elend. Death of my sister, the death of Reen. Crewmembers dead around me, Kelsier falling to the Lord Ruler, then my own spear in the Lord Ruler's chest. I try to protect, and tell myself that I'm escaping it all. And then. . .I do something like I did last night."

Not certain what else to do, Elend pulled her close. She was stiff, however. "You had a good reason for what you did," he said.

"No I didn't," Vin said. "I just wanted to hurt them. I wanted to scare them and make them leave you alone. It sounds childish, but that's how I felt."

"It's not childish, Vin," Elend said. "It was good strategy. You gave our enemies a show of force. You frightened away one of our major opponents, and now my father will be even more afraid to attack. You've bought us more time!"

"Bought it with the lives of hundreds of men."

"Enemy soldiers who marched into our city," Elend said. "Men who were protecting a tyrant who oppresses his people."

"That's the same rationale Kelsier used," Vin said quietly, "when he killed noblemen and their guards. He said they were upholding the Final Empire, so they deserved to die. He frightened me."

Elend didn't know what to say to that.

"It was like he thought himself a god," Vin whispered. "Taking life, giving life, where he saw fit. I don't want to be like him, Elend. But, everything seems to be pushing me in that direction."

"I. . ." *You're not like him*, he wanted to say. It was true, but the words wouldn't come out. They rang hollow to him.

Instead, he pulled Vin close, her shoulder up against his chest, head beneath his chin. "I wish I knew the right things to say, Vin," he whispered. "Seeing you like this makes every protective 1instinct inside of me twist. I want to make it better—I want to fix everything—but I don't know how. Tell me what to do. Just tell me how I can help!"

She resisted his embrace a little at first, but then sighed quietly and slid her arms around him, holding him tightly. "You can't help with this," she said softly. "I have to do it alone. There are. . .decisions I have to make."

He nodded. "You'll make the right ones, Vin."

"You don't even know what I'm deciding."

"It doesn't matter," he said. "I know I can't help—I couldn't even hold on to my own throne. You're ten times as capable as I am."

She squeezed his arm. "Don't say things like that. Please?"

He frowned at the tension in her voice, then nodded. "All right. But, either way, I trust you, Vin. Make your decisions—I'll support you."

She nodded, relaxing a bit beneath his arms. "I think. . ." she said. "I think I have to leave Luthadel."

"Leave? And go where?"

"North," she said. "To Terris."

Elend sat back, resting against the wooden wall. *Leave?* he thought with a twisting feeling. *Is this what I've earned by being so distracted lately?*

*Have I lost her?*

And yet, he'd just told her that he'd support her decisions. "If you feel you have to go, Vin," he found himself saying, "then you should do so."

"If I were to leave, would you go with me?"

"Now?"

Vin nodded, head rubbing his chest.

"No," he finally said. "I couldn't leave Luthadel, not with those armies still out there."

"But the city rejected you."

"I know," he said, sighing. "But. . .I can't leave them, Vin. They rejected me, but I won't abandon them."

Vin nodded again, and something told him this was the answer she had expected.

Elend smiled. "We're a mess, aren't we?"

"Hopeless," she said softly, sighing as she finally pulled away from him. She seemed so tired. Outside the room, Elend could hear footsteps. OreSeur appeared a moment later, poking his head into the hidden chamber.

"Your guards are growing restless, Your Majesty," he said to Elend. "They will soon come looking for you."

Elend nodded, shuffling over to the exit. Once in the hallway, he offered a hand to help Vin out. She took the hand, crawling out, then stood and dusted off her clothing—her typical shirt and trousers.

*Will she ever go back to dresses now?* he wondered.

"Elend," she said, fishing in a pocket. "Here, you can spend this, if you want."

She opened up her hand, dropping a bead into his hand.

"Atium?" he asked incredulously. "Where did you get it?"

"From a friend," she said.

"And you didn't burn it last night?" Elend asked. "When you were fighting all those soldiers?"

"No," Vin said. "I swallowed it, but I didn't end up ne1eding it, so I forced it back up."

*Lord Ruler!* Elend thought. *I didn't even consider that she didn't have atium. What could she have done if she'd burned that bit?* He looked up at her. "Some reports say that there's another Mistborn in the city."

"There is. Zane."

Elend dropped the bead back into her hand. "Then keep this. You might need it to fight him."

"I doubt that," Vin said quietly.

"Keep it anyway," Elend said. "This is worth a small fortune—but we'd need a very *large* fortune to make any difference now. Besides, who would buy it? If I used it to bribe Straff or Cett, they'd only become more certain I'm holding atium against them."

Vin nodded, then glanced at OreSeur. "Keep this," she said, handing the bead toward him. "It's big enough that another Allomancer could pull it off me if he wanted."

"I will guard it with my life, Mistress," OreSeur said, his shoulder splitting open to make room for the bit of metal.

Vin turned to join Elend as they walked down the steps, moving to meet with the guards below.

*I know what I have memorized. I know what is now repeated by the other Worldbringers.*

# 45

"THE HERO OF AGES WON'T be Terris," Tindwyl said, scribbling a note at the bottom of their list.

"We knew that already," Sazed said. "From the logbook."

"Yes," Tindwyl said, "but Alendi's account was only a reference—a thirdhand mention of the effects of a prophecy. I found someone quoting the prophecy itself."

"Truly?" Sazed asked, excited. "Where?"

"The biography of Helenntion," Tindwyl said. "One of the last survivors of the Council of Khlennium."

"Write it for me," Sazed said, scooting his chair a bit closer to hers. He had to blink a few times as she wrote, his head clouding for a moment from fatigue.

*Stay alert!* he told himself. *There isn't much time left. Not much at all. . ..*

Tindwyl was doing a little better than he, but her wakefulness was obviously beginning to run out, for she was starting to droop. He'd taken a quick nap during the night, rolled up on her floor, but she had carried on. As far as he could tell, she'd been awake for over a week straight.

*There was much talk of the Rabzeen, during those days*, Tindwyl wrote. *Some said he would come to fight the Conqueror. Others said he was the Conqueror. Helenntion didn't make his thoughts on the matter known to me. The Rabzeen is said to be "He who is not of his people, yet fulfills all of* *their wishes." If this is the case, then perhaps the Conqueror is the one. He is said to have been of Khlennium*.

She stopped there. Sazed frowned, reading the words again. Kwaan's last testimony—the rubbing Sazed had taken at the Conventical of Seran—had proven useful in more than one way. It had provided a key.

*It wasn't until years later that I became convinced that he was the Hero of Ages*, Kwaan had written. *Hero of Ages: the one called Rabzeen in Khlennium, the Anamnesor. . ..*

The rubbing was a means of translat1ion—not between languages, but between synonyms. It made sense that there would be other names for the Hero of Ages; a figure so important, so surrounded by lore, would have many titles. Yet, so much had been lost from those days. The Rabzeen and the Anamnesor were both mythological figures vaguely familiar to Sazed—but they were only two among hosts. Until the discovery of the rubbing, there had been no way to connect their names to the Hero of Ages.

Now Tindwyl and he could search their metalminds with open eyes. Perhaps, in the past, Sazed had read this very passage from Helenntion's biography; he had at least skimmed many of the older records, searching for religious references. Yet, he would never have been able to realize that the passage was referring to the Hero of Ages, a figure from Terris lore that the Khlenni people had renamed into their own tongue.

"Yes. . ." he said slowly. "This is good, Tindwyl. Very good." He reached over, laying his hand on hers.

"Perhaps," she said, "though it tells us nothing new."

"Ah, but the wording might be important, I think," Sazed said. "Religions are often very careful with their writings."

"Especially prophecies," Tindwyl said, frowning just a bit. She was not fond of anything that smacked of superstition or soothsaying.

"I would have thought," Sazed noted, "that you would no longer have this prejudice, considering our current enterprise."

"I gather information, Sazed," she said. "Because of what it says of people, and because of what the past can teach us. However, there is a reason I took to studying history as opposed to theology. I don't approve of perpetuating lies."

"Is that what you think I do when I teach of religions?" he asked in amusement.

Tindwyl looked toward him. "A bit," she admitted. "How can you teach the people to look toward the gods of the dead, Sazed? Those religions did their people little good, and their prophecies are now dust."

"Religions are an expression of hope," Sazed said. "That hope gives people strength."

"Then you don't believe?" Tindwyl asked. "You just give the people something to trust, something to delude themselves?"

"I would not call it so."

"Then you think the gods you teach of *do* exist?"

"I. . .think that they deserved to be remembered."

"And their prophecies?" Tindwyl said. "I see scholarly value in what we do—the bringing to light of facts from the past could give us information about our current problems. Yet, this soothsaying for the future is, at its core, foolishness."

"I would not say that," Sazed said. "Religions are promises—promises that there is something watching over us, guiding us. Prophecies, therefore, are natural extensions of the hopes and desires of the people. Not foolishness at all."

"So, your interest is purely academic?" Tindwyl said.

"I wouldn't say that."

Tindwyl studied him, watching his eyes. She frowned slowly. "You believe it, don't you?" she asked. "You believe that this girl is the Hero of Ages."

"I have not yet decided," Sazed said.

"How can you even consider such a thing, Sazed?" Tindwyl asked. "Don't you see? Hope is a1 good thing—a wonderful thing—but you must have hope in something appropriate. If you perpetuate the dreams of the past, then you stifle your own dreams of the future."

"What if the past dreams are worthy of being remembered?"

Tindwyl shook her head. "Look at the odds, Sazed. What are the chances we would end up where we are, studying this rubbing, in the very same household as the Hero of Ages?"

"Odds are irrelevant when a foretelling is involved."

Tindwyl closed her eyes. "Sazed. . .I think religion is a good thing, and belief is a good thing, but it is foolishness to look for guidance in a few vague phrases. Look at what happened last time someone assumed they had found this Hero. The Lord Ruler, the Final Empire, was the result."

"Still, I will hope. If you did not believe the prophecies, then why work so hard to discover information about the Deepness and the Hero?"

"It's simple," Tindwyl said. "We are obviously facing a danger that has come before—a recurring problem, like a plague that plays itself out, only to return again centuries later. The ancient people knew of this danger, and had information about it. That information, naturally, broke down and became legends, prophecies, and even religions. There will be, then, clues to our situation hidden in the past. This is not a matter of soothsaying, but of research."

Sazed lay his hand on hers. "I think, perhaps, that this is something we cannot agree upon. Come, let us return to our studies. We must use the time we have left."

"We should be all right," Tindwyl said, sighing and reaching to tuck a bit of hair back into her bun. "Apparently, your Hero scared off Lord Cett last night. The maid who brought breakfast was speaking of it."

"I know of the event," Sazed said.

"Then things are growing better for Luthadel."

"Yes," Sazed said. "Perhaps."

She frowned. "You seem hesitant."

"I do not know," he said, glancing down. "I do not feel that Cett's departure is a good thing, Tindwyl. Something is very wrong. We need to be finished with these studies."

Tindwyl cocked her head. "How soon?"

"We should try to be done tonight, I think," Sazed said, glancing toward the pile of unbound sheets they had stacked on the table. That stack contained all the notes, ideas, and connections that they'd made during their furious bout of study. It was a book, of sorts—a guidebook that told of the Hero of Ages and the Deepness. It was a good document—incredible, even, considering the time they'd been given. It was not comprehensive. It was, however, probably the most important thing he'd ever written.

Even if he wasn't certain why.

"Sazed?" Tindwyl asked, frowning. "What is this?" She reached to the stack of papers, pulling out a sheet that was slightly askew. As she held it up, Sazed was shocked to see that a chunk from the bottom right corner had been torn off.

"Did you do this?" she asked.

"No," Sazed said. He accepted the paper. It was one of the transcriptions of the rubbing; the tear had removed the last sentence or so. There was no sign of the missing piece.

Sazed looked up, meeting Tindwyl's confused gaze. She turned, shuffling through a stack of pap1ers to the side. She pulled out another copy of the transcription and held it up.

Sazed felt a chill. The corner was missing.

"I referenced this yesterday," Tindwyl said quietly. "I haven't left the room save for a few minutes since then, and you were always here."

"Did you leave last night?" Sazed asked. "To visit the privy while I slept?"

"Perhaps. I don't remember."

Sazed sat for a moment, staring at the page. The tear was eerily similar in shape to the one from their main stack. Tindwyl, apparently thinking the same thing, laid it over its companion. It matched perfectly; even the smallest ridges in the tears were identical. Even if they'd been torn lying right on top of one another, the duplication wouldn't have been so perfect.

Both of them sat, staring. Then they burst into motion, riffling through their stacks of pages. Sazed had four copies of the transcription. All were missing the same exact chunk.

"Sazed. . ." Tindwyl said, her voice shaking just a bit. She held up a sheet of paper—one that had only half of the transcription on it, ending near the middle of the page. A hole had been torn directly in the middle of the page, removing the exact same sentence.

"The rubbing!" Tindwyl said, but Sazed was already moving. He left his chair, rushing to the trunk where he stored his metalminds. He fumbled with the key at his neck, pulling it off and unlocking the trunk. He threw it open, removed the rubbing, then unfolded it delicately on the ground. He withdrew his fingers suddenly, feeling almost as if he'd been bitten, as he saw the tear at the bottom. The same sentence, removed.

"How is this possible?" Tindwyl whispered. "How could someone know so much of our work—so much of us?"

"And yet," Sazed said, "how could they know so little of our abilities? I have the entire transcription stored in my metalmind. I can remember it right now."

"What does the missing sentence say?"

"'Alendi must not reach the Well of Ascension; he must not be allowed to take the power for himself.'"

"Why remove this sentence?" Tindwyl asked.

Sazed stared at the rubbing. *This seems impossible. . ..*

A noise sounded at the window. Sazed spun, reaching reflexively into his pewtermind and increasing his strength. His muscles swelled, his robe growing tight.

The shutters swung open. Vin crouched on the sill. She paused as she saw Sazed and Tindwyl—who had also apparently tapped strength, growing to have almost masculine bulk.

"Did I do something wrong?" Vin asked.

Sazed smiled, releasing his pewtermind. "No, child," he said. "You simply startled us." He met Tindwyl's eye, and she began to gather up the ripped pieces of paper. Sazed folded up the rubbing; they would discuss it further later.

"Have you seen anyone spending too much time around my room, Lady Vin?" Sazed asked as he replaced the rubbing. "Any strangers—or even any particular guards?"

"No," Vin said, climbing into the room. She walked barefoot, as usual, and she didn't wear her mistcloak; she rarely did in the daytime. If she had fought the night before, she had changed clothing, for there were no stains of blood—or even sweat—on this outfit. "D1o you want me to watch for anyone suspicious?" she asked.

"Yes, please," Sazed said, locking the chest. "We fear that someone has been riffling through our work, though why they would wish to do so is confusing."

Vin nodded, remaining where she was as Sazed returned to his seat. She regarded him and Tindwyl for a moment.

"I need to talk to you, Sazed," Vin said.

"I can spare a few moments, I think," Sazed said. "But, I must warn you that my studies are very pressing."

Vin nodded, then glanced at Tindwyl. Finally, she sighed, rising. "I guess I will go and see about lunch, then."

Vin relaxed slightly as the door closed; then she moved over to the table, sitting down in Tindwyl's chair, pulling her legs up before her on the wooden seat.

"Sazed," she asked, "how do you know if you're in love?"

Sazed blinked. "I. . .I do not think *I* am one to speak on this topic, Lady Vin. I know very little about it."

"You always say things like that," Vin said. "But really, you're an expert on just about everything."

Sazed chuckled. "In this case, I assure you that my insecurity is heartfelt, Lady Vin."

"Still, you've got to know something."

"A bit, perhaps," Sazed said. "Tell me, how do you feel when you are with young Lord Venture?"

"I want him to hold me," Vin said quietly, turning to the side, looking out the window. "I want him to talk to me, even if I don't understand what he's saying. Anything to keep him there, with me. I want to be better because of him."

"That seems like a very good sign, Lady Vin."

"But. . ." Vin glanced down. "I'm not good for him, Sazed. He's scared of me."

"Scared?"

"Well, he's at least uncomfortable with me. I saw the look in his eyes when he saw me fighting on the day of the Assembly attack. He stumbled away from me, Sazed, horrified."

"He'd just seen a man slain," Sazed said. "Lord Venture is somewhat innocent in these matters, Lady Vin. It wasn't you, I think—it was simply a natural reaction to the horror of death."

"Either way," Vin said, glancing back out the window. "I don't want him to see me that way. I want to be the girl he needs—the girl who can support his political plans. The girl who can be pretty when he needs her on his arm, and who can comfort him when he's frustrated. Except, that's not me. You're the one who trained me to act like a courtly woman, Saze, but we both know that I wasn't all that good at it."

"And Lord Venture fell in love with you," Sazed said, "because you *didn't* act like the other women. Despite Lord Kelsier's interference, despite your knowledge that all noblemen were our enemies, Elend fell in love with you."

"I shouldn't have let him," Vin said quietly. "I need to stay away from him, Saze—for his own good. That way, he can fall in love with someone else. Someone who is a better match for him. Someone who doesn't go kill a hundred people when she gets frustrated. Someone who deserves his love."

Sazed rose, robes swishing as he stepped to Vin's chair. He stooped down, placing his head even with hers, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Oh, chi1ld. When will you stop worrying and simply let yourself be loved?"

Vin shook her head. "It's not that easy."

"Few things are. Yet, I tell you this, Lady Vin. Love must be allowed to flow both ways—if it is not, then it is not truly love, I think. It is something else. Infatuation, perhaps? Either way, there are some of us who are far too quick to make martyrs of ourselves. We stand at the side, watching, thinking that we do the right thing by inaction. We fear pain—our own, or that of another."

He squeezed her shoulder. "But. . .is that love? Is it love to assume for Elend that he has no place with you? Or, is it love to let him make his own decision in the matter?"

"And if I'm wrong for him?" Vin asked.

"You must love him enough to trust his wishes, even if you disagree with them. You must respect him—no matter how wrong you think he may be, no matter how poor you think his decisions, you must respect his desire to make them. Even if one of them includes loving you."

Vin smiled slightly, but she still seemed troubled. "And. . ." she said very slowly, "if there is someone else? For me?"

*Ah. . ..*

She tensed immediately. "You mustn't tell Elend I said that."

"I won't," Sazed promised. "Who is this other man?"

Vin shrugged. "Just. . .someone more like myself. The kind of man I *should* be with."

"Do you love him?"

"He's strong," Vin said. "He makes me think of Kelsier."

*So there is another Mistborn,* Sazed thought. In this matter, he knew he should remain unbiased. He didn't know enough about this second man to make a judgment—and Keepers were supposed to give information, but avoid specific advice.

Sazed, however, had never been very good at following that rule. He didn't know this other Mistborn, true, but he *did* know Elend Venture. "Child," he said, "Elend is the best of men, and you have been so much happier since you've been with him."

"But, he's really the first man I loved," Vin said quietly. "How do I know it's right? Shouldn't I pay more attention to the man who is a better match for me?"

"I don't know, Lady Vin. I honestly don't know. I warned you of my ignorance in this area. But, can you really hope to find a better person than Lord Elend?"

She sighed. "It's all so frustrating. I should be worrying about the city and the Deepness, not which man to spend my evenings with!"

"It is hard to defend others when our own lives are in turmoil," Sazed said.

"I just have to decide," Vin said, standing, walking over toward the window. "Thank you, Sazed. Thank you for listening. . .thank you for coming back to the city."

Sazed nodded, smiling. Vin shot backward out the open window, shoving herself against some bit of metal. Sazed sighed, rubbing his eyes as he walked over to the room's door and pulled it open.

Tindwyl stood outside, arms crossed. "I think I would feel more comfortable in this city," she said, "if I didn't know that our Mistborn had the volatile emotions of a teenage girl."

"Lady Vin is more stable than you think," Sazed said.

"Sazed, I've raised some fifteen daughters," Tindwyl said, entering the room. "*No* teenage girl is stable. Some are just better at hiding it than others."

"Then, be glad she didn't hear you eavesdropping," Sazed said. "She is usually rather paranoid about such things."

"Vin has a weak spot regarding Terris people," Tindwyl said with a wave of her hand. "We can likely thank you for that. She seems to give great value to your advice."

"Such as it is."

"I thought what you said was very wise, Sazed," Tindwyl said, sitting. "You would have made an excellent father."

Sazed bowed his head in embarrassment, then moved over to sit down. "We should—"

A knock came at the door.

"Now what?" Tindwyl asked.

"Did you not order us lunch?"

Tindwyl shook her head. "I never even left the hallway."

A second later, Elend poked his head into the room. "Sazed? Could I talk to you for a bit?"

"Of course, Lord Elend," Sazed said, rising.

"Great," Elend said, striding into the room. "Tindwyl, you are excused."

She rolled her eyes, shooting an exasperated glance at Sazed, but stood and walked from the room.

"Thank you," Elend said as she shut the door. "Please, sit," he said, waving to Sazed.

Sazed did so, and Elend took a deep breath, standing with hands clasped behind his back. He had gone back to his white uniforms, and stood with a commanding posture despite his obvious frustration.

*Someone stole my friend the scholar away,* Sazed thought, *and left a king in his place*. "I assume this is about Lady Vin, Lord Elend?"

"Yes," Elend said, beginning to pace, gesturing with one hand as he spoke. "She doesn't make any sense, Sazed. I expect that—hell, I count on it. She's not just female, she's *Vin*. But, I'm left unsure how to react. One minute she seems warm to me—like we were before this mess hit the city—and the next minute she's distant and stiff."

"Perhaps she's just confused herself."

"Perhaps," Elend agreed. "But shouldn't at least *one* of us know what is going on in our relationship? Honestly, Saze, sometimes I just think we're too different to be together."

Sazed smiled. "Oh, I don't know about that, Lord Elend. You may be surprised at how similarly the two of you think."

"I doubt that," Elend said, continuing to pace. "She's Mistborn; I'm just a regular man. She grew up on the streets; I grew up in a mansion. She is wily and clever; I'm book-learned."

"She is extremely competent, and so are you," Sazed said. "She was oppressed by her brother, you by your father. Both of you hated the Final Empire, and fought it. And both of you think far too much about what *should* be, rather than what is."

Elend paused, looking at Sazed. "What does that mean?"

"It means that I think you two are right for each other," Sazed said. "I am not supposed to make such judgments, and truly, this is just the opinion of a man who hasn't seen much of you two in the last few months. But, I believe it to be tr1ue."

"And our differences?" Elend asked.

"At first glance, the key and the lock it fits may seem very different," Sazed said. "Different in shape, different in function, different in design. The man who looks at them without knowledge of their true nature might think them opposites, for one is meant to open, and the other to keep closed. Yet, upon closer examination, he might see that without one, the other becomes useless. The wise man then sees that both lock and key were created for the same purpose."

Elend smiled. "You need to write a book sometime, Sazed. That's as profound as anything I've read."

Sazed flushed, but glanced at the stack of papers on the desktop. Would they be his legacy? He wasn't certain if they were profound, but they did represent the most cohesive attempt that he'd ever made at writing something original. True, most of the sheets contained quotes or references, but a great deal of the text also included his thoughts and annotations.

"So," Elend said, "what should I do?"

"About Lady Vin?" Sazed asked. "I would suggest simply giving her—and yourself—a little more time."

"Time is at a premium these days, Saze."

"When is it not?"

"When your city isn't besieged by two armies," Elend said, "one of them led by a megalomaniac tyrant, the other by a reckless fool."

"Yes," Sazed said slowly. "Yes, I think you may be right. I should return to my studies."

Elend frowned. "What are you working on, anyway?"

"Something that has little relevance to your current problem, I fear," Sazed said. "Tindwyl and I are collecting and compiling references about the Deepness and the Hero of Ages."

"The Deepness. . .Vin mentioned it, too. You really think it might return?"

"I think it has returned, Lord Elend," Sazed said. "It never left, really. I believe the Deepness was—*is*—the mists."

"But, why. . ." Elend said, then held up a hand. "I'll read your conclusions when you have finished. I can't afford to get sidetracked right now. Thank you, Sazed, for your advice."

*Yes, a king indeed,* Sazed thought.

"Tindwyl," Elend said, "you may come back in now. Sazed, good day." Elend turned toward the door, and it cracked open slowly. Tindwyl strode in, hiding her embarrassment.

"How did you know I was out there?" she asked.

"I guessed," Elend said. "You're as bad as Vin. Anyway, good day, both of you."

Tindwyl frowned as he left; then she glanced at Sazed.

"You really did do a fine job with him," Sazed said.

"Too fine a job," Tindwyl said, sitting. "I actually think that if the people had let him remain in command, he might have found a way to save the city. Come, we must return to work—this time, I actually did send someone for lunch, so we should get as much done as possible before it arrives."

Sazed nodded, seating himself and picking up his pen. Yet, he found it difficult to focus on his work. His mind kept returning to Vin and Elend. He wasn't certain why it was so important to him that they make their relationship work. Perhaps it was simply be1cause they were both friends of his, and he wished to see them happy.

Or perhaps there was something else. Those two were the best Luthadel had to offer. The most powerful Mistborn of the skaa underground, and the most noble leader of the aristocratic culture. They needed each other, and the Final Empire needed them both.

Plus, there was the work he was doing. The specific pronoun used in much of the Terris prophetic language was gender neutral. The actual word meant "it," though it was commonly translated into modern tongues as "he." Yet each "he" in his book could also have been written as "she." If Vin really was the Hero of Ages. . .

*I need to find a way to get them out of the city*, Sazed thought, a sudden realization washing over him. *Those two must not be here when Luthadel falls*.

He put aside his notes and immediately began writing a quick series of letters.

*The two are not the same*.

# 46

BREEZE COULD SMELL INTRIGUE FROM two streets away. Unlike many of his fellow thieves, he hadn't grown up impoverished, nor had he been forced to live in the underground. He'd grown up in a place far more cutthroat: an aristocratic court. Fortunately, the other crewmembers didn't treat him differently because of his full-blooded noble origin.

That was, of course, because they didn't know about it.

His upbringing afforded him certain understandings. Things that he doubted any skaa thief, no matter how competent, knew. Skaa intrigue made a brutal kind of sense; it was a matter of naked life and death. You betrayed your allies for money, for power, or to protect yourself.

In the noble courts, intrigue was more abstract. Betrayals wouldn't often end with either party dead, but the ramifications could span generations. It was a game—so much of one, in fact, that the young Breeze had found the open brutality of the skaa underground to be refreshing.

He sipped his warm mug of mulled wine, eyeing the note in his fingers. He'd come to believe that he wouldn't have to worry about intracrew conspiracies anymore: Kelsier's crew was an almost sickeningly tight group, and Breeze did everything within his Allomantic powers to keep it that way. He'd seen what infighting could do to a family.

That was why he was so surprised to receive this letter. Despite its mock innocence, he could easily pick out the signs. The hurried pace of the writing, smudged in places but not rewritten. Phrases like "No need to tell others of this" and "do not wish to cause alarm." The extra drops of sealing wax, spread gratuitously on the lip of the letter, as if to give extra protection against prying eyes.

There was no mistaking the tone of the missive. Breeze had been invited to a conspiratorial conference. But, why in the Lord Ruler's name would

*Sazed*, of all people, want to meet in secret?

Breeze sighed, pulling out his dueling cane and using it to steady himself. He grew light-headed sometimes when he stood; it was a minor malady he'd always had, though it seemed to have grown worse during the last few years. He glanced over his shoulder as his vision cleared, toward where Allrianne slept in his bed.

*I should probably feel more guilty about her*, he thought, smiling despite himself and reaching to put his vest and jacket on over his trousers and shirt. *But. . 1.well, we're all going to be dead in a few days anyway*. An afternoon spent speaking with Clubs could certainly put one's life in perspective.

Breeze wandered out into the hallway, making his way though the gloomy, inadequately lit Venture passageways. *Honestly*, he thought, *I understand the value in saving lamp oil, but things are depressing enough right now without the dark corridors*.

The meeting place was only a few short twists away. Breeze located it easily because of the two soldiers standing watch outside the door. Demoux's men—soldiers who reported to the captain religiously, as well as vocationally.

*Interesting*, Breeze thought, remaining hidden in the side hallway. He quested out with his Allomantic powers and Soothed the men, taking away their relaxation and certainty, leaving behind anxiety and nervousness. The guards began to grow restless, shuffling. Finally, one turned and opened the door, checking on the room inside. The motion gave Breeze a full view of the room's contents. Only one man sat within. Sazed.

Breeze stood quietly, trying to decide his next course of action. There was nothing incriminating in the letter; this couldn't all simply be a trap on Elend's part, could it? An obscure attempt at finding out which crewmembers would betray him and which wouldn't? Seemed like too distrustful a move for the good-natured boy. Besides, if that were the case, Sazed would have to try and get Breeze to do more than simply meet in a clandestine location.

The door swung closed, the soldier returning to his place. *I can trust Sazed, can't I?* Breeze thought. But, if that was the case, why the quiet meeting? Was Breeze overreacting?

No, the guards proved that Sazed worried about this meeting being discovered. It was suspicious. If it were anyone else, Breeze would have gone straight to Elend. But Sazed. . .

Breeze sighed, then wandered into the hallway, dueling cane clicking against the floor. *Might as well see what he has to say. Besides, if he is planning something devious, it'd almost be worth the danger to see it.* Despite the letter, despite the strange circumstances, Breeze had trouble imagining a Terrisman being involved in something that wasn't completely honest.

Perhaps the Lord Ruler had had the same problem.

Breeze nodded to the soldiers, Soothing away their anxiety and restoring them to a more temperate humor. There was another reason why he was willing to chance the meeting. Breeze was only just beginning to realize how dangerous his predicament was. Luthadel would soon fall. Every instinct he'd nurtured during thirty years in the underground was telling him to run.

That feeling made him more likely to take risks. The Breeze of a few years earlier would already have abandoned the city. *Damn you, Kelsier,* he thought as he pushed open the door.

Sazed looked up with surprise from his table. The room was sparse, with several chairs and only two lamps. "You're early, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, standing quickly.

"Of course I am," Breeze snapped. "I had to make certain this wasn't a trap of some sort." He paused. "This isn't a trap of some sort, right?"

"Trap?" Sazed asked. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, don't sound so shocked," Breeze said. "This is no simple meeting."

Sazed wilted slightly. "It's. . .that obvious, is it?"

B1reeze sat, laying his cane across his lap, and eyed Sazed tellingly, Soothing the man to make him feel a little more self-conscious. "You may have helped us overthrow the Lord Ruler, my dear man—but you have a lot to learn about being sneaky."

"I apologize," Sazed said, sitting. "I simply wanted to meet quickly, to discuss certain. . .sensitive issues."

"Well, I'd recommend getting rid of those guards," Breeze said. "They make the room stand out. Then, light a few more lamps and get us something to eat or drink. If Elend walks in—I assume it's Elend we're hiding from?"

"Yes."

"Well, if he comes and sees us sitting here in the dark, eyeing each other insidiously, he'll know something is up. The less natural the occasion, the more natural you want to appear."

"Ah, I see," Sazed said. "Thank you."

The door opened and Clubs hobbled in. He eyed Breeze, then Sazed, then wandered over toward a chair. Breeze glanced at Sazed—no surprise there. Clubs was obviously invited as well.

"Lose those guards," Clubs snapped.

"Immediately, Lord Cladent," Sazed said, standing and shuffling over to the door. He spoke briefly with the guards, then returned. As Sazed was sitting, Ham poked his head into the room, looking suspicious.

"Wait a minute," Breeze said. "How many people are coming to this secret meeting?"

Sazed gestured for Ham to sit. "All of the more. . .experienced members of the crew."

"You mean everyone but Elend and Vin," Breeze said.

"I did not invite Lord Lestibournes either," Sazed said.

*Yes, but Spook isn't the one we're hiding from.*

Ham sat down hesitantly, shooting a questioning glance at Breeze. "So. . .why exactly are we meeting behind the backs of our Mistborn and our king?"

"King no longer," a voice noted from the door. Dockson walked in and sat. "In fact, it could be argued that Elend isn't leader of this crew anymore. He fell into that position by happenstance—just like he fell into the throne."

Ham flushed. "I know you don't like him, Dox, but I'm not here to talk treason."

"There's no treason if there's no throne to betray," Dockson said, sitting. "What are we going to do—stay here and be servants in his house? Elend doesn't need us. Perhaps it's time to transfer our services to Lord Penrod."

"Penrod is a nobleman, too," Ham said. "You can't tell me you like him any better than you do Elend."

Dockson thumped the table quietly with his fist. "It's not about who I *like*, Ham. It's about seeing that this damn kingdom Kelsier threw at us remains standing! We've spent a year and a half cleaning up his mess. Do you want to see that work wasted?"

"Please, gentlemen," Sazed said, trying—without success—to break into the conversation.

"Work, Dox?" Ham said, flushed. "What work have you done? I haven't seen you do much of anything besides sit and complain every time someone offers a plan."

"Complain?" Dockson snapped. "Do you have any idea how much administrative work it has taken to keep this city from falling upon itself? What have you done, Ham? You refused to take command of the a1rmy. All you do is drink and spar with your friends!"

*That's enough of that*, Breeze thought, Soothing the men. *At this rate, we'll strangle each other before Straff can have us executed*.

Dockson settled back in his chair, waving a dismissive hand at Ham, who still sat red-faced. Sazed waited, obviously chagrined by the outbreak. Breeze Soothed away his insecurity. *You're in charge here, Sazed. Tell us what is going on*.

"Please," Sazed said. "I did not bring us together so that we could argue. I understand that you are all tense—that is understandable, considering the circumstances."

"Penrod is going to give our city to Straff," Ham said.

"That's better than letting him slaughter us," Dockson countered.

"Actually," Breeze said, "I don't think we have to worry about Straff slaughtering us."

"No?" Dockson asked, frowning. "Do you have some information you haven't been sharing with us, Breeze?"

"Oh, get over yourself, Dox," Ham snapped. "You've never been happy that you didn't end up in charge when Kell died. That's the real reason you never liked Elend, isn't it?"

Dockson flushed, and Breeze sighed, slapping both of them with a powerful blanket Soothing. They both jumped slightly, as if they'd been stung—though the sensation would be quite the opposite. Their emotions, once volatile, would suddenly have become numb and unresponsive.

Both looked at Breeze.

"Yes," he said, "of course I'm Soothing you. Honestly, I know Hammond is a bit immature—but you, Dockson?"

Dockson sat back, rubbing his forehead. "You can let go, Breeze," he said after a moment. "I'll keep my tongue."

Ham just grumbled, settling one hand on the table. Sazed watched the exchange with a little bit of shock.

*This is what cornered men are like, my dear Terrisman*, Breeze thought. *This is what happens when they lose hope. They might be able to keep up appearances in front of the soldiers, but put them alone with their friends. . .*

Sazed was a Terrisman; his entire life had been one of oppression and loss. But these men, Breeze himself included, were accustomed to success. Even against overwhelming odds, they were confident. They were the type of men who could go up against a god, and expect to win. They wouldn't deal well with losing. Of course, when losing meant death, who would?

"Straff's armies are getting ready to break camp," Clubs finally said. "He's doing it subtly, but the signs are there."

"So, he's coming for the city," Dockson said. "My men in Penrod's palace say the Assembly has been sending missive after missive to Straff, all but begging him to come take up occupation of Luthadel."

"He's not going to take the city," Clubs said. "At least, not if he's smart."

"Vin is still a threat," Breeze said. "And it doesn't look like Straff has a Mistborn to protect him. If he came into Luthadel, I doubt there is a single thing he could do to keep her from slitting his throat. So, he'll do something else."

Dockson frowned, and glanced at Ham, who shrugged.

"It's really quite simple," Breeze said, tapping the table with his dueling cane. "Why, even I figured it out." Clubs snorted at this. "If Straff makes it look like he's withdrawing, the koloss will probably attack Luthadel for him. They're too literal to understand the threat of a hidden army."

"If Straff withdraws," Clubs said, "Jastes won't be able to keep them from the city."

Dockson blinked. "But they'd. . ."

"Slaughter?" Clubs asked. "Yes. They'd pillage the richest sectors of the town—probably end up killing most of the noblemen in the city."

"Eliminating the men that Straff has been forced—against his will, knowing that man's pride—to work with," Breeze added. "In fact, there's a good chance the creatures will kill Vin. Can you imagine her not joining the fight if koloss broke in?"

The room fell silent.

"But, that doesn't really help Straff get the city," Dockson said. "He'll still have to fight the koloss."

"Yes," Clubs said, scowling. "But, they'll probably take down some of the city gates, not to mention level a lot of the homes. That will leave Straff with a clear field to attack a weakened foe. Plus, koloss don't strategize—for them, city walls won't be much help. Straff couldn't ask for a better setup."

"He'd be seen as a liberator," Breeze said quietly. "If he returns at the right time—after the koloss have broken into the city and fought the soldiers, but before they've done serious damage to the skaa quarter—he could free the people and establish himself as their protector, not their conqueror. Knowing how the people feel, I think they'd welcome him. Right now, a strong leader would mean more to them than coins in their pockets and rights in the Assembly."

As the group thought on this, Breeze eyed Sazed, who still sat quietly. He'd said so little; what was his game? Why gather the crew? Was he subtle enough to know that they'd simply needed to have an honest discussion like this, without Elend's morals to clutter things up?

"We could just let Straff have it," Dockson finally said. "The city, I mean. We could promise to call Vin off. If that is where this is heading anyway. . ."

"Dox," Ham said quietly, "what would Kell think, to hear you talk like that?"

"We could give the city to Jastes Lekal," Breeze said. "Perhaps he can be persuaded to treat the skaa with dignity."

"And let twenty thousand koloss into the city?" Ham asked. "Breeze, have you ever *seen* what those things can do?"

Dockson pounded the table. "I'm just giving options, Ham. What else are we going to do?"

"Fight," Clubs said. "And die."

The room fell silent again.

"You sure know how to kill a conversation, my friend," Breeze finally said.

"It needed to be said," Clubs muttered. "No use fooling yourselves anymore. We can't win a fight, and a fight is where this was always going. The city is going to get attacked. We're going to defend it. And we'll lose.

"You wonder if we should just give up. Well, we're not going to do that. Kell wouldn't let us, and so we won't let ourselves. We'll fight, and we'll die with dignity. Then, the city will burn—but we'll have said something. The Lord Ruler pushed us around for a thousand years, but now we skaa have pride. We fight. We resist. And we die."

"What w1as this all worth, then?" Ham said with frustration. "Why overthrow the Final Empire? Why kill the Lord Ruler? Why do anything, if it was just going to end like this? Tyrants ruling every dominance, Luthadel smashed to rubble, our crew dead?"

"Because," Sazed said softly, "someone had to begin it. While the Lord Ruler ruled, society could not progress. He kept a stabilizing hand on the empire, but it was an oppressive hand as well. Fashion stayed remarkably unchanged for a thousand years, the noblemen always trying to fit the Lord Ruler's ideals. Architecture and science did not progress, for the Lord Ruler frowned on change and invention.

"And the skaa could not be free, for he would not let them. However, killing him did not free our peoples, my friends. Only time will do that. It will take centuries, perhaps—centuries of fighting, learning, and growth. At the beginning, unfortunately and unavoidably, things will be very difficult. Worse even than they were beneath the Lord Ruler."

"And we die for nothing," Ham said with a scowl.

"No," Sazed said. "Not nothing, Lord Hammond. We will die to show that there are skaa who will not be bullied, who will not back down. This is a very important precedent, I think. In the histories and legends, this is the kind of event that inspires. If the skaa are ever to take rule of themselves, there will need to be sacrifices they can look to for motivation. Sacrifices like that of the Survivor himself."

The men sat in silence.

"Breeze," Ham said, "I could use a little more confidence right now."

"Of course," Breeze said, carefully Soothing away the man's anxiety and fear. His face lost some of its pale pallor, and he sat up a little straighter. Just for good measure, Breeze gave the rest of the crew a little of the same treatment.

"How long have you known?" Dockson asked Sazed.

"For some time now, Lord Dockson," Sazed said.

"But, you couldn't have known that Straff would pull back and give us to the koloss. Only Clubs figured that out."

"My knowledge was general, Lord Breeze," Sazed said in his even voice. "It did not relate to the koloss specifically. I have thought for some time that this city would fall. In all honesty, I am deeply impressed with your efforts. This people should long since have been defeated, I think. You have done something grand—something that will be remembered for centuries."

"Assuming anyone survives to tell the story," Clubs noted.

Sazed nodded. "That, actually, is why I called this gathering. There is little chance of those of us who remain in the city surviving—we will be needed to help with defenses, and if we do survive the koloss attack, Straff will try to execute us. However, it is not necessary for us *all* to remain in Luthadel for its fall—someone, perhaps, should be sent out to organize further resistance against the warlords."

"I won't leave my men," Clubs grumbled.

"Nor I," Ham said. "Though I *did* send my family to ground yesterday." The simple phrase meant that he'd had them leave, perhaps to hide in the city's underground, perhaps to escape through one of the passwalls. Ham wouldn't know—and that way he couldn't betray their location. Old habits died hard.

"If this city falls," Dockson said, "I'll be here with it. That's what Kell would expect. I'm not leaving."

"I'll go," Breeze said, looking at Sazed. "Is it too early to volunteer?"

"Um, actually, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, "I wasn't—"

Breeze held up a hand. "It's all right, Sazed. I believe it's obvious whom you think should be sent away. You didn't invite them to the meeting."

Dockson frowned. "We're going to defend Luthadel to the death, and you want to send away our only Mistborn?"

Sazed nodded his head. "My lords," he said softly, "the men of this city will need our leadership. We gave them this city and put them in this predicament. We cannot abandon them now. But. . .there are great things at work in this world. Greater things than us, I think. I am convinced that Mistress Vin is part of them.

"Even if these matters are delusions on my part, then Lady Vin still *must* not be allowed to die in this city. She is the people's most personal and powerful link to the Survivor. She has become a symbol to them, and her skills as a Mistborn give her the best chance of being able to get away, then survive the attacks Straff will undoubtedly send. She will be a great value in the fight to come—she can move quickly and stealthily, and can fight alone, doing much damage, as she proved last night."

Sazed bowed his head. "My lords, I called you here today so that we could decide how to convince her to run, when the rest of us stay to fight. It will not be an easy task, I think."

"She won't leave Elend," Ham said. "He'll have to go, too."

"My thoughts as well, Lord Hammond," Sazed said.

Clubs chewed his lip in thought. "That boy won't be easily convinced to flee. He still thinks we can win this fight."

"And we may yet," Sazed said. "My lords, my purpose is not to leave you without any hope at all. But, the dire circumstances, the likelihood of success. . ."

"We know, Sazed," Breeze said. "We understand."

"There have to be others of the crew who can go," Ham said, looking down. "More than just the two."

"I would send Tindwyl with them," Sazed said. "She will carry to my people many discoveries of great importance. I also plan to send Lord Lestibournes. He would do little good in the battle, and his abilities as a spy could be of help to Lady Vin and Lord Elend as they try to rally resistance among the skaa.

"However, those four will not be the only ones who survive. Most of the skaa should be safe—Jastes Lekal seems to be able to control his koloss somehow. Even if he cannot, then Straff should arrive in time to protect the city's people."

"Assuming Straff is planning what Clubs thinks he is," Ham said. "He could actually be withdrawing, cutting his losses and leaving Luthadel behind."

"Either way," Clubs said. "Not many can get out. Neither Straff nor Jastes are likely to allow large groups of people to flee the city. Right now, confusion and fear in the streets will serve their purposes far better than depopulation. We might be able to get a few riders on horseback out—

especially if one of those riders is Vin. The rest of the people will have to take their chances with the koloss."

Breeze felt his stomach turn. Clubs spoke so bluntly. . .so callously. But that was Clubs. He wasn't even really a pessimist; he just said the things that he didn't think others wanted to acknowledge.

*Some of the skaa will survive to become slaves for Straff Venture*, Breeze thought. *But those who fight—and those who have led the city this last year—are doomed. That includes me*.

*It's true. This time there really is no way out*.

"Well?" Sazed asked, hands spread before him. "Are we in agreement that these four should go?"

The members of the group nodded.

"Let us discuss, then," Sazed said, "and devise a plan for sending them away."

"We could just make Elend think that the danger isn't that great," Dockson said. "If he believes that the city is in for a long siege, he might be willing to go with Vin on a mission somewhere. They wouldn't realize what was happening back here until it was too late."

"A good suggestion, Lord Dockson," Sazed said. "I think, also, that we could work with Vin's concept of the Well of Ascension."

The discussion continued, and Breeze sat back, satisfied. *Vin, Elend, and Spook will survive*, he thought. *I'll have to convince Sazed to let Allrianne go with them*. He glanced around the room, noticing a release of tension in the postures of the others. Dockson and Ham seemed at peace, and even Clubs was nodding quietly to himself, looking satisfied as they talked through suggestions.

The disaster was still coming. But, somehow, the possibility that some would escape—the youngest crewmembers, the ones still inexperienced enough to hope—made everything else a little easier to accept.

Vin stood quietly in the mists, looking up at the dark spires, columns, and towers of Kredik Shaw. In her head, two sounds thumped. The mist spirit and the larger, vaster sound.

It was growing more and more demanding.

She continued forward, ignoring the thumps as she approached Kredik Shaw. The Hill of a Thousand Spires, once home of the Lord Ruler. It had been abandoned for well over a year, but no vagrants had made their home here. It was too ominous. Too terrible. Too much a reminder of *him*.

The Lord Ruler had been a monster. Vin remembered well the night, over a year before, when she had come to this palace intending to kill him. To do the job that Kelsier had unwittingly trained her to do. She had walked through this very courtyard, had passed guards at the doors before her.

And she had let them live. Kelsier would have just fought his way in. But Vin had talked them into leaving, into joining the rebellion. That act had saved her life when one of those very men, Goradel, had led Elend to the palace dungeons to help rescue Vin.

In a way, the Final Empire had been overthrown because she *hadn't* acted like Kelsier.

And yet, could she base future decisions upon a coincidence like that? Looking back, it seemed too perfectly allegorical. Like a neat little tale told to children, intended to teach a lesson.

Vin had never heard those tales as a child. And, she had survived when so many others had died. For every lesson like the one with Goradel, it seemed that there were a dozen that ended in tragedy.

And then there was Kelsier. He'd been right, in the end. His lesson was very different from the ones taught by the children's tales. Kelsier had been bold, even excited, when he executed those who stood in his path. Ruthless. He had looked toward the greater good; he'd always had hi1s eyes focused on the fall of the empire, and the eventual rise of a kingdom like Elend's.

He had succeeded. Why couldn't she kill as he had, knowing she was doing her duty, never feeling guilt? She'd always been frightened by the edge of danger Kelsier had displayed. Yet, wasn't that very edge the thing that had let him succeed?

She passed into the tunnel-like corridors of the palace, feet and mistcloak tassels trailing marks in the dust. The mists, as always, remained behind. They didn't enter buildings—or, if they did, they usually didn't remain for long. With them, she left behind the mist spirit.

She had to make a decision. She didn't like the decision, but she was accustomed to doing things she didn't like. That was life. She hadn't wanted to fight the Lord Ruler, but she had.

It soon became too dark even for Mistborn eyes, and she had to light a lantern. When she did, she was surprised to see that her footsteps weren't the only ones in the dust. Apparently, someone else had been haunting the corridors. However, whoever it was, she didn't encounter them as she walked through the hallways.

She entered the chamber a few moments later. She wasn't sure what had drawn her to Kredik Shaw, let alone the hidden chamber at its center. It seemed, however, that she had been feeling a kinship with the Lord Ruler lately. Her walkings had brought her here, to a place she hadn't visited since that night when she'd slain the only God she'd ever known.

He had spent a lot of time in this hidden chamber, a place he had apparently built to remind him of his homeland. The chamber had a domed roof that arced overhead. The walls were filled with silvery murals and the floor was filled with metallic inlays. She ignored these, walking forward toward the room's central feature—a small stone building that had been built within the larger chamber.

It was here that Kelsier and his wife had been captured many years before, during Kelsier's first attempt to rob the Lord Ruler. Mare had been murdered at the Pits. But Kelsier had survived.

It was here, in this same chamber, that Vin had first faced an Inquisitor, and had nearly been killed herself. It was also here that she had come months later in her first attempt to kill the Lord Ruler. She had been defeated that time, too.

She stepped into the small building-within-a-building. It had only one room. The floor had been torn up by Elend's crews, searching for the atium. The walls were still hung, however, with the trappings the Lord Ruler had left behind. She raised her lantern, looking at them.

Rugs. Furs. A small wooden flute. The things of his people, the Terris people, from a thousand years before. Why had he built his new city of Luthadel here, to the south, when his homeland—and the Well of Ascension itself—had been to the north? Vin had never really understood that.

Perhaps it came down to decision. Rashek, the Lord Ruler, had been forced to make a decision, too. He could have continued as he was, the pastoral villager. He would probably have had a happy life with his people.

But he had decided to become something more. In doing so, he had committed terrible atrocities. Yet, could she blame him for the decision itself? He had become what he'd thought he needed to be.

Her decision seemed more mundane, but she knew that other things—the Well of Ascension, the protection of Luthadel—could not be considered until she was certain what she wanted and who she was. And yet, standing in 1that room where Rashek had spent much of his time, thinking about the Well, the demanding thumps in her head sounded louder than they ever had before.

She had to decide. Elend was the one she wanted to be with. He represented peace. Happiness. Zane, however, represented what she felt she had to become. For the good of everyone involved.

The Lord Ruler's palace held no clues or answers for her. A few moments later, frustrated and baffled at why she had even come, she left it behind, walking back out into the mists.

Zane awoke to the sound of a tent spike being pounded in a specific rhythm. His reaction was immediate.

He burned steel and pewter. He always swallowed a new bit of each before sleeping. He knew the habit would probably kill him someday; metals were poisonous if allowed to linger.

Dying someday was better, in Zane's opinion, than dying today.

He flipped out of his cot, tossing his blanket toward the opening tent flap. He could barely see in the darkness of night. Even as he jumped, he heard something ripping. The tent walls being slit.

"Kill them!" God screamed.

Zane thumped to the ground and grabbed a handful of coins from the bowl beside his bed. He heard cries of surprise as he spun, throwing coins in a spinning spray around him.

He Pushed. Tiny plunks of sound thumped around him as coins met canvas, then continued on.

And men began to scream.

Zane fell to a crouch, waiting silently as the tent collapsed around him. Someone was thrashing the cloth to his right. He shot a few coins, and heard a satisfying grunt of pain. In the stillness, canvas resting atop him like a blanket, he heard footsteps running away.

He sighed, relaxing, and used a dagger to slice away the top of his tent. He emerged to a misty night. He'd gone to sleep later today than he usually did; it was probably near midnight. Time to be up anyway.

He strode across the fallen top of his tent—moving over to the now cloaked form of his cot—and cut a hole so he could reach through and pluck out the vial of metal he'd stored in a pocket beneath it. He downed the metals, and tin brought near light to his surroundings. Four men lay dying or dead around his tent. They were soldiers, of course—Straff's soldiers. The attack had come later than Zane had expected.

*Straff trusts me more than I assumed*. Zane stepped over the dead form of an assassin and cut his way into a storage chest, then pulled out his clothing. He changed quietly, then removed a small bag of coins from the chest. *It must have been the attack on Cett's keep*, he thought. *It finally convinced Straff that I was too dangerous to let live*.

Zane found his man working quietly beside a tent a short distance away, ostensibly testing the strength of a tent cord. He watched every night, paid to pound on a tent spike should anyone approach Zane's tent. Zane tossed the man a bag of coins, then moved off into the darkness, passing the canal waters with their supply barges on his way to Straff's tent.

His father had some few limitations. Straff was fine at large-scale planning, but the details—the subtleties—often got away from him. He could organize an army and crush his enemies. He, however, liked to play with dangerous tools. Like the atium mines at the Pits of Hathsin. Like Zane.

Those tools often ended up burning him.

Zane walked up to the side of Straff's tent, then ripped a hole in the canvas and strode in. Straff waited for him. Zane gave the man credit: Straff watched his death coming with defiance in his eyes. Zane stopped in the middle of the room, in front of Straff, who sat in his hard wooden chair.

"Kill him," God commanded.

Lamps burned in the corners, illuminating the canvas. The cushions and blankets in the corner were rumpled; Straff had taken one last romp with his favorite mistresses before sending his assassins. The king displayed his characteristic air of strong defiance, but Zane saw more. He saw a face too slick with sweat, and he saw hands trembling, as if from a disease.

"I have atium for you," Straff said. "Buried in a place only I know."

Zane stood quietly, staring at his father.

"I will proclaim you openly," Straff said. "Name you my heir. Tomorrow, if you wish."

Zane didn't respond. Straff continued to sweat.

"The city is yours," Zane finally said, turning away.

He was rewarded with a startled gasp from behind.

Zane glanced back. He'd never seen such a look of shock on his father's face. That alone was almost worth everything.

"Pull your men back, as you are planning," Zane said, "but don't return to the Northern Dominance. Wait for those koloss to invade the city, let them take down the defenses and kill the defenders. Then, you can sweep in and rescue Luthadel."

"But, Elend's Mistborn. . ."

"Will be gone," Zane said. "She's leaving with me, tonight. Farewell, Father." He turned and left through the slit he'd made.

"Zane?" Straff called from inside the tent.

Zane paused again.

"Why?" Straff asked, looking out through the slit. "I sent assassins to kill you. Why are you letting me live?"

"Because you're my father," Zane said. He turned away, looking into the mists. "A man shouldn't kill his father."

With that, Zane bid a final farewell to the man who had created him. A man whom Zane—despite his insanity, despite the abuse he'd known over the years—loved.

In the dark mists he threw down a coin and shot out over the camp. Outside its confines, he landed and easily located the bend in the canal he used as a marker. From the hollow of a small tree there, he pulled a bundle of cloth. A mistcloak, the first gift Straff had given him, years before when Zane had first Snapped. To him, it was too precious to wear around, to soil and use.

He knew himself a fool. However, he could not help how he felt. One could not use emotional Allomancy on one's self.

He unwrapped the mistcloak and withdrew the things it protected—several vials of metal and a pouch filled with beads. Atium.

He knelt there for a long moment. Then, he reached up to his chest, feeling the space just above his rib cages. Where his heart thumped.

There was a large bump there. There always had been. He didn't think about it often; his mind seemed to get distracted when he did. It, however, was the real reason he never wore cloaks.

He didn't like the way that cloaks rubbed against the small point of the spike that stuck out of his back just between the shoulder blades. The head was against his sternum, and couldn't be seen beneath clothing.

"It is time to go," God said.

Zane stood, leaving the mistcloak behind. He turned from his father's camp, leaving behind that which he had known, instead seeking the woman who would save him.

*Alendi believes as they do*.

# 47

A PART OF VIN WASN'T EVEN bothered by how many people she had killed. That very indifference, however, terrified her.

She sat on her balcony a short time after her visit to the palace, the city of Luthadel lost in darkness before her. She sat in the mists—but knew better, now, than to think she'd find solace in their swirling patterns. Nothing was that simple anymore.

The mist spirit watched her, as always. It was too distant to see, but she could feel it. And, even stronger than the mist spirit, she could feel something else. That powerful thumping, growing louder and louder. It had once seemed distant, but no longer.

The Well of Ascension.

That was what it had to be. She could *feel* its power returning, flowing back into the world, demanding to be taken up and used. She kept finding herself glancing north, toward Terris, expecting to see something on the horizon. A burst of light, a blazing fire, a tempest of winds. Something. But there was just mist.

It seemed that she couldn't succeed at anything, lately. Love, protection, duty. *I've let myself get stretched too thin*, she thought.

There were so many things that demanded her attention, and she'd tried to give heed to them all. As a result, she had accomplished nothing. Her research about the Deepness and the Hero of Ages lay untouched for days, still arranged in piles scattered across her floor. She knew next to nothing about the mist spirit—only that it watched her, and that the logbook author had thought it dangerous. She hadn't dealt with the spy in her crew; she didn't know if Zane's claims regarding Demoux were true.

And Cett still lived. She couldn't even perform a proper massacre without stumbling halfway through. It was Kelsier's fault. He had trained her to take his place, but could anyone ever really do that?

*Why do we always have to be someone else's knives?* Zane's voice whispered in her head.

His words had seemed to make sense sometimes, but they had a flaw. Elend. Vin wasn't his knife—not really. He didn't want her to assassinate or kill. But, his ideals had left him without a throne, and had left his city surrounded by enemies. If she really loved Elend—if she really loved the people of Luthadel—wouldn't she have done more?

The pulsings thumped against her, like the beats of a drum the size of the sun. She burned bronze almost constantly now, listening to the rhythm, letting it pull her away. . ..

"Mistress?" OreSeur asked from behind. "What are you thinking about?"

"The end," Vin said quietly, staring outward.

Silence.

"The end of what, Mistress?"

"I don't know."1p>

OreSeur padded over to the balcony, walking into the mists and sitting down beside her. She was getting to know him well enough that she could see concern in his canine eyes.

She sighed, shaking her head. "I just have decisions to make. And, no matter which choice I make, it will mean an end."

OreSeur sat for a moment, head cocked. "Mistress," he finally said, "that seems excessively dramatic to me."

Vin shrugged. "No advice for me, then?"

"Just make the decision," OreSeur said.

Vin sat for a moment, then smiled. "Sazed would have said something wise and comforting."

OreSeur frowned. "I fail to see why he should be part of this conversation, Mistress."

"He was my steward," Vin said. "Before he left, and before Kelsier switched your Contract to me."

"Ah," OreSeur said. "Well, I never did much like Terrismen, Mistress. Their self-important sense of subservience is very difficult to imitate—not to mention the fact that their muscles are far too stringy to taste good."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "You've imitated Terrismen? I didn't think there would be much cause for that—they weren't a very influential people during the days of the Lord Ruler."

"Ah," OreSeur said. "But they were always *around* influential people."

Vin nodded, standing. She walked back into her empty room and lit a lamp, extinguishing her tin. Mist carpeted the room, flowing over her stacks of paper, her feet throwing up puffs as she walked toward the bedroom.

She paused. That was a bit strange. Mist rarely remained long when it came indoors. Elend said it had to do with heat and enclosed spaces. Vin had always ascribed to it something more mystical. She frowned, watching it.

Even without tin, she heard the creak.

Vin spun. Zane stood on the balcony, his figure a black silhouette in the mists. He stepped forward, the mist following around him, as it did around anyone burning metals. And yet. . .it also seemed to be pushing *away* from him slightly.

OreSeur growled quietly.

"It's time," Zane said.

"Time for what?" Vin asked, setting the lamp down.

"To go," Zane said. "To leave these men and their armies. To leave the squabbling. To be free."

*Free*.

"I. . .don't know, Zane," Vin said, looking away.

She heard him step forward. "What do you owe him, Vin? He doesn't know you. He fears you. The truth is, he was never worthy of you."

"No," Vin said, shaking her head. "That's not it at all, Zane. You don't understand. I was never worthy of him. Elend deserves someone better. He deserves. . .someone who shares his ideals. Someone who thinks he was right to give up his throne. Someone who sees more honor—and less foolishness—in that."

"Either way," Zane said, stopping a short distance from her. "He cannot understand you. Us."

Vin didn't reply.

"Where would you go, Vin?" Zane asked. "If you weren't bound to this place, bound to him? If you were free, 1and could do whatever you wished, where would you go?"

The thumpings seemed louder. She glanced toward OreSeur, who sat quietly by the side wall, mostly in the dark. Why feel guilty? What did she have to prove to him?

She turned back to Zane. "North," she said. "To Terris."

"We can go there. Wherever you want. Location is irrelevant to me, as long as it is not this place."

"I can't abandon them," Vin said.

"Even if by doing so, you steal away Straff's only Mistborn?" Zane asked. "The trade is a good one. My father will know that I have disappeared, but he will not realize that you aren't still in Luthadel. He'll be even more afraid to attack. By giving yourself freedom, you'll also be leaving your allies with a precious gift."

Zane took her hand, forcing her to look at him. He did look like Elend—like a hard version of Elend. Zane had been broken by life, just as she had been, but both had put themselves back together. Had the re-forming made them stronger, or more fragile?

"Come," Zane whispered. "You can save me, Vin."

*A war is coming to the city*, Vin thought with a chill. *If I stay, I will have to kill again*.

And slowly, she let him draw her away from her desk, toward the mists and the comforting darkness beyond. She reached up, pulling out a metal vial for the journey, and the motion caused Zane to spin suspiciously.

*He has good instincts*, Vin thought. *Instincts like my own. Instincts that won't let him trust, but that keep him alive*.

He relaxed as he saw what she was doing, and smiled and turned away again. Vin followed him, walking again, but she felt a sudden stab of fear. *This is it*, she thought. *After this, everything changes. The time for decisions has passed*.

*And I made the wrong choice*.

*Elend wouldn't have jumped like that when I took out the vial*.

She froze. Zane tugged on her wrist, but she didn't move. He turned toward her in the mists, frowning as he stood at the edge of her balcony.

"I'm sorry," Vin whispered, slipping her hand free. "I can't go with you."

"What?" Zane asked. "Why not?"

Vin shook her head, turning and walking back into the room.

"Tell me what it is!" Zane said, tone rising. "What is it about him that draws you? He isn't a great leader. He's not a warrior. He's no Allomancer or general. *What is it about him?*"

The answer came to her simply and easily. *Make your decisions—I'll support you in them*. "He trusts me," she whispered.

"What?" Zane asked incredulously.

"When I attacked Cett," Vin said, "the others thought I was acting irrationally—and they were right. But Elend told them I had a good reason, even if he didn't know what it was."

"So he's a fool," Zane said.

"When we spoke later," Vin continued, not looking at Zane, "I was cold to him. I think he knew that I was trying to decide whether to stay with him or not. And. . .he told me that he trusted my judgment. He'd support me if I chose to leave him."

"So1 he's also unappreciative," Zane said.

Vin shook her head. "No. He just loves me."

"I love you."

Vin paused, looking at Zane. He looked angry. Desperate, even. "I believe you. I still can't go with you."

"But *why*?"

"Because it would require leaving Elend," she said. "Even if I can't share his ideals, I can respect them. Even if I don't deserve him, I can be near him. I'm staying, Zane."

Zane stood quietly for a moment, mist falling around his shoulders. "I've failed, then."

Vin turned away from him. "No. It isn't that you've failed. You aren't flawed simply because I—"

He slammed into her, throwing her toward the mist-covered floor. Vin turned her head, shocked, as she crashed into the wooden floor, the breath going out of her.

Zane loomed above her, his face dark. "You were supposed to save me," he hissed.

Vin flared every metal she had in a sudden jolt. She shoved Zane backward and Pulled herself against the door hinges. She flew backward and hit the door hard, the wood cracking slightly, but she was too tense—too shocked—to feel anything but the thud.

Zane rose quietly, standing tall, dark. Vin rolled forward into a crouch. Zane was attacking her. Attacking her for real.

*But. . .he. . .*

"OreSeur!" Vin said, ignoring her mind's objections, whipping out her daggers. "Run away!"

The code given, she charged, trying to distract Zane's attention from the wolfhound. Zane sidestepped her attacks with a casual grace. Vin whipped a dagger toward his neck. It barely missed as Zane tipped his head backward. She struck at his side, at his arm, at his chest. Each strike missed.

She'd known he'd burn atium. She'd expected that. She skidded to a stop, looking at him. He hadn't even bothered to pull out his own weapons. He stood before her, face dark, mist a growing lake at his feet. "Why didn't you listen to me, Vin?" he asked. "Why force me to keep being Straff's tool? We both know where that must lead."

Vin ignored him. Gritting her teeth, she launched into an attack. Zane backhanded her indifferently, and she Pushed slightly against the deskmounts behind him—tossing herself backward, as if thrown by the force of his blow. She slammed into the wall, then slumped to the ground.

Directly beside the startled OreSeur.

He hadn't opened his shoulder to give her the atium. Hadn't he understood the code? "The atium I gave you," Vin hissed. "I need it. *Now*."

"Kandra," Zane said. "Come to me."

OreSeur met her eyes, and she saw something within them. Shame. He glanced away, then padded across the floor, mist up to his knees, as he joined Zane in the center of the room.

"No. . ." Vin whispered. "OreSeur—"

"You will no longer obey her commands, TenSoon," Zane said.

OreSeur bowed his head.

"The Contract, OreSeur!" Vin said, climbing to her knees. "You *must* obey my orders!"

"My servant, Vin," Zane said. "My Contract. *My* orders."

*My servant. . ..*

And suddenly, it clicked. She'd suspected everyone—Dockson, Breeze, even Elend—but she'd never connected the spy to the one person that made the most sense. There *had* been a kandra in the palace all along. And he had been at her side.

"I'm sorry, Mistress," OreSeur whispered.

"How long?" Vin asked, bowing her head.

"Since you gave my predecessor—the real OreSeur—the dog's body," the kandra said. "I killed him that day and took his place, wearing the body of a dog. You never saw him as a wolfhound."

*What easier way to mask the transformation?* Vin thought. "But, the bones we discovered in the palace," she said. "You were with me on the wall when they appeared. They—"

She'd taken his word on how fresh those bones had been; she'd taken his word on when they had been produced. She'd assumed all along that the switch must have happened that day, when she was with Elend on the city wall—but she'd done so primarily because of what OreSeur had said.

*Idiot!* she thought. OreSeur—or, TenSoon, as Zane had called him—had led her to suspect everyone but himself. What was wrong with her? She was usually so good at sniffing out traitors, at noticing insincerity. How had she missed spotting her own kandra?

Zane walked forward. Vin waited, on her knees. *Weak*, she told herself. *Look weak. Make him leave you alone. Try to—*

"Soothing me will do no good," Zane said quietly, grabbing her by the front of her shirt, picking her up, then throwing her back down. Mist sprayed beneath her, puffing up in a splash as she slammed to the floor. Vin stifled her cry of pain.

*I have to stay quiet. If guards come, he'll kill them. If Elend comes. . .*

She had to stay quiet, quiet even as Zane kicked her in her wounded side. She grunted, eyes watering.

"You could have saved me," Zane said, peering down at her. "I was willing to go with you. Now, what is left? Nothing. Nothing, but Straff's orders." He punctuated that sentence with a kick.

*Stay small,* she told herself through the pain. *He'll leave you alone eventually. . ..*

But it had been years since she'd had to bow before anyone. Her days of cringing before Camon and Reen were almost misty shadows, forgotten before the light offered by Elend and Kelsier. As Zane kicked again, Vin found herself growing angry.

He brought his foot back, angling it toward her face, and Vin moved. As his foot arced down, she threw herself backward, Pushing against the window latches to scoot herself through the mists. She flared pewter, throwing herself up to her feet, trailing mist from the floor. It was up past her knees now.

She glared at Zane, who looked back with a dark expression. Vin ducked forward, but Zane moved faster—moved *first*—stepping between her and the balcony. Not that getting to it would do her any good; with atium, he could chase her down easily.

It was like before, when he'd attacked her with atium. Only this time it was worse. Before, she'd been able to believe—if just a little—that they were still sparring. Still not enemies, even if they weren't friends. She hadn't really believed that he wanted to kill her.

She had no such illusions this ti1me. Zane's eyes were dark, his expression flat—just like that night a few days before, when slaughtering Cett's men.

Vin was going to die.

She hadn't felt such fear in a long time. But now she saw it, felt it, smelled it on herself as she shied away from the approaching Zane. She felt what it was like to face a Mistborn—what it must have been like for those soldiers she'd killed. There was no fighting. There was no chance.

*No*, she told herself forcefully, holding her side. *Elend didn't back down against Straff. He doesn't have Allomancy, but he marched into the center of the koloss camp*.

*I can beat this*.

With a cry, Vin dashed toward TenSoon. The dog backed away in shock, but he needn't have worried. Zane was there again. He slammed a shoulder into Vin, then whipped his dagger around and slashed a wound across her cheek as she fell backward. The cut was precise. Perfect. Matching the wound on her other cheek, one given to her during her first fight with a Mistborn, nearly two years before.

Vin gritted her teeth, burning iron as she fell. She Pulled on a pouch on her desk, whipping the coins into her hand. She hit the ground on her side, other hand down, and threw herself back to her feet. She dumped a shower of coins from the pouch into her hand, then raised them at Zane.

Blood dripped from her chin. She threw the coins out. Zane moved to Push them away.

Vin smiled, then burned duralumin as she Pushed. The coins snapped forward, and the wind of their sudden passing parted the mist on the ground, revealing the floor beneath.

The room shook.

And in an eyeblink, Vin found herself slammed back against the wall. She gasped in surprise, breath knocked from her lungs, her vision swimming. She looked up, disoriented, surprised to find herself on the ground again.

"Duralumin," Zane said, still standing with a hand up before him. "TenSoon told me about it. We deduced you must have a new metal from the way you can sense me when my copper is on. After that, a little searching, and he found that note from your metallurgist, which handily had the instructions for making duralumin."

Her addled mind struggled to connect ideas. Zane had duralumin. He'd used the metal, and had Pushed against one of the coins she'd shot at him.

He must have Pushed behind himself as well, to keep from being forced backward as his weight met hers.

And her own duralumin-enhanced Push had slammed her against the wall. She had trouble thinking. Zane walked forward. She looked up, dazed, then scrambled away on hands and knees, crawling in the mists. It was at face level, and her nostrils tickled as she inhaled the cool, quiet chaos.

Atium. She needed atium. But, the bead was in TenSoon's shoulder, she couldn't Pull it to herself. The reason he carried it there was that the flesh protected it from being affected by Allomancers. Just like the spikes piercing an Inquisitor's body, just like her own earring. Metal inside—or even piercing—a person's body could not be Pulled or Pushed except with the most extreme of Allomantic forces.

But she'd done it once. When fighting the Lord Ruler. It hadn't been her own power, or even duralumin, that had let her accomplish it. It had been something else. The mists.

She'd drawn upon them.

Something hit her on her bac1k, pushing her down. She rolled over, kicking upward, but her foot missed Zane's face by a few atium-aided inches. Zane slapped her foot aside, then reached down, slamming her against the floor by her shoulders.

Mists churned around him as he looked down at her. Through her terror, she reached out for the mists, as she had over a year before when fighting the Lord Ruler. That day, they had fueled her Allomancy, giving her a strength that she shouldn't have had. She reached out for them, begging for their help.

And nothing happened.

*Please. . ..*

Zane slammed her down again. The mists continued to ignore her pleas.

She twisted, Pulling against the window frame to get leverage, and pushed Zane to the side. They rolled, Vin coming around on top.

Suddenly, both of them lurched off the floor, bursting out of the mists and flying toward the ceiling, thrown upward as Zane Pushed against coins on the floor. They slammed against the ceiling, Zane's body pushing against hers, pinning her to the wooden planks. He was on top again—or, rather, he was on the bottom, but that was now the point of leverage.

Vin gasped. He was so strong. Stronger than she. His fingers bit into the flesh of her arms despite her pewter, and her side ached from her earlier wounds. She was in no condition to fight—not against another Mistborn.

Especially not one with atium.

Zane continued to Push them against the ceiling. Vin's hair fell toward him, and mists churned the floor below, like a whirlpool vortex that was slowly rising.

Zane released his Push, and they fell. Yet, he was still in control. He spun her, throwing her down below him as they entered the mists again. They hit the ground, the blow knocking the wind from Vin's lungs yet again. Zane loomed above her, speaking through gritted teeth.

"All that effort, wasted," he hissed. "Hiding an Allomancer in Cett's hirelings so that you would suspect him of attacking you at the Assembly. Forcing you to fight in front of Elend so that he'd be intimidated by you. Pushing you to explore your powers and kill so that you'd realize just how powerful you truly are. All wasted!"

He leaned down. "You. Were. Supposed. To. *Save me!*" he said, his face just inches from hers, breathing heavily. He pinned one of her struggling arms to the floor with his knee, and then, in a strangely surreal moment, he kissed her.

And at the same time, he rammed his dagger into the side of one of her breasts. Vin tried to cry out, but his mouth held hers as the dagger cut her flesh.

"Be careful, Master!" OreSeur—TenSoon—suddenly yelled. "She knows much about kandra!"

Zane looked up, his hand stilled. The voice, the pain, brought lucidity to Vin. She flared tin, using the pain to shock herself awake, clearing her mind.

"What?" Zane asked, looking down toward the kandra.

"She knows, Master," TenSoon said. "She knows our secret. The reason why we served the Lord Ruler. The reason why we serve the Contract. She knows *why we fear Allomancers so much*."

"Be silent," Zane commanded. "And speak no more."

TenSoon fell silent.

*Our secret. . .* Vin thought, glancing over at the wolfhound, sensi1ng the anxiety in his canine expression. *He's trying to tell me something. Trying to* *help me*.

Secret. The secret of the kandra. The last time she'd tried Soothing him, he'd howled with pain. Yet, she saw permission in his expression. It was enough.

She slammed TenSoon with a Soothing. He cried out, howling, but she Pushed harder. Nothing happened. Gritting her teeth, she burned duralumin.

Something broke. She was in two places at once. She could feel TenSoon standing by the wall, and she could feel her own body in Zane's grip. TenSoon was hers, totally and completely. Somehow, not quite knowing how, she ordered him forward, controlling his body.

The massive wolfhound's body slammed into Zane, throwing him off Vin. The dagger flipped to the ground, and Vin stumbled to her knees, grabbing her chest, feeling warm blood there. Zane rolled, obviously shocked, but he came to his feet and kicked TenSoon.

Bones broke. The wolfhound tumbled across the floor—right toward Vin. She snatched the dagger off the ground as he rolled to her feet, then plunged it into his shoulder, cutting the shoulder, her fingers feeling in the muscle and sinew. She came up with bloodied hands and a single bead of atium. She swallowed it with a gulp, spinning toward Zane.

"Now let's see how you fare," she hissed, burning atium. Dozens of atium shadows burst from Zane, showing her possible actions he could take—all of them ambiguous. She would be giving off the same confusing mess to his eyes. They were even.

Zane turned, looking into her eyes, and his atium shadows disappeared.

*Impossible!* she thought. TenSoon groaned at her feet as she realized that her atium reserve was gone. Burned away. But the bead had been so large. . ..

"Did you think I'd give you the very weapon you needed to fight me?" Zane asked quietly. "Did you think I'd really give up atium?"

"But—"

"A lump of lead," Zane said, walking forward. "Plated with a thin layer of atium around it. Oh, Vin. You really need to be more careful whom you trust."

Vin stumbled backward, feeling her confidence wilt. *Make him talk!* she thought. *Try to get his atium to run out*.

"My brother said that I shouldn't trust anyone. . ." she mumbled. "He said. . .anyone would betray me."

"He was a wise man," Zane said quietly, standing chest-deep in mists.

"He was a paranoid fool," Vin said. "He kept me alive, but he left me broken."

"Then he did you a favor."

Vin glanced toward TenSoon's mangled, bleeding form. He was in pain; she could see it in his eyes. In the distance she could hear. . .thumping. She'd turned her bronze back on. She looked up slowly. Zane was walking toward her. Confident.

"You've been playing with me," she said. "You drove a wedge between me and Elend. You made me think he feared me, made me think he was using me."

"He was," Zane said.

"Yes," Vin said. "But it doesn't matter—not the way you made it seem. Elend uses me. Kelsier used me. We use each other, for love, for support, for trust."

"Trust will kill you," he said.

"Then it is better to di1e."

"I trusted you," he said, stopping before her. "And you betrayed me."

"No," Vin said, raising her dagger. "I'm going to save you. Just like you want." She snapped forward and struck, but her hope—that he'd run out of atium—was in vain. He sidestepped indifferently; he let her dagger come within an inch of striking, but he was never really in danger.

Vin spun to attack, but her blade cut only air, skimming along the top of the rising mists.

Zane moved before her next attack came, dodging even before she knew what she was going to do. Her dagger stabbed the place where he had been standing.

*He's too fast*, she thought, side burning, mind thumping. Or was that the Well of Ascension thumping. . ..

Zane stopped just in front of her.

*I can't hit him*, she thought with frustration. *Not when he knows where I'll strike before I do!*

Vin paused.

*Before I do. . ..*

Zane stepped away to a place near the center of the room, then kicked her fallen dagger into the air and caught it. He turned back toward her, mist trailing from the weapon in his hand, jaw set and eyes dark.

*He knows where I'll strike before I do*.

Vin raised her dagger, blood trickling down face and side, thunderous drumbeats booming in her mind. The mist was nearly up to her chin.

She cleared her mind. She didn't plan an attack. She didn't react to Zane as he ran toward her, dagger raised. She loosened her muscles and closed her eyes, listening to his footsteps. She felt the mist rise around her, churned by Zane's advent.

She snapped her eyes open. He had the dagger raised; it glittered as it swung. Vin prepared to attack, but didn't think about the strike; she simply let her body react.

And she watched Zane very, very carefully.

He flinched just slightly to the left, open hand moving upward, as if to grab something.

*There!* Vin thought, immediately wrenching herself to the side, forcing her instinctive attack out of its natural trajectory. She twisted her arm—and dagger—midswing. She had been about to attack left, as Zane's atium had anticipated.

But, by reacting, Zane had shown her what she was going to do. Let her see the future. And if she could see it, she could change it.

They met. Zane's weapon took her in the shoulder. But Vin's knife took him in the neck. His left hand closed on empty air, snatching at a shadow that should have told him where her arm would be.

Zane tried to gasp, but her knife had pierced his windpipe. Air sucked through blood around the blade, and Zane stumbled back, eyes wide with shock. He met her eyes, then collapsed into the mists, his body thumping against the wooden floor.

Zane looked up through the mists, looked up at her. *I'm dying*, he thought.

Her atium shadow had *split* at the last moment. Two shadows, two possibilities. He'd counteracted the wrong one. She'd tricked him, defeated him somehow. And now he was dying.

Finally.

"You know why I thought you'd save me?1" he tried to whisper to her, though he somehow knew that his lips weren't properly forming the words. "The voice. You were the first person I ever met that it didn't tell me to kill. The only person."

"Of course I didn't tell you to kill *her*," God said.

Zane felt his life seeping away.

"You know the really funny thing, Zane?" God asked. "The most amusing part of this all? You're not insane.

"You never were."

Vin watched quietly as Zane sputtered, blood coming from his lips. She watched cautiously; a knife to the throat should have been enough to kill even a Mistborn, but sometimes pewter could let one do awesome things.

Zane died. She checked his pulse, then retrieved her dagger. After that, she stood for a moment, feeling. . .numb, in both mind and body. She raised a hand to her wounded shoulder—and in doing so, she brushed her wounded breast. She was bleeding too much, and her mind was growing fuzzy again.

*I killed him*.

She flared pewter, forcing herself to keep moving. She stumbled over to TenSoon, kneeling beside him.

"Mistress," he said. "I'm sorry. . .."

"I know," she said, staring at the terrible wound she'd made. His legs no longer worked, and his body lay in an unnatural twist. "How can I help?"

"Help?" TenSoon said. "Mistress, I nearly got you killed!"

"I know," she said again. "How can I make the pain go away? Do you need another body?"

TenSoon was quiet for a moment. "Yes."

"Take Zane's," Vin said. "For the moment, at least."

"He is dead?" TenSoon asked with surprise.

*He couldn't see,* she realized. *His neck is broken*.

"Yes," she whispered.

"How, Mistress?" TenSoon asked. "He ran out of atium?"

"No," Vin said.

"Then, how?"

"Atium has a weakness," she said. "It lets you see the future."

"That. . .doesn't sound like a weakness, Mistress."

Vin sighed, wobbling slightly. *Focus!* she thought. "When you burn atium, you see a few moments into the future—and you can change what will happen in that future. You can grab an arrow that should have kept flying. You can dodge a blow that should have killed you. And you can move to block an attack before it even happens."

TenSoon was quiet, obviously confused.

"He showed me what *I* was going to do," Vin said. "I couldn't change the future, but Zane could. By reacting to my attack before I even knew what I was going to do, he inadvertently showed me the future. I reacted against him, and he tried to block a blow that never came. That let me kill him."

"Mistress. . ." TenSoon whispered. "That is brilliant."

"I'm sure I'm not the first to think of it," Vin said wearily. "But it isn't the sort of secret that you share. Anyway, take his body."

"I. . .would rather not wear the bones of that creature," TenSoon said. "You don't know how broken 1he was, Mistress."

Vin nodded tiredly. "I could just find you another dog body, if you want."

"That won't be necessary, Mistress," TenSoon said quietly. "I still have the bones of the other wolfhound you gave me, and most of them are still good. If I replace a few of them with the good bones from this body, I should be able to form a complete skeleton to use."

"Do it, then. We're going to need to plan what to do next."

TenSoon was quiet for a moment. Finally, he spoke. "Mistress, my Contract is void, now that my master is dead. I. . .need to return to my people for reassignment."

"Ah," Vin said, feeling a wrench of sadness. "Of course."

"I do not want to go," TenSoon said. "But, I must at least report to my people. Please, forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," Vin said. "And thank you for that timely hint at the end."

TenSoon lay quietly. She could see guilt in his canine eyes. *He shouldn't have helped me against his current master*.

"Mistress," TenSoon said. "You know our secret now. Mistborn can control a kandra's body with Allomancy. I don't know what you will do with it—but realize that I have entrusted you with a secret that my people have kept sacred for a thousand years. The way that Allomancers could take control of our bodies and make slaves of us."

"I. . .don't even understand what happened."

"Perhaps it is better that way," TenSoon said. "Please, leave me. I have the other dog's bones in the closet. When you return, I will be gone."

Vin rose, nodding. She left, then, pushing through the mists and seeking the hallway outside. Her wounds needed tending. She knew that she should go to Sazed, but somehow she couldn't force herself in that direction. She walked faster, feet taking her down the hallway, until she was running.

Everything was collapsing around her. She couldn't manage it all, couldn't keep things straight. But she did know what she wanted.

And so she ran to him.

*He is a good man—despite it all, he is a good man. A sacrificing man. In truth, all of his actions—all of the deaths, destructions, and pains that he has caused—have hurt him deeply. All of these things were, in truth, a kind of sacrifice for him.*

# 48

ELEND YAWNED, LOOKING OVER THE letter he'd penned to Jastes. Perhaps he could persuade his former friend to see reason.

If he couldn't. . .well, a duplicate of the wooden coin Jastes had been using to "pay" the koloss sat on Elend's desk. It was a perfect copy, whittled by Clubs himself. Elend was pretty certain that he had access to more wood than Jastes did. If he could help Penrod stall for a few more weeks, they might be able to make enough "money" to bribe the koloss away.

He set down his pen, rubbing his eyes. It was late. Time to—

His door slammed open. Elend spun, and caught sight of a flustered Vin dashing across the room and into his arms. She was crying.

And she was bloody.

"Vin!" he said. "What happened?"

"I killed him,"1 she said, head buried in Elend's chest.

"Who?"

"Your brother," she said. "Zane. Straff's Mistborn. I killed him."

"Wait. What? My *brother*?"

Vin nodded. "I'm sorry."

"Forget about that, Vin!" Elend said, gently prying her back and pushing her into his chair. She had a gash on her cheek, and her shirt was slick with blood. "Lord Ruler! I'm going to get Sazed right now."

"Don't leave me," she said, holding his arm.

Elend paused. Something had changed. She seemed to need him again. "Come with me, then. We'll both go see him."

Vin nodded, standing. She teetered just a bit, and Elend felt a spike of fear, but the determined look in her eyes wasn't something he wanted to challenge. He put his arm around her, letting her lean on him as they walked to Sazed's quarters. Elend paused to knock, but Vin simply pushed her way into the dark room, then wobbled and sat down on the floor just inside.

"I'll. . .sit here," she said.

Elend paused worriedly by her side, then raised his lamp and called toward the bedchamber. "Sazed!"

The Terrisman appeared a moment later, looking exhausted and wearing a white sleeping robe. He noticed Vin, blinked a few times, then disappeared into his chambers. He returned a moment later with a metalmind bracer strapped to his forearm and a bag of medical equipment.

"Now, Lady Vin," Sazed said, setting the bag down. "What would Master Kelsier think, seeing you in this condition? You ruin more clothing in this manner, I think. . .."

"This isn't a time for levity, Sazed," Elend said.

"I apologize, Your Majesty," Sazed said, carefully cutting the clothing away from Vin's shoulder. "However, if she is still conscious, then she isn't in serious danger." He peered closer at the wound, absently lifting clean cloths from his bag.

"You see?" Sazed asked. "This gash is deep, but the blade was deflected by the bone, and missed hitting any major vessels. Hold this here." He pressed a cloth to the wound, and Elend put his hand on it. Vin sat with her eyes closed, resting back against the wall, blood dripping slowly from her chin. She seemed more exhausted than in pain.

Sazed took his knife and cut away the front of Vin's shirt, exposing her wounded chest.

Elend paused. "Perhaps I should. . ."

"Stay," Vin said. It wasn't a plea, but a command. She raised her head, opening her eyes as Sazed tisked quietly at the wound, then got out a numbing agent and some needle and thread.

"Elend," she said, "I need to tell you something."

He paused. "All right."

"I've realized something about Kelsier," she said quietly. "I always focus on the wrong things, when it comes to him. It's hard to forget the hours he spent training me to be an Allomancer. Yet, it wasn't his ability to fight that made him great—it wasn't his harshness or his brutality, or even his strength or his instincts."

Elend frowned.

"Do you know what it was?" she asked.

He shook his head, still pressing the cloth against her shoulder.

"It was his ability to trust," she said. "It was the way that he made good people into *better* people, the way that he inspired them. His crew worked because he had confidence in them—because he respected them. And, in return, they respected each other. Men like Breeze and Clubs became heroes because Kelsier had faith in them."

She looked up at him, blinking tired eyes. "And you are far better at that than Kelsier ever was, Elend. He had to work at it. You do it instinctively, treating even weasels like Philen as if they were good and honorable men. It's not naivete, as some think. It's what Kelsier had, only greater. He could have learned from you."

"You give me too much credit," he said.

She shook a tired head. Then she turned to Sazed.

"Sazed?" she asked.

"Yes, child?"

"Do you know any wedding ceremonies?"

Elend nearly dropped the cloth in shock.

"I know several," Sazed said as he tended the wound. "Some two hundred, actually."

"Which one is the shortest?" Vin asked.

Sazed pulled a stitch tight. "The people of Larsta only required a profession of love before a local priest. Simplicity was a tenet of their belief structure—a reaction, perhaps, to the traditions of the land they were banished from, which was known for its complex system of bureaucratic rules. It is a good religion, one that focused on simple beauty found in nature."

Vin looked at Elend. Her face was bloody, her hair a mess.

"Now, see," he said. "Vin, don't you think that maybe this should wait until, you know—"

"Elend?" she interrupted. "I love you."

He froze.

"Do you love me?" she asked.

*This is insane*. "Yes," he said quietly.

Vin turned to Sazed, who was still working. "Well?"

Sazed looked up, fingers bloodied. "This is a very strange time for such an event, I think."

Elend nodded in agreement.

"It's just a little bit of blood," Vin said tiredly. "I'm really all right, now that I've sat down."

"Yes," Sazed said, "but you seem somewhat distraught, Lady Vin. This isn't a decision to be made lightly, under the influence of strong emotions."

Vin smiled. "The decision to get married shouldn't be made because of strong emotions?"

Sazed floundered. "That isn't exactly what I meant. I'm simply not certain that you are fully in control of your faculties, Lady Vin."

Vin shook her head. "I'm more in control than I have been for months. It's time for me to stop hesitating, Sazed—time to stop worrying, time to accept my place in this crew. I know what I want, now. I love Elend. I don't know what kind of time we'll have together, but I want some, at least."

Sazed sat for a moment, then returned to his sewing. "And you, Lord Elend? What are your thoughts?"

What *were* his thoughts? He remembered just the day before, when Vin had spoken of leaving, and the wrenching he had felt. He thought of how much he depended on h1er wisdom, and her bluntness, and her simple—but not simplistic—devotion to him. Yes, he did love her.

The world had gone chaotic recently. He had made mistakes. Yet, despite everything that had happened, and despite his frustrations, he still felt strongly that he wanted to be with Vin. It wasn't the idyllic infatuation he'd felt a year and a half ago, at the parties. But it felt more solid.

"Yes, Sazed," he said. "I do want to marry her. I have wanted it for some time. I. . .I don't know what's going to happen to the city, or my kingdom, but I want to be with Vin when it comes."

Sazed continued to work. "Very well, then," he finally said. "If it is my witness you require, then you have it."

Elend knelt, still pressing the cloth on Vin's shoulder, feeling a little bit stunned. "That's it then?"

Sazed nodded. "It is as valid as any witness the obligators could give you, I think. Be warned, the Larsta love oath is binding. They knew no form of divorce in their culture. Do you accept my witness of this event?"

Vin nodded. Elend felt himself doing the same.

"Then you are married," Sazed said, tying off his thread, then draping a cloth across Vin's chest. "Hold this for a bit, Lady Vin, and stanch the rest of the bleeding." Then he moved on to her cheek.

"I feel like there should be a ceremony or something," Elend said.

"I could give one, if you wish," Sazed said, "but I do not think you need one. I have known you both for some time, and am willing to give my blessing to this union. I simply offer counsel. Those who take lightly promises they make to those they love are people who find little lasting satisfaction in life. This is not an easy time in which to live. That does not mean that it has to be a difficult time to love, but it does mean that you will find unusual stresses upon your lives and your relationship.

"Do not forget the love oath you made to each other this evening. It will give you much strength in the days to come, I think." With that, he pulled the last stitch tight on Vin's face, then finally moved to the shoulder. The bleeding there had mostly stopped, and Sazed studied the wound for a moment before beginning work on it.

Vin looked up at Elend, smiling, looking a bit drowsy. He stood and walked over to the room's washbasin, and returned with a damp cloth to wipe off her face and cheek.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly as Sazed moved around and took the place Elend had been kneeling in.

"Sorry?" Elend said. "About my father's Mistborn?"

Vin shook her head. "No. For taking so long."

Elend smiled. "You're worth the wait. Besides, I think I had to figure a few things out as well."

"Like how to be a king?"

"And how to stop being one."

Vin shook her head. "You never stopped being one, Elend. They can take your crown, but they can't take your honor."

Elend smiled. "Thank you. However, I don't know how much good I've done the city. By even being here, I divided the people, and now Straff will end up in control."

"I'll kill Straff if he puts one foot in this city."

Elend gritted his teeth. *Back to the same problems again*. They could only 1hold Vin's knife against his neck for so long. He'd figure out a way to wiggle around, and there was always Jastes and those koloss. . ..

"Your Majesty." Sazed said as he worked, "perhaps I can offer a solution."

Elend glanced down at the Terrisman, raising an eyebrow.

"The Well of Ascension," Sazed said.

Vin opened her eyes immediately.

"Tindwyl and I have been researching the Hero of Ages," Sazed continued. "We are convinced that Rashek never did what the Hero was supposed to. In fact, we aren't even convinced that this Alendi of a thousand years ago *was* the Hero. There are too many discrepancies, too many problems and contradictions. In addition, the mists—the Deepness—are still here. And now they are killing people."

Elend frowned. "What are you saying?"

Sazed pulled a stitch tight. "Something still needs to be done, Your Majesty. Something important. Looking at it from a smaller perspective, it might seem that the events at Luthadel and the rise of the Well of Ascension are unrelated. However, from a larger view, they may be solutions to one another."

Elend smiled. "Like the lock and the key."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Sazed said, smiling. "Precisely like that."

"It thumps," Vin whispered, eyes closing. "In my head. I can *feel* it."

Sazed paused, then wrapped a bandage around Vin's arm. "Can you feel where it is?"

Vin shook her head. "I. . .There doesn't seem to be a direction to the pulses. I thought they were distant, but they're getting louder."

"That must be the Well returning to power," Sazed said. "It is fortunate that I know where to find it."

Elend turned, and Vin opened her eyes again.

"My research has revealed the location, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "I can draw you a map, from my metalminds."

"Where?" Vin whispered.

"North," Sazed said. "In the mountains of Terris. Atop one of the lower peaks, known as Deryatith. Travel there will be difficult this time of year. . .."

"I can do it," Vin said firmly as Sazed turned to working on her chest wound. Elend flushed again, then paused as he turned away.

*I'm. . .married.* "You're going to leave?" Elend asked, looking to Vin. "Now?"

"I have to," Vin whispered. "I *have* to go to it, Elend."

"You should go with her, Your Majesty," Sazed said.

"What?"

Sazed sighed, looking up. "We have to face facts, Your Majesty. As you said earlier, Straff will soon take this city. If you are here, you will be executed. However, Lady Vin will undoubtedly need help securing the Well."

"It's supposed to hold great power," Elend said, rubbing his chin. "Could we, you think, destroy those armies?"

Vin shook her head. "We couldn't use it," she whispered. "The power is a temptation. That's what went wrong last time. Rashek took the power instead of giving it up."

"Giving it up?" Elend asked. "What does that mean?"

"Letting i1t go, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "Letting *it* defeat the Deepness on its own."

"Trust," Vin whispered. "It's about trust."

"However," Sazed said, "I think that releasing this power could do great things for the land. Change things, and undo much of the damage the Lord Ruler did. I have a strong suspicion that it would destroy the koloss, since they were created by the Lord Ruler's misuse of the power."

"But Straff would hold the city," Elend said.

"Yes," Sazed said, "but if you leave, the transition will be peaceful. The Assembly has all but decided to accept him as their emperor, and it appears that he'll let Penrod rule as a subject king. There will be no bloodshed, and you will be able to organize resistance from outside. Besides, who knows what releasing the power will do? Lady Vin could be left changed, much as the Lord Ruler was. With the crew in hiding within the city, it should not be so difficult to oust your father—particularly when he grows complacent in a year or so."

Elend gritted his teeth. *Another revolution*. Yet, what Sazed said made sense. *For so long, we've been worrying about the small-scale*. He glanced at Vin, feeling a surge of warmth and love. *Maybe it's time I started listening to the things she's been trying to tell me*.

"Sazed," Elend said, a sudden thought occurring to him, "do you think that I could convince the Terris people to help us?"

"Perhaps, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "My prohibition against interfering—the one I have been ignoring—comes because I was given a different assignment by the Synod, not because we believe in avoiding all action. If you could convince the Synod that the future of the Terris people will be benefited by having a strong ally in Luthadel, you may just be able to get yourself military aid from Terris."

Elend nodded, thoughtful.

"Remember the lock and the key, Your Majesty," Sazed said, finishing off Vin's second wound. "In this case, leaving seems like the opposite of what you should do. However, if you look at the larger picture, you will see that it's precisely what you *need* to do."

Vin opened her eyes, looking up at him, smiling. "We can do this, Elend. Come with me."

Elend stood for a moment. *Lock and key*. . .. "All right," he said. "We'll leave as soon as Vin is able."

"She should be able to ride tomorrow," Sazed said. "You know what pewter can do for a body."

Elend nodded. "All right. I should have listened to you earlier, Vin. Besides, I've always wanted to see your homeland, Sazed. You can show it to us."

"I will need to stay here, I fear," Sazed said. "I should soon leave for the South to continue my work there. Tindwyl, however, can go with you—she has important information that needs to be passed on to my brethren the Keepers."

"It will need to be a small group," Vin said. "We'll have to outrun—or perhaps sneak past—Straff's men."

"Just you three, I think," Sazed said. "Or, perhaps one other person to help with watches while you sleep, someone skilled in hunting and scouting. Lord Lestibournes, perhaps?"

"Spook would be perfect," Elend said, nodding. "You're sure the other crewmembers will be safe in the city?"

"Of course they won't," Vin said, smiling. "But they're experts.1 They hid from the Lord Ruler—they'll be able to hide from Straff. Particularly if they don't have to worry about keeping you safe."

"Then it is decided," Sazed said, standing. "You two should try to rest well tonight, despite the recent change in your relationship. Can you walk, Lady Vin?"

"No need," Elend said, leaning down and picking her up. She wrapped her arms around him, though her grip was not tight, and he could see that her eyes were already drooping again.

He smiled. Suddenly, the world seemed a much simpler place. He would take some time and spend it on what was really important; then, once he and Vin had sought help from the North, they could return. He actually looked forward to coming back and tackling their problems with renewed vigor.

He held Vin tight, nodding good night to Sazed, then walking out toward his rooms. It seemed that everything had worked out fine in the end.

Sazed stood slowly, watching the two leave. He wondered what they would think of him, when they heard of Luthadel's fall. At least they would have each other for support.

His wedding blessing was the last gift he could give them—that, and their lives. *How will history judge me for my lies?* he wondered. *What will it think of the Terrisman who took such a hand in politics, the Terrisman who would fabricate mythology to save the lives of his friends?* The things he'd said about the Well were, of course, falsehoods. If there was such a power, he had no idea where it was, nor what it would do.

How history judged him would probably depend on what Elend and Vin did with their lives. Sazed could only hope that he had done the right thing. Watching them go, knowing that their youthful love would be spared, he couldn't help but smile at his decision.

With a sigh, he stooped down and gathered up his medical items; then he retreated to his rooms to fabricate the map he had promised Vin and Elend.

## PART FIVE

# SNOW AND ASH

*He is accustomed to giving up his own will before the greater good, as he sees it.*

## 49

"YOU ARE A FOOL, ELEND Venture," Tindwyl snapped, arms folded, eyes wide with displeasure.

Elend pulled a strap tight on his saddle. Part of the wardrobe Tindwyl had made for him included a black and silver riding uniform, and he wore this now, fingers snug within the leather gloves, and a dark cloak to keep off the ash.

"Are you listening to me?" Tindwyl demanded. "You can't leave. Not now! Not when your people are in such danger!"

"I'll protect them in another way," he said, checking on the packhorses.

They were in the keep's covered way, used for arrivals and departures. Vin sat on her own horse, enveloped almost completely in her cloak, hands holding her reins tensely. She had very little experience riding, but Elend refused to let her run. Pewter or no pewter, the wounds from her fight at the Assembly still hadn't healed completely, not to mention the damage she'd taken the night before.

"Another way?" Tindwyl asked. "You should be1 with them. You're their king!"

"No, I'm *not*," Elend snapped, turning toward the Terriswoman. "They rejected me, Tindwyl. Now I have to worry about more important events on a larger stage. They wanted a traditional king? Well, let them have my father. When I return from Terris, perhaps they will have realized what they lost."

Tindwyl shook her head and stepped forward, speaking in a quiet voice. "Terris, Elend? You go north. For her. You know why she wants to go there, don't you?"

He paused.

"Ah, so you do know," Tindwyl said. "What do you think of it, Elend? Don't tell me you believe these delusions. She thinks she's the Hero of Ages. She supposes that she'll find something in the mountains up there—some power, or perhaps some revelation, that will transform her into a divinity."

Elend glanced at Vin. She looked down at the ground, hood down, still sitting quietly on her horse.

"She's trying to follow her master, Elend," Tindwyl whispered. "The Survivor became a god to these people, so she thinks she has to do the same."

Elend turned to Tindwyl. "If that is what she truly believes, then I support her."

"You support her madness?" Tindwyl demanded.

"Do not speak of my wife in that manner," Elend said, his commanding tone causing Tindwyl to flinch. He swung up into his saddle. "I trust her, Tindwyl. Part of trust is belief."

Tindwyl snorted. "You can't possibly believe that she is some prophesied messiah, Elend. I know you—you're a scholar. You may have professed allegiance to the Church of the Survivor, but you don't believe in the supernatural any more than I do."

"I believe," he said firmly, "that Vin is my wife, and that I love her. Anything important to her is important to me—and anything she believes has at least that much weight of truth to me. We are going north. We will return once we've released the power there."

"Fine," Tindwyl said. "Then you will be remembered as a coward who abandoned his people."

"Leave us!" Elend ordered, raising his finger and pointing toward the keep.

Tindwyl spun, stalking toward the doorway. As she passed it, she pointed at the supply table, where she had previously placed a book-sized package, wrapped in brown paper, tied with a thick string. "Sazed wishes you to deliver this to the Keeper Synod. You'll find them in the city of Tathingdwen. Enjoy your exile, Elend Venture." Then, she left.

Elend sighed, moving his horse over beside Vin's.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"For what?"

"For what you said."

"I meant it, Vin," Elend said, reaching over to lay a hand on her shoulder.

"Tindwyl might be right, you know," she said. "Despite what Sazed said, I could be mad. Do you remember when I told you that I'd seen a spirit in the mists?"

Elend nodded slowly.

"Well, I've seen it again," Vin said. "It's like a ghost, formed from the patterns in mist. I see it all the time, watching me, following me. And I hear those rhythms in my head—majestic, powerful thumpings, like Allomantic pulses. Only, I don't need bronze anymore to hear them."

Elend squeezed her shoulder. "I believe you, Vin."

She looked up, reserved. "Do you, Elend? Do you really?"

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "But I'm trying very hard to. Either way, I think going north is the right thing to do."

She nodded slowly. "That's enough, I think."

He smiled, turning back to the doorway. "Where is Spook?"

Vin shrugged beneath her cloak. "I assume Tindwyl won't be coming with us, then."

"Probably not," Elend said, smiling.

"How will we find our way to Terris?"

"It won't be hard," Elend said. "We'll just follow the imperial canal to Tathingdwen." He paused, thinking of the map Sazed had given them. It led straight into the Terris Mountains. They'd have to get supplies in Tathingdwen, and the snows would be high, but. . .well, that was a problem for another time.

Vin smiled, and Elend walked over to pick up the package Tindwyl had left. It appeared to be a book of some sort. A few moments later, Spook arrived. He wore his soldier's uniform, and had saddlebags slung over his shoulder. He nodded to Elend, handed Vin a large bag, then moved to his own horse.

*He looks nervous,* Elend thought as the boy slung his bags over his horse. "What's in the bag?" he asked, turning to Vin.

"Pewter dust," she said. "I think we might need it."

"Are we ready?" Spook asked, looking over at them.

Elend glanced at Vin, who nodded. "I guess we—"

"Not quite yet," a new voice said. "I'm not ready at *all*."

Elend turned as Allrianne swept into the passage. She wore a rich brown and red riding skirt, and had her hair tied up beneath a scarf. *Where'd she get that outfit?* Elend wondered. Two servants followed her, bearing bundles.

Allrianne paused, tapping her lip with a thoughtful expression. "I think I'm going to need a packhorse."

"What are you doing?" Vin demanded.

"Going with you," Allrianne said. "Breezy says I have to leave the city. He's a very silly man, sometimes, but he can be quite stubborn. He spent the entire conversation Soothing me—as if I couldn't recognize his touch by now!"

Allrianne waved to one of the servants, who ran to get a stablehand.

"We're going to be riding very hard," Elend said. "I'm not sure if you'll be able to keep up."

Allrianne rolled her eyes. "I rode all the way out here from the Western Dominance! I think I can manage. Besides, Vin is hurt, so you probably won't be going *that* fast."

"We don't want you along," Vin said. "We don't trust you—and we don't like you."

Elend closed his eyes. *Dear, blunt Vin*.

Allrianne just twittered a laugh as the servant returned with two horses, then began to load one. "Silly Vin," she said. "How can you say that after all we've shared?"

"Shared?" Vin asked. "Allrianne, we went shopping together *one time*."

"And I felt we bonded quite well," Allrianne said. "Why, we're practically sisters!"

Vin gave the girl a flat stare.

"Yes," Allrianne said, "and you're *definitely* the older, boring sister." She smiled sweetly, then swung easily up into her saddle, suggesting considerable horsemanship. One of the servants led her packhorse over, then tied the reins into place behind Allrianne's saddle.

"All right, Elend dear," she said. "I'm ready. Let's go."

Elend glanced at Vin, who shook her head with a dark look.

"You can leave me behind if you wish," Allrianne said, "but I'll just follow and get into trouble, and then you'll have to come save me. And don't even try and pretend that you wouldn't!"

Elend sighed. "Very well," he said. "Let's go."

They made their way slowly through the city, Elend and Vin at the lead, Spook bringing their packhorses, Allrianne riding to the side. Elend kept his head up, but that only let him see the faces that poked out of windows and doorways as he passed. Soon, a small crowd was trailing them—and while he couldn't hear their whispers, he could imagine what they were saying.

*The king. The king is abandoning us. . ..*

He knew that many of them still couldn't understand that Lord Penrod held the throne. Elend glanced away from an alleyway, where he saw many eyes watching him. There was a haunted fear in those eyes. He had expected to see accusations, but somehow their despondent acceptance was even more disheartening. They expected him to flee. They expected to be abandoned. He was one of the few rich enough, and powerful enough, to get away. Of course he'd run.

He squeezed his own eyes shut, trying to force down his guilt. He wished that they could have left at night, sneaking out the passwall as Ham's family had. However, it was important that Straff saw Elend and Vin leaving, so that he understood he could take the city without attacking.

*I'll be back*, Elend promised the people. *I'll save you. For now, it's better if I leave*.

The broad doors of Tin Gate appeared ahead of them. Elend kicked his horse forward, speeding ahead of his silent wave of followers. The guards at the gate already had their orders. Elend gave them a nod, reining in his horse, and the men swung the doors open. Vin and the others joined him before the opening portal.

"Lady Heir," one of the guards asked quietly. "Are you leaving, too?"

Vin looked to the side. "Peace," she said. "We're not abandoning you. We're going for help."

The soldier smiled.

*How can he trust her so easily?* Elend thought. *Or, is hope all he has left?*

Vin turned her horse around, facing the crowd of people, and she lowered her hood. "We will return," she promised. She didn't seem as nervous as she had before when dealing with people who revered her.

*Ever since last night, something has changed in her*, Elend thought.

As a group, the soldiers saluted them. Elend saluted back; then he nodded to Vin. He led the way as they galloped out the gates, angling toward the northern highway—a path that would allow them to skirt just west of Straff's army.

They hadn't gone far before a group of horsemen moved to intercept them. Elend rode low on his horse, sparing a glance for Spook and the packhorse1s. What caught Elend's attention, however, was Allrianne: she rode with amazing proficiency, a look of determination on her face. She didn't seem the least bit nervous.

To the side, Vin whipped her cloak back, bringing out a handful of coins. She flung them into the air, and they shot forward with a speed Elend had never seen, even from other Allomancers. *Lord Ruler!* he thought with shock as the coins zipped away, disappearing faster than he could track.

Soldiers fell, and Elend barely heard the *plinging* of metal against metal over the sound of wind and hoofbeats. He rode directly through the center of the chaotic group of men, many of them down and dying.

Arrows began to fall, but Vin scattered these without even waving a hand. She had opened the bag of pewter, he noticed, and was releasing the dust in a shower behind her as she rode, Pushing some of it to the sides.

*The next arrows won't have metal heads,* Elend thought nervously. Soldiers were forming up behind, shouting.

"I'll catch up," Vin said, then jumped off her horse.

"Vin!" Elend yelled, turning his beast. Allrianne and Spook shot past him, riding hard. Vin landed and, amazingly, didn't even stumble as she began to run. She downed a vial of metal, then looked toward the archers.

Arrows flew. Elend cursed, but kicked his horse into motion. There was little he could do now. He rode low, galloping as the arrows fell around him. One passed within inches of his head, falling to stick into the road.

And then they stopped falling. He glanced backward, teeth gritted. Vin stood before a rising cloud of dust. *The pewter dust*, he thought. *She's Pushing on it—Pushing the flakes along the ground, stirring up the dust and ash*.

A massive wave of dust, metal, and ash slammed into the archers, washing over them. It blew around the soldiers, making them curse and shield their eyes, and some fell to the ground, holding their faces.

Vin swung back onto her horse, then galloped away from the billowing mass of wind-borne particles. Elend slowed his horse, letting her catch up. The army was in chaos behind them, men giving orders, people scattering.

"Speed up!" Vin said as she approached. "We're almost out of bowshot!"

Soon they joined Allrianne and Spook. *We aren't out of danger—my father could still decide to send pursuit*.

But, the soldiers couldn't have mistaken Vin. If Elend's instincts were right, Straff would let them run. His prime target was Luthadel. He could go after Elend later; for now, he would simply be happy to see Vin leaving.

"Thank you kindly for the help getting out," Allrianne suddenly said, watching the army. "I'll be going now."

With that, she veered her two horses away, angling toward a group of low hills to the west.

"What?" Elend asked with surprise, pulling up next to Spook.

"Leave her," Vin said. "We don't have time."

*Well, that solves one problem*, Elend thought, turning his horse to the northern highway. *Farewell, Luthadel. I'll be back for you later*.

"Well, that solves one problem," Breeze noted, standing atop the city wall and watching Elend's group disappear around a hillside. To the east, a large—and still unexp1lained—pillar of smoke rose from the koloss camp. To the west, Straff's army was buzzing about, stirred by the escape.

At first, Breeze had worried about Allrianne's safety—but then he'd realized that, enemy army notwithstanding, there was no safer place for her than beside Vin. As long as Allrianne didn't get too far away from the others, she would be safe.

It was a quiet group that stood atop the wall with him, and for once, Breeze barely touched their emotions. Their solemnity seemed appropriate. The young Captain Demoux stood beside the aging Clubs, and the peaceful Sazed stood with Ham the warrior. Together, they watched the seed of hope they'd cast to the winds.

"Wait," Breeze said, frowning as he noticed something. "Wasn't Tindwyl supposed to be with them?"

Sazed shook his head. "She decided to Stay."

"Why would she do that?" Breeze asked. "Didn't I hear her babbling something about not interfering in local disputes?"

Sazed shook his head. "I do not know, Lord Breeze. She is a difficult woman to read."

"They all are," Clubs muttered.

Sazed smiled. "Either way, it appears our friends have escaped."

"May the Survivor protect them," Demoux said quietly.

"Yes," Sazed said. "May he indeed."

Clubs snorted. Resting one arm on the battlements, he turned to eye Sazed with a gnarled face. "Don't encourage him."

Demoux flushed, then turned and walked away.

"What was that about?" Breeze asked curiously.

"The boy has been preaching to my soldiers," Clubs said. "Told him I didn't want his nonsense cluttering their minds."

"It is not nonsense, Lord Cladent," Sazed said, "it's faith."

"Do you honestly think," Clubs said, "that *Kelsier* is going to protect these people?"

Sazed wavered. "They believe it, and that is—"

"No," Clubs interrupted, scowling. "That *isn't* enough, Terrisman. These people fool themselves by believing in the Survivor."

"You believed in him," Sazed said. Breeze was tempted to Soothe him, make the argument less tense, but Sazed already seemed completely calm. "You followed him. You believed in the Survivor enough to overthrow the Final Empire."

Clubs scowled. "I don't like your ethics, Terrisman—I never have. Our crew—Kelsier's crew—fought to free this people because it was *right*."

"Because you believed it to be right," Sazed said.

"And what do you believe to be right, Terrisman?"

"That depends," Sazed said. "There are many different systems with many different worthy values."

Clubs nodded, then turned, as if the argument were over.

"Wait, Clubs," Ham said. "Aren't you going to respond to that?"

"He said enough," Clubs said. "His belief is situational. To him, even the Lord Ruler was a deity because people worshipped him—or were forced to worship him. Aren't I right, Terrisman?"

"In a way, Lord Cladent," Sazed said. "Though, the Lord1 Ruler might have been something of an exception."

"But you still keep records and memories of the Steel Ministry's practices, don't you?" Ham asked.

"Yes," Sazed admitted.

"Situational," Clubs spat. "At least that fool Demoux had the sense to choose *one* thing to believe in."

"Do not deride someone's faith simply because you do not share it, Lord Cladent," Sazed said quietly.

Clubs snorted again. "It's all very easy for you, isn't it?" he asked. "Believing everything, never having to choose?"

"I would say," Sazed replied, "that it is more difficult to believe as I do, for one must learn to be inclusionary and accepting."

Clubs waved a dismissive hand, turning to hobble toward the stairs. "Suit yourself. I have to go prepare my boys to die."

Sazed watched him go, frowning. Breeze gave him a Soothing—taking away his self-consciousness—for good measure.

"Don't mind him, Saze," Ham said. "We're all a little on edge, lately."

Sazed nodded. "Still, he makes good points—ones I have never before had to face. Until this year, my duty was to collect, study, and remember. It is still very hard for me to consider setting one belief beneath another, even if that belief is based on a man that I know to have been quite mortal."

Ham shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe Kell *is* out there somewhere, watching over us."

*No*, Breeze thought. *If he were, we wouldn't have ended up here—waiting to die, locked in a city we were supposed to save*.

"Anyway," Ham said, "I still want to know where that smoke is coming from."

Breeze glanced at the koloss camp. The dark pillar was too centralized to be coming from cooking fires. "The tents?"

Ham shook his head. "El said there were only a couple of tents—far too few to make that much smoke. That fire has been burning for some time."

Breeze shook his head. *Doesn't really matter now, I guess*.

Straff Venture coughed again, curling over in his chair. His arms were slick with sweat, his hands trembling.

He wasn't getting better.

At first, he'd assumed that the chills were a side effect of his nervousness. He'd had a hard evening, sending assassins after Zane, then somehow escaping death at the insane Mistborn's hands. Yet, during the night, Straff's shakes hadn't gotten better. They'd grown worse. They weren't just from nervousness; he must have a disease of some sort.

"Your Majesty!" a voice called from outside.

Straff straightened himself, trying to look as presentable as possible. Even so, the messenger paused as he entered the tent, apparently noting Straff's wan skin and tired eyes.

"My. . .lord," the messenger said.

"Speak, man," Straff said curtly, trying to project a regality he didn't feel. "Out with it."

"Riders, my lord," the man said. "They left the city!"

"What!" Straff said, throwing off his blanket and standing. He managed to stand upright despite a bout of dizziness. "Why wasn't I informed?"

"They passed quickly, my lord," the messenger said. "We barely had time to send the interception crew."

"You caught them, I assume," Straff said, steadying himself on his chair.

"Actually, they escaped, my lord," the messenger said slowly.

"*What?*" Straff said, spinning in rage. The motion was too much. The dizziness returned, blackness creeping across his field of vision. He stumbled, catching himself on the chair, managing to collapse into it rather than onto the floor.

"Send for the healer!" he heard the messenger shout. "The king is sick!"

*No*, Straff thought groggily. *No, this came too quickly. It can't be a disease*.

Zane's last words. What had they been? *A man shouldn't kill his father. . ..*

Liar.

"Amaranta," Straff croaked.

"My lord?" a voice asked. Good. Someone was with him.

"Amaranta," he said again. "Send for her."

"Your mistress, my lord?"

Straff forced himself to remain conscious. As he sat, his vision and balance returned somewhat. One of his door guards was at his side. What was the man's name? Grent.

"Grent," Straff said, trying to sound commanding. "You must bring Amaranta to me. Now!"

The soldier hesitated, then rushed from the room. Straff focused on his breathing. In and out. In and out. Zane was a snake. In and out. In and out. Zane hadn't wanted to use the knife—no, that was expected. In and out. But when had the poison come? Straff had been feeling ill the entire day before.

"My lord?"

Amaranta stood at the doorway. She had been beautiful once, before age had gotten to her—as it got to all of them. Childbirth destroyed a woman. So succulent she had been, with her firm breasts and smooth, unblemished skin. . ..

*Your mind is wandering*, Straff told himself. Focus.

"I need. . .antidote," Straff forced out, focusing on the Amaranta of the now: the woman in her late twenties, the old—yet still useful—thing that kept him alive in the face of Zane's poisons.

"Of course, my lord," Amaranta said, walking over to his poison cabinet, getting out the necessary ingredients.

Straff settled back, focusing on his breathing. Amaranta must have sensed his urgency, for she hadn't even tried to get him to bed her. He watched her work, getting out her burner and ingredients. He needed. . .to find. . .Zane. . ..

She wasn't doing it the right way.

Straff burned tin. The sudden flash of sensitivity nearly blinded him, even in the shade of his tent, and his aches and shivers became sharp and excruciating. But his mind cleared, as if he'd suddenly bathed in frigid water.

Amaranta was preparing the wrong ingredients. Straff didn't know a great deal about the making of antidotes. He'd been forced to delegate this duty, instead focusing his efforts on learning to recognize the details—the scents, the tastes, the discolorations—of poisons. Yet, he had watched Amaranta prepare her catch-all antidote on numerous occasions. And she was doing it differently this time.

He forced himself out of his chair, keeping tin flared, though it caused his eyes to water. "What are you doing?" he said, walking on unsteady feet toward her.

Amaranta looked up, shocked. The guilt that flashed in her eyes was enough confirmation.

"What are you doing!" Straff bellowed, fear giving him strength as he grabbed her by the shoulders, shaking her. He was weakened, but he was still much stronger than she.

The woman looked down. "Your antidote, my lord. . ."

"You're making it the wrong way!" Straff said.

"I thought, you looked fatigued, so I might add something to help you stay awake."

Straff paused. The words seemed logical, though he was having trouble thinking. Then, looking down at the chagrined woman, he noticed something. His eyes enhanced beyond natural detail, he caught a slight glimpse of a bit of uncovered flesh beneath her bodice.

He reached down and ripped off the side of her dress, exposing her skin. Her left breast—disgusting to him, for it sagged a slight bit—was scarred and cut, as if by a knife. None of the scars were fresh, but even in his addled state, Straff recognized Zane's handiwork.

"You're his lover?" Straff said.

"It's your fault," Amaranta hissed. "You abandoned me, once I aged and bore you a few children. Everyone told me you would, but yet, I hoped. . ."

Straff felt himself growing weak. Dizzy, he rested a hand on the wooden poisons cabinet.

"Yet," Amaranta said, tears on her cheeks. "Why did you have to take Zane from me, too? What did you do, to draw him off? To make him stop coming to me?"

"You let him poison me," Straff said, falling to one knee.

"Fool," Amaranta spat. "He never poisoned you—not a single time. Though, at my request, he often made you think that he had. And then, each time, you ran to me. You suspected everything Zane did—and yet, you never once paused to think what was in the 'antidote' I gave you."

"It made me better," Straff mumbled.

"That's what happens when you're addicted to a drug, Straff," Amaranta whispered. "When you get it, you feel better. When you don't get it. . .you die."

Straff closed his eyes.

"You're mine now, Straff," she said. "I can make you—"

Straff bellowed, gathering what strength he had and throwing himself at the woman. She cried in surprise as he tackled her, pushing her to the ground.

Then she said nothing, for Straff's hands choked her windpipe. She struggled for a bit, but Straff weighed far more than she did. He'd intended to demand the antidote, to force her to save him, but he wasn't thinking clearly. His vision began to fuzz, his mind dim.

By the time he regained his wits, Amaranta was blue and dead on the ground before him. He wasn't certain how long he'd been strangling her corpse. He rolled off her, toward the open cabinet. On his knees, he reached up for the burner, but his shaking hands toppled it to the side, spilling hot liquid across the floor.

Cursing to himself, he grabbed a flagon of unheated water and began to throw handfuls of herbs into it. He stayed away from the drawers that held the poisons, sticking to those tha1t held antidotes. Yet, there were many crossovers. Some things were poisonous in large doses, but could cure in smaller amounts. Most were addictive. He didn't have time to worry about that; he could feel the weakness in his limbs, and he could barely grab the handfuls of herbs. Bits of brown and red shook from his fingers as he dumped handful after handful into the mixture.

One of these was the herb that she'd gotten him addicted to. Any one of the others might kill him. He wasn't even sure what the odds were.

He drank the concoction anyway, gulping it down between choking gasps for air, then let himself slip into unconsciousness.

*I have no doubt that if Alendi reaches the Well of Ascension, he will take the power and then—in the name of the presumed greater good—give it up.*

# 50

"ARE THOSE THE FELLOWS YOU want, Lady Cett?"

Allrianne scanned the valley—and the army it contained—then looked down at the bandit, Hobart. He smiled eagerly—or, well, he *kind* of smiled. Hobart had fewer teeth than he had fingers, and he was missing a couple of those.

Allrianne smiled back from atop her horse. She sat sidesaddle, reins held lightly in her fingers. "Yes, I do believe that it is, Master Hobart."

Hobart looked back at his band of thugs, grinning. Allrianne Rioted them all a bit, reminding them how much they wanted her promised reward. Her father's army spread out before them in the distance. She had wandered for an entire day, traveling west, looking for it. But, she'd been heading in the wrong direction. If she hadn't run afoul of Hobart's helpful little gang, she would have been forced to sleep outside.

And that would have been rather unpleasant.

"Come, Master Hobart," she said, moving her horse forward. "Let's go and meet with my father."

The group followed happily, one of them leading her packhorse. There was a certain charm to simple men, like Hobart's crew. They really only wanted three things: money, food, and sex. And they could usually use the first to get the other two. When she'd first run across this group, she'd blessed her fortune—despite the fact that they had been running down a hillside in ambush, intent on robbing and raping her. Another charm about men like these was that they were rather inexperienced with Allomancy.

She kept a firm hold on their emotions as they rode down toward the camp. She didn't want them reaching any disappointing conclusions—such as "Ransoms are usually bigger than rewards." She couldn't control them completely, of course—she could only influence them. However, with men so base, it was fairly easy to read what was going on in their heads. It was amusing how quickly a little promise of wealth could turn brutes into near gentlemen.

Of course, there wasn't much of a challenge in dealing with men like Hobart, either. No. . .no challenge, as there had been with Breezy. Now, *that* had been fun. And rewarding, too. She doubted she'd ever find a man as aware of his emotions, and as aware of the emotions of others, as Breezy. Getting a man like him—a man so expert in Allomancy, so determined that his age made him inappropriate for her—to love her. . .well, that had been a true accomplishment.

*Ah, Breezy,* she thought as they passed out of the forest and onto the hillside before the army. *Do any of your friends even understand wh1at a noble man you are?*

They really didn't treat him well enough. Of course, that was to be expected. That was what Breezy wanted. People who underestimated you were easier to manipulate. Yes, Allrianne understood this concept quite well—for there were few things more quickly dismissed than a young, silly girl.

"Halt!" a soldier said, riding up with an honor guard. They had swords drawn. "Step away from her, you!"

*Oh, honestly,* Allrianne thought, rolling her eyes. She Rioted the group of soldiers, enhancing their sense of calmness. She didn't want any accidents.

"Please, Captain," she said as Hobart and his crew drew weapons, huddling around her uncertainly. "These men have rescued me from the savage wilderness and brought me safely home, at much personal cost and danger."

Hobart nodded firmly, an action undermined just a bit as he wiped his nose on his sleeve. The soldier captain looked over the ash-stained, motley-clothed group of bandits, then frowned.

"See that these men have a good meal, Captain," she said airily, kicking her horse forward. "And give them space for the night. Hobart, I'll send your reward once I meet with my father."

Bandits and soldiers moved in behind her, and Allrianne made sure to Riot them both, enhancing their senses of trust. It was a tough sell for the soldiers, especially as the wind shifted, blowing the full stench of the bandit crew across them. Still, they all reached the camp without incident.

The groups parted, Allrianne giving her horses to an aide and calling for a page to warn her father that she'd returned. She dusted off her riding dress, then strode through camp, smiling pleasantly and looking forward to a bath and the other comforts—such as they were—that the army could provide. However, first there were things she needed to attend to.

Her father liked to spend evenings in his open-sided planning pavilion, and he sat there now, arguing with a messenger. He looked over as Allrianne swished into the pavilion, smiling sweetly at Lords Galivan and Detor, her father's generals.

Cett sat on a high-legged chair so he could get a good view of his table and its maps. "Well, damn it," he said. "You *are* back."

Allrianne smiled, wandering around his planning table, looking at the map. It detailed the supply lines back to the Western Dominance. What she saw was not good.

"Rebellions back home, Father?" she asked.

"And ruffians attacking my supply carts," Cett said. "That boy Venture bribed them, I'm sure of it."

"Yes, he did," Allrianne said. "But, that's all pointless now. Did you miss me?" She made sure to Tug strongly on his sense of devotion.

Cett snorted, pulling at his beard. "Fool of a girl," he said. "I should have left you home."

"So I could have fallen to your enemies when they raised a rebellion?" she asked. "We both know that Lord Yomen was going to move the moment you pulled your armies out of the dominance."

"And I should have let that damn obligator have you!"

Allrianne gasped. "Father! Yomen would have held me for ransom. You know how terribly I wilt when I'm locked up."

Cett glanced at her, and then—apparently despite himself—he started to chuckle. "You'd've had him feedi1ng you gourmet foods before the day was through. Maybe I *should* have left you behind. Then, at least, I'd have known where you were—rather than worrying where you'd run off to next. You didn't bring that idiot Breeze back with you, did you?"

"Father!" Allrianne said. "Breezy is a good man."

"Good men die quickly in this world, Allrianne," Cett said. "I know—I've killed enough of them."

"Oh, yes," Allrianne said, "you're very wise. And taking an aggressive stance against Luthadel had *such* a positive outcome, didn't it? Chased away with your tail between your legs? You'd be dead now, if dear Vin had as little conscience as you."

"That 'conscience' didn't stop her from killing some three hundred of my men," Cett said.

"She's a very confused young lady," Allrianne said. "Either way, I do feel obliged to remind you that I was right. You should have made an alliance with the Venture boy, instead of threatening him. That means you owe me five new dresses!"

Cett rubbed his forehead. "This isn't a damn game, girl."

"Fashion, Father, is no *game,*" Allrianne said firmly. "I can't very well enchant bandit troops into leading me safely home if I look like a street rat, now can I?"

"More bandits, Allrianne?" Cett asked with a sigh. "You know how long it took us to get rid of the last group?"

"Hobart's a wonderful man," Allrianne said testily. "Not to mention well-connected with the local thieving community. Give him some gold and some prostitutes, and you might just be able to talk him into helping you with those brigands that are attacking your supply lines."

Cett paused, glancing at the map. Then he began to pull at his beard thoughtfully. "Well, you're back," he finally said. "Guess we'll have to take care of you. I suppose you want someone to carry a litter for you as we head home. . .."

"Actually," Allrianne said, "we're not going back to the dominance. We're returning to Luthadel."

Cett didn't immediately dismiss the comment; he could usually tell when she was being serious. Instead, he simply shook his head. "Luthadel holds nothing for us, Allrianne."

"We can't go back to the dominance, either," Allrianne said. "Our enemies are too strong, and some of them have Allomancers. That's why we had to come here in the first place. We can't leave the area until we have either money or allies."

"There's no money in Luthadel," Cett said. "I believe Venture when he says the atium isn't there."

"I agree," Allrianne said. "I searched that palace well, never found a bit of the stuff. That means we need to leave here with friends, instead of money. Go back, wait for a battle to start, then help whichever side looks like it's going to win. They'll feel indebted to us—they might even decide to let us live."

Cett stood quietly for a moment. "That's not going to help save your friend Breeze, Allrianne. His faction is by far the weakest—even teaming with the Venture boy, I doubt we could beat Straff or those koloss. Not without access to the city walls and plenty of time to prepare. If we go back, it will be to help your Breeze's enemies."

Allrianne shrugged. *You can't help him if you're not there, Father,* she thought. *They're going to lose anyway—if you are in the area, then there's a chance you'll end up helping Luthadel1i>.*

*A very small chance, Breeze. That's the best I can give you. I'm sorry.*

Elend Venture awoke on their third day out of Luthadel, surprised at how rested he could feel after a night spent in a tent out in the wilderness. Of course, part of that might have been the company.

Vin lay curled up beside him in their bedroll, her head resting against his chest. He would have expected her to be a light sleeper, considering how jumpy she was, but she seemed to feel comfortable sleeping beside him. She even seemed to become just a little less anxious when he put his arms around her.

He looked down at her fondly, admiring the form of her face, the slight curl of her black hair. The cut on her cheek was almost invisible now, and she'd already pulled out the stitches. A constant, low burn of pewter gave the body remarkable strength for recovery. She didn't even favor her right arm anymore—despite the cut shoulder—and her weakness from the fight seemed completely gone.

She still hadn't given him much of an explanation regarding that night. She had fought Zane—who had apparently been Elend's half brother—and TenSoon the kandra had left. Yet, neither of those things seemed like they could have caused the distress in her he'd sensed when she'd come to him in his rooms.

He didn't know if he'd ever get the answers he wanted. Yet, he was coming to realize that he could love her even if he didn't completely understand her. He bent down and kissed the top of her head.

She immediately tensed, eyes opening. She sat up, exposing a bare torso, then glanced around their small tent. It was dimly lit with the light of dawn. Finally, she shook her head, looking over at him. "You're a bad influence on me."

"Oh?" he asked, smiling as he rested on one arm.

Vin nodded, running a hand through her hair. "You're making me get used to sleeping at night," she said. "Plus, I don't sleep in my clothing anymore."

"If you did, it would make things a little awkward."

"Yes," she said, "but what if we get attacked during the night? I'd have to fight them naked."

"I wouldn't mind watching that."

She gave him a flat stare, then reached for a shirt.

"You're having a bad influence on me, too, you know," he said as he watched her dress.

She raised an eyebrow.

"You're making me relax," he said. "And letting me stop worrying. I've been so tied up with things in the city lately that I'd forgotten what it was like to be an impolite recluse. Unfortunately, during our trip, I've had time to read not only one, but all *three* volumes of Troubeld's *Arts of Scholarship*."

Vin snorted, kneeling in the low tent as she pulled her belt tight; then she crawled over to him. "I don't know how you read while riding," she said.

"Oh, it's quite easy—if you aren't afraid of horses."

"I'm not afraid of them," Vin said. "They just don't like me. They know I can outrun them, and that makes them surly."

"Oh, is that it?" Elend asked, smiling, pulling her over to straddle him.

She nodded, then leaned down to kiss him. She ended it after a moment, however, moving to stand. She swatted his hand a1way as he tried to pull her back down.

"After all the trouble I took to get dressed?" she asked. "Besides. I'm hungry."

He sighed, reclining back as she scampered out of the tent, into the red morning sunlight. He lay for a moment, quietly remarking to himself on his fortune. He still wasn't sure how their relationship had worked out, or even why it made him so happy, but he was more than willing to enjoy the experience.

Eventually, he looked over at his clothing. He had brought only one of his nice uniforms—along with the riding uniform—and he didn't want to wear either too often. He didn't have servants anymore to wash the ash out of his clothing; in fact, despite the tent's double flap, some ash had managed to work its way inside during the night. Now that they were out of the city, there were no workers to sweep the ash away, and it was getting everywhere.

So, he dressed in an outfit far more simple: a pair of riding trousers, not unlike the pants that Vin often wore, with a buttoning gray shirt and a dark jacket. He'd never been forced to ride long distances before—carriages were generally preferred—but Vin and he were taking the trip relatively slowly. They had no real urgency. Straff's scouts hadn't followed them for long, and nobody was expecting them at their destination. They had time to ride leisurely, taking breaks, occasionally walking so that they wouldn't get too sore from riding.

Outside, he found Vin stirring up the morning fire and Spook caring for the horses. The young man had done some extensive traveling, and he knew how to tend horses—something that Elend was embarrassed to have never learned.

Elend joined Vin at the firepit. They sat for a few moments, Vin poking at the coals. She looked pensive.

"What?" Elend asked.

She glanced southward. "I. . ." Then she shook her head. "It's nothing. We're going to need more wood." She glanced to the side, toward where their axe lay beside the tent. The weapon flipped up into the air, shooting toward her blade-first. She stepped to the side, snatching the handle as it passed between her and Elend. Then she stalked over to a fallen tree. She took two swings at it, then easily kicked it down and broke it in two.

"She has a way of making the rest of us feel a little redundant, doesn't she?" Spook asked, stepping up beside Elend.

"At times," Elend said with a smile.

Spook shook his head. "Whatever I see or hear, she can sense better—and she can fight whatever it is that she finds. Every time I come back to Luthadel, I just feel. . .useless."

"Imagine being a regular person," Elend said. "At least you're an Allomancer."

"Maybe," Spook said, the sound of Vin chopping coming from the side. "But people respect you, El. They just dismiss me."

"I don't dismiss you, Spook."

"Oh?" the young man asked. "When's the last time I did anything important for the crew?"

"Three days ago," Elend said. "When you agreed to come with Vin and me. You're not just here to tend horses, Spook—you're here because of your skills as a scout and a Tineye. Do you still think we're being followed?"

Spook paused, then shrugged. "I can't be sure. I think Straff's scouts turned back, but I keep catching sight of someone back there. I never get a good glimpse of them, though."

"It's the mist spirit," Vin said, walking by and dumping an armload of wood beside the firepit. "It's chasing us."

Spook and Elend shared a look. Then Elend nodded, refusing to act on Spook's uncomfortable stare. "Well, as long as it stays out of our way, it's not a problem, right?"

Vin shrugged. "I hope not. If you see it, though, call for me. The records say it can be dangerous."

"All right," Elend said. "We'll do that. Now, let's decide what to have for breakfast."

Straff woke up. That was his first surprise.

He lay in bed, inside his tent, feeling like someone had picked him up and slammed him against the wall a few times. He groaned, sitting up. His body was free from bruises, but he ached, and his head was pounding. One of the army healers, a young man with a full beard and bulging eyes, sat beside his bed. The man studied Straff for a moment.

"You, my lord, should be dead," the young man said.

"I'm not," Straff said, sitting up. "Give me some tin."

A soldier approached with a metal vial. Straff downed it, then scowled at how dry and sore his throat was. He burned the tin only lightly; it made his wounds feel worse, but he had come to depend on the slight edge the enhanced senses gave him.

"How long?" he asked.

"Better part of three days, my lord," the healer said. "We. . .weren't sure what you'd eaten, or why. We thought about trying to get you to vomit, but it appeared that you'd taken the draught of your own choice, so. . ."

"You did well," Straff said, holding his arm up in front of him. It still shook a bit, and he couldn't make it stop. "Who is in charge of the army?"

"General Janarle," the healer said.

Straff nodded. "Why hasn't he had me killed?"

The healer blinked in surprise, glancing at the soldiers.

"My lord," said Grent the soldier, "who would dare betray you? Any man who tried would end up dead in his tent. General Janarle was *most* worried about your safety."

*Of course,* Straff realized with shock. *They don't know that Zane is gone. Why. . .if I did die, then everyone assumes that Zane would either take control himself, or get revenge on those he thought responsible*. Straff laughed out loud, shocking those watching over him. Zane had tried to kill him, but had accidentally saved his life by sheer force of reputation.

*I beat you,* Straff realized. *You're gone, and I'm alive*. That didn't, of course, mean that Zane wouldn't return—but, then again, he might not. Perhaps. . .just maybe. . .Straff was rid of him forever.

"Elend's Mistborn," Straff said suddenly.

"We followed her for a while, my lord," Grent said. "But, they got too far from the army, and Lord Janarle ordered the scouts back. It appears she's making for Terris."

He frowned. "Who else was with her?"

"We think your son Elend escaped as well," the soldier said. "But it could have been a decoy."

*Zane did it*, Straff thought with shock. *He actually got rid of her*.

*Unless it's a trick of some sort. But, then. . .1*

"The koloss army?" Straff asked.

"There's been a lot of fighting in its ranks lately, sir," Grent said. "The beasts seem more restless."

"Order our army to break camp," Straff said. "Immediately. We're retreating back toward the Northern Dominance."

"My lord?" Grent said with shock. "I think Lord Janarle is planning an assault, waiting only for your word. The city is weak, and their Mistborn is gone."

"We're pulling back," Straff said, smiling. "For a while, at least." *Let's see if this plan of yours works, Zane*.

Sazed sat in a small kitchen alcove, hands on the table before him, a metallic ring glittering on each finger. They were small, for metalminds, but storing up Feruchemical attributes took time. It would take weeks to fill even a ring's worth of metal—and he barely had days. In fact, Sazed was surprised the koloss had waited so long.

Three days. Not much time at all, but he suspected he would need every available edge in the approaching conflict. So far he'd been able to store up a small amount of each attribute. Enough for a boost in an emergency, once his other metalminds ran out.

Clubs hobbled into the kitchen. He seemed a blur to Sazed. Even wearing his spectacles—to help compensate for the vision he was storing in a tinmind—it was difficult for him to see.

"That's it," Clubs said, his voice muffled—another tinmind was taking Sazed's hearing. "They're finally gone."

Sazed paused for a moment, trying to decipher the comment. His thoughts moved as if through a thick, turgid soup, and it took him a moment to understand what Clubs had said.

*They're gone. Straff's troops. They've withdrawn*. He coughed quietly before replying. "Did he ever respond to any of Lord Penrod's messages?"

"No," Clubs said. "But he did execute the last messenger."

*Well, that isn't a very good sign,* Sazed thought slowly. Of course, there hadn't been very many good signs over the last few days. The city was on the edge of starvation, and their brief respite of warmth was over. It would snow this evening, if Sazed guessed right. That made him feel even more guilty to be sitting in the kitchen nook, beside a warm hearth, sipping broth as his metalminds sapped his strength, health, senses, and power of thought. He had rarely tried to fill so many at once.

"You don't look so good," Clubs noted, sitting.

Sazed blinked, thinking through the comment. "My. . .goldmind," he said slowly. "It draws my health, storing it up." He glanced at his bowl of broth. "I must eat to maintain my strength," he said, mentally preparing himself to take a sip.

It was an odd process. His thoughts moved so slowly that it took him a moment to decide to eat. Then his body reacted slowly, the arm taking a few seconds to move. Even then, the muscles quivered, their strength sapped away and stored in his pewtermind. Finally, he was able to get a spoonful to his lips and take a quiet sip. It tasted bland; he was filling scent as well, and without it, his sense of taste was severely hampered.

He should probably be lying down—but if he did that, he was liable to sleep. And, while sleeping, he couldn't fill metalminds—or, at least, he could fill only one. A bronzemind, the metal that stored wakefulness, would force him to sleep longer in exchange for let1ting him go longer without sleep on another occasion.

Sazed sighed, carefully setting down his spoon, then coughing. He'd done his best to help avert the conflict. His best plan had been to send a letter to Lord Penrod, urging him to inform Straff Venture that Vin was gone from the city. He had hoped that Straff would then be willing to make a deal.

Apparently, that tactic had been unsuccessful. Nobody had heard from Straff in days.

Their doom approached like the inevitable sunrise. Penrod had allowed three separate groups of townspeople—one of them composed of nobility—to try to flee Luthadel. Straff's soldiers, more wary after Elend's escape, had caught and slaughtered each group. Penrod had even sent a messenger to Lord Jastes Lekal, hoping to strike some deal with the Southern leader, but the messenger had not returned from the koloss camp.

"Well," Clubs said, "at least we kept them off for a few days."

Sazed thought for a moment. "It was simply a delay of the inevitable, I fear."

"Of course it was," Clubs said. "But it was an important delay. Elend and Vin will be almost four days away by now. If the fighting had started too soon, you can bet that little Miss Mistborn would have come back and gotten herself killed trying to save us."

"Ah," Sazed said slowly, forcing himself to reach for another spoonful of broth. The spoon was a dull weight in his numb fingers; his sense of touch, of course, was being siphoned into a tinmind. "How are the city defenses coming?" he asked as he struggled with the spoon.

"Terribly," Clubs said. "Twenty thousand troops may sound like a lot—but try stringing them out through a city this big."

"But the koloss won't have any siege equipment," Sazed said, focused on his spoon. "Or archers."

"Yes," Clubs said. "But we have eight city gates to protect—and any of five are within quick reach of the koloss. None of those gates was built to withstand an attack. And, as it stands, I can barely post a couple thousand guards at each gate, since I really don't know which way the koloss will come first."

"Oh," Sazed said quietly.

"What did you expect, Terrisman?" Clubs asked. "Good news? The koloss are bigger, stronger, and far crazier than we are. And they have an advantage in numbers."

Sazed closed his eyes, quivering spoon held halfway to his lips. He suddenly felt a weakness unrelated to his metalminds. *Why didn't she go with them? Why didn't she escape?*

As Sazed opened his eyes, he saw Clubs waving for a servant to bring him something to eat. The young girl returned with a bowl of soup. Clubs eyed it with dissatisfaction for a moment, but then lifted a knotted hand and began to slurp. He shot a glance at Sazed. "You expecting an apology out of me, Terrisman?" he asked between spoonfuls.

Sazed sat shocked for a moment. "Not at all, Lord Cladent," he finally said.

"Good," Clubs said. "You're a decent enough person. You're just confused."

Sazed sipped his soup, smiling. "That is comforting to hear. I think." He thought for a moment. "Lord Cladent. I have a religion for you."

Clubs frowned. "You don't give up, do you?"

Sazed looked down. It took him a moment to gather together what he'd been thinking about before. "What you said earlier, Lord Cladent. Abou1t situational morality. It made me think of a faith, known as Dadradah. Its practitioners spanned many countries and peoples; they believed that there was only one God, and that there was only one right way to worship."

Clubs snorted. "I'm really not interested in one of your dead religions, Terrisman. I think that—"

"They were artists," Sazed said quietly.

Clubs hesitated.

"They thought art drew one closer to God," Sazed said. "They were most interested in color and hue, and they were fond of writing poetry describing the colors they saw in the world around them."

Clubs was silent. "Why preach this religion to me?" he demanded. "Why not pick one that is blunt, like I am? Or one that worshipped warfare and soldiers?"

"Because, Lord Cladent," Sazed said. He blinked, recalling memories with effort through his muddled mind. "That is not you. It is what you must do, but it is not you. The others forget, I think, that you were a woodworker. An artist. When we lived in your shop, I often saw you, putting the finishing touches on pieces your apprentices had carved. I saw the care you used. That shop was no simple front for you. You miss it, I know."

Clubs didn't respond.

"You must live as a soldier," Sazed said, pulling something from his sash with a weak hand. "But you can still dream like an artist. Here. I had this made for you. It is a symbol of the Dadradah faith. To its people, being an artist was a higher calling, even, than being a priest."

He set the wooden disk on the table. Then, with effort, he smiled at Clubs. It had been a long time since he had preached a religion, and he wasn't certain what had made him decide to offer this one to Clubs. Perhaps it was to prove to himself that there was value in them. Perhaps it was stubbornness, reacting against the things Clubs had said earlier. Either way, he found satisfaction in the way that Clubs stared at the simple wooden disk with the carved picture of a brush on it.

*The last time I preached a religion, he thought, I was in that village to the south, the one where Marsh found me*.

*Whatever happened to him, anyway? Why didn't he return to the city?*

"Your woman has been looking for you," Clubs finally said, looking up, leaving the disk on the table.

"*My* woman?" Sazed said. "Why, we are not. . ." He trailed off as Clubs eyed him. The surly general was quite proficient at meaningful looks.

"Very well," Sazed said, sighing. He glanced down at his fingers and the ten glittering rings they bore. Four were tin: sight, hearing, scent, and touch. He continued to fill these; they wouldn't handicap him much. He released his pewtermind, however, as well as his steelmind and his zincmind.

Immediately, strength refilled his body. His muscles stopped sagging, reverting from emaciated to healthy. The fuzz lifted from his mind, allowing him to think clearly, and the thick, swollen slowness evaporated. He stood, invigorated.

"That's fascinating," Clubs mumbled.

Sazed looked down.

"I could see the change," Clubs said. "Your body grew stronger, and your eyes focused. Your arms stopped shaking. I guess you don't want to face that woman without all of your faculties, eh? I don't blame you." Clubs grunted to himself, then continued to eat.

Sazed bid farewell to the man, then strode out of the kitchen. His feet and hands still seemed like nearly unfeeling lumps. Yet, he felt an energy. There was nothing like simple contrast to awaken a man's sense of indomitability.

And there was nothing that could sap that sensation more quickly than the prospect of meeting with the woman he loved. Why had Tindwyl stayed? And, if she was determined not to go back to Terris, why had she avoided him these last few days? Was she mad that he had sent Elend away? Was she disappointed that he insisted on staying to help?

He found her inside Keep Venture's grand ballroom. He paused for a moment, impressed—as always—by the room's unquestionable majesty. He released his sight tinmind for just a moment, removing his spectacles as he looked around the awesome space.

Enormous, rectangular stained-glass windows reached to the ceiling along both walls of the huge room. Standing at the side, Sazed was dwarfed by massive pillars that supported a small gallery that ran beneath the windows on either side of the chamber. Every bit of stone in the room seemed carved—every tile a part of one mosaic or another, every bit of glass colored to sparkle in the early-evening sunlight.

*It's been so long. . .*he thought. The first time he'd seen this chamber, he had been escorting Vin to her first ball. It was then, while playing the part of Valette Renoux, she had met Elend. Sazed had chastised her for carelessly attracting the attention of so powerful a man.

And now he himself had performed their marriage. He smiled, replacing his spectacles and filling his eyesight tinmind again. *May the Forgotten Gods watch over you, children. Make something of our sacrifice, if you can*.

Tindwyl stood speaking with Dockson and a small group of functionaries at the center of the room. They were crowded around a large table, and as Sazed approached, he could see what was spread atop it.

*Marsh's map*, he thought. It was an extensive and detailed representation of Luthadel, complete with notations about Ministry activity. Sazed had a visual image of the map, as well as a detailed description of it, in one of his copperminds—and he had sent a physical copy to the Synod.

Tindwyl and the others had covered the large map with their own notations. Sazed approached slowly, and as soon as Tindwyl saw him, she waved for him to approach.

"Ah, Sazed," Dockson said in a businesslike tone, voice muddled to Sazed's weak ears. "Good. Please, come here."

Sazed stepped up onto the low dance floor, joining them at the table. "Troop placements?" he asked.

"Penrod has taken command of our armies," Dockson said. "And he's put noblemen in charge of all twenty battalions. We're not certain we like that situation."

Sazed looked over the men at the table. They were a group of scribes that Dockson himself had trained—all skaa. *Gods!* Sazed thought. *He can't be planning a rebellion now of all times, can he?*

"Don't look so frightened, Sazed," Dockson said. "We're not going to do anything too drastic—Penrod is still letting Clubs organize the city defenses, and he seems to be taking advice from his military commanders. Besides, it's far too late to try something too ambitious."

Dockson almost seemed disappointed.

"However," Dockson said, pointing at the map, "I don't 1trust these commanders he's put in charge. They don't know anything about warfare—or even about survival. They've spent their lives ordering drinks and throwing parties."

*Why do you hate them so?* Sazed thought. Ironically, Dockson was the one in the crew who *looked* most like a nobleman. He was more natural in a suit than Breeze, more articulate than Clubs or Spook. Only his insistence on wearing a very unaristocratic half beard made him stand out.

"The nobility may not know warfare," Sazed said, "but they are experienced with command, I think."

"True," Dockson said. "But so are we. That's why I want one of our people near each gate, just in case things go poorly and someone really competent needs to take command."

Dockson pointed at the table, toward one of the gates—Steel Gate. It bore a notation of a thousand men in a defensive formation. "This is your battalion, Sazed. Steel Gate is the farthest the koloss are likely to reach, and so you might not even see any fighting. However, when the battle begins, I want you there with a group of messengers to bring word back to Keep Venture in case your gate gets attacked. We'll set up a command post here in the main ballroom—it's easily accessible with those broad doors, and can accommodate a lot of motion."

And it was a not-so-subtle smack in the face of Elend Venture, and nobility in general, to use such a beautiful chamber as a setting from which to run a war. *No wonder he supported me in sending Elend and Vin away. With them gone, he's gained undisputed control of Kelsier's crew*.

It wasn't a bad thing. Dockson was an organizational genius and a master of quick planning. He did have certain prejudices, however.

"I know you don't like to fight, Saze," Dockson said, leaning down on the table with both hands. "But we need you."

"I think he is preparing for battle, Lord Dockson," Tindwyl said, eyeing Sazed. "Those rings on his fingers give good indication of his intentions."

Sazed glanced across the table at her. "And what is your place in this, Tindwyl?"

"Lord Dockson came to me for advice," Tindwyl said. "He has little experience with warfare himself, and wished to know the things I have studied about the generals of the past."

"Ah," Sazed said. He turned to Dockson, frowning in thought. Eventually, he nodded. "Very well. I will take part in your project—but, I must warn you against divisiveness. Please, tell your men not to break the chain of command unless they absolutely must."

Dockson nodded.

"Now, Lady Tindwyl," Sazed said. "Might we speak for a moment in private?"

She nodded, and they excused themselves, walking under the nearest overhanging gallery. In the shadows, behind one of the pillars, Sazed turned toward Tindwyl. She looked so pristine—so poised, so calm—despite the dire situation. How did she do that?

"You're storing quite a large number of attributes, Sazed," Tindwyl noted, glancing at his fingers again. "Surely you have other metalminds prepared from before?"

"I used all of my wakefulness and speed making my way to Luthadel," Sazed said. "And I have no health stored at all—I used up the last of it overcoming a sickness when I was teaching in the South. I always intended to fill another one, but we've been too busy. I do have some large amount of strength and weight stored, as well as a go1od selection of tinminds. Still, one can never be *too* well prepared, I think."

"Perhaps," Tindwyl said. She glanced back at the group around the table. "If it gives us something to do other than think about the inevitable, then preparation has not been wasted, I think."

Sazed felt a chill. "Tindwyl," he said quietly. "Why did you stay? There is no place for you here."

"There is no place for you either, Sazed."

"These are my friends," he said. "I will not leave them."

"Then why did you convince their leaders to leave?"

"To flee and live," Sazed said.

"Survival is not a luxury often afforded to leaders," Tindwyl said. "When they accept the devotion of others, they must accept the responsibility that comes with it. This people will die—but they need not die feeling betrayed."

"They were not—"

"They expect to be saved, Sazed," Tindwyl hissed quietly. "Even those men over there—even *Dockson,* the most practical one in this bunch—think that they'll survive. And do you know why? Because, deep down, they believe that something will save them. Something that saved them before, the only piece of the Survivor they have left. She represents hope to them now. And you sent her away."

"To live, Tindwyl," Sazed repeated. "It would have been a waste to lose Vin and Elend here."

"Hope is never wasted," Tindwyl said, eyes flashing. "I thought you of all people would understand that. You think it was stubbornness that kept me alive all those years in the hands of the Breeders?"

"And is it stubbornness or hope that kept you here, in the city?" he asked.

She looked up at him. "Neither."

Sazed looked at her for a long moment in the shadowed alcove. Planners talked in the ballroom, their voices echoing. Shards of light from the windows reflected off the marble floors, throwing slivers of illumination across the walls. Slowly, awkwardly, Sazed put his arms around Tindwyl. She sighed, letting him hold her.

He released his tinminds and let his senses return in a flood.

Softness from her skin and warmth from her body washed across him as she moved farther into the embrace, resting her head against his chest. The scent of her hair—unperfumed, but clean and crisp—filled his nose, the first thing he'd smelled in three days. With a clumsy hand, Sazed pulled free his spectacles so he could see her clearly. As sounds returned fully to his ears, he could hear Tindwyl breathing beside him.

"Do you know why I love you, Sazed?" she asked quietly.

"I cannot fathom," he answered honestly.

"Because you never give in," she said. "Other men are strong like bricks—firm, unyielding, but if you pound on them long enough, they crack. You.

. .you're strong like the wind. Always there, so willing to bend, but never apologetic for the times when you must be firm. I don't think any of your friends understand what a power they had in you."

*Had*, he thought. *She already thinks of all this in the past tense. And. . .it feels right for her to do so*. "I fear that whatever I have won't be enough to save them," Sazed whispered.

"It was enough to save three of them, thoug1h," Tindwyl said. "You were wrong to send them away. . .but maybe you were right, too."

Sazed just closed his eyes and held her, cursing her for staying, yet loving her for it all the same.

At that moment, the wall-top warning drums began to beat.

*And so, I have made one final gamble*.

# 51

THE MISTY RED LIGHT OF morning was a thing that should not have existed. Mist died before daylight. Heat made it evaporate; even locking it inside of a closed room made it condense and disappear. It shouldn't have been able to withstand the light of the rising sun.

Yet it did. The farther they'd gotten from Luthadel, the longer the mists lingered in the mornings. The change was slight—they were still only a few days' ride from Luthadel—but Vin knew. She saw the difference. This morning, the mists seemed even stronger than she'd anticipated—they didn't even weaken as the sun came up. They obscured its light.

*Mist*, she thought. *Deepness*. She was increasingly sure that she was right about it, though she couldn't know for certain. Still, it felt right to her for some reason. The Deepness hadn't been some monster or tyrant, but a force more natural—and therefore more frightening. A creature could be killed. The mists. . .they were far more daunting. The Deepness wouldn't oppress with priests, but use the people's own superstitious terror. It wouldn't slaughter with armies, but with starvation.

How did one fight something larger than a continent? A thing that couldn't feel anger, pain, hope, or mercy?

Yet, it was Vin's task to do just that. She sat quietly on a large boulder beside the night's firepit, her legs up, knees to her chest. Elend still slept; Spook was out scouting.

She didn't question her place any longer. She was either mad or she was the Hero of Ages. It was her task to defeat the mists. *Yet. . .*she thought, frowning. *Shouldn't the thumpings be getting louder, not softer?* The longer they traveled, the weaker the thumpings seemed. Was she too late? Was something happening at the Well to dampen its power? Had someone else already taken it?

*We have to keep moving*.

Another person in her place might have asked why he had been chosen. Vin had known several men—both in Camon's crew and in Elend's government—who would complain every time they were given an assignment. "Why me?" they would ask. The insecure ones didn't think they were up to the task. The lazy ones wanted out of the work.

Vin didn't consider herself to be either self-assured or self-motivated. Still, she saw no point in asking why. Life had taught her that sometimes things simply happened. Often, there hadn't been any specific reason for Reen to beat her. And, reasons were weak comforts, anyway. The reasons that Kelsier had needed to die were clear to her, but that didn't make her miss him any less.

She had a job to do. The fact that she didn't understand it didn't stop her from acknowledging that she had to try to accomplish it. She simply hoped that she'd know what to do when the time came. Though the thumpings were weaker, they were still there. They drew her forward. To the Well of Ascension.

Behind her, she could feel the lesser vibration of the mist spirit. It never disappeared until the mists themselves did. It had been there all morning, standi1ng just behind her.

"Do you know the secret to this all?" she asked quietly, turning toward the spirit in the reddish mists. "Do you have—"

The Allomantic pulse of the mist spirit was coming from directly inside the tent she shared with Elend.

Vin jumped off the rock, landing on the frosted ground and scrambling to the tent. She threw open the flaps. Elend slept inside, head just barely visible as it poked out of the blankets. Mist filled the small tent, swirling, twisting—and that was odd enough. Mist didn't usually enter tents.

And there, in the middle of the mists, was the spirit. Standing directly above Elend.

It wasn't even really there. It was just an outline in the mists, a repeating pattern caused by chaotic movements. And yet it was real. She could feel it, and she could see it—see it as it looked up, meeting her gaze with invisible eyes.

Hateful eyes.

It raised an insubstantial arm, and Vin saw something flash. She reacted immediately, whipping out a dagger, bursting into the tent and swinging. Her blow met something tangible in the mist spirit's hand. A metallic sound rang in the calm air, and Vin felt a powerful, numbing chill in her arm. The hairs across her entire body prickled.

And then it disappeared. Fading away, like the ringing of its somehow substantial blade. Vin blinked, then turned to look through the blowing tent flap. The mists outside were gone; day had finally won.

It didn't seem to have many victories remaining.

"Vin?" Elend asked, yawning and stirring.

Vin calmed her breathing. The spirit had gone. The daylight meant safety, for now. *Once, it was the nights that I found safe,* she thought. *Kelsier gave them to me*.

"What's wrong?" Elend asked. How could someone, even a nobleman, be so slow to rise, so unconcerned about the vulnerability he displayed while sleeping?

She sheathed her dagger. *What can I tell him? How can I protect him from something I can barely see?* She needed to think. "It was nothing," she said quietly. "Just me. . .being jumpy again."

Elend rolled over, sighing contentedly. "Is Spook doing his morning scout?"

"Yes."

"Wake me when he gets back."

Vin nodded, but he probably couldn't see her. She knelt, looking at him as the sun rose behind her. She'd given herself to him—not just her body, and not just her heart. She'd abandoned her rationalizations, given away her reservations, all for him. She could no longer afford to think that she wasn't worthy of him, no longer give herself the false comfort of believing they couldn't ever be together.

She'd never trusted anyone this much. Not Kelsier, not Sazed, not Reen. Elend had everything. That knowledge made her tremble inside. If she lost him, she would lose herself.

*I mustn't think about that!* she told herself, rising. She left the tent, quietly closing the flaps behind her. In the distance, shadows moved. Spook appeared a moment later.

"Someone's definitely back there," he said quietly. "Not spirits, Vin. Five men, with a camp."

Vin frowned. "Following us?"

"They must be."

*Straff's scouts,* she thought. "We'll let Elend decide what to do about them."

Spook shrugged, walking over to sit on her rock. "You going to wake him?"

Vin turned back. "Let him sleep a little longer."

Spook shrugged again. He watched as she walked over to the firepit and unwrapped the wood they'd covered the night before, then began to build a fire.

"You've changed, Vin," Spook said.

She continued to work. "Everyone changes," she said. "I'm not a thief anymore, and I have friends to support me."

"I don't mean that," Spook said. "I mean recently. This last week. You're different than you were."

"Different how?"

"I don't know. You don't seem as frightened all the time."

Vin paused. "I've made some decisions. About who I am, and who I will be. About what I want."

She worked quietly for a moment, and finally got a spark to catch. "I'm tired of putting up with foolishness," she finally said. "Other people's foolishness, and my own. I've decided to act, rather than second-guess. Perhaps it's a more immature way of looking at things. But it feels right, for now."

"It's not immature," Spook said.

Vin smiled, looking up at him. Sixteen and hardly grown into his body, he was the same age that she'd been when Kelsier had recruited her. He was squinting against the light, even though the sun was low.

"Lower your tin," Vin said. "No need to keep it on so strong."

Spook shrugged. She could see the uncertainty in him. He wanted so badly to be useful. She knew that feeling.

"What about you, Spook?" she said, turning to gather the breakfast supplies. Broth and mealcakes again. "How have you been lately?"

He shrugged yet again.

*I'd almost forgotten what it was like to try and have a conversation with a teenage boy*, she thought, smiling.

"Spook. . ." she said, just testing out the name. "What do you think of that nickname, anyway? I remember when everyone called you by your real name." Lestibournes—Vin had tried to spell it once. She'd gotten about five letters in.

"Kelsier gave me my name," Spook said, as if that were reason enough to keep it. And perhaps it was. Vin saw the look in Spook's eyes when he mentioned Kelsier; Clubs might be Spook's uncle, but Kelsier had been the one he looked up to.

Of course, they all had looked up to Kelsier.

"I wish I were powerful, Vin," Spook said quietly, arms folded on his knees as he sat on the rock. "Like you."

"You have your own skills."

"Tin?" Spook asked. "Almost worthless. If I were Mistborn, I could do great things. Be someone important."

"Being important isn't all that wonderful, Spook," Vin said, listening to the thumpings in her head. "Most of the time, it's just annoying."

Spook shook his head. "If I were Mistborn, I could save people—help people, who need it. I could stop people from dying. But. . .I'm just Spook. Weak. A coward."

Vin1 looked at him, frowning, but his head was bowed, and he wouldn't meet her eyes.

*What was that about?* she wondered.

Sazed used a bit of strength to help him take the steps three at a time. He burst out of the stairwell just behind Tindwyl, the two of them joining the remaining members of the crew on the wall top. The drums still sounded; each had a different rhythm as it sounded over the city. The mixing beats echoed chaotically from buildings and alleyways.

The northern horizon seemed bare without Straff's army. If only that same emptiness had extended to the northeast, where the koloss camp seemed in turmoil.

"Can anyone make out what's going on?" Breeze asked.

Ham shook his head. "Too far."

"One of my scouts is a Tineye," Clubs said, hobbling over. "He raised the alarm. Said the koloss were fighting."

"My good man," Breeze said, "aren't the foul creatures *always* fighting?"

"More than usual," Clubs said. "Massive brawl."

Sazed felt a swift glimmer of hope. "They're fighting?" he said. "Perhaps they will kill each other!"

Clubs eyed him with one of those looks. "Read one of your books, Terrisman. What do they say about koloss emotions?"

"They only have two," Sazed said. "Boredom and rage. But—"

"This is how they always begin a battle," Tindwyl said quietly. "They start to fight among themselves, enraging more and more of their members, and then. . ."

She trailed off, and Sazed saw it. The dark smudge to the east growing lighter. Dispersing. Resolving into individual members.

Charging the city.

"Bloody hell," Clubs swore, then quickly began to hobble down the steps. "Messengers away!" he bellowed. "Archers to the wall! Secure the river grates! Battalions, form positions! Get ready to fight! Do you want those things breaking in here and getting at your children!"

Chaos followed. Men began to dash in all directions. Soldiers scrambled up the stairwells, clogging the way down, keeping the crew from moving.

*It's happening*, Sazed thought numbly.

"Once the stairwells are open," Dockson said quietly, "I want each of you to go to your battalion. Tindwyl, you have Tin Gate, in the north by Keep Venture. I might need your advice, but for now, stay with those boys. They'll listen to you—they respect Terrismen. Breeze, you have one of your Soothers in each of battalions four through twelve?"

Breeze nodded. "They aren't much, though. . .."

"Just have them keep those boys fighting!" Dockson said. "Don't let our men break!"

"A thousand men are far too many for one Soother to handle, my friend," Breeze said.

"Have them do the best they can," Dockson said. "You and Ham take Pewter Gate and Zinc Gate—looks like the koloss are going to hit here first. Clubs should bring in reinforcements."

The two men nodded; then Dockson looked at Sazed. "You know where to go?"

"Yes. . .yes, I think so," Sazed said, gripping the wall. In the air, flakes of ash began to fall from the sky.

"Go, then!" Dockson said as one final squad of archers made its way out of the stairwell.

"My lord Venture!"

Straff turned. With some stimulants, he was able to remain strong enough to stay atop his saddle—though he wouldn't have dared to fight. Of course, he wouldn't have fought anyway. That wasn't his way. One brought armies to do such things.

He turned his animal as the messenger approached. The man puffed, putting hands on knees as he stopped beside Straff's mount, bits of ash swirling on the ground at his feet.

"My lord," the man said. "The koloss army has attacked Luthadel!"

*Just as you said, Zane*, Straff thought in wonder.

"The koloss, attacking?" Lord Janarle asked, moving his horse up beside Straff's. The handsome lord frowned, then eyed Straff. "You expected this, my lord?"

"Of course," Straff said, smiling.

Janarle looked impressed.

"Pass an order to the men, Janarle," Straff said. "I want this column turned back toward Luthadel."

"We can be there in an hour, my lord!" Janarle said.

"No," Straff said. "Let's take our time. We wouldn't want to overwork our troops, would we?"

Janarle smiled. "Of course not, my lord."

Arrows seemed to have little effect on the koloss.

Sazed stood, transfixed and appalled, atop his gate's watchtower. He wasn't officially in charge of the men, so he didn't have any orders to give. He simply stood with the scouts and messengers, waiting to see if he was needed or not.

That left him plenty of time to watch the horror unfolding. The koloss weren't charging his section of the wall yet, thankfully, and his men stood watching tensely as the creatures barreled toward Tin Gate and Pewter Gate in the distance.

Even far away—the tower letting him see over a section of the city to where Tin Gate lay—Sazed could see the koloss running straight through hailstorms of arrows. Some of the smaller ones appeared to fall dead or wounded, but most just continued to charge. Men murmured on the tower near him.

*We aren't ready for this,* Sazed thought. *Even with months to plan and anticipate, we aren't ready*.

*This is what we get, being ruled over by a god for a thousand years. A thousand years of peace—tyrannical peace, but peace nonetheless. We don't have generals, we have men who know how to order a bath drawn. We don't have tacticians, we have bureaucrats. We don't have warriors, we have boys with sticks*.

Even as he watched the oncoming doom, his scholar's mind was analytical. Tapping sight, he could see that many of the distant creatures—especially the larger ones—carried small uprooted trees. They were ready, in their own way, to break into the city. The trees wouldn't be as effective as real battering rams—but then, the city gates weren't built to withstand a real battering in the first place.

*Those koloss are smarter than we give them credit for*, he thought. *They can recognize the abstract value of coins, even if they don't have an economy. They can see that they'll need tools to break down our doors, even if they don't know how to make those tools*.

Th1e first koloss wave reached the wall. Men began to toss down rocks and other items. Sazed's own section had similar piles, one just next to the gate arch, beside which he stood. But arrows had almost no effect; what good would a few rocks do? Koloss clumped around the base of the wall, like the water of a dammed-up river. Distant thumps sounded as the creatures began to beat against the gates.

"Battalion sixteen!" a messenger called from below, riding up to Sazed's gate. "Lord Culee!"

"Here!" a man called from the wall top beside Sazed's tower.

"Pewter Gate needs reinforcements immediately! Lord Penrod commands you to bring six companies and follow me!"

Lord Culee began to give the orders. *Six companies. . .*Sazed thought. *Six hundred of our thousand*. Clubs's words from earlier returned to him: Twenty thousand men might seem like a lot, until one saw how thinly they had to be stretched.

The six companies marched away, leaving the courtyard before Sazed's gate disturbingly empty. The four hundred remaining men—three hundred in the courtyard, one hundred on the wall—shuffled quietly.

Sazed closed his eyes and tapped his hearing tinmind. He could hear. . .wood beating on wood. Screams. Human screams. He released the tinmind quickly, then tapped eyesight again, leaning out and looking toward the section of the wall where the battle was being fought. The koloss were throwing back the fallen rocks—and they were far more accurate than the defenders. Sazed jumped as he saw a young soldier's face crushed, his body thrown back off the wall top by the rock's force. Sazed released his tinmind, breathing quickly.

"Be firm, men!" called one of the soldiers on the wall. He was barely a youth—a nobleman, but he couldn't be more than sixteen. Of course, a lot of the men in the army were that age.

"Stand firm. . ." the young commander repeated. His voice sounded uncertain, and it trailed off as he noticed something in the distance. Sazed turned, following the man's gaze.

The koloss had gotten tired of standing around, piling up at a single gate. They were moving to surround the city, large groups of them breaking up, fording the River Channerel toward other gates.

Gates like Sazed's.

Vin landed directly in the middle of the camp. She tossed a handful of pewter dust into the firepit, then Pushed, blowing coals, soot, and smoke across a pair of surprised guards, who had been fixing breakfast. She reached out and Pulled out the stakes of the three small tents.

All three collapsed. One was unoccupied, but cries came from the other two. The canvas outlined struggling, confused figures—one inside the larger tent, two inside the smaller one.

The guards scrambled back, raising their arms to protect their eyes from the soot and sparks, their hands reaching for swords. Vin raised a fist toward them—and, as they blinked their eyes clear, she let a single coin drop to the ground.

The guards froze, then took their hands off their swords. Vin eyed the tents. The person in charge would be inside the larger one—and he was the man she would need to deal with. Probably one of Straff's captains, though the guards didn't wear Venture heraldry. Perhaps—

Jastes Lekal poked his head out of his tent, cursing as he extricated himself from the canvas. He'd changed much in the two years since Vin had last seen him. However, there had been hi1nts of what the man would become. His thin figure had become spindly; his balding head had fulfilled its promise. Yet, how had his face come to look so haggard. . .so old? He was Elend's age.

"Jastes," Elend said, stepping out of his hiding place in the forest. He walked into the clearing, Spook at his side. "Why are you here?"

Jastes managed to stand as his other two soldiers cut their way out of their tent. He waved them down. "El," he said. "I. . .didn't know where else to go. My scouts said that you were fleeing, and it seemed like a good idea. Wherever you're going, I want to go with you. We can hide there, maybe. We can—"

"Jastes!" Elend snapped, striding forward to stand beside Vin. "Where are your koloss? Did you send them away?"

"I tried," Jastes said, looking down. "They wouldn't go—not once they'd seen Luthadel. And then. . ."

"What?" Elend demanded.

"A fire," Jastes said. "In our. . .supply carts."

Vin frowned.

"Your supply carts?" Elend said. "The carts where you carried your wooden coins?"

"Yes."

"Lord Ruler, man!" Elend said stepping forward. "And you just *left* them there, without leadership, outside our home?"

"They would have killed me, El!" Jastes said. "They were beginning to fight so much, to demand more coins, to demand we attack the city. If I'd stayed, they'd have slaughtered me! They're beasts—beasts that only barely have the shape of man."

"And you left," Elend said. "You abandoned Luthadel to them."

"You abandoned it, too," Jastes said. He walked forward, hands pleading as he approached Elend. "Look, El. I know I was wrong. I thought I could control them. I didn't mean for this to happen!"

Elend fell silent, and Vin could see a hardness growing in his eyes. Not a dangerous hardness, like Kelsier. More of a. . .regal bearing. The sense that he was more than he wanted to be. He stood straight, looking down at the man pleading before him.

"You raised an army of violent monsters and led them in a tyrannical assault, Jastes," Elend said. "You caused the slaughter of innocent villages. Then, you abandoned that army without leadership or control outside the most populated city in the whole of the Final Empire."

"Forgive me," Jastes said.

Elend looked the man in the eyes. "I forgive you," he said quietly. Then, in one fluid stroke, he drew his sword and sheared Jastes's head from his shoulders. "But my kingdom cannot."

Vin stared, dumbfounded, as the corpse fell to the ground. Jastes's soldiers cried out, drawing their weapons. Elend turned, his face solemn, and raised the point of his bloodied sword toward them. "You think this execution was performed in error?"

The guards paused. "No, my lord," one of them finally said, looking down.

Elend knelt and cleaned his sword on Jastes's cloak. "Considering what he did, this was a better death than he deserved." Elend snapped his sword back into its sheath. "But he was my friend. Bury him. Once you are through, you are welcome to travel with me to Terris, or you may go back to your homes. Choose as you wish." With that, he walked back into the woods.

Vin paused, watching the guar1ds. Solemnly, they moved forward to collect the body. She nodded to Spook, then dashed out into the forest after Elend. She didn't have to go far. She found him sitting on a rock a short distance away, staring at the ground. An ashfall had begun, but most of the flakes got caught in the trees, coating their leaves like black moss.

"Elend?" she asked.

He looked out, staring into the forest. "I'm not sure why I did it, Vin," he said quietly. "Why should I be the one to bring justice? I'm not even king. And yet, it had to be done. I felt it. I feel it still."

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

"He's the first man I've ever killed," Elend said. "He and I had such dreams, once: We'd ally two of the most powerful imperial houses, uniting Luthadel as never before. Ours wasn't to have been a treaty of greed, but a true political alliance intended to help make the city a better place."

He looked up at her. "I think I understand now, Vin, what it is like for you. In a way, we're both knives—both tools. Not for each other, but for this kingdom. This people."

She wrapped her arms around him, holding him, pulling his head to her chest. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

"It had to be done," he said. "The saddest part is, he's right. I abandoned them, too. I should take my own life with this sword."

"You left for a good reason, Elend," Vin said. "You left to protect Luthadel, to make it so Straff wouldn't attack."

"And if the koloss attack before Straff can?"

"Maybe they won't," Vin said. "They don't have a leader—maybe they'll attack Straff's army instead."

"No," Spook's voice said. Vin turned, seeing him approach through the forest, eyes squinting against the light.

*That boy burns way too much tin*, she thought.

"What do you mean?" Elend asked, turning.

Spook looked down. "They won't attack Straff's army, El. It won't be there anymore."

"What?" Vin asked.

"I. . ." Spook looked away, shame showing in his face.

*I'm a coward*. His words from earlier returned to her. "You knew," Vin said. "You knew the koloss were going to attack!"

Spook nodded.

"That's ridiculous," Elend said. "You couldn't have known that Jastes would follow us."

"I didn't," Spook said, a lump of ash falling from a tree behind him, bursting before the wind, and fluttering in a hundred different flakes to the ground. "But my uncle figured that Straff would withdraw his army and let the koloss attack the city. That's why Sazed decided to send us away."

Vin felt a sudden chill.

*I've found the location of the Well of Ascension*, Sazed had said. *To the north. In the Terris Mountains. . ..*

"Clubs told you this?" Elend was saying.

Spook nodded.

"And you didn't tell me?" Elend demanded, standing.

*Oh, no. . ..*

Spook paused, then shook his head. "You would have wanted to go back! I didn't want to die, El! I1'm sorry. I'm a coward." He cringed, glancing at Elend's sword, shying away.

Elend paused, as if realizing he'd been stepping toward the boy. "I'm not going to hurt you, Spook," he said. "I'm just ashamed of you." Spook lowered his eyes, then sank down to the ground, sitting with his back to an aspen.

*The thumpings, getting softer. . ..*

"Elend," Vin whispered.

He turned.

"Sazed lied. The Well isn't to the north."

"What?"

"It's at Luthadel."

"Vin, that's ridiculous. We'd have found it."

"We didn't," she said firmly, standing, looking south. Focusing, she could feel the thumpings, washing across her. Pulling her.

South.

"The Well can't be to the south," Elend said. "The legends *all* place it north, in the Terris Mountains."

Vin shook her head, confused. "It's there," she said. "I know it is. I don't know how, but it *is* there."

Elend looked at her, then nodded, trusting her instincts.

*Oh, Sazed,* she thought. *You probably had good intentions, but you may have doomed us all*. If the city fell to the koloss. . .

"How fast can we get back?" Elend asked.

"That depends," she said.

"Go back?" Spook asked, looking up. "El, they're all *dead*. They told me to tell you the truth once you got to Tathingdwen, so you wouldn't kill yourselves climbing the mountains in the winter for nothing. But, when Clubs talked to me, it was also to say goodbye. I could see it in his eyes. He knew he'd never see me again."

Elend paused, and Vin could see a moment of uncertainty in his eyes. A flash of pain, of terror. She knew those emotions, because they hit her at the same time.

*Sazed, Breeze, Ham. . .*

Elend grabbed her arm. "You have to go, Vin," he said. "There might be survivors. . .refugees. They'll need your help."

She nodded, the firmness of his grip—the determination in his voice—giving her strength.

"Spook and I will follow," he said. "It should only take us a couple of days' hard riding. But an Allomancer with pewter can go faster than any horse over long distances."

"I don't want to leave you," she whispered.

"I know."

It was still hard. How could she run off and leave him, when she'd only just rediscovered him? Yet, she could feel the Well of Ascension even more urgently now that she was sure of its location. And if some of her friends *did* survive the attack. . .

Vin gritted her teeth, then opened up her pouch and pulled out the last of her pewter dust. She drank it down with a mouthful of water from her flask. It scratched her throat going down. *It's not much,* she thought. *It won't let me pewter-drag for long.*

"They're all dead. . ." Spook mumbled again.

Vin turned. The pulses thumped demandingly. From the south.

*I'm coming.*

"Elend," she said. "Please do something for me. Don't sleep during the night, when the mists are out. Travel during the night, if you can, and keep your wits about you. Watch for the mist spirit—I think it may mean you harm."

He frowned, but nodded.

Vin flared pewter, then took off at a run toward the highway.

*My pleas, my teachings, my objections, and even my treasons were all ineffectual. Alendi has other counselors now, ones who tell him what he wants to hear.*

# 52

BREEZE DID HIS BEST TO pretend he was *not* in the middle of a war. It didn't work very well.

He sat on his horse at the edge of Zinc Gate's courtyard. Soldiers shuffled and clanked, standing in ranks before the gates, waiting and watching their companions atop the wall.

The gates thumped. Breeze cringed, but continued his Soothing. "Be strong," he whispered. "Fear, uncertainty—I take these away. Death may come through those doors, but you can fight it. You can win. Be strong. . .."

Brass flared like a bonfire within his stomach. He had long since used up his vials, and had taken to choking down handfuls of brass dust and mouthfuls of water, which he had in a steady supply thanks to Dockson's mounted messengers.

*How long can this possibly last?* he thought, wiping his brow, continuing to Soothe. Allomancy was, fortunately, very easy on the body; Allomantic power came from within the metals themselves, not from the one who burned them. Yet, Soothing was much more complex than other Allomantic skills, and it demanded constant attention.

"Fear, terror, anxiety. . ." he whispered. "The desire to run or give up. I take these from you. . ." The speaking wasn't necessary, of course, but it had always been his way—it helped keep him focused.

After a few more minutes of Soothing, he checked his pocket watch, then turned his horse and trotted over to the other side of the courtyard. The gates continued to boom, and Breeze wiped his brow again. He noted, with dissatisfaction, that his handkerchief was nearly too damp to do him any good. It was also beginning to snow. The wetness would make the ash stick to his clothing, and his suit would be absolutely ruined.

*The suit will be ruined by your blood, Breeze,* he told himself. *The time for silliness is over. This is serious. Far too serious. How did you even end up here?*

He redoubled his efforts, Soothing a new group of soldiers. He was one of the most powerful Allomancers in the Final Empire—especially when it came to emotional Allomancy. He could Soothe hundreds of men at once, assuming they were packed close enough together, and assuming that he was focusing on simple emotions. Even Kelsier hadn't been able to manage those numbers.

Yet, the entire crowd of soldiers was beyond even his ability, and he had to do them in sections. As he began work on the new group, he saw the ones he had left begin to wilt, their anxiety taking over.

*When those doors burst, these men are going to scatter*.

The gates boomed. Men clustered on the walls, throwing down rocks, shooting arrows, fighting with a frantic lack of discipline. Occasionally, an officer would push his way past them, yelling orders, trying to coordinate their efforts1, but Breeze was too far away to tell what they were saying. He could just see the chaos of men moving, screaming, and shooting.

And, of course, he could see the return fire. Rocks zipped into the air from below, some cracking against the ramparts. Breeze tried not to think about what was on the other side of the wall, the thousands of enraged koloss beasts. Occasionally, a soldier would drop. Blood dripped down into the courtyard from several sections of the ramparts.

"Fear, anxiety, terror. . ." Breeze whispered.

Allrianne had escaped. Vin, Elend, and Spook were safe. He had to keep focusing on those successes. *Thank you, Sazed, for making us send them away*, he thought.

Hoofbeats clopped behind him. Breeze continued his Soothing, but turned to see Clubs riding up. The general rode his horse with a hunched-over slouch, eyeing the soldiers with one eye open, the other perpetually squeezed closed in a squint. "They're doing well," he said.

"My dear man," Breeze said. "They're *terrified*. Even the ones beneath my Soothing watch those gates like they were some terrible void waiting to suck them in."

Clubs eyed Breeze. "Feeling poetic today, are we?"

"Impending doom has that effect on me," Breeze said as the gates shook. "Either way, I doubt the men are doing 'well.'"

Clubs grunted. "Men are always nervous before a fight. But, these are good lads. They'll hold."

The gates shook and quivered, splinters appearing at the edges. *Those hinges are straining. . .*Breeze thought.

"Don't suppose you can Soothe those koloss?" Clubs asked. "Make them less ferocious?"

Breeze shook his head. "Soothing those beasts has no effect. I've tried it."

They fell silent again, listening to the booming gates. Eventually, Breeze glanced over at Clubs, who sat, unperturbed, on his horse. "You've been in combat before," Breeze said. "How often?"

"Off and on for the better part of twenty years, when I was younger," Clubs said. "Fighting rebellions in the distant dominances, warring against the nomads out in the barrens. The Lord Ruler was pretty good about keeping those conflicts quiet."

"And. . .how did you do?" Breeze asked. "Were you often victorious?"

"Always," Clubs said.

Breeze smiled slightly.

"Of course," Clubs said, glancing at Breeze, "we were the ones with koloss on our side. Damn hard to kill, those beasts."

*Great*, Breeze thought.

Vin ran.

She'd only been on one "pewter drag" before—with Kelsier, two years ago. While burning pewter at a steady flare, one could run with incredible speed—like a sprinter in their quickest dash—without ever growing tired.

Yet, the process did something to a body. Pewter kept her moving, but it also bottled up her natural fatigue. The juxtaposition made her mind fuzz, bringing on a trancelike state of exhausted energy. Her soul wanted so badly to rest, yet her body just kept running, and running, and running, following the canal towpath toward the south. Toward Luthadel.

Vin was prepared for the effects of pewter dragging this time, and so she handled them far b1etter. She fought off the trance, keeping her mind focused on her goal, not the repetitive motions of her body. However, that focus led her to discomforting thoughts.

*Why am I doing this?* she wondered. *Why push myself so hard? Spook said it—Luthadel has to have already fallen. There is no need for urgency.*

And yet, she ran.

She saw images of death in her mind. Ham, Breeze, Dockson, Clubs, and dear, dear Sazed. The first real friends she had ever known. She loved Elend, and part of her blessed the others for sending him away from danger. However, the other piece of her was furious at them for sending her away. That fury guided her.

*They let me abandon them. They* forced *me to abandon them!*

Kelsier had spent months teaching her how to trust. His last words to her in life had been ones of accusation, and they were words she had never been able to escape. *You still have a lot to learn about friendship, Vin*.

He had gone on to risk his life to get Spook and OreSeur out of danger, fighting off—and eventually killing—a Steel Inquisitor. He had done this despite Vin's protests that the risk was pointless.

She had been wrong.

*How dare they!* she thought, feeling the tears on her cheeks as she dashed down the canal's highwaylike towpath. Pewter gave her inhuman balance, and the speed—which would have been perilous for anyone else—felt natural to her. She didn't trip, she didn't stumble, but an outside observer would think her pace reckless.

Trees whipped by. She leapt washouts and dips in the land. She ran as she had done only once before, and pushed herself even harder than she had on that day. Before, she had been running simply to keep up with Kelsier. Now she ran for those she loved.

*How dare they!* she thought again. *How dare they not give me the same chance that Kelsier had! How dare they refuse my protection, refuse to let me help them!*

*How dare they die. . .*

Her pewter was running low, and she was only a few hours into her run. True, she had probably covered an entire day's worth of walking in those few hours. Yet, somehow, she knew it wouldn't be enough. They were already dead. She was going to be too late, just as when she'd run years before. Too late to save their army. Too late to save her friends.

Vin continued to run. And she continued to cry.

"How did we get here, Clubs?" Breeze asked quietly, still on the floor of the courtyard, before the booming gate. He sat on his horse, amid a muddy mixture of falling snow and ash. The simple, quiet flutterings of white and black seemed to belie the screaming men, the breaking gate, and the falling rocks.

Clubs looked over at him, frowning. Breeze continued stare up at the ash and snow. Black and white. Lazy.

"We aren't men of principle," Breeze said quietly. "We're thieves. Cynics. You, a man tired of doing the Lord Ruler's bidding, a man determined to see himself get ahead for once. Me, a man of wavering morals who loves to toy with others, to make their emotions my game. How did we end up here? Standing at the head of an army, fighting an idealist's cause? Men like us shouldn't be leaders."

Clubs watched the men in the courtyard. "Guess we're just idiots," he finally said.

1Breeze paused, then noticed that glimmer in Clubs's eyes. That spark of humor, the spark that was hard to recognize unless one knew Clubs very well. It was that spark that told the truth—that showed Clubs to be a man of rare understanding.

Breeze smiled. "I guess we are. Like we said before. It's Kelsier's fault. He turned us into idiots who would stand at the front of a doomed army."

"That bastard," Clubs said.

"Indeed," Breeze said.

Ash and snow continued to fall. Men yelled in alarm.

And the gates burst open.

"The eastern gate has been breached, Master Terrisman!" Dockson's messenger said, puffing slightly as he crouched beside Sazed. They both sat beneath the wall-top battlements, listening to the koloss pound on their own gate. The one that had fallen would be Zinc Gate, the one on the easternmost side of Luthadel.

"Zinc Gate is the most well defended," Sazed said quietly. "They will be able to hold it, I think."

The messenger nodded. Ash blew along the wall top, piling in the cracks and alcoves in the stone, the black flakes adulterated by the occasional bit of bone-white snow.

"Is there anything you wish me to report to Lord Dockson?" the messenger asked.

Sazed paused, glancing along his wall's defenses. He'd climbed down from the watchtower, joining the regular ranks of men. The soldiers had run out of stones, though the archers were still working. He peeked over the side of the wall and saw the koloss corpses piling up. However, he also saw the splintered front of the gate. *It's amazing they can maintain such rage for so long*, he thought, ducking back. The creatures continued to howl and scream, like feral dogs.

He sat back against the wet stone, shivering in the chill wind, his toes growing numb. He tapped his brassmind, drawing out the heat he'd stored therein, and his body suddenly flooded with a pleasant sensation of warmth.

"Tell Lord Dockson that I fear for this gate's defenses," Sazed said quietly. "The best men were stolen away to help with the eastern gates, and I have little confidence in our leader. If Lord Dockson could send someone else to be in charge, that would be for the best, I think."

The messenger paused.

"What?" Sazed asked.

"Isn't that why he sent you, Master Terrisman?"

Sazed frowned. "Please tell him I have even less confidence in my own ability to lead. . .or to fight. . .than I do in that of our commander."

The messenger nodded and took off, scrambling down the steps toward his horse. Sazed cringed as a rock hit the wall just above him. Chips flipped over the merlon, scattering to the battlement in front of him. *By the Forgotten Gods. . .*Sazed thought, wringing his hands. *What am I doing here?*

He saw motion on the wall beside him, and turned as the youthful soldier captain—Captain Bedes—moved up to him, careful to keep his head down. Tall, with thick hair that grew down around his eyes, he was spindly even beneath his armor. The young man looked like he should have been dancing at balls, not leading soldiers in battle.

"What did the messenger say?" Bedes asked nervously.

"Zinc Gate has fallen, my lord," Sazed replied.

The young captain paled. "What. . .what should we do?"

"Why ask me, my lord?" Sazed asked. "You are in command."

"Please," the man said, grabbing Sazed's arm. "I don't. . .I. . ."

"My lord," Sazed said sternly, forcing down his own nervousness. "You are a nobleman, are you not?"

"Yes. . ."

"Then you are accustomed to giving orders," Sazed said. "Give them now."

"Which orders?"

"It doesn't matter," Sazed said. "Let the men see that you are in charge."

The young man wavered, then yelped and ducked as a rock took one of the nearby archers in the shoulder, throwing him back into the courtyard. The men below scrambled out of the way of the corpse, and Sazed noticed something odd. A group of people had gathered at the back of the courtyard. Civilians—skaa—in ash-stained clothing.

"What are they doing here?" Sazed asked. "They should be hiding, not standing here to tempt the koloss once the creatures break through!"

"*Once* they break through?" Captain Bedes asked.

Sazed ignored the man. Civilians he could deal with. He was accustomed to being in charge of a nobleman's servants.

"I will go speak to them," Sazed said.

"Yes. . ." Bedes said. "That sounds like a good idea."

Sazed made his way down the steps, which were growing slick and wet with ashen slush, then approached the group of people. There were even more of them than he had assumed; they extended back into the street a short distance. The hundred or so people stood huddled together, watching the gates through the falling snow, looking cold, and Sazed felt a little guilty for his brassmind's warmth.

Several of the people bowed their heads as Sazed approached.

"Why are you here?" Sazed asked. "Please, you must seek shelter. If your homes are near the courtyard, then go hide near the middle of the city. The koloss are likely to begin pillaging as soon as they finish with the army, so the edges of the city are more dangerous."

None of the people moved.

"Please!" Sazed said. "You *must* go. If you stay, you will die!"

"We are not here to die, Holy First Witness," said an elderly man at the front. "We are here to watch the koloss fall."

"Fall?" Sazed asked.

"The Lady Heir will protect us," said another woman.

"The Lady Heir has left the city!" Sazed said.

"Then we will watch you, Holy First Witness," the man said, leaning with one hand on a young boy's shoulder.

"Holy First Witness?" Sazed said. "Why call me this name?"

"You are the one who brought news of the Lord Ruler's death," the man said. "You gave the Lady Heir the spear she used to slay our lord. You were the witness to her actions."

Sazed shook his head. "That may be true, but I am not worthy of reverence. I'm not a holy man, I'm just a. . ."

"A witness," the old man said. "If the Heir is to join this fight, she will appear near1 you."

"I. . .am sorry. . ." Sazed said, flushing. *I sent her away. I sent your god to safety*.

The people watched him, their eyes reverent. It was wrong; they should not worship him. He was simply an observer.

Except, he wasn't. He had made himself part of this all. It was as Tindwyl had indirectly warned him. Now that Sazed had participated in events, he had become an object of worship himself.

"You should not look at me like that," Sazed said.

"The Lady Heir says the same thing," the old man said, smiling, breath puffing in the cold air.

"That is different," Sazed said. "She is. . ." He cut off, turning as he heard cries from behind. The archers on the wall were waving in alarm, and young Captain Bedes was rushing over to them. *What is—*

A bestial blue creature suddenly pulled itself up onto the wall, its skin streaked and dripping with scarlet blood. It shoved aside a surprised archer, then grabbed Captain Bedes by the neck and tossed him backward. The boy disappeared, falling to the koloss below. Sazed heard the screams even from a distance. A second koloss pulled itself up onto the wall, then a third. Archers stumbled away in shock, dropping their weapons, some shoving others off the ramparts in their haste.

*The koloss are jumping up,* Sazed realized. *Enough corpses must have piled below. And yet, to jump so high. . .*

More and more creatures were pulling themselves onto the top of the wall. They were the largest of the monsters, the ones over ten feet in height, but that only made it easier for them to sweep the archers out of their way. Men fell to the courtyard, and the pounding on the gates redoubled.

"Go!" Sazed said, waving at the people behind him. Some of them backed away. Many stood firm.

Sazed turned desperately back toward the gates. The wooden structures began to crack, splinters spraying through the snowy, ash-laden air. The soldiers backed away, postures frightened. Finally, with a snap, the bar broke and the right gate burst open. A howling, bleeding, wild mass of koloss began to scramble across the wet stones.

Soldiers dropped their weapons and fled. Others remained, frozen with terror. Sazed stood at their back, between the horrified soldiers and the mass of skaa.

*I am not a warrior*, he thought, hands shaking as he stared at the monsters. It had been difficult enough to stay calm inside their camp. Watching them scream—their massive swords out, their skin ripped and bloodied as they fell upon the human soldiers—Sazed felt his courage begin to fail.

*But if I don't do something, nobody will*.

He tapped pewter.

His muscles grew. He drew deeply upon his steelmind as he dashed forward, taking more strength than he ever had before. He had spent years storing up strength, rarely finding occasion to use it, and now he tapped that reserve.

His body changed, weak scholar's arms transforming into massive, bulky limbs. His chest widened, bulging, and his muscles grew taut with power. Days spent fragile and frail focused on this single moment. He shoved his way through the ranks of soldiers, pulling his robe over his head as it grew too restrictive, leaving himself wearing only a vestigial loincloth.

The lead koloss turned to find himself 1facing a creature nearly his own size. Despite its rage, despite its inhumanness, the beast froze, surprise showing in its beady red eyes.

Sazed punched the monster. He hadn't practiced for war, and knew next to nothing about combat. Yet, at that moment, his lack of skill didn't matter. The creature's face folded around his fist, its skull cracking.

Sazed turned on thick legs, looking back at the startled soldiers. *Say something brave!* he told himself.

"Fight!" Sazed bellowed, surprised at the sudden deepness and strength of his voice.

And, startlingly, they did.

Vin fell to her knees, exhausted on the muddy, ash-soaked highway. Her fingers and knees hit the slushy cold, but she didn't care. She simply knelt, wheezing. She couldn't run any farther. Her pewter was gone. Her lungs burned and her legs ached. She wanted to collapse and curl up, coughing.

*It's just the pewter drag*, she thought forcibly. She'd pushed her body hard, but hadn't had to pay for it until now.

She coughed a moment longer, groaning, then reached a dripping hand into her pocket and pulled out her last two vials. They had a mixture of all eight base metals, plus duralumin. Their pewter would keep her going for a little bit longer. . ..

But not long enough. She was still hours away from Luthadel. Even with pewter, she wouldn't arrive until long after dark. She sighed, replacing her vials, forcing herself to her feet.

*What would I do if I arrived?* Vin thought. *Why work so hard? Am I that eager to fight again? To slaughter?*

She knew that she wouldn't arrive in time for the battle. In fact, the koloss had probably attacked days ago. Still, this worried her. Her attack on Cett's keep still flashed horrific images in her head. Things she had done. Death she had caused.

And yet, something felt different to her now. She had accepted her place as a knife. But what was a knife, but another tool? It could be used for evil or for good; it could kill, or it could protect.

That point was moot, considering how weak she felt. It was hard to keep her legs from trembling as she flared tin, clearing her head. She stood on the imperial highway, a sodden, pockmarked roadway that looked—in the softly falling snow—to twist onward for eternity. It ran directly beside the imperial canal, which was a snakelike cut in the land, wide but empty, extending beside the highway.

Before, with Elend, this road had seemed bright and new. Now it looked dark and depressing. The Well thumped, its pulsings growing more powerful with each step she took back toward Luthadel. Yet, it wasn't happening fast enough. Not fast enough for her to stop the koloss from taking the city.

Not fast enough for her friends.

*I'm sorry. . .*she thought, teeth chattering as she pulled her cloak tight, pewter no longer aiding her against the cold. *I'm so sorry that I failed you*.

She saw a line of smoke in the distance. She looked east, then west, but didn't see much. The flat landscape was clouded in ashen snows.

*A village*, thought her still-numb mind. *One of many in the area*. Luthadel was by far the dominant city of the small dominance, but there were others. Elend hadn't been able to keep the others completely free of banditry, but they had fared far better than tow1ns in other areas of the Final Empire.

Vin stumbled forward, pressing on through the slushy black puddles toward the village. After about fifteen minutes of walking, she turned off the main highway and made her way up a side road to the village. It was small, even by skaa standards. Just a few hovels, along with a couple of nicer structures.

*Not a plantation*, Vin thought. *This was once a way village*—a place for traveling noblemen to stop for the evening. The small manor—which would have once been run by a minor noble landlord—was dark. Two of the skaa hovels, however, had light shining through the cracks. The gloomy weather must have convinced the people to retire from their labors early.

Vin shivered, walking up to one of the buildings, her tin-enhanced ears picking out sounds of talking inside. She paused, listening. Children laughed, and men spoke with gusto. She smelled what must have been the beginnings of the evening meal—a simple vegetable stew.

*Skaa. . .laughing*, she thought. A hovel like this one would have been a place of fear and gloom during the days of the Lord Ruler. Happy skaa had been considered underworked skaa.

*We've meant something. It's all meant something*.

But was it worth the deaths of her friends? The fall of Luthadel? Without Elend's protection, even this little village would soon be taken by one tyrant or another.

She drank in the sounds of laughter. Kelsier hadn't given up. He had faced the Lord Ruler himself, and his last words had been defiant. Even when his plans had seemed hopeless, his own corpse lying in the street, he had secretly been victorious.

*I refuse to give up, she thought, straightening. I refuse to accept their deaths until I hold their corpses in my arms*.

She raised a hand and pounded on the door. Immediately, the sounds inside stopped. Vin extinguished her tin as the door creaked open. Skaa, especially country skaa, were skittish things. She'd probably have to—

"Oh, you poor thing!" the woman exclaimed, pulling the door open the rest of the way. "Come in out of that snow. What are you doing out there!"

Vin hesitated. The woman was dressed simply, but the clothing was well made to stave off the winter. The firepit in the center of the room glowed with a welcome warmth.

"Child?" the woman asked. Behind, a stocky, bearded man rose to place a hand on the woman's shoulder and study Vin.

"Pewter," Vin said quietly. "I need pewter."

The couple looked at each other, frowning. They probably thought her mind addled. After all, how must she look, hair drenched by the snow, clothing wet and stuck with ash? She only wore simple riding clothing—trousers and a nondescript cloak.

"Why don't you come inside, child?" the man suggested. "Have something to eat. Then we can talk about where you came from. Where are your parents?"

*Lord Ruler!* Vin thought with annoyance. *I don't look* that *young, do I?*

She threw a Soothing on the couple, suppressing their concern and suspicion. Then, she Rioted their willingness to help. She wasn't as good as Breeze, but she wasn't unpracticed, either. The couple immediately relaxed.

"I don't have much time," Vin said. "Pewter."

"The lord had some fine diningware in his home," the man said slowly. "But we traded most of that for clothing and farming equipment. I think there are a couple of goblets left. Master Cled—our elder—has them in the other hovel. . .."

"That might work," Vin said. *Though the metal probably won't be mixed with Allomantic percentages in mind.* It would probably have too much silver or not enough tin, making the pewter work more weakly than it would otherwise.

The couple frowned, then looked at the others in the hovel.

Vin felt despair crawl back into her chest. What was she thinking? Even if the pewter were of the right alloy, it would take time to shave it and produce enough for her to use in running. Pewter burned relatively quickly.

She'd need a lot of it. Preparing it could take almost as much time as simply walking to Luthadel.

She turned, looking south, through the dark, snowy sky. Even with pewter, it would take hours more running. What she really needed was a spikeway—a path marked by spikes driven in the ground that an Allomancer could push against, throwing themselves through the air again and again. On such an organized pathway, she'd once traveled from Luthadel to Fellise—an hour's carriage ride—in under ten minutes.

But there was no spikeway from this village to Luthadel; there weren't even ones along the main canal routes. They were too hard to set up, too specific in their usefulness, to be worth the bother of running them long distances. . ..

Vin turned, causing the skaa couple to jump. Perhaps they'd noticed the daggers in her belt, or perhaps it was the look in her eyes, but they no longer looked quite as friendly as they had before.

"Is that a stable?" Vin said, nodding toward one of the dark buildings.

"Yes," the man said hesitantly. "But we have no horses. Only a couple of goats and cows. Surely you don't want to—"

"Horseshoes," Vin said.

The man frowned.

"I need horseshoes," Vin said. "A lot of them."

"Follow me," the man said, responding to her Soothing. He led her out into the cold afternoon. Others followed behind them, and Vin noticed a couple of men casually carrying cudgels. Perhaps it wasn't just Elend's protection that had allowed these people to remain unmolested.

The stocky man threw his weight against the stable door, pushing it to the side. He pointed to a barrel inside. "They were getting rusty anyway," he said.

Vin walked up to the barrel and took out a horseshoe, testing its weight. Then she tossed it up in front of her and Pushed it with a solid flare of steel. It shot away, arcing far through the air until it splashed into a pool some hundred paces away.

*Perfect*, she thought.

The skaa men were staring. Vin reached into her pocket and pulled out one of her metal vials, downing its contents and restoring her pewter. She didn't have much of it left by pewter-dragging standards, but she had plenty of steel and iron. Both burned slowly. She could Push and Pull on metals for hours yet.

"Prepare your village," she said, burning pewter, then counting out ten horseshoes. "Luthadel is besieged—it might have fallen already. If you get word that it has, I suggest you take your people and move to Terris. Follow the imperial canal directly to the north."

"Who are you?" the man asked.

"Nobody of consequence."

He paused. "You're *her*, aren't you?"

She didn't need to ask what he meant. She simply dropped a horseshoe to the ground behind her.

"Yes," she said quietly, then Pushed off of the shoe.

Immediately, she shot into the air at an angle. As she began to fall, she dropped another horseshoe. However, she waited until she was near the ground to Push against this one; she needed to keep herself going more forward than up.

She'd done all this before. It wasn't that different from using coins to jump around. The trick was going to be to keep herself moving. As she Pushed against the second horseshoe—propelling herself into the snowy air again—she reached behind herself and Pulled hard on the first horseshoe.

The horseshoe wasn't connected to anything, so it leaped into the air after her, crossing the distance through the sky as Vin dropped a third shoe to the ground. She let go of the first shoe, its momentum carrying it through the air above her head. It fell to the ground as she Pushed against the third shoe and Pulled on the second one, now far behind her.

*This is going to be tough*, Vin thought, frowning with concentration as she passed over the first shoe and Pushed on it. However, she didn't get the angle right, and she fell too far before Pushing. The horseshoe shot out behind her, and didn't give her enough upward momentum to keep her in the air. She hit the ground hard, but immediately Pulled the shoe to herself and tried again.

The first few tries were slow. The biggest problem was getting the angle down. She had to hit the shoe just right, giving it enough downward force to keep it in place on the ground, but enough forward motion to keep her moving in the right direction. She had to land often that first hour, going back to fetch horseshoes. However, she didn't have time for much experimentation, and her determination insisted that she get the process right.

Eventually, she had three shoes working pretty well; it helped that the ground was wet, and that her weight pressed the horseshoes down in the mud, giving her a stronger anchor to use when Pushing herself forward. Soon she was able to add a fourth shoe. The more frequently she Pushed—the more horseshoes she had to Push against—the faster she would go.

By the time she was an hour out of the village, she added a fifth shoe. The result was a continuous flow of flipping metal chunks. Vin Pulled, then Pushed, then Pulled, then Pushed, moving with continual single-mindedness, juggling herself through the air.

The ground raced beneath her and horseshoes shot through the air above her. The wind became a roar as she Pushed herself faster and faster, steering her pathway to the south. She was a flurry of metal and motion—as Kelsier had been, near the end, when he had killed the Inquisitor.

Except, her metal wasn't meant to kill, but save. *I might not arrive in time*, she thought, air rushing around her. *But I'm not going to give up halfway*.

*I have a young nephew, one Rashek. He hates all of Khlennium with the passion of envious youth. He hates Alendi even more acutely—though the two have never met—for Rashek feels betrayed that one of our oppressors should have been chosen as the Hero of Ages*.

## **53**1font>

STRAFF WAS ACTUALLY STARTING TO feel quite well as his army crested the last hill to overlook Luthadel. He'd discreetly tried a few drugs from his cabinet, and he was pretty certain he knew which one Amaranta had given him: Black Frayn. A nasty drug indeed. He'd have to wean himself from it slowly—but, for now, a few swallowed leaves made him stronger and more alert than he'd ever been before. In fact, he felt wonderful.

He was sure the same couldn't be said for those in Luthadel. The koloss pooled around the outer wall, still beating on several of the gates on the north and east sides. Smoke rose from inside the city.

"Our scouts say the creatures have broken through four of the city gates, my lord," said Lord Janarle. "They breached the eastern gate first, and there met with heavy resistance. The northeastern gate fell next, then the northwestern gate, but the troops at both are holding as well. The main breach happened in the north. The koloss are apparently ravaging from that direction, burning and looting."

Straff nodded. *The northern gate*, he thought. *The one closest to Keep Venture*.

"Do we attack, my lord?" Janarle asked.

"How long ago did the northern gate fall?"

"Perhaps an hour ago, my lord."

Straff shook his head leisurely. "Then, let us wait. The creatures worked quite hard to break into the city—we should at least let them have a little fun before we slaughter them."

"Are you sure, my lord?"

Straff smiled. "Once they lose their bloodlust in a few hours, they'll be tired from all the fighting and calm down. *That* will be the best time to strike. They'll be dispersed through the city and weakened from the resistance. We can take them easily, that way."

Sazed gripped his koloss opponent by the throat, forcing back its snarling, distorted face. The beast's skin was stretched so tightly that it had split down the center of the face, revealing bloody muscles above the teeth, around the nose holes. It breathed with husky rage, spraying droplets of spittle and blood across Sazed with each exhalation.

*Strength!* Sazed thought, tapping his pewtermind for more power. His body became so massive that he feared splitting his own skin. Fortunately, his metalminds had been built to expand, braces and rings that didn't connect on one side so that they could bend. Still, his bulk was daunting. He probably wouldn't have been able to walk or maneuver with such size—but it didn't matter, for the koloss had already knocked him to the ground. All he needed was some extra power in his grip. The creature clawed him in the arm with one hand, reaching behind with the other, grasping its sword. . ..

Sazed's fingers finally crushed the beast's thick neck. The creature tried to snarl, but no breath came, and it instead thrashed about in frustration. Sazed forced himself to his feet, then hurled the creature toward its companions. With such unnatural strength, even a body eleven feet tall felt light in his fingers. It smashed into a pile of attacking koloss, forcing them backward.

Sazed stood, gasping. *I'm using my strength up so quickly*, he thought, releasing his pewtermind, his body deflating like a wineskin. He couldn't continue tapping his reserves so much. He'd already used up a good half of his strength—strength that had taken decades to store. He still hadn't used his rings, but he had only a few minutes of each attribute in those. They1 would wait for an emergency.

*And that might be what I'm facing now*, he thought with dread. They still held Steel Gate Square. Though koloss had broken through the gate, only a few could pass through at once—and only the most massive seemed able to jump up to the wall.

Sazed's little troop of soldiers was sorely pressed, however. Bodies lay scattered in the courtyard. The skaa faithful at the back had begun pulling the wounded to safety. Sazed could hear them groaning behind him.

Koloss corpses littered the square as well, and despite the carnage, Sazed couldn't help but feel a sense of pride at how much it was costing the creatures to force their way inside this portal. Luthadel was not falling easily. Not at all.

The koloss seemed rebuffed for the moment, and though several skirmishes still continued in the courtyard, a new group of monsters was gathering outside the gate.

*Outside the gate*, Sazed thought, glancing to the side. The creatures had cared to break open only one of the massive door gates, the right one. There were corpses in the square—dozens, perhaps hundreds—but the koloss themselves had cleared many out of the way of the gate itself so that they could get into the courtyard.

Perhaps. . .

Sazed didn't have time to think. He dashed forward, tapping his pewtermind again, giving himself the strength of five men. He picked up the body of a smaller koloss and threw it out the gate. The creatures outside snarled, scattering. There were still hundreds waiting for the chance to get in, but they tripped over the dead in their haste to get out of the way of his projectile.

Sazed slipped on blood as he grabbed a second body, throwing it to the side. "To me!" he screamed, hoping that there were men who could hear, and who could respond.

The koloss realized what he was doing too late. He kicked another body out of the way, then slammed his body against the open door and tapped his ironmind, drawing forth the weight he had stored within it. Immediately, he became far heavier, and that weight crashed against the gate, slamming it closed.

Koloss rushed at the doorway from the other side. Sazed scrambled up against the gate, pushing corpses out of the way, forcing the massive portal closed all the way. He tapped his ironmind further, draining its precious reserve at an alarming rate. He became so heavy he felt his own weight crushing him to the ground, and only his increased strength managed to keep him on his feet. Frustrated koloss pounded on the gate, but he held. Held them back, hands and chest pressed against the rough wood, toes wedged back against uneven cobbles. With his brassmind, he didn't even feel the cold, though ash, snow, and blood mixed at his feet.

Men cried out. Some died. Others slammed their own weight against the gate, and Sazed spared a glance behind. The rest of his soldiers set up a perimeter, protecting the gate from the koloss inside the city. The men fought bravely, backs to the gate, only Sazed's power keeping the portal from flying open.

And yet, they fought. Sazed cried out in defiance, feet slipping, holding the gate as his soldiers killed the remaining koloss in the courtyard. Then, a group of them rushed in from the side, bearing with them a large length of wood. Sazed didn't know where they'd gotten it, nor did he care, as they slid it into place where the gate bar had been.

His weight ran out, the ironmind empty. *I should have stored more of that, over the years,*1 he thought with a sigh of exhaustion, sinking down before the closed gate. It had seemed like a lot, until he'd been forced to use it so often, using it to shove away koloss or the like.

*I usually just stored up weight as a side effect of making myself lighter. That always seemed the more useful way to use iron.*

He released pewter, and felt his body deflating. Fortunately, stretching his body in such a manner didn't leave his skin loose. He went back to his usual self, only bearing a dreadful sense of exhaustion and a faint soreness. The koloss continued to beat on the gate. Sazed opened tired eyes, lying bare-chested in the falling snow and ash. His soldiers stood solemnly before him.

*So few,* he thought. Barely fifty remained of his original four hundred. The square itself was red—as if painted—with bright koloss blood, and it mixed with the darker human kind. Sickly blue lumps of bodies lay alone or in heaps, interspersed with the twisted and torn pieces that were often all that remained of human bodies once they were hit by the brutal koloss swords.

The thumping continued, like low drums, on the other side of the gate. The beating picked up to a frenzied pace, the gate shaking, as the koloss grew more frustrated. They could probably smell the blood, feel the flesh that had so nearly been theirs.

"That board won't hold for long," one of the soldiers said quietly, a bit of ash floating down in front of his face. "And the hinges are splintering. They're going to get through again."

Sazed stumbled to his feet. "And we will fight again."

"My lord!" a voice said. Sazed turned to see one of Dockson's messengers ride around a pile of corpses. "Lord Dockson says that. . ." He trailed off, noticing for the first time that Sazed's gate was closed. "How. . ." the man began.

"Deliver your message, young man," Sazed said tiredly.

"Lord Dockson says you won't get any reinforcements," the man said, reining in his horse. "Tin Gate has fallen, and—"

"Tin Gate?" Sazed asked. *Tindwyl!* "When?"

"Over an hour ago, my lord."

*An hour?* he thought with shock. *How long have we been fighting?*

"You have to hold here, my lord!" the young man said, turning and galloping back the way he had come.

Sazed took a step to the east. *Tindwyl. . ..*

The thumping on his gate grew louder, and the board began to crack. The men ran for something else to use to secure the gate, but Sazed could see that the mountings that kept the board in place were beginning to pull apart. Once they went, there would be no way to hold the gate closed.

Sazed closed his eyes, feeling the weight of fatigue, reaching into his pewtermind. It was nearly drained. After it was gone, he'd only have the tiny bit of strength in one of the rings.

Yet, what else could he do?

He heard the board snap, and men yelled.

"Back!" Clubs yelled. "Fall into the city!"

The remnants of their army broke apart, pulling back from Zinc Gate. Breeze watched with horror as more and more koloss spilled into the square, overrunning the few men too weak or too wounded to retreat. The creatures swept forward like a great blue tide, a tide w1ith swords of steel and eyes of red.

In the sky, the sun—only faintly visible behind storm clouds—was a bleeding scar that crept toward the horizon.

"Breeze," Clubs snapped, pulling him back. "Time to go."

Their horses had long since bolted. Breeze stumbled after the general, trying not to listen to the snarling from behind.

"Fall back to the harrying positions!" Clubs called to those men who could hear him. "First squad, shore up inside Keep Lekal! Lord Hammond should be there by now, preparing the defenses! Squad two, with me to Keep Hasting!"

Breeze continued on, his mind as numb as his feet. He'd been virtually useless in the battle. He'd tried to take away the men's fear, but his efforts had seemed so inadequate. Like. . .holding a piece of paper up to the sun to make shade.

Clubs held up a hand, and the squad of two hundred men stopped. Breeze looked around. The street was quiet in the falling ash and snow. Everything seemed. . .dull. The sky was dim, the city's features softened by the blanket of black-speckled snow. It seemed so strange to have fled the horrific scene of scarlet and blue to find the city looking so lazy.

"Damn!" Clubs snapped, pushing Breeze out of the way as a raging group of koloss burst from a side street. Clubs's soldiers fell into a line, but another group of koloss—the creatures that had just burst through the gate—came up behind them.

Breeze stumbled, falling in the snow. *That other group. . .it came from the north! The creatures have infiltrated the city this far already?*

"Clubs!" Breeze said, turning. "We—"

Breeze looked just in time to see a massive koloss sword sheer through Clubs's upraised arm, then continue on to hit the general in the ribs. Clubs grunted, thrown to the side, his sword arm—weapon and all—flying free. He stumbled on his bad leg, and the koloss brought his sword down in a two-handed blow.

The dirty snow finally got some color. A splash of red.

Breeze stared, dumbfounded, at the remains of his friend's corpse. Then the koloss turned toward Breeze, snarling.

The likelihood of his own impending death hit, stirring him as even the cold snow couldn't. Breeze scrambled back, sliding in the snow, instinctively reaching out to try and Soothe the creature. Of course, nothing happened. Breeze tried to get to his feet, and the koloss—along with several others—began to bear down on him. At that moment, however, another troop of soldiers fleeing the gate appeared from a cross street, distracting the koloss.

Breeze did the only thing that seemed natural. He crawled inside a building and hid.

"This is all Kelsier's fault," Dockson muttered, making another notation on his map. According to messengers, Ham had reached Keep Lekal. It wouldn't last long.

The Venture grand hall was a flurry of motion and chaos as panicked scribes ran this way and that, finally realizing that koloss didn't care if a man were skaa, scholar, nobleman, or merchant. The creatures just liked to kill.

"He should have seen this coming," Dockson continued. "He left us with this mess, and then he just assumed that we'd find a way to fix it. Well, I can't hide a city from its enemies—not like I hid a crew. Just because we were excellent thieves doesn't mean we'd be any good at running a kingdom!"

Nobody was listening to him. His messengers had all fled, and his guards fought at the keep gates. Each of the keeps had its own defenses, but Clubs—rightly—had decided to use them only as a fallback option. They weren't designed to repel a large-scale attack, and they were too secluded from each other. Retreating to them only fractured and isolated the human army.

"Our real problem is follow-through," Dockson said, making a final notation at Tin Gate, explaining what had happened there. He looked over the map. He'd never expected Sazed's gate to be the last one to hold.

"Follow-through," he continued. "We assumed we could do a better job than the noblemen, but once we had the power, we put them back in charge. If we'd killed the whole lot, perhaps then we could have started fresh. Of course, that would have meant invading the other dominances—which would have meant sending Vin to take care of the most important, most problematic, noblemen. There would have been a slaughter like the Final Empire had never seen. And, if we'd done that. . ."

He trailed off, looking up as one of the massive, majestic stained-glass windows shattered. The others began to explode as well, broken by thrown rocks. A few large koloss jumped through the holes, landing on the shard-strewn marble floor. Even broken, the windows were beautiful, the spiked glass edges twinkling in the evening light. Through one of them, Dockson could see that the storm was breaking, letting sunlight through.

"If we'd done that," Dockson said quietly, "we'd have been no better than beasts."

Scribes screamed, trying to flee as the koloss began the slaughter. Dockson stood quietly, hearing noise behind—grunts, harsh breathing—as koloss approached through the back hallways. He reached for the sword on his table as men began to die.

He closed his eyes. *You know, Kell,* he thought. *I almost started to believe that they were right, that you were watching over us. That you were some sort of god*.

He opened his eyes and turned, pulling the sword from its sheath. Then he froze, staring at the massive beast approaching from behind. *So big!*

Dockson gritted his teeth, sending a final curse Kelsier's way, then charged, swinging.

The creature caught his weapon in an indifferent hand, ignoring the cut it caused. Then, it brought its own weapon down, and blackness followed.

"My lord," Janarle said. "The city has fallen. Look, you can see it burning. The koloss have penetrated all but one of the four gates under attack, and they run wild in the city. They aren't stopping to pillage—they're just killing. Slaughtering. There aren't many soldiers left to oppose them."

Straff sat quietly, watching Luthadel burn. It seemed. . .a symbol to him. A symbol of justice. He'd fled this city once, leaving it to the skaa vermin inside, and when he'd come back to demand it be returned to him, the people had resisted.

They had been defiant. They had earned this.

"My lord," Janarle said. "The koloss army is weakened enough already. Their numbers are hard to count, but the corpses they left behind indicate that as much as a third of their force has fallen. We can take them!"

"No," Straff said, shaking his head. "Not yet."

"My lord?" Janarle said.

"Let the koloss have the damn city," Straff1 said quietly. "Let them clear it out and burn the whole thing to the ground. Fires can't hurt our atium—in fact, they'll probably make the metal easier to find."

"I. . ." Janarle seemed shocked. He didn't object further, but his eyes were rebellious.

*I'll have to take care of him later*, Straff thought. *He'll rise against me if he finds that Zane is gone*.

That didn't matter at the moment. The city had rejected him, and so it would die. He'd build a better one in its place.

One dedicated to Straff, not the Lord Ruler.

"Father!" Allrianne said urgently.

Cett shook his head. He sat on his horse, beside his daughter's horse, on a hill to the west of Luthadel. He could see Straff's army, gathered to the north, watching—as he watched—the death throes of a doomed city.

"We have to help!" Allrianne insisted.

"No," Cett said quietly, shrugging off the effects of her Raging his emotions. He'd grown used to her manipulations long ago. "Our help wouldn't matter now."

"We have to do something!" Allrianne said, pulling his arm.

"No," Cett said more forcefully.

"But you came back!" she said. "Why did we return, if not to help?"

"We will help," Cett said quietly. "We'll help Straff take the city when he wishes, then we'll submit to him and hope he doesn't kill us."

Allrianne paled. "That's it?" she hissed. "That's why we returned, so that you can give our kingdom to that monster?"

"What else did you expect?" Cett demanded. "You know me, Allrianne. You know that this is the choice I have to make."

"I thought I knew you," she snapped. "I thought you were a good man, down deep."

Cett shook his head. "The good men are all dead, Allrianne. They died inside that city."

Sazed fought on. He was no warrior; he didn't have honed instincts or training. He calculated that he should have died hours before. And yet, somehow, he managed to stay alive.

Perhaps it was because the koloss didn't fight with skill, either. They were blunt—like their giant, wedgelike swords—and they simply threw themselves at their opponents with little thought of tactics.

That should have been enough. Yet, Sazed held—and where he held, his few men held with him. The koloss had rage on their side, but Sazed's men could see the weak and elderly standing, waiting, just at the edge of the square. The soldiers knew why they fought. This reminder seemed enough to keep them going, even when they began to be surrounded, the koloss working their way into the edges of the square.

Sazed knew, by now, that no relief was going to come. He'd hoped, perhaps, that Straff would decide to take the city, as Clubs had suggested. But it was too late for that; night was approaching, the sun inching toward the horizon.

*The end is finally here*, Sazed thought as the man next to him was struck down. Sazed slipped on blood, and the move saved him as the koloss swung over his head.

Perhaps Tindwyl had found a way to safety. Hopefully, Elend would deliver the things he and she had studied. *They were important*, Sazed thought, even if he didn'1t know why.

Sazed attacked, swinging the sword he'd taken from a koloss. He enhanced his muscles in a final burst as he swung, giving them strength right as the sword met koloss flesh.

He hit. The resistance, the wet sound of impact, the shock up his arm—these were familiar to him now. Bright koloss blood sprayed across him, and another of the monsters fell.

And Sazed's strength was gone.

Pewter tapped clean, the koloss sword was now heavy in his hands. He tried to swing it at the next koloss in line, but the weapon slipped from his weak, numb, tired fingers.

This koloss was a big one. Nearing twelve feet tall, it was the largest of the monsters Sazed had seen. Sazed tried to step away, but he stumbled over the body of a recently killed soldier. As he fell, his men finally broke, the last dozen scattering. They'd held well. Too well. Perhaps if he'd let them retreat. . .

*No,* Sazed thought, looking up at his death. *I did well, I think. Better than any mere scholar should have been able to*.

He thought about the rings on his fingers. They could, perhaps, give him a little bit of an edge, let him run. Flee. Yet, he couldn't summon the motivation. Why resist? Why had he resisted in the first place? He'd known that they were doomed.

*You're wrong about me, Tindwyl,* he thought. *I do give up, sometimes. I gave up on this city long ago*.

The koloss loomed over Sazed, who still lay half sprawled in the bloody slush, and raised its sword. Over the creature's shoulder, Sazed could see the red sun hanging just above the top of the wall. He focused on that, rather than on the falling sword. He could see rays of sunlight, like. . .shards of glass in the sky.

The sunlight seemed to sparkle, twinkling, coming for him. As if the sun itself were welcoming him. Reaching down to accept his spirit.

*And so, I die. . ..*

A twinkling droplet of light sparkled in the beam of sunlight, then hit the koloss directly in the back of the skull. The creature grunted, stiffening, dropping its sword. It collapsed to the side, and Sazed lay, stupefied, on the ground for a moment. Then he looked up at the top of the wall.

A small figure stood silhouetted by the sun. Black before the red light, a cloak flapped gently on her back. Sazed blinked. The bit of sparkling light he'd seen. . .it had been a coin. The koloss before him was dead.

Vin had returned.

She jumped, leaping as only an Allomancer could, to soar in a graceful arc above the square. She landed directly in the midst of the koloss and spun. Coins shot out like angry insects, cutting through blue flesh. The creatures didn't drop as easily as humans would have, but the attack got their attention. The koloss turned away from the fleeing soldiers and defenseless townspeople.

The skaa at the back of the square began to chant. It was a bizarre sound to hear in the middle of a battle. Sazed sat up, ignoring his pains and exhaustion as Vin jumped. The city gate suddenly lurched, its hinges twisting. The koloss had already beaten on it so hard. . ..

The massive wooden portal burst free from the wall, Pulled by Vin. *Such power*, Sazed thought numbly. *She must be Pulling on something behind herself—but, that would mean that poor Vin is being yanked between two weights as heavy as t1hat gate*.

And yet, she did it, lifting the gate door with a heave, Pulling it toward herself. The huge hardwood gate crashed through the koloss ranks, scattering bodies. Vin twisted expertly in the air, Pulling herself to the side, swinging the gate to the side as if it were tethered to her by a chain.

Koloss flew in the air, bones cracking, sprayed like splinters before the enormous weapon. In a single sweep, Vin cleared the entire courtyard.

The gate dropped. Vin landed amid a group of crushed bodies, silently kicking a soldier's war staff up into her hands. The remaining koloss outside the gate paused only briefly, then charged. Vin began to attack swiftly, but precisely. Skulls cracked, koloss falling dead in the slush as they tried to pass her. She spun, sweeping a few of them to the ground, spraying ashen red slush across those running up behind.

*I. . .I have to do something*, Sazed thought, shaking off his stupefaction. He was still bare-chested, the cold ignored because of his brassmind—which was nearly empty. Vin continued to fight, felling koloss after koloss. *Even her strength won't last forever. She can't save the city*.

Sazed forced himself to his feet, then moved toward the back of the square. He grabbed the old man at the front of the crowd of skaa, shaking the man out of his chanting. "You were right," Sazed said. "She returned."

"Yes, Holy First Witness."

"She will be able to give us some time, I think," Sazed said. "The koloss have broken into the city. We need to gather what people we can and escape."

The old man paused, and for a moment Sazed thought he would object—that he would claim Vin would protect them, would defeat the entire army. Then, thankfully, he nodded.

"We'll run out the northern gate," Sazed said urgently. "That is where the koloss first entered the city, and so it is likely that they have moved on from that area."

*I hope*, Sazed thought, rushing off to raise the warning. The fallback defensive positions were supposed to be the high noble keeps. Perhaps they would find survivors there.

*So*, Breeze thought, *it turns out that I'm a coward*.

It was not a surprising revelation. He had always said that it was important for a man to understand himself, and he had always been aware of his selfishness. So, he was not at all shocked to find himself huddling against the flaking bricks of an old skaa home, shutting his ears to the screams just outside.

Where was the proud man now? The careful diplomat, the Soother with his immaculate suits? He was gone, leaving behind this quivering, useless mass. He tried several times to burn brass, to Soothe the men fighting outside. However, he couldn't accomplish this most simple of actions. He couldn't even move.

Unless one counted trembling as movement.

*Fascinating*, Breeze thought, as if looking at himself from the outside, seeing the pitiful creature in the ripped, bloodied suit. *So this is what happens to me, when the stress gets too strong? It's ironic, in a way. I've spent a lifetime controlling the emotions of others. Now I'm so afraid, I can't even function*.

The fighting continued outside. It was going on an awful long time. Shouldn't those soldiers be dead?

"Breeze?"

He couldn't move to see who it was. *Sounds like Ham. That's funny. He should be dead, too*.

"Lord Ruler!" Ham said, coming into Breeze's view. He wore a bloodied sling on one arm. He fell urgently to Breeze's side. "Breeze, can you hear me?"

"We saw him duck in here, my lord," another voice said. A soldier? "Took shelter from the fight. We could feel him Soothing us, though. Kept us fighting, even when we should have given up. After Lord Cladent died. . ."

*I'm a coward*.

Another figure appeared. Sazed, looking concerned. "Breeze," Ham said, kneeling. "My keep fell, and Sazed's gate is down. We haven't heard anything from Dockson in over an hour, and we found Clubs's body. Please. The koloss are destroying the city. We need to know what to do."

*Well, don't ask me,* Breeze said—or tried to say. He thought it came out as a mumble.

"I can't carry you, Breeze," Ham said. "My arm is nearly useless."

*Well, that's all right*, Breeze mumbled. *You see, my dear man, I don't think I'm of much use anymore. You should move on. It's quite all right if you just leave me here*.

Ham looked up at Sazed, helpless.

"Hurry, Lord Hammond," Sazed said. "We can have the soldiers carry the wounded. We will make our way to Keep Hasting. Perhaps we can find sanctuary there. Or. . .perhaps the koloss will be distracted enough to let us slip out of the city."

*Distracted?* Breeze mumbled. *Distracted by the killing of other people, you mean. Well, it is somewhat comforting to know that we're* all *cowards. Now, if I could just lie here for a little longer, I might be able to fall asleep. . .*

*And forget all of this*.

*Alendi will need guides through the Terris Mountains. I have charged Rashek with making certain that he and his trusted friends are chosen as those guides*.

# 54

VIN'S STAFF BROKE AS SHE slammed it across a koloss face.

*Not again*, she thought with frustration, spinning and ramming the broken shard into another creature's chest. She turned and came face-to-face with one of the big ones, a good five feet taller than she.

It thrust its sword toward her. Vin jumped, and the sword collided with broken cobblestones beneath her. She shot upward, not needing any coins to carry herself up to eye level with the creature's twisted face.

They always looked surprised. Even after watching her fight dozens of their companions, they seemed shocked to see her dodge their blows. Their minds seemed to equate size with power; a larger koloss always beat a smaller one. A five-foot-tall human should have been no problem for a monster this big.

Vin flared pewter as she smashed her fist into the beast's head. The skull cracked beneath her knuckles, and the beast fell backward as she dropped back to the ground. Yet, as always, there was another to take its place.

She was getting tired. No, she'd *started* the battle tired. She'd pewter-dragged, then used a convoluted personal spikeway to carry herself across an entire dominance. She was exhausted. Only the pewter in her last metal vial was keeping her upright.

*I should have asked Sazed for one of his empty pewterminds!* she thought. Feruchemical and Allomantic metals were the same. She could have burned that—though it would probably have been a bracer or a bracelet. To large to swallow.

She ducked to the side as another koloss attacked. Coins didn't stop these things, and they all weighed too much for her to Push them away without an anchor. Besides, her steel and iron reserves were extremely low.

She killed koloss after koloss, buying time for Sazed and the people to get a good head start. Something was different this time—different from when she'd killed at Cett's palace. She felt good. It wasn't just because she killed monsters.

It was because she understood her purpose. And she agreed with it. She *could* fight, *could* kill, if it meant defending those who could not defend themselves. Kelsier might have been able to kill for shock or retribution, but that wasn't good enough for Vin.

And she would never let it be again.

That determination fueled her attacks against the koloss. She used a stolen sword to cut off the legs of one, then threw the weapon at another, Pushing on it to impale the koloss in the chest. Then she Pulled on the sword of a fallen soldier, yanking it into her hand. She ducked backward, but nearly stumbled as she stepped on another body.

*So tired,* she thought.

There were dozens—perhaps even hundreds—of corpses in the courtyard. In fact, a pile was forming beneath her. She climbed it, retreating slightly as the creatures surrounded her again. They crawled over the corpses of their fallen brethren, rage frothing in their blood-drop eyes. Human soldiers would have given up, going to seek easier fights. The koloss, however, seemed to multiply as she fought them, others hearing the sounds of battle and coming to join in.

She swiped, pewter aiding her strength as she cut off an arm from one koloss, then a leg from another, before finally going for the head of a third. She ducked and dodged, jumping, staying out of their reach, killing as many as she could.

But as desperate as her determination—as strong as her newfound resolve to defend—she knew that she couldn't keep fighting, not like this. She was only one person. She couldn't save Luthadel, not alone.

"Lord Penrod!" Sazed yelled, standing at the gates to Keep Hasting. "You *must* listen to me."

There was no response. The soldiers at the top of the short keep wall were quiet, though Sazed could sense their discomfort. They didn't like ignoring him. In the distance, the battle still raged. Koloss screamed in the night. Soon they would find their way to Sazed and Ham's growing band of several thousand, who now huddled quietly outside Keep Hasting's gate.

A haggard messenger approached Sazed. He was the same one that Dockson had been sending to Steel Gate. He'd lost his horse somewhere, and they'd found him with a group of refugees in the Square of the Survivor.

"Lord Terrisman," the messenger said quietly. "I. . .just got back from the command post. Keep Venture has fallen. . .."

"Lord Dockson?"

The man shook his head. "We found a few wounded scribes hiding outside the keep. They saw him die. The koloss are still in the building, breaking windows, rooting about. . .."

Sazed turned back, looking over the city. So1 much smoke billowed in the sky that it seemed the mists had come already. He'd begun filling his scent tinmind to keep the stench away.

The battle for the city might be over, but now the true tragedy would begin. The koloss in the city had finished killing soldiers. Now they would slaughter the people. There were hundreds of thousands of them, and Sazed knew the creatures would gleefully extend the devastation. No looting. Not when there was killing to be done.

More screams sounded in the night. They'd lost. Failed. And now, the city would *truly* fall.

*The mists can't be far away*, he thought, trying to give himself some hope. *Perhaps that will give us some cover*.

Still, one image stood out to him. Clubs, dead in the snow. The wooden disk Sazed had given him earlier that same day tied to a loop around his neck.

It hadn't helped.

Sazed turned back to Keep Hasting. "Lord Penrod," he said loudly. "We are going to try and slip out of the city. I would welcome your troops and your leadership. If you stay here, the koloss will attack this keep and kill you."

Silence.

Sazed turned, sighing as Ham—arm still in a sling—joined him. "We have to go, Saze," Ham said quietly.

"You're bloody, Terrisman."

Sazed turned. Ferson Penrod stood on the top of his wall, looking down. He still looked immaculate in his nobleman's suit. He even wore a hat against the snow and ash. Sazed looked down at himself. He still wore only his loincloth. He hadn't had time to worry about clothing, particularly with his brassmind to keep him warm.

"I've never seen a Terrisman fight," Penrod said.

"It is not a common occurrence, my lord," Sazed replied.

Penrod looked up, staring out over the city. "It's falling, Terrisman."

"That is why we must go, my lord," Sazed said.

Penrod shook his head. He still wore Elend's thin crown. "This is my city, Terrisman. I will not abandon it."

"A noble gesture, my lord," Sazed said. "But these with me are your people. Will you abandon them in their flight northward?"

Penrod paused. Then he just shook his head again. "There will be no flight northward, Terrisman. Keep Hasting is among the tallest structures in the city—from it, we can see what the koloss are doing. They will not let you escape."

"They may turn to pillaging," Sazed said. "Perhaps we can get by them and escape."

"No," Penrod said, his voice echoing hauntingly across the snowy streets. "My Tineye claims the creatures have already attacked the people you sent to escape through the northern gate. Now the koloss have turned this way. They're coming for us."

As cries began to echo through the distant streets, coming closer, Sazed knew that Penrod's words must be true. "Open your gates, Penrod!" Sazed yelled. "Let the refugees in!" *Save their lives for a few more pitiful moments*.

"There is no room," Penrod said. "And there is no time. We are doomed."

"You must let us in!" Sazed screamed.

"It is odd," Penrod said, voice growing softer. "By taking this throne from the Venture b1oy, I saved his life—and I ended my own. I could not save the city, Terrisman. My only consolation is that I doubt Elend could have done so either."

He turned to go, walking down somewhere beyond the wall.

"Penrod!" Sazed yelled.

He did not reappear. The sun was setting, the mists were appearing, and the koloss were coming.

Vin cut down another koloss, then jumped back, Pushing herself off of a fallen sword. She shot away from the pack, breathing heavily, bleeding from a couple of minor cuts. Her arm was growing numb; one of the creatures had punched her there. She could kill—kill better than anyone she knew. However, she couldn't fight forever.

She landed on a rooftop, then stumbled, falling to kneel in a pile of snow. The koloss called and howled behind her, and she knew they would come, chasing her, hounding her. She'd killed hundreds of them, but what was a few hundred when compared with an army of over twenty thousand?

*What did you expect?* she thought to herself. *Why keep fighting once you knew Sazed was free? Did you think to stop them all? Kill every koloss in the army?*

Once, she'd stopped Kelsier from rushing an army by himself. He had been a great man, but still just one person. He couldn't have stopped an entire army—no more than she could.

*I have to find the Well*, she thought with determination, burning bronze, the thumpings—which she'd been ignoring during the battle—becoming loud to her ears.

And yet, that left her with the same problem as before. She knew it was in the city now; she could feel the thumpings all around her. Yet, they were so powerful, so omnipresent, that she couldn't sense a direction from them.

Besides, what proof did she have that finding the Well would even help? If Sazed had lied about the location—had gone so far as to draw up a fake map—then what else had he lied about? The power might stop the mists, but what good would that do for Luthadel, burning and dying?

She knelt in frustration, pounding the top of the roof with her fists. She had proven too weak. What good was it to return—what good was it to decide to protect—if she couldn't do anything to help?

She knelt for a few moments, breathing in gasps. Finally, she forced herself to her feet and jumped into the air, throwing down a coin. Her metals were nearly gone. She barely had enough steel to carry her through a few jumps. She ended up slowing near Kredik Shaw, the Hill of a Thousand Spires. She caught one of the spikes at the top of the palace, spinning in the night, looking out over the darkening city.

It was burning.

Kredik Shaw itself was silent, quiet, left alone by looters of both races. Yet, all around her, Vin saw light in the darkness. The mists glowed with a haunting light.

*It's like. . .like that day two years ago*, she thought. *The night of the skaa rebellion*. Except, on that day, the firelight had come from the torches of the rebels as they marched on the palace. This night, a revolution of a different type was occurring. She could hear it. She had her tin burning, and she forced herself to flare it, opening her ears. She heard the screams. The death. The koloss hadn't finished their killing work by destroying the army. Not by far.

They had only just begun.

*The koloss are kil1ling them all*, she thought, shivering as the fires burned before her. *Elend's people, the ones he left behind because of me. They're dying*.

*I am his knife. Their knife. Kelsier trusted me with them. I should be able to do something. . ..*

She dropped toward the ground, skidding off an angled rooftop, landing in the palace courtyard. Mists gathered around her. The air was thick. And not just with ash and snow; she could smell death in its breezes, hear screams in its whispers.

Her pewter ran out.

She slumped to the ground, a wave of exhaustion hitting her so hard that everything else seemed inconsequential. She suddenly knew she shouldn't have relied on the pewter so much. Shouldn't have pushed herself so hard. But, it had seemed like the only way.

She felt herself begin to slip into unconsciousness.

But people were screaming. She could hear them—had heard them before. Elend's city. . .Elend's people. . .dying. Her friends were out there somewhere. Friends that Kelsier had trusted her to protect.

She gritted her teeth, shoving aside the exhaustion for a moment longer, struggling up to her feet. She looked through the mists, toward the phantom sounds of terrified people. She began to dash toward them.

She couldn't jump; she was out of steel. She couldn't even run very fast, but as she forced her body to move, it responded better and better, fighting off the dull numbness that she'd earned from relying on pewter so long.

She burst out of an alleyway, skidding in the snow, and found a small group of people running before a koloss raiding party. There were six of the beasts, small ones, but still dangerous. Even as Vin watched, one of the creatures cut down an elderly man, slicing him nearly in two. Another picked up a small girl, slamming her against the side of a building.

Vin dashed forward, past the fleeing skaa, whipping out her daggers. She still felt exhausted, but adrenaline helped her somewhat. She had to keep moving. Keep going. To stop was to die.

Several of the beasts turned toward her, eager to fight. One swung for her, and Vin let herself slide in the slush—slipping closer to him—before cutting the back of his leg. He howled in pain as her knife got caught in his baggy skin. She managed to yank it free as a second creature swung.

*I feel so slow!* she thought with frustration, barely sliding to her feet before backing away from the creature's reach. His sword sprayed chill water across her, and she jumped forward, planting a dagger in the creature's eye.

Suddenly thankful for the times Ham had made her practice without Allomancy, she caught the side of a building to steady herself in the slush. Then she threw herself forward, shouldering the koloss with the wounded eye—he was clawing at the dagger and yelling—into his companions. The koloss with the young girl turned, shocked, as Vin rammed her other dagger into his back. He didn't drop, but he did let go of the child.

*Lord Ruler, these things are tough!* she thought, cloak whipping as she grabbed the child and dashed away. *Especially when you're not tough yourself. I need some more metals*.

The girl in Vin's arms cringed as a koloss howl sounded, and Vin spun, flaring her tin to keep herself from falling unconscious from her fatigue. The creatures weren't following, however—they were arguing over a bit of clothing the dead m1an had been wearing. The howl sounded again, and this time, Vin realized, it had come from another direction.

People began to scream again. Vin looked up, only to find those she'd just rescued facing down an even larger group of koloss.

"No!" Vin said, raising a hand. But, they'd run far while she'd been fighting. She wouldn't even have been able to see them, save for her tin. As it was, she was able to see painfully well as the creatures began to lay into the small group with their thick-bladed swords.

"No!" Vin screamed again, the deaths startling her, shocking her, standing as a reminder of all the deaths she'd been unable to prevent.

"No. No! *No!*"

Pewter, gone. Steel, gone. Iron, gone. She had nothing.

Or. . .she had one thing. Not even pausing to think on what prompted her to use it, she threw a duralumin-enhanced Soothing at the beasts.

It was as if her mind slammed into Something. And then, that Something shattered. Vin skidded to a halt, shocked, child still in her arms as the koloss stopped, frozen in their horrific act of slaughter.

*What did I just do?* she thought, tracing through her muddled mind, trying to connect why she had reacted as she had. Was it because she had been frustrated?

No. She knew that the Lord Ruler had built the Inquisitors with a weakness: Remove a particular spike from their back, and they'd die. He had also built the kandra with a weakness. The koloss had to have a weakness, too.

*TenSoon called the koloss. . .his cousins,* she thought.

She stood upright, the dark street suddenly quiet save for the whimpering skaa. The koloss waited, and she could feel herself in their minds. As if they were an extension of her own body, the same thing she had felt when she'd taken control of TenSoon's body.

Cousins indeed. The Lord Ruler had built the koloss with a weakness—the same weakness as the kandra. He *had* given himself a way to keep them in check.

And suddenly she understood how he'd controlled them all those long years.

Sazed stood at the head of his large band of refugees, snow and ash—the two now indistinguishable in the misty darkness—falling around him. Ham sat to one side, looking drowsy. He'd lost too much blood; a man without pewter would have died by now. Someone had given Sazed a cloak, but he had used it to wrap the comatose Breeze. Even though be barely tapped his brassmind for warmth, Sazed himself wasn't cold.

Maybe he was just getting too numb to care.

He held two hands up before him, forming fists, ten rings sparkling against the light of the group's single lantern. Koloss approached from the dark alleyways, their forms huddled shadows in the night.

Sazed's soldiers backed away. There was little hope left in them. Sazed alone stood in the quiet snow, a spindly, bald scholar, nearly naked. He, the one who preached the end. He, who should have had the most faith of all.

Ten rings. A few minutes of power. A few minutes of life.

He waited as the koloss gathered. The beasts grew strangely silent in the night. They stopped approaching. They stood still, a line of dark, moundlike silhouettes in the night.

*Why don't they attack1!* Sazed thought, frustrated.

A child whimpered. Then, the koloss began to move again. Sazed tensed, but the creatures didn't walk forward. They split, and a quiet figure walked through the center of them.

"Lady Vin?" Sazed asked. He still hadn't had a chance to speak with her since she'd saved him at the gate. She looked exhausted.

"Sazed," she said tiredly. "You lied to me about the Well of Ascension."

"Yes, Lady Vin," he said.

"That isn't important now," she said. "Why are you standing naked *outside* of the keep's walls?"

"I. . ." He looked up at the koloss. "Lady Vin, I—"

"Penrod!" Vin shouted suddenly. "Is that you up there?"

The king appeared. He looked as confused as Sazed felt.

"Open your gates!" Vin yelled.

"Are you mad?" Penrod yelled back.

"I'm not sure," Vin said. She turned, and a group of koloss moved forward, walking quietly as if commanded. The largest one picked Vin up, holding her up high, until she was nearly level with the top of the keep's low wall. Several guards atop the wall shied away from her.

"I'm tired, Penrod," Vin said. Sazed had to tap his hearing tinmind to listen in on her words.

"We're all tired, child," Penrod said.

"I'm particularly tired," Vin said. "I'm tired of the games. I'm tired of people dying because of arguments between their leaders. I'm tired of good men being taken advantage of."

Penrod nodded quietly.

"I want you to gather our remaining soldiers," Vin said, turning to look over the city. "How many do you have in there?"

"About two hundred," he said.

Vin nodded. "The city is not lost—the koloss have fought against the soldiers, but haven't had much time to turn on the population yet. I want you to send out your soldiers to find any groups of koloss that are pillaging or killing. Protect the people, but don't attack the koloss if you can help it. Send a messenger for me instead."

Remembering Penrod's bullheadedness earlier, Sazed thought the man might object. He didn't. He just nodded.

"What do we do then?" Penrod asked.

"I'll take care of the koloss," Vin said. "We'll go reclaim Keep Venture first—I'm going to need more metals, and there are plenty stored there. Once the city is secure, I want you and your soldiers to put out those fires. It shouldn't be too hard; there aren't a lot of buildings left that can burn."

"Very well," Penrod said, turning to call out his orders.

Sazed watched in silence as the massive koloss lowered Vin to the ground. It stood quietly, as if it were a monster hewn of stone, and not a breathing, bleeding, living creature.

"Sazed," Vin said softly. He could sense the fatigue in her voice.

"Lady Vin," Sazed said. To the side, Ham finally shook himself out of his stupor, looking up in shock as he noticed Vin and the koloss.

Vin continued to look at Sazed, studying him. Sazed had trouble meeting her eyes. But, she was right. They could ta1lk about his betrayal later. There were other, more important tasks that had to be accomplished. "I realize you probably have work for me to do," Sazed said, breaking the silence. "But, might I instead be excused? There is. . .a task I wish to perform."

"Of course, Sazed," Vin said. "But first, tell me. Do you know if any of the others survived?"

"Clubs and Dockson are dead, my lady," Sazed said. "I have not seen their bodies, but the reports were from reliable sources. You can see that Lord Hammond is here, with us, though he has suffered a very bad wound."

"Breeze?" she asked.

Sazed nodded to the lump that lay huddled beside the wall. "He lives, thankfully. His mind, however, appears to be reacting poorly to the horrors he saw. It could simply be a form of shock. Or. . .it could be something more lasting."

Vin nodded, turning to Ham. "Ham. I need pewter."

He nodded dully, pulling out a vial with his good hand. He tossed it to her. Vin downed it, and immediately her fatigue seemed to lessen. She stood up straighter, her eyes becoming more alert.

*That can't be healthy*, Sazed thought with worry. *How much of that has she been burning?*

Step more energetic, she turned to walk toward her koloss.

"Lady Vin?" Sazed asked, causing her to turn around. "There is still an army out there."

"Oh, I know," Vin said, turning to take one of the large, wedge like koloss swords from its owner. It was actually a few inches taller than she was.

"I am well aware of Straff's intentions," she said, hefting the sword up onto her shoulder. Then she turned in to the snow and mist, walking toward Keep Venture, her strange koloss guards tromping after her.

It took Sazed well into the night to complete his self-appointed task. He found corpse after corpse in the frigid night, many of them iced over. The snow had stopped falling, and the wind had picked up, hardening the slush to slick ice. He had to break some of the corpses free to turn them over and inspect their faces.

Without his brassmind to provide heat, he could never have performed his grisly job. Even so, he had found himself some warmer clothing—a simple brown robe and a set of boots. He continued working through the night, the wind swirling flakes of snow and ice around him. He started at the gate, of course. That was where the most corpses were. However, he eventually had to move into alleyways and thoroughfares.

He found her body sometime near morning.

The city had stopped burning. The only light he had was his lantern, but it was enough to reveal the strip of fluttering cloth in a snowbank. At first, Sazed thought it was just another bloodied bandage that had failed in its purpose. Then he saw a glimmer of orange and yellow, and he moved over—he no longer had the strength to rush—and reached into the snow.

Tindwyl's body cracked slightly as he rolled it out. The blood on her side was frozen, of course, and her eyes were iced open. Judging from the direction of her flight, she had been leading her soldiers to Keep Venture.

*Oh, Tindwyl,* he thought, reaching down to touch her face. It was still soft, but dreadfully cold. After years of being abused by the Breeders, after surviving so much, she had found this. Death in a city where she hadn't belonged, with a man—no, a *ha1lf* man—who did not deserve her.

He released his brassmind, and let the night's cold wash over him. He didn't want to feel warm at the moment. His lantern flickered uncertainly, illuminating the street, shadowing the icy corpse. There, in that frozen alley of Luthadel, looking down at the corpse of the woman he loved, Sazed realized something.

He didn't know what to do.

He tried to think of something proper to say—something proper to think—but suddenly, all of his religious knowledge seemed hollow. What was the use in giving her a burial? What was the value in speaking the prayers of a long-dead god? What good was he? The religion of Dadradah hadn't helped Clubs; the Survivor hadn't come to rescue the thousands of soldiers who had died. What was the point?

None of Sazed's knowledge gave him comfort. He accepted the religions he knew—believed in their value—but that didn't give him what he needed. They didn't assure him that Tindwyl's spirit still lived. Instead, they made him question. If so many people believed so many different things, how could any one of them—or, even, anything at all—actually be true?

The skaa called Sazed holy, but at that moment he realized that he was the most profane of men. He was a creature who knew three hundred religions, yet had faith in none of them.

So, when his tears fell—and nearly began to freeze to his face—they gave him as little comfort as his religions. He moaned, leaning over the frozen corpse.

*My life,* he thought, *has been a sham*.

*Rashek is to try and lead Alendi in the wrong direction, to discourage him, or otherwise foil his quest. Alendi doesn't know that he has been deceived, that we've all been deceived, and he will not listen to me now*.

# 55

STRAFF WOKE IN THE COLD morning and immediately reached for a leaf of Black Frayn. He was beginning to see the benefits of his addiction. It woke him quickly and easily, making his body feel warm despite the early hour. When he might have once taken an hour to get ready, he was up in minutes, dressed, prepared for the day.

And glorious that day would be.

Janarle met him outside his tent, and the two walked through the bustling camp. Straff's boots cracked on half ice, half snow as he made his way to his horse.

"The fires are out, my lord," Janarle explained. "Probably due to the snows. The koloss probably finished their rampaging and took shelter from the cold. Our scouts are afraid to get too close, but they say the city is like a graveyard. Quiet and empty, save for the bodies."

"Maybe they actually killed each other off," Straff said cheerfully, climbing into his saddle, breath puffing in the crisp morning air. Around him, the army was forming up. Fifty thousand soldiers, eager at the prospect of taking the city. Not only was there plundering to be done, but moving into Luthadel would mean roofs and walls for all of them.

"Perhaps," Janarle said, mounting.

*Wouldn't that be convenient,* Straff thought with a smile. *All of my enemies dead, the city and its riches mine, and no skaa to worry about*.

"My lord!" someone cried.

Straff looked up. The field between his camp and Luthade1l was colored gray and white, the snow stained by ash. And gathering on the other side of that field were koloss.

"Looks like they are alive after all, my lord," Janarle said.

"Indeed," Straff said, frowning. There were still a lot of the creatures. They piled out of the western gate, not attacking immediately, instead gathering in a large body.

"Scout counts say there are fewer of them than there were," Janarle said after a short time. "Perhaps two-thirds their original number, maybe a bit fewer. But, they *are* koloss. . .."

"But they're abandoning their fortifications," Straff said, smiling, Black Frayn warming his blood, making him feel like he was burning metals. "And they're coming to us. Let them charge. This should be over quickly."

"Yes, my lord," Janarle said, sounding a little less certain. He frowned, then, pointing toward the southern section of the city. "My. . .lord?"

"What now?"

"Soldiers, my lord," Janarle said. "Human ones. Looks to be several thousand of them."

Straff frowned. "They should all be dead!"

The koloss charged. Straff's horse shuffled slightly as the blue monsters ran across the gray field, the human troops falling into more organized ranks behind.

"Archers!" Janarle shouted. "Prepare first volley!"

*Perhaps I shouldn't be at the front*, Straff thought suddenly. He turned his horse, then noticed something. An arrow suddenly shot from the midst of the charging koloss.

But, koloss didn't use bows. Besides, the monsters were still far away, and that object was far too big to be an arrow anyway. A rock, perhaps? It seemed larger than. . .

It began to fall down toward Straff's army. Straff stared into the sky, riveted by the strange object. It grew more distinct as it fell. It wasn't an arrow, nor was it a rock.

It was a person—a person with a flapping mistcloak.

"No!" Straff yelled. *She's supposed to be gone!*

Vin screamed down from her duralumin-fueled Steeljump, massive koloss sword light in her hands. She hit Straff directly in the head with the sword, then continued on downward, slamming into the ground, throwing up snow and frozen dirt with the power of her impact.

The horse fell into two pieces, front and back. What remained of the former king slid to the ground with the equine corpse. She looked at the remnants, smiled grimly, and bid Straff farewell.

Elend had, after all, warned him what would happen if he attacked the city.

Straff's generals and attendants stood around her in a stunned circle. Behind her, the koloss army barreled forward, confusion in Straff's ranks making the archer volleys ragged and less effective.

Vin kept a tight hold on her sword, then Pushed outward with a duralumin-enhanced Steelpush. Riders were thrown, their beasts tripped by their shoes, and soldiers sprayed backward from her in a circle of several dozen yards. Men screamed.

She downed another vial, restoring both steel and pewter. Then she jumped up, seeking out generals and other officers to attack. As she moved, her koloss troops hit the front ranks of Straff's army, and the real carnage began.

"What are they doing?" Cett asked, hurriedly throwing on his cloak as he was placed and tied into his saddle.

"Attacking, apparently," said Bahmen, one of his aides. "Look! They're working *with* the koloss."

Cett frowned, doing up his cloak clasp. "A treaty?"

"With koloss?" Bahmen asked.

Cett shrugged. "Who's going to win?"

"No way to tell, my lord," the man said. "Koloss are—"

"What is this!" Allrianne demanded, riding up the snowy incline, accompanied by a couple of abashed guards. Cett had, of course, ordered them to keep her in the camp—but he had also, of course, expected that she'd get past them eventually.

*At least I can count on her to be slowed down by getting ready in the morning,* he thought with amusement. She wore one of her dresses, immaculately arranged, her hair done. If a building were burning down, Allrianne would still pause to do her makeup before escaping.

"Looks like the battle has begun," Cett said, nodding toward the fighting.

"*Outside* the city?" Allrianne asked, riding up next to him. Then she brightened. "They're attacking Straff's position!"

"Yes," Cett said. "And that leaves the city—"

"We have to help them, Father!"

Cett rolled his eyes. "You know we're going to do nothing of the sort. We'll see who wins. If they're weak enough—which I hope they will be—we'll attack them. I didn't bring all of my forces back with me, but maybe. . ."

He trailed off as he noticed the look in Allrianne's eyes. He opened his mouth to speak, but before he could do so, she kicked her horse into motion.

Her guards cursed, dashing forward—too late—to try and grab her reins. Cett sat, stunned. This was a little insane, even for her. She wouldn't dare. . .

She galloped down the hill toward the battle. Then she paused, as he had expected. She turned, looking back at him.

"If you want to protect me, Father," she yelled, "you'd better charge!"

With that, she turned and started galloping again, her horse throwing up puffs of snow.

Cett didn't move.

"My lord," Bahmen said. "Those forces look almost evenly matched. Fifty thousand men against a force of some twelve thousand koloss and about five thousand men. If we were to add our strength to either side. . ."

*Damn fool girl!* he thought, watching Allrianne gallop away.

"My lord?" Bahmen asked.

*Why did I come to Luthadel in the first place? Was it because I really thought I could take the city? Without Allomancers, with my homeland in revolt? Or, was it because I was looking for something? A confirmation of the stories. A power like I saw on that night, when the Heir almost killed me*.

*How exactly did they get the koloss to fight with them, anyway?*

"Gather our forces!" Cett commanded. "We're marching to the defense of Luthadel. And somebody send riders after that fool daughter of mine!"

Sazed rode quietly, his horse moving slowly in the sn1ow. Ahead of him, the battle raged, but he was far enough behind it to be out of danger. He'd left the city behind, where Luthadel's surviving women and elderly watched from the walls. Vin had saved them from the koloss. The real miracle would be to see if she could save them from the other two armies.

Sazed didn't ride into the fight. His metalminds were mostly empty, and his body was nearly as tired as his mind. He simply brought his horse to a halt, its breath puffing in the cold as he sat alone on the snowy plain.

He didn't know how to deal with Tindwyl's death. He felt. . .hollow. He wished that he could just stop feeling. He wished that he could go back and defend her gate, instead of his own. Why hadn't he gone in search of her when he'd heard of the northern gate's fall? She'd still been alive then. He might have been able to protect her. . .

Why did he even care anymore? Why bother?

*But, the ones who had faith were right*, he thought. *Vin came back to defend the city. I lost hope, but they never did*.

He started his horse forward again. The sounds of battle came in the distance. He tried to focus on anything but Tindwyl, but his thoughts kept returning to things he had studied with her. The facts and stories became more precious, for they were a link to her. A painful link, but one he couldn't bear to discard.

*The Hero of Ages was not simply to be a warrior*, he thought, still riding slowly toward the battlefield. *He was a person who united others, who brought them together. A leader*.

He knew that Vin thought she was the Hero. But Tindwyl was right: it was too much of a coincidence. And, he wasn't even certain what he believed anymore. If anything.

*The Hero of Ages was removed from the Terris people*, he thought, watching the koloss attack. *He was not royalty himself, but came to it eventually*.

Sazed pulled his horse up, pausing in the center of the open, empty field. Arrows stuck from the snow around him, and the ground was thoroughly trampled. In the distance, he heard a drum. He turned, watching as an army of men marched over a rise to the west. They flew Cett's banner.

*He commanded the forces of the world. Kings rode to his aid*.

Cett's forces joined the battle against Straff. There was a crash of metal against metal, bodies grunting, as a new front came under attack. Sazed sat on the field between the city and the armies. Vin's forces were still outnumbered, but as Sazed watched, Straff's army began to pull back. It broke into pieces, its members fighting without direction. Their movements bespoke terror.

*She's killing their generals*, he thought.

Cett was a clever man. He himself rode to battle, but he stayed near the back of his ranks—his infirmities requiring him to remain tied into his saddle and making it difficult for him to fight. Still, by joining the battle, he ensured that Vin would not turn her koloss on him.

For there was really no doubt in Sazed's mind who would win this conflict. Indeed, before even an hour had passed, Straff's troops began to surrender in large groups. The sounds of battle died down, and Sazed kicked his horse forward.

*Holy First Witness*, he thought. *I don't know that I believe that. But, either way, I should be there for what happens next*.

The koloss stopped fighting, stan1ding silently. They parted for Sazed as he rode up through their ranks. Eventually, he found Vin standing, bloodied, her massive koloss sword held on one shoulder. Some koloss pulled a man forward—a lord in rich clothing and a silvery breastplate. They dropped him before Vin.

From behind, Penrod approached with an honor guard, led by a koloss. Nobody spoke. Eventually, the koloss parted again, and this time a suspicious Cett rode forward, surrounded by a large group of soldiers and led by a single koloss.

Cett eyed Vin, then scratched his chin. "Not much of a battle," he said.

"Straff's soldiers were afraid," Vin said. "They're cold, and they have no desire to fight koloss."

"And their leaders?" Cett asked.

"I killed them," Vin said. "Except this one. Your name?"

"Lord Janarle," said Straff's man. His leg appeared broken, and koloss held him by either arm, supporting him.

"Straff is dead," Vin said. "You control this army now."

The nobleman bowed his head. "No, I don't. You do."

Vin nodded. "On your knees," she said.

The koloss dropped Janarle. He grunted in pain, but then bowed forward. "I swear my army to you," he whispered.

"No," Vin said sharply. "Not to me—to the rightful heir of House Venture. He is your lord now."

Janarle paused. "Very well," he said. "Whatever you wish. I swear loyalty to Straff's son, Elend Venture."

The separate groups stood in the cold. Sazed turned as Vin did, looking at Penrod. Vin pointed at the ground. Penrod quietly dismounted, then bowed himself to the ground.

"I swear as well," he said. "I give my loyalty to Elend Venture."

Vin turned to Lord Cett.

"You expect this of me?" the bearded man said, amused.

"Yes," Vin said quietly.

"And if I refuse?" Cett asked.

"Then I'll kill you," Vin said quietly. "You brought armies to attack my city. You threatened my people. I won't slaughter your soldiers, make them pay for what you did, but I *will* kill you, Cett."

Silence. Sazed turned, looking back at the lines of immobile koloss, standing in the bloodied snow.

"That is a threat, you know," Cett said. "Your own Elend would never stand for such a thing."

"He's not here," Vin said.

"And what do you think he'd say?" Cett asked. "He'd tell me not to give in to such a demand—the honorable Elend Venture would never give in simply because someone threatened his life."

"You're not the man that Elend is," Vin said. "And you know it."

Cett paused, then smiled. "No. No, I'm not." He turned to his aides. "Help me down."

Vin watched quietly as the guards undid Cett's legs, then lifted him down to the snowy ground. He bowed. "Very well, then. I swear myself to Elend Venture. He's welcome to my kingdom. . .assuming he can take it back from that damn obligator who now controls it."

Vin nodded, turning to Sazed. "I need your help, Sazed."

"Whatever you command, Mistress," Sazed said quietly.

Vin paused. "Please don't call me that."

"As you wish," Sazed said.

"You're the only one here I trust, Sazed," Vin said, ignoring the three kneeling men. "With Ham wounded and Breeze. . ."

"I will do my best," Sazed said, bowing his head. "What is it you want me to do?"

"Secure Luthadel," Vin said. "Make certain the people are sheltered, and send for supplies from Straff's storehouses. Get these armies so that they won't kill each other, the send a squad to fetch Elend. He'll be coming south on the canal highway."

Sazed nodded, and Vin turned to the three kneeling kings. "Sazed is my second. You will obey him as you would Elend or myself."

They each nodded in turn.

"But, where will you be?" Penrod asked, looking up.

Vin sighed, suddenly looking terribly weak. "Sleeping," she said, and dropped her sword. Then she Pushed against it, shooting backward into the sky, toward Luthadel.

*He left ruin in his wake, but it was forgotten*, Sazed thought, turning to watch her fly. *He created kingdoms, and then destroyed them as he made the world anew*.

*We had the wrong gender all along*.

## PART SIX

# WORDS IN STEEL

*If Rashek fails to lead Alendi astray, then I have instructed the lad to kill Alendi*.

## 56

*HOW CAN VIN STAND THIS?* Elend wondered. He could barely see twenty feet in the mists. Trees appeared as apparitions around him as he walked, their branches curling around the road. The mist almost seemed to live: it moved, swirled, and blew in the cold night air. It snatched up his puffs of breath, as if drawing a piece of him into it.

He shivered and kept walking. The snow had melted patchily over the last few days, leaving heaps in shadowed areas. The canal road, thankfully, was mostly clear.

He walked with a pack over his shoulder, carrying only the necessities. At Spook's suggestion, they'd traded their horses at a village several days back. They'd rode the creatures hard the last few days, and it was Spook's estimation that trying to keep them fed—and alive—for the last leg of their trip to Luthadel wouldn't be worth the effort.

Besides, whatever was going to happen at the city had likely already occurred. So Elend walked, alone, in the darkness. Despite the eeriness, he kept his word and traveled only at night. Not only was it Vin's will, but Spook claimed that night was safer. Few travelers braved the mists. Therefore, most bandits didn't bother watching roadways at night.

Spook prowled ahead, his keen senses allowing him to detect danger before Elend blundered into it. *How does that work, anyway?* Elend wondered as he walked. *Tin is supposed to make you see better. But what does it matter how far you can see, if the mists just obscure everything?*

Writers claimed that Allomancy coul1d help a person pierce the mists, somehow. Elend had always wondered what that was like. Of course, he had also wondered what it felt like to feel the strength of pewter, or to fight with atium. Allomancers were uncommon, even among Great Houses. Yet, because of the way Straff had treated him, Elend had always felt guilty that he hadn't been one.

*But, I ended up as king eventually, even without Allomancy,* he thought, smiling to himself. He'd lost the throne, true. But, while they could take his crown, they could not take away his accomplishments. He'd proved that an Assembly could work. He'd protected the skaa, given them rights, and a taste of freedom they'd never forget. He'd done more than anyone would have expected of him.

Something rustled in the mists.

Elend froze, staring out into the darkness. *Sounds like leaves,* he thought nervously. *Something moving across them? Or. . .just the wind blowing them?*

He decided at that moment that there was nothing more unnerving than staring into the misty darkness, seeing ever-shifting silhouettes. A part of him would rather face down a koloss army than stand alone, at night, in an unknown forest.

"Elend," someone whispered.

Elend spun. He put a hand to his chest as he saw Spook approaching. He thought about chastising the boy for sneaking up on him—but, well, there wasn't really any other way to approach in the mists.

"Did you see something?" Spook asked quietly.

Elend shook his head. "But I think I heard something."

Spook nodded, then darted off into the mists again. Elend stood, uncertain whether he should continue on, or just wait. He didn't have to debate for very long. Spook returned a few moments later.

"Nothing to worry about," Spook said. "Just a mistwraith."

"*What?*" Elend asked.

"Mistwraith," Spook said. "You know. Big goopy things? Related to kandra? Don't tell me you haven't read about them?"

"I have," Elend said, nervously scanning the darkness. "But, I never thought I'd be out in the mists with one."

Spook shrugged. "It's probably just following our scent, hoping that we'll leave some trash for it to eat. The things are harmless, mostly."

"Mostly?" Elend asked.

"You probably know more about them than I do. Look, I didn't come back here to chat about scavengers. There's light up ahead."

"A village?" Elend asked, thinking back to when they'd come this way before.

Spook shook his head. "Looks like watchfires."

"An army?"

"Maybe. I'm just thinking you should wait behind for a bit. It could be awkward if you wander into a scout post."

"Agreed," Elend said.

Spook nodded, then took off into the mists.

And Elend was alone in the darkness again. He shivered, pulling his cloak close, and eyed the mists in the direction from which he'd heard the mistwraith. Yes, he'd read about them. He knew they were supposed to be harmless. But the thought of something crawling out there—its skeleton made from random sets of bones—watching him. . .

*1Don't focus on that,* Elend told himself.

He turned his attention, instead, to the mists. Vin was right about one thing, at least. They were lingering longer and longer despite the sunrise. Some mornings, they remained a full hour after the sun came up. He could easily imagine the disaster that would befall the land should the mists persist all day. Crops would fail, animals would starve, and civilization would collapse.

Could the Deepness really be something so simple? Elend's own impressions of the Deepness were seated in scholarly tradition. Some writers dismissed the entire thing as a legend—a rumor used by the obligators to enhance their god's aura of divinity. The majority accepted the historical definition of the Deepness—a dark monster that had been slain by the Lord Ruler.

And yet, thinking of it as the mist made some sense. How could a single beast, no matter how dangerous, threaten an entire land? The mists, though. . .they could be destructive. Kill plants. Perhaps even. . .kill people, as Sazed had suggested?

He eyed it shifting around him, playful, deceptive. Yes, he could see it as the Deepness. Its reputation—more frightening than a monster, more dangerous than an army—was one it would deserve. In fact, watching it as he was, he could see it trying to play tricks on his mind. For instance, the mist bank directly in front of him seemed to be forming shapes. Elend smiled as his mind picked out images in the mists. One almost looked like a person standing there, in front of him.

The person stepped forward.

Elend jumped, taking a slight step backward, his foot crunching on a bit of ice-crusted snow. *Don't be silly*, he told himself. *Your mind is playing tricks on you. There's nothing—*

The shape in the mists took another step forward. It was indistinct, almost formless, and yet it seemed real. Random movements in the mists outlined its face, its body, its legs.

"Lord Ruler!" Elend yelped, jumping back. The thing continued to regard him.

*I'm going mad*, he thought, hands beginning to shake. The mist figure stopped a few feet in front of him and then raised its right arm and pointed.

North. Away from Luthadel.

Elend frowned, glancing in the direction the figure pointed. There was nothing but more empty mists. He turned back toward it, but it stood quietly, arm upraised.

*Vin spoke of this thing,* he remembered, forcing down his fear. *She tried to tell me about it. And I thought she was making things up!* She was right—just as she'd been right about the mists staying longer in the day, and the possibility of the mists being the Deepness. He was beginning to wonder which of them was the scholar.

The mist figure continued to point.

"What?" Elend asked, his own voice sounding haunting in the silent air.

It stepped forward, arm still raised. Elend put a useless hand to his sword, but held his ground.

"Tell me what you wish of me!" he said forcefully.

The thing pointed again. Elend cocked his head. It certainly didn't seem threatening. In fact, he felt an unnatural feeling of peace coming from it.

*Allomancy?* he thought. *It's Pulling on my emotions!*

"Elend?" Spook's voice drifted out o1f the mists.

The figure suddenly dissolved, its form melting into the mists. Spook approached, his face dark and shadowed in the night. "Elend? What were you saying?"

Elend took his hand off his sword, standing upright. He eyed the mists, still not completely convinced that he wasn't seeing things. "Nothing," he said.

Spook glanced back the way he had come. "You should come look at this."

"The army?" Elend asked, frowning.

Spook shook his head. "No. The refugees."

"The Keepers are dead, my lord," the old man said, sitting across from Elend. He didn't have a tent, only a blanket stretched between several poles. "Either dead, or captured."

Another man brought Elend a cup of warm tea, his demeanor servile. Both wore the robes of stewards, and while their eyes bespoke exhaustion, their robes and hands were clean.

*Old habits*, Elend thought, nodding thankfully and taking a sip of the tea. *Terris's people might have declared themselves independent, but a thousand years of servitude cannot be so easily thrown off.*

The camp was an odd place. Spook said he counted nearly a thousand people in it—a nightmare of a number to care for, feed, and organize in the cold winter. Many were elderly, and the men were mostly stewards: eunuchs bred for genteel service, with no experience in hunting.

"Tell me what happened," Elend said.

The elderly steward nodded, his head shaking. He didn't seem particularly frail—actually, he had that same air of controlled dignity that most stewards exhibited—but his body had a slow, chronic tremble.

"The Synod came out into the open, my lord, once the empire fell." He accepted a cup of his own, but Elend noticed that it was only half full—a precaution that proved wise as the elderly steward's shaking nearly spilled its contents. "They became our rulers. Perhaps it was not wise to reveal themselves so soon."

Not all Terrismen were Feruchemists; in fact, very few were. The Keepers—people like Sazed and Tindwyl—had been forced into hiding long ago by the Lord Ruler. His paranoia that Feruchemical and Allomantic lines might mix—thereby potentially producing a person with his same powers—had led him to try and destroy all Feruchemists.

"I've known Keepers, friend," Elend said softly. "I find it hard to believe that they could have been easily defeated. Who did this?"

"Steel Inquisitors, my lord," the old man said.

Elend shivered. *So that's where they've been*.

"There were dozens of them, my lord," the old man said. "They attacked Ththingdwen with an army of koloss brutes. But, that was just a distraction, I think. Their real goal as the Synod and the Keepers themselves. While our army, such as it was, fought the beasts, the Inquisitors themselves struck at the Keepers."

*Lord Ruler. . .*Elend thought, stomach twisting. *So, what do we do with the book Sazed told us to deliver to the Synod? Do we pass it on to these men, or keep it?*

"They took the bodies with them, my lord," the old man said. "Terris is in ruins, and that is why we are going south. You said you know King Venture?"

"I. . .have met him," Elend said. "He ruled Luthadel, where I a1m from."

"Will he take us in, do you think?" the old man asked. "We have little hope anymore. Tathingdwen was the Terris capital, but even it wasn't large. We are few, these days—the Lord Ruler saw to that."

"I. . .do not know if Luthadel can help you, friend."

"We can serve well," the old man promised. "We were prideful to declare ourselves free, I think. We struggled to survive even before the Inquisitors attacked. Perhaps they did us a favor by casting us out."

Elend shook his head. "Koloss attacked Luthadel just over a week ago," he said quietly. "I am a refugee myself, Master Steward. For all I know, the city itself has fallen."

The old man fell silent. "Ah, I see," he finally said.

"I'm sorry," Elend said. "I was traveling back to see what happened. Tell me—I traveled this way not long ago. How is it that I missed you in my journey north?"

"We didn't come by the canal route, my lord," the old man said. "We cut across country, straight down, so that we could gather supplies at Suringshath. You. . .have no further word of events at Luthadel, then? There was a senior Keeper in residence there. We were hoping, perhaps, to seek her counsel."

"Lady Tindwyl?" Elend asked.

The old man perked up. "Yes. You know her?"

"She was an attendant at the king's court," Elend said.

"Keeper Tindwyl could be considered our leader now, I think," the old man said. "We aren't certain how many traveling Keepers there are, but she is the only known member of the Synod who was out of the city when we were attacked."

"She was still in Luthadel when I left," Elend said.

"Then she might live still," the old man said. "We can hope, I think. I thank you, traveler, for your information. Please, make yourself comfortable in our camp."

Elend nodded, rising. Spook stood a short distance away, in the mists near a pair of trees. Elend joined him.

The people kept large fires burning in the night, as if to defy the mists. The light did some good in dispelling the mists' power—and yet the light seemed to accentuate them as well, creating three-dimensional shadows that bewildered the eye. Spook leaned against the scraggly tree trunk, looking around at things Elend couldn't see. Elend could hear, however, some of what Spook must be inspecting. Crying children. Coughing men. Shuffling livestock.

"It doesn't look good, does it?" Elend said quietly.

Spook shook his head. "I wish they'd take down all these fires," he muttered. "The light hurts my eyes."

Elend glanced to the side. "They aren't that bright."

Spook shrugged. "They're just wasting wood."

"Forgive them their comfort, for now. They'll have little enough of it in the weeks to come." Elend paused, looking over at a passing squad of Terris "soldiers"—a group of men who were obviously stewards. Their posture was excellent, and they walked with a smooth grace, but Elend doubted they knew how to use any weapons beyond a cooking knife.

*No, there is no army in Terris to help my people*.

"You sent Vin back to gather our allies," Spook said quietly. "To bring them up to meet with us1, perhaps to seek refuge in Terris."

"I know," Elend said.

"We can't gather in Terris, though," Spook said. "Not with the Inquisitors up there."

"I know," Elend said again.

Spook was silent for a moment. "The whole world is falling apart, El," he finally said. "Terris, Luthadel. . ."

"Luthadel has *not* been destroyed," Elend said, looking sharply at Spook.

"The koloss—"

"Vin will have found a way to stop them," Elend said. "For all we know, she already found the power at the Well of Ascension. We need to keep going. We can, and will, rebuild whatever was lost. Then we'll worry about helping Terris."

Spook paused, then nodded and smiled. Elend was surprised to see how much his confident words seemed to soothe the boy's concerns. Spook leaned back, eyeing Elend's still steaming cup of tea, and Elend handed it over with a mumble that he didn't like heartroot tea. Spook drank happily.

Elend, however, found matters more troubling than he'd admitted. *The Deepness returning, ghosts in the mist, and Inquisitors making a play for the Terris Dominance. What else have I been ignoring?*

*It is a distant hope. Alendi has survived assassins, wars, and catastrophes. And yet, I hope that in the frozen mountains of Terris, he may finally be exposed. I hope for a miracle*.

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"LOOK, WE ALL KNOW WHAT we need to do," Cett said, pounding the table. "We've got our armies here, ready and willing to fight. Now, let's go get my damn country back!"

"The empress gave us no command to do such a thing," Janarle said, sipping his tea, completely unfazed by Cett's lack of decorum. "I, personally, think that we should wait at least until the emperor returns."

Penrod, the oldest of the men in the room, had enough tact to look sympathetic. "I understand that you are concerned for your people, Lord Cett. But we haven't even had a week to rebuild Luthadel. It is far too early to be worrying about expanding our influence. We cannot possibly authorize these preparations."

"Oh, leave off, Penrod," Cett snapped. "You're not in charge of us."

All three men turned to Sazed. He felt very awkward, sitting at the head of the table in Keep Venture's conference chamber. Aides and attendants, including some of Dockson's bureaucrats, stood at the perimeter of the sparse room, but only the three rulers—now kings beneath Elend's imperial rule—sat with Sazed at the table.

"I think that we should not be hasty, Lord Cett," Sazed said.

"This isn't haste," Cett said, pounding the table again. "I just want to order scout and spy reports, so that we can have information we need when we invade!"

"If we *do* invade," Janarle said. "If the emperor decides to recover Fadrex City, it won't happen until this summer, at the very earliest. We have far more pressing concerns. My armies have been away from the Northern Dominance for too long. It is basic political theory that we should stabilize what we have *before* we move into new territory."

"Bah!" Cett said, waving an indifferent hand.

"You may send your s1couts, Lord Cett," Sazed said. "But they are to seek information only. They are to engage in no raids, no matter how tempting the opportunity."

Cett shook a bearded head. "*This* is why I never bothered to play political games with the rest of the Final Empire. Nothing gets done because everyone is too busy scheming!"

"There is much to be said for subtlety, Lord Cett," Penrod said. "Patience brings the greater prize."

"Greater prize?" Cett asked. "What did the Central Dominance earn itself by waiting? You waited right up until the moment that your city fell! If you hadn't been the ones with the best Mistborn. . ."

"Best Mistborn, my lord?" Sazed asked quietly. "Did you not see her take command of the koloss? Did you not see her leap across the sky like an arrow in flight? Lady Vin isn't simply the 'best Mistborn.'"

The group fell silent. *I have to keep them focused on her,* Sazed thought. *Without Vin's leadership—without the threat of her power—this coalition would dissolve in three heartbeats*.

He felt so inadequate. He couldn't keep the men on-topic, and he couldn't do much to help them with their various problems. He could just keep reminding them of Vin's power.

The trouble was, he didn't really want to. He was feeling something very odd in himself, feelings he usually didn't have. Disconcern. Apathy. Why did anything that these men talked about matter? Why did anything matter, now that Tindwyl was dead?

He gritted his teeth, trying to force himself to focus.

"Very well," Cett said, waving a hand. "I'll send the scouts. Has that food arrived from Urteau yet, Janarle?"

The younger nobleman grew uncomfortable. "We. . .may have trouble with that, my lord. It seems that an unwholesome element has been rabble-rousing in the city."

"No wonder you want to send troops back to the Northern Dominance!" Cett accused. "You're planning to conquer your kingdom back and leave mine to rot!"

"Urteau is *much* closer than your capital, Cett," Janarle said, turning back to his tea. "It only makes sense to set me up there before we turn our attention westward."

"We will let the empress make that decision," Penrod said. He liked to act the mediator—and by doing so, he made himself seem above the issues. In essence, he put himself in control by putting himself in between the other two.

*Not all that different from what Elend tried to do,* Sazed thought, *with our armies*. The boy had more of a sense of political strategy than Tindwyl had ever credited him with.

*I shouldn't think about her*, he told himself, closing his eyes. Yet, it was hard not to. Everything Sazed did, everything he thought, seemed wrong because she was gone. Lights seemed dimmer. Motivations were more difficult to reach. He found that he had trouble even *wanting* to pay attention to the kings, let alone give them direction.

It was foolish, he knew. How long had Tindwyl been back in his life? Only a few months. Long ago, he had resigned himself to the fact that he would never be loved—in general—and that he certainly would never have *her* love. Not only did he lack manhood, but he was a rebel and a dissident—a man well outside of the Terris orthodoxy.

Surely her love for him had been a miracle. Yet, whom did he thank for that1 blessing, and whom did he thank for that blessing, and whom did he curse for stealing her away? He knew of hundreds of gods. He would hate them all, if he thought it would do any good.

For the sake of his own sanity, he forced himself to get distracted by the kings again.

"Listen," Penrod was saying, leaning forward, arms on the tabletop. "I think we're looking at this the wrong way, gentlemen. We shouldn't be squabbling, we should be happy. We are in a very unique position. In the time since the Lord Ruler's empire fell, dozens—perhaps hundreds—of men have tried to set themselves up as kings in various ways. The one thing they shared, however, was that they all lacked stability.

"Well, it appears that *we* are going to be forced to work together. I am starting to see this in a favorable light. I will give my allegiance to the Venture couple—I'll even live with Elend Venture's eccentric views of government—if it means that I'll still be in power ten years from now."

Cett scratched at his beard for a moment, then nodded. "You make a good point, Penrod. Maybe the first good one I've ever heard out of you."

"But we can't continue trying to assume that we know what we are to do," Janarle said. "We need direction. Surviving the next ten years, I suspect, is going to depend heavily on my not ending up dead on the end of that Mistborn girl's knife."

"Indeed," Penrod said, nodding curtly. "Master Terrisman. When can we expect the empress to take command again?"

Once again, all three pairs of eyes turned to Sazed.

*I don't really care*, Sazed thought, then immediately felt guilty. Vin was his friend. He did care. Even if it was hard to care about anything for him. He looked down in shame. "Lady Vin is suffering greatly from the effects of an extended pewter drag," he said. "She pushed herself very hard this last year, and then ended it by running all the way back to Luthadel. She is in great need of rest. I think we should let her be for a time longer."

The others nodded, and returned to their discussion. Sazed's mind, however, turned to Vin. He'd understated her malady, and he was beginning to worry. A pewter drag drained the body, and he suspected that she'd been forcing herself to stay awake with the metal for months now.

When a Keeper stored up wakefulness, he slept as if in a coma for a time. He could only hope that the effects of such a terrible pewter drag were the same, for Vin hadn't awoken a single time since her return a week before. Perhaps she'd awake soon, like a Keeper who came out of sleep.

Perhaps it would last longer. Her koloss army waited outside the city, controlled—apparently—even though she was unconscious. But for how long? Pewter dragging could kill, if the person had pushed themselves too hard.

What would happen to the city if she never woke up?

Ash was falling. *A lot of ashfalls lately*, Elend thought as he and Spook emerged from the trees and looked out over the Luthadel plain.

"See," Spook said quietly, pointing. "The city gates are broken."

Elend frowned. "But the koloss are camped *outside* the city." Indeed, Straff's army camp was also still there, right where it had been.

"Work crews," Spook said, shading his face against the sunlight to protect his overly sensitive Allomancer's eyes. "Looks like they're burying corpses ou1tside the city."

Elend's frown deepened. *Vin. What happened to her? Is she all right?*

He and Spook had cut across country, taking a cue from the Terrismen, to make certain that they didn't get discovered by patrols from the city. Indeed, this day they'd broken their pattern, traveling a little bit during the day so that they could arrive at Luthadel just before nightfall. The mists would soon be coming, and Elend was fatigued—both from rising early and from walking so long.

More than that, he was tired of not knowing what had happened to Luthadel. "Can you see whose flag is set over the gates?" he asked.

Spook paused, apparently flaring his metals. "Yours," he finally said, surprised.

Elend smiled. *Well, either they managed to save the city somehow, or this is a very elaborate trap to capture me*. "Come on," he said, pointing to a line of refugees who were being allowed back into the city—likely those who had fled before, returning for food now that the danger was past. "We'll mix with those and make our way in."

Sazed sighed quietly, shutting the door to his room. The kings were finished with the day's arguments. Actually, they were starting to get along quite well, considering the fact that they'd all tried to conquer each other just a few weeks before.

Sazed knew he could take no credit for their newfound amiability, however. He had other preoccupations.

*I've seen many die, in my days*, he thought, walking into the room. *Kelsier. Jadendwyl. Crenda. People I respected. I never wondered what had happened to their spirits*.

He set his candle on the table, the fragile light illuminating a few scattered pages, a pile of strange metal nails taken from koloss bodies, and one manuscript. Sazed sat down at the table, fingers brushing the pages, remembering the days spent with Tindwyl, studying.

*Maybe this is why Vin put me in charge*, he thought. *She knew I'd need something to take my mind off Tindwyl.*

And yet, he was finding more and more that he didn't *want* to take his mind off her. Which was more potent? The pain of memory, or the pain of forgetting? He was a Keeper—it was his life's work to remember. Forgetting, even in the name of personal peace, was not something that appealed to him.

He flipped through the manuscript, smiling fondly in the dark chamber. He'd sent a cleaned-up, rewritten version with Vin and Elend to the north. This, however, was the original. The frantically—almost desperately—scribbled manuscript made by two frightened scholars.

As he fingered the pages, the flickering candlelight revealed Tindwyl's firm, yet beautiful, script. It mixed easily with paragraphs written in Sazed's own, more reserved hand. At times, a page would alternate between their different hands a dozen different times.

He didn't realize that he was crying until he blinked, sending loose a tear, which hit the page. He looked down, stunned as the bit of water caused a swirl in the ink.

"What now, Tindwyl?" he whispered. "Why did we do this? You never believed in the Hero of Ages, and I never believed in anything, it appears. What was the point of all this?"

He reached up and dabbed the tear with his sleeve, preserving the page as best he could. Despite his tiredness, he began to read, selecting a random paragraph. He read to remember. To t1hink of days when he hadn't worried about why they were studying. He had simply been content to do what he enjoyed best, with the person he had come to love most.

*We gathered everything we could find on the Hero of Ages and the Deepness,* he thought, reading. *But so much of it seems contradictory*.

He flipped through to a particular section, one that Tindwyl had insisted that they include. It contained the several most blatant self-contradictions, as declared by Tindwyl. He read them over, giving them fair consideration for the first time. This was Tindwyl the scholar—a cautious skeptic. He fingered through the passages, reading her script.

*The Hero of Ages will be tall of stature,* one read. *A man who cannot be ignored by others*.

*The power must not be taken*, read another. *Of this, we are certain. It must be held, but not used. It must be released*. Tindwyl had found that condition foolish, since other sections talked about the Hero using the power to defeat the Deepness.

*All men are selfish*, read another. *The Hero is a man who can see the needs of all beyond his own desires*. "If all men are selfish," Tindwyl had asked, "then how can the Hero be selfless, as is said in other passages? And, indeed, how can a humble man be expected to conquer the world?"

Sazed shook his head, smiling. At times, her objections had been very well conceived—but at other times, she had just been struggling to offer another opinion, no matter how much of a stretch it required. He ran his fingers across the page again, but paused on the first paragraph.

*Tall of stature,* it said. That wouldn't refer to Vin. It hadn't come from the rubbing, but another book. Tindwyl had included it because the rubbing, the more trustworthy source, said he'd be short. Sazed flipped through the book to the complete transcription of Kwaan's iron-plate testimony, searching for the passage.

*Alendi's height struck me the first time I saw him*, it read. *Here was a man who was small of stature, but who seemed to tower over others, a man who demanded respect*.

Sazed frowned. Before, he'd argued that there was no contradiction, for one passage could be interpreted as referring to the Hero's presence or character, rather than just his physical height. Now, however, Sazed paused, really seeing Tindwyl's objections for the first time.

And something felt wrong to him. He looked back at his book, scanning the contents of the page.

*There was a place for me in the lore of the Anticipation*, he read. *I thought myself the Holy First Witness, the prophet foretold to discover the Hero of Ages. Renouncing Alendi then would have been to renounce my new position, my acceptance, by the others*.

Sazed's frown deepened. He traced the paragraph. Outside, it was growing dark, and a few trails of mist curled around the shutters, creeping into the room before vanishing.

*Holy First Witness*, he read again. *How did I miss that? It's the same name the people called me, back at the gates. I didn't recognize it*.

"Sazed."

Sazed jumped, nearly toppling his book to the floor as he turned. Vin stood behind him, a dark shadow in the poorly lit room.

"Lady Vin! You're up!"

"You shouldn't have let me sleep so long," she said1.

"We tried to wake you," he said softly. "You were in a coma."

She paused.

"Perhaps it is for the best, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "The fighting is done, and you pushed yourself hard these last few months. It is good for you to get some rest, now that this is over."

She stepped forward, shaking her head, and Sazed could see that she looked haggard, despite her days of rest. "No, Sazed," she said. "This is not 'over.' Not by far."

"What do you mean?" Sazed asked, growing concerned.

"I can still hear it in my head," Vin said, raising a hand to her forehead. "It's here. In the city."

"The Well of Ascension?" Sazed asked. "But, Lady Vin, I lied about that. Truly and apologetically, I don't even know if there *is* such a thing."

"Do you believe me to be the Hero of Ages?"

Sazed looked away. "A few days ago, on the field outside the city, I felt certain. But. . .lately. . .I don't seem to know what I believe anymore. The prophecies and stories are a jumble of contradictions."

"This isn't about prophecies," Vin said, walking over to his table and looking at his book. "This is about what needs to be done. I can feel it. . .pulling me."

She glanced at the closed window, with the mists curling at the edges. Then, she walked over and threw the shutters open, letting in the cold winter air. Vin stood, closing her eyes and letting the mists wash over her. She wore only a simple shirt and trousers.

"I drew upon it once, Sazed," she said. "Do you know that? Did I tell you? When I fought the Lord Ruler. I drew power from the mists. That's how I defeated him."

Sazed shivered, not just from the cold. From the tone in her voice, and the air of her words. "Lady Vin. . ." he said, but wasn't sure how to continue. Drew upon the mists? What did she mean?

"The Well is here," she repeated, looking out the window, mist curling into the room.

"It can't be, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "All of the reports agree. The Well of Ascension was found in the Terris Mountains."

Vin shook her head. "He changed the world, Sazed."

He paused, frowning. "What?"

"The Lord Ruler," she whispered. "He created the Ashmounts. The records say he made the vast deserts around the empire, that he broke the land in order to preserve it. Why should we assume that things look like they did when he first climbed to the Well? He created mountains. Why couldn't he have flattened them?"

Sazed felt a chill.

"It's what I would do," Vin said. "If I knew the power would return, if I wanted to preserve it. I'd hide the Well. I'd let the legends remain, talking about mountains to the north. Then, I would build my city around the Well so that I could keep an eye on it."

She turned, looking at him. "It's here. The power waits."

Sazed opened his mouth to object, but could find nothing. He had no faith. Who was he to argue with such things? As he paused, he heard voices below, from outside.

*Voices?* he thought. *At night? In the mists?* Curious, he strained to hear what was being said, but they were too far away. He reached into the bag beside his table. Most of his metalminds were empty; he wore only his copperminds, with their stores of ancient knowledge. Inside the sack, he found a small pouch. It contained the ten rings he had prepared for the siege, but had never used. He pulled it open, took out one of the ten, then tucked the bag into his sash.

With this ring—a tinmind—he could tap hearing. The words below became distinct to him.

"The king! The king has returned!"

Vin leaped out the window.

"I don't fully understand how she does it either, El," Ham said, walking with his arm in a sling.

Elend walked through the city streets, people trailing behind him, speaking in excited tones. The crowd was growing larger and larger as people heard that Elend had returned. Spook eyed them uncertainly, but seemed to be enjoying the attention.

"I was out cold for the last part of the battle," Ham was saying. "Only pewter kept me alive—koloss slaughtered my team, breached the walls of the keep I was defending. I got out, and found Sazed, but my mind was growing muddled by then. I remember falling unconscious outside Keep Hasting. When I woke up, Vin had already taken the city back. I. . ."

They paused. Vin stood in front of them in the city street. Quiet, dark. In the mists, she almost looked like the spirit Elend had seen earlier.

"Vin?" he asked in the eerie air.

"Elend," she said, rushing forward, into his arms, and the air of mystery was gone. She shivered as she held him. "I'm sorry. I think I did something bad."

"Oh?" he asked. "What is that?"

"I made you emperor."

Elend smiled. "I noticed, and I accept."

"After all you did to make certain the people had a choice?"

Elend shook his head. "I'm beginning to think my opinions were simplistic. Honorable, but. . .incomplete. We'll deal with this. I'm just glad to find that my city is still standing."

Vin smiled. She looked tired.

"Vin?" he asked. "Are you still pewter-dragging?"

"No," she said. "This is something else." She glanced to the side, face thoughtful, as if deciding something.

"Come," she said.

Sazed watched out the window, a second tinmind enhancing his sight. It was indeed Elend below. Sazed smiled, one of the weights on his soul removed. He turned, intending to go and meet the king.

And then he saw something blowing on the floor in front of him. A scrap of paper. He knelt down, picking it up, noticing his own handwriting on it. Its edges were jagged from having been ripped. He frowned, walking over to his table, opening the book to the page with Kwaan's narrative. A piece was missing. The same piece as before, the one that had been ripped free that time with Tindwyl. He'd almost forgotten the strange occurrence with the pages all missing the same sentence.

He'd rewritten this page, from his metalmind, after they'd found the torn sheets. Now the same bit had been torn free, the last sentence. Just to make certain, he put it up next to his book. It fit perfectly. *Alendi must not reach the Well of Ascension, it read, for he must not be allowed to take the power for himself*. It was the exact wording S1azed had in his memory, the exact wording of the rubbing.

*Why* would *Kwaan have worried about this?* he thought, sitting down. *He says he knew Alendi better than anyone else. In fact, he called Alendi an honorable man on several occasions*.

Why would Kwaan be so worried about Alendi taking the power for himself?

Vin walked through the mists. Elend, Ham, and Spook trailed behind her, the crowd dispersed by Elend's order—though some soldiers did stay close to protect Elend.

Vin continued on, feeling the pulsings, the thumpings, the power that shook her very soul. Why couldn't the others feel it?

"Vin?" Elend asked. "Where are we going?"

"Kredik Shaw," she said softly.

"But. . .why?"

She just shook her head. She knew the truth, now. The Well was in the city. With how strong the pulsings were growing, she might have assumed that their direction would be harder to discern. But that wasn't the way it was at all. Now that they were loud and full, she found it easier.

Elend glanced back at the others, and she could sense his concern. Up ahead, Kredik Shaw loomed in the night. Spires, like massive spikes, jutted from the ground in an off-balance pattern, reaching accusingly toward the stars above.

"Vin," Elend said. "The mists are acting. . .strangely."

"I know," she said. "They're guiding me."

"No, actually," Elend said. "They kind of look like they're pulling *away* from you."

Vin shook her head. This felt *right*. How could she explain? Together, they entered the remnants of the Lord Ruler's palace.

*The Well was here all along,* Vin thought, amused. She could feel the pulses vibrating through the building. Why hadn't she noticed it before?

*The pulses were still too weak, then,* she realized. *The Well wasn't full yet. Now it is*. And it called to her.

She followed the same path as before. The path she'd followed with Kelsier, breaking into Kredik Shaw on a doomful night when she had nearly died. The path she'd followed on her own, the night she had come to kill the Lord Ruler. The tight stone corridors opened into the room shaped like an upside-down bowl. Elend's lantern glistened against the fine stonework and murals, mostly in black and gray. The stone shack stood in the center of the room, abandoned, enclosed.

"I think we're finally going to find your atium, Elend," Vin said, smiling.

"What?" Elend said, his voice echoing in the chamber. "Vin, we searched here. We tried everything."

"Not enough, apparently," Vin said, eyeing the small building-within-a-building, but not moving toward it.

*This is where I'd put it*, she thought. *It makes sense. The Lord Ruler would have wanted to keep the Well close so that when the power returned, he'd be able to take it*.

*But I killed him before that could happen*.

The booming came from below. They'd torn up sections of the floor, but had stopped when they'd hit solid rock. There had to be a way down. She walked over, searching through the building-within-a-building, but found nothing. She left, passing her c1onfused friends, frustrated.

Then she tried burning her metals. As always, the blue lines shot up around her, pointing to sources of metal. Elend was wearing several, as was Spook, though Ham was clean. Some of the stonework bore metal inlays, and lines pointed to those.

Everything was as expected. There was nothing. . .

Vin frowned, stepping to the side. One of the inlays bore a particularly thick line. Too thick, in fact. She frowned, inspecting the line as it—like the others—pointed from her chest directly at the stone wall. This one seemed to be pointing *beyond* the wall.

*What?*

She Pulled on it. Nothing happened. So, she Pulled harder, grunting as she was yanked toward the wall. She released the line, glancing about. There were inlays on the floor. Deep ones. Curious, she anchored herself by Pulling on these, then Pulled on the wall again. She thought she felt something budge.

She burned duralumin and Pulled as hard as she could. The explosion of power nearly ripped her apart, but her anchor held, and duralumin-fueled pewter kept her alive. And a section of the wall slid open, stone grinding against stone in the quiet room. Vin gasped, letting go as her metals ran out.

"Lord Ruler!" Spook said. Ham was quicker, however, moving with the speed of pewter and peeking into the opening. Elend stayed at her side, grabbing her arm as she nearly fell.

"I'm fine," Vin said, downing a vial and restoring her metals. The power of the Well thumped around her. It almost seemed to shake the room.

"There are stairs in here," Ham said, poking his head back out.

Vin steadied herself and nodded to Elend, and the two of them followed Ham and Spook through the false section of the wall.

*But, I must continue with the sparsest of detail,* Kwaan's account read.

> *Space is limited. The other Worldbringers must have thought themselves humble when they came to me, admitting that they had been wrong about Alendi. Even then, I was beginning to doubt my original declaration. But, I was prideful.*
>
> *In the end, my pride may have doomed us all. I had never received much attention from my brethren; they thought that my work and my interests were unsuitable to a Worldbringer. The couldn't see how my studies, which focused on nature instead of religion, benefited the people of the fourteen lands.*
>
> *As the one who found Alendi, however, I became someone important. Foremost among the Worldbringers. There was a place for me in the lore of the Anticipation—I thought myself the Holy First Witness, the prophet foretold to discover the Hero of Ages. Renouncing Alendi then would have been to renounce my new position, my acceptance, by the others.*
>
> *And so I did not. But I do so now.*
>
> *Let it be known that I, Kwaan, Worldbringer of Terris, am a fraud. Alendi was never the Hero of Ages. At best, I have amplified his virtues, creating a hero where there was none. At worst, I fear that I have corrupted all we believe.*

Sazed sat at his table, reading from his book.

*Something is not right here*, he thought. He traced back a few lines, looking at the words "Holy First Witness" again. Why did that line keep bothering him?

He sat back, sighing. Even if the prophecies did speak about the future, they wouldn't be things to follow or use as guideposts. Tindwyl was right on that count. His own study had proven them to be unreliable and shadowed.

So what was the problem?

*It just doesn't make sense*.

But, then again, sometimes religion didn't make literal sense. Was that the reason, or was that his own bias? His growing frustration with the teachings he had memorized and taught, but which had betrayed him in the end?

It came down to the scrap of paper on his desk. The torn one. *Alendi must not be allowed to reach the Well of Ascension. . ..*

Someone was standing next to his desk.

Sazed gasped, stumbling back, nearly tripping over his chair. It wasn't actually a person. It was a shadow—formed, it seemed, from streams of mist. They were very faint, still trailing through the window that Vin had opened, but they made a person. Its head seemed turned toward the table, toward the book. Or. . .perhaps the scrap of paper.

Sazed felt like running, like scrambling away in fear, but his scholar's mind dredged something up to fight his terror. *Alendi*, he thought. *The one everyone thought was the Hero of Ages. He said he saw a thing made of mist following him*.

*Vin claimed to have seen it as well*.

"What. . .do you want?" he asked, trying to remain calm.

The spirit didn't move.

*Could it be. . .her?* he wondered with shock. Many religions claimed that the dead continued to walk the world, just beyond the view of mortals. But this thing was too short to be Tindwyl. Sazed was sure that he would have recognized her, even in such an amorphous form.

Sazed tried to gauge where it was looking. He reached out a hesitant hand, picking up the scrap of paper.

The spirit raised an arm, pointing toward the center of the city. Sazed frowned.

"I don't understand," he said.

The spirit pointed more insistently.

"Write down for me what you want me to do."

It just pointed.

Sazed stood for a long moment in the room with only one candle, then glanced at the open book. The wind flipped its pages, showing his handwriting, then Tindwyl's, then his again.

*Alendi must not be allowed to reach the Well of Ascension. He must not be allowed to take the power for himself.*

Perhaps. . .perhaps Kwaan knew something that nobody else had. Could the power corrupt even the best of people? Could that be why he turned against Alendi, trying to stop him?

The mist spirit pointed again.

*If the spirit tore free that sentence, perhaps it was trying to tell me something. But. . .Vin wouldn't take the power for herself. She wouldn't destroy, as the Lord Ruler did, would she?*

And if she didn't have a choice?

Outside, someone screamed. The yell was of pure terror, and it was soon joined by others. A horrible, echoing set of sounds in a dark night.

There wasn't time to think. Sazed grabbed the candle, spilling wax on the table in his haste, and left the room.

The winding set of stone stairs led downward for quite some time. Vin walked down them, Elend at her side, the thumping sounding loudly in her ears. At the bottom, the stairwell opened into. . .

A vast chamber. Elend held his lantern high, looking down into a huge stone cavern. Spook was already halfway down the stone steps leading to the floor. Ham was following.

"Lord Ruler. . ." Elend whispered, standing at Vin's side. "We'd have never found this without tearing down the entire building!"

"That was probably the idea," Vin said. "Kredik Shaw isn't simply a palace, but a capstone. Built to hide something. *This*. Above, those inlays on the walls hid the cracks of the doorway, and the metal in them obscured the opening mechanism from Allomantic eyes. If I hadn't had a hint. . ."

"Hint?" Elend asked, turning to her.

Vin shook her head, nodding to the steps. The two began down them. Below, she heard Spook's voice ring.

"There's food down here!" he yelled. "Cans and cans of it!"

Indeed, they found rank upon rank of shelves sitting on the cavern floor, meticulously packed as if set aside in preparation for something important. Vin and Elend reached the cavern floor as Ham chased after Spook, calling for him to slow down. Elend made as if to follow, but Vin grabbed his arm. She was burning iron.

"Strong source of metal that way," she said, growing eager.

Elend nodded, and they rushed through the cavern, passing shelf after shelf. *The Lord Ruler must have prepared these*, she thought. *But for what purpose?*

She didn't care at the moment. She didn't really care about the atium either, but Elend's eagerness to find it was too much to ignore. They rushed up to the end of the cavern, where they found the source of the metal line.

A large metal plaque hung on the wall, like the one Sazed had described finding in the Conventical of Seran. Elend was clearly disappointed when they saw it. Vin, however, stepped forward, looking through tin-enhanced eyes to see what it contained.

"A map?" Elend asked. "That's the Final Empire."

Indeed, a map of the empire was carved into the metal. Luthadel was marked at the center. A small circle marked another city nearby.

"Why is Statlin City circled?" Elend asked, frowning.

Vin shook her head. "This isn't what we came for," she said. "There." A tunnel split off from the main cavern. "Come on."

Sazed ran through the streets, not even certain what he was doing. He followed the mist spirit, which was difficult to trace in the night, as his candle had long since puffed out.

People screamed. Their panicked sounds gave him chills, and he itched to go and see what the problem was. Yet the mist spirit was demanding; it paused to catch his attention if it lost him. It could simply be leading him to his death. And yet. . .he felt a trust for it that he could not explain.

*Allomancy?* he thought. *Pulling on my emotions?*

Before he could consider that further, he stumbled across the first body. It was a skaa man in simple clothing, skin stained with ash. His face was twisted in a grimace of pain, and the ash on the ground was smeared from his thrashings.

Sazed gasped as he pulled to a halt. He knelt, studying the body by the dim light of an open window nearby. This man had not died easily.

*It's. . .like the killings I was studying, he thought. Months ago, in the village to the south. The man there said that the mists had killed his friend. Caused him to fall to the ground and thrash about.*

The spirit appeared in front of Sazed, its posture insistent. Sazed looked up, frowning. "You did this?" he whispered.

The thing shook its head violently, pointing. Kredik Shaw was just ahead. It was the direction Vin and Elend had gone earlier.

Sazed stood. *Vin said she thought the Well was still in the city*, he thought. *The Deepness has come upon us, as its tendrils have been doing in the far reaches of the empire for some time. Killing*.

*Something greater than we comprehend is going on*.

He still couldn't believe that Vin going to the Well would be dangerous. She had read; she knew Rashek's story. She wouldn't take the power for herself. He was confident. But not completely certain. In fact, he was no longer certain *what* they should do with the Well.

*I have to get to her. Stop her, talk to her, prepare her. We can't rush into something like this*. If, indeed, they were going to take the power at the Well, they needed to think about it first and decide what the best course was.

The mist spirit continued to point. Sazed stood and ran forward, ignoring the horror of the screams in the night. He approached the doors of the massive palace structure with its spires and spikes, then dashed inside.

The mist spirit remained behind, in the mists that had birthed it. Sazed lit his candle again with a flint, and waited. The mist spirit did not move forward. Still feeling an urgency, Sazed left it behind, continuing into the depths of the Lord Ruler's former home. The stone walls were cold and dark, his candle a wan light.

*The Well couldn't be here, he thought. It's supposed to be in the mountains*.

Yet, so much about that time was vague. He was beginning to doubt that he'd ever understood the things he'd studied.

He quickened his step, shading his candle with his hand, knowing where he needed to go. He'd visited the building-within-a-building, the place where the Lord Ruler had once spent his time. Sazed had studied the place after the empire's fall, chronicling and cataloguing. He stepped into the outer room, and was halfway across it before he noticed the unfamiliar opening in the wall.

A figure stood in doorway, head bowed. Sazed's candlelight reflected the polished marble walls, the silvery inlayed murals, and the spikes in the man's eyes.

"Marsh?" Sazed asked, shocked. "Where have you been?"

"What are you doing, Sazed?" Marsh whispered.

"I'm going to Vin," he said, confused. "She has found the Well, Marsh. We have to get to her, stop her from doing anything with it until we're sure what it does."

Marsh remained silent for a short time. "You should not have come here, Terrisman," he finally said, head still bowed.

"Marsh? What is going on?" Sazed took a step forward, feeling urgent.

"I wish I knew. I wish. . .I wish I understood."

"Understood what?" Sazed asked, voice echoing in the domed room.

Marsh stood silently for a moment. Then he looked up, focusing his sightless spikeheads on Sazed.

"I wish I understood why I have to kill you," he said, then lifted a hand. An Allomantic Push slammed into the metal bracers on Sazed's arms, throwing him backward, crashing him into the hard stone wall.

"I'm sorry," Marsh whispered.

*Alendi must not reach the Well of Ascension. . ..*

## 58

"LORD RULER!" ELEND WHISPERED, pausing at the edge of the second cavern.

Vin joined him. They had walked in the passage for some time, leaving the storage cavern far behind, walking through a natural stone tunnel. It had ended here, at a second, slightly smaller cavern that was clogged with a thick, dark smoke. It didn't seep out of the cavern, as it should have, but billowed and churned upon itself.

Vin stepped forward. The smoke didn't choke her, as she expected. There was something oddly welcoming about it. "Come on," she said, walking through it across the cavern floor. "I see light up ahead."

Elend joined her nervously.

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Sazed slammed into the wall. He was no Allomancer; he had no pewter to strengthen his body. As he collapsed to the ground, he felt a sharp pain in his side, and knew he had cracked a rib. Or worse.

Marsh strode forward, faintly illuminated by Sazed's candle, which burned fitfully where Sazed had dropped it.

"Why did you come?" Marsh whispered as Sazed struggled to his knees. "Everything was going so well." He watched with iron eyes as Sazed slowly crawled away. Then Marsh Pushed again, throwing Sazed to the side.

Sazed skidded across the beautiful white floor, crashing into another wall. His arm snapped, cracking, and his vision shuddered.

Through his pain, he saw Marsh stoop down and pick something up. A small pouch. It had fallen from Sazed's sash. It was filled with bits of metal; Marsh obviously thought it was a coin pouch.

"I'm sorry," Marsh said again, then raised a hand and Pushed the bag at Sazed.

The pouch shot across the room and hit Sazed, ripping, the bits of metal inside tearing into Sazed's flesh. He didn't have to look down to know how badly he was injured. Oddly, he could no longer feel his pain—but he could feel the blood, warm, on his stomach and legs.

*I'm. . .sorry, too,* Sazed thought as the room grew dark, and he fell to his knees. *I've failed. . .though I know not at what. I can't even answer Marsh's question. I don't know why I came here.*

He felt himself dying. It was an odd experience. His mind was resigned, yet confused, yet frustrated, yet slowly. . .having. . .trouble. . .

Those weren't coins, a voice seemed to whisper.

The thought rattled in his dying mind.

*The bag Marsh shot at you. Those weren't coins. They were rings, Sazed. Eight of them. You took out two—eyesight and hearing. You left the other ones where they were.*

*In the pouch, tucked into your sash.*

Sazed collapsed, death coming upon him like a cold shadow. And yet, the thought rang true. Ten rings, embedded into his flesh. Touching him. Weight. Speed of body. Sight. Hearing. Touch. Scent. Strength. Speed of mind. Wakefulness.

And health.

He tapped gold. He didn't have to be wearing the metalmind to use it—he only had to be touching it. His chest stopped burning, and his vision snapped back into focus. His arm straightened, the bones reknitting as he drew upon several days' worth of health in a brief flash of power. He gasped, his mind recovering from its near death, but the goldmind restored a crisp clarity to his thoughts.

The flesh healed around the metal. Sazed stood, pulling the empty bag from where it stuck from his skin, leaving the rings inside of him. He dropped it to the ground, the wound sealing, draining the last of the power from the goldmind. Marsh stopped at the mouth of the doorway, turning in surprise. Sazed's arm still throbbed, probably cracked, and his ribs were bruised. Such a short burst of health could only do so much.

But he was alive.

"You have betrayed us, Marsh," Sazed said. "I did not realize those spikes stole a man's soul, as well as his eyes."

"You cannot fight me," Marsh replied quietly, his voice echoing in the dark room. "You are no warrior."

Sazed smiled, feeling the small metalminds within him give him power. "Neither, I think, are you."

*I am involved in something that is far over my head,* Elend thought as they passed through the strange, smoke-filled cavern. The floor was rough and uneven, and his lantern seemed dim—as if the swirling black smoke were sucking in the light.

Vin walked confidently. No, determinedly. There was a difference. Whatever was at the end of this cavern, she obviously wanted to discover it.

*And. . .what will it be?* Elend thought. *The Well of Ascension?*

The Well was a thing of mythology—something spoken of by obligators when they taught about the Lord Ruler. And yet. . .he had followed Vin northward, expecting to find it, hadn't he? Why be so tentative now?

Perhaps because he was finally beginning to accept what was happening. And it worried him. Not because he feared for his life, but because suddenly he didn't understand the world. Armies he could understand, even if he didn't know how to defeat them. But a thing like the Well? A thing of gods, a thing beyond the logic of scholars and philosophers?

That was terrifying.

They finally approached the other side of the smoky cavern. Here, there appeared to be a final chamber, one much smaller than the first two. As they stepped into it, Elend noticed something immediately: this room was man-made. Or, at least, it had the *feel* of something man-made. Stalactites formed pillars through the low-ceilinged room, and they were spaced far too evenly to be random. Yet, at the same time, they looked as if they had grown naturall1y, and showed no signs of being worked.

The air seemed warmer inside—and, thankfully, they passed out of the smoke as they entered. A low light came from something on the far side of the chamber, though Elend couldn't distinguish the source. It didn't look like torchlight. It was the wrong color, and it shimmered rather than flickered.

Vin wrapped an arm around him, staring toward the back of the chamber, suddenly seeming apprehensive.

"Where is that light coming from?" Elend asked, frowning.

"A pool," Vin said quietly, her eyes far keener than his. "A glowing white pool."

Elend frowned. But, the two of them didn't move. Vin seemed hesitant. "What?" he asked.

She pulled against him. "That's the Well of Ascension. I can *feel* it inside of my head. Beating."

Elend forced a smile, feeling a surreal sense of displacement. "That's what we came for, then."

"What if I don't know what to do?" Vin asked quietly. "What if I take the power, but I don't know how to use it? What if I. . .become like the Lord Ruler?"

Elend looked down at her, arms wrapped around him, and his fear lessened a bit. He loved her. The situation they faced, it couldn't easily fit into his logical world. But Vin had never really needed logic. And he didn't need it either, if he trusted her.

He took her head in his hands, rotating it up to look at him. "Your eyes are beautiful."

She frowned. "What—"

"And," Elend continued, "part of the beauty in them comes from your sincerity. You won't become the Lord Ruler, Vin. You'll know what to do with that power. I trust you."

She smiled hesitantly, then nodded. However, she didn't move forward into the cavern. Instead, she pointed at something over Elend's shoulder. "What's that?"

Elend turned, noticing a ledge on the back wall of the small room. It grew straight out of the rock just beside the doorway they had entered. Vin approached the ledge, and Elend followed behind her, noticing the shards that lay upon it.

"It looks like broken pottery," Elend said. There were several patches of it, and more of it was scattered on the floor beneath the ledge.

Vin picked up a piece, but there didn't seem to be anything distinctive about it. She looked at Elend, who was fishing through the pottery pieces. "Look at this," he said, holding up one that hadn't been broken like the others. It was a disklike piece of fired clay with a single bead of some metal at the center.

"Atium?" she asked.

"It looks like the wrong color," he said, frowning.

"What is it, then?"

"Maybe we'll find the answers over there," Elend said, turning and looking down the rows of pillars toward the light. Vin nodded, and they walked forward.

Marsh immediately tried to Push Sazed away by the metal bracers on his arms. Sazed was ready, however, and he tapped his ring ironmind—drawing forth the weight he had stored within it. His body grew denser, and he felt its weight pulling him down, his fists feeling like balls of iron on the ends of lead arms.

Marsh immediately lurched away, thrown violently backward by his own Push. He slammed1 into the back wall, a cry of surprise escaping his lips. It echoed in the small, domed room.

Shadows danced in the room as the candle grew weaker. Sazed tapped sight, enhancing his vision, and released iron as he dashed toward the addled Inquisitor. Marsh, however, recovered quickly. He reached out, Pulling an unlit lamp off the wall. It zipped through the air, flying toward Marsh.

Sazed tapped zinc. He felt something like a twisted hybrid of an Allomancer and a Feruchemist, his sources of metal embedded within him. The gold had healed his insides, made him whole, but the rings still remained within his flesh. This was what the Lord Ruler had done, keeping his metalminds inside of him, piercing his flesh so that they would be harder to steal.

That had always seemed morbid to Sazed. Now, he saw how useful it could be. His thoughts sped up, and he quickly saw the trajectory of the lamp. Marsh would be able to use it as a weapon against him. So Sazed tapped steel. Allomancy and Feruchemy had one fundamental difference: Allomancy drew its powers from the metals themselves, and so the amount of power was limited; in Feruchemy, one could compound an attribute many times, drawing out months' worth of power in a few minutes.

Steel stored physical speed. Sazed zipped across the room, air rushing in his ears as he shot past the open doorway. He snatched the lamp out of the air, then tapped iron hard—increasing his weight manyfold—and tapped pewter to give himself massive strength.

Marsh didn't have time to react. He was now Pulling on a lamp held in Sazed's inhumanly strong, inhumanly heavy, hand. Again, Marsh was yanked by his own Allomancy. The Pull threw him across the room, directly toward Sazed.

Sazed turned, slamming the lamp into Marsh's face. The metal bent in his hand, and the force threw Marsh backward. The Inquisitor hit the marble wall, a spray of blood misting in the air. As Marsh slumped to the ground, Sazed could see that he'd driven one of the eye-spikes back into the front of the skull, crushing the bone around the socket.

Sazed returned his weight to normal, then jumped forward, raising his impromptu weapon again. Marsh, however, threw an arm up and Pushed. Sazed skidded back a few feet before he was able to tap the ironmind again, increasing his weight.

Marsh grunted, his Push forcing him back against the wall. It also, however, kept Sazed at bay. Sazed struggled to step forward, but the pressure of Marsh's Push—along with his own bulky, weighed-down body—made walking difficult. The two strained for a moment, Pushing against each other in the darkening light. The room's inlays sparkled, quiet murals watching them, open doorway leading down to the Well just to the side.

"Why, Marsh?" Sazed whispered.

"I don't know," Marsh said, his voice coming out in a growl.

With a flash of power, Sazed released his ironmind and instead tapped steel, increasing his speed again. He dropped the lamp, ducking to the side, moving more quickly than Marsh could track. The lamp was forced backward, but then fell to the ground as Marsh let go of his Push, jumping forward, obviously trying to keep from being trapped against the wall.

But Sazed was faster. He spun, raising a hand to try to pull out Marsh's linchpin spike—the one in between his shoulder blades, pounded down lengthwise into the back. Pulling this one spike would kill an Inquisitor; it was the weakness the Lord Ruler had built into them.

Sazed skidded around Marsh1 to attack from behind. The spike in Marsh's right eye protruded several extra inches out the back of his skull, and it dribbled blood.

Sazed's steelmind ran out.

The rings had never been intended to last long, and his two extreme bursts had drained this one in seconds. He slowed with a dreadful lurch, but his arm was still raised, and he still had the strength of ten men. He could see the bulge of the linchpin spike underneath Marsh's robe. If he could just —

Marsh spun, then dexterously knocked aside Sazed's hand. He rammed an elbow into Sazed's stomach, then brought a backhand up and crashed it into his face.

Sazed fell backward, and his pewtermind ran out, his strength disappearing. He hit the hard steel ground with a grunt of pain, and rolled.

Marsh loomed in the dark room. The candle flickered.

"You were wrong, Sazed," Marsh said quietly. "Once, I was not a warrior, but that has changed. You spent the last two years teaching, but I spent them killing. Killing so many people. . .."

Marsh stepped forward, and Sazed coughed, trying to get his bruised body to move. He worried that he'd rebroken his arm. He tapped zinc again, speeding up his thoughts, but that didn't help his body move. He could only watch—more fully aware of his predicament and unable to do a thing to stop it—as Marsh picked up the fallen lamp.

The candle went out.

Yet, Sazed could still see Marsh's face. Blood dripped from the crushed socket, making the man's expression even harder to read. The Inquisitor seemed. . .sorrowful as he raised the lamp in a clawlike grip, intending to smash it down into Sazed's face.

*Wait*, Sazed thought. *Where is that light coming from?*

A dueling cane smashed against the back of Marsh's head, shattering and throwing up splinters.

Vin and Elend walked up to the pool. Elend knelt quietly beside it, but Vin just stood. Staring at the glittering waters.

They were gathered in a small depression in the rock, and they looked thick—like metal. A silvery white, glowing liquid metal. The Well was only a few feet across, but its power loomed in her mind.

Vin was so enraptured by the beautiful pool, in fact, that she didn't notice the mist spirit until Elend's grip tightened on her arm. She looked up, noticing the spirit standing before them. It seemed to have its head bowed, but as she turned, its shadowy form stood up straighter.

She'd never seen the creature outside of the mist. It still wasn't completely. . .whole. Mist puffed from its body, flowing downward, creating its amorphous form. A persistent pattern.

Vin hissed quietly, pulling out a dagger.

"Wait!" Elend said, standing.

She frowned, shooting him a glance.

"I don't think it's dangerous, Vin," he said, stepping away from her, toward the spirit.

"Elend, no!" she said, but he gently shook her free.

"It visited me while you were gone, Vin," he explained. "It didn't hurt me. It just. . .seemed like it wanted me to know something." He smiled, still wearing his nondescript cloak and traveling clothing, and walked slowly up to the mist spirit. "What is it you want?"

The mist spirit stood immobile for a moment, then it raised its arm. Something flashed, reflecting the pool's light.

"*No!*" Vin screamed, dashing forward as the spirit slashed across Elend's gut. Elend grunted in pain, then stumbled back.

"Elend!" Vin said, scrambling to Elend's side as he slipped and fell to the ground. The spirit backed away, dripping blood from somewhere within its deceptively incorporeal form. Elend's blood.

Elend lay, shocked, eyes wide. Vin flared pewter and ripped open the front of his jacket, exposing the wound. The spirit had cut deeply into his stomach, slashing the gut open.

"No. . .no. . .no. . ." Vin said, mind growing numb, Elend's blood on her hands.

The wound was very bad. Deadly.

Ham dropped the broken cane, one arm still in a sling. The beefy Thug looked incredibly pleased with himself as he stepped over Marsh's body and reached his good hand toward Sazed.

"Didn't expect to find you here, Saze," the Thug said.

Dazed, Sazed took the hand and climbed to his feet. He stumbled over Marsh's body, somehow distractedly knowing that a simple club to the head wouldn't be enough to kill the creature. Yet Sazed was too addled to care. He picked up his candle, lit it from Ham's lantern, then made his way toward the stairs, forcing himself onward.

He had to keep going. He had to get to Vin.

Vin cradled Elend in her arms, her cloak forming a hasty—and dreadfully inadequate—bandage around his torso.

"I love you," she whispered, tears warm on her cold cheeks. "Elend, I love you. I love you. . ."

Love wouldn't be enough. He was trembling, eyes staring upward, barely able to focus. He gasped, and blood bubbled in his spittle.

She turned to the side, numbly realizing where she knelt. The pool glowed beside her, just inches from where Elend had fallen. Some of his blood had dribbled into the pool, though it didn't mix with the liquid metal.

*I can save him*, she realized. *The power of creation rests just inches from my fingers*. This was the place where Rashek had ascended to godhood. The Well of Ascension.

She looked back at Elend, at his dying eyes. He tried to focus on her, but he seemed to be having trouble controlling his muscles. It seemed like. . .he was trying to smile.

Vin rolled up her coat and put it beneath his head. Then, wearing just her trousers and shirt, she walked up to the pool. She could hear it thumping. As if. . .calling to her. Calling for her to join with it.

She stepped onto the pool. It resisted her touch, but her foot began to sink, slowly. She stepped forward, moving into the center of the pool, waiting as she sank. Within seconds, the pool was up to her chest, the glowing liquid all around her.

She took a breath, then leaned her head back, looking up as the pool absorbed her, covering her face.

Sazed stumbled down the stairs, candle held in quivering fingers. Ham was calling after him. He passed a confused Spook on the landing below, and ignored the boy's questions.

However, as he began to make his way down to the cavern floor, he slowed. A small tremor ran through the rock.

Somehow, he knew that he was too late.

The power came upon her suddenly.

She felt the liquid pressing against her, creeping into her body, crawling, forcing its way through the pores and openings in her skin. She opened her mouth to scream, and it rushed in that way too, choking her, gagging her.

With a sudden flare, her earlobe began to hurt. She cried out, pulling her earring free, dropping it into the depths. She pulled off her sash, letting it—and her Allomantic vials—go as well, removing the only metals on her person.

Then she started to burn. She recognized the sensation: it was exactly like the feeling of burning metals in her stomach, except it came from her entire body. Her skin flared, her muscles flamed, and her very bones seemed on fire. She gasped, and realized the metal was gone from her throat.

She was glowing. She felt the power within, as if it were trying to burst back out. It was like the strength she gained by burning pewter, but amazingly more potent. It was a force of incredible capacity. It would have been beyond her ability to understand, but it expanded her mind, forcing her to grow and comprehend what she now possessed.

She could remake the world. She could push back the mists. She could feed millions with the wave of her hand, punish the evil, protect the weak. She was in awe of herself. The cavern was as if translucent around her, and she saw the entire world spreading, a magnificent sphere upon which life could exist only in a small little area at the poles. She could fix that. She could make things better. She could. . .

She could save Elend.

She glanced down and saw him dying. She immediately understood what was wrong with him. She could fix his damaged skin and sliced organs.

*You mustn't do it, child*.

Vin looked up with shock.

*You know what you must do,* the Voice said, whispering to her. It sounded aged. Kindly.

"I have to save him!" she cried.

*You know what you must do*.

And she did know. She saw it happen—she saw, as if in a vision, Rashek when he'd taken the power for himself. She saw the disasters he created.

It was all or nothing—like Allomancy, in a way. If she took the power, she would have to burn it away in a few moments. Remaking things as she pleased, but only for a brief time.

Or. . .she could give it up.

*I must defeat the Deepness*, the Voice said.

She saw that, too. Outside the palace, in the city, across the land. People in the mists, shaking, falling. Many stayed indoors, thankfully. The traditions of the skaa were still strong within them.

Some were out, however. Those who trusted in Kelsier's words that the mists could not hurt them. But now the mists could. They had changed, bringing death.

*This* was the Deepness. Mists that killed. Mists that were slowly covering the entire land. The deaths were sporadic; Vin saw many falling dead, but saw others simply falling sick, and still others going about in the mists as if nothing were wrong.

*It will get worse*, the Voice said quietly. *It will kill and destroy. And, if you try to stop 1it yourself, you will ruin the world, as Rashek did before you*.

"Elend. . ." she whispered. She turned toward him, bleeding on the floor.

At that moment, she remembered something. Something Sazed had said. *You must love him enough to trust his wishes,* he had told her. *It isn't love unless you learn to respect him—not what you* assume *is best, but what he actually wants. . ..*

She saw Elend weeping. She saw him focusing on her, and she knew what he wanted. He wanted his people to live. He wanted the world to know peace, and the skaa to be free.

He wanted the Deepness to be defeated. The safety of his people meant more to him than his own life. Far more.

*You'll know what to do,* he'd told her just moments before. *I trust you. . ..*

Vin closed her eyes, and tears rolled down her cheeks. Apparently, gods could cry.

"I love you," she whispered.

She let the power go. She held the capacity to become a deity in her hands, and she gave it away, releasing it to the waiting void. She gave up Elend.

Because she knew that was what he wanted.

The cavern immediately began to shake. Vin cried out as the flaring power within her was ripped away, soaked up greedily by the void. She screamed, her glow fading, then fell into the now empty pool, head knocking against the rocks.

The cavern continued to shake, dust and chips falling from the ceiling. And then, in a moment of surreal clarity, Vin heard a single, distinct sentence ringing in her mind.

*I am FREE!*

*. . .for he must not be allowed to release the thing that is imprisoned there*.

# 59

VIN LAY, QUIETLY, WEEPING.

The cavern was still, the tempest over. The thing was gone, and the thumping in her mind was finally quiet. She sniffled, arms around Elend, holding him as he gasped his final few breaths. She'd screamed for help, calling for Ham and Spook, but had gotten no response. They were too far away.

She felt cold. Empty. After holding that much power, then having it ripped from her, she felt like she was nothing. And, once Elend died, she would be.

*What would be the point?* she thought. *Life doesn't mean anything. I've betrayed Elend. I've betrayed the world*.

She wasn't certain what had happened, but somehow she'd made a horrible, horrible mistake. The worst part was, she had tried so hard to do what was right, even if it hurt.

Something loomed above her. She looked up at the mist spirit, but couldn't even really feel rage. She was having trouble feeling anything at the moment.

The spirit raised an arm, pointing.

"It's over," she whispered.

It pointed more demandingly.

"I won't get to them in time," she said. "Besides, I *saw* how bad the cut was. Saw it with the power. There's nothing any of them could do, not even Sazed. So, you should be pleased. You got what you wanted. . ." She trailed off. Why had the spirit stabbed Elend?

*To make me heal him*, she thought. *To keep me. . .from releasing the power*.

She blinked her eyes. The spirit waved its arm.

Slowly, numbly, she got to her feet. She watched the spirit in a trance as it floated a few steps over and pointed at something on the ground. The room was dark, now that the pool was empty, and was illuminated only by Elend's lantern. She had to flare tin to see what the spirit was pointing at.

A piece of pottery. The disk Elend had taken from the shelf in the back of the room, and had been holding in his hand. It had broken when he'd collapsed.

The mist spirit pointed urgently. Vin approached and bent over, fingers finding the small nugget of metal that had been at the disk's center.

"What is it?" she whispered.

The mist spirit turned and drifted back to Elend. Vin walked up quietly.

He was still alive. He seemed to be getting weaker, and was trembling less. Eerily, as he grew closer to death, he actually seemed a bit more in control. He looked at her as she knelt, and she could see his lips moving.

"Vin. . ." he whispered.

She knelt beside him, looked at the bead of metal, then looked up at the spirit. It stood motionless. She rolled the bead between her fingers, then moved to eat it.

The spirit moved urgently, shaking its hands. Vin paused, and the spirit pointed at Elend.

*What?* she thought. However, she wasn't really in a state to think. She held the nugget up to Elend. "Elend," she whispered, leaning close. "You must swallow this."

She wasn't certain if he understood her or not, though he did appear to nod. She placed the bit of metal in his mouth. His lips moved, but he started to choke.

*I have to get him something to wash it down*, she thought. The only thing she had was one of her metal vials. She reached into the empty well, retrieving her earring and her sash. She pulled free a vial, then poured the liquid into his mouth.

Elend continued to cough weakly, but the liquid did its work well, washing down the bead of metal. Vin knelt, feeling so powerless, a depressing contrast to how she had been just moments before. Elend closed his eyes.

Then, oddly, the color seemed to return to his cheeks. Vin knelt, confused, watching him. The look on his face, the way he lay, the color of his skin. . .

She burned bronze, and with shock, felt pulses coming from Elend.

He was burning pewter.

# EPILOGUE

TWO WEEKS LATER, A SOLITARY figure arrived at the Conventical of Seran.

Sazed had left Luthadel quietly, troubled by his thoughts and by the loss of Tindwyl. He'd left a note. He couldn't stay in Luthadel. Not at the moment.

The mists still killed. They struck random people who went out at night, with no discernible pattern. Many of the people did not die, but only became sick. Others, the mists murdered. Sazed didn't know what to make of the deaths. He wasn't even certain if he cared. Vin spoke of something terrible she had released at the Well of Ascension. She had expected Sazed to want to study and record her experience.

Instead, he had left.

He made his way through the solemn, steel-plated rooms. He half expected to be confronted by one Inquisitor or another. Perhaps Marsh would try to kill him again. By the time he and Ham had returned from the storage cavern beneath Luthadel, Marsh had vanished again. His work had, apparently, been done. He'd stalled Sazed long enough to keep him from stopping Vin.

Sazed made his way down the steps, through the torture chamber, and finally into the small rock room he'd visited on his first trip to the Conventical, so many weeks before. He dropped his pack to the ground, working it open with tired fingers, then looked up at the large steel plate.

Kwaan's final words stared back at him. Sazed knelt, pulling a carefully tied portfolio from his pack. He undid the string, and then removed his original rubbing, made in this very room months before. He recognized his fingerprints on the thin paper, knew the strokes of the charcoal to be his own. He recognized the smudges he had made.

With growing nervousness, he held the rubbing up and slapped it against the steel plate on the wall.

And the two did not match.

Sazed stepped back, uncertain what to think now that his suspicions had been confirmed. The rubbing slipped limply from his fingers, and his eyes found the sentence at the end of the plate. The last sentence, the one that the mist spirit had ripped free time and time again. The original one on the steel plate was different from the one Sazed had written and studied.

*Alendi must not reach the Well of Ascension,* Kwaan's ancient words read, *for he must not be allowed to release the thing that is imprisoned there*.

Sazed sat down quietly. *It was all a lie*, he thought numbly. *The religion of the Terris people. . .the thing the Keepers spent millennia searching for, trying to understand, was a lie. The so-called prophecies, the Hero of Ages. . .a fabrication*.

*A trick.*

What better way for such a creature to gain freedom? Men would die in the name of prophecies. They wanted to believe, to hope. If someone—something—could harness that energy, twist it, what amazing things could be accomplished. . ..

Sazed looked up, reading the words on the wall, reading the second half once again. It contained paragraphs that were different from his rubbing.

Or, rather, his rubbing had been changed somehow. Changed to reflect what the thing had wished Sazed to read. *I write these words in steel*, Kwaan's first words said, *for anything not set in metal cannot be trusted*.

Sazed shook his head. They should have paid attention to that sentence. Everything he had studied after that had, apparently, been a lie. He looked up at the plate, scanning its contents, coming to the final section.

*And so*, they read, *I come to the focus of my argument. I apologize. Even forcing my words into steel, sitting and scratching in this frozen cave, I am prone to ramble.*

> *This is the problem. Though I believed in Alendi at first, I later became suspicious. It seemed that he fit the signs, true. But, well, how can I explain this?*
>
> *Could it be that he fit them too well?*
>
> *I know your argument. We speak of the Anticipation, of things foretold, of promises made by our greatest prophets of old. Of course the Hero of Ages will fit the prophecies. He will fit them perfectly. That's the idea.*
>
> *And yet. . .something about all this seems so convenient. It feels almost as if we constructed a hero to fit our prophecies, rather than allowing one to arise naturally. This was the worry I had, the thing that should have given me pause when my brethren came to me, finally willing to believe.*
>
> *After that, I began to see other problems. Some of you may know of my fabled memory. It is true; I need not a Feruchemist's metalmind to memorize a sheet of words in an instant. And I tell you, call me daft, but the words of the prophecies are changing.*
>
> *The alterations are slight. Clever, even. A word here, a slight twist there. But the words on the pages are different from the ones in my memory. The other Worldbringers scoff at me, for they have their metalminds to prove to them that the books and prophecies have not changed.*

*And so, this is the great declaration I must make. There is something—some force—that wants us to believe that the Hero of Ages has come, and that he must travel to the Well of Ascension. Something is making the prophecies change so that they refer to Alendi more perfectly.*

*And whatever this power is, it can change words within a Feruchemist's metalmind.*

*The others call me mad. As I have said, that may be true. But must not even a madman rely on his own mind, his own experience, rather than that of others? I know what I have memorized. I know what is now repeated by the other Worldbringers. The two are not the same.*

*I sense a craftiness behind these changes, a manipulation subtle and brilliant. I have spent the last two years in exile, trying to decipher what the alterations could mean. I have come to only one conclusion. Something has taken control of our religion, something nefarious, something that cannot be trusted. It misleads, and it shadows. It uses Alendi to destroy, leading him along a path of death and sorrow. It is pulling him toward the Well of Ascension, where the millennial power has gathered. I can only guess that it sent the Deepness as a method of making mankind more desperate, of pushing us to do as it wills.*

*The prophecies have changed. They now tell Alendi that he must give up the power once he takes it. This is not what was once implied by the texts—they were more vague. And yet, the new version seems to make it a moral imperative. The texts now outline a terrible consequence if the Hero of Ages takes the power for himself.*

*Alendi believes as they do. He is a good man—despite it all, he is a good man. A sacrificing man. In truth, all of his* *actions—all of the deaths, destructions, and pains that he has caused—have hurt him1 deeply. All of these things were, in truth, a kind of sacrifice for him. He is accustomed to giving up his own will for the common good, as he sees it.*

*I have no doubt that if Alendi reaches the Well of Ascension, he will take the power and then—in the name of the presumed greater good—will give it up. Give it away to this same force that has changed the texts. Give it up to this force of destruction that has brought him to war, that has tempted him to kill, that has craftily led him to the north.*

*This thing wants the power held in the Well, and it has raped our religion's holiest tenets in order to get it.*

*And so, I have made one final gamble. My pleas, my teachings, my objections, and even my treasons were all ineffectual. Alendi has other counselors now, ones who tell him what he wants to hear.*

*I have a young nephew, one Rashek. He hates all of Khlennium with the passion of envious youth. He hates Alendi even more acutely—though the two have never met—for Rashek feels betrayed that one of our oppressors should have been chosen as the Hero of Ages.*

*Alendi will need guides through the Terris Mountains. I have charged Rashek with making certain that he and his trusted friends are chosen as those guides. Rashek is to try and lead Alendi in the wrong direction, to dissuade him, discourage him, or otherwise foil his quest. Alendi doesn't know that he has been deceived, that we've all been deceived, and he will not listen to me now.*

*If Rashek fails to lead the trek astray, then I have instructed the lad to kill Alendi. It is a distant hope. Alendi has survived assassins, wars, and catastrophes. And yet, I hope that in the*

> *frozen mountains of Terris, he may finally be exposed. I hope for a miracle.*
>
> *Alendi must not reach the Well of Ascension, for he must not be allowed to release the thing that is imprisoned there.*

Sazed sat back. It was the final blow, the last strike that killed whatever was left of his faith.

He knew at that moment that he would never believe again.

Vin found Elend standing on the city wall, looking over the city of Luthadel. He wore a white uniform, one of the ones that Tindwyl had made for him. He looked. . .harder than he had just a few weeks before.

"You're awake," she said, moving up beside him.

He nodded. He didn't look at her, but continued to watch the city, with its bustling people. He'd spent quite a bit of time delirious and in bed, despite the healing power of his newfound Allomancy. Even with pewter, the surgeons had been uncertain if he'd survive.

He had. And, like a true Allomancer, he was up and about the first day he was lucid.

"What happened?" he asked.

She shook her head, leaning against the stones of the battlement. She could still hear that terrible, booming voice. *I am FREE. . ..*

"I'm an Allomancer," Elend said.

She nodded.

"Mistborn, apparently," he continued.

"I think. . .we know where they came from, now," Vin said. "The first Allomancers."

"What happened to the power? Ham didn't have a straight answer for me, and all anyone else knows are rumors."

"I set something free," she whispered. "Something that shouldn't have been released; something that led me to the Well. I should never have gone looking for it, Elend."

Elend stood in silence, still regarding the city.

She turned, burying her head in his chest. "It was terrible," she said. "I could feel that. And I set it free."

Finally, Elend wrapped his arms around her. "You did the best you could, Vin," he said. "In fact, you did the right thing. How could you have known that everything you'd been told, trained, and prepared to do was wrong?"

Vin shook her head. "I am worse than the Lord Ruler. In the end, maybe he realized he was being tricked, and knew he had to take the power rather than release it."

"If he'd been a good man, Vin," Elend said, "he wouldn't have done the things he did to this land."

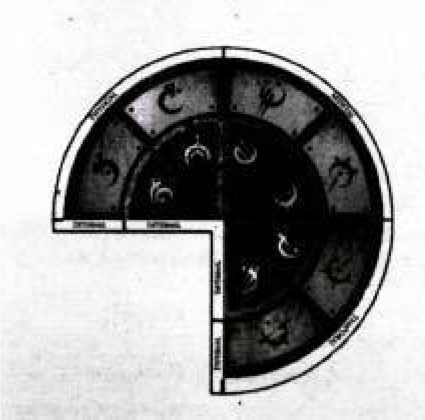
"I may have done far worse," Vin said. "This thing I released. . .the mists killing people, and coming during the day. . .Elend, what are we going to do?"

He looked at her for a moment, then turned back toward the city and its people. "We're going to do what Kelsier taught us, Vin. We're going to survive."

# ARS ARCANUM

*1. Metals Quick-Reference Chart*
*2. Names and Terms*
*3. Summary of Book One*

*You can also find extensive annotations of every chapter in the book along with deleted scenes, a very active blog, and expanded world information at www.brandonsanderson.com.*



## METALS QUICK-REFERENCE CHART

| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metals | Stores Physical Weight |
| Steel | Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Speed |
| Tin | Increases Senses | Stores Senses |
| Pewter | Increases Physical Abilities | Stores Physical Strength |
| Brass | Soothes (Dampens) Emotions | Stores Warmth |
| Zinc | Riots (Enflames) Emotions | Stores Mental Speed |
| Copper | Hides Allomantic Pulses | Stores Memories |
| Bronze | Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses | Stores Wakefulness |

| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER |
|---|---|---|
| Atium | See into Other People's Futures | Stores Age |
| Malatium | See into Other People's Pasts | Unknown |
| Gold | See into Your Own Past | Stores Health |
| Electrum | See into Your Own Future | Unknown |

## NAMES AND TERMS

ALENDI: A man who conquered the world a thousand years ago, before the Lord Ruler's Ascension. Vin found his journal in the Lord Ruler's palace, and thought—at first—that he had become the Lord Ruler. It was later discovered that his servant, Rashek, killed him and took his place. Alendi was a friend and protege of Kwaan, a Terris scholar who thought that Alendi might be the Hero of Ages.

ALLOMANCY: A mystical hereditary power involving the burning of metals inside the body to gain special abilities.

ALLOMANTIC METALS: There are eight basic Allomantic metals. These come in pairs, comprising a base metal and its alloy. They can also be divided into two groups of four as internal metals (tin, pewter, copper, bronze) and external metals (iron, steel, zinc, brass). It was long assumed that there were only two other Allomantic metals: gold and atium. However, the discovery of alloys for gold and atium has expanded the number of metals to twelve. There have been rumors of other metals, one of which has been discovered. (See also: Aluminum.)

ALLOMANTIC PULSE: The signal given off by an Allomancer who is burning metals. Only someone who is burning bronze can "hear" an Allomantic pulse.

ALLRIANNE: Lord Ashweather Cett's only daughter.

ALUMINUM: A metal Vin was forced to burn in the Lord Ruler's palace. Once known only to the Steel Inquisitors, this metal, when burned, depletes all of an Allomancer's other metal reserves. Its alloy, if it has one, is unknown.

AMARANTA: One of Straff Venture's mistresses. An herbalist.

ANCHOR (ALLOMANTIC): A term used to refer to a piece of metal that an Allomancer Pushes on or Pulls on when burning iron or steel.

ASCENSION (OF THE LORD RULER): The Ascension is the term used to describe what happened to Rashek when he took the power at the Well of Ascension and became the Lord Ruler.

ASHFALLS: Ash falls frequently from the sky in the Final Empire because of the Ashmounts.

ASHMOUNTS: Seven large ash volcanoes that appeared in the Final Empire during the Ascension.

ASHWEATHER: Lord Cett's first name.

ATIUM: A strange metal formerly produced in the Pits of Hathsin. It collected inside of small geodes that formed in crystalline pockets in caves beneath the ground.

BIRCHBANE: A common poison.

BOXING: The slang name for an imperial gold coin. The name comes from the picture on its back of Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's palace—or, the "box" in which he lives.

BREEZE: A Soother on Kelsier's crew, now one of Elend's foremost counselors.

BRONZEPULSE: Another term for an Allomantic pulse.

BURN (ALLOMANCY): An Allomancer utilizing or expending the metals in their stomachs. First, they must swallow a metal, then Allomantically metabolize it inside of them to access its power.

BURNLANDS: The deserts at the edges of the Final Empire.

CAMON: Vin's old crewleader. A harsh man who often beat her, Camon was cast out by Kelsier. The Inquisitors eventually killed him.

CANTON: A suboffice withi1n the Steel Ministry.

CETT: Lord Ashweather Cett is the most prominent king who has managed to gain power in the Western Dominance. His home city is Fadrex.

CHANNEREL: The river that runs through Luthadel.

CLADENT: Clubs's real name.

CLIP (COINAGE): The nickname for an imperial copper coin in the Final Empire. Commonly used by Mistborn and Coinshots for jumping and attacking.

CLUBS: A Smoker on Kelsier's crew, now general of Elend's armies. He once was a skaa carpenter.

COINSHOT: A Misting who can burn steel.

COLLAPSE, THE: The death of the Lord Ruler and the fall of the Final Empire.

COPPERCLOUD: The invisible, obsuring field set up by someone burning copper. If an Allomancer burns metals while within a coppercloud, their Allomantic pulses are hidden from those burning bronze. The term "Coppercloud" is also, sometimes, used to refer to a Smoker (a Misting who can burn copper).

DEEPNESS, THE: The mythological monster or force that threatened the land just before the rise of the Lord Ruler and the Final Empire. The term comes from Terris lore, and the Hero of Ages was the one prophesied to come and eventually defeat the Deepness. The Lord Ruler claims to have defeated it when he Ascended.

DEMOUX, CAPTAIN: Ham's second-in-command, a soldier in Elend's palace guard.

DOCKSON: Kelsier's old right-hand man, informal leader of his crew now that Kelsier is dead. He has no Allomantic powers.

DOMINANCE (FINAL EMPIRE): A province of the Final Empire. Luthadel is in the Central Dominance. The four surrounding dominances are called the Inner Dominances, and include most of the population and culture of the Final Empire. After the Collapse, the Final Empire shattered, and different kings took power, trying to claim leadership of the various dominances, effectively turning each one into a kingdom of its own.

DOX: Dockson's nickname.

ELEND VENTURE: King of the Central Dominance, son of Straff Venture.

EXTINGUISH (ALLOMANTIC): To cease burning an Allomantic metal.

FADREX: A modestly sized, well-fortified city in the Western Dominance. Capital city and home to Ashweather Cett. A main place of stockpile for the Canton of Resource.

FELT: Once one of Straff's spies, the man was (like most of Straff's employees) left behind at the fall of Luthadel. He gave his allegiance to Elend instead.

FINAL EMPIRE: The empire established by the Lord Ruler. The name came from the fact that, being immortal, he felt that it would be the last empire the world ever knew, since it would never fall or end.

FLARE (ALLOMANTIC): To draw a little extra power from an Allomantic metal at the expense of making it burn faster.

GNEORNDIN: Ashweather Cett's only son.

GORADEL: Once a soldier in the Luthadel Garrison, Goradel was guarding the palace when Vin decided to infiltrate and kill the Lord Ruler. Vin convinced him to switch sides, and he later led Elend through the palace to try and rescue her. Now a member of Elend's guard.

HAM: A Thug on Kelsier's crew, now captain of Elend's palace guard.

HAMMOND: Ham's real name.

HATHSIN: See Pits of Hathsin.

HERO OF AGES, THE: The mythological prophesied savior of the Terris people. It was foretold that he would come, take the power at the Well of Ascension, then be selfless enough to give it up in order to save the world from the Deepness. Alendi was thought to be the Hero of Ages, but was killed before he could complete his quest.

INQUISITORS, STEEL: A group of strange creatures, priests who served the Lord Ruler. They have spikes driven completely through their heads—point-first through the eyes—yet continue to live. They were fanatically devoted to him, and were used primarily to hunt out and kill skaa with Allomantic powers. They have the abilities of a Mistborn, and some others.

IRONEYES: Marsh's nickname in the crew.

IRONPULL: Pulling on a metal when Allomantically burning iron. This Pull exerts a force on the metal item, yanking it directly toward the Allomancer. If the metallic item, known as an anchor, is heavier than the Allomancer, he or she will instead be Pulled toward the metal source.

JANARLE: Straff Venture's second-in-command.

JASTES LEKAL: Heir to the Lekal house title, one of Elend's former friends. He and Elend often talked politics and philosophy together with Telden.

KANDRA: A race of strange creatures who can ingest the dead body of a person, then reproduce that body with their own flesh. They keep the bones of the person they imitate, using them, as kandra themselves have no bones. They serve Contracts with mankind—which must be bought with atium—and are relatives of mistwraiths.

KEEPER (TERRIS): "Keeper" is often used as simply another term for a Feruchemist. The Keepers are actually an organization of Feruchemists dedicated to discovering, then memorizing, all of the knowledge and religions that existed before the Ascension. The Lord Ruler hunted them to near extinction, forcing them to remain hidden.

KELL: Kelsier's nickname.

KELSIER: The most famous thieving crewleader in the Final Empire, Kelsier raised a rebellion of skaa and overthrew the Lord Ruler, but was killed in the process. He was Mistborn, and was Vin's teacher.

KHLENNIUM: An ancient kingdom that existed before the rise of the Final Empire. It was Alendi's homeland.

KLISS: A woman whom Vin knew in the court at Luthadel. She eventually turned out to be an informant for hire.

KOLOSS: A race of bestial warriors created by the Lord Ruler during his Ascension, then used by him to conquer the world.

KREDIK SHAW: The Lord Ruler's palace in Luthadel. It means "the Hill of a Thousand Spires" in the old Terris language.

KWAAN: A Terris scholar before the Collapse. He was a Worldbringer, and was the first to mistakenly think that Alendi was the Hero of Ages. He later changed his mind, betraying his former friend.

LADRIAN: Breeze's real name.

LESTIBOURNES: Spook's real name.

LLAMAS, MISTBORN: Brandon's writing group. Mistborn Llamas burn various kinds of plants to gain super-llaman powers. T-shirts can be found on the Web site.

LORD RULER: The emperor who ruled the Final Empire for a thousand years. He was once named Rashek, and was a Terris servant who was hired by Alendi. He killed Alendi, however, and went to the Well of Ascension in his place, and there took the power and Ascended. He was finally killed by Vin.

LURCHER: A Misting who can burn steel.

LUTHADEL: Capital of the Final Empire, and largest city in the land. Luthadel is known for its textiles, its forges, and its majestic noble keeps.

MALATIUM: The metal discovered by Kelsier, often dubbed the Eleventh Metal. Nobody knows where he found it, or why he thought it could kill the Lord Ruler. It did, however, eventually lead Vin to the clue she needed to defeat the emperor.

MARDRA: Ham's wife. She doesn't like to be involved in his thieving practices, or exposing their children to the danger of his lifestyle, and generally keeps her distance from the members of the crew.

METALMIND: A piece of metal that a Feruchemist uses as a kind of battery, filling it with certain attributes that he or she can later withdraw. Specific metalminds are named after the different metals: tinmind, steelmind, etc.

MIST: The strange, omnipresent fog that falls on the Final Empire every night. Thicker than a regular fog, it swirls and churns about, almost as if it were alive.

MISTBORN: An Allomancer who can burn all of the Allomantic metals.

MISTCLOAK: A garment worn by many Mistborn as a mark of their station. It is constructed from dozens of thick ribbons of cloth that are sewn together at the top, but allowed to spread free from the shoulders down.

MISTING: An Allomancer who can burn only one metal. They are much more common than Mistborn. (Note: In Allomancy, an Allomancer has either one power or all of them. There are no in-betweens with two or three.)

MISTWRAITH: A nonsentient relative of the kandra people. Mistwraiths are globs of boneless flesh that scavenge the land at night, eating bodies they find, then using the skeletons for their own bodies.

MOORDEN: One of the only obligators who chose to stay in Luthadel and serve Elend.

OBLIGATOR: A member of the Lord Ruler's priesthood. Obligators were more than just religious figures, however; they were civil bureaucrats, and even a spy network. A business deal or promise that wasn't witnessed by an obligator was not considered legally or morally binding.

ORESEUR: A kandra employed by Kelsier. He once played the part of Lord Renoux, Vin's uncle. Vin now holds his Contract.

PENROD, FERSON: One of the most prominent noblemen left in Luthadel. A member of Elend's Assembly.

PEWTERARM: Another term for a Thug, a Misting who can burn pewter.

PHILEN: A prominent merchant in Luthadel and a member of Elend's Assembly.

PITS OF HATHSIN, THE: A network of caverns that were once the only place in the Final Empire that produced atium. The Lord Ruler used prisoners to work them. Kelsier destroyed their ability to produce atium shortly before he died.

PULL (ALLOMANTIC): Using Allomancy to Pull on something—either people's emotions with zinc, or metals with iron.

PUSH (ALLOMANTIC): Using Allomancy to 1Push on something—either people's emotions with brass, or metals with steel.

RASHEK: A Terris packman before the Ascension, Rashek was hired by Alendi to help him make the trek to the Well of Ascension. Rashek never got along well with Alendi, and eventually killed him. He took the power himself, and became the Lord Ruler.

REEN: Vin's brother, the one who protected her and trained her as a thief. Reen was brutal and unforgiving, but he did save Vin from their insane mother, then protected her during her childhood.

RELEASE (FERUCHEMICAL): When a Feruchemist stops tapping a metalmind, no longer drawing forth its power.

RENOUX, LORD: A nobleman that Kelsier killed, then hired the kandra OreSeur to imitate. Vin played the part of his niece, Valette Renoux.

RIOT (ALLOMANTIC): When an Allomancer burns zinc and Pulls on a person's emotions, enflaming them.

RIOTER (ALLOMANTIC): A Misting who can burn zinc.

SAZE: Sazed's nickname on the crew.

SAZED: A Terris Keeper who joined Kelsier's crew against the wishes of his people, then helped overthrow the Final Empire.

SEEKER (ALLOMANTIC): A Misting who can burn bronze.

SHAN ELARIEL: Elend's former fiancee, a Mistborn whom Vin killed.

SKAA: The peasantry of the Final Empire. They were once of different races and nationalities, but over the thousand-year span of the empire the Lord Ruler worked hard to stamp out any sense of identity in the people, eventually succeeding in creating a single, homogeneous race of slave workers.

SMOKER (ALLOMANTIC): An Allomancer who can burn copper. Also known as a Coppercloud.

SOOTHE (ALLOMANTIC): When an Allomancer burns brass and Pushes on a person's emotions, dampening them.

SOOTHER: A Misting who can burn brass.

SPOOK: A Tineye on Kelsier's crew. The youngest member of the crew, Spook was only fifteen when the Lord Ruler was overthrown. He is Clubs's nephew, and was once known for his use of garbled street slang.

STEEL MINISTRY: The Lord Ruler's priesthood, consisting of a small number of Steel Inquisitors and a larger body of priests called obligators. The Steel Ministry was more than just a religious organization; it was the civic framework of the Final Empire as well.

STRAFF VENTURE: Elend's father, king of the Northern Dominance. He makes his home in Urteau.

SURVIVOR OF SATHSIN: A cognomen of Kelsier, referring to the fact that he is the only known prisoner to ever escape the prison camps at the Pits of Hathsin.

SYNOD (TERRIS): The elite leaders of the Terris Keeper organization.

TAP (FERUCHEMICAL): Drawing power from within a Feruchemist's metalminds. It is parallel to the term "burn" used by Allomancers.

TATHINGDWEN: Capital of the Terris Dominance.

TELDEN: One of Elend's old friends, with whom he would talk politics and philosophy.

TENSOON: Straff Venture's kandra.

TERRIS: The dominance in the far north of the Final Empire. It is the only do1minance to retain the name of the kingdom it used to be, perhaps a sign of the Lord Ruler's fondness for his homeland.

THUG (ALLOMANTIC): A Misting who can burn pewter.

TINDWYL: A Terris Keeper and a member of the Synod.

TINEYE: A Misting who can burn tin.

URTEAU: Capital of the Northern Dominance, and seat of House Venture.

VALETTE RENOUX: The alias that Vin used when infiltrating noble society during the days before the Collapse.

WELL OF ASCENSION: A mythological center of power from Terris lore. The Well of Ascension was said to hold a magical reserve of power that could be drawn upon by one who made the trek to visit it at the right time.

WORLDBRINGER: A sect of scholarly Terris Feruchemists before the Collapse. The subsequent Order of Keepers was based on the Worldbringers.

YEDEN: A member of Kelsier's crew and the skaa rebellion. He was killed during the fight against the Lord Ruler.

YOMEN, LORD: An obligator in Urteau who was politically opposed to Cett.

## SUMMARY OF BOOK ONE

*Mistborn: The Final Empire* introduced the land of the Final Empire, ruled over by a powerful immortal known as the Lord Ruler. A thousand years before, the Lord Ruler took the power at the Well of Ascension and supposedly defeated a powerful force or creature known only as the Deepness.

The Lord Ruler conquered the known world and founded the Final Empire. He ruled for a thousand years, stamping out all remnants of the individual kingdoms, cultures, religions, and languages that used to exist in his land. In their place he set up his own system. Certain peoples were dubbed "skaa," a word that meant something akin to "slave" or "peasant." Other peoples were dubbed nobility, and most of these were descendants of those people who had supported the Lord Ruler during his years of conquest. The Lord Ruler had supposedly given them the power of Allomancy in order to gain powerful assassins and warriors who had minds that could think, as opposed to the brutish koloss, and had used them well in conquering and maintaining his empire.

Skaa and nobility were forbidden to interbreed, and the nobility were somehow given the power of Allomancy. During the thousand years of the Lord Ruler's reign, many rebellions occurred among the skaa, but none were successful.

Finally, a half-breed Mistborn known as Kelsier decided to challenge the Lord Ruler. Once the most famous of gentleman thieves in the Final Empire, Kelsier had been known for his daring schemes. Those eventually ended with his capture, however, and he had been sent to the Lord Ruler's death camp at the Pits of Hathsin, the secret source of atium.

It was said that nobody ever escaped the Pits of Hathsin alive—but Kelsier did just that. He gained his powers as a Mistborn during that time, and managed to free himself, earning the title the Survivor of Hathsin. At this point, he turned from his selfish ways and decided to try his most daring plan yet: the overthrow of the Final Empire.

He recruited a team of thieves, mostly half-breed Mistings, to help him achieve his goal. During this time, he also recruited a young half-breed Mistborn girl named Vin. Vin was unaware of her powers, and Kelsier brought her into the crew to train her, theoretically to have someone to who1m he could pass his legacy.

Kelsier's crew slowly gathered an underground army of skaa rebels. The crew began to fear that Kelsier was setting himself up to be another Lord Ruler. He sought to make himself a legend among the skaa, becoming almost a religious figure to them. Meanwhile, Vin—who had been raised on the streets by a cruel brother—was growing to trust people for the first time in her life. As this happened, Vin began to believe in Kelsier and his purpose.

During the process of working on their plan, Vin was used as a spy among the nobility, and was trained to infiltrate their balls and parties playing the part of "Valette Renoux," a young noblewoman from the countryside. During the first of these balls, she met Elend Venture, a young, idealistic nobleman. He eventually showed her that not all noblemen were deserving of their poor reputation, and the two became enamored of each other, despite Kelsier's best efforts.

The crew also discovered a journal, apparently written by the Lord Ruler himself during the days before the Ascension. This book painted a different picture of the tyrant; it depicted a melancholy, tired man who was trying his best to protect the people against the Deepness, despite the fact that he didn't really understand it.

In the end, it was revealed that Kelsier's plan had been much more broad than simple use of the army to overthrow the empire. He'd partially spent so much effort on raising troops so that he would have an excuse to spread rumors about himself. He also used it to train his crew in the arts of leadership and persuasion. The true extent of his plan was revealed when he sacrificed his life in a very visible way, making himself a martyr to the skaa and finally convincing them to rise up and overthrow the Lord Ruler.

One of Kelsier's crewmembers—a man who had been playing the part of "Lord Renoux," Valette's uncle—turned out to be a kandra named OreSeur. OreSeur took on Kelsier's form, then went about spreading rumors that Kelsier had returned from the grave, inspiring the skaa. After this, he became Contractually bound to Vin, and was charged with watching over her after Kelsier's death.

Vin was the one who in fact killed the Lord Ruler. She discovered that he wasn't actually a god, or even immortal—he had simply found a way to extend his life and his power by making use of both Allomancy and Feruchemy at the same time. He wasn't the hero from the logbook—but, instead, was that man's servant, a Feruchemist of some great power. Still, he was much stronger in Allomancy than Vin. While she was fighting him, she drew upon the mists somehow, burning them in place of metals. She still doesn't know why or how this happened. With that power—and with the knowledge of his true nature—she was able to defeat and kill him.

The Final Empire was thrown into chaos. Elend Venture took control of Luthadel, the capital, and put Kelsier's crew in prime governmental positions.

One year has passed.

## A WORD FROM BRANDON SANDERSON

If you've enjoyed *The Well of Ascension*—and I certainly hope you have I—you don't have long to wait for the conclusion of Vin and Elend's story. *The Hero of Ages* is set for publication in October. You can find a free sample of it on my Web site at www.brandonsanderson.com.

While you're waiting, I think you might enjoy the work of a colleague of mine, someone I think is doing great things for fantasy and deserves more attention.

Daniel Abr1aham is one of the field's brightest new talents. His series, The Long Price Quartet, is beautiful. It has everything I love about a good fantasy story: an intriguing magic system, deep and complex characters who deviate from fantasy cliches, and an unexpected plot. Daniel's works are thoughtful, inquiring and—most important—just plain fun to read.

So it is my pleasure and privilege to present to you a chapter from *An Autumn War*, the third book of Daniel's Long Price Quartet. Enjoy!

Brandon Sanderson

Turn the page for a preview

THREE MEN CAME OUT OF the desert. Twenty had gone in.

The setting sun pushed their shadows out behind them, lit their faces a ruddy gold, blinded them. The weariness and pain in their bodies robbed them of speech. On the horizon, something glimmered that was no star, and they moved silently toward it. The farthest tower of Far Galt, the edge of the Empire, beckoned them home from the wastes, and without speaking, each man knew that they would not stop until they stood behind its gates.

The smallest of them shifted the satchel on his back. His gray commander's tunic hung from his flesh as if the cloth itself were exhausted.

His mind turned inward, half-dreaming, and the leather straps of the satchel rubbed against his raw shoulder. The burden had killed seventeen of his men, and now it was his to carry as far as the tower that rose up slowly in the violet air of evening. He could not bring himself to think past that.

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One of the others stumbled and fell to his knees on wind-paved stones. The commander paused. He would not lose another, not so near the end. And yet he feared bending down, lifting the man up. If he paused, he might never move again. Grunting, the other man recovered his feet. The commander nodded once and turned again to the west. A breeze stirred the low, brownish grasses, hissing and hushing. The punishing sun made its exit and left behind twilight and the wide swath of stars hanging overhead, cold candles beyond numbering. The night would bring chill as deadly as the midday heat.

It seemed to the commander that the tower did not so much come closer as grow, plantlike. He endured his weariness and pain, and the structure that had been no larger than his thumb was now the size of his hand. The beacon that had seemed steady flickered now, and tongues of flame leapt and vanished. Slowly, the details of the stonework came clear; the huge carved relief of the Great Tree of Galt. He smiled, the skin of his lip splitting, wetting his mouth with blood.

"We're not going to die," one of the others said. He sounded amazed. The commander didn't respond, and some measureless time later, another voice called for them to stop, to offer their names and the reason that they'd come to this twice-forsaken ass end of the world.

When the commander spoke, his voice was rough, rusting with disuse.

"Go to your High Watchman," he said. "Tell him that Balasar Gice has returned."

Balasar Gice had been in his eleventh year when he first heard the word *andat*. The river that passed through his father's estates had turned green one day, and then red. And then it rose fifteen feet. Balasar had watched in horror as the fields vanished, the cottages, the streets and yards he knew. The whole world, it seemed, had become a sea of foul water with only the top1s of trees and the corpses of pigs and cattle and men to the horizon.

His father had moved the family and as many of his best men as would fit to the upper stories of the house. Balasar had begged to take the horse his father had given him up as well. When the gravity of the situation had been explained, he changed his pleas to include the son of the village notary, who had been Balasar's closest friend. He had been refused in that as well. His horses and his playmates were going to drown. His father's concern was for Balasar, for the family; the wider world would have to look after itself.

Even now, decades later, the memory of those six days was fresh as a wound. The bloated bodies of pigs and cattle and people like pale logs floating past the house. The rich, low scent of fouled water. The struggle to sleep when the rushing at the bottom of the stairs seemed like the whisper of something vast and terrible for which he had no name. He could still hear men's voices questioning whether the food would last, whether the water was safe to drink, and whether the flood was natural, a catastrophe of distant rains, or an attack by the Khaiem and their andat.

He had not known then what the word meant, but the syllables had taken on the stench of the dead bodies, the devastation where the village had been, the emptiness and the destruction. It was only much later—after the water had receded, the dead had been mourned, the village rebuilt—that he learned how correct he had been.

Nine generations of fathers had greeted their new children into the world since the God Kings of the East had turned upon each other, his history tutor told him. When the glory that had been the center of all creation fell, its throes had changed the nature of space. The lands that had been great gardens and fields were deserts now, permanently altered by the war. Even as far as Galt and Eddensea, the histories told of weeks of darkness, of failed crops and famine, a sky dancing with flames of green, a sound as if the earth were tearing itself apart. Some people said the stars themselves had changed positions.

But the disasters of the past grew in the telling or faded from memory. No one knew exactly how things had been those many years ago. Perhaps the Emperor had gone mad and loosed his personal god-ghost—what they called andat—against his own people, or against himself. Or there might have been a woman, the wife of a great lord, who had been taken by the Emperor against her will. Or perhaps she'd willed it. Or the thousand factions and minor insults and treacheries that accrue around power had simply followed their usual course.

As a boy, Balasar had listened to the story, drinking in the tales of mystery and glory and dread. And, when his tutor had told him, somber of tone and gray, that there were only two legacies left by the fall of the God Kings—the wastelands that bordered Far Galt and Obar State, and the cities of the Khaiem where men still held the andat like Cooling, Seedless, Stone-Made-Soft—Balasar had understood the implication as clearly as if it had been spoken.

What had happened before could happen again at any time and without warning.

"And that's what brought you?" the High Watchman said. "It's a long walk from a little boy at his lessons to this place."

Balasar smiled again and leaned forward to sip bitter kafe from a rough tin mug. His room was baked brick and close as a cell. A cruel wind hissed outside the thick walls, as it had for the three long, feverish days since he had returned to the world. The small windows had been scrubbed milky by sandstorms. His little wounds were scabbing over, none of them re1ddened or hot to the touch, though the stripe on his shoulder where the satchel strap had been would doubtless leave a scar.

"It wasn't as romantic as I'd imagined," he said. The High Watchman laughed, and then, remembering the dead, sobered. Balasar shifted the subject. "How long have you been here? And who did you offend to get yourself sent to this. . .lovely place?"

"Eight years. I've been eight years at this post. I didn't much care for the way things got run in Acton. I suppose this was my way of saying so."

"I'm sure Acton felt the loss."

"I'm sure it didn't. But then, I didn't do it for them."

Balasar chuckled.

"That *sounds* like wisdom," Balasar said, "but eight years here seems an odd place for wisdom to lead you."

The High Watchman smacked his lips and shrugged.

"It wasn't me going inland," he said. Then, a moment later, "They say there's still andat out there. Haunting the places they used to control."

"There aren't," Balasar said. "There are other things. Things they made or unmade. There's places where the air goes bad on you—one breath's fine, and the next it's like something's crawling into you. There's places where the ground's thin as eggshell and a thousand-foot drop under it. And there are living things too—things they made with the andat, or what happened when the things they made bred. But the ghosts don't stay once their handlers are gone. That isn't what they are."

Balasar took an olive from his plate, sucked away the flesh, and spat back the stone. For a moment, he could hear voices in the wind. The words of men who'd trusted and followed him, even knowing where he would take them. The voices of the dead whose lives he had spent. Coal and Eustin had survived. The others—Little Ott, Bes, Mayarsin, Laran, Kellem, and a dozen more—were bones and memory now. Because of him. He shook his head, clearing it, and the wind was only wind again.

"No offense, General," the High Watchman said, "but there's not enough gold in the world for me to try what you did."

"It was necessary," Balasar said, and his tone ended the conversation.

The journey to the coast was easier than it should have been. Three men, traveling light. The others were an absence measured in the ten days it took to reach Lawton. It had taken sixteen coming from. The arid, empty lands of the East gave way to softly rolling hills. The tough yellow grasses yielded to blue-green almost the color of a cold sea, wavelets dancing on its surface. Farmsteads appeared off the road, windmills with broad blades shifting in the breezes; men and women and children shared the path that led toward the sea. Balasar forced himself to be civil, even gracious. If the world moved the way he hoped, he would never come to this place again, but the world had a habit of surprising him.

When he'd come back from the campaign in the Westlands, he'd thought his career was coming to its victorious end. He might take a place in the Council or at one of the military colleges. He even dared to dream of a quiet estate someplace away from the yellow coal-smoke of the great cities. When the news had come—a historian and engineer in Far Galt had divined a map that might lead to the old libraries—he'd known that rest had been a chimera, a thing for other men but never himself. He'd taken the best of his men, the strongest, smartest, most loyal, and come here. He had lost them here. The ones who had died, and per1haps also the ones who had lived.

Coal and Eustin were both quiet as they traveled, both respectful when they stopped to camp for the night. Without conversation, they had all agreed that the cold night air and hard ground was better than the company of men at an inn or wayhouse. Once in a while, one or the other would attempt to talk or joke or sing, but it always failed. There was a distance in their eyes, a stunned expression that Balasar recognized from boys stumbling over the wreckage of their first battlefield. They were seasoned fighters, Coal and Eustin. He had seen both of them kill men and boys, knew each of them had raped women in the towns they'd sacked, and still, they had left some scrap of innocence in the desert and were moving away from it with every step. Balasar could not say what that loss would do to them, nor would he insult their manhood by bringing it up. He knew, and that alone would have to suffice. They reached the ports of Parrinshall on the first day of autumn.

Half a hundred ships awaited them: great merchant ships built to haul cargo across the vast emptiness of the southern seas, shallow fishing boats that darted out of port and back again, the ornate three-sailed roundboats of Bakta, the antiquated and changeless ships of the east islands. It was nothing to the ports at Kirinton or Lanniston or Saraykeht, but it was enough. Three berths on any of half a dozen of these ships would take them off Far Galt and start them toward home.

"Winter'll be near over afore we see Acton," Coal said, and spat off the dock.

"I imagine it will," Balasar agreed, shifting the satchel against his hip. "If we sail straight through. We could also stay here until spring if we liked. Or stop in Bakta."

"Whatever you like, General," Eustin said.

"Then we'll sail straight through. Find what's setting out and when. I'll be at the harbor master's house."

"Anything the matter, sir?"

"No," Balasar said.

The harbor master's house was a wide building of red brick settled on the edge of the water. Banners of the Great Tree hung from the archway above its wide bronze doors. Balasar announced himself to the secretary and was shown to a private room. He accepted the offer of cool wine and dried figs, asked for and received the tools for writing the report now required of him, and gave orders that he not be disturbed until his men arrived. Then, alone, he opened his satchel and drew forth the books he had recovered, laying them side by side on the desk that looked out over the port. There were four, two bound in thick, peeling leather, another whose covers had been ripped from it, and one encased in metal that appeared to be neither steel nor silver, but something of each. Balasar ran his fingers over the mute volumes, then sat, considering them and the moral paradox they represented.

For these, he had spent the lives of his men. While the path back to Galt was nothing like the risk he had faced in the ruins of the fallen empire, still it was sea travel. There were storms and pirates and plagues. If he wished to be certain that these volumes survived, the right thing would be to transcribe them here in Parrinshall. If he were to die on the journey home, the books, at least, would not be drowned. The knowledge within them would not be lost.

Which was also the argument *against* making copies. He took the larger of the leather-bound volumes and opened it. The writing was in the flowing script of the dead empire, not the simpler chop the Khaiem used for business and trade with foreigners like himself. Balasar frowned as he picked out the symbols his tutor had taught him as a boy.

*There are two types of impossibility in the andat: those which cannot be understood, and those whose natures make binding impossible*. His translation was rough, but sufficient for his needs. These were the books he'd sought. And so the question remained whether the risk of their loss was greater than the risk posed by their existence. Balasar closed the book and let his head rest in his hands. He knew, of course, what he would do. He had known before he'd sent Eustin and Coal to find a boat for them. Before he'd reached Far Galt in the first place.

It was his awareness of his own pride that made him hesitate. History was full of men whom thought themselves to be the one great soul who power would not corrupt. He did not wish to be among that number, and yet here he sat, holding in his hands the secrets that might remake the shape of the human world. A humble man would have sought counsel from those wiser than himself, or at least feared to wield the power. He did not like what it said of him that giving the books to anyone besides himself seemed as foolish as gambling with their destruction. He would not even have trusted them to Eustin or Coal or any of the men who had died helping him.

He took the paper he'd been given, raised the pen, and began his report and, in a sense, his confession.

Three weeks out, Eustin broke.

The sea surrounded them, empty and immense as the sky. So far south, the water was clear and the air warm even with the slowly failing days. The birds that had followed them from Parrinshall had vanished. The only animal was a three-legged dog the ship's crew had taken on as a mascot. Nor were there women on board. Only the rank, common smell of men and the sea.

The rigging creaked and groaned, unnerving no one but Balasar. He had never loved traveling by water. Campaigning on land was no more comfortable, but at least when the day ended he was able to see that this village was not the one he'd been in the night before, the tree under which he slept looked out over some different hillside. Here, in the vast nothingness of water, they might almost have been standing still. Only the long white plume of their wake gave him a sense of movement, the visible promise that one day the journey would end. He would often sit at the stern, watch that constant trail, and take what solace he could from it. Sometimes he carved blocks of wax with a small, thin knife while his mind wandered and softened in the boredom of inaction.

It should not have surprised him that the isolation had proved corrosive for Eustin and Coal. And yet when one of the sailors rushed up to him that night, pale eyes bulging from his head, Balasar had not guessed the trouble. His man, the one called Eustin, was belowdecks with a knife, the sailor said. He was threatening to kill himself or else the crippled mascot dog, no one was sure which. Normally, they'd all have clubbed him senseless and thrown him over the side, but as he was a paying passage, the General might perhaps want to take a hand. Balasar put down the wax block half-carved into the shape of a fish, tucked his knife in his belt, and nodded as if the request were perfectly common.

The scene in the belly of the ship was calmer than he'd expected. Eustin sat on a bench. He had the dog by a rope looped around the thing's chest and a field dagger in his other hand. Ten sailors were standing in silence either in the room or just outside it, armed with blades and cudgels. Balasar ignored them, taking a low stool and setting it squarely in front of Eustin before he sat.

"General," Eustin said. His voice was low and flat, like a man half-dead from a wound.

"I hear there's some issue with the animal."

"He ate my soup."

One of the sailors coughed meaningfully, and Eustin's eyes narrowed and flickered toward the sound. Balasar spoke again quickly.

"I've seen Coal sneak half a bottle of wine away from you. It hardly seems a killing offense."

"He didn't steal my soup, General. I gave it to him."

"You gave it to him?"

"Yessir."

The room seemed close as a coffin, and hot. If only there weren't so many men around, if the bodies were not so thick, the air not so heavy with their breath, Balasar thought he might have been able to think clearly. He sucked his teeth, struggling to find something wise or useful to say, some way to disarm the situation and bring Eustin back from his madness. In the end, his silence was enough.

"He deserves better, General," Eustin said. "He's broken. He's a sick, broken thing. He shouldn't have to live like that. There ought to be some dignity at least. If there's nothing else, there should at least be some dignity."

The dog whined and craned its neck toward Eustin. Balasar could see distress in the animal's eyes, but not fear. The dog could hear the pain in Eustin's voice, even if the sailors couldn't. The bodies around him were wound tight, ready for violence, all of them except for Eustin. He held the knife weakly. The tension in his body wasn't the hot, loose energy of battle; he was knotted, like a boy tensed against a blow; like a man facing the gallows.

"Leave us alone. All of you," Balasar said.

"Not without Tripod!" one of the sailors said.

Balasar met Eustin's eyes. With a small shock he realized it was the first time he'd truly looked at the man since they'd emerged from the desert. Perhaps he'd been ashamed of what he might see reflected there. And perhaps his shame had some part in this. Eustin was *his* man, and so the pain he bore was Balasar's responsibility. He'd been weak and stupid to shy away from that. And weakness and stupidity always carried a price.

"Let the dog go. There's no call to involve him, or these men," Balasar said. "Sit with me awhile, and if you still need killing, I'll be the one to do it."

Eustin's gaze flickered over his face, searching for something. To see whether it was a ruse, to see whether Balasar would actually kill his own man. When he saw the answer, Eustin's wide shoulders eased. He dropped the rope, freeing the animal. It hopped in a circle, uncertain and confused.

"You have the dog," Balasar said to the sailors without looking at them. "Now go."

They filed out, none of them taking their eyes from Eustin and the knife still in his hand. Balasar waited until they had all left, the low door pulled shut behind them. Distant voices shouted over the creaking timbers, the oil lamp swung gently on its chain. This time, Balasar used the silence intentionally, waiting. At first, Eustin looked at him, anticipation in his eyes. And then his gaze passed into the distance, seeing something beyond the room, beyond them both. And then silently, Eustin wept. Balasar shifted his stool nearer and put his hand on the man's shoulder.

"I keep seeing them, sir."

"I know."

"I've seen a thousand men die one way or the other. But. . .but that was on a field. That was in a fight."

"It isn't the same," Balasar said. "Is that why you wanted those men to throw you in the sea?"

Eustin turned the blade slowly, catching the light. He was still weeping, his face now slack and empty. Balasar wondered which of them he was seeing now, which of their number haunted him in that moment, and he felt the eyes of the dead upon him. They were in the room, invisibly crowding it as the sailors had.

"Can you tell me they died with honor?" Eustin breathed.

"I'm not sure what honor is," Balasar said. "We did what we did because it was needed, and we were the men to do it. The price was too high for us to bear, you and I and Coal. But we aren't finished, so we have to carry it a bit farther. That's all."

"It wasn't needed, General. I'm sorry, but it *wasn't*. We take a few more cities, we gain a few more slaves. Yes, they're the richest cities in the world. I know it. Sacking even one of the cities of the Khaiem would put more gold in the High Council's coffers than a season in the Westlands. But how much do they need to buy Little Ott back from hell?" Eustin asked. "And why shouldn't I go there and get him myself, sir?"

"It's not about gold. I have enough gold of my own to live well and die old. Gold's a tool we use—a tool *I* use—to make men do what must be done."

"And honor?"

"And glory. Tools, all of them. We're men, Eustin. We've no reason to lie to each other."

He had the man's attention now. Eustin was looking only at him, and there was confusion in his eyes—confusion and pain—but the ghosts weren't inside him now.

"Why then, sir? Why are we doing this?"

Balasar sat back. He hadn't said these words before, he had never explained himself to anyone. Pride again. He was haunted by his pride. The pride that had made him take this on as his task, the work he owed to the world because no one else had the stomach for it.

"The ruins of the Empire were made," he said. "God didn't write it that the world should have something like that in it. Men *created* it. Men with little gods in their sleeves. And men like that still live. The cities of the Khaiem each have one, and they look on them like plow horses. Tools to feed their power and their arrogance. If it suited them, they could turn their andat loose on us. Hold our crops in permanent winter or sink our lands into the sea or whatever else they could devise. They could turn the world itself against us the way you or I might hold a knife. And do you know why they haven't?"

Eustin blinked, unnerved, Balasar thought, by the anger in his voice.

"No, sir."

"Because they haven't yet chosen to. That's all. They might. Or they might turn against each other. They could make everything into wastelands just like those. Acton, Kirinton, Marsh. Every city, every town. It hasn't happened yet because we've been lucky. But someday, one of them *will* grow ambitious or mad. And then all the rest of us are ants on a battlefield, trampled into the mud. That's what I mean when I say this is needed. You and I are seeing that it never happens," he said, and his words made his own blood hot. He was no longer uncertain or touched by shame. Balasar grinned wide and wolfish. If it was pride, then let him be proud. No man could do what he inte1nded without it. "When I've finished, the god-ghosts of the Khaiem will be a story women tell their babes to scare them at night, and nothing more than that. *That's* what Little Ott died for. Not for money or conquest or glory.

"I'm saving the world," Balasar said. "So, now. Say you'd rather drown than help me."

MICAH DEMOUX

**BRANDON SANDERSON** grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University and lives in Provo, Utah with his wife, Emily. For fascinating behind-the-scenes information about the Mistborn trilogy and his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*, visit him at www.brandonsanderson.com.

*Forthcoming

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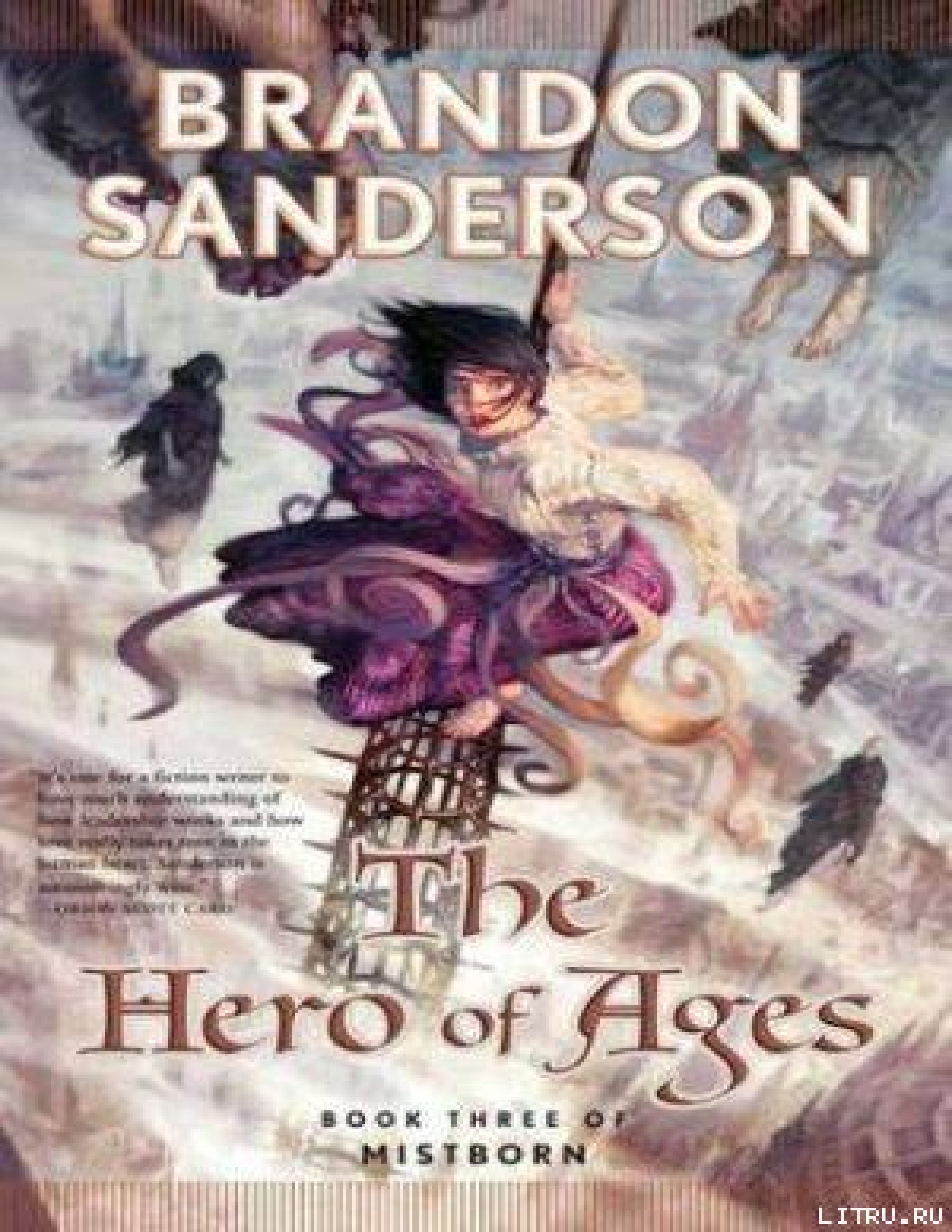

BRANDON
SANDERSON

# The Hero of Ages

BOOK THREE OF
MISTBORN

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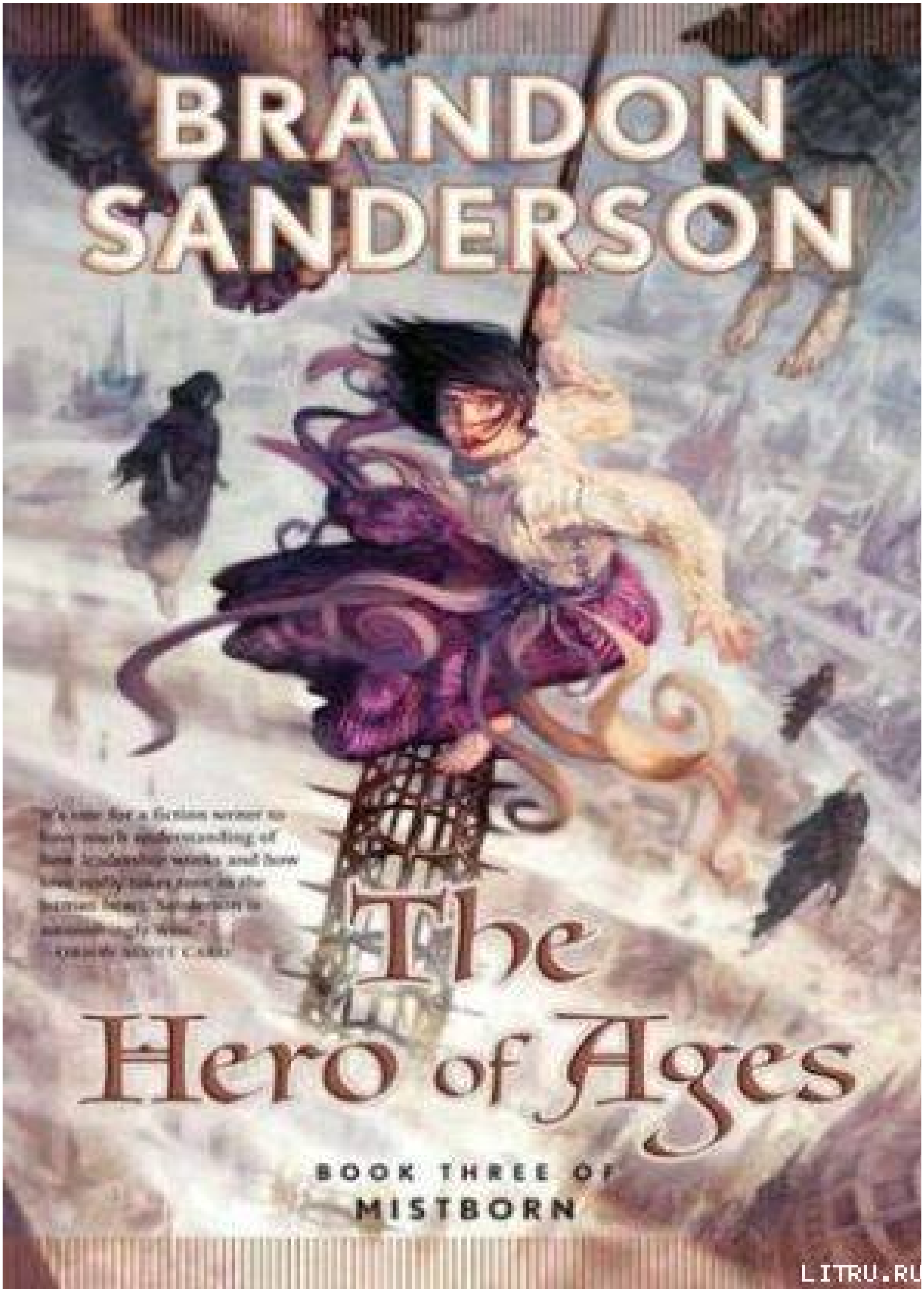

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The Hero of Ages
BOOK THREE OF
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# Annotation

Who is the Hero of Ages?

To end the Final Empire and restore freedom, Vin killed the Lord Ruler. But as a result, the Deepness---the lethal form of the ubiquitous mists---is back, along with increasingly heavy ashfalls and ever more powerful earthquakes. Humanity appears to be doomed.

Having escaped death at the climax of The Well of Ascension only by becoming a Mistborn himself, Emperor Elend Venture hopes to find clues left behind by the Lord Ruler that will allow him to save the world. Vin is consumed with guilt at having been tricked into releasing the mystic force known as Ruin from the Well. Ruin wants to end the world, and its near omniscience and ability to warp reality make stopping it seem impossible. She can't even discuss it with Elend lest Ruin learn their plans!

The conclusion of the Mistborn trilogy fulfills all the promise of the first two books. Revelations abound, connections rooted in early chapters of the series click into place, and surprises, as satisfying as they are stunning, blossom like fireworks to dazzle and delight. It all leads up to a finale unmatched for originality and audacity that will leave readers rubbing their eyes in wonder, as if awaking from an amazing dream.

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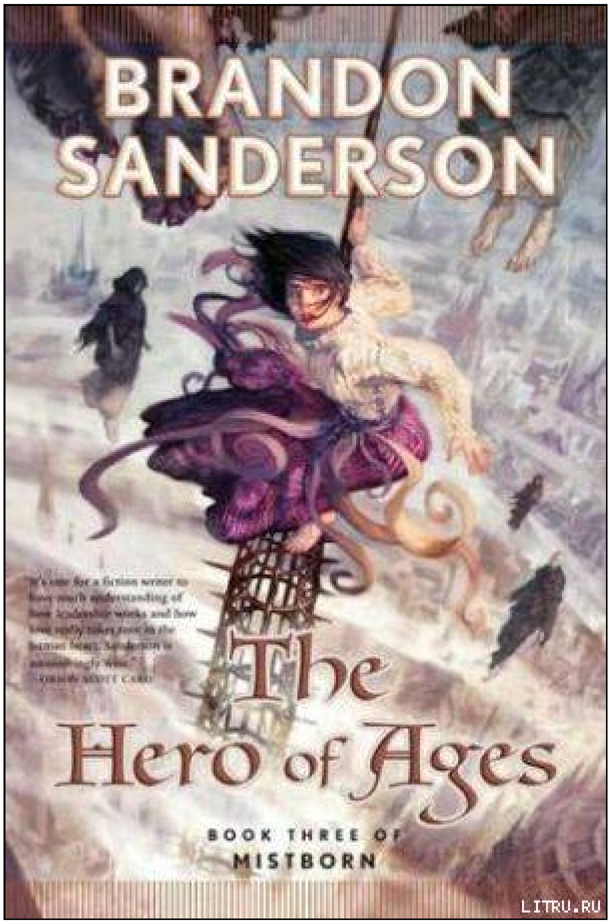
BRANDON SANDERSON
The Hero of Ages
BOOK THREE OF
MISTBORN
LITRU.RU

# THE HERO OF AGES
## BOOK THREE OF MISTBORN
## BRANDON SANDERSON

FOR JORDAN SANDERSON,
Who can explain to any who ask
What it's like to have a brother
*Who spends most of his time dreaming*.
(Thanks for putting up with me.)

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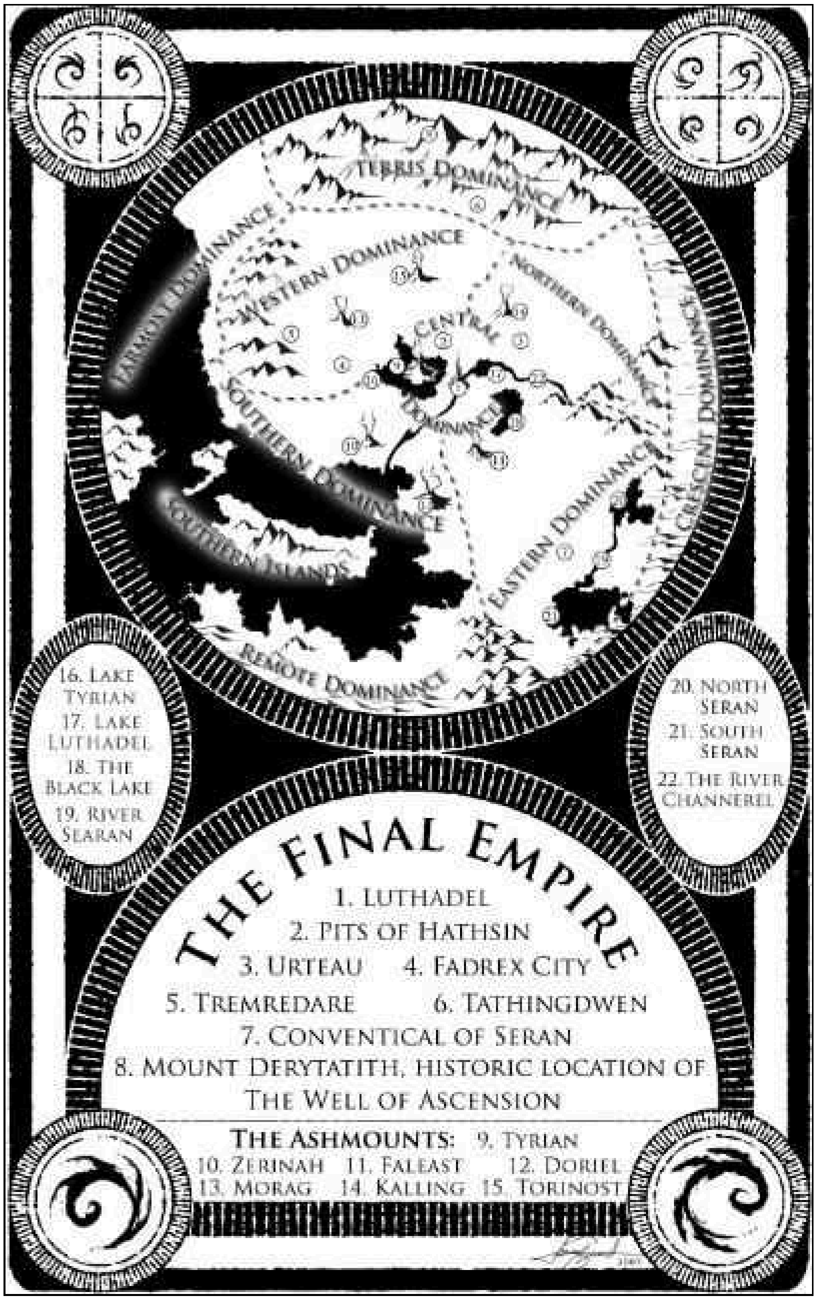
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Northern Dominance
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Crescent Dominance
Southern Dominance
Southern Islands
Eastern Dominance
Remote Dominance
16. Lake Tyrian
17. Lake Luthadel
18. The Black Lake
19. River Searan
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2. Pits of Hathsin
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The Ashmounts: 9. Tyrian
10. Zerinah
11. Faleast
12. Doriel
13. Morag
14. Kalling
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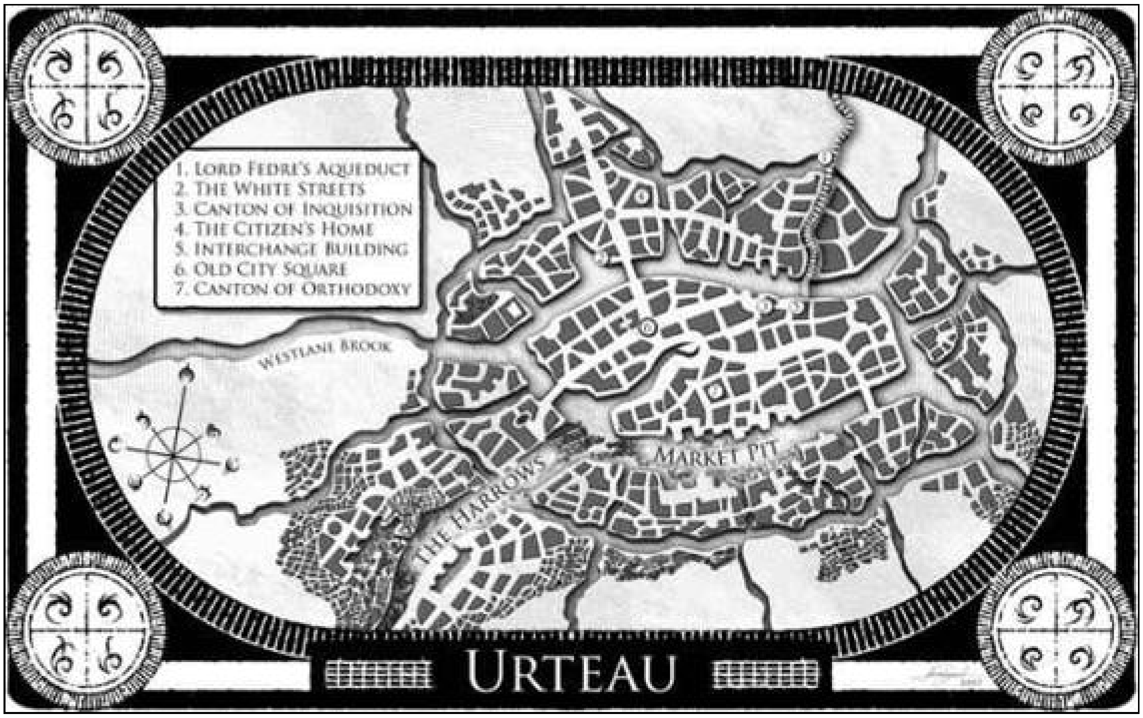
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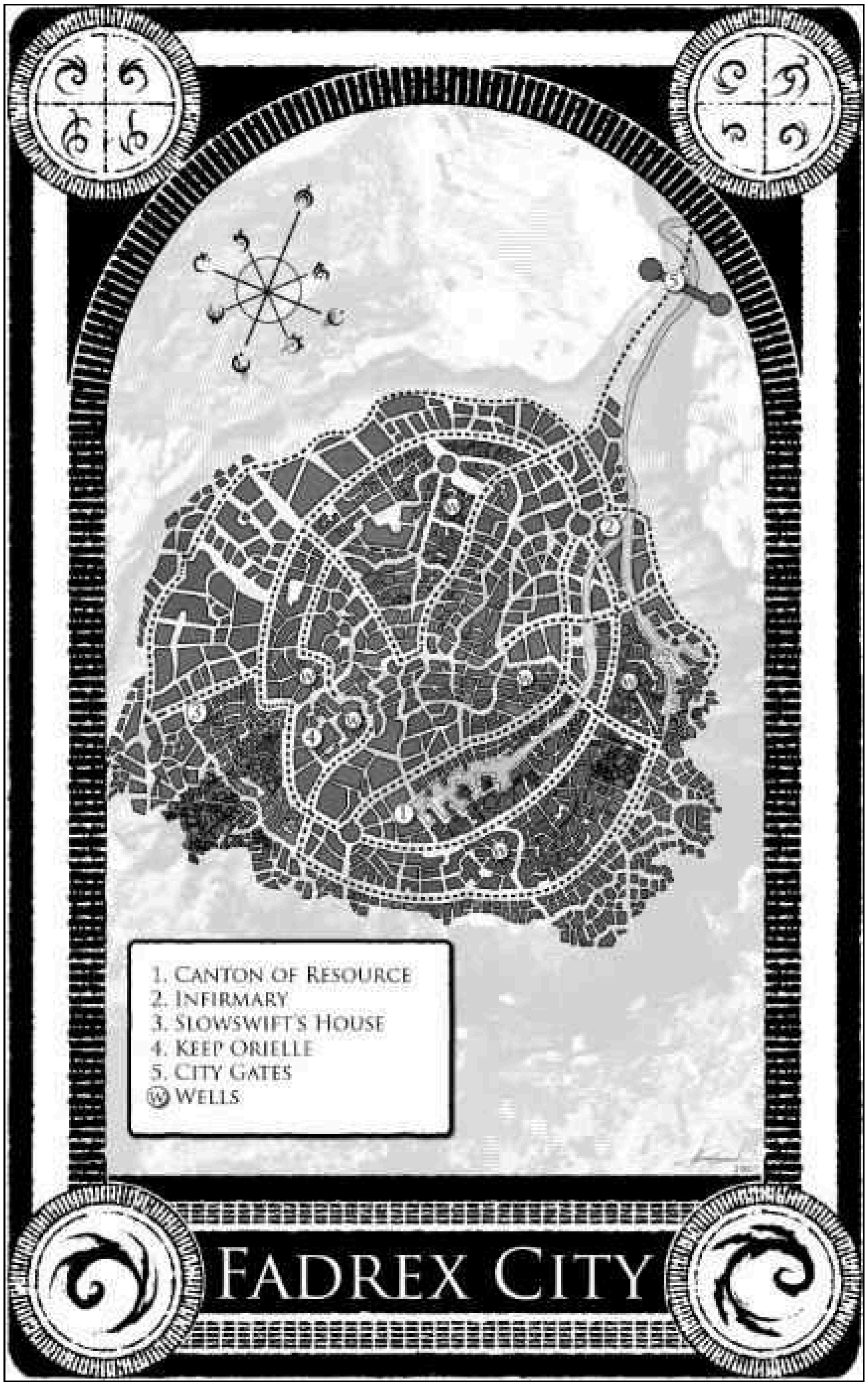
2. The White Streets
3. Canton of Inquisition
4. The Citizen's Home
5. Interchange Building
6. Old City Square
7. Canton of Orthodoxy
Westlane Brook
The Harrows
Market Pit
Urteau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2. Infirmary
3. Slowswift's House
4. Keep Orielle
5. City Gates
W Wells
Fadrex City

# PROLOGUE

MARSH STRUGGLED TO KILL HIMSELF.

His hand trembled as he tried to summon the strength to make himself reach up and pull the spike free from his back and end his monstrous life. He had given up on trying to break free. Three years. Three years as an Inquisitor, three years imprisoned in his own thoughts. Those years had proven that there was no escape. Even now, his mind clouded.

And then *It* took control. The world seemed to vibrate around him; then suddenly he could see clearly. Why had he struggled? Why had he worried? All was as it should be.

He stepped forward. Though he could no longer see as normal men did—after all, he had large steel spikes driven point-first through his eyes—he could sense the room around him. The spikes protruded from the back of his skull; if he reached up to touch the back of his head, he could feel the sharp points. There was no blood.

The spikes gave him power. Everything was outlined in fine blue Allomantic lines, highlighting the world. The room was of modest size, and several companions—also outlined in blue, the Allomantic lines pointing at the metals contained in their very blood—stood with Marsh. Each one had spikes through his eyes.

Each one, that is, except for the man tied to the table in front of him. Marsh smiled, taking a spike off of the table beside him, then hefting it. His prisoner wore no gag. That would have stopped the screams.

"Please," the prisoner whispered, trembling. Even a Terrisman steward would break down when confronted by his own violent death. The man struggled weakly. He was in a very awkward position, as he had been tied to the table on top of another person. The table had been designed that way, with depressions to allow for the body underneath.

"What is it you want?" the Terrisman asked. "I can tell you no more about the Synod!"

Marsh fingered the brass spike, feeling its tip. There was work to do, but he hesitated, relishing the pain and terror in the man's voice. Hesitated so that he could . . .

Marsh grabbed control of his own mind. The room's scents lost their sweetness, and instead reeked with the stench of blood and death. His joy turned to horror. His prisoner was a Keeper of Terris—a man who had worked his entire life for the good of others. Killing him would be not only a crime, but a tragedy. Marsh tried to take command, tried to force his arm up and around to grab the linchpin spike from his back—its removal would kill him.

Yet, *It* was too strong. The force. Somehow, it had control over Marsh—and it needed him and the other Inquisitors to be its hands. It was free—Marsh could still feel it exulting in that—but something kept it from affecting the world too much by itself. An opposition. A force that lay over the land like a shield.

*It* was not yet complete. It needed more. Something else . . . something hidden. And Marsh would find that something, bring it to his master. The master that Vin had freed. The entity that had been imprisoned within the Well of Ascension.

It called itself Ruin.

Marsh smiled as his prisoner began to cry; then he stepped forward, raising the spike in his hand. He placed it against the whimpering man's chest. The spike would need to pierce the man's body, passing through the heart, then be driven into the body of the Inquisitor tied below. Hemalurgy was a messy art.

That was why it was so much fun. Marsh picked up a mallet and began to pound.

# PART ONE
# LEGACY OF THE SURVIVOR

*I am, unfortunately, the Hero of Ages.*

# 1

FATREN SQUINTED UP AT THE RED SUN, which hid behind its perpetual screen of dark haze. Black ash fell lightly from the sky, as it did most days lately. The thick flakes fell straight, the air stagnant and hot, without even a hint of a breeze to lighten Fatren's mood. He sighed, leaning back against the earthen bulwark, looking over Vetitan. His town.

"How long?" he asked.

Druffel scratched his nose. His face was stained black with ash. He hadn't given much thought to hygiene lately. Of course, considering the stress of the last few months, Fatren knew that he himself wasn't much to look at either.

"An hour, maybe," Druffel said, spitting into the dirt of the bulwark.

Fatren sighed, staring up at the falling ash. "Do you think it's true, Druffel? What people are saying?"

"What?" Druffel asked. "That the world is ending?"

Fatren nodded.

"Don't know," Druffel said. "Don't really care."

"How can you say that?"

Druffel shrugged, scratching himself. "Soon as those koloss arrive, I'll be dead. That's pretty much the end of the world for me."

Fatren fell silent. He didn't like to voice his doubts; he was supposed to be the strong one. When the lords had left the town—a farming community, slightly more urban than a northern plantation—Fatren had been the one who had convinced the skaa to go ahead with their planting. Fatren had been the one to keep the press gangs away. In a time when most villages and plantations had lost every able-bodied man to one army or another, Vetitan still had a working population. It had cost much of their crops in bribes, but Fatren had kept the people safe.

Mostly.

"The mists didn't leave until noon today," Fatren said quietly. "They're staying later and later. You've seen the crops, Druff. They're not doing well—not enough sunlight, I'd guess. We won't have food to eat this winter."

"We won't last 'til winter," Druffel said. "Won't last 'til nightfall."

The sad thing—the thing that was really disheartening—was that Druffel had once been the optimist. Fatren hadn't heard his brother laugh in months. That laughter had been Fatren's favorite sound.

*Even the Lord Ruler's mills weren't able to grind Druff's laughter out of him*, Fatren thought. *But these last two years have*.

"Fats!" a voice called. "Fats!"

Fatren looked up as a young boy scrambled along the side of the bulwark. They'd barely finished the fortification—it had been Druffel's idea, back before he'd really given up. Their town contained some seven thousand people, which made it fairly large. It had taken a great deal of work to surround the entire thing with a defensive mound.

Fatren had barely a thousand real soldiers—it had been very hard to gather that many from such a small population—with maybe another thousand men who were too young, too old, or too unskilled to fight well. He didn't really know how big the koloss army was, but it was bound to be larger than two thousand. A bulwark was going to be of very little use.

The boy—Sev—finally puffed up to Fatren. "Fats!" Sev said. "Someone's coming!"

"Already?" Fatren asked. "Druff said the koloss were still a while away!"

"Not a koloss, Fats," the boy said. "A man. Come see!"

Fatren turned to Druff, who wiped his nose and shrugged. They followed Sev around the inside of the bulwark, toward the front gate. Ash and dust swirled on the packed earth, piling in corners, drifting. There hadn't been much time for cleaning lately. The women had to work the fields while the men trained and made war preparations.

War preparations. Fatren told himself that he had a force of two thousand "soldiers," but what he really had were a thousand skaa peasants with swords. They'd had two years of training, true, but they had very little real fighting experience.

A group of men clustered around the front gates, standing on the bulwark or leaning against its side. *Maybe I was wrong to spend so much of our resources training soldiers*, Fatren thought. *If those thousand men had worked the mines instead, we'd have some ore for bribes*.

Except, koloss didn't take bribes. They just killed. Fatren shuddered, thinking of Garthwood. That city had been bigger than his own, but fewer than a hundred survivors had made their way to Vetitan. That had been three months ago. He'd hoped, irrationally, that the koloss would be satisfied with destroying that city.

He should have known better. Koloss were never satisfied.

Fatren climbed up to the top of the bulwark, and soldiers in patched clothing and bits of leather made way for him. He peered through the falling ash across a dark landscape that looked as if it were blanketed in deep black snow.

A lone rider approached, wearing a dark, hooded cloak.

"What do you think, Fats?" one of the soldiers asked. "Koloss scout?"

Fatren snorted. "Koloss wouldn't send a scout, especially not a human one."

"He has a horse," Druffel said with a grunt. "We could use another of those." The city only had five. All were suffering from malnutrition.

"Merchant," one of the soldiers said.

"No wares," Fatren said. "And it would take a brave merchant to travel these parts alone."

"I've never seen a refugee with a horse," one of the men said. He raised a bow, looking at Fatren.

Fatren shook his head. Nobody fired as the stranger rode up, moving at an unhurried pace. He stopped his mount directly before the city gates. Fatren was proud of those. Real, true wooden gates mounted in the earthen bulwark. He'd gotten both wood and fine stone from the lord's manor at the city center.

Very little of the stranger was visible beneath the thick, dark cloak he wore to protect himself from the ash. Fatren looked over the top of the bulwark, studying the stranger, and then he glanced up at his brother, shrugging. The ash fell silently.

The stranger leaped from his horse.

He shot straight upward, as if propelled from beneath, cloak whipping free as he soared. Underneath it, he wore a uniform of brilliant white.

Fatren cursed, jumping backward as the stranger crested the top of the bulwark and landed on the top of the wooden gate itself. The man was an Allomancer. A nobleman. Fatren had hoped those would all stick to their squabbles in the North and leave his people in peace.

Or, at least, their peaceful deaths.

The newcomer turned. He wore a short beard, and had his dark hair shorn close. "All right, men," he said, striding across the top of the gate with an unnatural sense of balance, "we don't have much time. Let's get to work." He stepped off the gate onto the bulwark. Immediately, Druffel pulled his sword on the newcomer.

The sword jerked from Druffel's hand, yanked into the air by an unseen force. The stranger snatched the weapon as it passed his head. He flipped the sword around, inspecting it. "Good steel," he said, nodding. "I'm impressed. How many of your soldiers are this well equipped?" He flipped the weapon in his hand, handing it back toward Druffel hilt-first.

Druffel glanced at Fatren, confused.

"Who *are* you, stranger?" Fatren demanded with as much courage as he could muster. He didn't know a lot about Allomancy, but he was pretty certain this man was Mistborn. The stranger could probably kill everyone atop the bulwark with barely a thought.

The stranger ignored the question, turning to scan the city. "This bulwark goes around the entire perimeter of the city?" he asked, turning toward one of the soldiers.

"Um . . . yes, my lord," the man said.

"How many gates are there?"

"Just the one, my lord."

"Open the gate and bring my horse in," the newcomer said. "I assume you have stables?"

"Yes, my lord," the soldier said.

*Well*, Fatren thought with dissatisfaction as the soldier ran off, *this newcomer certainly knows how to command people*. Fatren's soldier didn't even pause to think that he was obeying a stranger without asking for permission. Fatren could already see the other soldiers straightening a bit, losing their wariness. This newcomer talked like he expected to be obeyed, and the soldiers were responding. This wasn't a nobleman like the ones Fatren had known back when he was a household servant at the lord's manor. This man was different.

The stranger continued his contemplation of the city. Ash fell on his beautiful white uniform, and Fatren thought it a shame to see the garment being dirtied. The newcomer nodded to himself, then began to walk down the side of the bulwark.

"Wait," Fatren said, causing the stranger to pause. "*Who are you?*"

The newcomer turned, meeting Fatren's eyes. "My name is Elend Venture. I'm your emperor."

With that, the man turned and continued down the embankment. The soldiers made way for him; then many of them followed behind.

Fatren glanced at his brother.

"Emperor?" Druffel muttered, then spat.

Fatren agreed with the sentiment. What to do? He'd never fought an Allomancer before; he wasn't even certain how to begin. The "emperor" had certainly disarmed Druffel easily enough.

"Organize the people of the city," the stranger—Elend Venture—said from ahead. "The koloss will come from the north—they'll ignore the gate, climbing over the bulwark. I want the children and the elderly concentrated in the southernmost part of the city. Pack them together in as few buildings as possible."

"What good will that do?" Fatren demanded. He hurried after the "emperor"—he didn't really see any other option.

"The koloss are most dangerous when they're in a blood frenzy," Venture said, continuing to walk. "If they do take the city, then you want them to spend as long as possible searching for your people. If the koloss frenzy wears off while they search, they'll grow frustrated and turn to looting. Then your people might be able to sneak away without being chased."

Venture paused, then turned to meet Fatren's eyes. The stranger's expression was grim. "It's a slim hope. But, it's something." With that, he resumed his pace, walking down the city's main thoroughfare.

From behind, Fatren could hear the soldiers whispering. They'd all heard of a man named Elend Venture. He was the one who had seized power in Luthadel after the Lord Ruler's death over two years before. News from up north was scarce and unreliable, but most of it mentioned Venture. He had fought off all rivals to the throne, even killing his own father. He'd hidden his nature as a Mistborn, and was supposedly married to the very woman who had slain the Lord Ruler. Fatren doubted that such an important man—one who was likely more legend than fact—had made his way to such a humble city in the Southern Dominance, especially unaccompanied. Even the mines weren't worth much anymore. The stranger had to be lying.

But . . . he *was* obviously an Allomancer . . .

Fatren hurried to keep up with the stranger. Venture—or whoever he was—paused in front of a large structure near the center of the city. The old offices of the Steel Ministry. Fatren had ordered the doors and windows boarded up.

"You found the weapons in there?" Venture asked, turning toward Fatren.

Fatren stood for a moment. Then, finally, shook his head. "From the lord's mansion."

"He left weapons behind?" Venture asked with surprise.

"We think he intended to come back for them," Fatren said. "The soldiers he left eventually deserted, joining a passing army. They took what they could carry. We scavenged the rest."

Venture nodded to himself, rubbing his bearded chin in thought as he stared at the old Ministry building. It was tall and ominous, despite—or perhaps because of—its disuse. "Your men look well trained. I didn't expect that. Do any of them have battle experience?"

Druffel snorted quietly, indicating that he thought this stranger had no business being so nosy.

"Our men have fought enough to be dangerous, stranger," Fatren said. "Some bandits thought to take rule of the city from us. They assumed we were weak, and would be easily cowed."

If the stranger saw the words as a threat, he didn't show it. He simply nodded. "Have any of you fought koloss?"

Fatren shared a look with Druffel. "Men who fight koloss don't live, stranger," he finally said.

"If that were true," Venture said, "I'd be dead a dozen times over." He turned to face the growing crowd of soldiers and townspeople. "I'll teach you what I can about fighting koloss, but we don't have much time. I want captains and squad leaders organized at the city gate in ten minutes. Regular soldiers are to form up in ranks along the bulwark—I'll teach the squad leaders and captains a few tricks, then they can carry the tips to their men."

Some of the soldiers moved, but—to their credit—most of them stayed where they were. The newcomer didn't seem offended that his orders weren't obeyed. He stood quietly, staring down the armed crowd. He didn't seem frightened, nor did he seem angry or disapproving. He just seemed . . . regal.

"My lord," one of the soldier captains finally asked. "Did you . . . bring an army with you to help us?"

"I brought two, actually," Venture said. "But we don't have time to wait for them." He met Fatren's eyes. "You wrote and asked for my help. And, as your liege, I've come to give it. Do you still want it?"

Fatren frowned. He'd never asked this man—or any lord—for help. He opened his mouth to object, but paused. *He'll let me pretend that I sent for him*, Fatren thought. *Act like this was part of the plan all along. I could give up rule here without looking like a failure.*

*We're going to die. But, looking into this man's eyes, I can almost believe that we have a chance.*

"I . . . didn't expect you to come alone, my lord," Fatren found himself saying. "I was surprised to see you."

Venture nodded. "That is understandable. Come, let's talk tactics while your soldiers gather."

"Very well," Fatren said. As he stepped forward, however, Druffel caught his arm.

"What are you doing?" his brother hissed. "You *sent* for this man? I don't believe it."

"Gather the soldiers, Druff," Fatren said.

Druffel stood for a moment, then swore quietly and stalked away. He didn't look like he had any intention of gathering the soldiers, so Fatren waved for two of his captains to do it. That done, he joined Venture, and the two walked back toward the gates, Venture ordering a few soldiers to walk ahead of them and keep people back so that he and Fatren could speak more privately. Ash continued to fall from the sky, dusting the street black, clustering atop the city's stooped, one-story buildings.

"Who are you?" Fatren asked quietly.

"I am who I said," Venture said.

"I don't believe you."

"But you trust me," Venture said.

"No. I just don't want to argue with an Allomancer."

"That's good enough, for now," Venture said. "Look, friend, you have *ten thousand* koloss marching on your city. You need whatever help you can get."

*Ten thousand?* Fatren thought, feeling stupefied.

"You're in charge of this city, I assume?" Venture asked.

Fatren shook out of his stupor. "Yes," he said. "My name is Fatren."

"All right, Lord Fatren, we—"

"I'm no lord," Fatren said.

"Well, you just became one," Venture said. "You can choose a surname later. Now, before we continue, you need to know my conditions for helping you."

"What kind of conditions?"

"The nonnegotiable kind," Venture said. "If we win, you'll swear fealty to me."

Fatren frowned, stopping in the street. Ash fell around him. "So that's it? You saunter in before a fight, claiming to be some high lord, so you can take credit for our victory? Why should I swear fealty to a man I only met a few minutes before?"

"Because if you don't," Venture said quietly, "I'll just take command anyway." Then he continued to walk.

Fatren stood for a moment; then he rushed forward and caught up to Venture. "Oh, I see. Even if we survive this battle, we'll end up ruled by a tyrant."

"Yes," Venture said.

Fatren frowned. He hadn't expected the man to be so blunt.

Venture shook his head, regarding the city through the falling ash. "I used to think that I could do things differently. And, I still believe that I'll be able to, someday. But, for now, I don't have a choice. I need your soldiers and I need your city."

"My city?" Fatren asked, frowning. "Why?"

Venture held up a finger. "We have to survive this battle first," he said. "We'll get to other things later."

Fatren paused, and was surprised to realize that he *did* trust the stranger. He couldn't have explained exactly why he felt that way. This was simply a man to follow—a leader such as Fatren had always wanted to be.

Venture didn't wait for Fatren to agree to the "conditions." It wasn't an offer, but an ultimatum. Fatren hurried to catch up again as Venture entered the small square in front of the city gates. Soldiers bustled about. None of them wore uniforms—their only method of distinguishing a captain from a regular soldier was a red band tied around the arm. Venture hadn't given them much time to gather—but, then, they all knew the city was about to be attacked. They had been gathered anyway.

"Time is short," Venture repeated in a loud voice. "I can teach you only a few things, but they will make a difference.

"Koloss range in size from small ones that are about five feet tall to the huge ones, which are about twelve feet tall. However, even the little ones are going to be stronger than you are. Expect that. Fortunately, the creatures fight without coordination between individuals. If a koloss's comrade is in trouble, he won't bother to help.

"They attack directly, without guile, and try to use blunt force to overwhelm. Don't let them! Tell your men to gang up on individual koloss—two men for the small ones, three or four for the big ones. We won't be able to maintain a very large front, but that will keep us alive the longest.

"Don't worry about creatures that get around our line and enter the city—we'll have the civilians hidden at the very back of your town, and the koloss who bypass our line might turn to pillaging, leaving others to fight alone. That's what we want! Don't chase them down into the city. Your families will be safe.

"If you're fighting a big koloss, attack the legs, bring it down before you go for the kill. If you're fighting a small one, make certain your sword or spear doesn't get caught in their loose skin. Understand that koloss aren't stupid—they're just unsophisticated. Predictable. They'll come at you the easiest way possible, and attack only in the most direct manner.

"The most important thing for you to understand is that they *can* be beaten. We'll do it today. Don't let yourselves become intimidated! Fight with coordination, keep your heads, and I promise you that we *will survive*."

The soldier captains stood in a small cluster, looking at Venture. They didn't cheer at the speech, but they did seem a little more confident. They moved off to pass on Venture's instructions to their men.

Fatren approached the emperor quietly. "If your count is correct, they outnumber us five to one."

Venture nodded.

"They're bigger, stronger, and better trained than we are."

Venture nodded again.

"We're doomed, then."

Venture finally looked at Fatren, frowning, black ash dusting his shoulders. "You're not doomed. You have something they don't—something very important."

"What's that?"

Venture met his eyes. "You have me."

"My lord emperor!" a voice called from atop the bulwark. "Koloss sighted!"

*They already call to him first*, Fatren thought. Fatren wasn't certain whether to be insulted or impressed.

Venture immediately jumped up to the top of the bulwark, using his Allomancy to cross the distance in a quick bound. Most of the soldiers stooped or hid behind the top of the fortification, keeping a low profile despite the distance of their enemies. Venture, however, stood proud in his white cape and uniform, shading his eyes, squinting toward the horizon.

"They're setting up camp," he said, smiling. "Good. Lord Fatren, prepare the men for an assault."

"An *assault?"* Fatren asked, scrambling up behind Venture.

The emperor nodded. "The koloss will be tired from marching, and will be distracted by making camp. We'll never have a better opportunity to attack them."

"But, we're on the defensive!"

Venture shook his head. "If we wait, they'll eventually whip themselves into a blood frenzy, then come against us. We need to attack, rather than just wait to be slaughtered."

"And abandon the bulwark?"

"The fortification is impressive, Lord Fatren, but ultimately useless. You don't have the numbers to defend the entire perimeter, and the koloss are generally taller and more stable than men. They'll just take the bulwark from you, then hold the high ground as they push down into the city."

"But—"

Venture looked at him. His eyes were calm, but his gaze was firm and expectant. The message was simple. *I am in charge now*. There would be no more arguing.

"Yes, my lord," Fatren said, calling over messengers to pass the orders.

Venture stood watching as the messenger boys dashed off. There seemed to be some confusion among the men—they weren't expecting to attack. More and more eyes turned toward Venture, standing tall atop the bulwark.

*He really does look like an emperor*, Fatren thought despite himself.

The orders moved down the line. Time passed. Finally, the entire army was watching. Venture pulled out his sword and held it high in the ash-scattered sky. Then, he took off down the bulwark in an inhumanly quick dash, charging toward the koloss camp.

For a moment, he ran alone. Then, surprising himself, Fatren gritted his teeth against shaking nerves and followed.

The bulwark exploded with motion, the soldiers charging with a collective yell, running toward death with their weapons held high.

*Holding the power did strange things to my mind. In just a few moments, I became familiar with the power itself, with its history, and with the ways it might be used.*

*Yet, this knowledge was different from experience, or even ability to use that power. For instance, I knew how to move a planet in the sky. Yet, I didn't know where to place it so that it wouldn't be too close, or too far, from the sun.*

# 2

AS ALWAYS, TENSOON'S DAY began in darkness. Part of that was due, of course, to the fact that he didn't have any eyes. He could have created a set—he was of the Third Generation, which was old, even for a kandra. He had digested enough corpses that he had learned how to create sensory organs intuitively without a model to copy.

Unfortunately, eyes would have done him little good. He didn't have a skull, and he had found that most organs didn't function well without a full body—and skeleton—to support them. His own mass would crush eyes if he moved the wrong way, and it would be very difficult to turn them about to see.

Not that there would be anything to look at. TenSoon moved his bulk slightly, shifting inside his prison chamber. His body was little more than a grouping of translucent muscles—like a mass of large snails or slugs, all connected, somewhat more malleable than the body of a mollusk. With concentration, he could dissolve one of the muscles and either meld it with another one, or make something new. Yet, without a skeleton to use, he was all but impotent.

He shifted in his cell again. His very skin had a sense of its own—a kind of taste. Right now, it tasted the stench of his own excrement on the sides of the chamber, but he didn't dare turn off this sense. It was one of his only connections to the world around him.

The "cell" was actually nothing more than a grate-covered stone pit. It was barely large enough to hold his mass. His captors dumped food in from the top, then periodically poured water in to hydrate him and wash his excrement out through a small drainage hole at the bottom. Both this hole and those in the locked grate above were too small for him to slide through—a kandra's body was supple, but even a pile of muscles could be squeezed only so small.

Most people would have gone mad from the stress of being so confined for . . . he didn't even *know* how long it had been. Months? But TenSoon had the Blessing of Presence. His mind would not give in easily.

Sometimes he cursed the Blessing for keeping him from the blissful relief of madness.

*Focus*, he told himself. He had no brain, not as humans did, but he was able to think. He didn't understand this. He wasn't certain if any kandra did. Perhaps those of the First Generation knew more—but if so, they didn't enlighten everyone else.

*They can't keep you here forever*, he told himself. *The First Contract says. . .*

But he was beginning to doubt the First Contract—or, rather, that the First Generation paid any attention to it. But, could he blame them? TenSoon was a Contract-breaker. By his own admission, he had gone against the will of his master, helping another instead. This betrayal had ended with his master's death.

Yet, even such a shameful act was the least of his crimes. The punishment for Contract-breaking was death, and if TenSoon's crimes had stopped there, the others would have killed him and been done with it. Unfortunately, there was much more at stake. TenSoon's testimony—given to the Second Generation in a closed conference—had revealed a much more dangerous, much more important, lapse.

TenSoon had betrayed his people's secret.

*They can't execute me*, he thought, using the idea to keep him focused. *Not until they find out who I told*.

The secret. The precious, precious secret.

*I've doomed us all. My entire people. We'll be slaves again. No, we're already slaves. We'll become something else—automatons, our minds controlled by others. Captured and used, our bodies no longer our own*.

This was what he had done—what he had potentially set in motion. The reason he deserved imprisonment and death. And yet, he wished to live. He should despise himself. But, for some reason, he still felt he had done the right thing.

He shifted again, masses of slick muscle rotating around one another. Midshift, however, he froze. Vibrations. Someone was coming.

He arranged himself, pushing his muscles to the sides of the pit, forming a depression in the middle of his body. He needed to catch all of the food that he could—they fed him precious little. However, no slop came pouring down through the grate. He waited, expectant, until the grate unlocked. Though he had no ears, he could feel the coarse vibrations as the grate was dragged back, its rough iron finally dropped against the floor above.

What?

Hooks came next. They looped around his muscles, grabbing him and ripping his flesh as they pulled him out of the pit. It hurt. Not just the hooks, but the sudden freedom as his body was spilled across the floor of the prison. He unwillingly tasted dirt and dried slop. His muscles quivered, the unfettered motion of being outside the cell felt strange, and he strained, moving his bulk in ways that he had nearly forgotten.

Then it came. He could taste it in the air. Acid, thick and pungent, presumably in a gold-lined bucket brought by the prison keepers. They were going to kill him after all.

*But, they can't!* he thought. *The First Contract, the law of our people, it—*

Something fell on him. Not acid, but something hard. He touched it eagerly, muscles moving against one another, tasting it, testing it, feeling it. It was round, with holes, and several sharp edges . . . a skull.

The acid stink grew sharper. Were they stirring it? TenSoon moved quickly, forming around the skull, filling it. He already had some dissolved flesh stored inside of an organ-like pouch. He brought this out, oozing it around the skull, quickly making skin. He left the eyes alone, working on lungs, forming a tongue, ignoring lips for the moment. He worked with a sense of desperation as the taste of acid grew strong, and then . . .

It hit him. It seared the muscles on one side of his body, washing over his bulk, dissolving it. Apparently, the Second Generation had given up on getting his secrets from him. However, before killing him, they knew they had to give him an opportunity to speak. The First Contract required it—hence the skull. However, the guards obviously had orders to kill him before he could actually say anything in his defense. They followed the form of the law, yet at the very same time they ignored its intent.

They didn't realize, however, how quickly TenSoon could work. Few kandra had spent as much time on Contracts as he had—all of the Second Generation, and most of the Third, had long ago retired from service. They led easy lives here in the Homeland.

An easy life taught one very little.

Most kandra took hours to form a body—some younger ones needed days. In seconds, however, TenSoon had a rudimentary tongue. As the acid moved up his body, he forced out a trachea, inflated a lung, and croaked out a single word:

"Judgment!"

The pouring stopped. His body continued to burn. He worked through the pain, forming primitive hearing organs inside the skull cavity.

A voice whispered nearby. "Fool."

"Judgment!" TenSoon said again.

"Accept death," the voice hissed quietly. "Do not put yourself in a position to cause further harm to our people. The First Generation has granted you this chance to die because of your years of extra service!"

TenSoon paused. A trial would be public. So far, only a select few knew the extent of his betrayal. He could die, cursed as a Contract-breaker but retaining some measure of respect for his prior career. Somewhere—likely in a pit in this very room—there were some who suffered endless captivity, a torture that would eventually break even the minds of those endowed with the Blessing of Presence.

Did he want to become one of those? By revealing his actions in an open forum, he would earn himself an eternity of pain. Forcing a trial would be foolish, for there was no hope of vindication. His confessions had already damned him.

If he spoke, it would not be to defend himself. It would be for other reasons entirely.

"Judgment," he repeated, this time barely whispering.

*In some ways, having such power was too overwhelming, I think. This was a power that would take millennia to understand. Remaking the world would have been easy, had one been familiar with the power. Yet, I realized the danger inherent in my ignorance. Like a child suddenly given awesome strength, I could have pushed too hard, and left* the world a broken toy I could never repair.

# 3

ELEND VENTURE, SECOND EMPEROR of the Final Empire, had not been born a warrior. He'd been born a nobleman—which, in the Lord Ruler's day, had essentially made Elend a professional socialite. He'd spent his youth learning to play the frivolous games of the Great Houses, living the pampered lifestyle of the imperial elite.

It wasn't odd for him to have ended up a politician. He'd always been interested in political theory, and while he'd been more a scholar than a true statesman, he'd known that someday he'd rule his house. Yet, he hadn't made a very good king at first. He hadn't understood that there was more to leadership than good ideas and honest intentions. Far more.

*I doubt you will ever be the type of leader who can lead a charge against the enemy, Elend Venture*. The words had been spoken by Tindwyl—the woman who'd trained him in practical politics. Remembering those words made Elend smile as his soldiers crashed into the koloss camp.

Elend flared pewter. A warm sensation—now familiar to him—burst to life in his chest, and his muscles became taut with extra strength and energy. He'd swallowed the metal earlier, so that he could draw upon its powers for the battle. He was an Allomancer. That still awed him sometimes.

As he'd predicted, the koloss were surprised by the attack. They stood motionless for a few moments, shocked—even though they must have seen Elend's newly recruited army as it charged. Koloss had trouble dealing with the unexpected. They found it hard to comprehend a group of weak, outnumbered humans attacking their camp. So, it took them time to adjust.

Elend's army made good use of that time. Elend himself struck first, flaring his pewter to give himself yet more power as he cut down the first koloss. It was a smaller beast. Like all of its kind, it was human-like in form, though it had oversized, drooping blue skin that seemed detached from the rest of its body. Its beady red eyes showed a bit of inhuman surprise as it died, Elend yanking his sword from its chest.

"Strike quickly!" he yelled as more koloss turned from their firepits. "Kill as many as you can before they frenzy!"

His soldiers—terrified, but committed—charged in around him, overrunning the first few groups of koloss. The "camp" was little more than a place where the koloss had tromped down ash and the plants beneath, then dug firepits. Elend could see his men growing more confident at their initial success, and he encouraged them by Pulling on their emotions with Allomancy, making them braver. He was more comfortable with this form of Allomancy—he still hadn't quite gotten the hang of leaping about with metals the way Vin did. Emotions, however—those he understood.

Fatren, the city's burly leader, stuck near Elend as he led a group of soldiers toward a large pack of koloss. Elend kept an eye on the man. Fatren was the ruler of this small city; if he died, it would be a blow to morale. Together, they rushed a small group of surprised koloss. The largest beast in that group was some eleven feet tall. Like that of all large koloss, this creature's skin—once loose—was now pulled tight around its oversized body. Koloss never stopped growing, but their skin always remained the same size. On the younger creatures, it hung loose and folded. On the big ones, it stretched and ripped.

Elend burned steel, then threw a handful of coins into the air in front of him. He Pushed on the coins, throwing his weight against them, spraying them at the koloss. The beasts were too tough to fall to simple coins with any reliability, but the bits of metal would injure and weaken them.

As the coins flew, Elend charged the large koloss. The beast pulled a huge sword off its back, and it seemed elated at the prospect of a fight.

The koloss swung first, and it had an awesome reach. Elend had to jump backward—pewter making him more nimble. Koloss swords were massive, brutish things, so blunt they were almost clubs. The force of the blow shook the air; Elend wouldn't have had a chance to turn the blade aside, even with pewter helping him. In addition, the sword—or, more accurately, the koloss holding it—weighed so much that Elend wouldn't be able to use Allomancy to Push it out of the creature's hands. Pushing with steel was all about weight and force. If Elend Pushed on something heavier than himself, he'd be thrown backward.

So, Elend had to rely on the extra speed and dexterity of pewter. He threw himself out of his dodge, dashing to the side, watching for a backhand. The creature turned, silent, eyeing Elend, but didn't strike. It hadn't quite frenzied yet.

Elend stared down his oversized enemy. *How did I get here?* he thought, not for the first time. *I'm a scholar, not a warrior*. Half the time he thought he had no business leading men at all.

The other half the time, he figured that he thought too much. He ducked forward, striking. The koloss anticipated the move, and tried to bring its weapon down on Elend's head. Elend, however, reached out and Pulled on the sword of another koloss—throwing that creature off balance and allowing two of Elend's men to slay it, and also Pulling Elend himself to the side. He just barely evaded his opponent's weapon. Then, as he spun in the air, he flared pewter and struck from the side.

He sheared completely through the beast's leg at the knee, toppling it to the ground. Vin always said that Elend's Allomantic power was unusually strong. Elend wasn't certain about that—he didn't have much experience with Allomancy—but the force of his own swing did send him stumbling. He managed to regain his footing, however, and then took off the creature's head.

Several of the soldiers were staring at him. His white uniform was now sprayed with bright red koloss blood. It wasn't the first time. Elend took a deep breath as he heard inhuman screams sounding through the camp. The frenzy was beginning.

"Form up!" Elend shouted. "Make lines, stay together, prepare for the assault!"

The soldiers responded slowly. They were far less disciplined than the troops Elend was accustomed to, but they did an admirable job of bunching up at his command. Elend glanced across the ground before them. They'd managed to take down several hundred koloss—an amazing feat.

The easy part, however, was over.

"Stay firm!" Elend yelled, running down in front of the soldier line. "But keep fighting! We need to kill as many of them as quickly as possible! *Everything* depends on this! Give them your fury, men!"

He burned brass and Pushed on their emotions, Soothing away their fear. An Allomancer couldn't control minds—not human minds, at least—but he *could* encourage some emotions while discouraging others. Again, Vin said that Elend was able to affect far more people than should have been possible. Elend had gained his powers recently, directly from a place he now suspected was the original source of Allomancy.

Under the influence of the Soothing, his soldiers stood up straight. Again, Elend felt a healthy respect for these simple skaa. He was giving them bravery and taking away some of their fear, but the determination was their own. These were good people.

With luck, he'd be able to save some of them.

The koloss attacked. As he'd hoped, a large group of the creatures broke away from the main camp and charged toward the village. Some of the soldiers cried out, but they were too busy defending themselves to follow. Elend threw himself into the fray whenever the line wobbled, shoring up the weak point. As he did so, he burned brass and tried to Push on the emotions of a nearby koloss.

Nothing happened. The creatures were resistant to emotional Allomancy, particularly when they were already being manipulated by someone else. However, when he *did* break through, he could take complete control of them. That, required time, luck, and a determination to fight tirelessly.

And so, he did. He fought alongside the men, watching them die, killing koloss as his line bent at the edges, forming a half circle to keep his troops from being surrounded. Even so, the fighting was grim. As more and more koloss frenzied and charged, the odds quickly turned against Elend's group. Still, the koloss resisted his emotional manipulation. But they were getting closer . . .

"We're doomed!" Fatren screamed.

Elend turned, a bit surprised to see the beefy lord beside him and still alive. The men continued to fight. Only about fifteen minutes had passed since the start of the frenzy, but the line was already beginning to buckle.

A speck appeared in the sky.

"You've led us to die!" Fatren yelled. He was covered in koloss blood, though a patch on his shoulder looked to be his own. "Why?" Fatren demanded.

Elend simply pointed as the speck grew larger.

"What is it?" Fatren asked over the chaos of battle.

Elend smiled. "The first of those armies I promised you."

Vin fell from the sky in a tempest of horseshoes, landing directly at the center of the koloss army.

Without hesitating, she used Allomancy to Push a pair of horseshoes toward a turning koloss. One took the creature in the forehead, throwing it backward, and the other shot over its head, hitting another koloss. Vin spun, flipping out another shoe, shooting it past a particularly large beast and taking down a smaller koloss behind him.

She flared iron, Pulling that horseshoe back, catching it around the larger koloss's wrist. Immediately, her Pull yanked her toward the beast—but it also threw the creature off balance. Its massive iron sword dropped to the ground as Vin hit the creature in the chest. Then, she Pushed off the fallen sword, throwing herself upward in a backward flip as another koloss swung at her.

She shot some fifteen feet into the air. The sword missed, cutting off the head of the koloss beneath her. The koloss who had swung didn't seem to mind that it had killed a comrade; it just looked up at her, bloodred eyes hateful.

Vin Pulled on the fallen sword. It lurched up at her, but also pulled her down with its weight. She caught it as she fell—the sword was nearly as tall as she was, but flared pewter let her handle it with ease—and she sheared free the attacking koloss's arm as she landed.

She took its legs off at the knees, then left it to die as she spun toward other opponents. As always, the koloss seemed fascinated—in an enraged, baffled way—with Vin. They associated large size with danger and had difficulty understanding how a small woman like Vin—twenty years old, barely over five feet in height and slight as a willow—could pose a threat. Yet, they saw her kill, and this drew them to her.

Vin was just fine with that.

She screamed as she attacked, if only to add some sound to the too-silent battlefield. Koloss tended to stop yelling as they entered their frenzy, growing focused only on killing. She threw out a handful of coins, Pushing them toward the group behind her, then jumped forward, Pulling on a sword.

A koloss in front of her stumbled. She landed on its back, attacking a creature beside it. This one fell, and Vin rammed her sword down into the back of the one below her. She Pushed herself to the side, Pulling on the sword of the dying koloss. She caught this weapon, cut down a third beast, then threw the sword, Pushing it like a giant arrow into the chest of a fourth monster. That same Push threw her backward out of the way of an attack. She grabbed the sword from the back of the one she'd stabbed before, ripping the weapon free even as the creature died. And, in one fluid stroke, she slammed it down through the collarbone and chest of a fifth beast.

She landed. Koloss fell dead around her.

Vin was not fury. She was not terror. She had grown beyond those things. She had seen Elend die—had held him in her arms as he did—and had known that she had let it happen. Intentionally.

And yet, he still lived. Every breath was unexpected, perhaps undeserved. Once, she'd been terrified that she would fail him. But, she had found peace—somehow—in understanding that she couldn't keep him from risking his life. In understanding that she didn't *want* to keep him from risking his life.

So, she no longer fought out of fear for the man she loved. Instead, she fought with an understanding. She was a knife—Elend's knife, the Final Empire's knife. She didn't fight to protect one man, but to protect the way of life he had created, and the people he struggled so hard to defend.

Peace gave her strength.

Koloss died around her, and scarlet blood—too bright to be human—stained the air. There were ten thousand in this army—far too many for her to kill. However, she didn't need to slaughter every koloss in the army.

She just had to make them afraid.

Because, despite what she'd once assumed, koloss *could* feel fear. She saw it building in the creatures around her, hidden beneath frustration and rage. A koloss attacked her, and she dodged to the side, moving with pewter's enhanced speed. She slammed a sword into its back as she moved, and spun, noticing a massive creature pushing its way through the army toward her.

*Perfect*, she thought. It was big—perhaps the biggest one she had ever seen. It had to be almost thirteen feet tall. Heart failure should have killed it long ago, and its skin was ripped half free, hanging in wide flaps.

It bellowed, the sound echoing across the oddly quiet battlefield. Vin smiled, then burned duralumin. Immediately, the pewter already burning inside of her exploded to give her a massive, instantaneous burst of strength. Duralumin, when used with another metal, amplified that second metal and made it burn out in a single burst, giving up all of its power at once.

Vin burned steel, then Pushed outward in all directions. Her duralumin-enhanced Push crashed like a wave into the swords of the creatures running at her. Weapons ripped free, koloss were thrown backward, and massive bodies scattered like mere flakes of ash beneath the bloodred sun. Duralumin-enhanced pewter kept her from being crushed as she did this.

Her pewter and steel both disappeared, burned away in single flash of power. She pulled out a small vial of liquid—an alcohol solution with metal flakes—and downed it in a single gulp, restoring her metals. Then, she burned pewter and leaped over fallen, disoriented koloss toward the massive creature she had seen earlier. A smaller koloss tried to stop her, but she caught its arm by the wrist, then twisted, breaking the joint. She took the creature's sword, ducking beneath another koloss's attack, and spun, felling three different koloss in one sweep by cutting at their knees.

As she completed her spin, she rammed her sword into the earth point-first. As expected, the large, thirteen-foot-tall beast attacked a second later, swinging a sword that was so large that it made the air roar. Vin planted her sword just in time, for—even with pewter—she never would have been able to parry this enormous creature's weapon. That weapon, however, slammed into the blade of her sword, which was stabilized by the earth below. The metal quivered beneath her hands, but she held against the blow.

Fingers still stinging from the shock of such a powerful block, Vin let go of the sword and jumped. She didn't Push—she didn't need to—but landed on the cross guard of her sword and leaped off it. The koloss showed that same, characteristic surprise as it saw her leap thirteen feet into the air, leg drawn back, tasseled mist-cloak flapping.

She kicked the koloss directly in the side of the head. The skull cracked. Koloss were inhumanly tough, but her flared pewter was enough. The creature's beady eyes rolled back in its head, and it collapsed. Vin Pushed slightly on the sword, keeping herself up long enough so that when she fell, she landed directly on the felled koloss's chest.

The koloss around her froze. Even in the midst of the blood fury, they were shocked to see her drop such an enormous beast with only a kick. Perhaps their minds were too slow to process what they had just seen. Or, perhaps in addition to fear, they really could feel a measure of wariness. Vin didn't know enough about them to tell. She did understand that in a regular koloss army, what she'd just done would have earned her the obedience of every creature that had watched her.

Unfortunately, this army was being controlled by an external force. Vin stood up straight, could see Elend's small, desperate army in the distance. Under Elend's guidance, they held. The fighting humans would have an effect on the koloss similar to Vin's mysterious strength—the creatures wouldn't understand how such a small force could hold against them. They wouldn't see the attrition, or the dire situation of Elend's group; they would simply see a smaller, inferior army standing and fighting.

Vin turned to resume combat. The koloss approached her with more trepidation, but they still came. That was the oddity about koloss. They never retreated. They felt fear, they just couldn't act on it. It did, however, weaken them. She could see it in the way they approached her, the way they looked. They were close to breaking.

And so, she burned brass and Pushed on the emotions of one of the smaller creatures. At first, it resisted. She shoved harder. And, finally, something broke within the creature and he became hers. The one who had been controlling him was too far away, and was focused on too many koloss at once. This creature—its mind confused because of the frenzy, emotions in a turmoil because of its shock, fear, and frustration—came completely under Vin's mental control.

Immediately, she ordered the creature to attack his companions. He was cut down a moment later, but not before he killed two other koloss. As Vin fought, she snatched up another koloss, then another. She struck randomly, fighting with her sword to keep the koloss distracted as she plucked members from their group and turned them. Soon, the area around her was in chaos, and she had a small line of koloss fighting for her. Every time one fell, she replaced it with two more.

As she fought, she spared a glanced for Elend's group again, and was relieved to find a large segment of koloss fighting alongside the group of humans. Elend himself moved among them, no longer fighting, focused on snatching koloss after koloss to his side. It had been a gamble for Elend to come to this city on his own, one she wasn't sure she approved of. For the moment, she was just glad she'd managed to catch up in time.

Taking Elend's cue, she stopped fighting, and instead concentrated on commanding her small force of koloss, snatching up new members one at a time. Soon, she had a group of almost a hundred fighting for her.

*Won't be long now*, she thought. And, sure enough, she soon caught sight of a speck in the air, shooting toward her through the falling ash. The speck resolved into a figure in dark robes, bounding over the army by Pushing down on koloss swords. The tall figure was bald, its face tattooed. In the ash-darkened light of midday, Vin could make out the two thick spikes that had been driven point-first through its eyes. A Steel Inquisitor, one she didn't recognize.

The Inquisitor hit hard, cutting down one of Vin's stolen koloss with a pair of obsidian axes. It focused its sightless gaze on Vin, and despite herself she felt a stirring of panic. A succession of distinct memories flashed in her mind. A dark night, rainy and shadowed. Spires and towers. A pain in her side. A long night spent captive in the Lord Ruler's palace.

Kelsier, the Survivor of Hathsin, dying on the streets of Luthadel.

Vin burned electrum. This created a cloud of images around her, shadows of possible things she could do in the future. Electrum, the Allomantic complement of gold. Elend had started calling it "poor man's atium." It wouldn't affect the battle much, other than to make her immune to atium, should the Inquisitor have any.

Vin gritted her teeth, dashing forward as the koloss army overwhelmed her few remaining stolen creatures. She jumped, Pushing slightly on a fallen sword and letting her momentum carry her toward the Inquisitor. The specter lifted its axes, swinging, but at the last moment Vin Pulled herself to the side. Her Pull wrenched a sword from the hands of a surprised koloss, and she caught this while spinning in the air, then Pushed it at the Inquisitor.

He Pushed the massive wedge of a weapon aside with barely a glance. Kelsier had managed to defeat an Inquisitor, but only after a great deal of effort. He himself had died moments later, struck dead by the Lord Ruler.

*No more memories!* Vin told herself forcefully. *Focus on the moment.*

Ash whipped past her as she spun in the air, still flying from her Push against the sword. She landed, foot slipping in koloss blood, then dashed at the Inquisitor. She'd deliberately lured him out, killing and controlling his koloss, forcing him to reveal himself. Now she had to deal with him.

She whipped out a glass dagger—the Inquisitor would be able to Push away a koloss sword—and flared her pewter. Speed, strength, and poise flooded her body. Unfortunately, the Inquisitor would have pewter as well, making them equal.

Except for one thing. The Inquisitor had a weakness. Vin ducked an axe swipe, Pulling on a koloss sword to give herself the speed to get out of the way. Then, she Pushed on the same weapon, throwing herself forward as she jabbed for the Inquisitor's neck. He fended her off with a swipe of the hand, blocking her dagger arm. But, with her other hand, she grabbed the side of his robe.

Then she flared iron and *Pulled* behind her, yanking on a dozen different koloss swords at once. The sudden Pull propelled her backward. Steelpushes and Ironpulls were jolting, blunt things that had far more power than subtlety. With pewter flared, Vin hung on to the robe, and the Inquisitor obviously stabilized himself by Pulling on koloss weapons in front of him.

The robe gave, ripping down the side, leaving Vin holding a wide section of cloth. The Inquisitor's back lay exposed, and she should have been able to see a single spike—similar to those in the eyes—protruding from the creature's back. However, that spike was hidden by a metal shield that covered the Inquisitor's back and ran underneath his arms and around his front. Like a formfitting breastplate, it covered his back, something like a sleek turtle's shell.

The Inquisitor turned, smiling, and Vin cursed. That dorsal spike—driven directly between every Inquisitor's shoulder blades—was their weakest point. Pulling it free would kill the creature. That, obviously, was the reason for the plate—something Vin suspected the Lord Ruler would have forbidden. He had *wanted* his servants to have weaknesses, so that he could control them.

Vin didn't have much time for thought, for the koloss were still attacking. Even as she landed, tossing aside the ripped fabric, a large, blue-skinned monster swung at her. Vin jumped, cresting the sword as it swung beneath her, then Pushed against it to give herself some height.

The Inquisitor followed, now on the attack. Ash spun in the air currents around Vin as she bounded across the battlefield, trying to think. The only other way she knew to kill an Inquisitor was to behead it—an act more easily contemplated than completed, considering that the fiend would be toughened by pewter.

She let herself land on a deserted hill on the outskirts of the battlefield. The Inquisitor thumped to the ashen earth behind her. Vin dodged an axe blade, trying to get in close enough to slash. But the Inquisitor swung with his other blade, and Vin took a gash in the arm as she turned the weapon aside with her dagger.

Warm blood dribbled down her wrist. Blood the color of the red sun. She growled, facing down her inhuman opponent. Inquisitor smiles disturbed her. She threw herself forward, to strike again.

Something flashed in the air.

Blue lines, moving quickly—the Allomantic indication of nearby bits of metal. Vin barely had time to twist herself out of her attack as a handful of coins surprised the Inquisitor from behind, cutting into his body in a dozen different places.

The creature screamed, spinning, throwing out drops of blood as Elend hit the ground atop the hill. His brilliant white uniform was soiled with ash and blood, but his face was clean, his eyes bright. He carried a dueling cane in one hand, the other rested against the earth, steadying him from his Steeljump. His physical Allomancy still lacked polish.

Yet, he was Mistborn, like Vin. And now the Inquisitor was wounded. Koloss were crowding around the hill, clawing their way toward the top, but Vin and Elend still had a few moments. She dashed forward, raising her knife, and Elend attacked as well. The Inquisitor tried to watch both of them at once, its smile finally fading. It moved to jump away.

Elend flipped a coin into the air. A single, sparkling bit of copper spun through the flakes of ash. The Inquisitor saw this, and smiled again, obviously anticipating Elend's Push. It assumed that its weight would transfer through the coin, then hit Elend's weight, since Elend would be Pushing as well. Two Allomancers of near-similar weight, shoving against each other. They would both be thrown back—the Inquisitor to attack Vin, Elend into a pile of koloss.

Except, the Inquisitor didn't anticipate Elend's Allomantic strength. How could it? Elend did stumble, but the Inquisitor was thrown away with a sudden, violent Push.

*He's so powerful!* Vin thought, watching the surprised Inquisitor fall. Elend was no ordinary Allomancer—he might not have learned perfect control yet, but when he flared his metals and Pushed, he could really *Push*.

Vin dashed forward to attack as the Inquisitor tried to reorient himself. He managed to catch her arm as her knife fell, his powerful grip throwing a shock of pain up her already wounded arm. She cried out as he threw her to the side.

Vin hit the ground and rolled, throwing herself back up to her feet. The world spun, and she could see Elend swinging his dueling cane at the

Inquisitor. The creature blocked the swing with an arm, shattering the wood, then ducked forward and rammed an elbow into Elend's chest. The emperor grunted.

Vin Pushed against the koloss who were now only a few feet away, shooting herself toward the Inquisitor again. She'd dropped her knife—but, then, he'd also lost his axes. She could see him glancing to the side, toward where the weapons had fallen, but she didn't give him a chance to go for them. She tackled him, trying to throw him back to the ground. Unfortunately, he was much larger—and much stronger—than she was. He tossed her down in front of him, knocking the breath from her.

The koloss were upon them. But Elend had grabbed one of the fallen axes, and he struck for the Inquisitor.

The Inquisitor moved with a sudden jolt of speed. Its form became a blur, and Elend swung only at empty air. Elend spun, shock showing on his face as the Inquisitor came up, wielding not an axe, but—oddly—a metal spike, like the ones in his own body but sleeker and longer. The creature raised the spike, moving inhumanly fast—faster even than any Allomancer should have managed.

*That was no pewter run*, Vin thought. *That wasn't even duralumin*. She scrambled to her feet, watching the Inquisitor. The creature's strange speed faded, but it was still in a position to hit Elend directly in the back with the spike. Vin was too far away to help.

But the koloss weren't. They were cresting the hill, mere feet from Elend and his opponent. Desperate, Vin flared brass and grabbed the emotions of the koloss closest to the Inquisitor. Even as the Inquisitor moved to attack Elend, her koloss spun, swinging its wedge-like sword, hitting the Inquisitor directly in the face.

It didn't separate the head from the body. It just crushed the head completely. Apparently, that was sufficient, for the Inquisitor dropped without a sound, falling motionless.

A shock ran through the koloss army.

"Elend!" Vin said. "Now!"

The emperor turned away from the dying Inquisitor, and she could see the look of concentration on his face. Once, Vin had seen the Lord Ruler affect an entire city square full of people with his emotional Allomancy. He had been stronger than she was; far stronger—even—than Kelsier.

She couldn't see Elend burn duralumin, then brass, but she could feel it. Feel him pressing on her emotions as he sent out a general wave of power, Soothing thousands of koloss at once. They all stopped fighting. In the distance, Vin could make out the haggard remnants of Elend's peasant army, standing in an exhausted circle of bodies. Ash continued to fall. It rarely stopped, these days.

The koloss lowered their weapons. Elend had won.

*This is actually what happened to Rashek, I believe. He pushed too hard. He tried to burn away the mists by moving the planet closer to the sun, but he moved it too far, making the w*orld far too hot for the people who inhabited it.

*The ashmounts were his solution to this. He had learned that shoving a planet around required too much precision, so instead he caused the mountains to erupt, spewing ash and smoke into the air. The thicker atmosphere made the world cooler, and turned the sun red.*

# 4

SAZED, CHIEF AMBASSADOR OF THE NEW EMPIRE, studied the sheet of paper in front of him. *The tenets of the Canzi people*, it read. *On the beauty of mortality, the importance of death, and the vital function of the human body as a partaker of the divine whole*.

The words were written in his own hand, copied out of one of his Feruchemical metalminds—where he had storages containing literally thousands of books. Beneath the heading, filling most of the sheet in cramped writing, he had listed the basic beliefs of the Canzi and their religion.

Sazed settled back in his chair, holding up the paper and going over his notes one more time. He'd been focusing on this one religion for a good day now, and he wanted to make a decision about it. Even before the day's study, he'd known much about the Canzi faith, for he'd studied it—along with all of the other pre-Ascension religions—for most of his life. Those religions had been his passion, the focus of all of his research.

And then the day had come where he'd realized that all of his learning had been meaningless.

*The Canzi religion contradicts itself*, he decided, making a notation with his pen at the side of the paper. *It explains that all creatures are part of the "divine whole" and implies that each body is a work of art created by a spirit who decides to live in this world*.

*However, one of its other tenets is that the evil are punished with bodies that do not function correctly*. A distasteful doctrine, in Sazed's mind. Those who were born with mental or physical deficiencies deserved compassion, perhaps pity, but not disdain. Besides, which of the religion's ideals were true? That spirits chose and designed their bodies as they wished, or that they were punished by the body chosen for them? And what of the influence of lineage upon a child's features and temperament?

He nodded to himself, made a note at the bottom of the sheet of paper. *Logically inconsistent. Obviously untrue*.

"What is that you have there?" Breeze asked.

Sazed looked up. Breeze sat beside a small table, sipping his wine and eating grapes. He wore one of his customary nobleman's suits, complete with a dark jacket, a bright red vest, and a dueling cane—with which he liked to gesture as he spoke. He'd gained back most of the weight he'd lost during Luthadel's siege and its aftermath, and could reasonably be described as "portly" once again.

Sazed looked down. He carefully placed the sheet alongside some hundred others inside his portfolio, then closed the cloth-wrapped board cover and did up the ties. "It is nothing of consequence, Lord Breeze," he said.

Breeze sipped quietly at his wine. "Nothing of consequence? You seem to always be puttering around with those sheets of yours. Whenever you have a free moment, you pull one of them out."

Sazed set the portfolio beside his chair. How to explain? Each of the sheets in the thick portfolio outlined one of the over three hundred different religions the Keepers had collected. Each and every one of those religions was now effectively "dead," as the Lord Ruler had stamped them out very early in his reign, some thousand years before.

One year ago, the woman Sazed loved had died. Now, he wanted to know . . . no, he *had* to know . . . if the religions of the world had answers for him. He would find the truth, or he would eliminate each and every faith.

Breeze was still looking at him.

"I would rather not talk about it, Lord Breeze," Sazed said.

"As you wish," Breeze said, raising his cup. "Perhaps you could use your Feruchemist's powers to listen in on the conversation happening in the next room . . ."

"I do not think it would be polite to do so."

Breeze smiled. "My dear Terrisman—only you would come to conquer a city, then worry about being 'polite' to the dictator you're threatening."

Sazed glanced down, feeling slightly abashed. But, he could not deny Breeze's remarks. Though the two of them had brought no army with them to Lekal City, they had indeed come to conquer. They simply intended to do it with a piece of paper rather than a sword.

It all hinged on what was happening in the next room. Would the king sign the treaty or not? All Breeze and Sazed could do was wait. He itched to get his portfolio out, to look over the next religion in the stack. He'd been considering the Canzi for over a day, and now that he'd made a decision about it, he wished to move on to the next sheet. During the last year, he'd gotten through about two-thirds of the religions. Barely a hundred remained, though the number was closer to two hundred if he took into account all of the sub-sects and denominations.

He was close. Over the next few months, he'd be able to get through the rest of the religions. He wanted to give each one fair consideration. Surely, one of the remaining ones would strike him as containing the essence of truth he was searching for. Surely one of them would tell him what had happened to Tindwyl's spirit without contradicting itself on a half-dozen different points.

But, for the moment, he felt self-conscious reading in front of Breeze. So, Sazed forced himself to sit and wait patiently.

The room around him was ornate, after the fashion of the old imperial nobility. Sazed wasn't used to such finery, not anymore. Elend had sold or burned most of his lavish trappings—his people had needed food and warmth during the winter. King Lekal hadn't done the same, it appeared, though perhaps that was because the winters were less harsh here in the South.

Sazed glanced out the window beside his chair. Lekal City didn't have a true palace—it had been just a country estate until about two years ago. The manor house, however, did have a nice view over the growing town—which was more of a large shantytown than it was a true city.

Still, that shantytown controlled lands that were dangerously inside Elend's defensive perimeter. They needed the security of King Lekal's allegiance. And so, Elend had sent a contingent—including Sazed, who was his chief ambassador—to secure the loyalty of the Lekal king. That man deliberated in the next room with his aides, trying to decide whether or not to accept the treaty—which would make them subjects of Elend Venture.

Chief ambassador of the New Empire . . .

Sazed was not very fond of his title, for it implied that he was actually a citizen of the empire. His people, the Terris people, had sworn to call no man master again. They had spent a thousand years being oppressed, being bred like animals and turned into perfect, docile servants. Only with the fall of the Final Empire had the Terris become free to rule themselves.

So far, the Terris people hadn't done a very good job of that. Of course, it didn't help that the Steel Inquisitors had slaughtered the entire Terris ruling council, leaving Sazed's people without direction or leadership.

*In a way, we're hypocrites anyway*, he thought. *The Lord Ruler was secretly a Terrisman. One of our own did those horrible things to us. What right do we have to insist on calling no foreigner master? It wasn't a foreigner that destroyed our people, our culture, and our religion*.

And so, Sazed served as Elend Venture's chief ambassador. Elend was a friend—a man Sazed respected like few others. To Sazed's mind, even the Survivor himself hadn't possessed Elend Venture's strength of character. The emperor hadn't tried to assume authority over the Terris people, even after he had accepted the refugees into his lands. Sazed wasn't sure if his people were free or not, but they owed Elend Venture a large debt. Sazed would gladly serve as the man's ambassador.

Even if there were other things Sazed felt he should be doing. Such as leading his people.

*No*, Sazed thought, glancing at his portfolio. *No. A man with no faith cannot lead them. I must find the truth for myself first. If such a thing exists*.

"It certainly is taking them long enough," Breeze said, eating a grape. "One would think that after all the talking we did to get to this point, they'd know by now whether they intended to sign the thing or not."

Sazed glanced toward the elaborately carved door on the other side of the room. What would King Lekal decide? Did he really have a choice? "Did we do the right thing here, do you think, Lord Breeze?" Sazed found himself asking.

Breeze snorted. "Right and wrong don't come into it. If *we* hadn't come to bully King Lekal, someone else would have. It comes down to basic strategic necessity. Or, that's how I see it—perhaps I'm just more calculating than others."

Sazed eyed the stocky man. Breeze was a Soother—in fact, he was the most brazen, flagrant Soother Sazed had ever known. Most Soothers used their powers with discrimination and subtlety, nudging emotions only at the most opportune times. Breeze, however, played with *everyone's* emotions. Sazed could feel the man's touch on his own feelings at that moment, in fact—though only because he knew what to look for.

"If you will excuse the observation, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, "you do not fool me as easily as you believe you do."

Breeze raised an eyebrow.

"I know you are a good man," Sazed said. "You work very hard to hide it. You make a great show of being callous and selfish. Yet, to those watching what you do and not just what you say, you become far more transparent."

Breeze frowned, and Sazed got a little stab of pleasure at surprising the Soother. He obviously hadn't expected Sazed to be so blunt.

"My dear man," Breeze said, sipping his wine, "I'm disappointed in you. Weren't you just speaking about being polite? Well, it's not *at all* polite to point out a crusty old pessimist's dark inner secret."

"Dark inner secret?" Sazed asked. "That you're kindhearted?"

"It's an attribute in myself that I've worked very hard to discourage," Breeze said lightly. "Unfortunately, I prove too weak. Now, to completely divert us from this subject—which I find *far* too discomforting—I shall return to your earlier question. You ask if we are doing the right thing? Right thing how? By forcing King Lekal to become a vassal to Elend?"

Sazed nodded.

"Well then," Breeze said, "I'd have to say that yes, we did the right thing. Our treaty will give Lekal the protection of Elend's armies."

"At the cost of his own freedom to govern."

"Bah," Breeze said with a wave of his hand. "We both know that Elend is a far better ruler than Lekal could ever hope to be. Most of his people are living in half-finished shacks, for the Lord Ruler's sake!"

"Yes, but you must admit that we bullied him."

Breeze frowned. "That's how all politics is. Sazed, this man's nephew sent an army of koloss to destroy Luthadel! He's lucky Elend didn't just come down and wipe out the entire city in retribution. We have bigger armies, more resources, and better Allomancers. This people will be far better off once Lekal signs that treaty. What is wrong with you, my dear man? You argued all these same points not two days ago at the negotiating table."

"I apologize, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. "I . . . seem to find myself feeling contrary of late."

Breeze didn't respond at first. "It still hurts, does it?" he asked.

*That man is far too good at understanding the emotions of others*, Sazed thought. "Yes," he finally whispered.

"It will stop," Breeze said. "Eventually."

*Will it?* Sazed thought, looking away. It had been a year. It still felt . . . as if nothing would ever be right again. Sometimes, he wondered if his immersion in the religions was simply a way of hiding from his pain.

If that were so, then he'd chosen a poor way to cope, for the pain was always there waiting for him. He had failed. No, his *faith* had failed *him*. Nothing was left to him.

It was all. Just. Gone.

"Look," Breeze said, drawing his attention, "sitting here and waiting for Lekal to make up his mind is obviously making us anxious. Why don't we talk about something else? How about telling me about one of those religions you have memorized. You haven't tried to convert me in months!"

"I stopped wearing my copperminds nearly a year ago, Breeze."

"But surely you remember a bit," Breeze said. "Why don't you try to convert me? You know, for old times' sake and all that."

"I don't think so, Breeze."

It felt like a betrayal. As a Keeper—a Terris Feruchemist—he could store memories inside of pieces of copper, then withdraw them later. During the time of the Final Empire, Sazed's kind had suffered much to gather their vast stores of information—and not just about religions. They had gathered every shred of information they could find about the time before the Lord Ruler. They'd memorized it, passed it on to others, depending on their Feruchemy to maintain accuracy.

Yet they'd never found the one thing they sought most urgently, the thing that had begun their quest: the religion of the Terris people. It had been erased by the Lord Ruler during the first century of his reign.

Still, so many had died, worked, and bled so that Sazed could have the vast storages he'd inherited. And he had taken them off. After retrieving his notes about each religion, writing them down on the pages he now carried in his portfolio, he'd removed each and every one of his metalminds and stored them away.

They just . . . didn't seem to matter anymore. At times, nothing did. He tried not to dwell too much on that. But the thought lurked in his mind, terrible and impossible to banish. He felt tainted, unworthy. As far as Sazed knew, he was the last living Feruchemist. They didn't have the resources to search right now, but in a year's time, no Keeper refugees had made their way to Elend's domain. Sazed was it. And, like all Terris stewards, he'd been castrated as a child. The hereditary power of Feruchemy might very well die with him. There would be some small trace of it left in the Terris people, but given the Lord Ruler's efforts to breed it away and the deaths of the Synod . . . things did not look good.

The metalminds remained packed away, carried along wherever he went, but never used. He doubted he would ever draw upon them again.

"Well?" Breeze asked, rising and walking over to lean against the window beside Sazed. "Aren't you going to tell me about a religion? Which is it going to be? That religion where people made maps, maybe? The one that worshipped plants? Surely you've got one in there that worships wine. That might fit me."

"Please, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, looking out over the city. Ash was falling. It always did these days. "I do not wish to speak of these things."

"What?" Breeze asked. "How can that be?"

"If there were a God, Breeze," Sazed said, "do you think he'd have let so many people be killed by the Lord Ruler? Do you think he'd have let the world become what it is now? I will not teach you—or anyone—a religion that cannot answer my questions. Never again."

Breeze fell silent.

Sazed reached down, touching his stomach. Breeze's comments pained him. They brought his mind back to that terrible time a year before, when Tindwyl had been killed. When Sazed had fought Marsh at the Well of Ascension, and had nearly been killed himself. Even through his clothing, he could feel the scars on his abdomen, where Marsh had hit him with a collection of metal rings, piercing Sazed's skin and nearly killing him.

He'd drawn upon the Feruchemical power of those very rings to save his life, healing his body, engulfing them within him. Soon after, however, he'd stored up some health and then had a surgeon remove the rings from his body. Despite Vin's protests that having them inside him would be an advantage, Sazed was worried that it was unhealthy to keep them embedded in his own flesh. Besides, he had just wanted them gone.

Breeze turned to look out the window. "You were always the best of us, Sazed," he said quietly. "Because you believed in something."

"I am sorry, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. "I do not mean to disappoint you."

"Oh, you don't disappoint me," Breeze said. "Because I don't believe what you've said. You're not meant to be an atheist, Sazed. I have a feeling you'll be no good at it—doesn't suit you at all. You'll come around eventually."

Sazed looked back out the window. He was brash for a Terrisman, but he did not wish to argue further.

"I never did thank you," Breeze said.

"For what, Lord Breeze?"

"For pulling me out of myself," Breeze said. "For forcing me to get up, a year ago, and keep going. If you hadn't helped me, I don't know that I would ever have gotten over . . . what happened."

Sazed nodded. On the inside, however, his thoughts were more bitter. *Yes, you saw destruction and death, my friend. But the woman* you *love is still alive. I could have come back too, if I hadn't lost her. I could have recovered, as you did.*

The door opened.

Sazed and Breeze both turned. A solitary aide entered, bearing an ornate sheet of parchment. King Lekal had signed the treaty at the bottom. His signature was small, almost cramped, in the large space allotted. He knew he was beaten.

The aide set the treaty on the table, then retreated.

*Each time Rashek tried to fix things, he made them worse. He had to change the world's plants to make them able to survive in the new, harsh environment. Yet, that change left the plants less nutritious to mankind. Indeed, the falling ash would make men sick, causing them to cough like those who spent too long mining beneath the earth. And so Rashek changed mankind itself as well, altering them so that they could survive.*

# 5

ELEND KNELT BESIDE THE FALLEN INQUISITOR, trying to ignore the mess that was left of the thing's head. Vin approached, and he noted the wound on her forearm. As usual, she all but ignored the injury.

The koloss army stood quietly on the battlefield around them. Elend still wasn't comfortable with the idea of controlling the creatures. He felt . . . tainted by even associating with them. Yet, it was the only way.

"Something's wrong, Elend," Vin said.

He looked up from the body. "What? You think there might be another one around?"

She shook her head. "Not that. That Inquisitor moved too quickly at the end. I've never seen a person—Allomancer or not—with that kind of speed."

"He must have had duralumin," Elend said, looking down. For a time, he and Vin had held an edge, since they'd had access to an Allomantic metal the Inquisitors hadn't known about. Reports now indicated that edge was gone.

Fortunately, they still had electrum. The Lord Ruler was to be thanked for that, actually. Poor man's atium. Normally, an Allomancer who was burning atium was virtually invincible—only another Allomancer burning the metal could fight him. Unless, of course, one had electrum. Electrum didn't grant the same invincibility as atium—which allowed an Allomancer to see slightly into the future—but it *did* make one immune to atium.

"Elend," Vin said, kneeling, "it wasn't duralumin. The Inquisitor was moving too quickly even for that."

Elend frowned. He had seen the Inquisitor move only out of the corner of his eye, but surely it hadn't been *that* fast. Vin had a tendency to be paranoid and assume the worst.

Of course, she also had a habit of being right.

She reached out and grabbed the front of the corpse's robe, ripping it free. Elend turned away. "Vin! Have respect for the dead!"

"I have no respect for these things," she said, "nor will I ever. Did you see how that thing tried to use one of its spikes to kill you?"

"That *was* odd. Perhaps he felt he couldn't get to the axes in time."

"Here, look."

Elend glanced back. The Inquisitor had the standard spikes—three pounded between the ribs on each side of the chest. But . . . there was another one—one Elend hadn't seen in any other Inquisitor corpse—pounded directly through the front of this creature's chest.

*Lord Ruler!* Elend thought. *That one would have gone right through its heart. How did it survive?* Of course, if two spikes through the brain didn't kill it, then one through the heart probably wouldn't either.

Vin reached down and yanked the spike free. Elend winced. She held it up, frowning. "Pewter," she said.

"Really?" Elend asked.

She nodded. "That makes ten spikes. Two through the eyes and one through the shoulders: all steel. Six through the ribs: two steel, four bronze. Now this, a pewter one—not to mention the one he tried to use on you, which appears to be steel."

Elend studied the spike in her hand. In Allomancy and Feruchemy, different metals did different things—he could only guess that for Inquisitors, the type of metal used in the various spikes was important as well. "Perhaps they don't use Allomancy at all, but some . . . third power."

"Maybe," Vin said, gripping the spike, standing up. "We'll need to cut open the stomach and see if it had atium."

"Maybe this one will finally have some." They always burned electrum as a precaution; so far, none of the Inquisitors they'd met had actually possessed any atium.

Vin shook her head, staring out over the ash-covered battlefield. "We're missing something, Elend. We're like children, playing a game we've watched our parents play, but not really knowing any of the rules. And . . . our opponent created the game in the first place."

Elend stepped around the corpse, moving over to her. "Vin, we don't even known that it's out there. The thing we saw a year ago at the Well . . . perhaps it's gone. Perhaps it left, now that it's free. That could be all it wanted."

Vin looked at him. He could read in her eyes that she didn't believe that. Perhaps she saw that he didn't really believe it either.

"It's out there, Elend," she whispered. "It's directing the Inquisitors; it knows what we're doing. That's why the koloss always move against the same cities we do. It has power over the world—it can change text that has been written, create miscommunications and confusion. It knows our plans."

Elend put a hand on her shoulder. "But today we beat it—and, it sent us this handy koloss army."

"And how many humans did we lose trying to capture this force?"

Elend didn't need to speak the answer. *Too many*. Their numbers were dwindling. The mists—the Deepness—were growing more powerful, choking the life from random people, killing the crops of the rest. The Outer Dominances were wastelands—only those closest to the capital, Luthadel, still got enough daylight to grow food. And even that area of livability was shrinking.

*Hope,* Elend thought forcefully. *She needs that from me; she's always needed that from me*. He tightened his grip on her shoulder, then pulled her into an embrace. "We'll beat it, Vin. We'll find a way."

She didn't contradict him, but she obviously wasn't convinced. Still, she let him hold her, closing her eyes and resting her head against his chest. They stood on the battlefield before their fallen foe, but even Elend had to admit that it didn't feel like much of a victory. Not with the world collapsing around them.

*Hope!* he thought again. *I belong to the Church of the Survivor, now. It has only one prime commandment*.

*Survive*.

"Give me one of the koloss," Vin finally said, pulling out of the embrace.

Elend released one of the medium-large creatures, letting Vin take control of it. He still didn't quite understand how they controlled the creatures. Once he had control of a koloss, he could control it indefinitely—whether sleeping or awake, burning metals or not. There were many things he didn't understand about Allomancy. He'd had only a year to use his powers, and he had been distracted by ruling an empire and trying to feed his people, not to mention the wars. He'd had little time for practice.

*Of course, Vin had less time than that to practice before she killed the Lord Ruler himself.* Vin, however, was a special case. She used Allomancy as easily as other people breathed; it was less a skill to her than an extension of who she was. Elend might be more powerful—as she always insisted—but she was the true master.

Vin's lone koloss wandered over and picked up the fallen Inquisitor and the spike. Then, Elend and Vin walked down the hill—Vin's koloss servant following—toward the human army. The koloss troops split and made a passage at Elend's command. He suppressed a shiver even as he controlled them.

Fatren, the dirty man who ruled the city, had thought to set up a triage unit—though Elend wasn't very confident in the abilities of a group of skaa surgeons.

"Why'd they stop?" Fatren asked, standing in front of his men as Vin and Elend approached across the ash-stained ground

"I promised you a second army, Lord Fatren," Elend said. "Well, here it is."

"The koloss?" he asked.

Elend nodded.

"But they're the army that came to destroy us."

"And now they're ours," Elend said. "Your men did very well. Make certain they understand that this victory was theirs. We had to force that Inquisitor out into the open, and the only way to do that was to turn his army against itself. Koloss become afraid when they see something small defeating something large. Your men fought bravely; because of them, these koloss are ours."

Fatren scratched his chin. "So," he said slowly, "they got afraid of us, so they switched sides?"

"Something like that," Elend said, looking over the soldiers. He mentally commanded some koloss to step forward. "These creatures will obey orders from the men in this group. Have them carry your wounded back to the city. However, make certain not to let your men attack or punish the koloss. They are our servants now, understand?"

Fatren nodded.

"Let's go," Vin said, eagerness sounding in her voice as she looked over at the small city.

"Lord Fatren, do you want to come with us, or do you want to supervise your men?" Elend asked.

Fatren's eyes narrowed. "What are you going to do?"

"There is something in your city we need to claim."

Fatren paused. "I'll come, then." He gave some orders to his men while Vin waited impatiently. Elend gave her a smile, then finally Fatren joined them, and the three walked back toward the Vetitan gate.

"Lord Fatren," Elend said as they walked, "you should address me as 'my lord' from now on."

Fatren looked up from his nervous study of the koloss standing around them.

"Do you understand?" Elend said, meeting the man's eyes.

"Um . . . yes. My lord."

Elend nodded, and Fatren fell a little behind him and Vin, as if showing an unconscious deference. He didn't seem rebellious—for now, he was probably happy to be alive. Perhaps he would eventually resent Elend for taking command of his city, but by then, there would be little he could do. Fatren's people would be accustomed to the security of being part of a larger empire, and the stories of Elend's mysterious command of the koloss—and therefore salvation of the city—would be too strong. Fatren would never rule again.

*So easily I command,* Elend thought. *Just two years ago, I made even more mistakes than this man. At least he managed to keep his city's people together in a time of crisis. I lost my throne, until Vin conquered it back for me.*

"I worry about you," Vin asked. "Did you have to start the battle without me?"

Elend glanced to the side. There was no reproach in her voice. Just concern.

"I wasn't sure when—or even *if*—you'd arrive," he said. "The opportunity was just too good. The koloss had just marched an entire day. We probably killed five hundred before they even decided to start attacking."

"And the Inquisitor?" Vin asked. "Did you really think you could take him on your own?"

"Did you?" Elend asked. "You fought him for a good five minutes before I was able to get there and help."

Vin didn't use the obvious argument—that she was by far the more accomplished Mistborn. Instead, she just walked silently. She still worried about him, even though she no longer tried to protect him from all danger. Both her worry and her willingness to let him take risks were part of her love for him. And he sincerely appreciated both.

The two of them tried to stay together as much as possible, but that wasn't always feasible—such as when Elend had discovered a koloss army marching on an indefensible city while Vin was away delivering orders to Penrod in Luthadel. Elend had hoped she would return to his army camp in time to find out where he had gone, then come help, but he hadn't been able to wait. Not with thousands of lives at stake.

Thousands of lives . . . and more.

They eventually reached the gates. A crowd of soldiers who had either arrived late to the battle or been too afraid to charge stood atop the bulwark, looking down with awe. Several thousand koloss had gotten past Elend's men and tried to attack the city. These now stood motionless—by his silent command—waiting outside the bulwark.

The soldiers opened the gates, letting in Vin, Elend, Fatren, and Vin's single koloss servant. Most of them eyed Vin's koloss with distrust—as well they should. She ordered it to put down the dead Inquisitor, then made it follow as the three of them walked down the ash-piled city street. Vin had a philosophy: the more people who saw koloss and grew accustomed to the creatures, the better. It made the people less frightened of the beasts, and made it easier to fight should they have to face koloss in battle.

They soon approached the Ministry building that Elend had first inspected upon entering the city. Vin's koloss walked forward and began to rip the boards off of its doors.

"The Ministry building?" Fatren said. "What good is it? We already searched it."

Elend eyed him.

"My lord," Fatren said belatedly.

"The Steel Ministry was linked directly to the Lord Ruler," Elend said. "Its obligators were his eyes across the empire, and through them he controlled the nobility, watched over commerce, and made certain that orthodoxy was maintained."

The koloss yanked the door open. Moving inside, Elend burned tin, enhancing his eyesight so that he could see in the dim light. Vin, obviously doing the same, had little trouble picking her way across the broken boards and furniture littering the floor. Apparently, Fatren's people hadn't just "searched" the place—they'd ransacked it.

"Yeah, I know about obligators," Fatren said. "There aren't any of them here, my lord. They left with the nobility."

"The obligators saw to some very important projects, Fatren," Elend said. "Things like trying to discover how to use new Allomantic metals, or like searching for lines of Terris blood that were breeding true. One of their projects is of particular interest to us."

"Here," Vin said, calling out from beside something set in the floor. A hidden trapdoor.

Fatren glanced back toward the sunlight, perhaps wishing that he'd decided to bring a few soldiers with him. Beside the trapdoor, Vin lit a lantern she'd salvaged from somewhere. In the blackness of a basement, even tin wouldn't provide sight. Vin opened the trapdoor, and they made their way down the ladder. It eventually ended in a wine cellar.

Elend walked to the center of the small cellar, surveying it as Vin began to check the walls. "I found it," she said a second later, rapping her fist on a certain portion of the stone block wall. Elend walked forward, joining her. Sure enough, there was a thin slit in the stones, barely visible. Burning steel, Elend could see two faint blue lines pointing to metal plates hidden behind the stone. Two stronger lines pointed behind him, toward a large metal plate set into the wall, affixed very securely with enormous bolts bored into the stone.

"Ready?" Vin asked.

Elend nodded, flaring his iron. They both Pulled on the plate buried in the stone wall, steadying themselves by Pulling back against the plates on the back wall.

Not for the first time, the foresight of the Ministry impressed Elend. How could they have known that someday, a group of skaa would take control of this city? And yet, this door had not only been hidden—it had been crafted so that only someone with Allomancy could open it. Elend continued to Pull in both directions at once, feeling as if his body were being stretched between two horses. But, fortunately, he had the power of pewter to strengthen his body and keep it from ripping apart. Vin grunted in effort beside him, and soon a section of the wall began to slide open toward them. No amount of prying would have been able to wedge the thick stone open, and only a lengthy, arduous effort would have been enough to break through. Yet, with Allomancy, they opened the door in a matter of moments.

Finally, they let go. Vin exhaled in exhaustion, and Elend could tell that it had been more difficult for her than it was for him. Sometimes, he didn't feel justified in having more power than she—after all, he'd been an Allomancer for far less time.

Vin picked up her lantern, and they moved into the now-open room. Like the other two Elend had seen, this cavern was enormous. It extended into the distance, their lantern's light making only a faint dent in the blackness. Fatren gasped in wonder as he joined them in the doorway. The room was filled with shelves. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them.

"What is it?" Fatren asked.

"Food," Elend said. "And basic supplies. Medicines, cloth, water."

"So much," Fatren said. "Here, all along . . ."

"Go get more men," Elend said. "Soldiers. We'll need them to guard the entrance, to keep people from breaking in and stealing the contents."

Fatren's face hardened. "This place belongs to my people."

"*My* people, Fatren," Elend said, watching Vin walk into the room, bearing the light with her. "This city is mine, now, as are its contents."

"You came to rob us," Fatren accused. "Just like the bandits who tried to take the city last year."

"No," Elend said, turning toward the soot-stained man. "I came to conquer you. There's a difference."

"I don't see one."

Elend gritted his teeth to keep himself from snapping at the man—the fatigue, the draining effect of leading an empire that seemed doomed—put him on edge so often lately. *No,* he told himself. *Men like Fatren need more than another tyrant. They need someone to look up to*.

Elend approached the man, and intentionally didn't use emotional Allomancy on him. Soothing was effective in many situations, but it wore off quickly. It was not a method to make permanent allies.

"Lord Fatren," Elend said. "I want you to think carefully about what you're arguing for. What would happen if I *did* leave you? With this much food, this much wealth down here? Can you trust your people not to break in, your soldiers not to try selling some of this to other cities? What happens when the secret of your food supply gets out? Will you welcome the thousands of refugees who will come? Will you protect them, and this cavern, against the raiders and bandits who will follow?"

Fatren fell silent.

Elend laid a hand on the man's shoulder. "I meant what I said above, Lord Fatren. Your people fought well—I was very impressed. They owe their survival today to you—your foresight, your training. Mere hours ago, they assumed they would be slaughtered by koloss. Now, they are not only safe, but under the protection of a much larger army.

"Don't fight this. You've struggled well, but it is time to have allies. I won't lie to you—I'm going to take the contents of this cavern, whether you resist me or not. However, I intend to give you the protection of my armies, the stability of my food supplies, and my word of honor that you can continue to rule your people under me. We need to work together, Lord Fatren. That's the only way any of us are going to survive the next few years."

Fatren looked up. "You're right, of course," he said. "I'll go get those men you asked for, my lord."

"Thank you," Elend said. "And, if you have anyone who can write, send them to me. We'll need to catalogue what we have down here."

Fatren nodded, then left.

"Once, you couldn't do things like that," Vin said from a short distance away, her voice echoing in the large cavern.

"Like what?"

"Give a man such forceful commands," she said. "Take control away from him. You'd have wanted to give these people a vote on whether or not they should join your empire."

Elend looked back at the doorway. He stood silently for a moment. He hadn't used emotional Allomancy, and yet he felt as if he'd bullied Fatren anyway. "Sometimes, I feel like a failure, Vin. There should be another way."

"Not right now, there isn't," Vin said, walking up to him, putting a hand on his arm. "They need you, Elend. You know that they do."

He nodded. "I know it. I just can't help thinking that a better man would have found a way to make the will of the people work along with his rule."

"You did," she said. "Your parliamentary assembly still rules in Luthadel, and the kingdoms you reign over maintain basic rights and privileges for the skaa."

"Compromises," Elend said. "They only get to do what they want as long as *I* don't disagree with them."

"It's enough. You have to be realistic, Elend."

"When my friends and I met together, I was the one who spoke of the perfect dreams, of the great things we'd accomplish. I was always the idealist."

"Emperors don't have that luxury," Vin said quietly.

Elend looked at her, then sighed, turning away.

Vin stood, watching Elend in the cold lantern-light of the cavern. She hated seeing such regret, such . . . disillusionment in him. In a way, his current problems seemed even worse than the self-doubt he had once struggled with. He seemed to see himself as a failure despite what he had accomplished.

And yet, he didn't let himself wallow in that failure. He moved on, working despite his regret. He was a harder man than he had once been. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing. The old Elend had been a man who was easily dismissed by many—a genius who had wonderful ideas, but little ability to lead. Still, she missed some of what was gone. The simple idealism. Elend was still an optimist, and he was still a scholar, but both attributes seemed tempered by what he had been forced to endure.

She watched him move along one of the storage shelves, trailing a finger in the dust. He brought the finger up, looking at it for a moment, then snapped it, throwing a small burst of dust into the air. The beard made him look more rugged—like the wartime commander he had become. A year of solid training with Allomancy and the sword had strengthened his body, and he'd needed to get his uniforms retailored to fit properly. The one he wore now was still stained from battle.

"This place is amazing, isn't it?" Elend asked.

Vin turned, glancing into the darkness of the storage cavern. "I suppose."

"He knew, Vin," Elend said. "The Lord Ruler. He suspected that this day would come—a day when the mists returned and food would be scarce. So, he prepared these supply depots."

Vin joined Elend beside a shelf. She knew from previous caverns that the food would still be good, much of it processed in one of the Lord Ruler's canneries, and would remain so for years in storage. The amount in this cavern could feed the town above for years. Unfortunately, Vin and Elend had more to worry about than a single town.

"Imagine the effort this must have taken," Elend said, turning over a can of stewed beef in his hand. "He would have had to rotate this food every few years, constantly packing and storing new supplies. And he did it for centuries, without anyone knowing what he was doing."

Vin shrugged. "It's not so hard to keep secrets when you're a god-emperor with a fanatical priesthood."

"Yes, but the effort . . . the sheer scope of it all . . ." Elend paused, looking at Vin. "You know what this means?"

"What?"

"The Lord Ruler thought it could be beaten. The Deepness, the thing that we released. The Lord Ruler thought he could eventually win."

Vin snorted. "It doesn't have to mean that, Elend."

"Then why go through all of this? He must have thought that fighting wasn't hopeless."

"People struggle, Elend. Even a dying beast will still keep fighting, will do anything to stay alive."

"You have to admit that these caverns are a good sign, though," Elend said.

"A good sign?" Vin asked quietly, stepping closer. "Elend, I know you're just trying to find hope in all this, but I have trouble seeing 'good signs' anywhere lately. You have to admit now that the sun is getting darker. Redder. It's even worse down here, in the South."

"Actually," Elend said, "I doubt that the sun has changed at all. It must be all the smoke and ash in the air."

"Which is another problem," Vin said. "The ash falls almost perpetually now. People are having trouble keeping it out of their streets. It blots out the light, making everything darker. Even if the mists *don't* kill off next year's crops, the ash will. Two winters ago—when we fought the koloss at Luthadel—was the first I'd seen snow in the Central Dominance, and this last winter was even worse. These aren't things we can fight, Elend, no matter how big our army!"

"What do you expect me to do, Vin?" Elend asked, slamming his can of stew down on the shelf. "The koloss are gathering in the Outer Dominances. If we don't build our defenses, our people won't *last* long enough to starve."

Vin shook her head. "Armies are short-term. This," she said, sweeping her hand across the cavern. "*This* is short-term. What are we doing here?"

"We're surviving. Kelsier said—"

"Kelsier is *dead,* Elend!" Vin snapped. "Am I the only one who sees the irony in that? We call him the Survivor, but he is the one who didn't survive! He *let* himself become a martyr. He committed suicide. How is that surviving?"

She stood for a moment, looking at Elend, breathing deeply. He stared back, apparently undaunted by her outburst.

*What am I doing?* Vin thought. *I was just thinking about how much I admired Elend's hope. Why argue with him now?*

They were stretched so thin. Both of them.

"I don't have answers for you, Vin," Elend said in the dark cavern. "I can't even begin to understand how to fight something like the mist. Armies, however, I can deal with. Or, at least, I'm learning how."

"I'm sorry," Vin said, turning away. "I didn't mean to argue again. It's just so frustrating."

"We're making progress," Elend said. "We'll find a way, Vin. We'll survive."

"Do you really think we can do it?" Vin asked, turning to look him in the eyes.

"Yes," Elend said.

And she believed him. He had hope, and always would. That was a big part of why she loved him so much.

"Come on," Elend said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Let's find what we came for."

Vin joined him, leaving her koloss behind, walking into the depths of the cavern as they heard footsteps outside. There was more than one reason they had come to this place. The food and the supplies—of which they passed seemingly endless shelves—were important. However, there was more.

A large metal plate was set into the back wall of the rough-hewn cavern. Vin read the words inscribed on it out loud.

" 'This is the last metal I will tell you about,' " she read. " 'I have trouble deciding the purpose of it. It allows you to see the past, in a way. What a person could have been, and who they might have become, had they made different choices. Much like gold, but for others.

" 'By now, the mists have likely come again. Such a foul, hateful thing. Scorn it. Don't go out in it. It seeks to destroy us all. If there is trouble, know that you can control the koloss and the kandra by use of several people Pushing on their emotions at once. I built this weakness into them. Keep the secret wisely.' "

Beneath that was listed an Allomantic compound of metals, one with which Vin was already familiar. It was the alloy of atium they called malatium—Kelsier's Eleventh Metal. So the Lord Ruler *had* known about it. He'd simply been as baffled as the rest of them as to its purpose.

The plate had been written by the Lord Ruler, of course. Or, at least, he'd ordered it written as it was. Each previous cache had also contained information, written in steel. In Urteau, for instance, she had learned about electrum. In the one to the east, they'd found a description of aluminum—though they'd already known about that metal.

"Not much new there," Elend said, sounding disappointed. "We already knew about malatium and about controlling koloss. Though, I'd never thought to have several Soothers Push at the same time. That might be helpful." Before, they'd thought it took a Mistborn burning duralumin to get control of koloss.

"It doesn't matter," Vin said, pointing at the other side of the plate. "We have *that*."

The other half of the plate contained a map, carved into steel, just like the maps they had found in the other three storage caverns. It depicted the Final Empire, divided into dominances. Luthadel was a square at the center. An "X" to the east marked the main thing they'd come looking for: the location of the final cavern.

There were five, they thought. They'd found the first one beneath Luthadel, near the Well of Ascension. It had given the location of the second, to the east. The third had been in Urteau—Vin had been able to sneak into that one, but they hadn't managed to recover the food yet. That one had led them here, to the south.

Each map had two numbers on it—a five and a lower number. Luthadel had been number one. This one was number four.

"That's it," Vin said, running her fingers along the carved inscriptions on the plate. "In the Western Dominance, as you guessed. Somewhere near Chardees?"

"Fadrex City," Elend said.

"Cett's home?"

Elend nodded. He knew far more about geography than she.

"That's the place, then," Vin said. "The one where *it* is."

Elend met her eyes, and she knew he understood her. The caches had grown progressively larger and more valuable. Each one had a specialized aspect to it as well—the first had contained weapons in addition to its other supplies, while the second had contained large amounts of lumber. As they'd investigated each successive cache, they'd grown more and more excited about what the last one might contain. Something spectacular, surely. Perhaps even *it*.

The Lord Ruler's atium cache.

It was the most valuable treasure in the Final Empire. Despite years of searching, nobody had ever located it. Some said it didn't even exist. But, Vin felt that it had to. Despite a thousand years of controlling the sole mine that produced the extremely rare metal, he had allowed only a small portion of atium to enter the economy. Nobody knew what the Lord Ruler had done with the greater portion he had kept to himself for all those centuries.

"Now, don't get too excited," Elend said. "We have no proof that we'll find the atium in that final cavern."

"It has to be there," Vin said. "It makes sense. Where else would the Lord Ruler store his atium?"

"If I could answer that, we'd have found it."

Vin shook her head. "He put it somewhere safe, but somewhere where it would eventually be found. He left these maps as clues to his followers, should he—somehow—be defeated. He didn't want an enemy who captured one of the caverns to be able to find them all instantly."

A trail of clues that led to one, final cache. The most important one. It made sense. It *had* to. Elend didn't look convinced. He rubbed his bearded chin, studying the reflective plate in their lantern light. "Even if we find it," he said, "I don't know that it will help that much. What good is money to us now?"

"It's more than money," she said. "It's power. A weapon we can use to fight."

"Fight the mists?" he asked.

Vin fell silent. "Perhaps not," she finally said. "But the koloss, and the other armies. With that atium, your empire becomes secure. . . . Plus, atium is part of all this, Elend. It's only valuable because of Allomancy—but Allomancy didn't exist until the Ascension."

"Another unanswered question," Elend said. "Why did that nugget of metal I ingested make me Mistborn? Where did it come from? Why was it placed at the Well of Ascension, and by whom? Why was there only one left, and what happened to the others?"

"Maybe we'll find the answer once we take Fadrex," Vin said.

Elend nodded. She could tell he considered the information contained in the caches the most important reason to track them down, followed closely by the supplies. To him, the possibility of finding atium was relatively unimportant. Vin couldn't explain why she felt he was so wrong in this regard. The atium *was* important. She just knew it. Her earlier despair lightened as she looked over the map. They had to go to Fadrex. She knew it.

The answers would be there.

"Taking Fadrex won't be easy," Elend noted. "Cett's enemies have entrenched themselves quite solidly there. I hear a former Ministry obligator is in charge."

"The atium will be worth it," Vin said.

"If it's there," Elend said.

She gave him a flat stare.

He held up a hand. "I'm just trying to do what you told me, Vin—I'm trying to be realistic. However, I agree that Fadrex will be worth the effort. Even if the atium isn't there, we need the supplies in that store. We need to know what the Lord Ruler left us."

Vin nodded. She herself no longer had any atium. She'd burned up their last bit a year and a half ago, and she'd never gotten used to how exposed she felt without it. Electrum softened that fear somewhat, but not completely.

Voices sounded from the other end of the cavern, and Elend turned. "I should go speak to them," he said. "We're going to have to organize things in here quickly."

"Have you told them yet that we're going to have to move them back to Luthadel?"

Elend shook his head. "They won't like it," he said. "They're becoming independent, as I always hoped they would."

"It has to be done, Elend," Vin said. "This city is well outside our defensive perimeter. Plus, they can't have more than a few hours of mistless daylight left this far out. Their crops are already doomed."

Elend nodded, but he continued to stare out into the darkness. "I come, I seize control of their city, take their treasure, then force them to abandon their homes. And from here we go to Fadrex to conquer another."

"Elend—"

He held up a hand. "I know, Vin. It must be done." He turned, leaving the lantern and walking toward the doorway. As he did, his posture straightened, and his face became more firm.

Vin turned back to the plate, rereading the Lord Ruler's words. On a different plate, much like this one, Sazed had found the words of Kwaan, the long-dead Terrisman who had changed the world by claiming to have found the Hero of Ages. Kwaan had left his words as a confession of his errors, warning that some kind of force was working to change the histories and religions of mankind. He'd worried that the force was suborning the Terris religion in order to cause a "Hero" to come to the North and release it.

That was exactly what Vin had done. She'd called herself hero, and had released the enemy—all the while thinking that she was sacrificing her own needs for the good of the world.

She ran her fingers across the large plate.

*We have to do more than just fight wars!* she thought, angry at the Lord Ruler. *If you knew so much, why didn't you leave us more than this? A few maps in scattered halls filled with supplies? A couple of paragraphs, telling us about metals that are of barely any use? What good is a cave full of food when we have an entire empire to feed!*

Vin stopped. Her fingers—made far more sensitive by the tin she was burning to help her eyesight in the dark cavern—brushed against grooves in the plate's surface. She knelt, leaning close, to find a short inscription carved in the metal, at the bottom, the letters much smaller than the ones up above.

*Be careful what you speak,* it read. *It can hear what you say. It can read what you write. Only your thoughts are safe.*

Vin shivered.

*Only your thoughts are safe.*

What had the Lord Ruler learned in his moments of transcendence? What things had he kept in his mind forever, never writing them down for fear of revealing his knowledge, always expecting that he would eventually be the one who took the power when it came again? Had he, perhaps, planned to use that power to destroy the thing that Vin had released?

*You have doomed yourselves*. . . . The Lord Ruler's last words, spoken right before Vin had thrust the spear through his heart. He'd known. Even then—before the mists had started coming during the day, before she'd begun hearing the strange thumpings that led her to the Well of Ascension—even then, she'd worried.

*Be careful what you speak . . . only your thoughts are safe*.

*I have to figure this out. I have to connect what we have, find the way to defeat—or outwit—this thing that I've loosed*.

*And I can't talk this over with anyone, or it will know what I'm planning*.

*Rashek soon found a balance in the changes he made to the world—which was fortunate, for his power burned away quite quickly. Though the power he held seemed immense to him, it was truly only a tiny fraction of something much greate*r.

*Of course, he did end up naming himself the "Sliver of Infinity" in his religion. Perhaps he understood more than I give him credit for*.

*Either way, we had him to thank for a world without flowers, where plants grew brown rather than green, and where people could survive in an environment where ash fell from the sky on a regular basis*.

# 6

I'M TOO WEAK, Marsh thought.

Lucidity came upon him suddenly, as it often did when Ruin wasn't watching him closely. It was like waking from a nightmare, fully aware of what had been going on in the dream, yet confused as to the reasoning behind his actions.

He continued to walk through the koloss camp. Ruin still controlled him, as it always did. Yet, when it didn't press hard enough against Marsh's mind—when it didn't focus on him—sometimes, Marsh's own thoughts returned.

*I can't fight it,* he thought. Ruin couldn't read his thoughts, of that he was fairly confident. And yet, Marsh couldn't fight or struggle in any way. When he did, Ruin immediately asserted control once again. This had been proven to Marsh a dozen times over. Sometimes he managed to quiver a finger, perhaps halt a step, but that was the best he could do.

It was depressing. However, Marsh had always considered himself to be a practical man, and he forced himself to acknowledge the truth. He was never going to gain enough control over his body to kill himself.

Ash fell as he walked through the camp. Did it ever stop these days? He almost wished that Ruin wouldn't ever let go of his mind. When his mind was his own, Marsh saw only pain and destruction. When Ruin controlled him, however, the falling ash was a thing of beauty, the red sun a marvelous triumph, the world a place of sweetness in its death.

*Madness,* Marsh thought, approaching the center of camp. *I need to go mad. Then I won't have to deal with all of this*.

Other Inquisitors joined him at the center of the camp, walking with quiet swishes of their robes. They didn't speak. They never spoke—Ruin controlled them all, so why bother with conversation? Marsh's brethren had the normal spikes in their heads, driven into the skull. Yet, he could also see telltale signs of the new spikes, jutting from their chests and backs. Marsh had placed many of them himself, killing the Terrismen that had either been captured in the north or tracked down across the land.

Marsh himself had a new set of spikes, some driven between the ribs, others driven down through the chest. They were a beautiful thing. He didn't understand why, but they excited him. The spikes had come through death, and that was pleasant enough—but there was more. He knew, somehow, that the Inquisitors had been incomplete—the Lord Ruler had withheld some abilities to make the Inquisitors more dependent upon him. To make certain they couldn't threaten him. But now, what he'd kept back had been provided.

*What a beautiful world,* Marsh thought, looking up into the falling ash, feeling the light, comforting flakes upon his skin.

*I speak of us as "we." The group. Those of us who were trying to discover and defeat Ruin. Perhaps my thoughts are now tainted, but I like to look back and see the sum of what we were doing as a single, united assault, though we were all involved in different processes and plans.*

*We were one. That didn't stop the world from ending, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.*

# 7

THEY GAVE HIM BONES.

TenSoon flowed around them, dissolving muscles, then re-forming them into organs, sinew, and skin. He built a body around the bones, using skills gained over centuries spent eating and digesting humans. Corpses only, of course—he had never killed a man. The Contract forbade such things.

After a year in his pit of a prison, he felt as if he had forgotten how to use a body. What was it like to touch the world with rigid digits, rather than a body that flowed against the confines of stone? What was it like to taste and smell with only tongue and nostrils, rather than with every bit of skin exposed to the air. What was it like to . . .

To see. He opened his eyes and gasped, drawing first breath into remade, full-sized lungs. The world was a thing of wonder and of . . . light. He had forgotten that, during the months of near madness. He pushed himself to his knees, looking down at his arms. Then, he reached up, feeling his face with a tentative hand.

His body wasn't that of any specific person—he would have needed a model to produce such a replica. Instead, he had covered the bones with muscles and skin as best he could. He was old enough that he knew how to create a reasonable approximation of a human. The features wouldn't be handsome; they might even be a little grotesque. That, however, was more than good enough for the moment. He felt . . . real again.

Still on hands and knees, he looked up at his captor. The cavern was lit only by a glowstone—a large, porous rock set atop a thick column base. The bluish fungus that grew on the rock made enough of a glow to see by—especially if one had specifically grown eyes that were good at seeing in dim blue light.

TenSoon knew his captor. He knew most kandra, at least up to the Sixth and Seventh Generations. This kandra's name was VarSell. In the Homeland, VarSell didn't wear the bones of an animal or human, but instead used a True Body—a set of false bones, human-shaped, crafted by a kandra artisan. VarSell's True Body was quartz, and he left his skin translucent, allowing the stone to sparkle faintly in the fungal light as he studied TenSoon.

*I made my body opaque,* TenSoon realized. *Like that of a human, with tan skin to obscure the muscles beneath*. Why had that come so naturally to him? Once, he had cursed the years he spent among the humans, using their bones instead of a True Body. Perhaps he had fallen to that same old default because his captors hadn't given him a True Body. Human bones. An insult, of sorts.

TenSoon stood. "What?" he asked at the look in VarSell's eyes.

"I just picked a random set of bones from the storeroom," VarSell said. "It's ironic that I would give you a set of bones that you'd originally contributed."

TenSoon frowned. *What?*

And then he made the connection. The body that TenSoon had created around the bones must look convincing—as if it were the original one that these bones had belonged to. VarSell assumed that TenSoon had been able to create such a realistic approximation because he'd originally digested the human's corpse, and therefore knew how to create the right body around the bones.

TenSoon smiled. "I've never worn these bones before."

VarSell eyed him. He was of the Fifth Generation—two centuries younger than TenSoon. Indeed, even among those of the Third Generation, few kandra had as much experience with the outside world as TenSoon.

"I see," VarSell finally said.

TenSoon turned, looking over the small chamber. Three more Fifth Generationers stood near the door, watching him. Like VarSell, few of them wore clothing—and those who did wore only open-fronted robes. Kandra tended to wear little while in the Homeland, as that allowed them to better display their True Bodies.

TenSoon saw two sparkling rods of metal embedded in the clear muscles of each Fifth's shoulders—all three had the Blessing of Potency. The Second Generation was taking no risk of his escaping. It was, of course, another insult. TenSoon had come to his fate willingly.

"Well?" TenSoon asked, turning back to VarSell. "Are we to go?"

VarSell glanced at one of his companions. "Forming the body was expected to take you longer."

TenSoon snorted. "The Second Generation is unpracticed. They assume that because it still takes them many hours to create a body, the rest of us require the same amount of time."

"They are your elder generation," VarSell said. "You should show them respect."

"The Second Generation has been sequestered in these caves for centuries," TenSoon said, "sending the rest of us to serve Contracts while they remain lazy. I passed them in skill long ago."

VarSell hissed, and for a moment TenSoon thought the younger kandra might slap him. VarSell restrained himself, barely—to TenSoon's amusement. After all, as a member of the Third Generation, TenSoon was senior to VarSell—much in the same way that the Seconds were supposedly senior to TenSoon.

Yet, the Thirds were a special case. They always had been. That's why the Seconds kept them out on Contracts so much—it wouldn't do to have their immediate underlings around all the time, upsetting their perfect little kandra utopia.

"Let's go, then," VarSell finally decided, nodding for two of his guards to lead the way. The other one joined VarSell, walking behind TenSoon. Like VarSell, these three had True Bodies formed of stone. Those were popular among the Fifth Generation, who had time to commission—and use—lavish True Bodies. They were the favored pups of the Seconds, and tended to spend more time than most in the Homeland.

They had given TenSoon no clothing. So, as they walked, he dissolved his genitals, and re-formed a smooth crotch, as was common among the kandra. He tried to walk with pride and confidence, but he knew this body wouldn't look very intimidating. It was emaciated—he'd lost much mass during his imprisonment and more to the acid, and he hadn't been able to form very large muscles.

The smooth, rock tunnel had probably once been a natural formation, but over the centuries, the younger generations had been used during their infancy to smooth out the stone with their digestive juices. TenSoon didn't see many other kandra. VarSell kept to back corridors, obviously not wanting to make too much of a show.

*I've been away so long,* TenSoon thought. *The Eleventh Generation must have been chosen by now. I still don't know most of the Eighth, let alone the Ninth or Tenth.*

He was beginning to suspect that there wouldn't be a Twelfth Generation. Even if there were, things could not continue as they had. The Father was dead. What, then, of the First Contract? His people had spent ten centuries enslaved to humankind, serving the Contracts in an effort to keep themselves safe. Most of the kandra hated men for their situation. Up until recently, TenSoon had been one of those.

*It's ironic,* TenSoon thought. *But, even when we wear True Bodies, we wear them in the form of humans. Two arms, two legs, even faces formed after the fashion of mankind.*

Sometimes he wondered if the unbirthed—the creatures that the humans called mistwraiths—were more honest than their brothers the kandra. The mistwraiths would form a body however they wished, connecting bones in odd arrangements, making almost artistic designs from both human and animal bones. The kandra, though—they created bodies that looked human. Even while they cursed humankind for keeping them enslaved.

Such a strange people they were. But they were his. Even if he had betrayed them.

*And now I have to convince the First Generation that I was right in that betrayal. Not for me. For them. For all of us.*

They passed through corridors and chambers, eventually arriving at sections of the Homeland that were more familiar to TenSoon. He soon realized that their destination must be the Trustwarren. He would argue his defense in his people's most sacred place. He should have guessed.

A year of torturous imprisonment had earned him a trial before the First Generation. He'd had a year to think about what to say. And if he failed, he'd have an eternity to think about what he'd done wrong.

*It is too easy for people to characterize Ruin as simply a force of destruction. Think rather of Ruin as intelligent decay. Not simply chaos, but a force that sought in a rational—and dangerous—way to break everything down to its most basic forms.*

*Ruin could plan and carefully plot, knowing if he built one thing up, he could use it to knock down two others. The nature of the world is that when we create something, we often destroy something else in the process.*

# 8

ON THE FIRST DAY OUT OF VETITAN, Vin and Elend murdered a hundred of the villagers. Or, at least, that was how Vin felt.

She sat on a rotting stump at the center of camp, watching the sun approach the distant horizon, knowing what was about to happen. Ash fell silently around her. And the mists appeared.

Once—not so long ago—the mists had come only at night. During the year following the Lord Ruler's death, however, that had changed. As if a thousand years of being confined to the darkness had made the mists restless.

And so, they had begun to come during the day. Sometimes, they came in great rolling waves, appearing out of nowhere, disappearing as quickly. Most commonly, however, they just appeared in the air like a thousand phantoms, twisting and growing together. Tendrils of mist that sprouted, vine-like tentacles creeping across the sky. Each day, they retreated a little bit later in the day, and each day they appeared a little earlier in the evening. Soon—perhaps before the year ended—they would smother the land permanently. And this presented a problem, for ever since that night when Vin had taken the power of the Well of Ascension, the mists killed.

Elend had had trouble believing Sazed's stories two years before, when the Terrisman had come to Luthadel with horrific reports of terrified villagers and mists that killed. Vin too had assumed that Sazed was mistaken. A part of her wished she could continue in that delusion as she watched the waiting townspeople, huddled together on the broad open plain, surrounded by soldiers and koloss.

The deaths began as soon as the mists appeared. Though the mists left most of the people alone, they chose some at random, causing them to begin shaking. These fell to the ground, having a seizure, while their friends and family watched in shock and horror.

Horror was still Vin's reaction. That, and frustration. Kelsier had promised her that the mists were an ally—that they would protect her and give her power. She'd believed that to be true until the mists started to feel alien to her, hiding shadowed ghosts and murderous intent.

"I hate you," she whispered as the mists continued their grisly work. It was like watching a beloved old relative pick strangers out of a crowd and, one at a time, slit their throats. And there was nothing at all she could do. Elend's scholars had tried everything—hoods to keep the mists from being breathed in, waiting to go outside until the mists had already established themselves, rushing people inside the moment they started shaking. Animals were immune for some reason, but every human was potentially susceptible. If one went outside in the mists, one risked death, and nothing could prevent it.

It was over soon. The mists gave the fits to fewer than one in six, and only a small fraction of those died. Plus, one only needed to risk these new mists once—one gamble, and then you were immune. Most who fell sick would recover. That was no comfort to the families of those who died.

She sat on her stump, staring out into the mists, which were still lit by the setting sun. Ironically, it was more difficult for her to see than it would have been if it were dark. She couldn't burn much tin, lest the sunlight blind her—but without it, she couldn't pierce the mists.

The result was a scene that reminded her why she had once feared the mists. Her visibility reduced to barely ten feet, she could see little more than shadows. Amorphous figures ran this way and that, calling out. Silhouettes knelt or stood terrified. Sound was a traitorous thing, echoing against unseen objects, cries coming from phantom sources.

Vin sat among them, ash raining around her like burnt tears, and bowed her head.

"Lord Fatren!" Elend's voice called, causing Vin to look up. Once, his voice hadn't carried nearly as much authority. That seemed like so long ago. He appeared from the mists, dressed in his second white uniform—the one that was still clean—his face hardened against the mortalities. She could feel his Allomantic touch on those around him as he approached—his Soothing would make the people's pain less acute, but he didn't Push as hard as he could have. She knew from talking to him that he didn't feel it was right to remove all of a person's grief at the death of one they loved.

"My lord!" she heard Fatren say, and saw him approaching. "This is a disaster!"

"It looks far worse than it is, Lord Fatren," Elend said. "As I explained, most of those who have fallen will recover."

Fatren stopped beside Vin's stump. Then, he turned and stared into the mists, listening to the weeping and the pain of his people. "I can't believe we did this. I can't . . . I can't believe you talked me into making them stand in the mists."

"Your people needed to be inoculated, Fatren," Elend said.

It was true. They didn't have tents for all of the townsfolk, and that left only two options. Leave them behind in their dying village, or force them north—make them go out in the mists, and see who died. It was terrible, and it was brutal, but it would have happened eventually. Still, even though she knew the logic of what they had done, Vin felt terrible for being part of it.

"What kind of monsters are we?" Fatren asked in a hushed tone.

"The kind we have to be," Elend said. "Go make a count. Find out how many are dead. Calm the living and promise them that no further harm will come from the mists."

"Yes, my lord," Fatren said, moving away.

Vin watched him go. "We murdered them, Elend," she whispered. "We told them it would be all right. We forced them to leave their village and come out here, to die."

"It will be all right," Elend said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Better than a slow death in that village."

"We could have given them a choice."

Elend shook his head. "There was no choice. Within a few months, their city will be covered in mists permanently. They would have had to stay inside their homes and starve, or go out into the mists. Better that we take them to the Central Dominance, where there is still enough mistless daylight to grow crops."

"The truth doesn't make it any easier."

Elend stood in the mists, ash falling around him. "No," he said. "It doesn't. I'll go gather the koloss so they can bury the dead."

"And the wounded?" Those the mists attacked, but didn't kill, would be sick and cramped for several days, perhaps longer. If the usual percentages held, then nearly a thousand of the villagers would fall into that category.

"When we leave tomorrow, we'll have the koloss carry them. If we can get to the canal, then we can probably fit most of them on the barges."

Vin didn't like feeling exposed. She'd spent her childhood hiding in corners, her adolescence playing the silent nighttime assassin. So it was incredibly difficult *not* to feel exposed while traveling with five thousand tired villagers along one of the Southern Dominance's most obvious routes.

She walked a short distance away from the townspeople—she never rode—and tried to find something to distract herself from thinking about the deaths the evening before. Unfortunately, Elend was riding with Fatren and the other town leaders, busy trying to smooth relations. That left her alone.

Except for her single koloss.

The massive beast lumbered beside her. She kept it close partially out of convenience; she knew it would make the villagers keep their distance from her. As willing as she was to be distracted, she didn't want to deal with those betrayed, frightened eyes. Not right now.

Nobody understood the koloss, least of all Vin. She'd discovered how to control them, using the hidden Allomantic trigger. Yet, during the thousand years of the Lord Ruler's reign, he had kept the koloss separated from mankind, letting very little be known about them beyond their brutal prowess in battle and their simple bestial nature.

Even now, Vin could feel her koloss tugging at her, trying to break free. It didn't like being controlled—it wanted to attack her. It could not, fortunately; she controlled it, and would continue to do so whether awake or asleep, burning metals or not, unless someone stole the beast from her.

Even linked as they were, there was so much Vin didn't understand about the creatures. She looked up, and found the koloss staring at her with its bloodred eyes. Its skin was stretched tight across its face, the nose pulled completely flat. The skin was torn near the right eye, and a jagged rip ran down to the corner of its mouth, letting a flap of blue skin hang free, exposing the red muscles and bloodied teeth below.

"Don't look at me," the creature said, speaking in a sluggish voice. Its words were slurred, partially from the way its lips were pulled.

"What?" Vin asked.

"You don't think I'm human," the koloss said, speaking slowly, deliberately—like the others she had heard. It was like they had to think hard between each word.

"You *aren't* human," Vin said. "You're something else."

"I will be human," the koloss said. "We will kill you. Take your cities. Then we will be human."

Vin shivered. It was a common theme among koloss. She'd heard others make similar remarks. There was something very chilling about the flat, emotionless way the koloss spoke of slaughtering people.

*They were created by the Lord Ruler,* she thought. *Of course they're twisted. As twisted as he was*.

"What is your name?" she asked the koloss.

It continued to lumber beside her. Finally, it looked at her. "Human."

"I know you want to be human," Vin said. "What is your name?"

"That is my name. Human. You call me Human."

Vin frowned as they walked. *That almost seemed . . . clever*. She'd never taken the opportunity to talk to koloss before. She'd always assumed that they were of a homogeneous mentality—just the same stupid beast repeated over and over.

"All right, Human," she said, curious. "How long have you been alive?"

He walked for a moment, so long that Vin thought he had forgotten the question. Finally, however, he spoke. "Don't you see my bigness?"

"Your bigness? Your size?"

Human just kept walking.

"So you all grow at the same rate?"

He didn't answer. Vin shook her head, suspecting that the question was too abstract for the beast.

"I'm bigger than some," Human said. "Smaller than some—but not very many. That means I'm old."

*Another sign of intelligence,* she thought, raising an eyebrow. From what Vin had seen of other koloss, Human's logic was impressive.

"I hate you," Human said after a short time spent walking. "I want to kill you. But I can't kill you."

"No," Vin said. "I won't let you."

"You're big inside. Very big."

"Yes," Vin said. "Human, where are the girl koloss?"

The creature walked several moments. "Girl?"

"Like me," Vin said.

"We're not like you," he said. "We're big on the outside only."

"No," Vin said. "Not my size. My . . ." How did one describe gender? Short of stripping, she couldn't think of any methods. So, she decided to try a different tactic. "Are there baby koloss?"

"Baby?"

"Small ones," Vin said.

The koloss pointed toward the marching koloss army. "Small ones," he said, referring to some of the five-foot-tall koloss.

"Smaller," Vin said.

"None smaller."

Koloss reproduction was a mystery that, to her knowledge, nobody had ever cracked. Even after a year spent fighting with the beasts, she'd never found out where new ones came from. Whenever Elend's koloss armies grew too small, she and he stole new ones from the Inquisitors.

Yet, it was ridiculous to assume that the koloss didn't reproduce. She'd seen koloss camps that weren't controlled by an Allomancer, and the creatures killed each other with fearful regularity. At that rate, they would have killed themselves off after a few years. Yet, they had lasted for ten centuries.

That implied a very quick rise from child to adult, or so Sazed and Elend seemed to think. They hadn't been able to confirm their theories, and she knew their ignorance frustrated Elend greatly—especially since his duties as emperor left him little time for the studies he'd once enjoyed so much.

"If there are none smaller," Vin asked, "then where do new koloss come from?"

"New koloss come from us," Human finally said.

"From you?" Vin asked, frowning as she walked. "That doesn't tell me much."

Human didn't say anything further. His talkative mood had apparently passed.

*From us,* Vin thought. *They bud off of each other, perhaps?* She'd heard of some creatures that, if you cut them the right way, each half would grow into a new animal. But, that couldn't be the case with koloss—she'd seen battlefields filled with their dead, and no pieces rose to form new koloss. But she'd also never seen a female koloss. Though most of the beasts wore crude loincloths, they were—as far as she knew—all male.

Further speculation was cut off as she noticed the line ahead bunching up; the crowd was slowing. Curious, she dropped a coin and left Human behind, shooting herself over the people. The mists had retreated hours ago, and though night was again approaching, for the moment it was both light and mistless.

Therefore, as she shot through the falling ash, she easily picked out the canal up ahead. It cut unnaturally through the ground, far straighter than any river. Elend speculated that the constant ashfall would soon put an end to most of the canal systems. Without skaa laborers to dredge them on a regular basis, they would fill up with ashen sediment, eventually clogging to uselessness.

Vin soared through the air, completing her arc, heading toward a large mass of tents stationed beside the canal. Thousands of fires spit smoke into the afternoon air, and men milled about, training, working, or preparing. Nearly fifty thousand soldiers bivouacked here, using the canal route as a supply line back to Luthadel.

Vin dropped another coin, bounding through the air again. She quickly caught up to the small group of horses that had broken off from Elend's line of tired, marching skaa. She landed—dropping a coin and Pushing against it slightly to slow her descent, throwing up a spray of ash as she hit.

Elend reined in his horse, smiling as he surveyed the camp. The expression was rare enough on his lips these days that Vin found herself smiling as well. Ahead, a group of men waited for them—their scouts would have long since noticed the townspeople's approach.

"Lord Elend!" said a man sitting at the head of the army contingent. "You're ahead of schedule!"

"I assume you're ready anyway, General," Elend said, dismounting.

"Well, you know me," Demoux said, smiling as he approached. The general wore well-used armor of leather and steel, his face bearing a scar on one cheek, the left side of his scalp missing a large patch of hair where a koloss blade had nearly taken his head. Ever formal, the grizzled man bowed to Elend, who just slapped him on the shoulder affectionately.

Vin's smile lingered. *I remember when that man was little more than a fresh recruit standing frightened in a tunnel*. Demoux wasn't actually that much older than she was, even though his tanned face and callused hands gave that impression.

"We've held position, my lord," Demoux said as Fatren and his brother dismounted and joined the group. "Not that there was much to hold it against. Still, it was good for my men to practice fortifying a camp."

Indeed, the army's camp beside the canal was surrounded by heaped earth and spikes—a considerable feat, considering the army's size.

"You did well, Demoux," Elend said, turning back to look over the townspeople. "Our mission was a success."

"I can see that, my lord," Demoux said, smiling. "That's a fair pack of koloss you picked up. I hope the Inquisitor leading them wasn't *too* sad to see them go."

"Couldn't have bothered him too much," Elend said. "Since he was dead at the time. We found the storage cavern as well."

"Praise the Survivor!" Demoux said.

Vin frowned. At his neck, hanging outside his clothing, Demoux wore a necklace that bore a small silver spear: the increasingly popular symbol of the Church of the Survivor. It seemed odd to her that the weapon that had killed Kelsier would become the symbol of his followers.

Of course, she didn't like to think about the other possibility—that the spear might not represent the one that had killed Kelsier. It might very well represent the one that she herself had used to kill the Lord Ruler. She'd never asked Demoux which it was. Despite three years of growing Church power, Vin had never become comfortable with her own part in its doctrine.

"Praise the Survivor indeed," Elend said, looking over the army's supply barges. "How did your project go?"

"Dredging the southern bend?" Demoux asked. "It went well—there was blessed little else to do while we waited. You should be able to get barges through there now."

"Good," Elend said. "Form two task forces of five hundred men. Send one with barges back to Vetitan for the supplies we had to leave down in that cavern. They will transfer the supplies to the barges and send them up to Luthadel."

"Yes, my lord," Demoux said.

"Send the second group of soldiers north to Luthadel with these refugees," Elend said, nodding to Fatren. "This is Lord Fatren. He's in command of the townspeople. Have your men respect his wishes, as long as they are reasonable, and introduce him to Lord Penrod."

Once—not long ago—Fatren would probably have complained about being handed off. However, his time with Elend had transformed him surprisingly quickly. The dirty leader nodded gratefully at the escort. "You . . . aren't coming with us then, my lord?"

Elend shook his head. "I have other work to do, and your people need to get to Luthadel, where they can begin farming. Though, if any of your men wish to join my army, they are welcome. I'm always in need of good troops, and against the odds, you succeeded in training a useful force."

"My lord . . . why not just compel them? Pardon me, but that's what you've done so far."

"I compelled your people to safety, Fatren," Elend said. "Sometimes even a drowning man will fight the one who tries to save him and must be compelled. My army is a different matter. Men who don't want to fight are men you can't depend on in battle, and I won't have any of those in my army. You yourself need to go to Luthadel—your people need you—but please let your soldiers know that I will gladly welcome any of them into our ranks."

Fatren nodded. "All right. And . . . thank you, my lord."

"You are welcome. Now, General Demoux, are Sazed and Breeze back yet?"

"They should arrive sometime this evening, my lord," Demoux said. "One of their men rode ahead to let us know."

"Good," Elend said. "I assume my tent is ready?"

"Yes, my lord," Demoux said.

Elend nodded, suddenly looking very tired to Vin.

"My lord?" Demoux asked eagerly. "Did you find the . . . other item? The location of the final cache?"

Elend nodded. "It's in Fadrex."

"Cett's city?" Demoux asked, laughing. "Well, he'll be happy to hear that. He's been complaining for over a year that we haven't ever gotten around to conquering it back for him."

Elend smiled wanly. "I've been half convinced that if we did, Cett would decide that he—and his soldiers—didn't need us anymore."

"He'll stay, my lord," Demoux said. "After the scare Lady Vin gave him last year . . ."

Demoux glanced at Vin, trying to smile, but she saw it in his eyes. Respect, far too much of it. He didn't joke with her the way he did with Elend. She still couldn't believe that Elend had joined that silly religion of theirs. Elend's intentions had been political—by joining the skaa faith, Elend had forged a link between himself and the common people. Even so, the move made her uncomfortable.

A year of marriage had taught her, however, that there were some things one just had to ignore. She could love Elend for his desire to do the right thing, even when she thought he'd done the opposite.

"Call a meeting this evening, Demoux," Elend said. "We have much to discuss—and let me know when Sazed arrives."

"Should I inform Lord Hammond and the others of the meeting's agenda, my lord?"

Elend paused, glancing toward the ashen sky. "Conquering the world, Demoux," he finally said. "Or, at least, what's left of it."

*Allomancy was, indeed, born with the mists. Or, at least, Allomancy began at the same time as the mists' first appearances. When Rashek took the power at the Well of Ascension, he became aware of certain things. Some were whispered to him by Ruin; others were granted to him as an instinctive part of the power.*

*One of these was an understanding of the Three Metallic Arts. He knew, for instance, that the nuggets of metal in the Chamber of Ascension would make those who ingested them into Mistborn. These were, after all, fractions of the very power in the Well itself.*

# 9

TENSOON HAD VISITED the Trustwarren before; he was of the Third Generation. He had been born seven centuries ago, when the kandra were still new—though by that time, the First Generation had already given over the raising of new kandra to the Second Generation.

The Seconds hadn't done very well with TenSoon's generation—or, at least, that was how the Seconds felt. They'd wanted to form a society of individuals who followed strict rules of respect and seniority. A "perfect" people who lived to serve their Contracts—and, of course, the members of the Second Generation.

Up until his return, TenSoon had generally been considered one of the least troublesome of the Thirds. He'd been known as a kandra who cared little for Homeland politics; one who served out his Contracts, content to keep himself as far away from the Seconds and their machinations as possible. It was ironic indeed that TenSoon would end up on trial for the most heinous of kandra crimes.

His guards marched him right into the center of the Trustwarren—onto the platform itself. TenSoon wasn't certain whether to be honored or ashamed. Even as a member of the Third Generation, he hadn't often been allowed so near the Trust.

The room was large and circular, with metal walls. The platform was a massive steel disk set into the rock floor. It wasn't very high—perhaps a foot tall—but it was ten feet in diameter. TenSoon's feet felt cold hitting its slick surface, and he was reminded again of his nudity. They didn't bind his hands; that would have been too much of an insult even for him. Kandra obeyed the Contract, even those of the Third Generation. He would not run, and he would not strike down one of his own. He was better than that.

The room was lit by lamps, rather than glowstone, though each lamp was enclosed in blue glass. Oil was difficult to get—the Second Generation, for good reason, didn't want to rely on supplies from the world of men. The people above, even most of the Father's servants, didn't know there was a centralized kandra government. It was much better that way.

In the blue light, TenSoon could easily see the members of the Second Generation—all twenty of them, standing behind their lecterns, arranged in tiers on the far side of the room. They were close enough to see, study, and speak to—yet far enough away that TenSoon felt isolated, standing alone in the center of the platform. His feet were cold. He looked down, and noticed the small hole in the floor near his toes. It was cut into the steel disk of the platform.

*The Trust,* he thought. It was directly underneath him.

"TenSoon of the Third Generation," a voice said.

TenSoon looked up. It was KanPaar, of course. He was a tall kandra—or, rather, he preferred to use a tall True Body. Like all of the Seconds, his bones were constructed of the purest crystal—his with a deep red tint. It was an impractical body in many ways. Those bones wouldn't stand up to much punishment. Yet, for the life of an administrator in the Homeland, the weakness of the bones was apparently an acceptable trade-off for their sparkling beauty.

"I am here," TenSoon said.

"You insist on forcing this trial?" KanPaar said, keeping his voice lofty, reinforcing his thick accent. By staying away from humans for so long, his language hadn't been corrupted by their dialects. The Seconds' accents were similar to that of the Father, supposedly.

"Yes," TenSoon said.

KanPaar sighed audibly, standing behind his fine stone lectern. Finally, he bowed his head toward the upper reaches of the room. The First Generation watched from above. They sat in their individual alcoves running around the perimeter of the upper room, shadowed to the point where they were little more than humanoid lumps. They did not speak. That was for the Seconds.

The doors behind TenSoon opened, and hushed voices sounded, feet rustling. He turned, smiling to himself as he watched them enter. Kandra of various sizes and ages. The very youngest ones wouldn't be allowed to attend an event this important, but those of the adult generations—everyone up through the Ninth Generation—could not be denied. This was his victory, perhaps the only one he would have in the entire trial.

If he was to be condemned to endless imprisonment, then he wanted his people to know the truth. More important, he wanted them to hear this trial, to hear what he had to say. He would not convince the Second Generation, and who knew what the Firsts would silently think, sitting in their shadowed alcoves? The younger kandra, however . . . perhaps they would listen. Perhaps they would do something, once TenSoon was gone. He watched them file in, filling the stone benches. There were hundreds of kandra now. The elder generations—Firsts, Seconds, Thirds—were small in number, since many had been killed in the early days, when the humans had feared them. However, later generations were well populated—the Tenth Generation had over a hundred individuals in it. The Trustwarren's benches had been constructed to hold the entire kandra population, but they were now filled just by those who happened to be free from both duty and Contract.

He had hoped that MeLaan wouldn't be in that group. Yet, she was virtually the first in the doors. For a moment, he worried that she'd rush across the chamber—stepping on the platform, where only the most blessed or cursed were allowed. Instead, she froze just inside the doorway, forcing others to push around her in annoyance as they found seats.

He shouldn't have recognized her. She had a new True Body—an eccentric one, with bones made of wood. They were thin and willowy in an exaggerated, unnatural way: her wooden skull long with a pointed triangular chin, her eyes too large, twisted bits of cloth sticking from her head like hair. The younger generations were pushing the boundaries of propriety, annoying the Seconds. Once, TenSoon would probably have agreed with them—even now, he was something of a traditionalist. Yet, this day, her rebellious body simply made him smile.

That seemed to give her comfort, and she found a seat, near the front, with a group of other Seventh Generationers. They all had deformed True Bodies—one too much like a block, another actually sporting four arms.

"TenSoon of the Third Generation," KanPaar said formally, quieting the crowd of watching kandra. "You have obstinately demanded judgment before the First Generation. By the First Contract, we cannot condemn you without first allowing you the opportunity to plead before the Firsts. Should they see fit to stay your punishment, you will be freed. Otherwise, you must accept the fate the Council of Seconds assigns you."

"I understand," TenSoon said.

"Then," KanPaar said, leaning forward on his lectern. "Let us begin."

*He's not worried at all,* TenSoon realized. *He actually sounds like he's going to enjoy this.*

*And why not? After centuries of preaching that the Third Generation is filled with miscreants? They've tried all this time to overcome their mistakes* *with us—mistakes like giving us too much freedom, letting us think that we were as good as they were. By proving that I—the most "temperate" of the Thirds—am a danger, KanPaar will win a struggle he's been fighting for most of his life.*

TenSoon had always found it strange how threatened the Seconds felt by the Thirds. It had taken them only one generation to understand their mistakes—the Fourths were nearly as loyal as the Fifths, with only a few deviant members.

And yet, with some of the younger generations—MeLaan and her friends providing an example—acting as they did . . . well, perhaps the Seconds had a right to feel threatened. And TenSoon was to be their sacrifice. Their way of restoring order and orthodoxy.

They were certainly in for a surprise.

*Nuggets of pure Allomancy, the power of Preservation itself. Why Rashek left one of those nuggets at the Well of Ascension, I do not know. Perhaps he didn't see it, or perhaps he intended to save it to bestow upon a fortunate servant.*

*Perhaps he feared that someday, he would lose his powers, and would need that nugget to grant him Allomancy. Either way, I bless Rashek for his oversight, for without that nugget, Elend would have died that day at the Well.*

# 10

LARSTAISM WAS A DIFFICULT one for Sazed to measure. The religion seemed innocent enough. They knew much about it; a Keeper during the fourth century had managed to uncover an entire trove of prayer materials, scriptures, notes, and writings which had once belonged to a high-ranking member of the religion.

And yet, the religion itself didn't seem very . . . well, religious. It had focused on art, not the sacred in the usual sense, and had centered around donating money to support monks so that they could compose poetry and paint and sculpt works of art. That, actually, blocked Sazed's attempts to dismiss it, as he couldn't find any contradictions in its doctrines. It just didn't have enough of those for them to conflict with one another.

He held the paper in front of him, shaking his head, reading over the sheet again. It was strapped to the front of the portfolio to keep it from being caught in the wind, and a parasol strapped to his saddle kept most of the ash from smearing the page. He had heard Vin complain that she didn't know how people could possibly read while riding a horse, but this method made it rather easy.

He didn't have to turn pages. He simply read the same words over and over, turning them in his mind, playing with them. Trying to decide. Did this one have the truth? It was the one that Mare, Kelsier's wife, had believed. She'd been one of the few people Sazed had ever met who had chosen to believe in one of the old religions he had preached.

*The Larsta believed that life was about seeking the divine,* he read. *They taught that art draws us closer to understanding divinity. Since not all men can spend their time in art, it is to the benefit of society as a whole to support a group of dedicated artists to create great works, which then elevate those who experience them*.

That was all well and good, in Sazed's estimation, but what about questions of life and death? What about the spirit? What *was* the divine, and how could such terrible things happen to the world if divinity did exist?

"You know," Breeze said from the saddle of his horse, "there's something amazing about all of this."

The comment broke Sazed's concentration. He sighed, looking up from his research. The horse continued to clop along beneath him. "Amazing about what, Lord Breeze?"

"The ash," Breeze said. "I mean, look at it. Covering everything, making the land look so black. It's simply astounding how *dreary* the landscape has become. Back in the Lord Ruler's reign, everything was brown, and most plants grown outdoors looked as if they were on the very edge of sickly death. I thought *that* was depressing. But ash falling every day, burying the entire land . . ." The Soother shook his head, smiling. "I wouldn't have thought it possible for things to actually be worse without the Lord Ruler. But, well, we've certainly made a mess! Destroying the world. That's no mean feat, if you think about it. I wonder if we should be impressed with ourselves."

Sazed frowned. Occasional flakes drifted from the sky, the upper atmosphere darkened by its usual dark haze. The ashfall was light, if persistent, falling steadily for nearly two months now. Their horses moved through a good half-foot of the stuff as they moved southward, accompanied by a hundred of Elend's soldiers. How long would it be before the ash grew so deep that travel was impossible? It already drifted several feet high in some places.

Everything was black—the hills, the road, the entire countryside. Trees drooped with the weight of ash on their leaves and branches. Most of the ground foliage was likely dead—bringing even two horses with them on the trip to Lekal City had been difficult, for there was nothing for them to graze on. The soldiers had been forced to carry feed.

"I do have to say, however," Breeze continued, chatting along in his normal way, protected from the ash by a parasol attached to the back of his saddle, "the ash *is* a tad unimaginative."

"Unimaginative?"

"Why, yes," Breeze said. "While I do happen to like black as a color for suits, I otherwise find it a somewhat uninspired hue."

"What else would the ash be?"

Breeze shrugged. "Well, Vin says that there's something behind all this, right? Some evil force of doom or whatever? Well, if *I* were said force of doom, then I certainly wouldn't have used my powers to turn the land black. It just lacks flair. Red. Now, *that* would be an interesting color. Think of the possibilities—if the ash were red, the rivers would run like blood. Black is so monotonous that you can forget about it, but red—you'd always be thinking, 'Why, look at that. That hill is red. That evil force of doom trying to destroy me certainly has style.' "

"I'm not convinced there is any 'evil force of doom,' Breeze," Sazed said.

"Oh?"

Sazed shook his head. "The ashmounts have *always* spewed out ash. Is it really that much of a stretch to assume that they have become more active than before? Perhaps this is all the result of natural processes."

"And the mists?"

"Weather patterns change, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. "Perhaps it was simply too warm during the day for them to come out before. Now that the ashmounts are emitting more ash, it would make sense that the days are growing colder, and so the mists stay longer."

"Oh? And if that were the case, my dear man, then why haven't the mists stayed out during the day in the winters? It was colder then than the summer, but the mists always left when day arrived."

Sazed grew silent. Breeze made a good point. Yet, as Sazed checked each new religion off of his list, he wondered more and more if they were simply *creating* an enemy in this "force" Vin had felt. He didn't know anymore. He didn't believe for a moment that she would have fabricated her stories. Yet, if there were no truth in the religions, was it too much of a stretch to infer that the world was simply ending because it was time?

"Green," Breeze finally said.

Sazed turned.

"Now, that would be a color with style," Breeze said. "Different. You can't see green and forget about it—not like you can black or brown. Wasn't Kelsier always talking about plants being green, once? Before the Ascension of the Lord Ruler, before the first time the Deepness came upon the land?"

"That's what the histories claim."

Breeze nodded thoughtfully. "Style indeed," he said. "It would be pretty, I think."

"Oh?" Sazed asked, genuinely surprised. "Most people with whom I have spoken seem to find the concept of green plants rather odd."

"I thought that once, but now, after seeing black all day, every day . . . Well, I think a little variety would be nice. Fields of green . . . little specks of color . . . what did Kelsier call those?"

"Flowers," Sazed said. The Larsta had written poems about them.

"Yes," Breeze said. "It will be nice when those return."

"Return?"

Breeze shrugged. "Well, the Church of the Survivor teaches that Vin will someday cleanse the sky of ash and the air of mists. I figure while she's at it, she might as well bring back the plants and the flowers. Seems like a suitably feminine thing to do, for some reason."

Sazed sighed, shaking his head. "Lord Breeze," he said, "I realize that you are simply trying to encourage me. However, I have serious trouble believing that *you* accept the teachings of the Church of the Survivor."

Breeze hesitated. Then, he smiled. "So I overdid it a bit, did I?"

"A tad."

"It's difficult to tell with you, my dear man. You're so aware of my touch on your emotions that I can't use much Allomancy, and you've been so . . . well, different lately." Breeze's voice grew wistful. "Still, it would be nice to see those green plants our Kelsier always spoke of. After six months of ash . . . well, it makes a man at least *want* to believe. Perhaps that's enough for an old hypocrite like me."

The sense of despair inside Sazed wanted to snap that simply *believing* wasn't enough. Wishing and believing hadn't gotten him anywhere. It wouldn't change the fact that the plants were dying and the world was ending.

It wasn't worth fighting, because nothing meant anything.

Sazed forced himself to stop that line of thought, but it was difficult. He worried, sometimes, about his melancholy. Unfortunately, much of the time, he had trouble summoning even the effort to care about his own pessimistic bent.

*The Larsta,* he told himself. *Focus on that religion. You need to make a decision*.

Breeze's comments had set Sazed thinking. The Larsta focused so much on beauty and art as being "divine." Well, if divinity was in any way related to art, then a god *couldn't* in any way be involved in what was happening to the world. The ash, the dismal, depressing landscape . . . it was more than just "unimaginative," as Breeze had put it. It was completely insipid. Dull. Monotonous.

*Religion not true,* Sazed wrote at the bottom of the paper. *Teachings are directly contradicted by observed events*.

He undid the straps on his portfolio and slipped the sheet in, one step closer to having gone through all of them. Sazed could see Breeze watching out of the corner of his eye; the Soother loved secrets. Sazed doubted the man would be all that impressed if he discovered what the work was really about. Either way, Sazed just wished that Breeze would leave him alone when it came to these studies.

*I shouldn't be curt with him, though,* Sazed thought. He knew the Soother was, in his own way, just trying to help. Breeze had changed since they'd first met. Early on—despite glimmers of compassion—Breeze really had been the selfish, callous manipulator that he now only pretended to be. Sazed suspected that Breeze had joined Kelsier's team not out of a desire to help the skaa, but because of the challenge the scheme had presented, not to mention the rich reward Kelsier had promised.

That reward—the Lord Ruler's atium cache—had proven to be a myth. Breeze had found other rewards instead.

Up ahead, Sazed noticed someone moving through the ash. The figure wore black, but against the field of ash, it was easy to pick out even a hint of flesh tone. It appeared to be one of their scouts. Captain Goradel called the line to a halt, then sent a man forward to meet the scout. Sazed and Breeze waited patiently.

"Scout report, Lord Ambassador," Captain Goradel said, walking up to Sazed's horse a short time later. "The emperor's army is just a few hills away—less than an hour."

"Good," Sazed said, relishing the thought of seeing something other than the dreary hills of black.

"They've apparently seen us, Lord Ambassador," Goradel said. "Riders are approaching. In fact, they are—"

"Here," Sazed said, nodding into the near distance, where he saw a rider crest the hill. This one was very easy to pick out against the black. Not only was it moving very quickly—actually galloping its poor horse along the road—but it was also pink.

"Oh, dear," Breeze said with a sigh.

The bobbing figure resolved into a young woman with golden hair, wearing a bright pink dress—one that made her look younger than her twenty-something years. Allrianne had a fondness for lace and frills, and she tended to wear colors that made her stand out. Sazed might have expected someone like her to be a poor equestrian. Allrianne, however, rode with easy mastery, something one would need in order to remain on the back of a galloping horse while wearing such a frivolous dress.

The young woman reared her horse up in front of Sazed's soldiers, spinning the animal in a flurry of ruffled fabric and golden hair. About to dismount, she hesitated, eyeing the half-foot-deep layer of ash on the ground.

"Allrianne?" Breeze asked after a moment of silence.

"Hush," she said. "I'm trying to decide if it's worth getting my dress dirty to scamper over and hug you."

"We could wait until we get back to the camp . . ."

"I couldn't embarrass you in front of your soldiers that way," she said.

"Technically, my dear," Breeze said, "they're not *my* soldiers at all, but Sazed's."

Reminded of Sazed's presence, Allrianne looked up. She smiled prettily toward Sazed, then bent herself in a horseback version of a curtsy. "Lord Ambassador," she said, and Sazed felt a sudden—and unnatural—fondness for the young lady. She was Rioting him. If there was anyone more brazen with their Allomantic powers than Breeze, it was Allrianne.

"Princess," Sazed said, nodding his head to her.

Finally, Allrianne made her decision and slipped off the horse. She didn't quite "scamper"—instead, she held up her dress in a rather unladylike fashion. It would have been immodest if she hadn't been wearing what appeared to be several layers of lace petticoats underneath.

Eventually, Captain Goradel came over and helped her up onto Breeze's horse so that she was sitting in the saddle in front of him. The two had never been officially married—partially, perhaps, because Breeze felt embarrassed to be in a relationship with a woman so much younger than himself. When pressed on the issue, Breeze had explained that he didn't want to leave her as a widow when he died—something he seemed to assume would happen immediately, though he was only in his mid-forties.

*We'll all die soon, the way things are going,* Sazed thought. *Our ages do not matter.*

Perhaps that was part of why Breeze had finally accepted having a relationship with Allrianne. Either way, it was obvious from the way he looked at her—from the way he held her with a delicate, almost reverent touch—that he loved her very much.

*Our social structure is breaking down,* Sazed thought as the column began to march again. *Once, the official stamp of a marriage would have been essential, especially in a relationship involving a young woman of her rank.*

And yet, who was there to be "official" for now? The obligators were all but extinct. Elend and Vin's government was a thing of wartime necessity—a utilitarian, martially organized alliance of cities. And looming over it all was the growing awareness that something was seriously wrong with the world.

Why bother to get married if you expected the world would end before the year was out?

Sazed shook his head. This was a time when people needed structure—needed *faith*—to keep them going. He should have been the one to give it to them. The Church of the Survivor tried, but it was too new, and its adherents were too inexperienced with religion. Already there were arguments about doctrine and methodology, and each city of the New Empire was developing its own mutant variant of the religion.

In the past, Sazed had taught religions without feeling a need to believe in each one. He'd accepted each as being special in its own way, and offered them up, as a waiter might serve an appetizer he himself didn't feel like eating.

Doing so now seemed hypocritical to Sazed. If this people needed faith, then he should not be the one to give it to them. He would not teach lies, not anymore.

Sazed splashed his face with the basin's cold water, enjoying the pleasurable shock. The water dribbled down his cheeks and chin, carrying with it stains of ash. He dried his face with a clean towel, then took out his razor and mirror so that he could shave his head properly.

"Why do you keep doing that?" asked an unexpected voice.

Sazed spun. His tent in the camp had been empty just moments before. Now, however, someone stood behind him. Sazed smiled. "Lady Vin."

She folded her arms, raising an eyebrow. She had always moved stealthily, but she was getting so good that it amazed even him. She'd barely rustled the tent flap with her entrance. She wore her standard shirt and trousers, after male fashion, though during the last two years she had grown her raven hair to a feminine shoulder length. There had been a time when Vin had seemed to crouch wherever she went, always trying to hide, rarely looking others in the eye. That had changed. She was still easy to miss, with her quiet ways, thin figure, and small stature. She now always looked people in the eye, however.

And that made a big difference.

"General Demoux said that you were resting, Lady Vin," Sazed noted.

"Demoux knows better than to let me sleep through your arrival."

Sazed smiled to himself, then gestured toward a chair so that she could sit.

"You can keep shaving," she said. "It's all right."

"Please," he said, gesturing again.

Vin sighed, taking the seat. "You never answered my question, Saze," she said. "Why do you keep wearing those steward's robes? Why do you keep your head shaved, after the fashion of a Terris servant? Why worry about showing disrespect by shaving while I'm here? You're not a servant anymore."

He sighed, carefully seating himself in the chair across from Vin. "I'm not exactly sure *what* I am anymore, Lady Vin."

The tent walls flapped in a gentle breeze, a bit of ash blowing in through the door, which Vin hadn't tied closed behind herself. She frowned at his comment. "You're Sazed."

"Emperor Venture's chief ambassador."

"No," Vin said. "That might be what you *do,* but that's not what you *are*."

"And what am I, then?"

"Sazed," she repeated. "Keeper of Terris."

"A Keeper who no longer wears his copperminds?"

Vin glanced toward the corner, toward the trunk where he kept them. His copperminds, the Feruchemical storages that contained the religions, histories, stories, and legends of peoples long dead. It all sat waiting to be taught, waiting to be added to. "I fear that I have become a very selfish man, Lady Vin," Sazed said quietly.

"That's silly," Vin said. "You've spent your entire life serving others. I know of nobody more selfless than you."

"I do appreciate that sentiment," he said. "But I fear that I must disagree. Lady Vin, we are not a people new to sorrow. You know better than anyone here, I think, the hardships of life in the Final Empire. We have all lost people dear to us. And yet, I seem to be the only one unable to get over my loss. I feel childish. Yes, Tindwyl is dead. In all honesty, I did not have much time with her before she did pass. I have no reason to feel as I do.

"Still, I cannot wake up in the morning and not see darkness ahead of me. When I place the metalminds upon my arms, my skin feels cold, and I remember time spent with her. Life lacks all hope. I should be able to move on, but I cannot. I am weak of will, I think."

"That just isn't true, Sazed," Vin said.

"I must disagree."

"Oh?" Vin asked. "And if you really were weak of will, would you be able to disagree with me?"

Sazed paused, then smiled. "When did you get so good at logic?"

"Living with Elend," Vin said with a sigh. "If you prefer irrational arguments, don't marry a scholar."

*I almost did*. The thought came to Sazed unbidden, but it quieted his smile nonetheless. Vin must have noticed, for she cringed slightly.

"Sorry," she said, looking away.

"It is all right, Lady Vin," Sazed said. "I just . . . I feel so weak. I cannot be the man my people wish me to be. I am, perhaps, the very last of the Keepers. It has been a year since the Inquisitors attacked my homeland, killing even the child Feruchemists, and we have seen no evidence that others of my sect survived. Others were out of the city, certainly and inevitably, but either Inquisitors found them or other tragedy did. There has certainly been enough of that lately, I think."

Vin sat with her hands in her lap, looking uncharacteristically weak in the dim light. Sazed frowned at the pained expression on her face. "Lady Vin?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's just that . . . you've always been the one who gives advice, Sazed. But, now what I need advice about is you."

"There is no advice to give, I fear."

They sat in silence for a few moments.

"We found the stockpile," Vin said. "The next-to-last cavern. I made a copy for you of the words we found, etched in a thin sheet of steel so they'll be safe."

"Thank you."

Vin sat, looking uncertain. "You're not going to look at it, are you?"

Sazed paused, then shook his head. "I do not know."

"I can't do this alone, Sazed," Vin whispered. "I can't fight it by myself. I *need* you."

The tent grew quiet. "I . . . am doing what I can, Lady Vin," Sazed finally said. "In my own way. I must find answers for myself before I can provide them to anyone else. Still, have the etching delivered to my tent. I promise that I will at least look at it."

She nodded, then stood. "Elend's having a meeting tonight. To plan our next moves. He wants you there." She trailed a faint perfume as she moved to leave. She paused beside his chair. "There was a time," she said, "after I'd taken the power at the Well of Ascension, when I thought Elend would die."

"But he did not," Sazed said. "He lives still."

"It doesn't matter," Vin said. "I thought him dead. I knew he was dying—I held that power, Sazed, power *you can't imagine*. Power you'll never be able to imagine. The power to destroy worlds and remake them anew. The power to see and to understand. I saw him, and I knew he would die. And knew I held the power in my hands to save him."

Sazed looked up.

"But I didn't," Vin said. "I let him bleed, and released the power instead. I consigned him to death."

"How?" Sazed asked. "How could you do such a thing?"

"Because I looked into his eyes," Vin said, "and knew it was what he wanted me to do. You gave me that, Sazed. You taught me to love him enough to let him die."

She left him alone in the tent. A few moments later, he returned to his shaving, and found something sitting beside his basin. A small, folded piece of paper.

It contained an aged, fading drawing of a strange plant. A flower. The picture had once belonged to Mare. It had gone from her to Kelsier, and from him to Vin.

Sazed picked it up, wondering what Vin intended to say by leaving him the picture. Finally, he folded it up and slipped it into his sleeve, then returned to his shaving.

*The First Contract, oft spoken of by the kandra, was originally just a series of promises made by the First Generation to the Lord Ruler. They* *wrote these promises down, and in doing so codified the first kandra laws. They were worried about governing themselves, independently of the Lord Ruler and his empire. So, they took what they had written to him, asking for his approval.*

*He commanded it cast into steel, then personally scratched a signature into the bottom. This code was the first thing that a kandra learned upon awakening from his or her life as a mistwraith. It contained commands to revere earlier generations, simple legal rights granted to each kandra, provisions for creating new kandra, and a demand for ultimate dedication to the Lord Ruler.*

*Most disturbingly, the First Contract contained a provision which, if invoked, would require the mass suicide of the entire kandra people.*

# 11

KANPAAR LEANED FORWARD ON HIS LECTERN, red crystalline bones sparkling in the lamplight. "All right, then, TenSoon, traitor to the kandra people. You have demanded this judgment. Make your plea."

TenSoon took a deep breath—it felt so good to be able to do that again—and opened his mouth to speak.

"Tell them," KanPaar continued, sneering, "explain, if you can, why you killed one of our own. A fellow kandra."

TenSoon froze. The Trustwarren was quiet—the generations of kandra were far too well behaved to rustle and make noise like a crowd of humans. They sat with their bones of rock, wood, or even metal, waiting for TenSoon's answer.

KanPaar's question wasn't the one TenSoon had expected.

"Yes, I killed a kandra," TenSoon said, standing cold and naked on the platform. "That is not forbidden."

"Need it be forbidden?" KanPaar accused, pointing. "Humans kill each other. Koloss kill each other. But they are both of Ruin. *We* are of Preservation, the chosen of the Father himself. We don't kill one another!"

TenSoon frowned. This was a strange line of questioning. *Why ask this?* he thought. *My betrayal of all our people is surely a greater sin than the murder of one*.

"I was compelled by my Contract," TenSoon said frankly. "You must know, KanPaar. *You* are the one who assigned me to the man Straff Venture. We all know what kind of person he was."

"No different from any other *man,*" spat one of the Seconds.

Once, TenSoon would have agreed. Yet, he knew that there were some humans, at least, who *were* different. He had betrayed Vin, and yet she hadn't hated him for it. She had understood, and had felt mercy. Even if they hadn't already become friends, even if he hadn't grown to respect her greatly, that one moment would have earned her his devoted loyalty.

She was counting on him, even if she didn't know it. He stood a little straighter, looking KanPaar in the eyes. "I was assigned to the man Straff Venture by paid Contract," TenSoon said. "He gave me over to the whims of his twisted son, Zane. It was Zane who commanded that I kill the kandra OreSeur and take his place, so that I could spy on the woman Vin."

There were a few hushed whispers at her name. *Yes, you've heard of her. The one who slew the Father*.

"And so you did what this Zane commanded?" KanPaar asked loudly. "You killed another kandra. You murdered a *member of your own generation!*"

"You think I enjoyed it?" TenSoon demanded. "OreSeur was my generation brother—a kandra I had known for seven hundred years! But . . . the Contract . . ."

"Forbids killing," KanPaar said.

"It forbids the killing of men."

"And is not a kandra life worth more than that of a man?"

"The words are specific, KanPaar," TenSoon snapped. "I know them well—I helped write them! We were both there when these service Contracts were created using the First Contract itself as a model! They forbid us from killing humans, but not each other."

KanPaar leaned forward again. "Did you argue with this Zane? Suggest perhaps that he should perform the murder himself? Did you even try to get out of killing one of our people?"

"I do not argue with my masters," TenSoon said. "And I certainly didn't want to tell the man Zane how to kill a kandra. His instability was well known."

"So, you didn't argue," KanPaar said. "You simply killed OreSeur. And then you took his place, pretending to be him."

"That is what we do," TenSoon said with frustration. "We take the place of others, acting as spies. That is the entire *point* of the Contract!"

"We do these things to *humans,*" snapped another Second. "This is the first case where a kandra has been used to imitate another kandra. It is a disturbing precedent you set."

*It was brilliant,* TenSoon thought. *I hate Zane for making me do it, but I can still see the genius in it. Vin never even suspected me. Who would?*

"You should have refused to do this act," KanPaar said. "You should have pled the need for clarification of your Contract. If others were to begin using us in this way, to kill one another, then we could be wiped out in a matter of years!"

"You betrayed us all with your rashness," said another.

*Ah,* TenSoon thought. *So that is their plan. They establish me as a traitor first, so that what I say later lacks credibility*. He smiled. He was of the Third Generation; it was time he started acting like it.

"I betrayed us with my rashness?" TenSoon asked. "What of you, glorious Seconds? Who was it who allowed a Contract to be assigned to Kelsier himself? You gave a kandra servant *to the very man who was planning to kill the Father!*"

KanPaar stiffened, as if he'd been slapped, translucent face angry in the blue lamplight. "It is not your place to make accusations, Third!"

"I have no place anymore, it seems," TenSoon said. "None of us do, now that the Father is dead. We have no right to complain, for we helped it happen."

"How were we to know this man would succeed when others hadn't," a Second sputtered. "He paid so well that—"

KanPaar cut the other off with a sharp wave of the hand. It wasn't good for those of the Second Generation to defend themselves. However, HunFoor—the kandra who had spoken—hadn't ever really fit in with the others of his generation. He was a little more . . . dense.

"You shall speak no more of this, Third," KanPaar said, pointing at TenSoon.

"How can I defend myself if I cannot—"

"You aren't *here* to defend yourself," KanPaar said. "This is not a trial—you have already admitted your guilt. This is a judgment. Explain your actions, then let the First Generation pronounce your fate!"

TenSoon fell silent. It was not time to push. Not yet.

"Now," KanPaar said, "this thing you did in taking the place of one of your own brothers is bad enough. Need we speak on, or would you accept judgment now?"

"We both know that OreSeur's death has little to do with why I am here," TenSoon said.

"Very well," said KanPaar. "Let us move on, then. Why don't you tell the First Generation why—if you are such a Contract-abiding kandra—you *broke* Contract with your master, disobeying his interests and helping his enemy instead?"

KanPaar's accusation echoed in the room. TenSoon closed his eyes, thinking back to that day over a year ago. He remembered sitting quietly on the floor of Keep Venture, watching as Zane and Vin fought.

No. It hadn't been a fight. Zane had been burning atium, which had made him all but invincible. Zane had played with Vin, toying with and mocking her.

Vin hadn't been TenSoon's master—TenSoon had killed her kandra and taken his place, spying on Vin at Zane's order. Zane. *He* had been TenSoon's master. *He* had held TenSoon's Contract.

But against all of his training, TenSoon had helped Vin. And, in doing so, he had revealed to her the great Secret of the kandra. Their weakness: that an Allomancer could use their powers to take complete control of a kandra's body. The kandra served their Contracts to keep this Secret hidden—they became servants, lest they end up as slaves. TenSoon opened his eyes to the quiet chamber. This was the moment he had been planning for.

"I didn't break my Contract," he announced.

KanPaar snorted. "You said otherwise when you came to us a year ago, Third."

"I told you what happened," TenSoon said, standing tall. "What I said was not a lie. I helped Vin instead of Zane. Partially because of my actions, my master ended up dead at Vin's feet. But I did not break my Contract."

"You imply that Zane *wanted* you to help his enemy?" KanPaar said.

"No," TenSoon said. "I did not break my Contract because I decided to serve a greater Contract. The First Contract!"

"The Father is dead!" one of the Seconds snapped. "How could you serve our Contract with him?"

"He is dead," TenSoon said. "That is true. But the First Contract did not die with him! Vin, the Heir of the Survivor, was the one who killed the Lord Ruler. *She* is our Mother now. Our First Contract is with her!"

He had expected outcries of blasphemy and condemnation. Instead, he got shocked silence. KanPaar stood, stupefied, behind his stone lectern. The members of the First Generation were silent, as usual, sitting in their shadowed alcoves.

*Well,* TenSoon thought, *I suppose that means I should continue*. "I *had* to help the woman Vin," he said. "I could not let Zane kill her, for I had a duty to her—a duty that began the moment she took the Father's place."

KanPaar finally found his voice. "*She*? Our Mother? She killed the Lord Ruler!"

"And took his place," TenSoon said. "She is one of us, in a way."

"Nonsense!" KanPaar said. "I had expected rationalizations, TenSoon—perhaps even lies. But these fantasies? These blasphemies?"

"Have you been outside recently, KanPaar?" TenSoon asked. "Have you left the Homeland in the last century at all? Do you understand what is happening? The Father is *dead*. The land is in upheaval. While returning to the Homeland a year ago, I saw the changes in the mists. They no longer behave as they always have. We cannot continue as we have. The Second Generation may not yet realize it, but Ruin has come! Life will end. The time that the Worldbringers spoke of—perhaps the time for the Resolution—is here!"

"You are delusional, TenSoon. You've been amongst the humans too—"

"Tell them what this is all really about, KanPaar," TenSoon interrupted, voice rising. "Don't you want my *real* sin known? Don't you want the others to hear?"

"Don't force this, TenSoon," KanPaar said, pointing again. "What you've done is bad enough. Don't make it—"

"I told her," TenSoon said, cutting him off again. "I told her our *Secret*. At the end, she used me. Like the Allomancers of old. She took control of my body, using the Flaw, and she made me fight against Zane! *This* is what I've done. I've betrayed us all. She knows—and I'm certain that she has told others. Soon they'll all know how to control us. And, do you know *why* I did it? Is it not the point of this judgment for me to speak of my purposes?"

He kept talking, despite the fact that KanPaar tried to speak over him. "I did it because she has the *right* to know our Secret," TenSoon shouted. "She is the Mother! She inherited everything the Lord Ruler had. Without her, we have nothing. We cannot create new Blessings, or new kandra, on our own! The Trust is hers, now! We should go to her. If this truly is the end of all things, then the Resolution will soon come. She will—"

"Enough!" KanPaar bellowed.

The chamber fell silent again.

TenSoon stood, breathing deeply. For a year, trapped in his pit, he'd planned how to proclaim that information. His people had spent a thousand years, ten generations, following the teachings of the First Contract. They deserved to hear what had happened to him.

And yet, it felt so . . . inadequate to just scream it out like some raving human. Would any of his people really believe? Would he change anything at all?

"You have, by your own admission, betrayed us," KanPaar said. "You've broken Contract, you've murdered one of your own generation, and you've told a human how to dominate us. You demanded judgment. Let it come."

TenSoon turned quietly, looking up toward the alcoves where the members of the First Generation watched.

*Perhaps . . . perhaps they'll see that what I say is true. Perhaps my words will shock them, and they'll realize that we need to offer service to Vin, rather than just sit in these caves and wait while the world ends around us.*

But, nothing happened. No motion, no sound. At times, TenSoon wondered if anyone still lived up there. He hadn't spoken with a member of the First Generation for centuries—they limited their communications strictly to the Seconds.

If they did still live, none of them took the opportunity to offer TenSoon clemency. KanPaar smiled. "The First Generation has ignored your plea, Third," he said. "Therefore, as their servants, we of the Second Generation will offer judgment on their behalf. Your sentencing will occur in one month's time."

TenSoon frowned. *A month? Why wait?*

Either way, it was over. He bowed his head, sighing. He'd had his say. The kandra now knew that their Secret was out—the Seconds could no longer hide that fact. Perhaps his words would inspire his people to action.

TenSoon would probably never know.

*Rashek moved the Well of Ascension, obviously.*

*It was very clever of him—perhaps the cleverest thing he did. He knew that the power would one day return to the Well, for power such as this—the fundamental power by which the world itself was formed—does not simply run out. It can be used, and therefore diffused, but it will always be renewed.*

*So, knowing that rumors and tales would persist, Rashek changed the very landscape of the world. He put mountains in what became the North, and named that location Terris. Then he flattened his true homeland, and built his capital there.*

*He constructed his palace around that room at its heart, the room where he would meditate, the room that was a replica of his old hovel in Terris. A refuge created during the last moments before his power ran out.*

# 12

"I'M WORRIED ABOUT HIM, Elend," Vin said, sitting on their bedroll.

"Who?" Elend asked, looking away from the mirror. "Sazed?"

Vin nodded. When Elend awoke from their nap, she was already up, bathed, and dressed. He worried about *her* sometimes, working herself as hard as she did. He worried even more now that he too was Mistborn, and understood the limitations of pewter. The metal strengthened the body, letting one postpone fatigue—but at a price. When the pewter ran out or was turned off, the fatigue returned, crashing down on you like a collapsing wall.

Yet Vin kept going. Elend was burning pewter too, pushing himself, but she seemed to sleep half as much as he did. She was harder than he was—strong in ways he would never know.

"Sazed will deal with his problems," Elend said, turning back to his dressing. "He must have lost people before."

"This is different," Vin said. He could see her in the reflection, sitting cross-legged behind him in her simple clothing. Elend's stark white uniform was just the opposite. It shone with its gold-painted wooden buttons, intentionally crafted with too little metal in them to be affected by Allomancy. The clothing itself had been made with a special cloth that was easier to scrub clean of ash. Sometimes, he felt guilty at all the work it took to make him look regal. Yet it was necessary. Not for his vanity, but for his image. The image for which his men marched to war. In a land of black, Elend wore white—and became a symbol.

"Different?" Elend asked, doing up the buttons on his jacket sleeves. "What is different about Tindwyl's death? She fell during the assault on Luthadel. So did Clubs and Dockson. You killed my own father in that battle, and I beheaded my best friend shortly before it. We've all lost people."

"He said something like that himself," Vin said. "But, it's more than just one death to him. I think he sees a kind of betrayal in Tindwyl's death—he always was the only one of us who had faith. He lost that when she died, somehow."

"The only one of us who had faith?" Elend asked, plucking a wooden, silver-painted pin off his desk and affixing it to his jacket. "What about this?"

"You belong to the Church of the Survivor, Elend," Vin said. "But you don't have faith. Not like Sazed did. It was like . . . he *knew* everything would turn out all right. He trusted that something was watching over the world."

"He'll deal with it."

"It's not just him, Elend," Vin said. "Breeze tries too hard."

"What does that mean?" Elend asked with amusement.

"He Pushes on everyone's emotions," Vin said. "He Pushes too hard, trying to make others happy, and he laughs too hard. He's afraid, worried. He shows it by overcompensating."

Elend smiled. "You're getting as bad as he is, reading everybody's emotions and telling them how they're feeling."

"They're my friends, Elend," Vin said. "I *know* them. And, I'm telling you—they're giving up. One by one, they're beginning to think we can't win this one."

Elend fastened the final button, then looked at himself in the mirror. Sometimes, he still wondered if he fit the ornate suit, with its crisp whiteness and implied regality. He looked into his own eyes, looking past the short beard, warrior's body, and scarred skin. He looked into those eyes, searching for the king behind them. As always, he wasn't completely impressed with what he saw.

He carried on anyway, for he was the best they had. Tindwyl had taught him that. "Very well," he said. "I trust that you're right about the others—I'll do something to fix it."

That, after all, was his job. The title of emperor carried with it only a single duty.

To make everything better.

"All right," Elend said, pointing to a map of the empire hanging on the wall of the conference tent. "We timed the arrival and disappearance of the mists each day, then Noorden and his scribes analyzed them. They've given us these perimeters as a guide."

The group leaned in, studying the map. Vin sat at the back of the tent, as was still her preference. Closer to the shadows. Closer to the exit. She'd grown more confident, true—but that didn't make her careless. She liked to be able to keep an eye on everyone in the room, even if she did trust them.

And she did. Except maybe Cett. The obstinate man sat at the front of the group, his quiet teenage son at his side, as always. Cett—or, *King* Cett, one of the monarchs who had sworn allegiance to Elend—had an unfashionable beard, an even more unfashionable mouth, and two legs that didn't work. That hadn't kept him from nearly conquering Luthadel over a year before.

"Hell," Cett said. "You expect us to be able to read that thing?"

Elend tapped the map with his finger. It was a rough sketch of the empire, similar to the one they'd found in the cavern, only more up to date. It had several large concentric circles inscribed on it.

"The outermost circle is the place where the mists have completely taken the land, and no longer leave at all during the daylight." Elend moved his finger inward to another circle. "This circle passes through the village we just visited, where we found the cache. This marks four hours of daylight. Everything inside the circle gets more than four hours. Everything outside of it gets less."

"And the final circle?" Breeze asked. He sat with Allrianne as far away from Cett as the tent would allow. Cett still had a habit of throwing things at Breeze: insults, for the most part, and occasionally knives.

Elend eyed the map. "Assuming the mists keep creeping toward Luthadel at the same rate, that circle represents the area that the scribes feel will get enough sunlight this summer to support crops."

The room fell silent.

*Hope is for the foolish,* Reen's voice seemed to whisper in the back of Vin's mind. She shook her head. Her brother, Reen, had trained her in the ways of the street and the underground, teaching her to be mistrustful and paranoid. In doing so, he'd also taught her to survive. It had taken Kelsier to show her that it was possible to both trust and survive—and it had been a hard lesson. Even so, she still often heard Reen's phantom voice in the back of her mind—more a memory than anything else—whispering her insecurities, bringing back the brutal things he had taught her.

"That's a fairly small circle, El," Ham said, still studying the map. The large-muscled man sat with General Demoux between Cett and Breeze. Sazed sat quietly to the side. Vin glanced at him, trying to judge if their previous conversation had lifted his depression any, but she couldn't tell.

They were a small group: only nine, if one counted Cett's son, Gneorndin. But, it included pretty much all that was left of Kelsier's crew. Only Spook, doing reconnaissance in the North, was missing. Everyone was focused on the map. The final circle was, indeed, very small—not even as big as the Central Dominance, which held the imperial capital of Luthadel. What the map said, and Elend implied, was that over ninety percent of the empire wouldn't be able to support crops this summer.

"Even this small bubble will be gone by next winter," Elend said.

Vin watched the others contemplate, and realize—if they hadn't already—the horror of what was upon them. *It's like Alendi's logbook said,* she thought. *They couldn't fight the Deepness with armies. It destroyed cities, bringing a slow, terrible death. They were helpless.*

The Deepness. That was what they'd called the mists—or, at least, that was what the surviving records called them. Perhaps the thing they fought, the primal force Vin had released, was behind the obfuscation. There was really no way of knowing for sure what had once been, for the entity had the power to change records.

"All right, people," Elend said, folding his arms. "We need options. Kelsier recruited you because you could do the impossible. Well, our predicament is pretty impossible."

"He didn't recruit me," Cett pointed out. "I got pulled by my balls into this little fiasco."

"I wish I cared enough to apologize," Elend said, staring at them. "Come on. I know you have thoughts."

"Well, my dear man," Breeze said, "the most obvious option appears to be the Well of Ascension. It seems the power there was built to fight the mists."

"Or to free the thing hiding in them," Cett said.

"That doesn't matter," Vin said, causing heads to turn. "There's no power at the Well. It's gone. Used up. If it ever returns, it will be in another thousand years, I suspect."

"That's a little bit long to stretch the supplies in those storage caches," Elend said.

"What if we grew plants that need very little light?" Ham asked. As always, he wore simple trousers and a vest. He was a Thug, and could burn pewter—which made him resistant to heat and cold. He'd cheerfully walk around sleeveless on a day that would send most men running for shelter.

Well, maybe not cheerfully. Ham hadn't changed overnight, as Sazed had. Ham, however, *had* lost some of his joviality. He tended to sit around a lot, looks of consternation on his face, as if he were considering things very, very carefully—and not much liking the answers he came up with.

"There are plants that don't need light?" Allrianne asked, cocking her head.

"Mushrooms and the like," Ham said.

"I doubt we could feed an entire empire on mushrooms," Elend said. "Though it's a good thought."

"There have to be other plants, too," Ham said. "Even if the mists come all day, there will be some light that gets through. Some plants have to be able to live on that."

"Plants we can't eat, my dear man," Breeze pointed out.

"Yes, but maybe animals can," Ham said.

Elend nodded thoughtfully.

"Blasted little time left for horticulture," Cett noted. "We should have been working on this sort of thing years ago."

"We didn't know most of this until a few months ago," Ham said.

"True," Elend said. "But the Lord Ruler had a thousand years to prepare. That's why he made the storage caverns—and we still don't know what the last one contains."

"I don't like relying on the Lord Ruler, Elend," Breeze said with a shake of his head. "He must have prepared those caches knowing that he'd be dead if anyone ever had to use them."

Cett nodded. "The idiot Soother has a point. If I were the Lord Ruler, I'd have stuffed those caches with poisoned food and pissed-in water. If I were dead, then everyone else ought to be as well."

"Fortunately, Cett," Elend said with a raised eyebrow, "the Lord Ruler has proven more altruistic than we might have expected."

"Not something I ever thought I'd hear," Ham noted.

"He was emperor," Elend said. "We may not have liked his rule, but I can understand him somewhat. He wasn't spiteful—he wasn't even evil, exactly. He just . . . got carried away. Besides, he resisted this thing that we're fighting."

"This thing?" Cett asked. "The mists?"

"No," Elend said. "The thing that was trapped in the Well of Ascension."

*It is called Ruin,* Vin thought suddenly. *It will destroy everything*.

"This is why I've decided we need to secure that last cache," Elend said. "The Lord Ruler lived through this once—he knew how to prepare. Perhaps we'll find plants that can grow without sunlight. Each of the caches so far has had repeats—food stores, water—but each one has held something new as well. In Vetitan, we found large stores of the first eight Allomantic metals. The thing in that last cache might be just what we need in order to survive."

"That's it, then!" Cett said, smiling broadly through his beard. "We *are* marching on Fadrex, aren't we?"

Elend nodded curtly. "Yes. The main force of the army will march for the Western Dominance once we break camp here."

"Ha!" Cett said. "Penrod and Janarle can suck on *that* for a few days."

Vin smiled faintly. Penrod and Janarle were the two other most important kings under Elend's imperial rule. Penrod governed Luthadel, which was why he wasn't with them currently, and Janarle ruled the Northern Dominance—the kingdom that included House Venture's hereditary lands.

The largest city in the north, however, had been seized in a revolt while Janarle—with Elend's father, Straff Venture—had been away laying siege to Luthadel. So far, Elend hadn't been able to spare the troops necessary to take Urteau back from its dissidents, so Janarle ruled in exile, his smaller force of troops used to maintain order in the cities he *did* control.

Both Janarle and Penrod had made a point of finding reasons to keep the main army from marching on Cett's homeland.

"Those bastards won't be at all happy when they hear about this," Cett said.

Elend shook his head. "Does everything you say have to contain one vulgarity or another?"

Cett shrugged. "What's the point of speaking if you can't say something interesting?"

"Swearing isn't interesting," Elend said.

"That's your own damned opinion," Cett said, smiling. "And, you really shouldn't be complaining, Emperor. If you think the things *I* say are vulgar, you've been living in Luthadel far too long. Where I come from, people are embarrassed to use pretty words like 'damn.' "

Elend sighed. "Anyway, I—"

He was cut off as the ground began to shake. Vin was on her feet in seconds, looking for danger as the others cursed and reached for stability. She threw back the tent flap, peering through the mists. Yet, the shaking subsided quickly, and it caused very little chaos in the camp, all things considered. Patrols moved about, checking for problems—officers and Allomancers under Elend's command. Most of the soldiers, however, just remained in their tents.

Vin turned back toward the tent's room. A few of the chairs had fallen over, travel furniture disturbed by the earthquake. The others slowly returned to their seats. "Sure have been a lot of those lately," Ham said. Vin met Elend's eyes, and could see concern in them.

We can fight armies, we can capture cities, but what of ash, mists, and earthquakes? What about the world falling apart around us?

"Anyway," Elend said, voice firm despite the concerns Vin knew he must feel, "Fadrex has to be our next goal. We can't risk missing the cache, and the things it might contain."

*Like the atium,* Reen whispered in Vin's head as she sat back down. "Atium," she said out loud.

Cett perked up. "You think it'll be there?"

"There are theories," Elend said, eyeing Vin. "But we have no proof."

"It will be there," she said. *It has to be. I don't know why, but we* have *to have it.*

"I hope it isn't," Cett said. "I marched halfway across the blasted empire to try and steal that atium—if it turns out I left it beneath my own city . . ."

"I think we're missing something important, El," Ham said. "Are you talking about *conquering* Fadrex City?"

The room fell still. Up until this point, Elend's armies had been used defensively, attacking koloss garrisons or the camps of small warlords and bandits. They had bullied a few cities into joining with him, but they had never actually assaulted a city and taken it by force.

Elend turned, looking back toward the map. Even from the side, Vin could see his eyes—the eyes of a man hardened by two years of near-perpetual war.

"Our primary goal will be to take the city by diplomacy," Elend said.

"Diplomacy?" Cett said. "Fadrex is *mine*. That damn obligator stole it from me! There's no need to worry your conscience about attacking him, Elend."

"No need?" Elend asked, turning. "Cett, those are your people—your soldiers—we'd have to kill to get into that city."

"People die in war," Cett said. "Feeling bad about it doesn't remove the blood from your hands, so why bother? Those soldiers turned against me; they deserve what they'll get."

"It's not that simple," Ham said. "If there was no way for the soldiers to fight this usurper, then why expect them to give up their lives?"

"Especially for a man who was, himself, a usurper," Elend said.

"Either way," Ham said, "reports describe that city as being very well defended. It will be a tough stone to break, El."

Elend stood quietly for a moment, then eyed Cett, who still looked inordinately pleased with himself. The two seemed to share something—an understanding. Elend was a master of theory, and had probably read as much on war as anyone. Cett seemed to have a sixth sense for warfare and tactics, and had replaced Clubs as the empire's prime military strategist.

"Siege," Cett said.

Elend nodded. "If King Yomen won't respond to diplomacy, then the only way we'll get in that city—short of killing half our men breaking in—is by besieging it and making him desperate."

"Do we have time for that?" Ham asked, frowning.

"Besides Urteau," Elend said, "Fadrex City and the surrounding areas are the only major sections of the Inner Dominances that maintain a strong enough force to be threatening. That, plus the cache, means we can't afford to simply leave them alone."

"Time is on our side, in a way," Cett said, scratching his beard. "You don't just attack a city like Fadrex, Ham. It has fortifications, one of the few cities besides Luthadel that could repel an army. But, since it's outside of the Central Dominance, it's probably already hurting for food."

Elend nodded. "While we have all of the supplies we found in the storage caches. If we block off the highway, then hold the canal, they'll *have* to surrender the city eventually. Even if they've found the cache—which I doubt—we will be able to outlast them."

Ham frowned. "I guess. . . ."

"Besides," Elend added, "if things get tough, we do have about twenty thousand koloss we can draw upon."

Ham raised an eyebrow, though said nothing. The implication was clear. *You'd turn koloss against other people?*

"There is another element to this," Sazed said softly. "Something we have, as of yet, not discussed." Several people turned, as if they'd forgotten he was there.

"The mists," Sazed said. "Fadrex City lies well beyond the mist perimeter, Emperor Venture. Will you subject your army to fifteen percent casualties before you even arrive at the city?"

Elend fell quiet. So far, he'd managed to keep most of his soldiers out of the mists. It seemed wrong to Vin that their army had been protected from the sickness, while the villagers had been forced to go out in the mists. And yet, where they camped, there was still a significant amount of mistless daylight, and they also had enough tents to hold all of the soldiers, something they'd lacked when moving the villagers.

Mists rarely went into buildings, even cloth ones. There had been no reason to risk killing some of the soldiers, since they'd been able to avoid it. It seemed hypocritical to Vin, but so far, it still made sense.

Elend met Sazed's eyes. "You make a good point," he said. "We can't protect the soldiers from this forever. I forced the villagers of Vetitan to immunize themselves; I suspect that I will have to make the army do the same, for the same reasons."

Vin sat back quietly. She often wished for the days when she'd had nothing to do with such decisions—or, better yet, when Elend hadn't been forced to make them.

"We march for Fadrex," Elend said again, turning from the group. He pointed at the map. "If we're going to pull through this—and by 'we,' I mean all the people of the New Empire—we're going to need to band together and concentrate our populations near the Central Dominance. It will be the only place that can grow food this summer, and we'll need every bit of manpower we can muster to clear ash and prepare the fields. That means bringing the people of Fadrex under our protection.

"That also means," he said, pointing toward the northeastern section of the map, "that we'll need to suppress the rebellion in Urteau. Not only does the city there contain a storage cache—with grain we desperately need for a second planting down in the Central Dominance—but the city's new rulers are gathering strength and an army. Urteau is well within staging distance of Luthadel, as we discovered back when my father marched on us. I will *not* have a repeat of that event."

"We don't have enough troops to march on both fronts at once, El," Ham said.

Elend nodded. "I know. In fact, I'd rather avoid marching on Urteau. That was my father's seat—the people there had good reason to rebel against him. Demoux, report?"

Demoux stood. "We had a steel-inscribed message from Spook while Your Majesty was away," he said. "The lad says that the faction controlling Urteau is made up of skaa rebels."

"That sounds promising," Breeze noted. "Our kind of people."

"They're . . . quite harsh with noblemen, Lord Breeze," Demoux said. "And they include anyone with noble parents in that group."

"A little extreme, I'd think," Ham said.

"A lot of people thought Kelsier was extreme too," Breeze said. "I'm certain we can talk reason into these rebels."

"Good," Elend said, "because I'm counting on you and Sazed to bring Urteau under our control without the use of force. There are only five of these caches, and we can't afford to lose one. Who knows what we'll eventually discover in Fadrex—it might require us to return to the other caches to find something we missed." He turned, looking at Breeze, then Sazed.

"We can't just sneak the food out of Urteau," he said. "If the rebellion in that city spreads, it could cause the entire empire to fracture back into splinters. We *have* to bring the men there to our side."

The members of the room nodded, as did Vin. They knew from personal experience how much power a small rebellion could exert on an empire.

"The Fadrex siege could take some time," Elend said. "Long before summer arrives, I want you to have secured that northern cache and subdued the rebellion. Send the seed stock down to the Central Dominance for planting."

"Don't worry," Breeze said. "I've seen the kinds of governments skaa set up—by the time we get there, the city will probably be on the edge of collapse anyway. Why, they'll likely be relieved to get an offer to join the New Empire!"

"Be wary," Elend said. "Spook's reports have been sparse, but it sounds as if tensions in the city are extreme. We'll send a few hundred soldiers with you as protection." He looked back at the map, eyes narrowing slightly. "Five caches, five cities. Urteau is part of this all, somehow. We can't afford to let it slip away."

"Your Majesty," Sazed said. "Is my presence required on that trip?"

Elend frowned, glancing back at Sazed. "You have something else you need to be doing, Sazed?"

"I have research I would do," the Keeper said.

"I respect your wishes, as always," Elend said. "If you think this research is important . . ."

"It's of a personal nature, Your Majesty," Sazed said.

"Could you do it while helping in Urteau?" Elend asked. "You're a Terrisman, which lends you a credibility none of us can claim. Beyond that, people respect and trust you, Sazed—with good reason. Breeze, on the other hand, has something of a . . . reputation."

"I worked hard for it, you know," Breeze said.

"I'd really like to have you lead that team, Sazed," Elend said. "I can't think of a better ambassador than the Holy Witness himself."

Sazed's expression was unreadable. "Very well," he finally said. "I shall do my best."

"Good," Elend said, turning to regard the rest of the group. "Then there's one last thing I need to ask of you all."

"And what is that?" Cett asked.

Elend stood for a few moments, looking over their heads, appearing thoughtful. "I want you to tell me about the Survivor," he finally said.

"He was lord of the mists," Demoux said immediately.

"Not the rhetoric," Elend said. "Someone tell me about the man, Kelsier. I never met him, you know. I saw him once, right before he died, but I never knew him."

"What's the point?" Cett asked. "We've all heard the stories. He's practically a god, if you listen to the skaa."

"Just do as I ask," Elend said.

The tent was still for a few moments. Finally, Ham spoke. "Kell was . . . grand. He wasn't just a man, he was bigger than that. Everything he did was large—his dreams, the way he spoke, the way he thought. . . ."

"And it wasn't false," Breeze added. "I can tell when a man is being a fake. That's why I started my first job with Kelsier, actually. Amidst all the pretenders and posturers, he was genuine. Everyone wanted to be the best. Kelsier really was."

"He was a man," Vin said quietly. "Just a man. Yet, you always knew he'd succeed. He made you be what he wanted you to be."

"So he could use you," Breeze said.

"But you were better when he was done with you," Ham added.

Elend nodded slowly. "I wish I could have known him. Early in my career, I always compared myself to him. By the time I heard of Kelsier, he was already becoming a legend. It was unfair to force myself to try and be him, but I worried regardless. Anyway, those of you who knew him, maybe you can answer another question for me. What do you think he'd say, if he saw us now?"

"He'd be proud," Ham said immediately. "I mean, we defeated the Lord Ruler, and we built a skaa government."

"What if he saw us at this conference?" Elend said.

The tent fell still again. When someone spoke what they were all thinking, it came from a source Vin hadn't expected.

"He'd tell us to laugh more," Sazed whispered.

Breeze chuckled. "He was completely insane, you know. The worse things got, the more he'd joke. I remember how chipper he was the very day after one of our worst defeats, when we lost most of our skaa army to that fool Yeden. Kell walked in, a spring in his step, making one of his inane jokes."

"Sounds insensitive," Allrianne said.

Ham shook his head. "No. He was just determined. He always said that laughter was something the Lord Ruler couldn't take from him. He planned and executed the overthrow of a thousand-year empire—and he did it as a kind of . . . penance for letting his wife die thinking that he hated her. But, he did it all with a smirk on his lips. Like every joke was his way of slapping fate in the face."

"We need what he had," Elend said.

The room's eyes turned back toward him.

"We can't keep doing this," Elend said. "We bicker amongst ourselves, we mope about, watching the ash fall, convinced that we're doomed."

Breeze chuckled. "I don't know if you noticed the earthquake a few minutes ago, my dear man, but the world appears to be ending. That is an indisputably depressing event."

Elend shook his head. "We can survive this. But, the only way that will happen is if our people don't give up. They need leaders who laugh, leaders who feel that this fight *can* be won. So, this is what I ask of you. I don't care if you're an optimist or a pessimist—I don't care if secretly, you think we'll all be dead before the month ends. On the outside, I want to see you smiling. Do it in defiance, if you have to. If the end does come, I want this group to meet that end smiling. As the Survivor taught us."

Slowly, the members of the former crew nodded—even Sazed, though his face seemed troubled.

Cett just shook his head. "You people are all insane. How I ended up with you, I'll never know."

Breeze laughed. "Now, that's a lie, Cett. You know *exactly* how you ended up joining with us. We threatened to kill you if you didn't!"

Elend was looking at Vin. She met his eyes, and nodded. It had been a good speech. She wasn't certain if his words would change anything—the crew could never again be the way it had been at the beginning, laughing freely around Clubs's table in the evening hours. However, maybe if they kept Kelsier's smile in mind, they'd be less likely to forget just why it was they kept struggling on.

"All right, people," Elend finally said. "Let's start preparations. Breeze, Sazed, Allrianne—I'll need you to talk with the scribes about supply estimates for your trip. Ham, send word to Luthadel and tell Penrod to have our scholars work on culturing plants that can grow in very little sunlight. Demoux, pass the word to the men. We march tomorrow."

*Hemalurgy, it is called, because of the connection to blood. It is not a coincidence, I believe, that death is always involved in the transfer of powers via Hemalurgy. Marsh once described it as a "messy" process. Not the adjective I would have chosen. It's not disturbing enough.*

# 13

*I'M MISSING SOMETHING,* MARSH THOUGHT.

He sat in the koloss camp. Just sitting. He hadn't moved in hours. Ash dusted him like a statue. Ruin's attention had been focused elsewhere lately, and Marsh had been left with more and more time to himself.

He still didn't struggle. Struggle just brought Ruin's attention.

*Isn't that what I want?* he thought. *To be controlled?* When Ruin forced him to see things its way, the dying world seemed wonderful. That bliss was far superior to the dread he felt while sitting on the stump, slowly being buried in ash.

*No. No, that's not what I want*! It was bliss, true, but it was false. As he had once struggled against Ruin, he now struggled against his own sense of inevitability.

*What am I missing?* he thought again, distracting himself. The koloss army—three hundred thousand strong—hadn't moved in weeks. Its members were slowly, yet relentlessly, killing each other. It seemed a waste of resources to let the army stagnate, even if the creatures could apparently eat even the dead plants beneath the ash to survive.

*They can't possibly live on that for long, can they?* He didn't know much about the koloss, despite spending the better part of a year with them. They appeared to be able to eat almost anything, as if just filling their stomachs were more important than actual nutrition.

What was Ruin waiting for? Why not take his army in and attack? Marsh was familiar enough with Final Empire geography to recognize that he was stationed in the North, near Terris. Why not move down and strike Luthadel?

There were no other Inquisitors in the camp. Ruin had called them to other tasks, leaving Marsh alone. Of all the Inquisitors, Marsh had been given the largest number of new spikes—he had ten new ones planted at various places in his body. That ostensibly made him the most powerful of the Inquisitors. Why leave him behind?

*Yet . . . what does it matter?* he wondered. *The end has come. There is no way to beat Ruin. The world will end.*

He felt guilty for the thought. If he could have turned his eyes downward in shame, he would have. There had been a time when he'd run the entire skaa rebellion. Thousands had looked to him for leadership. And then . . . Kelsier had been captured. As had Mare, the woman both Kelsier and Marsh had loved.

When Kelsier and Mare had been cast into the Pits of Hathsin, Marsh had left the rebellion. His rationale had been simple. If the Lord Ruler could catch Kelsier—the most brilliant thief of his time—then he would catch Marsh eventually too. It hadn't been fear that had driven Marsh's retirement, but simple realism. Marsh had always been practical. Fighting had proven useless. So why do it?

And then Kelsier had returned and done what a thousand years of rebellious skaa hadn't been able to: He'd overthrown the empire, facilitating the death of the Lord Ruler himself.

*That should have been me,* Marsh thought. *I served the rebellion all my life, then gave up just before they finally won.*

It was a tragedy, and it was made worse by the fact that Marsh was doing it again. He was giving up.

*Damn you, Kelsier!* he thought with frustration. *Can't you leave me be even in death?*

And yet, one harrowing, undeniable fact remained. Mare had been right. She had chosen Kelsier over Marsh. And then, when both men had been forced to deal with her death, one had given up.

The other had made her dreams come true.

Marsh knew why Kelsier had decided to overthrow the Final Empire. It hadn't been for the money, the fame, or even—as most suspected—for revenge. Kelsier knew Mare's heart. He'd known that she dreamed of days when plants flourished and the sky was not red. She'd always carried with her that little picture of a flower, a copied copy of a copy—a depiction of something that had been lost to the Final Empire long ago.

*But,* Marsh thought bitterly, *you didn't make her dreams a reality, Kelsier. You failed. You killed the Lord Ruler, but that didn't fix anything. It made things worse!*

The ash continued to fall, blowing around Marsh in a lazy breeze. Koloss grunted, and in the near distance one screamed as his companion killed him.

Kelsier was dead now. But, he had died for her dream. Mare had been right to pick him, but she was dead too. Marsh wasn't. Not yet. *I can fight still,* he told himself. *But how?* Even moving his finger would draw Ruin's attention.

Although, during the last few weeks, he hadn't struggled at all. Perhaps that was why Ruin decided it could leave Marsh alone for so long. The creature—or the force, or whatever it was—wasn't omnipotent. Marsh suspected, however, that it could move about freely, watching the world and seeing what was happening in various parts of it. No walls could block its view—it seemed to be able to watch anything.

Except a man's mind.

Perhaps . . . perhaps if I stop struggling long enough, I'll be able to surprise it when I finally do decide to strike.

It seemed as good a plan as any. And, Marsh knew exactly what he would do, when the time came. He'd remove Ruin's most useful tool. He'd pull the spike from his back and kill himself. Not out of frustration, and not out of despair. He knew that he had some important part to play in Ruin's plans. If he removed himself at the right time, it could give the others the chance they needed.

It was all he could give. Yet, it seemed fitting, and his new confidence made him wish he could stand and face the world with pride. Kelsier had killed himself to secure freedom for the skaa. Marsh would do the same—and in doing so, hope to help save the world itself from destruction.

# PART TWO
# CLOTH AND GLASS

*Ruin's consciousness was trapped by the Well of Ascension, kept mostly impotent. That night, when we discovered the Well for the first time, we found something we didn't understand. A black smoke, clogging one of the rooms.*

*Though we discussed it after the fact, we couldn't decide what that was. How could we possibly have known?*

*The body of a god—or, rather, the power of a god, since the two are really the same thing. Ruin and Preservation inhabited power and energy in the same way a person inhabits flesh and blood.*

# 14

SPOOK FLARED TIN.

He let it burn within him—burn brightly, burn powerfully. He never turned it off anymore. He just left it on, letting it roar, a fire within him. Tin was one of the slowest-burning of metals, and it wasn't difficult to obtain in the amounts necessary for Allomancy.

He moved down the silent street. Even with Kelsier's now-famous proclamations that the skaa need not fear the mists, few people went out at night. For, at night, the mists came. Deep and mysterious, dark and omnipresent, the mists were one of the great constants of the Final Empire. They came every night. Thicker than a simple fog, they swirled in definite patterns—almost as if the different banks, streams, and fronts of mist were living things. Almost playful, yet enigmatic.

To Spook, however, they were barely an obstruction anymore. He'd always been told not to flare his tin too much; he'd been warned not to become dependent upon it. It would do dangerous things to his body, people said. And, the truth was, they were right. He had flared his tin nonstop for a year straight—never letting up, keeping his body in a constant state of super-heightened senses—and it *had* changed him. He worried that the changes would, indeed, be dangerous.

But he needed them, for the people of Urteau needed him.

Stars blazed in the sky above him like a million tiny suns. They shone through the mists, which had—during the last year—become diaphanous and weak. At first, Spook had thought the world itself was changing. Then he had realized that it was just his perception. Somehow, by flaring tin for so long, he had permanently enhanced his senses to a point far beyond what other Allomancers could attain.

He'd almost stopped. The flared tin had begun as a reaction to Clubs's death. He still felt terrible about the way he'd escaped Luthadel, leaving his uncle to die. During those first few weeks, Spook had flared his metals as almost a penance—he'd wanted to *feel* everything around him, take it all in, even though it was painful. Perhaps because it was painful.

But then he'd started to change, and that had worried him. But, the crew always talked about how hard Vin pushed herself. She rarely slept, using pewter to keep herself awake and alert. Spook didn't know how that worked—he was no Mistborn, and could only burn one metal—but he figured that if burning his one metal could give him an advantage, he'd better take it. Because they were going to need every advantage they could get.

The starlight was like daylight to him. During the actual day, he had to wear a cloth tied across his eyes to protect them, and even then going outside was sometimes blinding. His skin had become so sensitive that each pebble in the ground—each crack, each flake of stone—felt like a knife jabbing him through the soles of his shoes. The chill spring air seemed freezing, and he wore a thick cloak.

However, he had concluded that these nuisances were small prices to pay for the opportunity to become . . . whatever it was he had become. As he moved down the street, he could hear people shuffling and turning in their beds, even through their walls. He could sense a footstep from yards away. He could see on a dark night as no other human ever had.

Perhaps he'd find a way to become useful to the others. Always before, he'd been the least important member of the crew. The dismissible boy who ran errands or kept watch while the others made plans. He didn't resent them for that—they'd been right to give him such simple duties. Because of his street dialect, he'd been difficult to understand, and while all the other members of the crew had been hand-picked by Kelsier, Spook had joined by default since he was Clubs's nephew.

Spook sighed, shoving his hands in his trouser pockets as he walked down the too-bright street. He could feel each and every thread in the fabric.

Dangerous things were happening, he knew that: the way the mists lingered during the day, the way the ground shook as if it were a sleeping man, periodically suffering a terrible dream. Spook worried he wouldn't be of much help in the critical days to come. A little over a year before, his uncle had died after Spook fled the city. Spook had run out of fear, but also out of a knowledge of his own impotence. He wouldn't have been able to help during the siege.

He didn't want to be in that position again. He wanted to be able to help, somehow. He wouldn't run into the woods, hiding while the world ended around him. Elend and Vin had sent him to Urteau to gather as much information as he could about the Citizen and his government there, and so

Spook intended to do his best. If that meant pushing his body beyond what was safe, so be it.

He approached a large intersection. He looked both ways down the intersecting streets—the view clear as day to his eyes. *I may not be Mistborn, and I may not be emperor,* he thought. *But I'm something. Something new. Something Kelsier would be proud of.*

Maybe this time I can help.

He saw no motion in either direction, so he slipped onto the street and moved to the north. It felt strange, sometimes, slinking quietly along a street that seemed brightly lit. Yet, he knew that to others it would be dark, with only starlight to see by, the mist blocking and obscuring as ever. Tin helped an Allomancer pierce the mists, and Spook's increasingly sensitive eyes were even better at this. He brushed through the mists, barely noticing them.

He heard the patrol long before he saw it. How could someone *not* hear that clanking of armor, not feel that clatter of feet on the cobblestones? He froze, standing with his back to the earthen wall bordering the street, watching for the patrol.

They bore a torch—to Spook's enhanced eyes, it looked like a blazing beacon of near-blinding brilliance. The torch marked them as fools. Its light wouldn't help—just the reverse. The light reflected off the mists, enveloping the guards in a little bubble of light that ruined their night vision.

Spook stayed where he was, motionless. The patrol clanked forward, moving down the street. They passed within a few feet of him, but didn't notice him standing there. There was something . . . invigorating about being able to watch, feeling at once completely exposed and perfectly unseen. It made him wonder why the new Urteau government even bothered with patrols. Of course, the government's skaa officials would have very little experience with the mists.

As the guard patrol disappeared around a corner—bearing their glaring torch with them—Spook turned back to his task. The Citizen would be meeting with his aides this night, if his schedule held. Spook intended to listen in on that conversation. He moved carefully down the street.

No city could compare with Luthadel in sheer size, but Urteau made a respectable effort. As the hereditary home of the Venture line, it had once been a much more important—and well-maintained—city than it was now. That decline had begun even before the death of the Lord Ruler. The most obvious sign of that was the roadway Spook now walked on. Once, the city had been crisscrossed with canals that had functioned as watery streets. Those canals had gone dry some time ago, leaving the city crossed by deep, dusty troughs that grew muddy when it rained. Rather than filling them in, the people had simply begun to use the empty bottoms as roads.

The street Spook now used had once been a wide waterway capable of accommodating even large barges. Ten-foot-high walls rose on either side of the sunken street, and buildings loomed above, built up against the lip of the canal. Nobody had been able to give Spook a definite, or consistent, answer as to why the canals had emptied—some blamed earthquakes, others blamed droughts. The fact remained, however, that in the hundred years since the canals had lost their water, nobody had found an economical way to refill them.

And so, Spook continued down the "street," feeling like he was walking in a deep slot. Numerous ladders—and the occasional ramp or flight of stairs—led up to the sidewalks and the buildings above, but few people ever walked up there. The streetslots—as the city's residents called them—had simply become normal.

Spook caught a scent of smoke as he walked. He glanced up, and noted a gap in the horizon of buildings. Recently, a building on this street had been burned to the ground. The house of a nobleman. His sense of smell, like his other senses, was incredibly sensitive. So it was possible that he was smelling smoke from long ago, when buildings had burned during the initial rampages following Straff Venture's death. And yet, the scent seemed too strong for that. Too recent.

Spook hurried on. Urteau was dying slowly, decaying, and a lot of the blame could be placed on its ruler, the Citizen. Long ago, Elend had given a speech to the people of Luthadel. It had been the night when the Lord Ruler had died, the night of Kelsier's rebellion. Spook remembered Elend's words well, for the man had spoken of hatred, rebellion, and the dangers associated with them. He'd warned that if the people founded their new government on hatred and bloodshed, it would consume itself with fear, jealousy, and chaos.

Spook had been in that audience, listening. He now saw that Elend was right. The skaa of Urteau had overthrown their noble rulers, and—in a way—Spook was proud of them for doing so. He felt a growing fondness for the city, partially because of how devoutly they tried to follow what the

Survivor had taught. Yet, their rebellion hadn't stopped with the ousting of the nobility. As Elend had predicted, the city had become a place of fear and death.

The question was not *why* it had happened, but how to stop it.

For now, that wasn't Spook's job. He was just supposed to gather information. Only familiarity—gained during weeks spent investigating the city—let him know when he was getting close, for it was frustratingly difficult to keep track of where one was down in the streetslots. At first, he had tried to stay out of them, slipping through smaller alleyways above. Unfortunately, the slots networked the entire city, and he'd wasted so much time going up and down that he'd eventually realized that the slots really were the only viable way of getting around.

Unless one were Mistborn, of course. Unfortunately, Spook couldn't hop from building to building on lines of Allomantic power. He was stuck in the slots. He made the best of it.

He picked a ladder and swung onto it, climbing up. Though he wore leather gloves, he could feel the grain of the wood. Up top, there was a small sidewalk running along the streetslot. An alleyway extended ahead of him, leading into a cluster of houses. A building at the end of the small street was his goal, but he did not move toward it. Instead, he waited quietly, searching for the signs he knew were there. Sure enough, he caught a rustling motion in a window a few buildings down. His ears caught the sound of footsteps in another building. The street ahead of him was being watched.

Spook turned aside. While the sentries were very careful to watch the alleyway, they unintentionally left another avenue open: their own buildings. Spook crept to the right, moving on feet that could feel each pebble beneath them, listening with ears that could hear a man's increased breathing as he spotted something unusual. He rounded the outside of a building, turning away from the watchful eyes, and entering a dead-end alleyway on the other side. There, he lay a hand against the wall of the building.

There were vibrations inside the room; it was occupied, so he moved on. The next room alerted him immediately, as he heard whispered voices inside. The third room, however, gave him nothing. No vibrations of motion. No whispers. Not even the muted thudding of a heartbeat—something he could sometimes hear, if the air were still enough. Taking a deep breath, Spook quietly worked open the window lock and slipped inside.

It was a sleeping chamber, empty as he'd anticipated. He'd never come through this particular room before. His heart thumped as he closed the shutters, then slipped across the floor. Despite the near-total darkness, he had no trouble seeing in the room. It barely seemed dim to him.

Outside the room, he found a more familiar hallway. He easily snuck past two guard rooms, where men watched the street outside. There was a thrill in doing these infiltrations. Spook was in one of the Citizen's own guardhouses, steps away from large numbers of armed soldiers. They should have taken care to guard their own building better.

He crept up the stairs, making his way to a small, rarely used room on the third floor. He checked for vibrations, then slipped inside. The austere chamber was piled with a mound of extra bedrolls and a dusty stack of uniforms. Spook smiled as he moved across the floor, stepping carefully and quietly, his highly sensitive toes able to feel loose, squeaky, or warped boards. He sat down on the windowsill itself, confident that nobody outside would be able to see well enough to spot him.

The Citizen's house lay a few yards away. Quellion decried ostentation, and had chosen for his headquarters a structure of modest size. It had probably once been a minor nobleman's home, and had only a small yard, which Spook could easily see into from his vantage. The building itself glowed, light streaking from every crack and window. It was as if the building were filled with some awesome power, and on the verge of bursting.

But, then, that was just the way that Spook's overflared tin made him see any building that had lights on inside.

Spook leaned back, legs up on the windowsill, back against the frame. The window contained neither glass nor shutters, though there were nail holes on the side of the wood, indicating that there had once been something there. The reason the shutters had been removed didn't matter to Spook—the lack of them meant that this room was unlikely to be entered at night. Mists had already claimed the room, though they were so faint to Spook's eyes that he had had trouble seeing them.

For a while, nothing happened. The building and grounds below remained silent and still in the night air. Eventually, however, she appeared.

Spook perked up, watching the young woman leave the house and enter the garden. She had on a light brown skaa's dress—a garment she somehow wore with striking elegance. Her hair was darker than the dress, but not by much. Spook had seen very few people with her shade of deep auburn hair—at least, few people who had been able to keep it clean of ash and soot.

Everyone in the city knew of Beldre, the Citizen's sister, though few had ever seen her. She was said to be beautiful—and in this case, the rumors were true. However, nobody had ever mentioned her sadness. With his tin flared so high, Spook felt like he was standing next to her. He could see her deep, sorrowful eyes, reflecting light from the shining building behind her.

There was a bench in the yard. It sat before a small shrub. It was the only plant left in the garden; the rest had been torn up and plowed under, leaving behind blackish brown earth. From what Spook had heard, the Citizen had declared that ornamental gardens were of the nobility. He claimed that such places had only been possible through the sweat of skaa slaves—just another way the nobility had achieved high levels of luxury by creating equally high levels of work for their servants.

When the people of Urteau had whitewashed the city's murals and shattered its stained-glass windows, they had also torn up all the ornamental gardens.

Beldre sat down on her bench, hands held motionless in her lap, looking down at the sad shrub. Spook tried to convince himself that *she* wasn't the reason why he made certain to always sneak in and listen to the Citizen's evening conferences, and he was mostly successful. These were some of the best spying opportunities Spook got. Being able to see Beldre was simply a bonus. Not that he cared *that* much, of course. He didn't even know her.

He thought that even as he sat there, staring down at her, wishing he had some way to talk to her.

But, this wasn't the time for that. Beldre's exile to the garden meant that her brother's meeting was about to start. He always kept her near, but apparently didn't want her hearing state secrets. Unfortunately for him, his window opened toward Spook's vantage point. No normal man—not even an ordinary Tineye or Mistborn—could have heard what was being said inside. But Spook wasn't, by any stretched definition of the word, normal.

*I won't be useless anymore,* he thought with determination as he listened for words spoken in confidence. They passed through the walls, across the short space, and arrived at his ears.

"All right, Olid," said a voice. "What news?" The voice was, by now, familiar to Spook. Quellion, the Citizen of Urteau.

"Elend Venture has conquered another city," said a second voice—Olid, the foreign minister.

"Where?" Quellion demanded. "What city?"

"An unimportant one," Olid said. "To the south. Barely five thousand people."

"It makes no sense," said a third voice. "He immediately abandoned the city, taking its populace with him."

"But he got another koloss army, somehow," Olid added.

*Good,* Spook thought. The fourth storage cavern was theirs. Luthadel wouldn't starve for a while yet. That only left two to secure—the one here in Urteau, and the last one, wherever that turned out to be.

"A tyrant needs no real reason for what he does," Quellion said. He was a young man, but not foolish. At times, he sounded like other men Spook had known. Wise men. The difference, then, was one of extremity.

Or, perhaps, timing?

"A tyrant simply conquers for the thrill of control," Quellion continued. "Venture isn't satisfied with the lands he's taken—he never will be. He'll just keep on conquering. Until he comes for us."

The room fell silent.

"He's reportedly sending an ambassador to Urteau," the third voice said. "A member of the Survivor's own crew."

Spook perked up.

Quellion snorted. "One of the liars? Coming here?"

"To offer us a treaty, the rumors say," Olid said.

"So?" Quellion asked. "Why do you mention this, Olid? Do you think we should make a pact with the tyrant?"

"We can't fight him, Quellion," Olid said.

"The Survivor couldn't fight the Lord Ruler," Quellion said. "But he did anyway. He died, but still won, giving the skaa courage to rebel and overthrow the nobility."

"Until that bastard Venture took control," the third voice said.

The room fell silent again.

"We can't give in to Venture," Quellion finally said. "I will not hand this city to a nobleman, not after what the Survivor did for us. Of all the Final Empire, only Urteau achieved Kelsier's goal of a skaa-ruled nation. Only we burned the homes of the nobility. Only we cleansed our town of them and their society. Only we obeyed. The Survivor will watch over us."

Spook shivered quietly. It felt very strange to be hearing men he didn't know speak of Kelsier in such tones. Spook had walked with Kelsier, learned from Kelsier. What right did these men have to speak as if they had known the man who had become their Survivor?

The conversation turned to matters more mundane. They discussed new laws that would forbid certain kinds of clothing once favored by the nobility, and then made a decision to give more funding to the genealogical survey committee. They needed to root out any in the city who were hiding noble parentage. Spook took notes so he could pass them on to the others. However, he had trouble keeping his eyes from trailing back down to the young woman in the garden.

*What brings her such sorrow?* he wondered. A part of him wanted to ask—to be brash, as the Survivor would have been, and hop down to demand of this solemn, solitary girl why she stared at that plant with such melancholy. In fact, he found himself moving to stand before he caught himself.

He might be unique, he might be powerful, but—as he had to remind himself again—he was no Mistborn. His was the way of silence and stealth.

So, he settled back. Content, for the moment, to lean down and watch her, feeling that somehow—despite their distance, despite his ignorance—he understood that feeling in her eyes.

*The ash.*

*I don't think the people really understood how fortunate they were. During the thousand years before the Collapse, they pushed the ash into rivers, piled it up outside of cities, and generally just let it be. They never understood that without the microbes and plants Rashek had developed to break down the ash particles, the land would quickly have been buried.*

*Though, of course, that did eventually happen anyway.*

# 15

THE MISTS BURNED. Bright, flaring, lit by the red sunlight, they seemed a fire that enveloped her.

Mist during the day was unnatural. But even the nightmists didn't seem to be Vin's anymore. Once, they had shadowed and protected her. Now she found them increasingly alien. When she used Allomancy it seemed that the mists pulled away from her slightly—like a wild beast shying away from a bright light.

She stood alone before the camp, which was silent despite the fact that the sun had risen hours ago. So far, Elend continued to keep his army protected from the mists by ordering them to remain in their tents. Ham argued that exposing them wasn't necessary, but Vin's instinct said that Elend would stick to his plan to order his soldiers into the mist. They needed to be immune.

*Why?* Vin thought, looking up through the sunlit mists. *Why have you changed? What is different?* The mists danced around her, moving in their usual, strange pattern of shifting streams and swirls. It seemed to Vin that they began to move more rapidly. Quivering. Vibrating.

The sun seemed to grow hotter, and the mists finally retreated, vanishing like water evaporating on a warming pan. The sunlight hit her like a wave, and Vin turned, watching the mists go, their death like an echoing scream.

*They're not natural,* Vin thought as guards called the all clear. The camp immediately began to shift and move, men striding from tents, going about the morning's activity with a flair of urgency. Vin stood at the head of the camp, dirt road beneath her feet, motionless canal to her right. Both seemed more *real* now that the mists were gone.

She had asked Sazed and Elend their opinions of the mists—whether they were natural or . . . something else. And both men, like the scholars they were, had quoted theories to support *both* sides of the argument. Sazed, at least, had eventually made a decision—he'd come down on the side of the mists being natural.

*Even the way that the mists choke some people, leaving others alive, could be explained, Lady Vin,* he had explained. *After all, insect stings kill* *some people, while barely bothering others.*

Vin wasn't that interested in theories and arguments. She had spent most of her life thinking of the mists like any other weather pattern. Reen and the other thieves had mostly scoffed at tales that made the mists out to be supernatural. Yet, as Vin had become an Allomancer, she had grown to know the mists. She *felt* them, a sense that seemed to have grown even more potent on the day she'd touched the power of the Well of Ascension.

They disappeared too quickly. When they burned away in the sunlight, they withdrew like a person fleeing for safety. Like . . . a man who used all of his strength fighting, then finally gave up to retreat. In addition, the mists didn't appear indoors. A simple tent was enough to protect the men inside. It was as if the mists somehow understood that they were excluded, unwelcome.

Vin glanced back toward the sun, glowing like a scarlet ember behind the dark haze of the upper atmosphere. She wished TenSoon were there, so she could talk to him about her worries. She missed the kandra a great deal, more than she'd ever assumed that she would. His simple frankness had been a good match to her own. She still didn't know what had happened to him after he'd returned to his people; she'd tried to find another kandra to deliver a message for her, but the creatures had become very scarce lately.

She sighed and turned, walking quietly back into camp.

It was impressive how quickly the men managed to get the army moving. They spent the mornings sequestered inside their tents, caring for armor and weapons, the cooks preparing what they could. By the time Vin had crossed a short distance, cooking fires had burst alight, and tents began to collapse, soldiers working quickly to prepare for departure.

As she passed, some of the men saluted. Others bowed their heads in reverence. Still others glanced away, looking uncertain. Vin didn't blame them. Even *she* wasn't sure what her place was in the army. As Elend's wife, she was technically their empress, though she wore no royal garb. To many, she was a religious figure, the Heir of the Survivor. She didn't really want that title either.

She found Elend and Ham conversing outside of the imperial tent, which was in an early stage of disassembly. Though they stood out in the open, their mannerisms completely nonchalant, Vin was immediately struck by how far the two men were standing from the workers, as if Elend and

Ham didn't want the men to hear. Burning tin, she could make out what they were saying long before she reached them.

"Ham," Elend said quietly, "you know I'm right. We can't keep doing this. The further we penetrate into the Western Dominance, the more daylight we'll lose to the mists."

Ham shook his head. "You'd really stand by and watch your own soldiers die, El?"

Elend's face grew hard, and he met Vin's eyes as she joined them. "We can't afford to wait out the mists every morning."

"Even if it saves lives?" Ham asked.

"Slowing down *costs* lives," Elend said. "Each hour we spend out here brings the mists closer to the Central Dominance. We're planning to be at siege for some time, Ham—and that means we need to get to Fadrex as soon as possible."

Ham glanced at Vin, looking for support. She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Ham. Elend is right. We can't have our entire army dependent upon the whims of the mists. We'd be exposed—if someone attacked us in the morning, our men would either have to respond and get struck down by the mists, or hide in their tents and wait."

Ham frowned, then excused himself, tromping through the fallen ash to help a group of soldiers pack away their tents. Vin stepped up beside Elend, watching the large soldier go.

"Kelsier was wrong about him," she finally said.

"Who?" Elend asked. "Ham?"

Vin nodded. "At the end—after Kelsier died—we found a last note from him. He said that he'd chosen the members of the crew to be leaders in his new government. Breeze to be an ambassador, Dockson to be a bureaucrat, and Ham to be a general. The other two fit their roles perfectly, but Ham . . ."

"He gets too involved," Elend said. "He has to know each man he commands personally or it makes him uncomfortable. And, when he knows them all that well, he grows attached."

Vin nodded quietly, watching Ham begin to laugh and work with the soldiers.

"Listen to us," Elend said, "callously talking about the lives of those who follow us. Perhaps it would be better to grow attached, like Ham. Maybe then I wouldn't be so quick to order people to their deaths."

Vin glanced at Elend, concerned at the bitterness in his voice. He smiled, trying to cover it up, then glanced away. "You need to do something with that koloss of yours. He's been poking around the camp, scaring the men."

Vin frowned. As soon as she thought of the creature, she became aware of where it was—near the edge of the camp. It was always under her command, but she could only take direct, full control of it when she concentrated. Otherwise, it would follow her general orders—staying in the area, not killing anything.

"I should go make sure the barges are ready to move," Elend said. He glanced at her, and when she didn't indicate that she'd go with him, he gave her a quick kiss, then departed.

Vin moved through the camp again. Most of the tents were down and stowed, and the soldiers were making quick work of their food. She passed out of the perimeter, and found Human sitting quietly, ash drifting slightly against his legs. He watched the camp with red eyes, his face broken by the ripped skin which hung from his right eye down to the corner of his mouth.

"Human," she said, folding her arms.

He looked over at her, then stood, ash falling from his eleven-foot, overly muscled blue figure. Even with the number of creatures she'd killed, even knowing she controlled this one completely, Vin had a moment of reflexive fear as she stood before the massive beast with its tightly stretched skin and bleeding rips.

"Why did you come to camp?" she said, shaking off her panic.

"I am human," he said with his slow, deliberate tone.

"You're koloss," she said. "You know that."

"I should have a house," Human said. "Like those."

"Those are tents, not houses," Vin said. "You can't come to camp like this. You have to stay with the other koloss."

Human turned, glancing toward the south, where the koloss army waited, separate from the humans. They remained under Elend's control, twenty thousand in number, now that they'd picked up the ten thousand that had been waiting with the main bulk of the army. It made more sense to leave them under Elend's control, since—in terms of raw power—he was a much stronger Allomancer than Vin.

Human looked back at Vin. "Why?"

"Why do you have to stay with the others?" Vin asked. "Because you make the people in the camp uncomfortable."

"Then they should attack me," Human said.

"That's why you're not a human," Vin said. "We don't attack people just because they make us uncomfortable."

"No," Human said. "You make *us* kill them instead."

Vin paused, cocking her head. Human, however, just looked away, staring at the human camp again. His beady red eyes made his face hard to read, but Vin almost sensed a . . . longing in his expression.

"You're one of us," Human said.

Vin looked up. "Me?"

"You're like us," he said. "Not like them."

"Why do you say that?" Vin asked.

Human looked down at her. "Mist," he said.

Vin felt a momentary chill, though she had no real idea why. "What do you mean?"

Human didn't respond.

"Human," she said, trying another tactic. "What do you think of the mists?"

"They come at night."

Vin nodded. "Yes, but what do you think of them. Your people. Do they fear the mists? Does it ever kill them?"

"Swords kill," Human said. "Rain doesn't kill. Ash doesn't kill. Mist doesn't kill."

*Fairly good logic,* Vin thought. *A year ago, I would have agreed with it.* She was about to give up on the line of reasoning, but Human continued.

"I hate it," he said.

Vin paused.

"I hate it because it hates me," Human said. He looked at her. "*You* feel it."

"Yes," Vin said, surprising herself. "I do."

Human regarded her, a line of blood trailing out of the ripped skin near his eye, running stark down his blue skin, mixing with flakes of ash. Finally, he nodded, as if giving approval to her honest reply.

Vin shivered. *The mist isn't alive,* she thought. *It can't hate me. I'm imagining things.*

But . . . once, years ago, she had drawn upon the mists. When fighting the Lord Ruler, she had somehow gained a power over them. It had been as if she'd used the mist itself to fuel her Allomancy instead of metals. It was only with that power that she'd been able to defeat the Lord Ruler.

That had been a long time ago, and she'd never been able to replicate the event. She'd tried time and again over the years, and after so many failures, she was beginning to think that she must have been mistaken. Certainly, in more recent times, the mists had been unfriendly. She tried to keep telling herself that there was nothing supernatural about it, but she knew that wasn't true. What of the mist spirit, the thing that had tried to kill Elend—and then had saved him by showing her how to make him into an Allomancer? It was real, of that she was certain, even if she hadn't seen it in over a year.

What of the hesitance she felt toward the mists, the way they pulled away from her? The way they stayed out of buildings, and the way they killed. It all seemed to point to what Human had said. The mists—the Deepness—hated her. And, finally, she acknowledged what she had been resisting for so long.

The mists were her enemy.

*They are called Allomantic savants. Men or women who flare their metals so long, and so hard, that the constant influx of Allomantic power transforms their very physiology.*

*In most cases, with most metals, the effects of this are very slight. Bronze burners, for instance, often become bronze savants without knowing it. Their range is expanded from burning the metal so long. Becoming a pewter savant is dangerous, as it requires pushing the body so hard in a state where one cannot feel exhaustion or pain. Most accidentally kill themselves before the process is complete, and in my opinion, the benefit isn't worth the effort.*

*Tin savants, however . . . now, they are something special. Endowed with senses beyond what any normal Allomancer would need—or even want—they become slaves to what they touch, hear, see, smell, and taste. Yet, the abnormal power of these senses gives them a distinct, and interesting, advantage.*

*One could argue that, like an Inquisitor who has been transformed by a Hemalurgic spike, the Allomantic savant is no longer even human.*

# 16

SPOOK AWOKE TO DARKNESS.

That was happening less and less frequently lately. He could feel the blindfold on his face, tied tightly across his eyes and over his ears. It dug into his overly sensitive skin, but it was far better than the alternative. Starlight was as bright as the sun to his eyes, and footsteps in the hallway outside his room could sound like thunderclaps. Even with the thick cloth, even with his ears plugged with wax, even with the shutters drawn tight and hung with a cloth, it was sometimes hard for him to sleep.

The muffling was dangerous. It left him vulnerable. And yet, lack of sleep would be even more dangerous. Perhaps the things he'd done to his body by burning tin would kill him. Yet, the more time he spent among the people of Urteau, the more he felt they were going to need his help to survive the dangers that were coming. He needed an edge. He worried that he'd made the wrong decision, but at least he'd made a decision. He would continue as he had, and hope that it was enough.

He groaned quietly, sitting up, taking off the cloth and pulling the wax from his ears. The room was dark, but even the faint light creeping through the shutters—their gaps stuffed with cloth—was enough for him to see by.

Tin flared comfortably in his stomach. His reserve was nearly gone, burned away during the night. His body now used it as instinctively as it drew breath or blinked. He had heard that Thugs could burn pewter to heal their bodies even if they were unconscious from their wounds. The body understood what it needed.

He reached into a small pail beside his bed, pulling out a small handful of tin dust. He'd brought a lot with him from Luthadel, and augmented this by buying more through the underground. Fortunately, tin was relatively cheap. He dumped his handful into a mug on his nightstand, then moved to the door. The room was small and cramped, but he didn't have to share it with anyone. That made it lavish by skaa standards.

He squeezed his eyes shut, then pulled open the door. The luminosity of a sunlit hallway crashed against him. He gritted his teeth against the light, intense despite his shut eyelids, and felt about on the ground. He found the jug of fresh water—drawn from the well for him by the inn's servants—and pulled it inside, then shut the door.

He blinked, walking across the room to fill his mug. He drank it, washing down the tin. It would be enough for the entire day. He took an extra handful and stuffed it into a pouch, just in case.

A few minutes later he was dressed and ready. He sat down on the bed, closing his eyes, preparing for the day. If the Citizen's spies were to be believed, other members of Elend's team were on their way to Urteau. They were probably under orders to secure the storage cache and quell the rebellion; Spook would need to learn as much as he could before they arrived.

He sat, going over plans, thinking to himself. He could feel feet thumping in the rooms around him—the wooden structure seemed to shake and tremble like some enormous hive filled with bustling workers. Outside, he could hear voices calling, yelling, speaking. Bells rang faintly. It was early yet, barely past noon, but the mists would be gone—Urteau got about six or seven hours of mistless daylight, making it a place where crops could still grow and man could still thrive.

Normally, Spook would have slept through the hours of daylight. However, there were things he needed to do. He opened his eyes, then reached to his night-stand, picking up a pair of spectacles. They had been specially crafted, at his request, to hold lenses that made no corrections to his vision. They were just filled with regular glass.

He put these on, then retied the cloth around his head, covering the front and sides of the lenses. Even with his heightened senses, he couldn't see through his own eyelids. However, with the spectacles on, he could open his eyes and wear the cloth at the same time. He felt his way to the window, then he pulled off the blanket and threw open the shutters.

Hot—nearly scalding—sunlight bathed him. The cloth bit into the skin of his head. But he could see. The cloth blocked just enough light to keep him from being blinded, yet was translucent enough to allow vision. It was like the mists, actually—the cloth was nearly invisible to him, for his eyes were enhanced beyond the point of reason. His mind just filtered out the cloth's interference.

Spook nodded to himself, then picked up his dueling cane and made his way from the room.

"I know you're a quiet one," Durn said, rapping softly on the ground in front of him with a pair of sticks. "But even you have to admit that this is better than living under the lords."

Spook sat in a streetslot, back to the stone wall that had sustained the canal, head bowed slightly. Marketpit was the widest of the streetslots of Urteau. Once, it had been a waterway so broad that three boats abreast could moor in its center while leaving room on both sides for the passage of others in either direction. Now it had become a central boulevard for the city, which also made it a prime location for tradesmen and beggars.

Beggars like Spook and Durn. They sat at the very side of the slot, buildings looming like fortress walls above. Few of the passers paid any attention to the ragged men. Nobody paused to notice that one of them seemed to be watching the crowd carefully, despite the dark cloth over his eyes, while the other spoke far too articulately to have been educated in the gutter.

Spook didn't respond to Durn's question. In his youth, the way he spoke—with a thick accent, language littered with slang—had marked him, made people dismiss him. Even now, he didn't have a glib tongue or charming manner like Kelsier's. So, instead, Spook just tried to say as little as possible. Less chance of getting himself into trouble that way.

Oddly, instead of finding him *easier* to dismiss when he didn't talk, it seemed that people paid more attention to him. Durn continued to pound out his rhythm, like a street performer with no audience. It was too soft against the earthen floor for anyone to hear—unless one were Spook.

Durn's rhythm was perfect. Any minstrel would have envied him.

"I mean, look at the market," Durn continued. "Under the Lord Ruler, most skaa could never engage openly in commerce. We have something beautiful here. Skaa ruling skaa. We're happy."

Spook could see the market. It seemed to him that if the people were truly happy, they'd wear smiles, rather than downcast looks. They'd be shopping and browsing, rather than quickly picking out what they wanted, then moving on. Plus, if the city were the happy utopia it was supposed to be, there wouldn't be a need for the dozens of soldiers who watched the crowd. Spook shook his head. Everybody wore nearly the exact same clothing—colors and styles dictated by the Citizen's orders. Even begging was heavily regulated. Men would soon arrive to count Spook's offerings, tally how much he had earned, then take the Citizen's cut.

"Look," Durn said, "do you see anyone being beaten or killed on the street? Surely that's worth a few strictures."

"The deaths happen in quiet alleys now," Spook said softly. "At least the Lord Ruler killed us openly."

Durn frowned, sitting back, thumping the ground with his sticks. It was a complex pattern. Spook could feel the vibrations through the ground, and found them soothing. Did the people know the talent they passed, quietly beating the ground they walked upon? Durn could have been a master musician. Unfortunately, under the Lord Ruler, skaa didn't play music. And under the Citizen . . . well, it generally wasn't good to draw attention to yourself, no matter what the method.

"There it is," Durn said suddenly. "As promised."

Spook glanced up. Through the mutters, the sounds, the flashes of color and the powerful scents of refuse, people, and goods for sale, Spook saw a group of prisoners, being escorted by soldiers in brown. Sometimes, the flood of sensation was almost overwhelming to him. However, as he'd once told Vin, burning tin wasn't about what one could sense, but about what one could ignore. And he had learned very well to focus on the senses he needed, shunting aside that which would distract.

The market goers made way for the group of soldiers and their prisoners. The people bowed their heads, watching solemnly.

"You still want to follow?" Durn asked.

Spook stood.

Durn nodded, then stood and grabbed Spook by the shoulder. He knew that Spook could really see—or, at least, Spook assumed that Durn was observant enough to have noticed that fact. They both maintained the act, however. It was common among beggars to adopt a guise of being afflicted in an attempt to elicit more coins. Durn himself walked with a masterful false limp, and had his hair pulled out in sickly patches. Yet, Spook could smell soap on the man's skin and fine wine on his breath. He was a thief lord; there were few more powerful in the city. Yet, he was clever enough with his disguises that he could walk about on the streets unnoticed.

They weren't the only ones following the soldiers and their prisoners. Skaa wearing the approved gray trailed the group like ghosts—a quiet, shuffling mass in the falling ash. The soldiers walked to a ramp leading out of the streetslots, guiding the people into a wealthier section of the town, where some of the canals had been filled in and cobbled.

Soon, the dead spots began to appear. Charred scars—ruins that had once been homes. The smell of smoke was almost overpowering to Spook, and he had to start breathing through his mouth. They didn't have to walk very far before arriving at their destination. The Citizen himself was in attendance. He rode no horse—those had all been shipped to the farms, for only crass noblemen were too good to walk the ground on their own feet. He did, however, wear red.

"What's that he's wearing?" Spook whispered as Durn led him around the side of the crowd. The Citizen and his retinue stood on the steps of a particularly grand mansion, and the skaa were clustering around. Durn led Spook to a place where a group of toughs had muscled themselves an exclusive piece of the street with a good vantage of the Citizen. They nodded to Durn, letting him pass without comment.

"What do you mean?" Durn asked. "The Citizen is wearing what he always does—skaa trousers and a work shirt."

"They're red," Spook whispered. "That's not an approved color."

"As of this morning it is. Government officers can wear it. That way, they stand out, and people in need can find them. Or, at least, that's the official explanation."

Spook frowned. However, something else caught his attention.

She was there.

It was natural, of course—she accompanied her brother wherever he went. He was particularly worried for her safety, and seldom let her out of his sight. She wore the same look as always, eyes sorrowful within a frame of auburn hair.

"Sad group today," Durn said, and at first Spook thought he was referring to Beldre. However, Durn was nodding toward the group of prisoners. They looked just like the rest of the people in the city—gray clothing, ash-stained faces, subservient postures. The Citizen, however, stepped forward to explain the differences.

"One of the first proclamations this government made," he announced, "was one of solidarity. We are a skaa people. The 'noblemen' chosen by the Lord Ruler oppressed us for ten centuries. Urteau, we decided, would become a place of freedom. A place like the Survivor himself prophesied would come."

"You've got the count?" Durn whispered to Spook.

Spook nodded. "Ten," he said, counting the prisoners. "The ones we expected. You're not earning your coin, Durn."

"Watch."

"These," the Citizen said, bald scalp shining in the red sunlight as he pointed at the prisoners. "These didn't heed our warning. They knew, as all of you know, that any nobleman who stayed in this city would forfeit his life! This is our will—*all* of our will.

"But, like all of their kind, these were too arrogant to listen. They tried to hide. But, they think themselves above us. They always will. That exposes them."

He paused, then spoke again. "And that is why we do what we must."

He waved his soldiers forward. They shoved the prisoners up the steps. Spook could smell the oil on the air as the soldiers opened the house's doors and pushed the people in. Then, the soldiers barred the door from the outside and took up a perimeter. Each soldier lit a torch and threw it on the building. It didn't take superhuman senses to feel the heat that soon blazed to life, and the crowd shied back—revolted and frightened, but fascinated.

The windows had been boarded shut. Spook could see fingers trying to pry the wood free, could hear people screaming. He could hear them thumping against the locked door, trying to break their way out, crying in terror.

He longed to do something. Yet, even with tin, he couldn't fight an entire squad of soldiers on his own. Elend and Vin had sent him to gather information, not play their hand. Still, he cringed, calling himself a coward as he turned away from the burning building.

"This should not be," Spook whispered harshly.

"They were noblemen," Durn said.

"No they weren't! Their parents might have been, but these were skaa. Normal people, Durn."

"They have noble blood."

"So do we all, if you look back far enough," Spook said.

Durn shook his head. "This is the way it has to be. This is the Survivor —"

"Do *not* speak his name in association with this barbarity," Spook hissed.

Durn was quiet for a moment, the only sounds that of the flames and those dying inside them. Finally, he spoke. "I know it's hard to see, and perhaps the Citizen is too eager. But . . . I heard *him* speak once. The Survivor. This is the sort of thing he taught. Death to the noblemen; rule by the skaa. If you'd heard him, you'd understand. Sometimes, you have to destroy something in order to build something better."

Spook closed his eyes. Heat from the fire seemed to be searing his skin. He *had* heard Kelsier speak to crowds of skaa. And, Kelsier had said the things that Durn now referred to. Then, the Survivor had been a voice of hope, of spirit. His same words repeated now, however, became words of hatred and destruction. Spook felt sick.

"Again, Durn," he said, looking up, feeling particularly harsh, "I don't pay you to spout Citizen propaganda at me. Tell me why I'm here, or you'll get no further coin from me."

The large beggar turned, meeting Spook's eyes behind the cloth. "Count the skulls," he said quietly. With that, Durn took his hand off Spook's shoulder and retreated into the crowd.

Spook didn't follow. The scents of smoke and burning flesh were growing too powerful for him. He turned, pushing his way through the crowd, seeking fresh air. He stumbled up against a building, breathing deeply, feeling the rough grain of its wood press against his side. It seemed to him that the falling flakes of ash were a part of the pyre behind, bits of death cast upon the wind.

He heard voices. Spook turned, noting that the Citizen and his guards had moved away from the fire. Quellion was addressing the crowd, encouraging them to be vigilant. Spook watched for a time, and finally the crowd began to leave, trailing the Citizen as he moved back toward the market pit.

*He's punished them, now he needs to bless them.* Often, especially after executions, the Citizen visited the people personally, moving between stalls in the market, shaking hands and giving encouragement.

Spook took off down a side street. He soon passed out of the wealthier section of town, arriving at a place where the street fell away before him. He chose a place where the retaining wall had collapsed, forming a slope down into the dry canal, then hopped down, skidding his way to the bottom. He pulled up the hood of his cloak, obscuring his covered eyes, and made his way through the busy street with the dexterity of one who had grown up a street urchin.

Even taking a more roundabout route, he arrived at Marketpit before the Citizen and his retinue. Spook watched through the raining ash as the man moved down a broad ramp of earth, trailed by a following that numbered in the hundreds.

*You want to be him,* Spook thought, crouching beside a merchant's stall. *Kelsier died to bring this people hope, and now you think to steal his legacy.*

This man was no Kelsier. This man wasn't even worthy to utter the Survivor's name.

The Citizen moved about, maintaining a paternal air, speaking to the people of the market. He touched them on the shoulders, shook hands, and smiled benevolently. "The Survivor would be proud of you." Spook could hear his voice even over the noise of the crowd. "The ash that falls is a sign from him—it represents the fall of the empire, the ashes of tyranny. From those ashes we will make a new nation! One ruled by skaa."

Spook edged forward, putting down the top of his hood and feeling before himself with his hands, as if he were blind. He carried his dueling cane across his back, in a strap obscured by the folds of his baggy gray shirt. He was more than capable when it came to moving through crowds. While Vin had always worked hard to remain obscure and unseen, Spook had managed to achieve both things without ever trying. In fact, he'd often tried the opposite. He'd dreamed of being a man like Kelsier—for even before he'd met the Survivor, Spook had heard stories of the man. The greatest skaa thief of their time—a man bold enough to try to rob the Lord Ruler himself.

And yet, try as he might, Spook had never been able to distinguish himself. It was just too easy to ignore yet another ash-faced boy, especially if you couldn't understand his thick Eastern slang. It had taken actually meeting Kelsier—seeing how he could move people by talking—to finally convince Spook to abandon his dialect. That was when Spook had begun to understand that there was a power in words.

Spook subtly moved his way toward the front of the crowd watching the Citizen. He got jostled and shoved, but nobody cried out against him. A blind man who had gotten caught up in the press of people was easy to ignore—and what was ignored could get where it wasn't supposed to. With some careful positioning, Spook soon placed himself at the front of the group, barely an arm's length from the Citizen.

The man smelled of smoke.

"I understand, good woman," the Citizen was saying as he held an elderly woman's hands. "But your grandson is needed where he is, working the fields. Without him and his kind, we would not be able to eat! A nation ruled by skaa also has to be one *worked* by skaa."

"But . . . can't he come back, even for a bit?" the woman asked.

"In time, good woman," the Citizen said. "In time." His crimson uniform made him the only splash of color on the street, and Spook found himself staring. He tore his eyes away and continued to maneuver, for the Citizen was not his goal.

Beldre stood to the side, as usual. Always watching, but never interacting. The Citizen was so dynamic that his sister was easily forgotten. Spook understood that feeling quite well. He let a soldier jostle him, pushing him out of the Citizen's way. That jostle placed Spook right next to Beldre. She smelt just faintly of perfume.

I thought that was supposed to be forbidden.

What would Kelsier have done? He'd have attacked, perhaps, killing the Citizen. Or, he'd have moved against the man in another way. Kelsier wouldn't have let such terrible things happen—he'd have acted.

Perhaps he would have tried to make an ally out of someone trusted by the Citizen?

Spook felt his heart—always so much louder to him now—beat faster. The crowd began to move again, and he let himself get shoved up against Beldre. The guards weren't watching—they were focused on the Citizen, keeping him safe with so many random elements around.

"Your brother," Spook whispered in her ear, "you approve of his murders?"

She spun, and he noticed for the first time that her eyes were green. He stood in the crowd, letting it shove him away as she searched, trying to figure out who had spoken. The crowd, following her brother, carried her from Spook.

Spook waited, being jostled in the sea of elbows, for a short time. Then he began to maneuver again, pushing through the people with subtle care until he was again beside Beldre.

"You think this is any different from what the Lord Ruler did?" he whispered. "I once saw him gather up random people and execute them in the Luthadel city square."

She spun again, finally identifying Spook among the moving crowd. He stood still, meeting her eyes despite the blindfold. People moved between them, and she was carried away.

Her mouth moved. Only someone with the enhanced senses of tin could have seen with enough detail to make out the words on her lips.

"Who are you?"

He pushed his way through the crowd one more time. The Citizen was apparently planning to make a big speech up ahead, capitalizing on the increasingly large crowd. People were bunching up around the podium that lay in the middle of the market; it was getting more difficult to move through them.

Spook reached her, but felt the crowd pulling him away again. So, he reached between a pair of bodies and grabbed her hand, pulling her wrist as he moved with the surgings of the crowd's motion. She spun, of course, but she didn't cry out. The crowd moved around them, and she turned to meet his blindfolded eyes through the throng.

"Who are you?" Beldre asked again. Though he was close enough to have heard her had she spoken, no sound escaped her lips. She just mouthed the words. Behind her, on the podium, her brother began to preach.

"I'm the man who will kill your brother," Spook said softly.

Again, he had expected a reaction from her—a scream, perhaps. An accusation. His actions here had been impulsive, born from his frustration at not being able to help the people who were executed. If she *did* scream, he realized, it could bring his death.

Yet she remained silent, flakes of ash falling between them.

"Others have said that same thing," she mouthed.

"Others were not me."

"And who are you?" she asked a third time.

"The companion of a god. A man who can see whispers and feel screams."

"A man who thinks he knows better for this people than their own chosen ruler?" she mouthed. "There will always be dissenters who balk at what must be done."

He still had her hand. He gripped it tightly, pulling her close. The crowd crowded the podium, leaving her and Spook at their rear, like shells left on a beach by the retreating waves.

"I *knew* the Survivor, Beldre," he whispered harshly. "He named me, called me friend. What you've done in this city would horrify him—and I'm *not* going to let your brother continue to pervert Kelsier's legacy. Bring him warning, if you must. Tell Quellion that I'm coming for him."

The Citizen had stopped speaking. Spook glanced up, looking toward the lectern. Quellion stood upon it, looking out over his crowd of followers. Looking at Spook and Beldre, standing together at the back of the crowd. Spook hadn't realized how exposed they had become.

"You there!" the Citizen cried. "What are you doing with my sister!"

*Damn!* Spook thought, releasing the girl and dashing away. However, one major inconvenience of the streetslots was their high, steep walls. There were very few ways to get out of the market, and those were all being watched by members of Quellion's security forces. At the Citizen's shouted command, soldiers began to dash forward from their posts, wearing leather and carrying steel.

*Fine,* Spook thought, charging the nearest group of soldiers. If he could get through them, he could reach a ramp up, perhaps disappear into the alleys between buildings above.

Swords scraped from scabbards. Behind Spook, people cried out in shock. He reached into the ragged tears of his cloak and whipped forth his dueling cane.

And then, he was among them.

Spook wasn't a warrior, not really. He'd trained with Ham, of course—Clubs had insisted that his nephew know how to defend himself. However, the crew's true warriors had always been their Mistborn, Vin and Kelsier, with Ham—as a Pewterarm—providing brute force, if necessary.

Yet, Spook had spent a lot of time training, lately, and while doing so he had discovered something interesting. He had something that Vin and Kelsier could never have had: a blurring array of sensory knowledge that his body could instinctively use. He could feel disturbances in the air, sense tremors in the floor, and could know where people were simply by how close their heartbeats sounded.

He was no Mistborn, but he was still very dangerous. He felt a soft wind, and knew a sword was swinging for him. He ducked. He felt a footstep on the ground, and knew someone was attacking from the side. He stepped away. It was almost like having atium.

Sweat flew from his brow as he spun, and he cracked his dueling cane into the back of one soldier's head. The man fell—Spook's weapon was crafted of the finest hardwood. But, just to be certain, he brought the butt of the weapon down on the fallen man's temple, knocking him out of the battle for good.

He heard someone grunt beside him—soft, yet telling. Spook whipped his weapon to the side and smacked it against the attacking soldier's forearm. The bones broke, and the soldier cried out, dropping his weapon. Spook rapped him on the head. Then, Spook spun, lifting his cane to block the third soldier's strike.

Steel met wood, and the steel won, Spook's weapon breaking. However, it stopped the sword strike long enough for Spook to duck away and grab a fallen warrior's sword. It was different from the swords he'd practiced with—the men of Urteau preferred long, thin blades. Still, Spook only had one soldier left—if he could cut the man down, he'd be free.

Spook's opponent seemed to realize that he had the advantage. If Spook ran, it would expose his back to attack. However, if Spook stayed, he'd soon be overwhelmed. The soldier circled warily, trying to stall for time.

So, Spook attacked. He raised his blade, trusting in his enhanced senses to compensate for the difference in training. The soldier raised his weapon to parry as Spook swung.

Spook's sword froze in the air.

Spook stumbled, trying to force the weapon forward, but it was strangely held in place—as if he were trying to push it through something solid, rather than air. It was as if . . .

Someone was Pushing against it. Allomancy. Spook glanced desperately around him, and immediately found the source of the power. The person Pushing had to be directly opposite Spook, for Allomancers could only Push away from themselves.

Quellion, the Citizen, had joined his sister. The Citizen met Spook's gaze, and Spook could see effort in the man's eyes as he clutched his sister, using her weight for support as he Pushed against Spook's sword, interfering in the battle as Kelsier himself once had, long ago when visiting the caverns where his army trained.

Spook dropped the weapon, letting it fly backward out of his hands, then threw himself to the ground. He felt the draft of an enemy sword swinging overhead, narrowly missing him. His own weapon clanged to the ground a short distance from him, its ringing loud in his ears.

He didn't have time to gather his breath; he could only push himself up to dodge the soldier's follow-up blow. Fortunately, Spook wasn't wearing any metal that Quellion could Push against to influence the fight any further. That was a habit that Spook was glad he'd never lost.

The only choice was to run. He couldn't fight, not with an Allomancer interfering. He turned while the soldier prepared another swing. Then, Spook threw himself forward, getting inside the soldier's guard. He ducked under the man's arm and dashed to the side, hoping to run past and leave the soldier confused.

Something caught his foot.

Spook spun. At first, he assumed that Quellion was Pulling on him somehow. Then, he saw that the soldier on the ground—the first one he'd dropped—had grabbed his foot.

*I hit that man in the head twice!* Spook thought with frustration. *There's no way he's still conscious!*

The hand squeezed his foot, yanking Spook backward with an inhuman strength. With strength like that, the man had to be a Thug—a pewter burner, like Ham.

Spook was in serious trouble.

Spook kicked, managing to break free, then stumbled to his feet. But a Thug would have the power of pewter—he'd be able to run faster, and farther, than Spook.

*Two Allomancers, counting the Citizen himself,* Spook thought. *Somebody isn't as disdainful of noble blood as he claims!*

The two soldiers advanced on him. Yelling in frustration—hearing his own heart thump like a pounding drum—Spook threw himself at the Thug and grappled the man, taking him by surprise. In that moment of confusion, Spook spun him around, using the Thug's body like a shield to protect himself from the third soldier.

He hadn't counted on the Citizen's brutal training. Quellion always spoke of sacrifice and necessity. Apparently, this philosophy extended to his soldiers, for the man with the sword rammed his weapon straight through his friend's back, piercing his heart and driving the weapon directly into Spook's chest. It was a move only a man with the strength and precision of a Thug could have performed.

*Three Allomancers,* Spook thought, dazed, as the soldier tried to pull his sword free from two bodies. The body of the dead man was a weight that finally snapped the blade.

How did I even survive this long? They must have been trying not to reveal their powers. Trying to remain hidden from the population. . . .

Spook stumbled backward, feeling blood on his chest. Oddly, he didn't feel pain. His heightened senses should have made the pain so powerful that —

It hit. Everything went black.

*The subtlety displayed in the ash-eating microbes and enhanced plants shows that Rashek got better and better at using the power. It burned out in a matter of minutes—but to a god, minutes can pass like hours. During that time, Rashek began as an ignorant child who shoved a planet too close to the sun, grew into an adult who could create ashmounts to cool the air, then finally became a mature artisan who could develop plants and creatures for specific purposes.*

*It also shows his mind-set during his time with Preservation's power. Under its influence he was obviously in a protective mode. Instead of leveling the ashmounts and trying to push the planet back into place, he was reactive, working furiously to fix problems that he himself had caused.*

# 17

ELEND RODE AT THE FRONT OF HIS MEN, astride a brilliant white stallion that had been scrubbed clean of ash. He turned his mount, looking over the ranks of nervous soldiers. They waited in the evening light, and Elend could see their terror. They had heard rumors, then had those rumors confirmed by Elend the day before. Today, his army would become immunized to the mists.

Elend rode through their ranks, General Demoux riding a roan stallion beside him. Both horses were big destriers, brought on the trip to impress more than for usefulness. Elend and the other officers would spend most of the trip riding in canal boats, rather than on horseback.

He didn't worry about the morality of his decision to expose his forces to the mists—at least, he didn't worry about it at that moment. Elend had learned something very important about himself: He was honest. Perhaps too honest. If he was uncertain, it would show in his face. The soldiers would sense his hesitation. So he'd learned to confine his worries and concerns to times when he was only with those closest to him. That meant Vin saw too much of his brooding. However, it left him free at other times to project confidence.

He moved quickly, letting his horse's hooves beat a thunder for the men to hear. Occasionally, he heard captains call out for their men to be firm. Even so, Elend saw the anxiety in his soldiers' eyes. And could he blame them? This day, the men would face an enemy that they could not fight, and could not resist. Within the hour, seven hundred of them would lay dead. About one in fifty. Not bad odds, on a grand scale—but that meant little to a man standing and feeling the mist creep around him.

The men stood their ground. Elend was proud of them. He had given those who wished it the opportunity to return to Luthadel instead of facing the mists. He still needed troops in the capital, and he'd rather not march with men unwilling to go into the mists. Almost none had gone. The vast majority had instead lined up in full ranks without having to be ordered, wearing full battle gear, armor polished and oiled, uniforms looking as clean as possible in the ash-stained wilderness. It seemed right to Elend for them to be in their armor. It made them seem as if they were going to battle—and, in a way, they were.

They trusted him. They knew that the mists were advancing toward Luthadel, and understood the importance of capturing the cities with storage caverns. They believed in Elend's ability to do something to save their families.

Their trust made him even more determined. He reined in his horse, turning the massive beast beside a rank of soldiers. He flared pewter, making his body stronger, giving more power to his lungs, then Rioted the emotions of the men to make them braver.

"Be strong!" he shouted.

Heads turned toward him, and the clanking of armor hushed. His own voice was so loud in his ears that he had to dampen his tin. "These mists will strike down some of us. However, most of us will be untouched—and most who fall will recover! Then, none of us need fear the mists again. We *cannot* arrive at Fadrex City without having inoculated ourselves! If we did so, we would risk being attacked in the morning, when we are hiding in our tents. Our enemies would force us out into the mists anyway, and we would have to fight with a sixth of our men shaking on the ground from sickness!"

He turned his horse, Demoux following behind, and moved along the ranks. "I do not know why the mists kill. But I trust in the Survivor! He named himself Lord of the Mists. If some of us die, then it is his will. Stay strong!"

His reminders seemed to have some effect. The soldiers stood a little straighter, facing west, toward where the sun would soon set. Elend reined in again, sitting tall and letting himself be seen.

"They look strong, my lord," Demoux said quietly, moving his horse up beside Elend's. "It was a good speech."

Elend nodded.

"My lord . . ." Demoux said, "did you mean what you said about the Survivor?"

"Of course I did."

"I'm sorry, my lord," Demoux said. "I didn't mean to question your faith, it's just that . . . well, you don't have to keep up the charade of belief, if you don't want to."

"I gave my word, Demoux," Elend said, frowning and glancing at the scarred general. "I do what I say."

"I believe you, my lord," Demoux said. "You are an honorable man."

"But?"

Demoux paused. "But . . . if you don't really believe in the Survivor, I don't think he would want you speaking in his name."

Elend opened his mouth to reprimand Demoux for his lack of respect, but stopped himself. The man spoke with honesty, from his heart. That wasn't the kind of thing to punish.

Besides, he might have had a point. "I don't know what I believe, Demoux," Elend said, looking back at the field of soldiers. "Certainly not in the Lord Ruler. Sazed's religions have been dead for centuries, and even he has stopped talking about them. It seems to me that leaves the Church of the Survivor as the only real option."

"With all due respect, my lord," Demoux said. "That's not a very strong profession of faith."

"I'm having trouble with faith lately, Demoux," Elend said, looking up, watching flakes of ash drift through the air. "My last god was killed by the woman I eventually married—a woman you claim as a religious figure, but who spurns your devotion."

Demoux nodded quietly.

"I don't reject your god, Demoux," Elend said. "I meant what I said—I think having faith in Kelsier is better than the alternatives. And, considering what's going to be coming at us in the next few months, I'd rather believe that something—anything—is out there helping us."

They were quiet for a few moments.

"I know that the Lady Heir objects to our worship of the Survivor, my lord," Demoux finally said. "She knew him, as did I. What she doesn't understand is that the Survivor has become so much more than just the man Kelsier."

Elend frowned. "That sounds like you calculatedly made him a god, Demoux—that you believe in him as a symbol only."

Demoux shook his head. "I'm saying that Kelsier was a man, but a man who gained something—a mantle, a portion of something eternal and immortal. When he died, he wasn't just Kelsier, the crewleader. Don't you think it odd that he was never Mistborn before he went to the Pits?"

"That's the way Allomancy works, Demoux," Elend said. "You don't gain your powers until you Snap—until you face something traumatic, something that nearly kills you."

"And you don't think that Kelsier experienced those kinds of events before the Pits?" Demoux asked. "My lord, he was a thief who robbed from obligators and noblemen. He lived a very dangerous life. You think he could have avoided beatings, near-deaths, and emotional anguish?"

Elend paused.

"He gained his powers at the Pits," Demoux said quietly, "because something else came upon him. People who knew him speak of how he was a changed man when he came back. He had purpose—he was driven to accomplish something the rest of the world thought impossible."

Demoux shook his head. "No, my lord. Kelsier the man died in those Pits, and Kelsier the Survivor was born. He was granted great power, and great wisdom, by a force that is above us all. *That* is why he accomplished what he did. *That* is why we worship him. He still had the follies of a man, but he had the hopes of a divinity."

Elend turned away. The rational, scholarly side of him understood exactly what was happening. Kelsier was gradually being deified, his life made more and more mystical by those who followed him. Kelsier had to be invested with heavenly power, for the Church couldn't continue to revere a mere man.

And yet, another part of Elend was glad for the rationalization, if only because it made the story that much more believable. After all, Demoux was right. How *did* a man living on the streets last so long before Snapping?

Someone screamed.

Elend looked up, scanning the ranks. Men began to shuffle as the mists appeared, sprouting in the air like growing plants. He couldn't see the soldier who had fallen. Soon, the point was moot, for others began to scream.

The sun began to be obscured, blazing red as it approached the horizon. Elend's horse shuffled nervously. The captains ordered the men to remain steady, but Elend could still see motion. In the group before him, pockets appeared in the ranks as men randomly collapsed to the ground, like marionettes whose strings had been cut. They shook on the ground, other soldiers backing away in horror, mist moving all around.

*They need me,* Elend thought, grabbing his reigns, Pulling on the emotions of those around him. "Demoux, let's ride."

He turned his horse. Demoux did not follow.

Elend spun. "Demoux? What—"

He choked off immediately. Demoux sat in the mists, shaking horribly. Even as Elend watched, the balding soldier slipped from his saddle, collapsing to the ankle-deep ash below.

"Demoux!" Elend yelled, hopping down, feeling like a fool. He'd never thought to wonder if Demoux was susceptible—he'd just assumed that he, like Vin and the others, was already immune. Elend knelt beside Demoux, his legs in the ash, listening to soldiers scream and captains yell for order. His friend shook and twisted, gasping in pain.

And the ash continued to fall.

*Rashek didn't solve all the world's problems. In fact, with each thing he did fix, he created new issues. However, he was clever enough that each subsequent problem was smaller than the ones before it. So, instead of plants that died from the distorted sun and ashy ground, we got plants that didn't provide quite enough nutrition.*

*He did save the world. True, the near-destruction was his fault in the first place—but he did an admirable job, all things considered. At least he didn't release Ruin to the world as we did.*

# 18

SAZED SLAPPED HIS HORSE ON THE RUMP, sending it galloping away. The beast's hooves kicked up chunks of packed ash as it ran. Its coat had once been a keen white; now it was a rough gray. Its ribs were beginning to show—it was malnourished to the point that it was no longer reasonable to expect it to carry a rider, and they could no longer afford to spare food for it.

"Now, that's a sad sight," Breeze noted, standing beside Sazed on the ash-covered road. Their guard of two hundred soldiers waited quietly, watching the beast run. Sazed couldn't help feeling that the release of their final horse was a symbol.

"You think it will be able to survive?" Breeze asked.

"I suspect that it will still be able to poke beneath the ash and find nourishment for a time," Sazed said. "It will be difficult, however."

Breeze grunted. "Living's difficult work for all of us, these days. Well, I wish the creature the best of luck. Are you going to join Allrianne and me in the carriage?"

Sazed glanced over his shoulder, toward the vehicle, which had been lightened, then rigged to be pulled by soldiers. They had removed the doors and hung curtains instead, and had removed sections of the back as well. With the decreased weight and two hundred men to take turns, the vehicle wouldn't be too much of a burden. Still, Sazed knew he would feel guilty being pulled by others. His old servant's instincts were too strong.

"No," Sazed said. "I shall walk for a bit. Thank you."

Breeze nodded, walking to the carriage to sit with Allrianne, a soldier holding a parasol over his head until he was inside. Now exposed to the ash, Sazed put up the hood of his travel robe, hefted his portfolio in his arm, then strode across the black ground to the front of the line.

"Captain Goradel," he said. "You may continue your march."

They did so. It was a rough hike—the ash was growing thick, and it was slick and tiring to walk on. It moved and shifted beneath the feet, almost as difficult as walking on sand. As hard as the hike was, however, it wasn't enough to distract Sazed from his troubled feelings. He had hoped that visiting the army—meeting with Elend and Vin—would give him a respite. The two were dear friends, and their affection for one another tended to bolster him. He had, after all, been the one to perform their marriage.

Yet, this meeting had left him even more troubled. *Vin allowed Elend to die,* he thought. *And she did it because of things I taught her.*

He carried the picture of a flower in his sleeve pocket, trying to make sense of his conversation with Vin. How had Sazed become the one that people came to with their problems? Couldn't they sense that he was simply a hypocrite, capable of formulating answers that sounded good, yet incapable of following his own advice? He felt lost. He felt a weight, squeezing him, telling him to simply give up.

How easily Elend spoke of hope and humor, as if being happy were simply a decision one made. Some people assumed that it was. Once, Sazed might have agreed with them. Now, his stomach simply twisted, and he felt sick at the thought of taking pretty much any action. His thoughts were constantly invaded by doubts.

*This is what religion is for,* Sazed thought as he tromped through the ash at the head of the column, carrying his pack on his shoulders. *It helps people through times like these.*

He looked down at his portfolio. Then, he opened it and leafed through the pages as he walked. Hundreds finished, and not a single one of the religions had provided the answers he sought. Perhaps he simply knew them too well. Most of the crew had trouble worshipping Kelsier as the other skaa did, for they knew of his faults and his quirks. They knew him as a man first, and as a god second. Perhaps the religions were the same to Sazed. He knew them so well that he could see their flaws too easily.

He did not disparage the people who had followed the religions, but Sazed—so far—had found only contradiction and hypocrisy in each religion he studied. Divinity was supposed to be perfect. Divinity didn't let its followers get slaughtered, and certainly didn't allow the world to be destroyed by good men who were just trying to save it.

One of the remaining ones would provide an answer. There *had* to be truth he could discover. As his feelings of dark suffocation threatened to overwhelm him, he fell to his studies, taking out the next sheet in line and strapping it to the outside of the portfolio. He would study it as he walked, carrying the portfolio with the sheet on the bottom when he wasn't reading, thereby keeping the ash off of it.

He'd find the answers. He dared not think what he would do if there weren't any.

They eventually passed into the Central Dominance, entering lands where men could still struggle for food and life. Breeze and Allrianne stayed in the carriage, but Sazed was glad to walk, even if it made his religions difficult to study.

He wasn't certain what to make of the cultivated fields. They passed scores of them—Elend had packed as many people as possible into the Central Dominance, then had ordered all of them to grow food for the coming winter. Even those skaa who had lived in the cities were well accustomed to hard work, and they quickly did as Elend ordered. Sazed wasn't certain if the people understood just how dire their situation was, or if they were simply happy to have someone tell them what to do.

The roadside grew heaped with tall piles of ash. Each day, the skaa workers had to clear away the ash that had fallen during the night. This unending task—along with the need to carry water to most of the new, unirrigated fields—created a very labor-intensive system of agriculture.

The plants did grow, however. Sazed's troop passed field after field, each one budding with brown plants. The sight should have brought him hope. Yet, it was difficult to look upon the sprouting stalks and not feel an even greater despair. They looked so weak and small beside the massive piles of ash. Even forgetting the mists, how was Elend going to feed an empire in these conditions? How long would it be before there was simply too much ash to move? Skaa worked the fields, their postures much as they had been during the days of the Lord Ruler. What had really changed for them?

"Look at them," a voice said. Sazed turned to see Captain Goradel walking up beside him. Bald and rugged, the man had a good-natured disposition—a trait common in the soldiers whom Ham promoted.

"I know," Sazed said quietly.

"Even with the ash and the mist, seeing them gives me hope."

Sazed looked up sharply. "Really?"

"Sure," Goradel said. "My family were farmers, Master Terrisman. We lived in Luthadel, but worked the outer fields."

"But, you were a soldier," Sazed said. "Weren't you the one who led Lady Vin into the palace the night she killed the Lord Ruler?"

Goradel nodded. "Actually, I led Lord Elend into the palace to rescue Lady Vin, though she turned out to not need much help from us. Anyway, you're right. I was a soldier in the Lord Ruler's palace—my parents disowned me when I joined up. But, I just couldn't face working in the fields my whole life."

"It is arduous work."

"No, it wasn't that," Goradel said. "It wasn't the labor, it was the . . . hopelessness. I couldn't stand to work all day to grow something I knew would belong to someone else. That's why I left the fields to become a soldier, and that's why seeing these farms gives me hope."

Goradel nodded toward a passing field. Some of the skaa looked up, then waved as they saw Elend's banner. "These people," Goradel said, "they work because they want to."

"They work because if they don't, they will starve."

"Sure," Goradel said. "I guess you're right. But they're not working because someone will beat them if they don't—they're working so that their families and their friends won't die. There's a difference in that, to a farmer. You can see it in the way they stand."

Sazed frowned as they walked, but said nothing further.

"Anyway, Master Terrisman," Goradel said, "I came to suggest that we make a stop at Luthadel for supplies."

Sazed nodded. "I suspected that we would do so. I, however, will need to leave you for a few days as you go to Luthadel. Lord Breeze can take command. I shall meet up with you on the northern highway."

Goradel nodded, moving back to make the arrangements. He didn't ask why Sazed wanted to leave the group, or what his destination was.

Several days later, Sazed arrived—alone—at the Pits of Hathsin. There was little to distinguish the area, now that the ash covered everything. Sazed's feet kicked up clumps of it as he moved to the top of a hill. He looked down on the valley that contained the Pits—the place where Kelsier's wife had been murdered. The place where the Survivor had been born.

It was now the home of the Terris people.

There were few of them remaining. They had never been a very large population, and the coming of the mists and the difficult trek down to the Central Dominance had claimed many lives. There were, perhaps, forty thousand of them left. And a good many of the men were eunuchs, like Sazed.

Sazed moved down the slope toward the valley. It had been a natural place to settle the Terris people. During the days of the Lord Ruler, hundreds of slaves had worked here, watched over by hundreds more soldiers. That had ended when Kelsier had returned to the Pits and destroyed their ability to produce atium. However, the Pits still had the buildings and infrastructure that had supported them during their working days. There was plenty of fresh water, and some shelter. The Terris people had improved on this, building other structures across the valley, making what was once the most terrifying of prison camps into a pastoral group of villages.

Even as Sazed walked down the hillside, he could see people brushing away the ash from the ground, letting the natural plant life poke through to provide grazing for the animals. The scrub that formed the dominant foliage in the Central Dominance was a resilient, hardy group of plants, and they were adapted to ash, and didn't need as much water as farm crops. That meant that the Terris people actually had easier lives than most. They were herdsman, as they had been even during the centuries before the Lord Ruler's Ascension. A hearty, short-legged breed of sheep mulled about on the hills, chewing down the uncovered stalks of scrub.

*The Terris people,* Sazed thought, *living lives easier than most. What a strange world it has become.*

His approach soon attracted attention. Children ran for their parents, and heads poked from shacks. Sheep began to gather around Sazed as he walked, as if hoping that he had come bearing treats of some sort.

Several aged men rushed up the hillside, moving as quickly as their gnarled limbs would allow. They—like Sazed—still wore their steward's robes. And, like Sazed, they kept them cleaned of ash, showing the colorful V-shaped patterns that ran down the fronts. Those patterns had once indicated the noble house that the steward served.

"Lord Sazed!" one of the men said eagerly.

"Your Majesty!" said another.

*Your Majesty.* "Please," Sazed said, raising his hands. "Do not call me that."

The two aged stewards glanced at each other. "Please, Master Keeper. Let us get you something warm to eat."

*Yes, the ash was black. No, it should not have been. Most common ash has a dark component, but is just as much gray or white as it is black.*

*Ash from the ashmounts . . . it was different. Like the mists themselves, the ash covering our land was not truly a natural thing. Perhaps it was the influence of Ruin's power—as black as Preservation was white. Or, perhaps it was simply the nature of the ashmounts, which were designed and created specifically to blast ash and smoke into the sky.*

# 19

"GET UP!"

Everything was dark.

"*Get up!*"

Spook opened his eyes. Everything seemed so dull, so muted. He could barely see. The world was a dark blur. And . . . he felt numb. Dead. Why couldn't he feel?

"Spook, you need to get up!"

The voice, at least, was clear. Yet, everything else felt muddy. He couldn't quite manage to think. He blinked, groaning quietly. What was wrong with him? His spectacles and cloth were gone. That should have left him free to see, but everything was so dark.

He was out of tin.

There was nothing burning in his stomach. The familiar flame, a comforting candle within, was no longer there. It had been his companion for over a year, always there. He'd feared what he was doing, but had never let it die. And now it was gone.

That was why everything seemed so dull. Was this really how other people lived? How he used to live? He could barely see—the sharp, rich detail he'd grown accustomed to was gone. The vibrant colors and crisp lines. Instead, everything was bland and vague.

His ears felt clogged. His nose . . . he couldn't smell the boards beneath him, couldn't tell the species of wood by scent. He couldn't smell the bodies that had passed. He couldn't feel the thumpings of people moving about in other rooms.

And . . . he *was* in a room. He shook his head, sitting up, trying to think. Immediately, a pain in his shoulder made him gasp. The wound had not been cared for. He remembered the sword piercing him near the shoulder. That was not a wound one recovered from easily—indeed, his left arm didn't seem to work right, one of the reasons he was having so much trouble rising.

"You've lost a lot of blood," the voice said. "You'll die soon, even if the flames don't take you. Don't bother to look for the pouch of tin at your belt—they took that."

"Flames?" Spook croaked, blinking. How did people survive in a world that was this dark?

"Can't you feel them, Spook? They're near."

There *was* a light nearby, down a hallway. Spook shook his head, trying to clear his mind. *I'm in a house,* he thought. *A nice one. A nobleman's house.*

And they're burning it down.

This, finally, gave him motivation to stand, though he immediately dropped again, his body too weak—his mind too fuzzy—to keep him on his feet.

"Don't walk," the voice said. Where had he heard that voice before? He trusted it. "Crawl," it said.

Spook did as commanded, crawling forward.

"No, not *toward* the flames! You have to get out, so you can punish those who did this to you. Think, Spook!"

"Window," Spook croaked, turning to the side, crawling toward one of them.

"Boarded shut," the voice said. "You saw this before, from the outside. There's only one way to survive. You have to listen to me."

Spook nodded dully.

"Go out the room's other door. Crawl toward the stairs leading to the second floor."

Spook did so, forcing himself to keep moving. His arms were so numb they felt like weights tied to his shoulders. He'd been flaring tin so long that normal senses just didn't seem to work for him anymore. He found the stairs, though he was coughing by the time he got there. That would be because of the smoke, a part of his mind told him. It was probably a good thing he was crawling.

He could feel the heat as he climbed. The flames seemed to be chasing him, claiming the room behind him as he moved up the stairs, still dizzy. He reached the top, then slipped on his own blood, slumping against the side of the wall, groaning.

"Get up!" the voice said.

*Where have I heard that voice before?* he thought again. *Why do I want to do what it says?* It was so close. He'd have it, if his mind weren't so muddled. Yet, he obeyed, forcing himself to his hands and knees again.

"Second room on the left," the voice commanded.

Spook crawled without thinking. Flames crept up the stairs, flickering across the walls. His nose was weak, like his other senses, but he suspected that the house had been soaked with oil. It made for a faster, more dramatic burn that way.

"Stop. This is the room."

Spook turned left, crawling into the room. It was a study, well furnished. The thieves in the city complained that ransacking places like this one wasn't worth the effort. The Citizen forbade ostentation, and so expensive furniture couldn't be sold, even on the black market. Nobody wanted to be caught owning luxuries, lest they end up burning to death in one of the Citizen's executions.

"Spook!"

Spook had heard of those executions. He'd never seen one. He'd paid Durn to keep an eye out for the next one. Spook's coin would get him advance warning, as well as a good position to watch the building burn down. Plus, Durn promised he had another tidbit, something Spook would be interested in. Something worth the coin he'd paid.

Count the skulls.

"Spook!"

Spook opened his eyes. He'd fallen to the floor and begun to drift off. Flames were already burning the ceiling. The building was dying. There was no way Spook would get out, not in his current condition.

"Go to the desk," the voice commanded.

"I'm dead," Spook whispered.

"No you're not. Go to the desk."

Spook turned his head, looking at the flames. A figure stood in them, a dark silhouette. The walls dripped, bubbled, and hissed, their plaster and paints blackening. Yet, this shadow of a person didn't seem to mind the fire. That figure seemed familiar. Tall. Commanding.

"You . . .?" Spook whispered.

"Go to the desk!"

Spook rolled to his knees. He crawled, dragging his useless arm, moving to the side of the desk.

"Right drawer."

Spook pulled it open, then leaned against the side, slumping. Something was inside.

Vials?

He reached for them eagerly. They were the kinds of vials used by Allomancers to store metal shavings. With trembling fingers, Spook picked one up, then it slipped free of his numb fingers. It shattered. He stared at the liquid that had been inside—an alcohol solution that would keep the metal flakes from corroding, as well as help the Allomancer drink them down.

"Spook!" the voice said.

Dully, Spook took another vial. He worked off the stopper with his teeth, feeling the fires blaze around him. The far wall was nearly gone. The fires crept toward him.

He drank the contents of the vial, then searched inside of himself, seeking tin. But there was none. Spook cried out in despair, dropping the vial. It had contained no tin. How would that have saved him anyway? It would have made him feel the flames, and his wound, more acutely.

"Spook!" the voice commanded. "Burn it!"

"There is no tin!" Spook yelled.

"Not tin! The man who owned this house was no Tineye!"

Not tin. Spook blinked. Then—reaching within himself—he found something completely unexpected. Something he'd never thought to ever see, something that shouldn't have existed.

A new metal reserve. He burned it.

His body flared with strength. His trembling arms became steady. His weakness seemed to flee, cast aside like darkness before the rising sun. He felt tension and power, and his muscles grew taut with anticipation.

"Stand!"

His head snapped up. He leaped to his feet, and this time the dizziness was gone. His mind still felt numb, but something was clear to him. Only one metal could have changed his body, making it strong enough to work despite his terrible wound and blood loss.

Spook was burning pewter.

The figure stood in the flames, dark, hard to make out. "I've given you the blessing of pewter, Spook," the voice said. "Use it to escape this place. You can break through the boards on the far side of that hallway, escape out onto the roof of the building nearby. The soldiers won't be watching for you—they're too busy controlling the fire so it doesn't spread."

Spook nodded. The heat didn't bother him anymore. "Thank you."

The figure stepped forward, becoming more than just a silhouette. Flames played against the man's firm face, and Spook's suspicions were confirmed. There was a reason he'd trusted that voice, a reason why he'd done what it had said.

He'd do whatever this man commanded.

"I didn't give you pewter just so you could live, Spook," Kelsier said, pointing. "I gave it to you so you could get revenge. Now, go!"

*More than one person reported feeling a sentient hatred in the mists. This is not necessarily related to the mists killing people, however. For most—even those it struck down—the mists seemed merely a weather phenomenon, no more sentient or vengeful than a terrible disease.*

*For some few, however, there was more. Those it favored, it swirled around. Those it was hostile to, it pulled away from. Some felt peace within it, others felt hatred. It all came down to Ruin's subtle touch, and how much one responded to his promptings.*

# 20

TENSOON SAT IN HIS CAGE.

The cage's very existence was an insult. Kandra were not like men—even if he were not imprisoned, TenSoon would not have run or tried to escape. He had come willingly to his fate.

And yet, they locked him up. He wasn't certain where they had gotten the cage—it certainly wasn't something kandra normally would need. Still, the Seconds had found it and erected it in one of the main caverns of the Homeland. It was made of iron plates and hard steel bars with a strong wire mesh stretched across all four faces to keep him from reducing his body to base muscles and wriggling through. It was another insult.

TenSoon sat inside, naked on the cold iron floor. Had he accomplished anything other than his own condemnation? Had his words in the Trustwarren been of any value at all?

Outside his cage, the caverns glowed with the light of cultivated mosses, and kandra went about their duties. Many stopped, studying him. This was the purpose of the long delay between his judgment and sentencing. The Second Generationers didn't need weeks to ponder what they were going to do to him. However, TenSoon had forced them to let him speak his mind, and the Seconds wanted to make certain he was properly punished. They put him on display, like some human in the stocks. In all the history of the kandra people, no other had ever been treated in such a way. His name would be a byword of shame for centuries.

*But we won't last centuries,* he thought angrily. *That was what my speech was all about.*

But, he hadn't given it very well. How could he explain to the people what he felt? That their traditions were coming to a focus, that their lives—which had been stable for so long—were in drastic need of change?

*What happened above? Did Vin go to the Well of Ascension?* What of Ruin, and Preservation? The gods of the kandra people were at war again, and the only ones who knew of them were pretending that nothing was happening.

Outside his cage, the other kandra lived their lives. Some trained the members of the newer generations—he could see Elevenths moving along, little more than blobs with some glistening bones. The transformation from mistwraith to kandra was a difficult one. Once given a Blessing, the mistwraith would lose most of its instincts as it gained sentience, and would have to relearn how to form muscles and bodies. It was a process that took many, many years.

Other adult kandra went about food preparation. They would stew a mixture of algae and fungi inside stone pits, not unlike the one in which TenSoon would spend eternity. Despite his former hatred of mankind, TenSoon had always found the opportunity to enjoy outside food—particularly aged meat—a very tempting consolation for going out on a Contract.

Now, he barely had enough to drink, let alone enough to eat. He sighed, looking through the bars at the vast cavern. The caves of the Homeland were enormous, far too large for the kandra to fill. But, that was what many of his people liked about them. After spending years in a Contract—serving a master's whims, often for decades at a time—a place that offered the option of solitude was quite precious.

*Solitude,* TenSoon thought. *I'll have plenty of that, soon enough.* Contemplating an eternity in prison made him a little less annoyed with the people who came to gawk at him. They would be the last of his people he ever saw. He recognized many of them. The Fourths and Fifths came to spit at the ground before him, showing their devotion to the Seconds. The Sixths and the Sevenths—who made up the bulk of the Contract fillers—came to pity him and shake their heads for a friend fallen. The Eighths and Ninths came out of curiosity, amazed that one so aged could have fallen so far.

And then he saw a particularly familiar face amidst the watching groups. TenSoon turned aside, ashamed, as MeLaan approached, pain showing in those overly large eyes of hers.

"TenSoon?" a whisper soon came.

"Go away, MeLaan," he said quietly, his back to the bars, which only let him look out at another group of kandra, watching him from the other side.

"TenSoon . . ." she repeated.

"You need not see me like this, MeLaan. Please go."

"They shouldn't be able to do this to you," she said, and he could hear the anger in her voice. "You're nearly as old as they, and far more wise."

"They are the Second Generation," TenSoon said. "They are chosen by those of the First. They lead us."

"They don't *have* to lead us."

"MeLaan!" he said, finally turning toward her. Most of the gawkers stayed back, as if TenSoon's crime were a disease they could catch. MeLaan crouched alone beside his cage, her True Body of spindly wooden bones making her look unnaturally slim.

"You could challenge them," MeLaan said quietly.

"What do you think we are?" TenSoon asked. "Humans, with their rebellions and upheavals? We are kandra. We are of Preservation. We follow order."

"You still bow before them?" MeLaan hissed, pressing her thin face up against the bars. "After what you said—with what is happening above?"

TenSoon paused. "Above?"

"You were right, TenSoon," she said. "Ash cloaks the land in a mantle of black. The mists come during the day, killing both crops and people. Men march to war. Ruin has returned."

TenSoon closed his eyes. "They will do something," he finally said. "The First Generation."

"They are old," MeLaan said. "Old, forgetful, impotent."

TenSoon opened his eyes. "You have changed much."

She smiled. "They should never have given children of a new generation to be raised by a Third. There are many of us, the younger ones, who would fight. The Seconds can't rule forever. What can we do, TenSoon? How can we help you?"

*Oh, child,* he thought. *You don't think that they know about you?*

Those of the Second Generation were not fools. They might be lazy, but they were old and crafty—TenSoon understood this, for he knew each of them quite well. They would have kandra listening, waiting to see what was said at his cage. A kandra of the Fourth or Fifth Generation who had the Blessing of Awareness could stand a distance away, and still hear every word being spoken at his cage.

TenSoon was kandra. He had returned to receive his punishment because that was right. It was more than honor, more than Contract. It was who he was.

And yet, if the things MeLaan had said were true . . .

Ruin has returned.

"How can you just sit here?" MeLaan said. "You're stronger than they are, TenSoon."

TenSoon shook his head. "I broke Contract, MeLaan."

"For a higher good."

At least I convinced her.

"Is it true, TenSoon?" she asked very quietly.

"What?"

"OreSeur. He had the Blessing of Potency. You must have inherited it, when you killed him. Yet, they didn't find it on your body when they took you. So, what did you do with it? Can I fetch it for you? Bring it, so that you can fight?"

"I will not fight my own people, MeLaan," TenSoon said. "I am kandra."

"Someone must lead us!" she hissed.

That statement, at least, was true. But, it wasn't TenSoon's right. Nor, really, was it the right of the Second Generation—or even the First Generation. It was the right of the one who had created them. That one was dead. But, another had taken his place.

MeLaan was silent for a time, still kneeling beside his cage. Perhaps she waited for him to offer encouragement, or perhaps to become the leader she sought. He didn't speak.

"So, you just came to die," she finally said.

"To explain what I've discovered. What I've felt."

"And then what? You come, proclaim dread news, then leave us to solve the problems on our own?"

"That's not fair, MeLaan," he said. "I came to be the best kandra I know how."

"Then fight!"

He shook his head.

"It's true then," she said. "The others of my generation, they said that you were broken by that last master of yours. The man Zane."

"He did not break me," TenSoon said.

"Oh?" MeLaan said. "And why did you return to the Homeland in that . . . body you were using?"

"The dog's bones?" TenSoon said. "Those weren't given to me by Zane, but by Vin."

"So *she* broke you."

TenSoon exhaled quietly. How could he explain? On one hand, it seemed ironic to him that MeLaan—who intentionally wore a True Body that was inhuman—would find his use of a dog's body so distasteful. Yet, he could understand. It had taken him quite some time to appreciate the advantages of those bones.

He paused.

But, no. He had not come to bring revolution. He had come to explain, to serve the interests of his people. He would do that by accepting his punishment, as a kandra should.

And yet . . .

There was a chance. A slim one. He wasn't even certain he wanted to escape, but if there was an opportunity . . . "Those bones I wore," TenSoon found himself saying. "You know where they are?"

MeLaan frowned. "No. Why would you want them?"

TenSoon shook his head. "I don't," he said, choosing his words carefully. "They were disgraceful! I was made to wear them for over a year, forced into the humiliating role of a dog. I would have discarded them, but I had no corpse to ingest and take, so I had to return here wearing that horrid body."

"You're avoiding the real issue, TenSoon."

"There is no real issue, MeLaan," he said, turning away from her. Whether or not his plan worked, he didn't want the Seconds punishing her for associating with him. "I will not rebel against my people. Please, if you truly wish to help me, just let me be."

MeLaan hissed quietly, and he heard her stand. "You were once the greatest of us."

TenSoon sighed as she left. *No, MeLaan. I was never great. Up until recently, I was the most orthodox of my generation, a conservative distinguished only by his hatred of humans. Now, I've become the greatest criminal in the history of our people, but I did it mostly by accident.*

That isn't greatness. That's just foolishness.

*It should be no surprise that Elend became such a powerful Allomancer. It is a well-documented fact—though that documentation wasn't available to most—that Allomancers were much stronger during the early days of the Final Empire.*

*In those days, an Allomancer didn't need duralumin to take control of a kandra or koloss. A simple Push or Pull on the emotions was enough. In fact, this ability was one of the main reasons that the kandra devised their Contracts with the humans—for, at that time, not only Mistborn, but Soothers and Rioters could take control of them at the merest of whims.*

# 21

DEMOUX SURVIVED.

He was one of the larger group, the fifteen percent who grew sick, but did not die. Vin sat atop the cabin of her narrowboat, arm resting on a wooden ledge, idly fingering her mother's earring—which, as always, she wore in her ear. Koloss brutes trudged along the towpath, dragging the barges and boats down the canal. Many of the barges still carried supplies—tents, foodstuffs, pure water. Several had been emptied, however, their contents carried on the backs of the surviving soldiers, making room for the wounded.

Vin turned away from the barges, looking toward the front of the narrowboat. Elend stood at the prow, as usual, staring west. He did not brood. He looked like a king, standing straight-backed, staring determinedly toward his goal. He looked so different now from the man he had once been, with his full beard, his longer hair, his uniforms that had been scrubbed white. They were growing worn. Not ragged . . . they were still clean and sharp, as white as things could get in the current state of the world. They were just no longer new. They were the uniforms of a man who had been at war for two years straight.

Vin knew him well enough to sense that all was not well. However, she also knew him well enough to sense that he didn't want to talk about it for the moment.

She stood and stepped down, burning pewter unconsciously to heighten her balance. She slid a book off a bench beside the boat's edge, and settled down quietly. Elend would talk to her eventually—he always did. For the moment, she had something else to engage her.

She opened the book to the marked page and reread a particular paragraph. *The Deepness must be destroyed*, the words said. *I have seen it, and I have felt it. This name we give it is too weak a word, I think. Yes, it is deep and unfathomable, but it is also terrible. Many do not realize that it is sentient, but I have sensed its mind, such as it is, the few times I have confronted it directly.*

She eyed the page for a moment, sitting back on her bench. Beside her, the canal waters passed, covered with a froth of floating ash.

The book was Alendi's logbook. It had been written a thousand years before by a man who had thought himself to be the Hero of Ages. Alendi hadn't completed his quest; he had been killed by one of his servants—Rashek—who had then taken the power at the Well of Ascension and become the Lord Ruler.

Alendi's story was frighteningly close to Vin's own. She had also assumed herself to be the Hero of Ages. She had traveled to the Well, and had been betrayed. She, however, hadn't been betrayed by one of her servants—but instead by the force imprisoned within the Well. That force was, she assumed, behind the prophecies about the Hero of Ages in the first place.

*Why do I keep coming back to this paragraph?* she thought, eyeing it again. Perhaps it was because of what Human had said to her—that the mists hated her. She had felt that hatred herself, and it appeared that Alendi had felt the same thing.

But, could she even trust the logbook's words? The force she had released, the thing she called Ruin, had proven that it could change things in the world. Small things, yet important ones. Like the text of a book, which was why Elend's officers were now instructed to send all messages via memorized words or letters etched into metal.

Regardless, if there had been any clues to be gained by reading the logbook, Ruin would have removed them long ago. Vin felt as if she'd been led by the nose for the last three years, pulled by invisible strings. She had thought she was having revelations and making great discoveries, but all she'd really been doing was following Ruin's bidding.

*Yet, Ruin is not omnipotent*, Vin thought. *If it were, there would have been no fight. It wouldn't have needed to trick me into releasing it.*

*It cannot know my thoughts. . . .*

Even that knowledge was frustrating. What good were her thoughts? Always before, she'd had Sazed, Elend, or TenSoon to talk with about problems like this. This wasn't a task for Vin; she was no scholar. Yet, Sazed had turned his back on his studies, TenSoon had returned to his people, and Elend was far too busy lately to worry about anything but his army and its politics. That left Vin. And she still found reading and scholarship to be stuffy and boring.

Yet, she was also becoming more and more comfortable with the idea of doing what was necessary, even if she found it distasteful. She was no longer just her own person. She belonged to the New Empire. She had been its knife—now it was time to try a different role.

*I have to do it,* she thought, sitting in the red sunlight. *There is a puzzle here—something to be solved. What was it Kelsier liked to say?*

There's always another secret.

She remembered Kelsier, standing boldly before a small group of thieves, proclaiming that they would overthrow the Lord Ruler and free the empire. *We're thieves,* he'd said. *And we're extraordinarily good ones. We can rob the unrobbable and fool the unfoolable. We know how to take an incredibly large task and break it down to manageable pieces, then deal with each of those pieces.*

That day, when he'd written up the team's goals and plans on a small board, Vin had been amazed by how possible he had made an impossible task seem. That day, a little bit of her had begun to believe that Kelsier could overthrow the Final Empire.

*All right,* Vin thought. *I'll begin like Kelsier did, by listing the things that I know for certain.*

There *had* been a power at the Well of Ascension, so that much about the stories was true. There had also been something alive, imprisoned in or near the Well. It had tricked Vin into using the power to destroy its bonds. Maybe she could have used that power to destroy Ruin instead, but she'd given it up.

She sat thoughtfully, tapping her finger against the back of the logbook. She could still remember wisps of what it had felt like to hold that power. It had awed her, yet at the same time felt natural and right. In fact, while she held it, *everything* had felt natural. The workings of the world, the ways of men . . . it was like the power had been more than simple capability. It had been understanding as well.

That was a tangent. She needed to focus on what she knew before she could philosophize on what she needed to do. The power was real, and Ruin was real. Ruin had retained some ability to change the world while confined—Sazed had confirmed that his texts had been altered to suit Ruin's purpose. Now Ruin was free, and Vin assumed that it was behind the violent mist killings and the falling ash.

*Though*, she reminded herself, *I don't know either of those things for certain.* What did she know about Ruin? She had touched it, felt it, in that moment she had released it. It had a need to destroy, yet it was not a force of simple chaos. It didn't act randomly. It planned and thought. And, it didn't seem able to do anything it wanted. Almost as if it followed specific rules . . .

She paused. "Elend?" she called.

The emperor turned from his place beside the prow.

"What is the first rule of Allomancy?" Vin asked. "The first thing I taught you?"

"Consequence," Elend said. "Every action has consequences. When you Push on something heavy, it will push you back. If you Push on something light, it will fly away."

It was the first lesson that Kelsier had taught Vin, as well as—she assumed—the first lesson his master had taught him.

"It's a good rule," Elend said, turning back to his contemplation of the horizon. "It works for all things in life. If you throw something into the air, it will come back down. If you bring an army into a man's kingdom, he will react . . ."

*Consequence*, she thought, frowning. *Like things falling back when thrown into the sky. That's what Ruin's actions feel like to me. Consequences.* Perhaps it was a remnant of touching the power, or perhaps just some rationalization her unconscious mind was giving her. Yet, she felt a logic to Ruin. She didn't understand that logic, but she could recognize it.

Elend turned back toward her. "That's why I like Allomancy, actually. Or, at least, the theory of it. The skaa whisper about it, call it mystical, but it's really quite rational. You can tell what an Allomantic Push is going to do as certainly as you can tell what will happen when you drop a rock off the side of the boat. For every Push, there is a Pull. There are no exceptions. It makes simple, logical sense—unlike the ways of men, which are filled with flaws, irregularities, and double meanings. Allomancy is a thing of nature."

A thing of nature.

For every Push, there is a Pull. A consequence.

"That's important," Vin whispered.

"What?"

A consequence.

The thing she had felt at the Well of Ascension had been a thing of destruction, like Alendi described in his logbook. But, it hadn't been a creature, not like a person. It had been a force—a thinking force, but a force nonetheless. And forces had rules. Allomancy, weather, even the pull of the ground. The world was a place that made sense. A place of logic. Every Push had a Pull. Every force had a consequence.

She had to discover, then, the laws relating to the thing she was fighting. That would tell her how to beat it.

"Vin?" Elend asked, studying her face.

Vin looked away. "It's nothing, Elend. Nothing I can speak of, at least."

He watched her for a moment. *He thinks that you're plotting against him*, Reen whispered from the back of her mind. Fortunately, the days when she had listened to Reen's words were long past. Indeed, as she watched Elend, she saw him nod slowly, and accept her explanation. He turned back to his own contemplations.

Vin rose, walking forward, laying a hand on his arm. He sighed, raising the arm and wrapping it around her shoulders, pulling her close. That arm, once the weak arm of a scholar, was now muscular and firm.

"What are you thinking about?" Vin asked.

"You know," Elend said.

"It was necessary, Elend. The soldiers had to get exposed to the mists eventually."

"Yes," Elend said. "But there's something more, Vin. I fear I'm becoming like *him*."

"Who?"

"The Lord Ruler."

Vin snorted quietly, pulling closer to him.

"This is something he would have done," Elend said. "Sacrificing his own men for a tactical advantage."

"You explained this to Ham," Vin said. "We can't afford to waste time."

"It's still ruthless," Elend said. "The problem isn't that those men died, it's that I was so willing to make it happen. I feel . . . *brutal*, Vin. How far will I go to see my goals achieved? I'm marching on another man's kingdom to take it from him."

"For the greater good."

"That has been the excuse of tyrants throughout all time. I know it. Yet, I press on. *This* is why I didn't want to be emperor. This is why I let Penrod take my throne from me back during the siege. I didn't want to be the kind of leader who had to do things like this. I want to protect, not besiege and kill! But, is there any other way? Everything I do seems like it *must* be done. Like exposing my own men in the mists. Like marching on

Fadrex City. We have to get to that storehouse—it's the only lead we have that could even possibly give us some clue as to what we're supposed to do! It all makes such sense. Ruthless, brutal sense."

*Ruthlessness is the very most practical of emotions,* Reen's voice whispered. She ignored it. "You've been listening to Cett too much."

"Perhaps," Elend said. "Yet, his is a logic I find difficult to ignore. I grew up as an idealist, Vin—we both know that's true. Cett provides a kind of balance. The things he says are much like what Tindwyl used to say."

He paused, shaking his head. "Just a short time ago, I was talking with Cett about Allomantic Snapping. Do you know what the noble houses did to ensure that they found the Allomancers among their children?"

"They had them beaten," Vin whispered. A person's Allomantic powers were always latent until something traumatic brought them out. A person had to be brought to the brink of death and survive—only then would their powers be awakened. It was called Snapping.

Elend nodded. "It was one of the great, dirty secrets of so-called noble life. Families often lost children to the beatings—those beatings had to be brutal for them to evoke Allomantic abilities. Each house was different, but they generally specified an age before adolescence. When a boy or girl hit that age, they were taken and beaten near to death."

Vin shivered slightly.

"I vividly remember mine," Elend said. "Father didn't beat me himself, but he did watch. The saddest thing about the beatings was that most of them were pointless. Only a handful of children, even noble children, became Allomancers. I didn't. I was beaten for nothing."

"You stopped those beatings, Elend," Vin said softly. He had drafted a bill soon after becoming king. A person could choose to undergo a supervised beating when they came of age, but Elend had stopped it from happening to children.

"And I was wrong," Elend said softly.

Vin looked up.

"Allomancers are our most powerful resource, Vin," Elend said, looking out over the marching soldiers. "Cett lost his kingdom, nearly his life, because he couldn't marshal enough Allomancers to protect him. And I made it illegal to search out Allomancers in my population."

"Elend, you stopped the *beating of children."*

"And if those beatings could save lives?" Elend asked. "Like exposing my soldiers could save lives? What about Kelsier? He only gained his powers as a Mistborn *after* he was trapped in the Pits of Hathsin. What would have happened if he'd been beaten properly as a child? He would always have been Mistborn. He could have saved his wife."

"And then wouldn't have had the courage or motivation to overthrow the Final Empire."

"And is what we have any better?" Elend asked. "The longer I've held this throne, Vin, the more I've come to realize that some of the things the Lord Ruler did weren't evil, but simply effective. Right or wrong, he maintained order in his kingdom."

Vin looked up, catching his eyes, forcing him to look down at her. "I don't like this hardness in you, Elend."

He looked out over the blackened canal waters. "It doesn't control me, Vin. I don't agree with most of the things the Lord Ruler did. I'm just coming to understand him—and that understanding worries me." She saw questions in his eyes, but also strengths. He looked down and met her eyes. "I can hold this throne only because I know that at one point, I was willing to give it up in the name of what was right. If I ever lose that, Vin, you need to tell me. All right?"

Vin nodded.

Elend looked back at the horizon again. *What is it he hopes to see?* Vin thought.

"There has to be a balance, Vin," he said. "Somehow, we'll find it. The balance between whom we wish to be and whom we need to be." He sighed. "But for now," he said, nodding to the side, "we simply have to be satisfied with who we are."

Vin glanced to the side as a small courier skiff from one of the other narrowboats pulled up alongside theirs. A man in simple brown robes stood upon it. He wore large spectacles, as if attempting to obscure the intricate Ministry tattoos around his eyes, and he was smiling happily.

Vin smiled herself. Once, she had thought that a happy obligator was *always* a bad sign. That was before she'd known Noorden. Even during the days of the Lord Ruler, the contented scholar had probably lived most of his life in his own little world. He provided a strange proof that even in the confines of what had once been—in her opinion—the most evil organization in the empire, one could find good men.

"Your Excellency," Noorden said, stepping off of the skiff and bowing. A couple of assistant scribes joined him on the deck, lugging books and ledgers.

"Noorden," Elend said, joining the man on the foredeck. Vin followed. "You have done the counts I asked?"

"Yes, Your Excellency," Noorden said as an aide opened up a ledger on a pile of boxes. "I must say, this was a difficult task, what with the army moving about and the like."

"I'm certain you were thorough as always, Noorden," Elend said. He glanced at the ledger, which seemed to make sense to him, though all Vin saw was a bunch of random numbers.

"What's it say?" she asked.

"It lists the number of sick and dead," Elend said. "Of our thirty-eight thousand, nearly six thousand were taken by the sickness. We lost about five hundred and fifty."

"Including one of my own scribes," Noorden said, shaking his head.

Vin frowned. Not at the death, at something else, something itching at her mind . . .

"Fewer dead than expected," Elend said, pulling thoughtfully at his beard.

"Yes, Your Excellency," Noorden said. "I guess these soldier types are more rugged than the average skaa population. The sickness, whatever it is, didn't strike them as hard."

"How do you know?" Vin asked, looking up. "How do you know how many *should* have died?"

"Previous experience, my lady," Noorden said in his chatty way. "We've been tracking these deaths with some interest. Since the disease is new, we're trying to determine exactly what causes it. Perhaps that will lead us to a way to treat it. I've had my scribes reading what we can, trying to find clues of other diseases like this. It seems a little like the shakewelts, though that's usually brought on by—"

"Noorden," Vin said, frowning. "You have figures then? Exact numbers?"

"That's what His Excellency asked for, my lady."

"How many fell sick to the disease?" Vin asked. "Exactly?"

"Well, let me see . . ." Noorden said, shooing his scribe away and checking the ledger. "Five thousand two hundred and forty-three."

"What percentage of the soldiers is that?" Vin asked.

Noorden paused, then waved over a scribe and did some calculations. "About thirteen and a half percent, my lady," he finally said, adjusting his spectacles.

Vin frowned. "Did you include the men who died in your calculations?"

"Actually, no," Noorden said.

"And which total did you use?" Vin asked. "The total number of men in the army, or the total number who hadn't been in the mists before?"

"The first."

"Do you have a count for the second number?" Vin asked.

"Yes, my lady," Noorden said. "The emperor wanted an accurate count of which soldiers would be affected."

"Use that number instead," Vin said, glancing at Elend. He seemed interested.

"What is this about, Vin?" he asked as Noorden and his men worked.

"I'm . . . not sure," Vin said.

"Numbers are important for generalizations," Elend said. "But I don't see how . . ." He trailed off as Noorden looked up from his calculations, then cocked his head, saying something softly to himself.

"What?" Vin asked.

"I'm sorry, my lady," Noorden said. "I was just a bit surprised. The calculation came out to be exact—precisely sixteen percent of the soldiers fell sick. To the man."

"A coincidence, Noorden," Elend said. "It isn't *that* remarkable for calculations to come out exact."

Ash blew across the deck. "No," Noorden said, "no, you are right, Your Excellency. A simple coincidence."

"Check your ledgers," Vin said. "Find percentages based on other groups of people who have caught this disease."

"Vin," Elend said, "I'm no statistician, but I have worked with numbers in my research. Sometimes, natural phenomena produce seemingly odd results, but the chaos of statistics actually results in normalization. It might appear strange that our numbers broke down to an exact percentage, but that's just the way that statistics work."

"Sixteen," Noorden said. He looked up. "Another exact percentage."

Elend frowned, stepping over to the ledger.

"This third one here isn't exact," Noorden said, "but that's only because the base number isn't a multiple of twenty-five. A fraction of a person can't really become sick, after all. Yet, the sickness in this population here is within a single person of being exactly sixteen percent."

Elend knelt down, heedless of the ash that had dusted the deck since it had last been swept. Vin looked over his shoulder, scanning the numbers.

"It doesn't matter how old the average member of the population is," Noorden said, scribbling. "Nor does it matter where they live. Each one shows the *exact* same percentage of people falling sick."

"How could we have not noticed this before?" Elend asked.

"Well, we did, after a fashion," Noorden said. "We knew that *about* four in twenty-five caught the sickness. However, I hadn't realized how exact the numbers were. This is indeed odd, Your Excellency. I know of no other disease that works this way. Look, here's an entry where a hundred scouts were sent into the mists, and *precisely* sixteen of them fell sick!"

Elend looked troubled.

"What?" Vin asked.

"This is wrong, Vin," Elend said. "Very wrong."

"It's like the chaos of normal random statistics has broken down," Noorden said. "A population should never react *this* precisely—there should be a curve of probability, with smaller populations reflecting the expected percentages least accurately."

"At the very least," Elend said, "the sickness should affect the elderly in different ratios from the healthy."

"In a way, it does," Noorden said as one of his assistants handed him a paper with further calculations. "The *deaths* respond that way, as we would expect. But, the total number who fall sick is always sixteen percent! We've been paying so much attention to how many died, we didn't notice how unnatural the percentages of those stricken were."

Elend stood. "Check on this, Noorden," he said, gesturing toward the ledger. "Do interviews, make certain the data hasn't been changed by Ruin, and find out if this trend holds. We can't jump to conclusions with only four or five examples. It could all just be a large coincidence."

"Yes, Your Excellency," Noorden said, looking a bit shaken. "But . . . what if it's not a coincidence? What does it mean?"

"I don't know," Elend said.

*It means consequence,* Vin thought. *It means that there are laws, even if we don't understand them.*

Sixteen. Why sixteen percent?

*The beads of metal found at the Well—beads that made men into Mistborn—were the reason why Allomancers used to be more powerful. Those first Mistborn were as Elend Venture became—possessing a primal power, which was then passed down through the lines of the nobility, weakening a bit with each generation.*

*The Lord Ruler was one of these ancient Allomancers, his power pure and unadulterated by time and breeding. That is part of why he was so mighty compared to other Mistborn—though, admittedly, his ability to mix Feruchemy and Allomancy was what produced many of his most spectacular abilities. Still, it is interesting to me that one of his "divine" powers—his essential Allomantic strength—was something every one of the original nine Allomancers possessed.*

# 22

SAZED SAT IN ONE OF THE NICER BUILDINGS at the Pits of Hathsin—a former guardhouse—holding a mug of hot tea. The Terris elders sat in chairs before him, a small stove providing warmth. On the next day, Sazed would have to leave to catch up with Goradel and Breeze, who would be well on their way to Urteau by now.

The sunlight was dimming. The mists had already come, and they hung just outside the glass window. Sazed could just barely make out depressions in the dark ground outside—cracks, in the earth. There were dozens of the cracks; the Terris people had built fences to mark them. Only a few years ago, before Kelsier had destroyed the atium crystals, men had been forced to crawl down into those cracks, seeking small geodes which had beads of atium at their centers.

Each slave who hadn't been able to find at least one geode a week had been executed. There were likely still hundreds, perhaps thousands, of corpses pinned beneath the ground, lost in deep caverns, dead without anyone knowing or caring.

*What a terrible place this was,* Sazed thought, turning away from the window as a young Terriswoman closed the shutters. Before him on the table were several ledgers which showed the resources, expenditures, and needs of the Terris people.

"I believe I suggested keeping these figures in metal," Sazed said.

"Yes, Master Keeper," said one of the elderly stewards. "We copy the important figures into a sheet of metal each evening, then check them weekly against the ledgers to make certain nothing has changed."

"That is well," Sazed said, picking through one of the ledgers, sitting in his lap. "And sanitation? Have you addressed those issues since my last visit?"

"Yes, Master Keeper," said another man. "We have prepared many more latrines, as you commanded—though we do not need them."

"There may be refugees," Sazed said. "I wish for you to be able to care for a larger population, should it become necessary. But, please. These are only suggestions, not commands. I claim no authority over you."

The group of stewards shared glances. Sazed had been busy during his time with them, which had kept him from dwelling on his melancholy thoughts. He'd made sure they had enough supplies, that they kept a good communication with Penrod in Luthadel, and that they had a system in place for settling disputes among themselves.

"Master Keeper," one of the elders finally said. "How long will you be staying?"

"I must leave in the morning, I fear," Sazed said. "I came simply to check on your needs. This is a difficult time to live, and you could be easily forgotten by those in Luthadel, I think."

"We are well, Master Keeper," said one of the others. He was the youngest of the elders, and he was only a few years younger than Sazed. Most of the men here were far older—and far wiser—than he. That they should look to him seemed wrong.

"Will you not reconsider your place with us, Master Keeper?" asked another. "We want not for food or for land. Yet, what we do lack is a leader."

"The Terris people were oppressed long enough, I think," Sazed said. "You have no need for another tyrant king."

"Not a tyrant," one said. "One of our own."

"The Lord Ruler was one of our own," Sazed said quietly,

The group of men looked down. That the Lord Ruler had proven to be Terris was a shame to all of their people.

"We need someone to guide us," one of the men said. "Even during the days of the Lord Ruler, he was not our leader. We looked to the Keeper Synod."

The Keeper Synod—the clandestine leaders of Sazed's sect. They had led the Terris people for centuries, secretly working to make certain that Feruchemy continued, despite the Lord Ruler's attempts to breed the power out of the people.

"Master Keeper," said Master Vedlew, senior of the elders.

"Yes, Master Vedlew?"

"You do not wear your copperminds."

Sazed looked down. He hadn't realized it was noticeable that, beneath his robes, he wasn't wearing the metal bracers. "They are in my pack."

"It seems odd, to me," Vedlew said, "that you should work so hard during the Lord Ruler's time, always wearing your metalminds in secret, despite the danger. Yet, now that you are free to do as you wish, you carry them in your pack."

Sazed shook his head. "I cannot be the man you wish me to be. Not right now."

"You are a Keeper."

"I was the lowest of them," Sazed said. "A rebel and a reject. They cast me from their presence. The last time I left Tathingdwen, I did so in disgrace. The common people cursed me in the quiet of their homes."

"Now they bless you, Master Sazed," said one of the men.

"I do not deserve those blessings."

"Deserve them or not, you are all we have left."

"Then we are a sorrier people than we may appear."

The room fell silent.

"There was another reason why I came here, Master Vedlew," Sazed said, looking up. "Tell me, have any of your people died recently in . . . odd circumstances?"

"Of what do you speak?" the aged Terrisman asked.

"Mist deaths," Sazed said. "Men who are killed by simply going out into the mists during the day."

"That is a tale of the skaa," one of the other men scoffed. "The mists are not dangerous."

"Indeed," Sazed said carefully. "Do you send your people out to work in them during the daylight hours, when the mists have not yet retreated for the day?"

"Of course we do," said the younger Terrisman. "Why, it would be foolish to let those hours of work pass."

Sazed found it difficult not to let his curiosity work on that fact. Terrismen weren't killed by the daymists.

What was the connection?

He tried to summon the mental energy to think on the issue, but he felt traitorously apathetic. He just wanted to hide somewhere where nobody would expect anything of him. Where he wouldn't have to solve the problems of the world, or even deal with his own religious crisis.

He almost did just that. And yet, a little part of him—a spark from before—refused to simply give up. He would at least continue his research, and would do what Elend and Vin asked of him. It wasn't *all* he could do, and it wouldn't satisfy the Terrismen who sat here, looking at him with needful expressions.

But, for the moment, it was all Sazed could offer. To stay at the Pits would be to surrender, he knew. He needed to keep moving, keep working.

"I'm sorry," he said to the men, setting aside the ledger. "But this is how it must be."

*During the early days of Kelsier's original plan, I remember how much he confused us all with his mysterious "Eleventh Metal." He claimed that there were legends of a mystical metal that would let one slay the Lord Ruler—and that Kelsier himself had located that metal through intense research.*

*Nobody really knew what Kelsier did in the years between his escape from the Pits of Hathsin and his return to Luthadel. When pressed, he simply said that he had been in "the West." Somehow in his wanderings he discovered stories that no Keeper had ever heard. Most of the crew didn't know what to make of the legends he spoke of. This might have been the first seed that made even his oldest friends begin to question his leadership.*

# 23

IN THE EASTERN LANDS, near the wastelands of grit and sand, a young boy fell to the ground inside a skaa shack. It was many years before the Collapse, and the Lord Ruler still lived. Not that the boy knew of such things. He was a dirty, ragged thing—like most other skaa children in the Final Empire. Too young to be put to work in the mines, he spent his days ducking away from his mother's care and running about with the packs of children who foraged in the dry, dusty streets.

Spook hadn't been that boy for some ten years. In a way, he was aware that he was delusional—that the fever of his wounds was causing him to come in and out of consciousness, dreams of the past filling his mind. He let them run. Staying focused required too much energy.

And so, he remembered what it felt like as he hit the ground. A large man—all men were large compared with Spook—stood over him, skin dirtied with the dust and grime of a miner. The man spat on the dirty floor beside Spook, then turned to the other skaa in the room. There were many. One was crying, the tears leaving lines of cleanliness on her cheeks, washing away the dust.

"All right," the large man said. "We have him. Now what?"

The people glanced at each other. One quietly closed the shack's door, shutting out the red sunlight.

"There's only one thing to be done," another man said. "We turn him in."

Spook looked up. He met the eyes of the crying woman. She looked away. "Wasing the where of what?" Spook demanded.

The large man spat again, setting a boot against Spook's neck, pushing him back down against the rough wood. "You shouldn't have let him run around with those street gangs, Margel. Damn boy is barely coherent now."

"What happens if we give him up?" asked one of the other men. "I mean, what if they decide that we're like him? They could have *us* executed! I've seen it before. You turn someone in, and those . . . things come searching for everyone that knew him."

"Problems like his run in the family, they do," another man said.

The room grew quiet. They all knew about Spook's family.

"They'll kill us," said the frightened man. "You know they will! I've seen them, seen them with those spikes in their eyes. Spirits of death, they are."

"We can't just let him run about," another man said. "They'll discover what he is."

"There's only one thing to be done," the large man said, pressing down on Spook's neck even harder.

The room's occupants—the ones Spook could see—nodded solemnly. They couldn't turn him in. They couldn't let him go. But, nobody would miss a skaa urchin. No Inquisitor or obligator would ask twice about a dead child found in the streets. Skaa died all the time.

That was the way of the Final Empire.

"Father," Spook whispered.

The heel came down harder. "You're not my son! My son went into the mists and never came out. You must be a mistwraith."

Spook tried to object, but his chest was pressed down too tight. He couldn't breathe, let alone speak. The room started to grow black. And yet, his ears—supernaturally sensitive, enhanced by powers he barely understood—heard something.

Coins.

The pressure on his neck grew weaker. He was able to gasp for breath, his vision returning. And there, spilled on the ground before him, was a scattering of beautiful copper coins. Skaa weren't paid for their work—the miners were given goods instead, barely enough to survive on. Yet, Spook had seen coins occasionally passing between noble hands. He'd once known a boy who had found a coin, lost in the dusty grime of the street.

A larger boy had killed him for it. Then, a nobleman had killed that boy when he'd tried to spend it. It seemed to Spook that no skaa would want coins—they were far too valuable, and far too dangerous. And yet, every eye in the room stared at that spilled bag of wealth.

"The bag in exchange for the boy," a voice said. Bodies parted to where a man sat at a table at the back of the room. He wasn't looking at Spook. He just sat, quietly spooning gruel into his mouth. His face was gnarled and twisted, like leather that had been sitting in the sun for far too long. "Well?" the gnarled man said between bites.

"Where did you get money like this?" Spook's father demanded.

"None of your business."

"We can't let the boy go," one of the skaa said. "He'll betray us! Once they catch him, he'll tell them that we knew!"

"They won't catch him," the gnarled man said, taking another bite of food. "He'll be with me, in Luthadel. Besides, if you *don't* let him go, I'll just go ahead and tell the obligators about you all." He paused, lowering his spoon, glancing at the crowd with a crusty look. "Unless you're going to kill me too."

Spook's father finally took his heel off Spook's neck as he stepped toward the gnarled stranger. However, Spook's mother grabbed her husband's arm. "Don't, Jedal," she said softly—but not too softly for Spook's enhanced ears. "He'll kill you."

"He's a traitor," Spook's father spat. "Servant in the Lord Ruler's army."

"He brought us coins. Surely taking his money is better than simply killing the boy."

Spook's father looked down at the woman. "*You* did this! You sent for your brother. You knew he'd want to take the boy!"

Spook's mother turned away.

The gnarled man finally set down his spoon, then stood. People backed away from his chair in apprehension. He walked with a pronounced limp as he crossed the room.

"Come on, boy," he said, not looking at Spook as he opened the door.

Spook rose slowly, tentatively. He glanced at his mother and father as he backed away. Jedal stooped down, finally gathering up the coins. Margel met Spook's eyes, then turned away. *This is all I can give you*, her posture seemed to say.

Spook turned, rubbing his neck, and rushed into the hot red sunlight after the stranger. The older man hobbled along, walking with a cane. He glanced at Spook as he walked.

"You have a name, boy?"

Spook opened his mouth, then stopped. His old name didn't seem like it would do any more. "Lestibournes," he finally said.

The old man didn't bat an eye. Later, Kelsier would decide that Lestibournes was too difficult to say, and name him "Spook" instead. Spook never did figure out whether or not Clubs knew how to speak Eastern street slang. Even if he did, Spook doubted that he'd understand the reference.

Lestibournes. Lefting I'm born.

Street slang for "I've been abandoned."

*I now believe that Kelsier's stories, legends, and prophecies about the "Eleventh Metal" were fabricated by Ruin. Kelsier was looking for a way to kill the Lord Ruler, and Ruin—ever subtle—provided a way.*

*That secret was indeed crucial. Kelsier's Eleventh Metal provided the very clue we needed to defeat the Lord Ruler. However, even in this, we were manipulated. The Lord Ruler knew Ruin's goals, and would never have released him from the Well of Ascension. So, Ruin needed other pawns—and for that to happen, the Lord Ruler needed to die. Even our greatest victory was shaped by Ruin's subtle fingers.*

# 24

DAYS LATER, MELAAN'S WORDS still pricked TenSoon's conscience.

*You come, proclaim dread news, then leave us to solve the problems on our own?* During his year of imprisonment, it had seemed simple. He would make his accusations, deliver his information, then accept the punishment he deserved.

But now, strangely, an eternity of imprisonment seemed like the easy way out. If he let himself be taken in such a manner, how was he better than the First Generation? He would be avoiding the issues, content to be locked away, knowing that the outside world was no longer his problem.

*Fool*, he thought. *You'll be imprisoned for eternity—or, at least, until the kandra themselves are destroyed, and you die of starvation. That's not the easy way out! By accepting your punishment, you're doing the honorable, orderly thing.*

And by so doing, he would leave MeLaan and the others to be destroyed as their leaders refused to take action. What's more, he would leave Vin without the information she needed. Even from within the Homeland, he could feel the occasional rumbles in the rock. The earthquakes were still remote, and the others likely ignored them. But TenSoon worried.

The end could be nearing. If it was, then Vin needed to know the truths about the kandra. Their origins, their beliefs. Perhaps she could use the Trust itself. Yet, if he told Vin anything more, it would mean an even greater betrayal of his people. Perhaps a human would have found it ridiculous that he would hesitate now. However, so far, his true sins had been impulsive, and he'd only later rationalized what he'd done. If he fought his way free of prison, it would be different. Willful and deliberate.

He closed his eyes, feeling the chill of his cage, which still sat alone in the large cavern—the place was mostly abandoned during the sleeping hours. What was the point? Even with the Blessing of Presence—which let TenSoon focus, despite his uncomfortable confines—he could think of no way to escape the meshed cage and its Fifth Generation guards, who all bore the Blessing of Potency. Even if he did get out of the cage, TenSoon would have to pass through dozens of small caverns. With his body mass as low as it was, he didn't have the muscles to fight, and he couldn't outrun kandra who had the Blessing of Potency. He was trapped.

In a way, this was comforting. Escape was not something he preferred to contemplate—it simply wasn't the kandra way. He had broken Contract, and deserved punishment. There was honor in facing the consequences of one's actions.

Wasn't there?

He shifted positions in his cell. Unlike that of a real human, the skin of his naked body did not become sore or chapped from the extended exposure, for he could re-form his flesh to remove wounds. However, there was little to do about the cramped feeling he got from being forced to sit in the small cage for so long.

Motion caught his attention. TenSoon turned, surprised to see VarSell and several other large Fifths approaching his cage, their quartzite stone True Bodies ominous in size and coloring.

*Time already?* TenSoon thought. With the Blessing of Presence, he was able to mentally recount the days of his imprisonment. It was nowhere near time. He frowned, noting that one of the Fifths carried a large sack. For a moment, Ten-Soon had a flash of panic as he pictured them towing him away inside the sack.

It looked filled already, however.

Dared he hope? Days had passed since his conversation with MeLaan, and while she had returned several times to look at him, they had not spoken. He'd almost forgotten his words to her, said in the hope that they would be overheard by the minions of the Second Generation. VarSell opened the cage and tossed the sack in. It clinked with a familiar sound. Bones.

"You are to wear those to the trial," VarSell said, leaning down and putting a translucent face up next to TenSoon's bars. "Orders of the Second Generation."

"What is wrong with the bones I now wear?" TenSoon asked carefully, pulling over the sack, uncertain whether to be excited or ashamed.

"They intend to break your bones as part of your punishment," VarSell said, smiling. "Something like a public execution—but where the prisoner lives through the process. It's a simple thing, I know—but the display ought to leave . . . an impression on some of the younger generations."

TenSoon's stomach twisted. Kandra could re-form their bodies, true, but they felt pain just as acutely as any human. It would take quite a severe beating to break his bones, and with the Blessing of Presence, there would be no release of unconsciousness for him.

"I still don't see the need for another body," TenSoon said, pulling out one of the bones.

"No need to waste a perfectly good set of human bones, Third," VarSell said, slamming the cage door closed. "I'll be back for your current bones in a few hours."

The leg bone he pulled out was not that of a human, but a dog. A large wolfhound. It was the very body TenSoon had been wearing when he'd returned to the Homeland over a year before. He closed his eyes, holding the smooth bone in his fingers.

A week ago, he'd spoken of how much he despised these bones, hoping that the Second Generation's spies would carry the news back to their masters. The Second Generation was far more traditional than MeLaan, and even she had found the thought of wearing a dog's body distasteful. To the Seconds, forcing TenSoon to wear an animal's body would be supremely degrading.

That was exactly what TenSoon had been counting on.

"You'll look good, wearing that," VarSell said, standing to leave. "When your punishment comes, everyone will be able to see you for what you really are. No *kandra* would break his Contract."

TenSoon rubbed the thighbone with a reverent finger, listening to VarSell's laughter. The Fifth had no way of knowing that he'd just given TenSoon the means he needed to escape.

*The Balance. Is it real?*

*We've almost forgotten this little bit of lore. Skaa used to talk about it, before the Collapse. Philosophers discussed it a great deal in the third and fourth centuries, but by Kelsier's time, it was mostly a forgotten topic.*

*But it was real. There was a physiological difference between skaa and nobility. When the Lord Ruler altered mankind to make them more capable of dealing with ash, he changed other things as well. Some groups of people—the noblemen—were created to be less fertile, but taller, stronger, and more intelligent. Others—the skaa—were made to be shorter, hardier, and to have many children.*

*The changes were slight, however, and after a thousand years of interbreeding, the differences had largely been erased.*

# 25

"FADREX CITY," ELEND SAID, standing in his customary place near the narrowboat's prow. Ahead, the broad Conway Canal—the primary canal route to the west—continued into the distance, turning to the northwest. To Elend's left, the ground rose in a broken incline, forming a set of steep rock formations. He could see them rising much higher in the distance.

Closer to the canal, however, a broad city was nestled in the very center of a large group of rock formations. The deep red and orange rocks were the type left behind when wind and rain wore away weaker sections of stone, and many of them reached high, like spires. Others formed jagged, hedge-like barriers—like stacks of enormous blocks that had been fused together, reaching some thirty and forty feet into the air.

Elend could barely see the tips of the city's buildings over the stone formations. Fadrex had no formal city wall, of course—only Luthadel had been allowed one of those—but the rising rocks around the city formed a set of terrace-like natural fortifications.

Elend had been to the city before. His father had made certain to introduce him in all of the Final Empire's main cultural centers. Fadrex hadn't been one of those, but it had been on the way to Tremredare, once known as the capital of the West. In forging his new kingdom, however, Cett had ignored Tremredare, instead establishing his capital in Fadrex. A clever move, in Elend's estimation—Fadrex was smaller, more defensible, and had been a major supply station for numerous canal routes.

"The city looks different from the last time I was here," Elend said.

"Trees," Ham said, standing beside him. "Fadrex used to have trees growing on the rocky shelves and plateaus." Ham glanced at him. "They're ready for us. They cut down the trees to provide a better killing field and to keep us from sneaking up close."

Elend nodded. "Look down there."

Ham squinted, though it obviously took him a moment to pick out what Elend's tin-enhanced eyes had noticed. On the northern side of the city—the one closest to the main canal route—the rock terraces and shelves fell down into a natural canyon. Perhaps twenty feet across, it was the only way into the city, and the defenders had cut several troughs into the floor. They were bridged at the moment, of course, but getting through that narrow entryway, with pits in front of the army and archers presumably firing from the rocky shelves above, with a gate at the end . . .

"Not bad," Ham said. "I'm just glad they decided not to drain the canal on us."

As they'd moved west, the land had risen—requiring the convoy to pass through several massive lock mechanisms. The last four had been jammed intentionally, requiring hours of effort to get them working.

"They rely on it too much," Elend said. "If they survive our siege, they'll need to ship in supplies. Assuming any can be had."

Ham fell silent. Finally, he turned, looking back up the dark canal behind them. "El," he said. "I don't think that much more will be traveling this canal. The boats barely made it this far—there's too much ash clogging it. If we go home, we'll do so on foot."

" 'If' we go home?"

Ham shrugged. Despite the colder western weather, he still wore only a vest. Now that Elend was an Allomancer, he could finally understand the habit. While burning pewter, Elend barely felt the chill, though several of the soldiers had complained about it in the mornings.

"I don't know, El," Ham finally said. "It just seems portentous to me. Our canal closing behind us as we travel. Kind of like fate is trying to strand us here."

"Ham," Elend said, "*everything* seems portentous to you. We'll be fine."

Ham shrugged.

"Organize our forces," Elend said, pointing. "Dock us in that inlet over there, and set up camp on the mesa."

Ham nodded. He was still looking backward, however. Toward Luthadel, which they had left behind.

*They don't fear the mists*, Elend thought, staring up through the darkness at the rocky formations that marked the entrance into Fadrex City. Bonfires blazed up there, lighting the night. Often, such lights were futile—signifying man's fear of the mists. These fires were different, somehow. They seemed a warning; a bold declaration of confidence. They burned brightly, high, as if floating in the sky.

Elend turned, walking into his illuminated commander's tent, where a small group of people sat waiting for him. Ham, Cett, and Vin. Demoux was absent, still recovering from mistsickness.

*We're spread thin,* Elend thought. *Spook and Breeze in the North, Penrod back at Luthadel, Felt watching the storage cache in the East . . .*

"All right," Elend said, letting the tent flaps close behind him. "Looks like they're holed up in there pretty well."

"Initial scout reports are in, El," Ham said. "We're guessing about twenty-five thousand defenders."

"Not as many as I expected," Elend said.

"That bastard Yomen has to keep control of the rest of my kingdom," Cett said. "If he pulled all of his troops into the capital, the other cities would overthrow him."

"What?" Vin asked, sounding amused. "You think they'd rebel and switch back to your side?"

"No," Cett said, "they'd rebel and try to take over the kingdom themselves! That's the way this works. Now that the Lord Ruler is gone, every little lord or petty obligator with half a taste of power thinks he can run a kingdom. Hell, I tried it—so did you."

"We were successful," Ham pointed out.

"And so was Lord Yomen," Elend said, folding his arms. "He's held this kingdom since Cett marched on Luthadel."

"He all but forced me out," Cett admitted. "He had half the nobility turned against me before I even struck toward Luthadel. I said I was leaving him in charge, but we both knew the truth. He's a clever one—clever enough to know he can hold that city against a larger force, letting him spread his troops out to maintain the kingdom, and to endure a longer siege without running out of supplies."

"Unfortunately, Cett's probably right," Ham said. "Our initial reports placed Yomen's forces at somewhere around eighty thousand men. He'd be a fool to not have a few units within striking distance of our camp. We'll have to be wary of raids."

"Double the guards and triple scout patrols," Elend said, "particularly during the early morning hours, when the daymist is out to obscure, but the sun is up to provide light."

Ham nodded.

"Also," Elend said thoughtfully, "order the men to stay in their tents during the mists—but tell them to be ready for a raid. If Yomen thinks that we're afraid to come out, perhaps we can bait one of his 'surprise' attacks against us."

"Clever," Ham said.

"That won't get us past those natural walls, though," Elend said, folding his arms. "Cett, what do you say?"

"Hold the canal," Cett said. "Post sentries up around those upper rock formations to make certain that Yomen doesn't resupply the city via secret means. Then, move on."

"What?" Ham asked with surprise.

Elend eyed Cett, trying to decide what the man meant. "Attack surrounding cities? Leave a force here that's large enough to stymie a siege-break, then capture other parts of his territory?"

Cett nodded. "Most of the cities around here aren't fortified at all. They'd cave in without a fight."

"A good suggestion," Elend said. "But we won't do it."

"Why not?" Cett asked.

"This isn't just about conquering your homeland back, Cett," Elend said. "Our primary reason for coming here is to secure that storage cache—and I hope to do that without resorting to pillaging the countryside."

Cett snorted. "What do you expect to find in there? Some magical way to stop the ash? Even atium wouldn't do that."

"Something's in there," Elend said. "It's the only hope we have."

Cett shook his head. "You've been chasing a puzzle left by the Lord Ruler for the better part of a year, Elend. Hasn't it ever occurred to you that the man was a sadist? There's no secret. No magical way out of this. If we're going to survive the next few years, we're going to have to do it on our own—and that means securing the Western Dominance. The plateaus in this area represent some of the most elevated farmland in the empire—and higher altitude means closer to the sun. If you're going to find plants that survive despite the daymists, you'll have to grow them here."

They were good arguments. *But I can't give up*, Elend thought. *Not yet.* Elend had read the reports of supplies back in Luthadel, and had seen the projections. Ash was killing crops as much or more than the mists were. More land wouldn't save his people—they needed something else. Something that, he hoped, the Lord Ruler left for them.

The Lord Ruler didn't hate his people, and he wouldn't want them to die out, even if he were defeated. He left food, water, supplies. And, if he knew secrets, he would have hidden them in the caches. There will be something here.

There has to be.

"The cache remains our primary target," Elend said. To the side, he could see Vin smiling.

"Fine," Cett said, sighing. "Then you know what we have to do. This siege could take a while."

Elend nodded. "Ham, send our engineers in under cover of mist. See if they can find a way for our troops to cross those troughs. Have the scouts search out streams that might run into the city—Cett, presumably you can help us locate some of these. And, once we get spies into the city, have them search out food stores that we can ruin."

"A good start," Cett said. "Of course, there's one easy way to sow chaos in that city, to perhaps make them surrender without a fight . . ."

"We're not going to assassinate King Yomen," Elend said.

"Why not?" Cett demanded. "We've got *two* Mistborn. We'll have no difficulty killing off the Fadrex leadership."

"We don't work that way," Ham said, face growing dark.

"Oh?" Cett asked. "That didn't stop Vin from tearing a hole through my army and attacking *me* back before we teamed up."

"That was different," Ham said.

"No," Elend said, interrupting. "It wasn't. The reason we're not going to assassinate Yomen, Cett, is because I want to try diplomacy first."

"Diplomacy?" Cett asked. "Didn't we just march an army of forty thousand soldiers on his city? That's not a diplomatic move."

"True," Elend said, nodding. "But we haven't attacked, not yet. Now that I'm here in person, I might as well try talking before sending out knives in the night. We might be able to persuade Lord Yomen that an alliance will benefit him more than a war."

"If we make an alliance," Cett said, leaning forward in his chair, "I don't get my city back."

"I know," Elend said.

Cett frowned.

"You seem to be forgetting yourself, Cett," Elend said. "You did not 'team up' with me. You knelt before me, offering up oaths of service in exchange for not getting executed. Now, I appreciate your allegiance, and I *will* see you rewarded with a kingdom to rule under me. However, you don't get to choose where that kingdom is, nor when I will grant it."

Cett paused, sitting in his chair, one arm resting on his useless, paralyzed legs. Finally, he smiled. "Damn, boy. You've changed a lot in the year I've known you."

"So everyone is fond of telling me," Elend said. "Vin. You think you can get into the city?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I hope that was meant to be rhetorical."

"It was meant to be polite," Elend said. "I need you to do some scouting. We know next to nothing about what's been going on in this dominance lately—we've focused all of our efforts on Urteau and the South."

Vin shrugged. "I can go poke around a bit. I don't know what you expect me to find."

"Cett," Elend said, turning, "I need names. Informants, or perhaps some noblemen that might still be loyal to you."

"Noblemen?" Cett asked, amused. "Loyal?"

Elend rolled his eyes. "How about some that could be bribed to pass on a little information."

"Sure," Cett said. "I'll write up some names and locations. Assuming they still live in the city. Hell, assuming they're even still alive. Can't count on much these days."

Elend nodded. "We won't take any further action until we have more information. Ham, make certain the soldiers dig in well—use the field fortifications that Demoux taught them. Cett, see that those guard patrols get set up, and make certain our Tineyes remain alert and on watch. Vin will scout and see if she can sneak into the cache like she did in Urteau. If we know what's in there, then we can better judge whether to gamble on trying to conquer the city or not."

The various members of the group nodded, understanding that the meeting was over. As they left, Elend stepped back out into the mists, looking up at the distant bonfires burning on the rocky heights.

Quiet as a sigh, Vin stepped up to his side, following his gaze. She stood for a few moments. Then she glanced to the side, where a pair of soldiers were entering the tent to carry Cett away. Her eyes narrowed in displeasure.

"I know," Elend said quietly, knowing that she was thinking of Cett again and his influence over Elend.

"You didn't deny that you might turn to assassination," Vin said softly.

"Hopefully it won't come to that."

"And if it does?"

"Then I'll make the decision that is best for the empire."

Vin was silent for a moment. Then, she glanced at the fires up above.

"I could come with you," Elend offered.

She smiled, then kissed him. "Sorry," she said. "But you're noisy."

"Come now. I'm not *that* bad."

"Yes you are," Vin said. "Plus, you smell."

"Oh?" he asked, amused. "What do I smell like?"

"An emperor. A Tineye would pick you out in seconds."

Elend raised his eyebrows. "I see. And, don't you possess an imperial scent as well?"

"Of course I do," Vin said, wrinkling her nose. "But I know how to get rid of it. Either way, you're not good enough to go with me, Elend. I'm sorry."

Elend smiled. *Dear, blunt Vin.*

Behind him, the soldiers left the tent, carrying Cett. An aide walked up, delivering to Elend a short list of informants and noblemen who might be willing to talk. Elend passed it to Vin. "Have fun," he said.

She dropped a coin between them, kissed him again, then shot up into the night.

*I am only just beginning to understand the brilliance of the Lord Ruler's cultural synthesis. One of the benefits afforded him by being both immortal and—for all relevant purposes—omnipotent was a direct and effective influence on the evolution of the Final Empire.*

*He was able to take elements from a dozen different cultures and apply them to his new, "perfect" society. For instance, the architectural brilliance of the Khlenni builders is manifest in the keeps that the high nobility construct. Khlenni fashion sense—suits for gentlemen, gowns for ladies—is another thing the Lord Ruler decided to appropriate.*

*I suspect that despite his hatred of the Khlenni people—of whom Alendi was one—Rashek had a deep-seated envy of them as well. The Terris of the time were pastoral herdsmen, the Khlenni cultured cosmopolitans.*

*However ironic, it is logical that Rashek's new empire would mimic the high culture of the people he hated.*

# 26

SPOOK STOOD IN HIS LITTLE ONE-ROOM LAIR, a room that was—of course—illegal. The Citizen forbade such places, places where a man could live unaccounted, unwatched. Fortunately, forbidding such places didn't eliminate them.

It only made them more expensive.

Spook was lucky. He barely remembered leaping from the burning building, clutching six Allomantic vials, coughing and bleeding. He didn't at all remember making it back to his lair. He should probably be dead. Even surviving the fires, he should have been sold out—if the proprietor of his little illegal inn had realized who Spook was and what he'd escaped, the promise of reward would undoubtedly have been irresistible.

But, Spook had survived. Perhaps the other thieves in the lair thought he had been on the wrong side of a robbery. Or, perhaps they simply didn't care. Either way, he was able to stand in front of the room's small mirror, shirt off, looking in wonder at his wound.

*I'm alive,* he thought. *And . . . I feel pretty good.*

He stretched, rolling his arm in its socket. The wound hurt far less than it should have. In the very dim light, he was able to see the cut, scabbed over and healing. Pewter burned in his stomach—a beautiful complement to the familiar flame of tin.

He was something that shouldn't exist. In Allomancy, people either had just one of the eight basic powers, or they had all fourteen powers. One or all. Never two. Yet, Spook had tried to burn other metals without success. Somehow, he had been given pewter alone to complement his tin. Amazing as that was, it was overshadowed by a greater wonder.

He had seen Kelsier's spirit. The Survivor had returned and had shown himself to Spook.

Spook had no idea how to react to that event. He wasn't particularly religious, but . . . well, a dead man—one some called a god—had appeared to him and saved his life. He worried that it had been an hallucination. But, if that were so, how had he gained the power of pewter?

He shook his head, reaching for his bandages, but paused as something twinkled in the mirror's reflection. He stepped closer, relying—as always—

upon starlight from outside to provide illumination. With his extreme tin senses, it was easy to see the bit of metal sticking from the skin in his shoulder, even though it only protruded a tiny fraction of an inch.

*The tip of that man's sword,* Spook realized, *the one that stabbed me. It broke—the end must have gotten embedded in my skin.* He gritted his teeth, reaching to pull it free.

"No," Kelsier said. "Leave it. It, like the wound you bear, is a sign of your survival."

Spook started. He glanced about, but there was no apparition this time. Just the voice. Yet, he was certain he'd heard it.

"Kelsier?" he hesitantly asked.

There was no response.

*Am I going mad?* Spook wondered. *Or . . . is it like the Church of the Survivor teaches?* Could it be that Kelsier had become something greater, something that watched over his followers? And, if so, did Kelsier *always* watch him? That felt a little bit . . . unsettling. However, if it brought him the power of pewter, then who was he to complain?

Spook turned and put his shirt on, stretching his arm again. He needed more information. How long had he been delirious? What was Quellion doing? Had the others from the crew arrived yet?

Taking his mind off of his strange visions for the moment, he slipped out of his room and onto the dark street. As lairs went, his wasn't all that impressive—a room behind the hidden door in a slum alleyway wall. Still, it was better than living in one of the crowded shanties he passed as he made his way through the dark, mist-covered city.

The Citizen liked to pretend that everything was perfect in his little utopia, but Spook had not been surprised to find that it had slums, just like every other city he'd ever visited. There were many people in Urteau who, for one reason or another, weren't fond of living in the parts of town where the Citizen could keep watch on them. These had aggregated in a place known as the Harrows, a particularly cramped canal far from the main trenches.

The Harrows was clogged with a disorderly mash of wood and cloth and bodies. Shacks leaned against shacks, buildings leaned precariously against earth and rock, and the entire mess piled on top of itself, creeping up the canal walls toward the dark sky above. Here and there, people slept under only a dirty sheet stretched between two bits of urban flotsam—their millennium-old fear of the mists giving way before simple necessity.

Spook shuffled down the crowded canal. Some of the piles of half-buildings reached so high and wide that the sky narrowed to a mere crack far above, shining down its midnight light, too dim to be of use to any eyes but Spook's.

Perhaps the chaos was why the Citizen chose not to visit the Harrows. Or, perhaps he was simply waiting to clean them out until he had a better grip on his kingdom. Either way, his strict society, mixed with the poverty it was creating, made for a curiously open nighttime culture. The Lord Ruler had patrolled the streets. The Citizen, however, preached that the mists were of Kelsier—and so could hardly forbid people to go out in them. Urteau was the first place in Spook's experience where a person could walk down a street at midnight and find a small tavern open and serving drinks. He moved inside, cloak pulled tight. There was no proper bar, just a group of dirty men sitting around a dug-out firepit in the ground. Others sat on stools or boxes in the corners. Spook found an empty box, and sat down.

Then he closed his eyes and listened, filtering through the conversations. He could hear them all, of course—even with his earplugs in. So much about being a Tineye wasn't about what you could hear, but what you could ignore.

Footsteps thumped near him, and he opened his eyes. A man wearing trousers sewn with a dozen different buckles and chains stopped in front of Spook, then thumped a bottle on the ground. "Everyone drinks," the man said. "I have to pay to keep this place warm. Nobody just sits for free."

"What have you got?" Spook asked.

The bartender kicked the bottle. "House Venture special vintage. Aged fifty years. Used to go for six hundred boxings a bottle."

Spook smiled, fishing out a pek—a coin minted by the Citizen to be worth a fraction of a copper clip. A combination of economic collapse and the Citizen's disapproval of luxury meant that a bottle of wine that had once been worth hundreds of boxings was now practically worthless.

"Three for the bottle," the bartender said, holding out his hand.

Spook brought out two more coins. The bartender left the bottle on the floor, and so Spook picked it up. He had been offered no corkscrew or cup—both likely cost extra, though this vintage of wine did have a cork that stuck up a few inches above the bottle's lip. Spook eyed it.

*I wonder. . . .*

He had his pewter on a low burn—not flared like his tin. Just there enough to help with the fatigue and the pain. In fact, it did its job so well that he'd nearly forgotten about his wound during the walk to the bar. He stoked the pewter a bit, and the rest of the wound's pain vanished. Then, Spook grabbed the cork, pulling it with a quick jerk. It came free of the bottle with barely a hint of resistance.

Spook tossed the cork aside. *I think I'm going to like this*, he thought with a smile.

He took a drink of the wine straight from the bottle, listening for interesting conversations. He had been sent to Urteau to gather information, and he wouldn't be much use to Elend or the others if he stayed lying in bed. Dozens of muffled conversations echoed in the room, most of them harsh. This wasn't the kind of place where one found men loyal to the local government—which was precisely why Spook had found his way to the Harrows in the first place.

"They say he's going to get rid of coins," a man whispered at the main firepit. "He's making plans to gather them all up, keep them in his treasury."

"That's foolish," another voice replied. "He minted his own coins—why take them now?"

"It's true," the first voice said. "I seen him speak on it myself. He says that men shouldn't have to rely on coins—that we should have everything together, not having to buy and sell."

"The Lord Ruler never let skaa have coins either," another voice grumbled. "Seems that the longer old Quellion is in charge, the more he looks like that rat the Survivor killed."

Spook raised an eyebrow, taking another chug of wine. Vin, not Kelsier, was the one who had killed the Lord Ruler. Urteau, however, was a significant distance from Luthadel. They probably hadn't even known about the Lord Ruler's fall until weeks after it happened. Spook moved on to another conversation, searching for those who spoke in furtive whispers. He found exactly what he was listening for in a couple of men sharing a bottle of fine wine as they sat on the floor in the corner.

"He has most everyone catalogued now," the man whispered. "But he's not done yet. He has those scribes of his, the genealogists. They're asking questions, interrogating neighbors and friends, trying to trace everyone back five generations, looking for noble blood."

"But, he only kills those who have noblemen back two generations."

"There's going to be a division," the other voice whispered. "Every man who is pure back five generations will be allowed to serve in the government. Everyone else will be forbidden. It's a time when a man could make a great deal of coin if he could help people hide certain events in their past."

*Hum*, Spook thought, taking a swig of wine. Oddly, the alcohol didn't seem to be affecting him very much. *The pewter*, he realized. *It strengthens the body, makes it more resistant to pains and wounds. And, perhaps, helps it avoid intoxication?*

He smiled. The ability to drink and not grow drunk—an advantage of pewter that nobody had told him about. There had to be a way to use such a skill.

He turned his attention to other bar patrons, searching for useful tidbits. Another conversation spoke of work in the mines. Spook felt a chill and a flicker of remembrance. The men spoke of a coal mine, not a gold mine, but the grumbles were the same. Cave-ins. Dangerous gas. Stuffy air and uncaring taskmasters.

*That would have been my life,* Spook thought. *If Clubs hadn't come for me.*

To this day, he still didn't understand. Why had Clubs traveled so far—visiting the distant eastern reaches of the Final Empire—to rescue a nephew he'd never met? Surely there had been young Allomancers in Luthadel who had been equally deserving of his protection.

Clubs had spent a fortune, traveled a long distance in an empire where skaa were forbidden to leave their home cities, and had risked betrayal by Spook's father. For that, Clubs had earned the loyalty of a wild street boy who—before that time—had run from any authority figure who tried to control him.

*What would it be like?* Spook thought. *If Clubs hadn't come for me, I would never have been in Kelsier's crew. I might have hidden my Allomancy and refused to use it. I might have simply gone to the mines, living my life like any other skaa.*

The men commiserated about the deaths of several who had fallen to a cave-in. It seemed that for them, little had changed since the days of the Lord Ruler. Spook's life would have been like theirs, he suspected. He'd be out in those Eastern wastes, living in sweltering dust when outside, working in cramped confines the rest of the time.

Most of his life, it seemed that he had been a flake of ash, pushed around by whatever strong wind came his way. He'd gone where people told him to go, done what they'd wanted him to. Even as an Allomancer, Spook had lived his life as a nobody. The others had been great men. Kelsier had organized an impossible revolution. Vin had struck down the Lord Ruler himself. Clubs had led the armies of revolution, becoming Elend's foremost general. Sazed was a Keeper, and had carried the knowledge of centuries. Breeze had moved waves of people with his clever tongue and powerful Soothing, and Ham was a powerful soldier. But Spook, he had simply watched, not really doing anything.

Until the day he ran away, leaving Clubs to die.

Spook sighed, looking up. "I just want to be able to help," he whispered.

"You can," Kelsier's voice said. "You can be great. Like I was."

Spook started, glancing about. But, nobody else appeared to have heard the voice. Spook sat back uncomfortably. However, the words made sense. Why did he always berate himself so much? True, Kelsier hadn't picked him to be on the crew, but now the Survivor himself had appeared to Spook and granted him the power of pewter.

*I could help the people of this city,* he thought. *Like Kelsier helped those of Luthadel. I could do something important: bring Urteau into Elend's empire, deliver the storage cache as well as the loyalty of the people.*

*I ran away once. I don't ever have to do that again. I* won't *ever do that again!*

Smells of wine, bodies, ash, and mold hung in the air. Spook could feel the very grain in the stool beneath him despite his clothing, the movements of people throughout the building shuffling and vibrating the ground beneath his feet. And, with all of this, pewter burned inside of him. He flared it, made it strong alongside his tin. The bottle cracked in his hand, his fingers pressing too hard, though he released it quickly enough to keep it from shattering. It fell toward the floor, and he snatched it from the air with his other hand, the arm moving with blurring quickness.

Spook blinked, awed at the speed of his own motions. Then, he smiled. *I'm going to need more pewter,* he thought.

"That's him."

Spook froze. Several of the conversations in the room had stopped, and to his ears—accustomed to a cacophony—the growing silence was eerie. He glanced to the side. The men who had been speaking of the mines were looking at Spook, speaking softly enough that they probably assumed he couldn't hear them.

"I'm telling you I saw him get *run through* by the guards. Everyone thought he was dead even before they burned him."

*Not good*, Spook thought. He hadn't thought himself memorable enough for people to notice. But . . . then again, he had attacked a group of soldiers in the middle of the city's busiest market.

"Durn's been talking about him," the voice continued. "Said he was of the Survivor's own crew . . ."

*Durn,* Spook thought. *So he does know who I really am. Why has he been telling people my secrets? I thought he was more careful than that.*

Spook stood up as nonchalantly as he could, then fled into the night.

*Yes, Rashek made good use of his enemy's culture in developing the Final Empire. Yet, other elements of imperial culture were a complete contrast to Khlennium and its society. The lives of the skaa were modeled after the slave peoples of the Canzi. The Terris stewards resembled the servant class of Urtan, which Rashek conquered relatively late in his first century of life.*

*The imperial religion, with its obligators, actually appears to have arisen from the bureaucratic mercantile system of the Hallant, a people who were very focused on weights, measures, and permissions. The fact that the Lord Ruler would base his Church on a financial institution shows—in my opinion—that he worried less about true faith in his followers, and more about stability, loyalty, and quantifiable measures of devotion.*

# 27

VIN SHOT THROUGH THE DARK NIGHT AIR. Mist swirled about her, a spinning, seething storm of white upon black. It darted close to her body, as if snapping at her, but never came closer than a few inches away—as if blown back by some current of air. She remembered a time when the mist had skimmed close to her skin, rather than being repelled. The transition had been gradual; it had taken months before she had realized the change.

She wore no mistcloak. It felt odd to be leaping about in the mists without one of the garments, but in truth, she was quieter this way. Once, the mistcloak had been useful in making guards or thieves turn away at her passing. However, like the era of friendly mists, that time had passed. So, instead, she wore only a black shirt and trousers, both closely fitted to her body to keep the sounds of flapping fabric to a minimum. As always, she wore no metal save for the coins in her pouch and an extra vial of metals in her sash. She pulled out a coin now—its familiar weight wrapped in a layer of cloth—and threw it beneath her. A Push against the metal sent it slamming into the rocks below, but the cloth dampened the sound of its striking. She used the Push to slow her descent, popping her up slightly into the air.

She landed carefully on a rock ledge, then Pulled the coin back into her hand. She crept across the rocky shelf, fluffy ash beneath her toes. A short distance away, a small group of guards sat in the darkness, whispering quietly, watching Elend's army camp—which was now little more than a haze of campfire light in the mists. The guards spoke of the spring chill, commenting that it seemed colder this year than it had in previous ones. Though Vin was barefoot, she rarely noticed the cold. A gift of pewter.

Vin burned bronze, and heard no pulsings. None of the men were burning metals. One of the reasons Cett had come to Luthadel in the first place was because he'd been unable to raise enough Allomancers to protect him from Mist-born assassins. No doubt Lord Yomen had experienced similar trouble recruiting Allomancers, and he probably wouldn't have sent those he did have out into the cold to watch an enemy camp.

Vin crept past the guard post. She didn't need Allomancy to keep her quiet—she and her brother, Reen, had sometimes been burglars, sneaking into homes. She had a lifetime of training that Elend would never know or understand. He could practice with pewter all he liked—and he really was getting better—but he'd never be able to replicate instincts honed by a childhood spent sneaking to stay alive.

As soon as she was past the guard post, she jumped into the mists again, using her sound-deadened coins as anchors. She gave the fires at the front of the city a wide berth, instead rounding to the rear of Fadrex. Most of the patrols would be at the front of the city, for the back was protected by the steep walls of the rising rock formations. Of course, that barely inconvenienced Vin, and she soon found herself dropping several hundred feet through the air along a rock wall before landing in an alley at the very back of the city.

She took to the roofs and did a quick survey, jumping from street to street in wide Allomantic leaps. She was quickly impressed with Fadrex's size. Elend had called the city "provincial," and Vin had imagined a town barely larger than a village. Once they'd arrived, she'd instead begun to imagine a barricaded, austere city—more like a fort. Fadrex was neither.

She should have realized that Elend—who had been raised in the sprawling metropolis of Luthadel—would have a skewed concept of what constituted a large city. Fadrex was plenty big. Vin counted several skaa slums, a smattering of noble mansions, and even two Luthadel-style keeps. The grand stone structures sported the typical arrangement of stained-glass windows and soaring, buttressed walls. These were undoubtedly the homes of the most important nobles in the city.

She landed on a rooftop near one of the keeps. Most of the buildings in the city were only a single story or two, which was quite a change from the high tenements of Luthadel. They were spaced out a bit more, and tended to be flat and squat, rather than tall and peaked. That only made the massive keep seem so much larger by comparison. The building was rectangular, with a row of three peaked towers rising from each end. Ornamented white stonework ran around the entire perimeter at the top.

And the walls, of course, were lined with beautiful stained-glass windows, lit from inside. Vin crouched on a low rooftop, looking at the colored beauty of the swirling mists. For a moment, she was taken back to a time three years before, when she had attended balls in keeps like this one in Luthadel as part of Kelsier's plan to overthrow the Final Empire. She had been an uncertain, nervous thing back then, worried that her newfound world of a trustworthy crew and beautiful parties would collapse around her. And, in a way, it had—for that world was gone. She had helped to destroy it.

Yet, during those months, she had been content. Perhaps more content than any other time in her life. She loved Elend, and was glad life had progressed to the point where she could call him husband, but there had been a delicious innocence about her early days with the crew. Dances spent with Elend reading at her table, pretending to ignore her. Nights spent learning the secrets of Allomancy. Evenings spent sitting around the table at Clubs's shop, sharing laughter with the crew. They'd faced the challenge of planning something as large as the fall of an empire, yet felt no burden of leadership or weight of responsibility for the future.

Somehow, she had grown into a woman in between the fall of kings and collapse of worlds. Once she had been terrified of change. Then she had been terrified of losing Elend. Now her fears were more nebulous—worries of what would come after she was gone, worries of what would happen to the people of the empire if she failed to divine the secrets she sought.

She turned from her contemplation of the large, castle-like keep, Pushing herself off of a chimney brace and into the night. Attending those balls in Luthadel had changed her dramatically, leaving a residual effect that she'd never been able to shake. Something within her had responded instantly to the dancing and the parties. For the longest time, she'd struggled to understand how that part of her fit into the rest of her life. She still wasn't certain she knew the answer. Was Valette Renoux—the girl she had pretended to be at the balls—really a part of Vin, or just a fabrication devised to serve Kelsier's plot?

Vin bounded across the city, making cursory notes of fortifications and troop placements. Ham and Demoux would probably find a way to get true military spies into the city eventually, but they'd want to hear preliminary information from Vin. She also made note of living conditions. Elend had hoped that the city would be struggling, a factor that his siege would exacerbate, making Lord Yomen more likely to capitulate.

She found no obvious signs of mass starvation or disrepair—though it was difficult to tell much at night. Still, the city streets were kept swept of ash, and a remarkable number of the noble homes appeared occupied. She would have expected the noble population to be the first to bolt at news of an approaching army.

Frowning to herself, Vin completed her loop of the city, landing in a particular square that Cett had suggested. The mansions here were separated from each other by large grounds and cultivated trees; she walked along the street, counting them off. At the fourth mansion, she leaped up and over the gate, then moved up the hill to the house.

She wasn't certain what she expected to find—Cett had been absent from the city for two years, after all. Yet, he'd indicated that this informant was the most likely to be of help. True to Cett's instructions, the rear balcony of the mansion was lit. Vin waited in the darkness suspiciously, the mist cold and unfriendly, yet providing cover. She didn't trust Cett—she worried that he still bore her a grudge for her attack on his keep in Luthadel a year before. Wary, she dropped a coin and launched herself into the air.

A lone figure sat on the balcony, fitting the description in Cett's instructions. Those same instructions gave this informant the nickname Slowswift. The old man appeared to be reading by the light of a lamp. Vin frowned, but as instructed, she landed on the balcony railing, crouching beside a ladder that would have allowed a more mundane visitor to approach.

The old man did not look up from his book. He puffed quietly on a pipe, a thick woolen blanket across his knees. Vin wasn't certain if he noticed her or not. She cleared her throat.

"Yes, yes," the old man said calmly. "I shall be with you in a moment."

Vin cocked her head, looking at the strange man with his bushy eyebrows and frosty white hair. He was dressed in a nobleman's suit, with a scarf and an overcoat that bore an oversized fur collar. He appeared to be completely unconcerned by the Mistborn crouching on his railing. Eventually, the elderly man closed his book, then turned toward her. "Do you enjoy stories, young lady?"

"What kind of stories?"

"The best kind, of course," Slowswift said, tapping his book. "The kind about monsters and myths. Longtales, some call them—stories told by skaa around the fires, whispering of mistwraiths, sprites, and brollins and such."

"I don't have much time for stories," Vin said.

"Seems that fewer and fewer people do, these days." A canopy kept off the ash, but he seemed unconcerned about the mists. "It makes me wonder what is so alluring about the real world that gives them all such a fetish for it. It's not a very nice place these days."

Vin did a quick check with bronze, but the man burned nothing. What was his game? "I was told that you could give me information," she said carefully.

"That I can certainly do," the man said. Then he smiled, glancing at her. "I have a wealth of information—though somehow I suspect that you might find most of it useless."

"I'll listen to a story, if that's what it will cost."

The man chuckled. "There's no surer way to kill a story than to make it a 'cost,' young lady. What is your name, and who sent you?"

"Vin Venture," Vin said. "Cett gave me your name."

"Ah," the man said. "That scoundrel still alive?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I could chat with someone sent by an old writing friend. Come down off that railing—you're giving me vertigo."

Vin climbed down, wary. "Writing friend?"

"Cett is one of the finest poets I know, child," said Slowswift, waving her toward a chair. "We shared our work with one another for a good decade or so before politics stole him away. He didn't like stories either. To him, everything had to be gritty and 'real,' even his poetry. Seems like an attitude with which you'd agree."

Vin shrugged, sitting in the indicated chair. "I suppose."

"I find that ironic in a way you shall never understand," the old man said, smiling. "Now, what is it you wish of me?"

"I need to know about Yomen, the obligator king."

"He's a good man."

Vin frowned.

"Oh," Slowswift said. "You didn't expect that? Everyone who is your enemy must also be an evil person?"

"No," Vin said, thinking back to the days before the fall of the Final Empire. "I ended up marrying someone my friends would have named an enemy."

"Ah. Well then, Yomen is a fine man, and a decent king. A fair bit better a king than Cett ever was, I'd say. My old friend tries too hard, and that makes him brutal. He doesn't have the subtle touch that a leader needs."

"What has Yomen done that is so good, then?" Vin asked.

"He kept the city from falling apart," Slowswift said, puffing on his pipe. The smoke mixed with the swirling mists. "Plus, he gave both nobility and skaa what they wanted."

"Which was?"

"Stability, child. For a time, the world was in turmoil—neither skaa nor nobleman knew his place. Society was collapsing, and people were starving. Cett did little to stop that—he fought constantly to keep what he'd killed to obtain. Then Yomen stepped in. People saw authority in him. Before the Collapse, the Lord Ruler's Ministry had ruled, and the people were ready to accept an obligator as a leader. Yomen immediately took control of the plantations and brought food to his people, then he returned the factories to operation, started work in the Fadrex mines again, and gave the nobility a semblance of normalcy."

Vin sat quietly. Before, it might have seemed incredible to her that—after a thousand years of oppression—the people would willingly return to slavery. Yet, something similar had happened in Luthadel. They had ousted Elend, who had granted them great freedoms, and had put Penrod in charge—all because he promised them a return to what they had lost.

"Yomen is an obligator," she said.

"People like what is familiar, child."

"They're oppressed."

"Someone must lead," the old man said. "And, someone must follow. That is the way of things. Yomen has given the people something they've been crying for since the Collapse—identity. The skaa may work, they may be beaten, they may be enslaved, but they know their place. The nobility may spend their time going to balls, but there is an order to life again."

"Balls?" Vin asked. "The world is ending, and Yomen is throwing *balls?*"

"Of course," Slowswift said, taking a long, slow puff on his pipe. "Yomen rules by maintaining the familiar. He gives the people what they had before—and balls were a large part of life before the Collapse, even in a smaller city like Fadrex. Why, there is one happening tonight, at Keep Orielle."

"On the very day an army arrived to besiege the city?"

"You just pointed out that the world seems very close to disaster," the old man said, pointing at her with his pipe. "In the face of that, an army doesn't mean much. Plus, Yomen understands something even the Lord

Ruler didn't—Yomen always personally attends the balls thrown by his subjects. In doing so, he comforts and reassures them. That makes a day like this, when an army arrived, a perfect day for a ball."

Vin sat back, uncertain what to think. Of all the things she had expected to find in the city, courtly balls were very low on the list. "So," she said. "What's Yomen's weakness? Is there something in his past that we can use? What quirks of personality make him vulnerable? Where should we strike?"

Slowswift puffed quietly on his pipe, a breeze blowing mist and ash across his elderly figure.

"Well?" Vin asked.

The old man let out a breath of mist and smoke. "I just told you that I like the man, child. What would possess me to give you information to use against him?"

"You're an informant," Vin said. "That's what you do—sell information."

"I'm a storyteller," Slowswift corrected. "And not every story is meant for every set of ears. Why should I talk to those who would attack my city and overthrow my liege?"

"We'd give you a powerful position in the city once it is ours."

Slowswift snorted quietly. "If you think such things would interest me, then Cett obviously told you little regarding my temperament."

"We could pay you well."

"I sell information, child. Not my soul."

"You're not being very helpful," Vin noted.

"And tell me, dear child," he said, smiling slightly. "Why exactly should I care?"

Vin frowned. *This is,* she thought, *undoubtedly the strangest informant meeting I've ever been to.*

Slowswift puffed on his pipe. He didn't appear to be waiting for her to say anything. In fact, he seemed to think the conversation was over.

*He's a nobleman,* Vin thought. *He likes the way that the world used to be. It was comfortable. Even skaa fear change.*

Vin stood. "I'll tell you why you should care, old man. Because the ash is falling, and soon it will cover up your pretty little city. The mists kill. Earthquakes shake the landscape, and the ashmounts burn hotter and hotter. Change is looming. Eventually, even Yomen won't be able to ignore it. You hate change. I hate it too. But things can't stay the same—and that's well, for when nothing changes in your life, it's as good as being dead." She turned to leave.

"They say you'll stop the ash," the old man said quietly from behind. "Turn the sun yellow again. They call you Heir of the Survivor. Hero of Ages."

Vin paused, turning to look through the traitorous mist toward the man with his pipe and closed book. "Yes," she said.

"Seems like quite the destiny to live up to."

"It's either that or give up."

Slowswift sat silently for a moment. "Sit down, child," the old man finally said, gesturing toward the seat again.

Vin reseated herself.

"Yomen is a good man," Slowswift said, "but only a mediocre leader. He's a bureaucrat, a member of the Canton of Resource. He can make things happen—get supplies to the right places, organize construction projects. Ordinarily, that would have made him a good enough ruler. However . . ."

"Not when the world is ending," Vin said softly.

"Precisely. If what I've heard is true, then your husband is a man of vision and action. If our little city is going to survive, then we'll need to be part of what you are offering."

"What do we do, then?"

"Yomen has few weaknesses," Slowswift said. "He's a calm man, and an honorable one. However, he has an unfailing belief in the Lord Ruler and his organization."

"Even now?" Vin asked. "The Lord Ruler died!"

"Yes, so?" Slowswift asked, amused. "And your Survivor? Last I checked, he was somewhat dead as well. Didn't seem to hinder his revolution much, now did it?"

"Good point."

"Yomen is a believer," Slowswift said. "That may be a weakness; it may be a strength. Believers are often willing to attempt the seemingly impossible, then count on providence to see them through." He paused, glancing at Vin. "That sort of behavior can be a weakness *if* the belief is misplaced."

Vin said nothing. Belief in the Lord Ruler *was* misplaced. If he'd been a god, then she wouldn't have been able to kill him. In her mind, it was a rather simple matter.

"If Yomen has another weakness," Slowswift said, "it is his wealth."

"Hardly a weakness."

"It is if you can't account for its source. He got money somewhere—a suspiciously vast amount of it, far more than even local Ministry coffers should have been able to provide. Nobody knows where it came from."

*The cache,* Vin thought, perking up. *He really does have the atium!*

"You reacted a little too strongly to that one," Slowswift said, taking a puff on his pipe. "You should try to give less away when speaking with an informant."

Vin flushed.

"Anyway," the old man said, turning back to his book, "if that is all, I should like to return to my reading. Give my regards to Ashweather."

Vin nodded, rising and moving over toward the banister. As she did, however, Slowswift cleared his throat. "Usually," he noted, "there is compensation for acts such as mine."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "I thought you said that stories shouldn't cost."

"Actually," Slowswift noted, "I said that a story itself shouldn't be a cost. That is very different from the story itself costing something. And, while some will argue, I believe that a story without cost is one considered worthless."

"I'm sure that's the only reason," Vin said, smiling slightly as she tossed her bag of coins—minus a few cloth-covered ones to use for jumping—to the old man. "Gold imperials. Still good here, I assume?"

"Good enough," the old man said, tucking them away. "Good enough . . ."

Vin jumped out into the night, leaping a few houses away, burning bronze to see if she felt any Allomantic pulses from behind. She knew that her nature made her irrationally suspicious of people who appeared weak. For the longest time, she'd been convinced that Cett was Mistborn, simply because he was paraplegic. Still, she checked on Slowswift. This was one old habit that she didn't feel much need to extinguish.

No pulses came from behind. Soon, she moved on, pulling out Cett's instructions, searching out a second informant. She trusted Slowswift's words well enough, but she would like confirmation. She picked an informant on the other side of the spectrum—a beggar named Hoid whom Cett claimed could be found in a particular square late at night.

A few quick jumps brought her to the location. She landed atop a roof and looked down, scanning the area. The ash had been allowed to drift here, piling in corners, making a general mess of things. A group of lumps huddled in an alley beside the square. Beggars, without home or job. Vin had lived like that at times, sleeping in alleys, coughing up ash, hoping it wouldn't rain. She soon located a figure that wasn't sleeping like the others, but sitting quietly in the light ashfall. Her ears picked out a faint sound. The man was humming to himself, as the instructions said that he might be doing.

Vin hesitated.

She couldn't decide what it was, but something bothered her about the situation. It wasn't right. She didn't stop to think, she simply turned and jumped away. That was one of the big differences between her and Elend—she didn't always need a reason. A feeling was enough. He always wanted to tease things out and find a *why,* and she loved him for his logic. However, he would have been very frustrated about her decision to turn away from the square as she had.

Perhaps nothing bad would have happened if she'd gone into the square. Perhaps something terrible would have occurred. She would never know, nor did she need to know. As she had countless other times in her life, Vin simply accepted her instincts and moved on.

Her flight took her along a street that Cett had noted in his instructions. Curious, Vin didn't search out another informant, but instead followed the road, bounding from anchor to anchor in the pervasive mists. She landed on a cobbled street a short distance from a building with lit windows.

Blocky and utilitarian, the building was nonetheless daunting—if only because of its size. Cett had written that the Canton of Resource was the largest of the Steel Ministry buildings in the city. Fadrex had acted as a kind of way station between Luthadel and more important cities to the west. Near several main canal routes and well fortified against banditry, the city was the perfect place for a Canton of Resource regional headquarters. Yet, Fadrex hadn't been important enough to attract the Cantons of Orthodoxy or Inquisition—traditionally the most powerful of the Ministry departments.

That meant that Yomen, as head obligator at the Resource building, had been the area's top religious authority. From what Slowswift said, Vin assumed that Yomen was pretty much a standard Resource obligator: dry, boring, but terribly efficient. And so, of course, he'd chosen to make his old

Canton building into his palace. It was what Cett had suspected, and Vin could easily see that it was true. The building bustled with activity despite the late hour, and was guarded by platoons of soldiers. Yomen had probably chosen the building in order to remind everyone where his authority originated.

Unfortunately, it was also where the Lord Ruler's supply cache would be located. Vin sighed, turning from her contemplation of the building. Part of her wanted to sneak in and try to find her way down to the cavern beneath. Instead, she dropped a coin and shot herself into the air. Even Kelsier wouldn't have tried breaking into the place on his first night of scouting. She'd gotten into the one in Urteau, but it had been abandoned. She had to confer with Elend and study the city for a few days before she did something as bold as sneak into a fortified palace.

Using starlight and tin, Vin read off the name of the third and final informant. It was another nobleman, which wasn't surprising, considering Cett's own station. She began moving in the direction indicated. However, as she moved, she noticed something.

She was being followed.

She only caught hints of him behind her, obscured by the patterns of swirling mist. Tentatively, Vin burned bronze, and was rewarded with a very faint thumping from behind. An obscured Allomantic pulse. Usually, when an Allomancer burned copper—as the one behind her was doing—it made him invisible to the Allomantic bronze sense. Yet, for some reason Vin had never been able to explain, she could see through this obfuscation. The Lord Ruler had been able to do likewise, as had his Inquisitors.

Vin continued to move. The Allomancer following her obviously believed himself—or herself—invisible to Vin's senses. He moved with quick, easy bounds, following at a safe distance. He was good without being excellent, and he was obviously Mistborn, for only a Mistborn could have burned both copper and steel at the same time.

Vin wasn't surprised. She'd assumed that if there were any Mistborn in the city, her leaping would draw their attention. Just in case, she hadn't bothered burning any copper herself, leaving her pulses open to be heard by anyone—Mistborn or Seeker—who was listening. Better an enemy drawn out than one hiding in the shadows.

She increased her pace, though not suspiciously so, and the person following had to move quickly to keep up. Vin kept going toward the front of the city, as if planning to leave. As she got closer, her Allomantic senses produced twin blue lines pointing at the massive iron brackets holding the city gates to the rock at their sides. The brackets were large, substantial sources of metal, and the lines they gave off were bright and thick.

Which meant they would make excellent anchors. Flaring her pewter to keep from being crushed, Vin *Pushed* on the brackets, throwing herself backward.

Immediately, the Allomantic pulses behind her disappeared.

Vin shot through ash and mist, even her tight clothing flapping slightly from the wind. She quickly Pulled herself down to a rooftop and crouched, tense. The other Allomancer must have stopped burning his metals. But why would he do that? Did he know that she could pierce copperclouds? If he did, then why had he followed her so recklessly?

Vin felt a chill. There was something else that gave off Allomantic pulses in the night. The mist spirit. She hadn't seen it in over a year. In fact, during her last encounter with it, it had nearly killed Elend—only to then restore him by making him Mistborn.

She still didn't know how the spirit fit into all of this. It wasn't Ruin—she had felt Ruin's presence when she'd freed him at the Well of Ascension. They were different.

*I don't even know if this* was *the spirit tonight*, Vin told herself. Yet, the one tailing her had vanished so abruptly. . . .

Confused, and chilled, she Pushed herself out of the city and quickly made her way back to Elend's camp.

*One final aspect of the Lord Ruler's cultural manipulation is quite interesting: that of technology.*

*I have already mentioned that Rashek chose to use Khlenni architecture, which allowed him to construct large structures and gave him the civil engineering necessary to build a city as large as Luthadel. In other areas, however, he suppressed technological advancements. Gunpowder, for instance, was so frowned upon by Rashek that knowledge of its use disappeared almost as quickly as knowledge of the Terris religion.*

*Apparently, Rashek found it alarming that armed with gunpowder weapons, even the most common of men could be nearly as effective as archers with years of training. And so, he favored archers. The more training-dependent military technology was, the less likely it was that the* *peasant population would be able to rise up and resist him. Indeed, skaa revolts always failed in part for this very reason.*

# 28

"ARE YOU SURE IT WAS THE MIST SPIRIT?" Elend asked, frowning, a half-finished letter—scribed into a steel foil sheet—sitting on his desk before him. He'd decided to sleep in his cabin aboard the narrowboat, rather than in a tent. Not only was it more comfortable, he felt more secure with walls around him, as opposed to canvas.

Vin sighed, sitting down on their bed, pulling her legs up and setting her chin on her knees. "I don't know. I kind of got spooked, so I fled."

"Good thing," Elend said, shivering as he remembered what the mist spirit had done to him.

"Sazed was convinced that the mist spirit wasn't evil," Vin said.

"So was I," Elend said. "If you'll remember, I'm the one who walked right up to it, telling you that I felt it was friendly. That was right about the time it stabbed me."

Vin shook her head. "It was trying to keep me from releasing Ruin. It thought that if you were dying, I would take the power for myself and heal you, rather than giving it up."

"You don't know its intentions for certain, Vin. You could be connecting coincidences in your mind."

"Perhaps. However, it led Sazed to discover that Ruin was altering text."

That much, at least, was true—if, indeed, Sazed's account of the matter could be trusted. The Terrisman had been a little bit . . . inconsistent since Tindwyl had died. *No,* Elend told himself, feeling an instant stab of guilt. *No, Sazed is trustworthy. He might be struggling with his faith, but he is still twice as reliable as the rest of us.*

"Oh, Elend," Vin said softly. "There's so much we don't know. Lately, I feel like my life is a book written in a language I don't know how to read. The mist spirit is related to all this, but I can't even begin to fathom how."

"It's probably on our side," Elend said, though it was hard not to keep flashing back to memories of how it had felt to be stabbed, to feel his life fading away. To die, knowing what it would do to Vin.

He forced himself back to the conversation at hand. "You think the mist spirit tried to keep you from releasing Ruin, and Sazed says it gave him important information. That makes it the enemy of our enemy."

"For the moment," Vin said. "But, the mist spirit is much weaker than Ruin. I've felt them both. Ruin was . . . vast. Powerful. It can hear whatever we say—can see all places at once. The mist spirit is far fainter. More like a memory than a real force or power."

"Do you still think it hates you?"

Vin shrugged. "I haven't seen it in over a year. Yet, I'm pretty sure that it isn't the sort of thing that changes, and I always felt hatred and animosity from it." She paused, frowning. "That was the beginning. That night when I first saw the mist spirit was when I began to sense that the mists were no longer my home."

"Are you sure the spirit isn't what kills people and makes them sick?"

Vin nodded. "Yes, I'm sure." She was adamant about this, though Elend felt she was a bit quick to judge. Something ghost-like, moving about in the mists? It seemed like just the kind of thing that would be related to people dying suddenly in those same mists.

Of course, the people who died in the mists didn't die of stabbings, but of a shaking disease. Elend sighed, rubbing his eyes. His unfinished letter to Lord Yomen sat on his desk—he'd have to get back to it in the morning.

"Elend," Vin said. "Tonight, I told someone that I'd stop the ash from falling and turn the sun yellow."

Elend raised an eyebrow. "That informant you spoke of?"

Vin nodded. The two sat in silence.

"I never expected you to admit something like that," he finally said.

"I'm the Hero of Ages, aren't I? Even Sazed said so, before he started to go strange. It's my destiny."

"The same 'destiny' that said you would take up the power of the Well of Ascension, then release it for the greater good of mankind?"

Vin nodded.

"Vin," Elend said with a smile, "I really don't think 'destiny' is the sort of thing we need to worry about right now. I mean, we have proof that the prophecies were twisted by Ruin in order to trick people into freeing him."

"Someone has to worry about the ash," Vin said.

There wasn't much he could say to that. The logical side of him wanted to argue, claiming that they should focus on the things they could do—making a stable government, uncovering the secrets left by the Lord Ruler, securing the supplies in the caches. Yet, the constant ashfall seemed to be growing even denser. If that continued, it wouldn't be long before the sky was nothing more than a solid black storm of ash.

It just seemed so difficult to think that Vin—his wife—could do anything about the color of the sun or the falling ash. *Demoux is right,* he thought, tapping his fingers across the metallic letter to Lord Yomen. *I'm really not a very good member of the Church of the Survivor.*

He looked across the cabin at her, sitting on the bed, expression distant as she thought about things that shouldn't have to be her burden. Even after leaping about all night, even after their days spent traveling, even with her face dirtied by ash, she was beautiful.

At that moment, Elend realized something. Vin didn't need another person worshipping her. She didn't need another faithful believer like Demoux, especially not in Elend. He didn't need to be a good member of the Church of the Survivor. He needed to be a good husband.

"Well, then," he said. "Let's do it."

"What?" Vin asked.

"Save the world," Elend said. "Stop the ash."

Vin snorted quietly. "You make it sound like a joke."

"No, I'm serious," he said, standing. "If this is what you feel you must do—what you feel that you are—then let's do it. I'll help however I can."

"What about your speech before?" Vin said. "In the last storage cavern—you talked about division of labor. Me working on the mists, you working on uniting the empire."

"I was wrong."

Vin smiled, and suddenly Elend felt as if the world had been put back together just a bit.

"So," Elend said, sitting on the bed beside her. "What have you got? Any thoughts?"

Vin paused. "Yes," she said. "But I can't tell you."

Elend frowned.

"It's not that I don't trust you," Vin said. "It's Ruin. In the last storage cavern, I found a second inscription on the plate, down near the bottom. It warned me that anything I speak—or that I write—will be known by our enemy. So, if we talk too much, *he* will know our plans."

"That makes it a bit difficult to work on the problem together."

Vin took his hands. "Elend, do you know why I finally agreed to marry you?"

Elend shook his head.

"Because I realized that you trusted me," Vin said. "Trusted me as nobody ever has before. On that night, when I fought Zane, I decided that I had to give my trust to you. This force that's destroying the world, we have something that it can never understand. I don't necessarily need your help; I need your trust. Your hope. It's something I've never had of myself, and I rely on yours."

Elend nodded slowly. "You have it."

"Thank you."

"You know," Elend added, "during those days when you refused to marry me, I constantly thought about how strange you were."

She raised an eyebrow. "Well, that's romantic."

Elend smiled. "Oh, come on. You have to admit that you're unusual, Vin. You're like some strange mixture of a noblewoman, a street urchin, and a cat. Plus, you've managed—in our short three years together—to kill not only my god, but my father, my brother, *and* my fiancée. That's kind of like a homicidal hat trick. It's a strange foundation for a relationship, wouldn't you say?"

Vin just rolled her eyes.

"I'm just glad I don't have any other close relatives," Elend said. Then, he eyed her. "Except for you, of course."

"I'm not about to drown myself, if that's what you're getting at."

"No," Elend said. "I'm sorry. I'm just . . . well, you know. Anyway, I was explaining something. In the end, I stopped worrying about how strange you seemed. I realized that it didn't really *matter* if I understood you, because I trusted you. Does that make sense? Either way, I guess I'm saying that I agree. I don't really know what you're doing, and I don't have any clue how you're going to achieve it. But, well, I trust that you'll do it."

Vin pulled close to him.

"I just wish there were something I could do to help," Elend said.

"Then take the whole numbers part," Vin said, frowning distastefully. Though she'd been the one to think something was odd about the percentages of those who fell to the mists, Elend knew that she found numbers troublesome. She didn't have the training, or the practice, to deal with them.

"You're sure that's even related?" Elend asked.

"You were the one who thought that the percentages were so strange."

"Good point. All right, I'll work on it."

"Just don't tell me what you discover," Vin said.

"Well, how is *that* going to help anything?"

"Trust," Vin said. "You can tell me what to do, just don't tell me why. Maybe we can stay ahead of this thing."

*Stay ahead of it?* Elend thought. *It has the power to bury the entire empire in ash, and can apparently hear every single word we say. How do we "stay ahead" of something like that?* But, he had just promised to trust Vin, so he did so.

Vin pointed at the table. "Is that your letter to Yomen?"

Elend nodded. "I'm hoping that he'll talk to me, now that I'm actually here."

"Slowswift does seem to think that Yomen is a good man. Maybe he'll listen."

"Somehow, I doubt it," Elend said. He sat softly for a moment, then made a fist, gritting his teeth in frustration. "I told the others that I want to try diplomacy, but I *know* that Yomen is going to reject my message. That's why I brought my army in the first place—I could have just sent you to sneak in, like you did in Urteau. However, sneaking in didn't help us much there; we still have to secure the city if we want the supplies.

"We *need* this city. Even if you hadn't felt so driven to discover what was in the cache, I would have come here. The threat Yomen poses to our kingdom is too strong, and the possibility that the Lord Ruler left important information in that cache can't be ignored. Yomen has grain in that storage, but the land here won't get enough sunlight to grow it. So, he'll probably feed it to the people—a waste, when we don't have enough to plant and fill the Central Dominance. We have to take this city, or at least make an ally out of it.

"But, what do I do if Yomen won't talk? Send armies to attack nearby villages? Poison the city's supplies? If you're right, then he's found the cache, which means he'll have more food than we hoped. Unless we destroy that, he might outlast our siege. But, if I do destroy it, his people will starve . . ." Elend shook his head. "Do you remember when I executed Jastes?"

"That was well within your right," Vin said quickly.

"I believe it was," Elend said. "But I killed him because he led a group of koloss to my city, then let them ravage my people. I've nearly done the same thing here. There are twenty thousand of the beasts outside."

"You can control them."

"Jastes thought he could control them too," Elend said. "I don't want to turn those creatures loose, Vin. But what if the siege fails, and I have to try and break Yomen's fortifications? I won't be able to do that without the koloss." He shook his head. "If only I could *talk* to Yomen. Perhaps I could make him see reason, or at least convince myself that he needs to fall."

Vin paused. "There . . . might be a way."

Elend glanced over, catching her eyes.

"They're still staging balls inside the city," Vin said. "And King Yomen attends every one."

Elend blinked. At first, he assumed that he must have misunderstood her. However, the look in her eyes—that wild determination—persuaded him otherwise. Sometimes, he saw a touch of the Survivor in her; or, at least, of the man the stories claimed Kelsier had been. Bold to the point of recklessness. Brave and brash. He'd rubbed off on Vin more than she liked to admit.

"Vin," he said flatly, "did you just suggest that we attend a *ball* being held in the middle of a city we're besieging?"

Vin shrugged. "Sure. Why not? We're both Mistborn—we can get into that city without much trouble at all."

"Yes, but . . ." He trailed off.

*I'd have a room filled with the very nobility I'm hoping to intimidate—not to mention have access to the man who refuses to meet with me, in a situation where he'd have trouble running away without looking like a coward.*

"You think it's a good idea," Vin said, smiling impishly.

"It's a *crazy* idea," Elend said. "I'm emperor—I shouldn't be sneaking into the enemy city so I can go to a party."

Vin narrowed her eyes, staring at him.

"I will admit, however," Elend said, "that the concept *does* have considerable charm."

"Yomen won't come meet us," Vin said, "so we go in and crash his party."

"It's been a while since I've been to a ball," Elend said speculatively. "I'll have to dig up some good reading material for old time's sake."

Suddenly, Vin grew pale. Elend paused, glancing at her, sensing that something was wrong. Not with what he'd said, something else. *What is it?*

*Assassins? Mist spirits? Koloss?*

"I just realized something," Vin said, looking at him with those intense eyes of hers. "I can't go to a ball—I didn't bring a gown!"

*The Lord Ruler didn't just forbid certain technologies, he suppressed technological advancement completely. It seems odd now that during the entirety of his thousand-year reign, very little progress was made. Farming techniques, architectural methods—even fashion remained remarkably stable during the Lord Ruler's reign.*

*He constructed his perfect empire, then tried to make it stay that way. For the most part, he was successful. Pocket watches—another Khlenni appropriation—that were made in the tenth century of the empire were nearly identical to those made during the first. Everything stayed the same.*

*Until it all collapsed, of course.*

# 29

LIKE MOST CITIES IN THE FINAL EMPIRE, Urteau had been forbidden a city wall. In the early days of Sazed's life, before he'd rebelled, the fact that cities couldn't build fortifications had always seemed a subtle indication to him of the Lord Ruler's vulnerability. After all, if the Lord Ruler was worried about rebellions and cities that could stand against him, then perhaps he knew something that nobody else did: that he *could* be defeated.

Thoughts like those had led Sazed to Mare, and finally to Kelsier. And now, they led him to the city of Urteau—a city that finally *had* rebelled against noble leadership. Unfortunately, it lumped Elend Venture in with all the other nobles.

"I don't like this, Master Keeper," Captain Goradel said, walking beside Sazed, who—for the sake of his image—now rode in the carriage with Breeze and Allrianne. After leaving the Terris people behind, Sazed had hurriedly caught up with Breeze and the others, and they were finally entering the city that was their destination.

"Things are supposed to be kind of brutal in there," Goradel continued. "I don't think you'll be safe."

"I doubt it's as bad as you think," Sazed said.

"What if they take you captive?" Goradel asked.

"My dear man," Breeze said, leaning forward to look out at Goradel. "That's why kings *send* ambassadors. This way, if someone gets captured, the king is still safe. We, my friend, are something Elend can never be: expendable."

Goradel frowned at that. "*I* don't feel very expendable."

Sazed peered out of the carriage, looking at the city through the falling ash. It was large, and was one of the oldest cities in the empire. He noted with interest that as they approached, the road sloped downward, entering an empty canal trough.

"What's this?" Allrianne asked, sticking her blond head out of the other side of the carriage. "Why'd they build their roads in ditches?"

"Canals, my dear," Breeze said. "The city used to be filled with them. Now they're empty—an earthquake or something diverted a river."

"It's creepy," she said, bringing her head back in. "It makes the buildings look twice as tall."

As they entered the city proper—their two hundred soldiers marching around them in formation—they were met by a delegation of Urteau soldiers in brown uniforms. Sazed had sent word ahead of their coming, of course, and the king—the Citizen, they called him—had given Sazed leave to bring his small contingent of troops into the city.

"They say that their king wants to meet with you immediately, Master Terrisman," Goradel said, walking back to the carriage.

"The man doesn't waste time, does he?" Breeze asked.

"We'll go, then," Sazed said, nodding to Goradel.

"You aren't wanted here."

Quellion, the Citizen, was a short-haired man with rough skin and an almost military bearing. Sazed wondered where the man—apparently a simple farmer before the Collapse—had gained such leadership skills.

"I realize that you have no desire to see foreign soldiers in your city," Sazed said carefully. "However, you must have realized that we do not come to conquer. Two hundred men is hardly an invading force."

Quellion stood at his desk, arms clasped behind his back. He wore what appeared to be regular skaa trousers and shirt, though both had been dyed a deep red verging on maroon. His "audience chamber" was a large conference room in what had once been a nobleman's house. The walls had been whitewashed and the chandelier removed. Stripped of its furniture and finery, the room felt like a box.

Sazed, Breeze, and Allrianne sat on hard wooden stools, the only comfort the Citizen had offered them. Goradel stood at the back with ten of his soldiers as a guard.

"It isn't about the soldiers, Terrisman," Quellion said. "It's about the man who sent you."

"Emperor Venture is a good and reasonable monarch," Sazed said.

Quellion snorted, turning to one of his companions. He had many of these—perhaps twenty—and Sazed assumed they were members of his government. Most wore red, like Quellion, though their clothing hadn't been dyed as deeply.

"Elend Venture," Quellion said, raising a finger, turning back to Sazed, "is a liar and a tyrant."

"That isn't true."

"Oh?" Quellion asked. "And how did he gain his throne? By defeating Straff Venture and Ashweather Cett in war?"

"War was—"

"War is often the excuse of tyrants, Terrisman," Quellion said. "My reports said that his Mistborn wife forced the kings to kneel before him that day—forced them to swear their loyalty to him or be slaughtered by his koloss brutes. Does that sound like the actions of a 'good and reasonable' man?"

Sazed didn't respond.

Quellion stepped forward, laying both hands palm-down on the top of his desk. "Do you know what we've done to the noblemen in this city, Terrisman?"

"You've killed them," Sazed said quietly.

"Just as the Survivor ordered," Quellion said. "You claim to have been his companion, before the fall. Yet, you serve one of the very noble houses he sought to overthrow. Doesn't that strike you as inconsistent, Terrisman?"

"Lord Kelsier accomplished his purpose in the death of the Lord Ruler," Sazed said. "Once that was achieved, peace—"

"Peace?" Quellion asked. "Tell me, Terrisman. Did you ever hear the Survivor speak of peace?"

Sazed hesitated. "No," he admitted.

Quellion snorted. "At least you're honest. The only reason I'm talking to you is because Venture was clever enough to send a Terrisman. If he'd sent a nobleman, I would have killed the cur and sent his blackened skull back as an answer."

The room fell silent. Tense. After a few moments of waiting, Quellion turned his back on Sazed, facing his companions. "You sense that?" he asked his men. "Can you feel yourselves begin to feel ashamed? Look at your emotions—do you suddenly feel a fellowship with these servants of a liar?"

He turned back, glancing at Breeze. "I've warned you all of Allomancy, the black tool of the nobility. Well, now you get to feel it. That man—sitting beside our *distinguished* Terrisman—is known as Breeze. He's one of the world's most vile men. A Soother of no small skill."

Quellion turned to address Breeze. "Tell me, Soother. How many friends have your magics made for you? How many enemies have you forced to kill themselves? That pretty girl beside you—did you use your arts to hex her into your bed?"

Breeze smiled, raising his cup of wine. "My dear man, you have, of course, found me out. However, instead of congratulating yourself for noticing my touch, perhaps you should ask yourself why I manipulated you into saying what you just did."

Quellion paused—though, of course, Breeze was bluffing. Sazed sighed. An indignant reaction would have been far more appropriate—but, then, that wasn't Breeze's way. Now the Citizen would spend the rest of the meeting wondering if his words were being guided by Breeze.

"Master Quellion," Sazed said, "these are dangerous times. Surely you have noticed that."

"We can protect ourselves well enough," Quellion said.

"I'm not speaking of armies or bandits, Citizen. I'm speaking of mists and ash. Have you noticed that the mists are lingering longer and longer during the daylight hours? Have you noticed them doing strange things to your people, causing the deaths of some who go out?"

Quellion did not contradict him or call his words foolish. That told Sazed enough. People had died in this city.

"The ash falls perpetually, Citizen," Sazed said. "The mists are deadly, and the koloss run free. This would be a very good time to have powerful alliances. In the Central Dominance, we can grow better crops, for we get more sunlight. Emperor Venture has discovered a method of controlling the koloss. Whatever is to come in the next few years, it would be very advantageous to be Emperor Venture's friend."

Quellion shook his head, as if in resignation. He turned to his companions again. "You see—just as I told you. First, he tells us he comes in peace, then he moves on to threats. Venture controls the koloss. Venture controls the food. Next he'll be saying that Venture controls the mists!" Quellion turned back to Sazed. "We don't have any use for threats here, Terrisman. We aren't worried about our future."

Sazed raised an eyebrow. "And why is that?"

"Because *we* follow the Survivor," Quellion said. "Be gone from my sight."

Sazed stood. "I would like to stay in the city and perhaps meet with you again."

"That meeting will not happen."

"Regardless," Sazed said. "I would prefer to stay. You have my promise that my men will not cause trouble. Might I have your leave?" He bowed his head in deference.

Quellion muttered something under his breath before waving a hand at him. "If I forbid you, then you'll just sneak in. Stay if you must, Terrisman, but I warn you—follow our laws and do not make trouble."

Sazed bowed further, then retreated with his people.

"Well," Breeze said, settling back into the carriage, "murderous revolutionaries, everybody wearing the same gray clothing, ditch-like streets where every tenth building has been burned to the ground. This is a lovely place Elend chose for us to visit—remind me to thank him upon our return."

Sazed smiled, though he felt little humor.

"Oh, don't look so grim, old man," Breeze said, waving with his cane as the carriage began to roll, their soldiers surrounding it. "Something tells me that Quellion there isn't half as threatening as his bearing implies. We'll convince him eventually."

"I'm not certain, Lord Breeze. This place . . . it's different from the other cities we've visited. The leaders aren't as desperate, and the people are more subservient. We won't have an easy time of it here, I think."

Allrianne poked Breeze's arm. "Breezy, do you see that, over there?"

Breeze squinted against the light, and Sazed leaned forward, glancing out the side of the carriage. A group of people had created a bonfire in the courtyard. The massive blaze sent a twisting line of smoke into the air. Sazed reflexively looked for a tinmind to draw upon and enhance his vision. He shoved the impulse aside, instead squinting against the afternoon light.

"It looks like . . ."

"Tapestries," said one of their soldiers, marching at the side of the carriage. "And furniture—rich things that are signs of the nobility, according to the Citizen. The burning was staged for your benefit, of course. Quellion probably keeps storehouses of the stuff so that he can order them burned at dramatically appropriate times."

Sazed froze. The soldier was remarkably well informed. Sazed looked closely, suspicious. Like all of their men, this one wore his cloak hood up against the falling ash. As the man turned his head, Sazed could see that—oddly—he wore a thick bandage tied across his eyes, as if he were blind. Despite that, Sazed recognized the face.

"Spook, my dear boy!" Breeze exclaimed. "I knew you'd turn up eventually. Why the blindfold?"

Spook didn't answer the question. Instead, he turned, glancing back at the burning flames of the bonfire. There seemed a . . . tension to his posture.

*The cloth must be thin enough to see through*, Sazed thought. That was the only explanation for the way Spook moved with ease and grace, despite the cloth. Though, it certainly seemed thick enough to be obscuring. . . .

Spook turned back to Sazed. "You're going to need a base of operations in the city. Have you chosen one yet?"

Breeze shook his head. "We were thinking of using an inn."

"There aren't any true inns in the city," Spook said. "Quellion says that citizens should care for one another, letting visitors stay in each other's homes."

"Hmm," Breeze said. "Perhaps we'll need to camp outside."

Spook shook his head. "No. Follow me."

"The Ministry Canton of Inquisition?" Sazed asked, frowning as he climbed out of the carriage.

Spook stood ahead of them, on the steps leading into the grand building. He turned, nodding his strange, cloth-wrapped head. "Quellion hasn't touched any of the Ministry buildings. He ordered them boarded up, but he didn't ransack or burn them. I think he's afraid of Inquisitors."

"A healthy and rational fear, my boy," Breeze said, still sitting inside the carriage.

Spook snorted. "The Inquisitors aren't going to bother us, Breeze. They're far too busy trying to kill Vin. Come on."

He walked up the steps, and Sazed followed. Behind, he could hear Breeze sigh with an exaggerated sound, then call for one of the soldiers to bring a parasol against the ash.

The building was broad and imposing, like most Ministry offices. During the days of the Lord Ruler, these buildings had stood as reminders of imperial might in every city across the Final Empire. The priests who had filled them had mostly been bureaucrats and clerks—but, then, that had been the real power of the Final Empire. Its control of resources and management of people.

Spook stood beside the building's broad, boarded-up doors. Like most structures in Urteau, it was built of wood, rather than stone. He stared up, as if watching the falling ash, as he waited for Sazed and Breeze. He had always been a quiet one, even more so since his uncle's death during the assault on Luthadel. As Sazed arrived, Spook began to rip boards free from the front of the building. "I'm glad you're here, Sazed," he said.

Sazed moved to help pull off boards. He heaved, trying to get the nails undone—yet, he must have chosen one of the more stubborn boards, for though the ones Spook grabbed came free with ease, Sazed's refused to even budge. "And why is it you're glad I am here, Lord Spook?"

Spook snorted. "I'm no lord, Saze. Never did get Elend to give me a title."

Sazed smiled. "He said that you only wanted one to impress women."

"Of course I did," Spook said, smiling as he ripped free another board. "What other reason would there be to have a title? Anyway, please just call me Spook. It's a good name."

"Very well."

Spook reached over, using a single, casual hand to pull off the board Sazed had tried to budge. *What?* Sazed thought with shock. Sazed was by no means muscular—but, then, he hadn't thought that Spook was either. The lad must have been practicing with weights.

"Anyway," Spook said, turning, "I'm glad you're here, because I have things to discuss with you. Things that others might not understand."

Sazed frowned. "Things of what nature?"

Spook smiled, then threw his shoulder against the door, opening it into a dark, cavernous chamber. "Things of gods and men, Sazed. Come on."

The boy disappeared into the darkness. Sazed waited outside, but Spook never lit a lantern. He could hear the young man moving around inside.

"Spook?" he finally called out. "I can't see in there. Do you have a lantern?"

There was a pause. "Oh," Spook's voice said. "Right." A moment later, a light sparked, and a lantern began to glow.

Breeze sauntered up behind Sazed. "Tell me, Sazed," he said quietly, "is it me, or has that boy changed since we last saw him?"

"He seems far more self-confident," Sazed said, nodding to himself. "More capable as well. But, what do you suppose is the purpose of that blindfold?"

Breeze shrugged, taking Allrianne's arm. "He always was an odd one. Perhaps he thinks it will disguise him and help keep him from being recognized as a member of Kelsier's crew. Considering the improvement in the boy's disposition—and diction—I'm willing to deal with a quirk or two."

Breeze and Allrianne entered the building, and Sazed waved to Captain Goradel, indicating that he should make a perimeter outside. The man nodded, sending a squad of soldiers up to follow Sazed and the others. Finally, Sazed frowned to himself and entered the building.

He wasn't certain what he had been expecting. The building had been part of the Canton of Inquisition—the most infamous of the Ministry's arms. It wasn't a place Sazed relished entering. The last building like this he'd entered had been the Conventical of Seran, and it had been decidedly eerie. This building, however, proved to be nothing like the Conventical—it was just another bureaucratic office. It was furnished a little more austerely than most Ministry buildings, true, but it still had tapestries on the wooden walls and broad red rugs on the floor. The trim was of metal, and there were hearths in every room.

As Sazed followed Breeze and Spook through the building, he was able to imagine what the building had been like during the days of the Lord Ruler. There would have been no dust, then, but instead an air of crisp efficiency. Administrators would have sat at those desks, collecting and filing information about noble houses, skaa rebels, and even other Ministry Cantons. There had been a longstanding feud between the Canton of Orthodoxy, which had administered the Lord Ruler's empire, and the Canton of Inquisition, which had policed it.

This was not a place of fear at all, but rather a place of ledgers and files. The Inquisitors had probably visited this building only rarely. Spook led them through several cluttered rooms toward a smaller storage chamber at the back. Here, Sazed could see that the dust on the floor had been disturbed.

"You've been here before?" he asked, entering the room after Spook, Breeze, and Allrianne.

Spook nodded. "As has Vin. Don't you remember the report?" With that, he felt about on the floor, eventually finding a hidden latch and opening a trapdoor. Sazed peered down into the dark cavern below.

"What's he talking about?" Allrianne whispered to Breeze. "Vin's been here?"

"She did reconnaissance in this city, dear," Breeze said. "To find . . ."

"The cache," Sazed said as Spook began to climb down a ladder into the darkness. He left the lantern behind. "The supply cache left behind by the Lord Ruler. All of them are underneath Ministry buildings."

"Well, that's what we're here to recover, isn't it?" Allrianne asked. "So, we've got it. Why bother with that Citizen fellow and his crazy peasants?"

"There's no way we could get these supplies out of the city with the Citizen in control." Spook's voice drifted up, echoing slightly. "There's too much down here."

"Besides, my dear," Breeze said. "Elend didn't just send us to get these supplies—he sent us to quell a rebellion. We can't have one of our major cities in revolt, and we *particularly* can't afford to let the rebellion spread. I must say, though, it does feel odd to be on this side of the problem—stopping a rebellion, rather than starting one."

"We may have to organize a rebellion *against* the rebellion, Breeze," Spook's voice echoed from below. "If that makes you feel any more comfortable. Anyway, are you three coming down or not?"

Sazed and Breeze shared a look, then Breeze gestured toward the dark pit. "After you."

Sazed picked up the lantern and climbed down the ladder. At the bottom, he found a small stone chamber, one wall of which had been pulled back to reveal a cavern. He stepped inside, Breeze reaching the ground behind him, then helping Allrianne down.

Sazed raised the lantern, staring quietly.

"Lord Ruler!" Breeze said, stepping up beside him. "It's enormous!"

"The Lord Ruler prepared these caches in case of a disaster," Spook said, standing ahead of them in the cavern. "They were meant to help the empire through what we're now facing. They wouldn't be much good if they weren't created on a grand scale."

"Grand" was correct. They stood on a ledge near the ceiling of the cavern, and a vast chamber extended out below. Sazed could see row upon row of shelves lining the cavern floor.

"I think we should set up our base here, Sazed," Spook said, moving toward stairs that led down to the cavern floor. "It's the only defensible place in the city. If we move our troops into the building above, we can use this cavern for supplies—and can even fall back in here in an emergency. We could defend this even against a determined assault."

Sazed turned, regarding the stone doorway into the chamber. It was small enough that only one man could pass through at a time—which meant that it would be very easy to guard. And, there was probably a way to shut it again.

"Suddenly I feel a whole lot safer in this city," Breeze noted.

Sazed nodded. He turned, regarding the cavern again. In the distance, he could hear something. "Is that water?"

Spook was moving down steps. Again, his voice echoed hauntingly in the chamber. "Each cache has a specialty—something it contains more of than all the others."

Sazed moved down the steps as Goradel's soldiers entered the chamber behind Breeze. Though the soldiers had brought more lanterns, Breeze and Allrianne stuck close to Sazed as they descended.

Soon, Sazed realized he could see something sparkling in the distance. He held the lantern high, pausing on the steps as he saw that some of the darkness in the distance was too flat to be part of the cavern floor.

Breeze whistled quietly as they studied the enormous underground lake. "Well," he noted, "I guess now we know where all the water from those canals went."

*Originally, men assumed that Rashek's persecution of the Terris religion came from hatred. Yet, now that we know that Rashek was himself a Terrisman, his destruction of that religion seems odd. I suspect it had something to do with the prophecies about the Hero of Ages. Rashek knew that Preservation's power would eventually return to the Well of Ascension. If the Terris religion had been allowed to survive, then perhaps—someday—a person would find their way to the Well and take up the power, then use it to defeat Rashek and overthrow his empire. So, he obscured knowledge of the Hero and what he was supposed to do, hoping to keep the secret of the Well to himself.*

# 30

"YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TRY AND TALK me out of this?" Elend asked, amused.

Ham and Cett shared a look.

"Why would we do that, El?" Ham asked, standing at the front of the boat. In the distance, the sun was setting, and the mists had already begun to gather. The boat rocked quietly, and soldiers milled about on the shore, preparing for night. One week had passed since Vin's initial scouting of Fadrex, and she still hadn't managed to sneak into the storage cache.

The night of the next ball had arrived, and Elend and Vin were planning to attend.

"Well, I can think of a couple of reasons why you might object," Elend said, counting them off on his fingers. "First, it isn't wise to expose me to potential capture. Second, by revealing myself at the party, I'll show that I'm Mistborn, confirming rumors that Yomen may not believe. Third, I'll be putting both of our Mistborn in the same place, where they can be easily attacked—that can't be a good idea. Finally, there's the fact that going to a ball in the middle of a war is just *plain crazy*."

Ham shrugged, leaning with one elbow against the deck railing. "This isn't so different from when you entered your father's camp during the siege of Luthadel. Except you weren't Mistborn then, and you weren't in such a position of political power. Yomen would be crazy to make a move against you—he has to know that if you're in the same room with him, he's in mortal danger himself."

"He'll run," Cett said from his seat. "This party will end the moment you arrive."

"No," Elend said, "I don't think it will." He glanced back toward their cabin. Vin was still getting ready—she'd had the camp tailors modify one of the cooking girls' dresses. Elend was worried. No matter how good the dress turned out to be, it would look out of place compared to the lavish ball gowns.

He turned back to Cett and Ham. "I don't think Yomen will run. He has to know that if Vin wanted to kill him, she'd attack his palace in secret. He's trying very hard to pretend that nothing has changed since the Lord Ruler disappeared. When we show up at the ball, it will make him think that we're willing to pretend with him. He'll stay and see if he can gain some advantage by meeting with us on his terms."

"The man's a fool," Cett said. "I can't believe he'd want to go back to the way things were."

"At least he's trying to give his subjects what they want. That's where you went wrong, Cett. You lost your kingdom the moment you left because you didn't care to try pleasing anyone."

"A king doesn't have to please anyone," Cett snapped. "He's the one with the army—that means other people have to please *him.*"

"Actually," Ham said, rubbing his chin, "that theory can't be true. A king has to please somebody—after all, even if he intended to *force* everyone to do what he said, he'd still have to at least please his army. But then, I guess if the army is pleased simply by being allowed to push people around, you might have an argument . . ."

Ham trailed off, looking thoughtful, and Cett scowled. "Does everything have to be some damn logic puzzle to you?" he demanded. Ham just continued to rub his chin.

Elend smiled, glancing at his cabin again. It was good to hear Ham acting like himself. Cett protested Ham's comments almost as much as Breeze did. In fact . . . *Maybe that's why Ham hasn't been quite so prone to his little logic puzzles lately,* Elend thought. *There hasn't been anyone around to complain about them.*

"So, Elend . . ." Cett said. "If you die, I'm in charge, right?"

"Vin will take command if something happens to me," Elend said. "You know that."

"Right," Cett said. "And if both of you die?"

"Sazed is next in the imperial succession after Vin, Cett. We've discussed that."

"Yes, but what about this army?" Cett said. "Sazed is off in Urteau. Who leads these men until we meet up with him?"

Elend sighed. "If, somehow, Yomen manages to kill both Vin and myself, then I suggest that you run—because yes, you'd be in charge here, and the Mistborn who killed us is likely to come for you next."

Cett smiled in satisfaction, though Ham frowned at this.

"You've never wanted titles, Ham," Elend pointed out. "And you've chafed at every leadership position I've given you."

"I know," he said. "But what about Demoux?"

"Cett has more experience," Elend said. "He's a better man than he pretends, Ham. I trust him. That will have to be enough for you. Cett, if things turn bad, I charge you with returning to Luthadel and searching out Sazed to tell him that he's emperor. Now, I think that—"

Elend paused as the door to his cabin opened. He turned, putting on his best consoling smile, then froze.

Vin stood in the doorway wearing a stunning black gown with silver trim, cut after a modern fashion. Somehow, it managed to look sleek despite the bell-shaped skirt, which fanned out with petticoats. Her pure black hair, which she often wore pulled back in a tail, was down, and it now reached to her collarbone, neatly trimmed and curling just slightly. The only jewelry she wore was her simple earring, the one she'd gotten from her mother when she was just a child.

He always thought she was beautiful. And yet . . . how long had it been since he'd seen her in a gown, with her hair and makeup done? He tried to say something, give her a compliment, but his voice just kind of trailed off.

She walked over on light feet, kissing him briefly. "I'll take that as an indication that I managed to put this thing on right. I'd forgotten what a *pain* gowns could be. And the makeup! Honestly, Elend, you're never allowed to complain about those suits of yours again."

Beside them, Ham was chuckling. Vin turned. "What?"

"Ah, Vin," Ham said, leaning back and folding his muscular arms, "when did you go and grow up on me? It seems like just last week you were scrambling about, hiding in corners, wearing the haircut of a boy and the attitude of a mouse."

Vin smiled fondly. "Do you remember when we first met? You thought I was a twixt."

Ham nodded. "Breeze nearly fainted dead away when he found we'd been talking with a Mistborn all that time! Honestly, Vin. Sometimes I can't believe that you were that same frightened girl Kelsier brought into the crew."

"It *has* been five years, Ham. I'm twenty-one now."

"I know," Ham said, sighing. "You're like my own children, adults before I had time to know them as kids. In fact, I probably know you and El better than I know any of them . . ."

"You'll get back to them, Ham," Vin said, reaching over and laying a hand on his shoulder. "Once this is all over."

"Oh, I know that," he said, smiling, ever the optimist. "But, you can never have back what you've missed. I hope all this turns out to be worth it."

Elend shook his head, finally finding his voice. "I have only one thing to say. If that dress is what the cooking girls are wearing, I'm paying them *far* too much."

Vin laughed.

"Seriously, Vin," Elend said. "The army's tailors are good, but there's no way that dress came from materials we had in camp. Where did you get it?"

"It's a mystery," Vin said, narrowing her eyes and smiling. "We Mistborn are incredibly mysterious."

Elend paused. "Um . . . I'm Mistborn too, Vin. That doesn't make any sense."

"We Mistborn need not make sense," Vin said. "It's beneath us. Come on—the sun's already down. We need to get moving."

"Have fun dancing with our enemies," Ham said as Vin hopped from the boat, then Pushed herself up through the mists. Elend waved farewell, Pushing himself into the air as well. As he shot away, his tin-enhanced ears heard Ham's voice talking to Cett.

"So . . . you can't go anywhere unless someone carries you, right?" the Thug asked.

Cett grunted.

"Well then," Ham said, sounding very pleased. "I've got quite a number of philosophical puzzles you might enjoy. . . ."

Allomantic jumping was *not* easy when one was wearing a ball gown. Every time Vin started to descend, the bottom of the dress flared up around her, ruffling and flapping like a flock of startled birds.

Vin wasn't particularly worried about showing off what was under the dress. Not only was it too dark for most people to see, but she wore leggings beneath the petticoats. Unfortunately, flapping dresses—and the drag they created in the air—made steering a jump much more difficult. They also made a lot of noise. She wondered what the guards thought as she passed over the rocky shelves that were the natural city walls. To her ear, she sounded like a dozen waving flags, beating against themselves in the middle of a windstorm.

She finally slowed, aiming for a rooftop that had been cleared of ash. She hit lightly, bouncing up and spinning, dress flaring, before landing and waiting for Elend. He followed, landing less smoothly with a hard thump and a grunt. It wasn't that he was bad at Pushing and Pulling—he just hadn't had as much practice as Vin. She'd probably been much like him during her first years as an Allomancer.

*Well . . . maybe not like him,* she thought fondly as Elend dusted himself off. *But, I'm sure a lot of other Allomancers were about at Elend's level after only a year of practice.*

"That was quite the series of jumps, Vin," Elend said, puffing slightly as he glanced back toward the cliff-like rock formations, their fires burning high in the night. Elend wore his standard white military uniform, one of the same ones that Tindwyl had designed for him. He'd had this one scrubbed free of ash, and he'd gotten his beard trimmed.

"I couldn't land often," Vin explained. "These white petticoats will stain with ash easily. Come on—we need to get inside."

Elend turned, smiling in the darkness. He actually looked excited. "The dress. You paid a dressmaker inside the city to make it for you?"

"Actually, I paid a friend inside the city to have it made for me, and to get me the makeup." She jumped away, heading toward Keep Orielle—which, according to Slowswift, was the site of the evening's ball. She kept to the air, never landing. Elend followed behind, using the same coins.

Soon, they approached a burst of color in the mists, like an aurora from one of Sazed's stories. The bubble of light turned into the massive keep she had seen during her previous infiltration, its stained-glass windows shining from the inside. Vin angled herself downward, streaking through the mists. She briefly considered dropping to the ground out in the courtyard—away from watchful eyes—so that she and Elend could approach the doors subtly. Then she decided against it.

This wasn't an evening for subtlety.

So, instead she dropped directly down onto the carpeted steps leading up to the main entrance of the castle-like building. Her landing blew away flakes of ash, creating a little pocket of cleanliness. Elend landed beside her a second later, then stood up straight, his brilliant white cape flapping around him. At the top of the steps, a pair of uniformed servants had been greeting guests and ushering them into the building. Both men froze, stunned expressions on their faces.

Elend held out his arm to Vin. "Shall we?"

Vin took the arm. "Yes," she said. "Preferably before those men can get the guards."

They strode up the steps, sounds of surprise coming from behind, where a small group of noblemen had been exiting their carriage. Ahead, one of the servants moved forward and cut off Vin and Elend. Elend carefully placed a hand against the man's chest, then shoved him aside with a pewter-fueled push. The man stumbled backward into the wall. The other one went running for the guards.

Inside the antechamber, waiting nobility began to whisper and question. Vin heard them asking if anyone recognized these strange newcomers, one in black, the other in white. Elend strode forward firmly, Vin at his side, causing people to stumble over themselves and move out of the way. Elend and Vin passed quickly through the small room, and Elend handed a name card to a servant who waited to announce arrivals into the ballroom proper.

They waited on the servant, and Vin realized that she'd begun holding her breath. It seemed as if she were reliving a dream—or was it a fond memory? For a moment, she was that same young girl of over four years before, arriving at Keep Venture for her very first ball, nervous and worried that she wouldn't be able to play her part.

Yet, she felt none of that same insecurity. She didn't worry if she'd find acceptance or belief. She'd slain the Lord Ruler. She'd married Elend Venture. And—more remarkable than either accomplishment—somehow in the chaos and mess she'd discovered who she was. Not a girl of the streets, though that was where she'd been raised. Not a woman of the court, though she appreciated the beauty and grace of the balls. Someone else.

Someone she liked.

The servant reread Elend's card, growing pale. He looked up. Elend met the man's eyes, then gave a small nod, as if to say, "Yes, I'm afraid that it's true."

The servant cleared his throat, and Elend led Vin into the ballroom.

"High Emperor, Lord Elend Venture," the servant announced in a clear voice. "And the Empress Vin Venture, Heir of the Survivor, Hero of Ages."

The entire ballroom grew suddenly—and unnaturally—quiet. Vin and Elend paused at the front of the room, giving the gathered nobility a chance to see them. It appeared that Keep Orielle's grand main hall, like Keep Venture's, was also its ballroom. However, instead of being tall with a broad, arched roof, this room had a relatively low ceiling and small, intricate designs in the stonework. It was as if the architect had tried for beauty on a delicate scale, rather than an imposing one.

The entire chamber was crafted from white marble of various shades. While it was large enough to hold hundreds of people—plus a dance floor and tables—it still felt intimate. The room was divided by rows of ornamental marble pillars, and it was further partitioned with large stained-glass panels that ran from floor to ceiling. Vin was impressed—most keeps in Luthadel left their stained glass to the perimeter walls, so they could be lit from outside. While this keep did have some of those, she quickly realized that the true masterpieces had been placed here, freestanding inside the ballroom, where they could be admired from both sides.

"By the Lord Ruler," Elend whispered, scanning the gathered people. "They really *do* think they can just ignore the rest of the world, don't they?"

Gold, silver, bronze, and brass sparkled upon figures in brilliant ball gowns and sharp gentlemen's suits. The men generally wore dark clothing, and the women generally wore colors. A group of musicians played strings in a far corner, their music unimpeded by the shocked atmosphere. Servants waited, uncertain, bearing drinks and foods.

"Yes," Vin whispered. "We should move out of the doorway. When the guards come, we'll want to be mingled in the crowd to make the soldiers uncertain if they want to attack."

Elend smiled, and she knew he was remarking to himself about her tendency to keep her back from being exposed. However, she also knew that he realized she was right. They walked down the short set of marble steps, joining the party.

Skaa might have shied away from such a dangerous couple, but Vin and Elend wore the costume of noble propriety. The aristocracy of the Final Empire were quite adept at playing pretend—and when they were uncertain how to behave, they fell back on the old standard: proper manners.

Lords and ladies bowed and curtsied, acting as if the emperor and empress's attendance had been completely expected. Vin let Elend take the lead, as he had far more experience than she with matters of court. He nodded to those they passed, displaying just the right amount of self-assurance. Behind, guards finally arrived at the doors. They stopped, however, obviously wary about disturbing the party.

"There," Vin said, nodding to their left. Through a stained-glass partition, she could make out a figure sitting at an elevated table.

"I see him," Elend said, leading her around the glass, and giving Vin her first sight of Aradan Yomen, king of the Western Dominance.

He was younger than she'd expected—perhaps as young as Elend. Round-faced with serious eyes, Yomen had his head shaved bald, after the manner of obligators. His dark gray robes were a mark of his station, as were the complicated patterns of tattoos around his eyes, which proclaimed him a very high-ranking member of the Canton of Resource.

Yomen stood up as Vin and Elend approached. He looked utterly dumbfounded. Behind, the soldiers had begun to carefully work their way into the room. Elend paused a distance from the high table, with its white cloth and pure crystal place settings. He met Yomen's gaze, the other guests so quiet that Vin guessed most were holding their breaths.

Vin checked her metal reserves, turning slightly, keeping an eye on the guards. Then, from the corner of her eye, she saw Yomen raise his hand and subtly wave the guards back.

Chatter began in the room almost immediately. Yomen sat back down, looking troubled, and did not return to his meal.

Vin looked up at Elend. "Well," she whispered, "we're in. What now?"

"I need to talk to Yomen," Elend said. "But I'd like to wait a little bit first; give him a chance to get used to our presence."

"Then we should mingle."

"Split up? We can cover more nobility that way."

Vin hesitated.

"I can protect myself, Vin," Elend said, smiling. "I promise."

"All right." Vin nodded, though that wasn't the only reason she'd paused.

"Talk to as many people as you can," Elend said. "We're here to shatter this people's image of safety. After all, we just proved that Yomen can't keep us out of Fadrex—and we're showing that we're so unthreatened by him that we'll waltz into a ball that he's attending. Once we've made a bit of a stir, I'll talk to their king, and they'll all be certain to listen in."

Vin nodded. "When you mingle, watch for people who look like they might be willing to support us against the current government. Slowswift implied that there are some in the city who aren't pleased with the way their king is handling things."

Elend nodded, kissed her cheek, and then she was alone. Vin stood in her beautiful gown, feeling a moment of shock. Over the last two years, she'd explicitly worked to keep herself out of situations where she would wear gowns and mingle with nobility. She'd determinedly worn trousers and shirts, making it her self-appointed duty to sow discomfort in those she found too full of themselves.

Yet, she had been the one to suggest this infiltration to Elend. Why? Why put herself back in this position? She wasn't displeased with who she was—she didn't need to prove anything by putting on another silly gown and making courtly conversation with a bunch of nobility she didn't know.

Did she?

*No use fidgeting about it now,* Vin thought, scanning the crowd. Noble balls in Luthadel—and she could only assume here—were very polite affairs, designed to encourage mingling, and therefore facilitate political give and take. Balls had once been the main form of sport for the nobility, who had lived privileged lives under the Lord Ruler because their ancestors had been his friends back before his Ascension.

And so, the party was made up of small groups—some mixed couples, but many clusters of just women or just men. A pair was not expected to stay together the entire time. There were side rooms where gentlemen could retire and drink with their allies, leaving the women to converse in the ballroom.

Vin walked forward, slipping a cup of wine off the tray of a passing servant. By splitting up, Elend and she had indicated that they were open to conversation with others. Unfortunately, it had been a long, long time since Vin had to be alone at a party like this. She felt awkward, uncertain whether to approach one of the groups, or wait to see if anyone came to her. She felt somewhat as she had that first night, when she'd gone to Keep Venture posing as a lone noblewoman, Sazed her only guide.

That day, she'd played a part, hiding in her role as Valette Renoux. She couldn't do that anymore. Everyone knew who she really was. That would have bothered her, once, but it didn't anymore. Still, she couldn't just do what she'd done then—stand around and wait for others to come to her. The entire room seemed to be staring at her.

She strode through the beautiful white room, aware of how much her black dress stood out against the women in their colors. She moved around the slices of colored glass that hung from the ceiling like crystalline curtains. She'd learned from her earlier balls that there was one thing she could always count on: Whenever noblewomen gathered, one always set herself up as the most important.

Vin found her with ease. The woman had dark hair and tan skin, and she sat at a table surrounded by sycophants. Vin recognized that arrogant look, that way the woman's voice was just loud enough to be imperious, but just soft enough to make everyone hang on her words.

Vin approached with determination. Years ago, she'd been forced to start at the bottom. She didn't have time for that. She didn't know the subtle political intricacies of the city—the allegiances and rivalries. However, there was one thing of which she was fairly confident.

Whichever side this woman was on, Vin wanted to be on the opposite one.

Several of the sycophants looked up as Vin approached, and they grew pale. Their leader had the poise to remain aloof. *She'll try to ignore me,* Vin thought. *I can't leave her that option.* Vin sat at the table directly across from the woman. Then, Vin turned and addressed several of the younger sycophants.

"She's planning to betray you," Vin said.

The women glanced at each other.

"She has plans to get out of the city," Vin said. "When the army attacks, she won't be here. And she's going to leave you all to die. Make an ally of me, however, and I will see that you are protected."

"Excuse me?" the lead woman said, her voice indignant. "Did I invite you to sit here?"

Vin smiled. *That was easy.* A thieving crewleader's basis of power was money—take that away, and he'd fall. For a woman like this, her power was in the people who listened to her. To make her react, one simply had to threaten to take her minions.

Vin turned to confront the woman. "No, you didn't invite me. I invited myself. Someone needs to warn the women here."

The woman sniffed. "You spread lies. You know nothing of my supposed plans."

"Don't I? You're not the type to let a man like Yomen determine your future, and if the others here think about it, they'll realized that there's no way you would let yourself get caught in Fadrex City without plans to escape. I'm surprised you're even still here."

"Your threats do not frighten me," the lady said.

"I haven't threatened you yet," Vin noted, sipping her wine. She gave a careful Push on the emotions of the women at the table, making them more worried. "We could get to that, if you wish—though, technically, I've got your entire city under threat already."

The woman narrowed her eyes at Vin. "Don't listen to her, ladies."

"Yes, Lady Patresen," one of the women said, speaking a little too quickly.

*Patresen,* Vin thought, relieved that someone had finally mentioned the woman's name. *Do I know that name?* "House Patresen," Vin said idly. "Isn't that a cousin family of House Elariel?"

Lady Patresen remained quiet.

"I killed an Elariel once," Vin said. "It was a good fight. Shan was a very clever woman, and a skilled Mistborn." She leaned in. "You may think that the stories about me are exaggerations. You may assume that I didn't really kill the Lord Ruler, and that the talk is simply propaganda crafted to help stabilize my husband's rule.

"Think as you wish, Lady Patresen. However, there is one thing you *must* understand. You are not my adversary. I don't have *time* for people like you. You're a petty woman in an insignificant city, part of a doomed culture of nobility. I'm not talking to you because I want to be part of your schemes; you can't even understand how unimportant they are to me. I'm just here to voice a warning. We're going to take this city—and when we do, there will be little room for people who were against us."

Patresen paled just slightly. However, her voice was calm when she spoke. "I doubt that's true. If you could take the city as easily as you claim, then you would have already."

"My husband is a man of honor," Vin said, "and decided that he wished to speak with Yomen before attacking. I, however, am not quite so temperate."

"Well, *I* think that—"

"You don't understand, do you?" Vin asked. "It doesn't matter what you think. Look, I know you're the type with powerful connections. Those connections will have told you by now the numbers we bring. Forty thousand men, twenty thousand koloss, and a full contingent of Allomancers. Plus two Mistborn. My husband and I did not come to this conference to make allies, or even to make enemies. We came to give warning. I suggest you take it."

She punctuated her last comment with a powerful Soothing. She wanted it to be obvious to the women, to let them know that they were—indeed—under her power. Then, she stood, trailing away from the table.

What she had said to Patresen wasn't really that important—the important thing was that Vin had been seen confronting the woman. Hopefully, that would put Vin on a side in the local politics, making her less threatening to some factions in the room. That, in turn, would make her more accessible, and—

The sound of chairs scooting back from the table came from behind her. Vin turned, suspicious, and saw most of Lady Patresen's clique approaching in a hurry, leaving their leader sitting virtually alone at her table, a scowl on her face.

Vin tensed.

"Lady Venture," one of the women said. "Perhaps you would let some of us . . . introduce you at the party?"

Vin frowned.

"Please," the woman said very quietly.

Vin blinked in surprise. She'd expected the women to resent her, not *listen* to her. She glanced about. Most of the women looked so intimidated that Vin thought they might wilt away, like leaves in the sun. Feeling a little bemused, Vin nodded her head and let herself be led into the party for introductions.

*Rashek wore both black and white. I think he wanted to show that he was a duality, Preservation and Ruin.*

*This, of course, was a lie. After all, he had only touched one of the powers—and only in a very small way at that.*

# 31

"LORD BREEZE GUESSED CORRECTLY," Sazed said, standing at the front of their small group. "As far as I can tell, the diversion of waters into this underground reservoir was intentional. The project must have taken decades. It required widening natural passageways so that the water—which once fed the river and canals above—instead flowed into this cavern."

"Yes, but what's the point?" Breeze asked. "Why waste so much effort to move a river?"

Three days in Urteau had allowed them to do as Spook had suggested, moving their troops into the Ministry building, ostensibly taking up residence inside of it. The Citizen couldn't know about the cache, otherwise he would have ransacked it. That meant Sazed and his team held a distinct advantage should events in the city turn ugly.

They had pulled some of the furniture from the building above and arranged it—with sheets and tapestries to create "rooms"—amid the shelves in the cavern. Logic dictated that the cavern was the best place to spend their time, for should someone attack the Ministry building, the cavern was where they wanted to be. True, they'd be trapped—but with the supplies they had, they'd be able to survive indefinitely and work out a plan of escape.

Sazed, Breeze, Spook, and Allrianne sat in one of these partitioned-off areas among the shelves of food. "The reason that the Lord Ruler made this lake is simple, I think." Sazed turned, glancing over his shoulder at the lake. "That water comes via an underground river, filtered—in all likelihood—through layers of rock. It is pure water, the likes of which you rarely see in the Final Empire. No ash, no sediment. The purpose of that water is to sustain a population should a disaster occur. If it were still flowing into the canals above, it would quickly get soiled and polluted by the population living in the city."

"The Lord Ruler was looking to the future," Spook said, still wearing his strange eye bandage. He'd turned aside all questions and promptings regarding why he wore it, though Sazed was beginning to suspect it had to do with burning tin.

Sazed nodded at the young man's comment. "The Lord Ruler wasn't worried about causing financial ruin in Urteau—he just wanted to make certain this cavern had access to a constant, flowing source of fresh water."

"Isn't this all beside the point?" Allrianne asked. "So we have water. What about that maniac running the city?"

Sazed paused, and the others turned to look to him. *I am, unfortunately, in charge.* "Well," he said, "we should speak of this. Emperor Venture has asked us to secure the city. As the Citizen has proven unwilling to meet with us again, we shall need to discuss other options."

"That man needs to go," Spook said. "We need assassins."

"I fear that wouldn't work very well, my dear boy," Breeze said.

"Why not?" Spook asked. "We killed the Lord Ruler, and that worked pretty well."

"Ah," Breeze said, raising a finger, "but the Lord Ruler was irreplaceable. He was a god, and so killing him created a psychological impact on his populace."

Allrianne nodded. "This Citizen's not a force of nature, but a man—and men can be replaced. If we assassinate Quellion, one of his lackeys will simply take his place."

"And we will be branded as murderers," Breeze added.

"What, then?" Spook asked. "We leave him alone?"

"Of course not," Breeze said. "If we want to take this city, we need to undermine him, *then* remove him. We prove that his entire system is faulty—that his government is, in essence, silly. If we manage that, we won't just stop him, we'll stop everyone who has worked with him and supported him. That is the only way we're going to take Urteau short of marching an army in here and seizing it by force."

"And, since His Majesty kindly left us *without* any troops to speak of . . ." Allrianne said.

"I am not convinced that such rash action is required," Sazed said. "Perhaps, given more time, we'll be able to work with this man."

"Work with *him?"* Spook asked. "You've been here three days—isn't that enough for you to see what Quellion is like?"

"I have seen," Sazed said. "And, to be perfectly honest, I do not know that I can fault the Citizen's views."

The cavern fell silent.

"Perhaps you should explain yourself, my dear man," Breeze said, sipping at a cup of wine.

"The things that the Citizen says are not false," Sazed said. "We cannot blame him for teaching the very same things that Kelsier did. The Survivor spoke of killing the nobility—goodness knows, we all saw him engaging in *that* activity often enough. He spoke of revolution and of skaa ruling themselves."

"He spoke of extreme actions during extreme times," Breeze said. "That's what you do when you need to motivate people. Even Kelsier wouldn't have taken it this far."

"Perhaps," Sazed said. "But can we really be surprised that people who heard Kelsier speak have created this society? And, what right have we to take it from them? In a way, they've been truer to Kelsier than we have. Can you really say that you think he'd be pleased to find out that we put a nobleman on the throne not one day after he died?"

Breeze and Spook glanced at each other, and neither contradicted him.

"It's just not right," Spook finally said. "These people claim to know Kelsier, but they don't. He didn't want people to be grim and bullied—he wanted them to be free and happy."

"Indeed," Breeze said. "Besides, we *did* choose to follow Elend Venture—and he's given us an order. Our empire needs these supplies, and we can't afford to let an organized rebellion seize and control one of the most important cities in the empire. We need to secure this cache and protect the people of Urteau. It's for the greater good, and all that!"

Allrianne nodded her agreement—and, as always, Sazed felt her touch on his emotions.

*For the greater good . . .* Sazed thought. He knew that Spook was right. Kelsier wouldn't want this warped society being perpetuated in his name. Something needed to be done. "Very well," he said. "What should our course of action be?"

"Nothing, for now," Breeze said. "We need time to feel out the city's climate. How close are the people to rebelling against dear Quellion? How active is the local criminal element? How corruptible are the men who serve the new government? Give me some time to discover answers to these questions, and then we can decide what to do."

"I still say we do it as Kelsier did," Spook said. "Why can't we just topple the Citizen like he did the Lord Ruler?"

"I doubt that would work," Breeze said, sipping his wine.

"Why not?" Spook asked.

"For a very simple reason, my dear boy," Breeze said. "We don't have Kelsier anymore."

Sazed nodded. That much was true—though he did wonder if they would ever be rid of the Survivor's legacy. In a way, the battle in this town had been inevitable. If Kelsier had possessed one flaw, it had been his extreme hatred of the nobility. It was a passion that had driven him, had helped him accomplish the impossible. However, Sazed feared it would destroy those whom it had infected.

"Take the time you need, Breeze," Sazed said. "Let me know when you think we are ready to take the next step."

Breeze nodded, and the meeting broke up. Sazed stood, sighing quietly. As he did, he met Breeze's eyes, and the man winked at him with a smile that seemed to say, "This won't be half as difficult as you think." Sazed smiled back, and he felt Breeze's touch on his emotions, trying to encourage him.

Yet, the Soother's hand was too light. Breeze couldn't have known the conflict that still twisted inside of Sazed. A conflict about much more than Kelsier and the problems in Urteau. He was glad for a little bit of time to wait in the city, for he still had much work to do with the religions listed, one per sheet, in his portfolio.

Even that work was difficult for him to get to recently. He did his best to give the others leadership, as Elend had asked. However, the pernicious darkness Sazed felt inside of him refused to be shaken away. It was more dangerous to him, he knew, than anything else he had faced while serving with the crew, because it made him feel as if he didn't care.

*I* must *keep working,* he decided, walking away from the meeting place, carefully sliding his portfolio off of a nearby shelf. *I have to keep searching. I must not give up.*

It was far more difficult than that, however. In the past, logic and thought had always been his refuge. However, his emotions didn't respond to logic. No amount of thinking about what he *should* be doing could help him.

He ground his teeth, walking, hoping that the motion would help him work out the knots within himself. A part of him wanted to go out and study the new form of the Church of the Survivor that had sprung up here in

Urteau. However, that seemed like a waste of time. The world was ending, why study one more religion? He already knew this one was false; he'd dismissed the Church of the Survivor early in his studies. It was filled with more contradictions than almost any in his portfolio.

More filled with passion as well.

All the religions in his collection were alike in one respect; they had failed. The people who'd followed them had died, been conquered, their religions stamped out. Was that not proof enough for him? He'd tried preaching them, but he'd very, very rarely had any success.

It was all meaningless. Everything was ending anyway.

*No!* Sazed thought. *I will find the answers. The religions didn't disappear completely—the Keepers preserved them. There must be answers in one of them. Somewhere.*

Eventually, he found his way to the wall of the cavern, which held the steel plate inscribed by the Lord Ruler. They already had a record of what it said, of course, but Sazed wanted to see it and read it for himself. He looked up at the metal, which reflected the light of a nearby lantern, reading the words of the very man who had destroyed so many religions.

*The plan,* the words said, *is simple. When the power returns to the Well, I will take it and make certain the thing remains trapped.*

And still I worry. It has proven far more clever than I had assumed, infecting my thoughts, making me see and feel things I do not wish to. It is so subtle, so careful. I cannot see how it could cause my death, but still I worry.

If I am dead, then these caches will provide some measure of protection for my people. I fear what is coming. What might be. If you read this now, and I am gone, then I fear for you. Still, I will try to leave what help I can.

There are metals of Allomancy which I have shared with none. If you are a priest of mine, working this cavern and reading these words, know that you will incur my wrath if you share this knowledge. However, if it is true that the force has returned and I am unable to deal with it, then perhaps knowledge of electrum will give you some aid. My researchers have discovered that mixing an alloy of forty-five percent gold and fifty-five percent silver creates a new Allomantic metal. Burning it will not give you the power of atium, but will provide some help against those who themselves burn it.

And that was it. Beside the words was a map, indicating the location of the next cache—the one in the small southern mining village that Vin and Elend had secured a short time back. Sazed read over the words again, but they only served to enhance his sense of despair. Even the Lord Ruler seemed to feel helpless in the face of their current predicament. He'd planned to be alive, he'd planned for none of this to happen. But he'd known that his plans might not work.

Sazed turned, leaving the plate behind, walking to the bank of the underground lake. The water lay like black glass, undisturbed by wind or ash, though it did ripple slightly from the current. A pair of lanterns sat by the edge of the water, burning quietly, marking the bank. Behind him, a short distance away, some of the soldiers had made camp—though a good two-thirds of them kept to the upstairs to make certain the building had the look of being lived in. Others searched the cavern walls in hopes of finding a secret exit. They would all be a lot more comfortable within the cavern if they knew they had a means of escaping it, should they get attacked.

"Sazed."

Sazed turned, then nodded to Spook as the young man walked up to join him on the bank of the black still water. They stood together quietly, contemplative.

*This one has troubles of his own,* Sazed thought, noting the way that Spook watched the waters. Then, surprisingly, Spook reached up and untied the cloth from his eyes. He pulled it free, revealing a pair of spectacles underneath, perhaps used to keep the cloth from pressing his eyes closed. Spook removed the spectacles and blinked, squinting. His eyes began to water, then he reached down and put out one of the two lanterns, leaving Sazed standing in very dim light. Spook sighed, standing and wiping his eyes.

*So it* is *his tin,* Sazed thought. As Sazed considered the thought, he realized that he had often seen the young man wearing gloves—as if to protect his skin. Sazed suspected that if he watched closely, he'd see the boy put in earplugs as well. *Curious.*

"Sazed," Spook said, "I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Please, speak as you wish."

"I . . ." Spook trailed off, then glanced at Sazed. "I think Kelsier is still with us."

Sazed frowned.

"Not alive, of course," Spook said quickly. "But, I think he's watching over us. Protecting us . . . that sort of thing."

"That's a pleasant sentiment, I think," Sazed said. *Completely false, of course.*

"It's not just a sentiment," Spook replied. "He's here. I was just wondering if there was anything in any of those religions you studied that talked about things like that."

"Of course," Sazed said. "Many of them spoke of the dead remaining as spirits to help, or curse, the living."

They fell silent, Spook obviously waiting for something.

"Well?" Spook asked. "Aren't you going to preach a religion to me?"

"I don't do that anymore," Sazed said quietly.

"Oh," Spook said. "Um, why not?"

Sazed shook his head. "I find it hard to preach to others that which has offered me no solace, Spook. I am looking through them, trying to discover which—if any of them—are right and true. Once I have that knowledge, I will be happy to share with you any that seem most likely to contain truth. For now, however, I believe none of them, and therefore will preach none of them."

Surprisingly, Spook didn't argue with him. Sazed had found it frustrating that his friends—people who were, for the most part, determined atheists—would grow so offended when he threatened to join them in their lack of belief. And yet, Spook didn't offer arguments.

"It makes sense," the young man finally said. "Those religions *aren't* true. After all, Kelsier is the one who watches over us, not those other gods."

Sazed closed his eyes. "How can you say that, Spook? You lived with him—you knew him. We both know that Kelsier was no god."

"The people of this city think he is."

"And where has it gotten them?" Sazed asked. "Their belief has brought oppression and violence. What is the good of faith if *this* is the result? A city full of people misinterpreting their god's commands? A world of ash and pain and death and sorrow?" Sazed shook his head. "That is why I no longer wear my metalminds. Religions which cannot offer more than this do not deserve to be taught."

"Oh," Spook said. He knelt down, dipping a hand in the water, then shivered. "That makes sense too, I guess—though I'd have guessed it was because of *her."*

"What do you mean?"

"Your woman," Spook said. "The other Keeper—Tindwyl. I heard her talk about religion. She didn't think very much of it. I'd have thought that maybe you wouldn't talk about religion anymore because that might be what she'd have wanted."

Sazed felt a chill.

"Anyway," Spook said, standing, wiping off his hand, "the people of this city know more than you think they do. Kelsier is watching over us."

With that, the boy trailed away. Sazed, however, wasn't listening. He stood, staring at the ebony waters.

Because that might be what she'd have wanted. . . .

Tindwyl had thought religion to be foolish. She had said that people who looked toward ancient prophecies or unseen forces were seeking excuses. During her last few weeks with Sazed, this had often been a topic of conversation—even slight contention—between the two of them, for their research had dealt with the prophecies regarding the Hero of Ages.

That research had turned out to be useless. At best, the prophecies were the vain hopes of men who wished for a better world. At worst, they had been cleverly placed to further the goals of a malignant force. Either way, he had believed strongly in his work at that time. And Tindwyl had helped him. They had searched through their metalminds, sifting through centuries of information, history, and mythology, seeking references to the Deepness, the Hero of Ages, and the Well of Ascension. She had worked with him, claiming that her interest was academic, not religious. Sazed suspected that she'd had a different motivation.

She'd wanted to be with him. She had suppressed her dislike of religion out of a desire to be involved with what he found important. And, now that she was dead, Sazed found himself doing what *she'd* found important. Tindwyl had studied politics and leadership. She'd loved to read the biographies of great statesmen and generals. Had he unconsciously agreed to become Elend's ambassador so that he could involve himself in Tindwyl's studies, just as she—before her death—had given herself over to his?

He wasn't certain. In truth, he thought his problems were deeper than that. However, the fact that *Spook* had been the one to make such an astute observation gave Sazed pause. It was a very clever way of looking at things. Instead of contradicting him, Spook had offered a possible explanation.

Sazed was impressed. He turned out, looking across the waters for a time and contemplating what Spook had said. Then, he pulled out the next religion in his portfolio and began to consider it. The sooner he got through them, the sooner he could—hopefully—find the truth.

*Allomancy, obviously, is of Preservation. The rational mind will see this. For, in the case of Allomancy, net power is gained. It is provided by an external source—Preservation's own body.*

# 32

"ELEND, IS THAT REALLY YOU?"

Elend turned with shock. He'd been mingling at the ball, talking with a group of men who had turned out to be distant cousins of his. The voice from behind, however, seemed far more familiar. "Telden?" Elend asked. "What are you doing here!"

"I live here, El," Telden said, clasping hands with Elend.

Elend was dumbfounded. He hadn't seen Telden since his house had escaped Luthadel in the days of chaos following the death of the Lord Ruler. Once, this man had been one of Elend's best friends. To the side, Elend's cousins made a graceful withdrawal. "I thought you were in BasMardin, Tell," Elend said.

"No," Telden said. "That's where my house settled, but I thought that the area was too dangerous, what with the koloss rampages. I moved inward to Fadrex once Lord Yomen came to power—he quickly gained a reputation for being able to provide stability."

Elend smiled. The years had changed his friend. Telden had once been the model of a debonair ladies' man, his hair and expensive suits intended to draw attention. It wasn't that the older Telden had grown sloppy, but he obviously didn't take as much care to appear stylish. He'd always been a large man—tall and kind of rectangular—and the extra weight he'd gained made him look far more . . . ordinary than he once had.

"Elend," Telden said, shaking his head. "You know, for the longest time, I refused to believe that you'd really managed to seize power in Luthadel."

"You were there at my coronation!"

"I thought that they had picked you as a puppet, El," Telden said, rubbing his wide chin. "I thought . . . well, I'm sorry. I guess I just didn't have much faith in you."

Elend laughed. "You were right, my friend. I turned out to be a terrible king."

Telden obviously wasn't sure how to reply to that.

"I did get better at the job," Elend said. "I just had to stumble through a few messes first."

Partygoers shuffled through the divided ballroom. Though those watching did their best to appear uninterested and aloof, Elend could tell that they were doing the noble equivalent of gawking. He glanced to the side, where Vin stood in her gorgeous black dress, surrounded by a group of women. She seemed to be doing well—she took to the courtly scene far better than she liked to let herself think or admit. She was graceful, poised, and the center of attention.

She was also alert—Elend could tell by the way she managed to keep her back to a wall or glass partition. She'd be burning iron or steel, watching for sudden movements of metal that might indicate an attacking Coinshot. Elend began burning iron as well, and he made certain to keep burning zinc to Soothe the emotions of those in the room, keeping them from feeling too angry or threatened by his intrusion. Other Allomancers—Breeze, or even Vin—would have had trouble Soothing an entire room at once. For Elend, with his inordinate power, it barely took any attention.

Telden still stood nearby, looking troubled. Elend tried to say something to start their conversation again, but he struggled to come up with anything that wouldn't sound awkward. It had been nearly four years since Telden had left Luthadel. Before that, he had been one of the friends with whom Elend had discussed political theory, planning with the idealism of youth for the day when they would lead their houses. Yet, the days of youth—and their idealistic theories—were gone.

"So . . ." Telden said. "This is where we end up, is it?"

Elend nodded.

"You're not . . . really going to attack the city, are you?" Telden asked. "You're just here to intimidate Yomen, right?"

"No," Elend said softly. "I will conquer the city if I have to, Telden."

Telden flushed. "What happened to you, Elend? Where is the man who talked about rights and legality?"

"The world caught up with me, Telden," Elend said. "I can't be the man I was."

"So you become the Lord Ruler instead?"

Elend hesitated. It felt odd to have another confront him with his own questions and arguments. Part of him felt a stab of fear—if Telden asked these things, then Elend had been right to worry about them. Perhaps they were true.

Yet, a stronger impulse flared within him. An impulse nurtured by Tindwyl, then refined by a year of struggling to bring order to the shattered remains of the Final Empire.

An impulse to trust himself.

"No, Telden," Elend said firmly. "I'm not the Lord Ruler. A parliamentary council rules in Luthadel, and there are others like it in every city I've brought into my empire. This is the first time that I've marched on a city with my armies out of a need to conquer, rather than protect—and that is only because Yomen himself took this city from an ally of mine."

Telden snorted. "You set yourself up as emperor."

"Because that's what the people *need,* Telden," Elend said. "They don't want to return to the days of the Lord Ruler—but they would rather do that than live in chaos. Yomen's success here proves that much. The people want to know that someone is watching over them. They had a god-emperor for a thousand years—now is not the time to leave them without a leader."

"You mean to tell me that you're just a figurehead?" Telden asked, folding his arms.

"Hardly," Elend said. "But, eventually, I hope to be. We both know I'm a scholar and not a king."

Telden frowned. He didn't believe Elend. And yet, Elend found that fact didn't bother him. Something about saying those words, about confronting the skepticism, made him recognize the validity of his own confidence. Telden didn't understand—he hadn't lived through what Elend had. The young Elend himself wouldn't have agreed with what he was now doing. A part of that youth still had a voice inside of Elend's soul—and he would never quiet it. However, it was time to stop letting it undermine him.

Elend put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "It's all right, Tell. It took me years to convince you that the Lord Ruler was a terrible emperor. I fully expect it to take the same amount of time to convince you that I'll be a good one."

Telden smiled wanly.

"Going to tell me that I've changed?" Elend asked. "Seems all the rage lately."

Telden laughed. "I thought that was obvious. No need to point it out."

"What, then?" Elend asked.

"Well . . ." Telden said. "I was actually going to chide you for not inviting me to your wedding! I'm hurt, El. Truly. I spent the better part of my youth giving you relationship advice, then when you finally pick a girl, you don't even let me know about the marriage!"

Elend laughed, turning to follow Telden's gaze toward Vin. Confident and powerful, yet somehow delicate and graceful. Elend smiled with pride. Even during the glory days of the Luthadel ball scene, he couldn't remember a woman commanding as much attention as Vin now did. And, unlike Elend, she'd stepped into this ball without knowing a single person.

"I feel a little like a proud parent," Telden said, laying a hand on Elend's shoulder. "There were days I was convinced that you were hopeless, El! I figured you'd someday wander into a library and just disappear completely. We'd find you twenty years later covered with dust, picking through some philosophy text for the seven hundredth time. Yet, here you are, married—and to a woman like that!"

"Sometimes, I don't understand either," Elend said. "I can't ever come up with any logical reason why she would want to be with me. I just . . . have to trust her judgment."

"Either way, you did well."

Elend raised an eyebrow. "I seem to remember that *you* once tried to talk me out of spending time with her."

Telden flushed. "You have to admit, she *was* acting very suspiciously when she came to those parties."

"Yes," Elend said. "She seemed too much like a real person to be a noblewoman." He looked over at Telden, smiling. "However, if you'll excuse me, I have something I need to do."

"Of course, El," Telden said, bowing slightly as Elend withdrew. The move felt a little odd coming from Telden. They didn't really know each other anymore. However, they did have memories of friendship.

*I didn't tell him that I killed Jastes,* Elend thought as he made his way through the room, its members parting easily for him. *I wonder if he knows.*

Elend's enhanced hearing picked out a general rise in excitement among the whispered conversations as people realized what he was doing. He'd given Yomen time enough to deal with his surprise; it was time to confront the man. Though part of Elend's purpose in visiting the ball was to intimidate the local nobility, the main reason was still to speak with their king.

Yomen watched Elend approach the high table—and, to his credit, the obligator did not look frightened at the prospect of a meeting. His meal still remained uneaten, however. Elend didn't wait for permission to come to the table, but he did pause and wait as Yomen waved for servants to clear space and set Elend a place directly across the high table from him.

Elend sat, trusting in Vin—mixed with his own burning steel and tin—to warn him of attacks from behind. He was the only one on this side of the table, and Yomen's dining companions all retired as Elend seated himself, leaving the two rulers alone. In another situation, the image might have looked ridiculous: two men seated across from each other with empty table wings extending a great distance to either side. The white tablecloth and crystalline dinnerware were pristine, just as it would have been during the Lord Ruler's day.

Elend had sold all such finery he owned, struggling to feed his people during the last few winters.

Yomen laced his fingers on the table in front of him—his meal taken away by silent servants—and studied Elend, his cautious eyes framed by intricate tattoos. Yomen wore no crown, but he *did* wear a single bead of metal tied so that it hung in the center of his forehead.

Atium.

"There is a saying in the Steel Ministry," Yomen finally said. " 'Sit down to dine with evil, and you will ingest it with your meal.' "

"It's a good thing we're not eating, then," Elend said, smiling slightly.

Yomen did not smile back.

"Yomen," Elend said, growing more serious. "I come to you now, not as an emperor seeking for new lands to control, but as a desperate king seeking allies. The world has become a dangerous place—the land itself seems to be fighting us, or at least falling apart beneath us. Accept my hand of friendship, and let us be done with wars."

Yomen didn't reply. He just sat, fingers laced, studying Elend.

"You doubt my sincerity," Elend said. "I can't say that I blame you, since I marched my army up to your doorstep. Is there a way that I can persuade you? Would you be willing to enter into talks or parley?"

Again, no answer. So, this time, Elend just waited. The room around them felt still.

Yomen finally spoke. "You are a flagrant and garish man, Elend Venture."

Elend bristled at that. Perhaps it was the ball setting, perhaps it was the way Yomen so flippantly ignored his offer. However, Elend found himself responding to the comment in a way he might have years before, when he hadn't been a king at war. "It's a bad habit I've always had," Elend said. "I'm afraid that the years of rule—and of being trained in propriety—haven't changed one fact: I'm a terribly rude man. Bad breeding would be my guess."

"You find this a game," the obligator said, eyes hard. "You come to my city to slaughter my people, then you dance into my ball hoping to frighten the nobility to the point of hysteria."

"No," Elend said. "No, Yomen, this is no game. The world seems near to ending, and I'm just doing my best to help as many people survive as possible."

"And doing your best includes conquering my city?"

Elend shook his head. "I'm not good at lying, Yomen. So, I'll be truthful with you. I don't want to kill anyone—as I said, I'd rather we simply made a truce and were done with it. Give me the information I seek, pool your resources with mine, and I will not force you to give up your city. Deny me, and things will grow more difficult."

Yomen sat quietly for a moment, music still being played softly in the background, vibrating over the hum of a hundred polite conversations.

"Do you know why I dislike men like you, Venture?" Yomen finally asked.

"My insufferable charm and wit?" Elend asked. "I doubt it's my good looks—but, compared to that of an obligator, I suppose even my face could be enviable."

Yomen's expression darkened. "How did a man like you ever end up at a table of negotiation?"

"I was trained by a surly Mistborn, a sarcastic Terrisman, and a group of disrespectful thieves," Elend said, sighing. "Plus, on top of that, I was a fairly insufferable person to begin with. But, kindly continue with your insult—I didn't mean to interrupt."

"I don't like you," Yomen continued, "because you have the gall to believe that you *deserve* to take this city."

"I do," Elend said. "It belonged to Cett; half the soldiers I brought with me on this march once served him, and this is their homeland. We've come to liberate, not conquer."

"Do these people look to you like they need liberation?" Yomen said, nodding to the dancing couples.

"Yes, actually," Elend said. "Yomen, you're the upstart here—not me. You have no right to this city, and you know it."

"I have the right given me by the Lord Ruler."

"We don't accept the Lord Ruler's right to rule," Elend said. "That's why we killed him. Instead, we look to the *people's* right to rule."

"Is that so?" Yomen said, hands still laced before him. "Because, as I recall, the people of *your* city chose Ferson Penrod to be their king."

*Good point, that one,* Elend had to admit.

Yomen leaned forward. "This is the reason I don't like you, Venture. You're a hypocrite of the worst kind. You pretended to let the people be in charge—but when they ousted you and picked another, you had your Mistborn conquer the city back for you. You rule by force, not by common consent, so don't talk to me about *rights."*

"There were . . . circumstances in Luthadel, Yomen. Penrod was working with our enemies, and he bought himself the throne through manipulating the assembly."

"That sounds like a flaw in the system," Yomen said. "A system that *you* set up—a system replacing the one of order that existed before it. A people depend on stability in their government; they need someone to look to. A leader that they can trust, a leader with true authority. Only a man chosen by the Lord Ruler has that claim on authority."

Elend studied the obligator. The frustrating thing was, he almost agreed with the man. Yomen said things that Elend himself had said, even if they were twisted a bit by his perspective as an obligator.

"Only a man chosen by the Lord Ruler has that claim on authority . . ." Elend said, frowning. The phrase sounded familiar. "That's from Durton, isn't it? *Calling of Trust?"*

Yomen paused. "Yes."

"I prefer Gallingskaw, when it comes to divine right."

Yomen made a curt gesture. "Gallingskaw was a heretic."

"That makes his theories invalid?" Elend asked.

"No," Yomen said. "It shows that he lacked the ability to reason soundly—otherwise he wouldn't have gotten himself executed. *That* affects the validity of his theories. Besides, there is no divine mandate in the common man, as he proposed."

"The Lord Ruler was a common man before he took his throne," Elend said.

"Yes," Yomen said, "but the Lord Ruler touched divinity at the Well of Ascension. That imprinted the Sliver of Infinity upon him, and gave him the Right of Inference."

"Vin, my wife, touched that same divinity."

"I don't accept that story," Yomen said. "As it has been said, the Sliver of Infinity was unique, unplanned, uncreated."

"Don't bring Urdree into this," Elend said, raising a finger. "We both know he was more a poet than a real philosopher—he ignored convention, and never gave proper attributions. At least give me the benefit of the doubt and quote Hardren. He'd give you a much better foundation."

Yomen opened his mouth, then stopped, frowning. "This is pointless," he said. "Arguing philosophy will not remove the fact that you have an army camped outside my city, nor change the fact that I find you a hypocrite, Elend Venture."

Elend sighed. For a moment, he'd thought that they might be able to respect one another as scholars. There was one problem, however. Elend saw true loathing in Yomen's eyes. And, Elend suspected that there was a deeper reason for it than Elend's alleged hypocrisy. After all, Elend *had* married the woman who had killed Yomen's god.

"Yomen," Elend said, leaning in. "I realize we have differences. However, one thing seems clear—we both care about the people of this empire. We both took the time to study political theory, and we both apparently focused on the texts that held the good of the people up as the prime reason for rule. We should be able to make this work.

"I want to offer you a deal. Accept kingship under me—you'd be able to stay in control, with very few changes in your government. I will need access to the city and its resources, and we will need to discuss setting up a parliamentary council. Other than that, you may continue as you wish—you can even keep throwing your parties and teaching about the Lord Ruler. I will trust your judgment."

Yomen did not scoff at the offer, but Elend could tell that he also didn't give it much weight. He had likely already known what Elend would say.

"You mistake one thing, Elend Venture," Yomen said.

"And that is?"

"That I can be intimidated, bribed, or influenced."

"You're no fool, Yomen," Elend said. "Sometimes, fighting isn't worth its cost. We both know that you can't beat me."

"That is debatable," Yomen said. "Regardless, I do not respond well to threats. Perhaps if you didn't have an army camped on my doorstep, I could see my way to an alliance."

"We both know that without an army on your doorstep, you wouldn't even have listened to me," Elend said. "You refused every messenger I sent, even before I marched here."

Yomen just shook his head. "You seem more reasonable than I would have thought, Elend Venture, but that doesn't change facts. You already have a large empire of your own. In coming here, you betray your arrogance. Why did you need my dominance? Wasn't what you already had enough?"

"Firstly," Elend said, raising a finger, "I feel that I need to remind you again that you stole this kingdom from an ally of mine. I had to come here eventually, if only to make good on promises I gave Cett. However, there's something much larger at play here." Elend hesitated, then made a gamble. "I need to know what is in your storage cavern."

Elend was rewarded with a slight look of surprise on Yomen's face, and that was all the confirmation Elend needed. Yomen did know about the cavern. Vin was right. And considering that atium displayed so prominently on his forehead, perhaps she was right about what was contained in the cavern.

"Look, Yomen," Elend said, speaking quickly. "I don't care about the atium—it's barely of any value anymore. I need to know what instructions the Lord Ruler left in that cavern. What information is there for us? What supplies did he find necessary for our survival?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Yomen said flatly. He wasn't a particularly good liar.

"You asked me why I came here," Elend said. "Yomen, it's not about conquering or taking this land from you. I realize you may find that hard to believe, but it's the truth. The Final Empire is dying. Surely you've seen that. Mankind needs to band together, pool its resources—and you have vital clues we need. Don't force me to break down your gates to get them. Work with me."

Yomen shook his head. "There is your mistake again, Venture. You see, I don't care if you attack me." He met Elend's eyes. "It would be better for my people to fight and to *die* than to be ruled by the man who overthrew our god and destroyed our religion."

Elend held those eyes, and saw determination in them.

"That's how it has to be?" Elend said.

"It is," Yomen said. "I can expect an attack in the morning, then?"

"Of course not," Elend said, standing. "Your soldiers aren't starved yet. I'll get back to you in a few months." *Maybe then you'll be more willing to deal.*

Elend turned to go, then hesitated. "Nice party, by the way," he said, glancing back at Yomen. "Regardless of what I believe, I do think that your god would be pleased with what you've done here. I think you should reconsider your prejudices. The Lord Ruler probably isn't fond of Vin and me, but I'd say that he'd rather that your people live than get themselves killed."

Elend nodded in respect, then left the high table, feeling more frustrated than he showed. It felt like Yomen and he had been so close, and yet at the same time, an alliance seemed impossible. Not while the obligator had such hatred of Elend and Vin.

He forced himself to relax, walking. There was little he could do about the situation at the moment—it would take the siege to make Yomen rethink his position. *I'm at a ball,* Elend thought, wandering. *I should enjoy what I can of it, letting myself be seen by the nobility here, intimidating them and making them think about helping us instead of Yomen. . . .*

A thought occurred to him. He glanced at Vin, then waved a servant over to him.

"My lord?" the man asked.

"I need you to fetch something for me," Elend said.

Vin was the center of attention. Women pandered to her, hung on her words, and looked to her as a model. They wanted to know news from Luthadel, to hear about fashion, politics, and events from the great city. They didn't reject her, or even seem to resent her.

The instant acceptance was the strangest thing Vin had ever experienced. She stood amid the women in their gowns and finery, and was foremost among them. She knew that it was just because of her power—yet, the women of this city seemed almost desperate to have someone to look to. An empress.

And Vin found herself enjoying it. There was a part of her that had craved this acceptance since the first day she'd attended a ball. She'd spent that year being mistreated by most of the women of court—some had let her join with their company, but she'd always been an insignificant country noblewoman with no connections or significance. It was a shallow thing, this acceptance, but sometimes even shallow things feel important. Plus, there was something else about it. As she smiled toward a newcomer—a young niece that one of the women wanted to meet Vin—Vin realized what it was.

*This is part of me,* she thought. *I didn't want it to be—perhaps because I didn't believe that I deserved it. I found this life too different, too full of beauty and confidence. Yet, I* am *a noblewoman. I* do *fit in here.*

I was born to the streets by one parent, but I was born to this by another.

She'd spent the first year of Elend's reign trying so hard to protect him. She'd forced herself to focus only on her street side, the side that had been trained to be ruthless, for that, she thought, would give her the power to defend what she loved. Yet, Kelsier had shown her another way to be powerful. And, that power was connected with the nobility—with their intrigue, their beauty, and their clever schemes. Vin had taken almost immediately to life at court, and that had frightened her.

*That's it,* she thought, smiling at another curtsying young girl. *That's why I always felt that this was wrong. I didn't have to work for it, so I couldn't believe that I deserved it.*

She'd spent sixteen years on the streets—she'd earned that side of her. Yet, it had taken her barely a month to adapt to noble life. It had seemed impossible to her that something that came so easily could be as important a part of herself as the years spent on the streets.

But it was.

*I had to confront this,* she realized. *Tindwyl tried to make me do it, two years ago, but I wasn't ready.*

She needed to prove to herself not only that she could move among the nobility, but that she belonged with them. Because that proved something much more important: that the love she'd earned from Elend during those few early months wasn't based on a falsehood.

*It's . . . true,* Vin thought. *I can be both. Why did it take me so long to figure it out?*

"Excuse me, ladies," a voice said.

Vin smiled, turning as the women parted to make way for Elend. Several of the younger ones got dreamy expressions on their faces as they regarded Elend with his warrior's body, his rugged beard, and his white imperial uniform. Vin suppressed a huff of annoyance. *She'd* loved him long before he'd become dreamy.

"Ladies," Elend said to the women, "as Lady Vin herself will be quick to tell you, I'm rather ill-mannered. That, in itself, would be a very small sin. Unfortunately, I'm also quite unconcerned about my own disregard for propriety. So, therefore, I'm going to steal my wife away from you all and selfishly monopolize her time. I'd apologize, but that's not the sort of thing we barbarians do."

With that, and with a smile, he held out his elbow to her. Vin smiled back, taking the arm and allowing him to lead her away from the pack of women.

"Thought you might want some room to breathe," Elend said. "I can only imagine how it must make you feel to be surrounded by a virtual army of puffballs."

"I appreciate the rescue," Vin said, though it wasn't actually true. How was Elend to know that she'd suddenly discovered that she fit in with those puffballs? Besides, just because they wore frills and makeup didn't mean they weren't dangerous—she'd learned that much easily her first few months. The thought distracted her such that she didn't notice where Elend was leading her until they were almost there.

When she did realize it, she stopped immediately, jerking Elend back. "The dance floor?" she asked.

"Indeed," he said.

"But, I haven't danced in almost four years!"

"Neither have I," Elend said. He stepped closer. "But, it would be terrible to miss the opportunity. After all, we never did get to dance."

It was true. Luthadel had gone into revolt before they'd gotten an opportunity to dance together, and after that, there hadn't been time for balls or frivolity. She knew Elend understood how much she missed not having had the chance. He'd asked her to dance on the first night when they'd met, and she'd turned him down. She still felt as if she'd given up some unique opportunity on that first evening.

And so, she let him lead her up onto the slightly raised dance floor. Couples whispered, and as the song ended, everyone else furtively departed the dance floor, leaving Vin and Elend alone—a figure in lines of white, and another in curves of black. Elend put an arm at her waist, turning her toward him, and Vin found herself traitorously nervous.

*This is it,* she thought, flaring pewter to keep from shaking. *It's finally happening. I finally get to dance with him!*

At that moment—as the music began—Elend reached into his pocket and pulled out a book. He raised it with one hand, the other on her waist, and began to read.

Vin's jaw dropped, then she whacked him on the arm. "What do you think you're doing?" she demanded as he shuffled through the dance steps, still holding his book. "Elend! I'm trying to have a special moment here!"

He turned toward her, smiling with a terribly mischievous grin. "Well, I want to make that special moment as authentic as possible. I mean, you are dancing with *me,* after all."

"For the first time!"

"All the more important to be certain that I make the right impression, Miss Valette!"

"Oh, for . . . Will you please just put the book away?"

Elend smiled more deeply, but slid the book back into his pocket, taking her hand and dancing with her in a more proper manner. Vin flushed as she saw the confused crowd standing around the dance floor. They obviously had no idea what to make of Elend's behavior.

"You *are* a barbarian," Vin told him.

"A barbarian because I read books?" Elend said lightly. "That's one that Ham will have a great time with."

"Honestly," Vin said, "where did you even get a book here?"

"I had one of Yomen's servants fetch it for me," Elend said. "From the keep library. I knew they'd have it—*Trials of Monument* is a rather famous work."

Vin frowned. "Do I recognize that title?"

"It was the book that I was reading that night on the Venture balcony," Elend said. "The time we first met."

"Why, Elend! That's almost romantic—in a twisted 'I'm going to make my wife want to kill me' sort of way."

"I thought you'd appreciate it," he said, turning lightly.

"You're in rare form tonight. I haven't seen you like this for quite some time."

"I know," he said, sighing. "To be honest, Vin, I feel a bit guilty. I'm worried that I was too informal during my conversation with Yomen. He's so stiff that my old instincts—the ones that always made me respond to people like him with mockery—came out."

Vin let him lead the dance, looking up at him. "You're just acting like yourself. That's a good thing."

"My old self didn't make a good king," Elend said.

"The things you learned about kingship didn't have to do with your personality, Elend," Vin said. "They had to do with other things—about confidence, and about decisiveness. You can have those things and still be yourself."

Elend shook his head. "I'm not sure I can. Certainly, tonight, I should have been more formal. I allowed the setting to make me lax."

"No," Vin said firmly. "No, I'm *right* about this, Elend. You've been doing the exact thing I have. You've been so determined to be a good king that you've let it squish who you really are. Our responsibilities shouldn't have to destroy us."

"They haven't destroyed you," he said, smiling behind his short beard.

"They nearly did," Vin said. "Elend, I had to realize that I could be both people—the Mistborn of the streets and the woman of the court. I had to acknowledge that the new person I'm becoming is a valid extension of who I am. But for you, it's opposite! You have to realize that who you were is still a valid part of you. That person makes silly comments, and does things just to provoke a reaction. But, he's also lovable and kindhearted. You can't lose those things just because you're emperor."

He got that look in his face, the thoughtful one, the one that meant he was going to argue. Then, however, he hesitated.

"Coming to this place," he said, looking at the beautiful windows and watching the nobility, "it's reminded me of what I spent most of my life doing. Before I had to be a king. Even then, I was trying to do things my way—I went off and read during balls. But, I didn't do it away in the library, I did it in the ballroom. I didn't want to hide, I wanted to express discontent with my father, and reading was my way."

"You were a good man, Elend," Vin said. "Not an idiot, as you now seem to think that you were. You were a little undirected, but still a good leader. You took control of Luthadel and stopped the skaa from committing a slaughter in their rebellion."

"But then, the whole Penrod fiasco . . ."

"You had things to learn," Vin said. "Like I did. But, please don't become someone else, Elend. You can be both Elend the emperor and Elend the man."

He smiled deeply, then pulled her close, pausing their dance. "Thank you," he said, then kissed her. She could tell that he hadn't made his decision yet—he still thought that he needed to be more of a hard warrior than a kind scholar. However, he was thinking. That was enough, at the moment.

Vin looked up into his eyes, and they returned to the dance. Neither spoke; they simply let the wonder of the moment hold them. It was a surreal experience for Vin. Their army was outside, the ash was falling perpetually, and the mists were killing people. Yet, inside this room of white marble and sparkling colors, she danced with the man she loved for the first time.

They both spun with the grace of Allomancy, stepping as if on the wind, moving as if made of mist. The room grew hushed, the nobility like a theater audience, watching some grand performance, not two people who hadn't danced in years. And yet, Vin knew it was wonderful, something that had rarely been seen. Most noble Mistborn couldn't afford to appear too graceful, lest they give away their secret powers.

Vin and Elend had no such inhibitions. They danced as if to make up for the four years lost, as if to throw their joy in the face of an apocalyptic world and a hostile city. The song began to wind down. Elend pulled her against him, and her tin let her feel his heartbeat so close. It was beating far more swiftly than a simple dance could account for.

"I'm glad we did this," he said.

"There's another ball soon," she said. "In a few weeks."

"I know," he said. "As I understand it, that ball is going to be held at the Canton of Resource."

Vin nodded. "Thrown by Yomen himself."

"And, if the supply cache is hidden anywhere in the city, it will most likely be beneath that building."

"We'd have an excuse—and a precedent—to get in."

"Yomen has some atium," Elend said. "He's wearing a bead of it on his forehead. Though, just because he has one bead doesn't mean he has a wealth of it."

Vin nodded. "I wonder if he's found the storage cavern."

"He has," Elend said, "I'm sure of it. I got a reaction out of him when I mentioned it."

"That still shouldn't stop us," Vin said, smiling. "We go to his ball, sneak into the cavern, find out what the Lord Ruler left there, then decide what to do about the siege—and the city—based on that?"

"Seems like a good plan," Elend said. "Assuming I can't get him to listen to reason. I was *close,* Vin. I can't help but think that there might be a chance to bring him to our side."

She nodded.

"All right, then," he said. "Ready to make a grand exit?"

Vin smiled, then nodded. As the music ended, Elend spun and threw her to the side, and she Pushed off of the metal dance floor rim. She shot out over the crowd, guiding herself toward the exit, dress flapping.

Behind, Elend addressed the crowd. "Thank you so much for letting us join you. Anyone who wants to escape the city will be allowed passage through my army."

Vin landed and saw the crowd turn as Elend jumped over their heads, fortunately managing to guide himself through the relatively low room without crashing into any windows or hitting the ceiling. He joined her at the doors, and they escaped through the antechamber and into the night.

*Hemalurgy is of Ruin. It destroys. By taking abilities from one person and giving them to another—in reduced amounts—power is actually lost. In line with Ruin's own appointed purpose—breaking down the universe into smaller and smaller pieces—Hemalurgy gives great gifts, but at a high cost.*

# 33

HUMANS MIGHT HAVE SCORNED TENSOON, perhaps throwing things at him or yelling curses as he passed. Kandra were too orderly for that kind of display, but TenSoon could feel their disdain. They watched as he was taken from his cage, then led back to the Trustwarren for judgment. Hundreds of eyes regarded him, set in bodies with bones of steel, glass, rock, and wood. The younger kandra were more extreme in form, the older were more orthodox.

All were accusatory.

Before, at the trial, the crowd had been curious—perhaps horrified. That had changed; TenSoon's time spent in the display cage had worked as intended. The Second Generation had been able to promote his infamy, and kandra who had once, perhaps, been sympathetic to him now watched with disgust. In a thousand years of history, the kandra had never had a criminal such as TenSoon.

He bore the stares and the scorn with a raised head, padding through the corridor in a dog's body. It was strange to him, how natural the bones felt. He'd only spent a year's time wearing them, but putting them on again—discarding the scrawny, naked human body—felt more like returning home than coming back to the Homeland had a year before.

And so, what was supposed to be a humiliation for him became, instead, something of a triumph. It had been a wild hope, but he'd manipulated the Second Generation into giving him back the dog's body. The sack had even contained the body's hair and nails—likely, they had simply collected the entire mess after forcing TenSoon to abandon it and enter his prison a year ago.

The comfortable bones gave him strength. This was the body that Vin had given him. She was the Hero of Ages. He had to believe that.

Otherwise he was about to make a very big mistake.

His guards led him into the Trustwarren. This time, there were too many observers to fit into the room, so the Seconds declared that those younger than the Seventh Generation had to wait outside. Even so, kandra filled the rows of stone seats. They sat silently as TenSoon was led to the slightly raised metallic disk set into the center of the stone floor. The broad doors were left open, and younger kandra crowded outside, listening.

TenSoon looked up as he stepped onto his platform. The lump-like shadows of the First Generation waited above, each one in his separate alcove, backlit faintly in blue.

KanPaar approached his lectern. TenSoon could see the satisfaction in the way KanPaar slid across the floor. The Second felt that his triumph was complete—what happened to those who ignored the directives of the Second Generation would not soon be forgotten. TenSoon settled back on his haunches, guarded by two kandra with the Blessing of Potency twinkling in each shoulder. They carried large mallets.

"TenSoon of the Third Generation," KanPaar said loudly. "Are you ready to bear the sentence of your judgment?"

"There will be no judgment," TenSoon said. His words slurred, coming from the dog's mouth, but they were clear enough to understand.

"No judgment?" KanPaar asked, amused. "You now seek to back out of what you yourself demanded?"

"I came to give information, not to be judged."

"I—"

"I'm not speaking to you, KanPaar," TenSoon said, turning from the Second to look up. "I'm talking to them."

"They heard your words, Third," KanPaar snapped. "Control yourself! I will not let you turn this judgment into a circus, as you did before."

TenSoon smiled. Only a kandra would consider a mild argument to be a 'circus.' TenSoon didn't turn away from the First Generation's alcoves, however.

"Now," KanPaar said. "We—"

"You!" TenSoon bellowed, causing KanPaar to sputter again. "First Generation! How long will you sit in your comfortable home, pretending that the world above doesn't exist? You think that if you ignore the problems, they won't affect you? Or, is it that you've stopped believing in your own teachings?

"The days of mist have come! The endless ash now falls! The earth shakes and trembles. You can condemn me, but you must not ignore me! The world will soon die! If you want people—in all of their forms—to survive, you must act! You must be ready! For you may soon need to command our people to accept the Resolution!"

The room fell silent. Several of the shadows above shuffled, as if discomfited—though kandra generally didn't react in such a way. It was too disorderly.

Then a voice—soft, scratchy, and very tired—spoke from above. "Proceed, KanPaar."

The comment was so unexpected that several members of the audience actually gasped. The First Generation never spoke in the presence of lessers. TenSoon wasn't awed—he'd seen them, and talked with them, before they'd grown too superior to deal with anyone but the Seconds. No, he wasn't awed. He was just disappointed.

"My faith in you was misplaced," he said, mostly to himself. "I should not have returned."

"TenSoon of the Third Generation!" KanPaar said, standing up straight, crystalline True Body sparkling as he pointed. "You have been sentenced to the ritual imprisonment of ChanGaar! You will be beaten to the point of fracture, then bricked into a pit, with only one hole for your daily slop. You will remain there for ten generations! Only after that will you be executed by starvation! Know that your greatest sin was that of rebellion. If you had not strayed from the advice and wisdom of this council, you would never have thought it right to break the First Contract. Because of you, the Trust has been endangered, as has every kandra of every generation!"

KanPaar let the pronouncement ring in the chamber. TenSoon sat quietly on his haunches. KanPaar had obviously expected some kind of response from him, but TenSoon gave none. Finally, KanPaar gestured to the guards beside TenSoon, who hefted their fearsome hammers.

"You know, KanPaar," TenSoon said, "I learned a few important things while wearing these bones a year ago."

KanPaar gestured again. The guards raised their weapons.

"It's something I had never paused to consider," TenSoon said. "Humans, if you think about it, just aren't built for speed. Dogs, however, *are."*

The hammers fell.

TenSoon leaped forward.

The powerful dog's haunches launched him into motion. TenSoon was a member of the Third Generation. Nobody had been eating and emulating bodies as long as he had, and he knew how to pack muscles into a body. In addition, he had spent a year wearing the bones of a wolfhound, being forced to try to keep up with his Mistborn master. He had undergone what had effectively been a year of training by one of the most talented Allomancers the world had ever known.

On top of that, a body mass that had translated from a scrawny human made quite a substantial wolfhound. This, combined with his skill in crafting bodies, meant that when TenSoon jumped, he *jumped.* His guards cried out in shock as TenSoon sprang away, his leap taking him at least ten feet across the room. He hit the ground running, but didn't head for the door. They'd be expecting that.

Instead he sprang directly toward KanPaar. The foremost of Seconds cried out, throwing up ineffectual hands as a hundred pounds of wolfhound crashed into him, throwing him to the stone floor. TenSoon heard sharp cracks as KanPaar's delicate bones shattered, and KanPaar screamed in a very un-kandra-like way.

*That seems appropriate,* TenSoon thought, shoving his way through the ranks of the Seconds, shattering bones. *Honestly, what kind of vain fool wears a True Body made of crystal?*

Many of the kandra didn't know how to react. Others—especially the younger ones—had spent a lot of time around humans on Contracts, and they were more accustomed to chaos. These scattered, leaving their elder companions sitting on the benches in shock. TenSoon darted between bodies, heading toward the doors. The guards beside the podium—the ones who would have shattered his bones—rushed to KanPaar's side, their filial sense of duty overriding their desire to prevent his escape. Besides, they must have seen the crowd clogging the doorway, and assumed that TenSoon would be slowed.

As soon as he reached the crowd, TenSoon jumped again. Vin had required him to be able to leap incredible heights, and he'd practiced with many different muscle structures. This jump wouldn't have impressed Vin—TenSoon no longer had the Blessing of Potency he'd stolen from OreSeur—but it was more than enough to let him clear the watching kandra. Some cried out, and he landed in a pocket of open space, then leaped again toward the open cavern beyond.

"No!" he heard echoing from the Trustwarren. "Go after him!"

TenSoon took off in a loping dash down one of the corridors. He ran quickly—far more quickly than anything bipedal could have managed. With his canine body, he hoped he'd be able to outrun even kandra bearing the Blessing of Potency.

*Farewell, my home,* TenSoon thought, leaving the main cavern behind. *And farewell to what little honor I had left.*

# PART THREE
# THE BROKEN SKIES

*Feruchemy, it should be noted, is the power of balance. Of the three powers, only it was known to men before the conflict between Preservation and Ruin came to a head. In Feruchemy, power is stored up, then later drawn upon. There is no loss of energy—just a changing of the time and rate of its use.*

# 34

MARSH STRODE INTO THE SMALL TOWN. Workers atop the makeshift gate—which looked flimsy enough that a determined knock would send it toppling—froze in place. Ash sweepers noticed him pass with shock, then horror. It was odd, how they watched, too terrified to flee. Or, at least, too terrified to be the first one to flee.

Marsh ignored them. The earth trembled beneath him in a beautiful song—quakes were common, here, in the shadow of Mount Tyrian. It was the ashmount closest to Luthadel. Marsh walked through Elend Venture's own territory. But, of course, the emperor had abandoned it. That seemed an invitation to Marsh, and to the one who controlled him. They were really the same. Marsh smiled as he walked.

A small piece of him was still free. He let it sleep, however. Ruin needed to think he had given up. That was the point. And so, Marsh held back only a tiny bit, and he did not fight. He let the ashen sky become a thing of bespeckled beauty, and treated the death of the world as a blessed event.

Biding his time. Waiting.

The village was an inspiring sight. The people were starving here, even though they were within the Central Dominance: Elend Venture's "protected" area. They had the wonderful, haunted expressions of those who were close to giving up hope. The streets were barely maintained, the homes—which had once been the dwellings of noblemen, but were now filled with hungry skaa—covered in ash, their gardens stripped and their structures cannibalized to feed fires during the winter.

The gorgeous sight made Marsh smile with satisfaction. Behind him, people finally started to move, fleeing, doors slamming. There were probably some six or seven thousand people living in the town. They were not Marsh's concern. Not at the moment.

He was interested only in a single, specific building. It looked little different from the others, a mansion in a fine row. The town had once been a stopping place for travelers, and had grown to be a favored place for nobility to construct second homes. A few noble families had lived here permanently, overseeing the many skaa who had worked the plantations and fields on the plains outside.

The building Marsh chose was slightly better maintained than those around it. The garden was, of course, more weeds than cultivation, and the outer mansion walls hadn't seen a good scrubbing in years. However, fewer sections of it looked to have been broken apart for firewood, and a guard actually stood watch at the front gate.

Marsh killed him with one of the razor-sharp metal triangles that had once been used in the Lord Ruler's ceremonies. Marsh Pushed it through the guard's chest even as the man opened his mouth in challenge. The air was oddly still and quiet as the guard's voice cut off, and he toppled to the side in the road. The skaa who watched from nearby homes knew better than to react, and didn't stir.

Marsh hummed to himself as he strolled up the front walk to the mansion, startling a small flock of ravens who had come to roost. Once this path would have been a calming stroll through gardens, the way marked by flagstones. Now it was simply a hike through a weed-filled field. The man who owned the place obviously couldn't afford more than the lone gate guard, and nobody raised an alarm at Marsh's approach. He was actually able to walk right up to the front doors. Smiling to himself, he knocked.

A maidservant opened the doors. She froze when she saw Marsh, taking in his spiked eyes, his unnaturally tall figure, his dark robes. Then she began to tremble.

Marsh held out a hand, palm up, with another of the triangles. Then he Pushed it straight into her face. It snapped out the back of the skull, and the woman toppled. He stepped over her body and entered the house.

It was far nicer inside than the exterior had led him to expect. Rich furnishings, freshly painted walls, intricate ceramics. Marsh raised an eyebrow, scanning the room with his spiked eyes. The way his sight worked, it was hard for him to distinguish colors, but he was familiar enough with his powers now that he could pick them out if he wanted. The Allomantic lines from the metals inside of most things were really quite expressive.

To Marsh, the mansion was a place of pristine whiteness and bright blobs of expensive color. Marsh searched through it, burning pewter to enhance his physical abilities, allowing him to walk much more lightly than would otherwise have been possible. He killed two more servants in the course of his exploration, and eventually moved up to the second floor.

He found the man he wanted sitting at a desk in a top-floor room. Balding, wearing a rich suit. He had a petite mustache set in a round face, and was slumped, eyes closed, a bottle of hard liquor empty at his feet. Marsh saw this with displeasure.

"I come all this way to get you," Marsh said. "And when I finally find you, I discover that you have intoxicated yourself into a stupor?"

The man had never met Marsh, of course. That didn't stop Marsh from feeling annoyed that he wouldn't be able to see the look of terror and surprise in the man's eyes when he found an Inquisitor in his home. Marsh would miss out on the fear, the anticipation of death. Briefly, Marsh was tempted to wait until the man sobered up so that the killing could be performed properly.

But, Ruin would have none of that. Marsh sighed at the injustice of it, then slammed the unconscious man down against the floor and drove a small bronze spike through his heart. It wasn't as large or thick as an Inquisitor spike, but it killed just as well. Marsh ripped it out of the man's heart, leaving the former nobleman dead, blood pooling on the floor.

Then, Marsh walked out, leaving the building. The nobleman—Marsh didn't even know his name—had used Allomancy recently. The man was a Smoker, a Misting who could create copperclouds, and the use of his ability had drawn Ruin's attention. Ruin had been wanting an Allomancer to drain.

And so, Marsh had come to harvest the man's power and draw it into the spike. It seemed something of a waste to him. Hemalurgy—particularly Allomantic imbues—was much more potent when one could drive the spike through the victim's heart and directly into a waiting host. That way, very little of the Allomantic ability was lost. Doing it this way—killing the Allomancer to make a spike, then traveling somewhere else to place it—would grant the new host far less power.

But, there was no getting around it in this case. Marsh shook his head as he stepped over the maidservant's body again, moving out into the unkempt gardens. No one accosted, or even looked at, him as he made his way to the front gates. There, however, he was surprised to find a couple of skaa men kneeling on the ground.

"Please, Your Grace," one said as Marsh passed. "Please, send the obligators back to us. We will serve better this time."

"You have lost that opportunity," Marsh said, staring at them with his spike-heads.

"We will believe in the Lord Ruler again," another said. "He fed us. Please. Our families have no food."

"Well," Marsh said. "You needn't worry about that for long."

The men knelt, confused, as Marsh left. He didn't kill them, though part of him wished to. Unfortunately, Ruin wanted to claim that privilege for himself.

Marsh walked across the plain outside the town. After about an hour's time he stopped, turning to look back at the community and the towering ashmount behind it.

At that moment, the top left half of the mountain exploded, spewing a deluge of dust, ash, and rock. The earth shook, and a booming sound washed over Marsh. Then, flaming hot and red, a large gout of magma began to flow down the side of the ashmount toward the plain.

Marsh shook his head. Yes. Food was *hardly* this town's biggest problem. They really needed to get their priorities straight.

*Hemalurgy is a power about which I wish I knew far less. To Ruin, power must have an inordinately high cost—using it must be attractive, yet must sow chaos and destruction in its very implementation.*

*In concept, it is a very simple art. A parasitic one. Without other people to steal from, Hemalurgy would be useless.*

# 35

"YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT HERE?" Spook asked.

Breeze turned away from the brightened tavern, raising an eyebrow. Spook had brought him—along with several of Goradel's soldiers in street clothing—to one of the larger, more reputable locations. Voices rang within.

"Yes, this should be fine," Breeze said, eyeing the tavern. "Skaa out at night. Never thought I'd see that. Perhaps the world really *is* ending. . . ."

"I'm going to go to one of the poorer sections of town," Spook said quietly. "There are some things I want to check on."

"Poorer sections," Breeze said musingly. "Perhaps I should accompany you. I've found that the poorer people are, the more likely they are to let their tongues wag."

Spook raised an eyebrow. "No offense, Breeze, but I kind of think you'd stand out."

"What?" Breeze asked, nodding toward his utilitarian brown worker's outfit—quite a change from his usual suit and vest. "I'm wearing these dreadful clothes, aren't I?"

"Clothing isn't everything, Breeze. You've kind of got a . . . bearing about you. Plus, you don't have much ash on you."

"I was infiltrating the lower ranks before you were born, child," Breeze said, wagging a finger at him.

"All right," Spook said. He reached to the ground, scooping up a pile of ash. "Let's just rub this into your clothing and on your face. . . ."

Breeze froze. "I'll meet you back at the lair," he finally said.

Spook smiled, dropping the ash as he disappeared into the mists.

"I never did like him," Kelsier whispered.

Spook left the richer section of town, moving at a brisk pace. When he hit the streetslot, he didn't stop, but simply leaped off the side of the road and plummeted twenty feet.

His cloak flapped behind him as he fell. He landed easily and continued his quick pace. Without pewter, he would certainly have broken some limbs. Now he moved with the same dexterity he'd once envied in Vin and Kelsier. He felt exhilarated. With pewter flaring inside of him, he never felt tired—never even felt fatigued. Even simple acts, like walking down the street, made him feel full of grace and power.

He moved quickly to the Harrows, leaving behind the streets of better men, entering the cluttered, overpacked alley-like streetslot, knowing exactly where he'd find his quarry. Durn was one of the leading figures in the Urteau underworld. Part informant, part beggar lord, the unfulfilled musician had become a sort of a mayor of the Harrows. Men like that had to be where people could find—and pay—them.

Spook still remembered that first night after waking from his fevers a few weeks back, the night when he'd visited a tavern and heard men talking about him. Over the next few days, he'd visited several other taverns, and had heard others mention rumors that spoke of Spook. Sazed and Breeze's arrival had kept Spook from confronting Durn—the apparent source of the rumors—about what he'd been telling people. It was time to correct that oversight.

Spook picked up his pace, leaping heaps of discarded boards, dashing around piles of ash, until he reached the hole that Durn called home. It was a section of canal wall that had been hollowed out to form a kind of cave. Though the wooden framing around the door looked as rotted and splintered as everything else in the Harrows, Spook knew it to be reinforced on the back with a thick oaken bar.

Two brutes sat watch outside. They eyed Spook as he stopped in front of the door, cloak whipping around him. It was the same one he'd been wearing when he'd been tossed into the fire, and it was still spotted with burn marks and holes.

"The boss isn't seeing anyone right now, kid," said one of the big men, not rising from his seat. "Come back later."

Spook kicked the door. It broke free, its hinges snapping, the bar shattering its mountings and tumbling backward.

Spook stood for a moment, shocked. He had too little experience with pewter to gauge its use accurately. If he was shocked, however, the two brutes were stunned. They sat, staring at the broken door.

"You may need to kill them," Kelsier whispered.

*No,* Spook thought. *I just have to move quickly.* He dashed into the open hallway, needing no torch or lantern by which to see. He whipped spectacles and a cloth out of his pocket as he approached the door at the end of the hallway, fixing them in place even as the guards called out behind him.

He threw his shoulder against the door with a bit more care, slamming it open but not breaking it. He moved into a well-lit room where four men sat playing chips at a table. Durn was winning.

Spook pointed at the men as he skidded to a stop. "You three. Out. Durn and I have business."

Durn sat at the table, looking genuinely surprised. The brutes rushed up behind Spook, and he turned, falling to a crouch, reaching under his cloak for his dueling cane.

"It's all right," Durn said, standing. "Leave us."

The guards hesitated, obviously angry at being passed so easily. Finally, however, they withdrew, Durn's gambling partners going with them. The door closed.

"That was quite the entrance," Durn noted, sitting back down at his table.

"You've been talking about me, Durn," Spook said, turning. "I've heard people discussing me in taverns, mentioning your name. You've been spreading rumors about my death, telling people that I was on the Survivor's crew. How did you know who I was, and why have you been using my name?"

"Oh, come now," Durn said, scowling. "How anonymous did you think you were? You're the Survivor's friend, and you spend a good half your time living in the emperor's own palace."

"Luthadel's a long way from here."

"Not so far that news doesn't travel," Durn said. "A Tineye comes to town, spying about, flaunting seemingly endless funds? It wasn't really that hard to figure out who you were. Besides, there's your eyes."

"What about them?" Spook asked.

The ugly man shrugged. "Everyone knows that strange things happen around the Survivor's crew."

Spook wasn't certain what to make of that. He walked forward, looking over the cards on the table. He picked one up, feeling its paper. His heightened senses let him feel the bumps on the back.

"Marked cards?" he asked.

"Of course," Durn said. "Practice game, to see if my men could read the patterns right."

Spook tossed the card onto the table. "You still haven't told me why you've been spreading rumors about me."

"No offense, kid," Durn said. "But . . . well, you're supposed to be dead."

"If you believed that, then why bother talking about me?"

"Why do you think?" Durn said. "The people love the Survivor—and anything related to him. That's why Quellion uses his name so often. But, if I could show that Quellion killed one of Kelsier's own crew . . . well, there are a lot of people in this city who wouldn't like that."

"So, you're just trying to help," Spook said flatly. "Out of the goodness of your heart."

"You're not the only one who thinks that Quellion is killing this city. If you're really of the Survivor's crew, you'll know that sometimes, people fight."

"I find it difficult to think of you as an altruist, Durn. You're a thief."

"So are you."

"We didn't know what we were getting into," Spook said. "Kelsier promised us riches. How do you gain from all this?"

Durn snorted. "The Citizen is very bad for business. Venture red wine being sold for a fraction of a clip? Our smuggling has been choked to a trickle because everyone fears buying our goods. Things were *never* this bad under the Lord Ruler." He leaned in. "If your friends staying in the old Ministry building think they can do something about that lunatic running this city, then tell them they'll have my support. There isn't a large underground left in this city, but Quellion will be surprised at the damage it can do if manipulated the right way."

Spook stood quietly for a moment. "There's a man milking for information in the tavern on Westbrook Lane. Send someone to contact him. He's a Soother—the best one you'll ever meet—but he stands out a bit. Make your offer to him."

Durn nodded.

Spook turned to go, then glanced back at Durn. "Don't mention my name to him, or what happened to me."

With that, he left through the hallway, passing the guards and the displaced crooks from the card game. Spook pulled off his blindfold as he stepped into the daylight-like brightness of the starlit night.

He strolled through the Harrows, trying to decide what he thought of the meeting. Durn hadn't revealed anything all *that* important. Yet, Spook felt as if something were happening around him, something he hadn't planned on, something he couldn't quite decipher. He was becoming more comfortable with Kelsier's voice, and with his pewter, but he was still worried that he wouldn't be able to live up to the position he'd fallen into.

"If you don't get to Quellion soon," Kelsier said, "he's going to find your friends. He's already preparing assassins."

"He won't send them," Spook said quietly. "Especially if he's heard Durn's rumors about me. Everyone knows that Sazed and Breeze were on your crew. Quellion won't take them out unless they prove to be such a threat that he has no other choice."

"Quellion is an unstable man," Kelsier said. "Don't wait too long. You don't want to find out how irrational he can be."

Spook fell silent. Then, he heard footsteps, approaching quickly. He felt the vibrations in the ground. He spun and loosened his cloak, reaching for his weapon.

"You're not in danger," Kelsier said quietly.

Spook relaxed as someone rushed around the alley corner. It was one of the men from Durn's chips game. The man was puffing, his face flush with exhaustion. "My lord!" he said.

"I'm no lord," Spook said. "What happened? Is Durn in danger?"

"No, sir," the man said. "I just . . . I . . ."

Spook raised an eyebrow.

"I need your help," the man said between breaths. "When we realized who you were, you were already gone. I just . . ."

"Help with what?" Spook said tersely.

"My sister, sir," the man said. "She got taken by the Citizen. Our . . . father was a nobleman. Durn hid me, but Mailey, she got sold by the woman I'd left her with. Sir, she's only seven. He's going to burn her in a few days!"

Spook frowned. *What does he expect me to do?* He opened his mouth to ask that very question, but then stopped. He wasn't the same man anymore. He wasn't limited as the old Spook would have been. He could do something else.

What Kelsier would have done.

"Can you gather ten men?" Spook asked. "Friends of yours, willing to take part in some late-night work?"

"Sure. I guess. Does this have to do with saving Mailey?"

"No," Spook said. "It has to do with your payment for saving Mailey. Get me those workers, and I'll do what I can to help your sister."

The man nodded eagerly.

"Do it now," Spook said, pointing. "We start tonight."

*In Hemalurgy, the type of metal used in a spike is important, as is the positioning of that spike on the body. For instance, steel spikes take physical Allomantic powers—the ability to burn pewter, tin, steel, or iron—and bestow them upon the person receiving the spike. Which of these four is granted, however, depends on where the spike is placed.*

*Spikes made from other metals steal Feruchemical abilities. For example, all of the original Inquisitors were given a pewter spike, which—after first being pounded through the body of a Feruchemist—gave the Inquisitor the ability to store up healing power. (Though they couldn't do so as quickly as a real Feruchemist, as per the law of Hemalurgic decay.) This, obviously, is where the Inquisitors got their infamous ability to recover from wounds quickly, and was also why they needed to rest so much.*

# 36

"YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE GONE IN," Cett said flatly.

Elend raised an eyebrow, riding his stallion through the center of his camp. Tindwyl had taught him that it was good to be seen by one's people, especially in situations where he could control the way he was perceived. He happened to agree with this particular lesson, and so he rode, wearing a black cloak to mask the ash's smudges, making certain his soldiers knew that he was among them. Cett rode with him, tied into his specially made saddle.

"You think I put myself in too much danger by entering the city?" Elend asked, nodding to a group of soldiers who had paused in their morning labors to salute him.

"No," Cett said, "we both know that I don't give a damn whether you live or die, boy. Besides, you're Mistborn. You could have gotten out if things turned dangerous."

"Why, then?" Elend asked. "Why was it a mistake?"

"Because," Cett said. "You met the people inside. You talked with them, danced among them. Hell, boy. Can't you see why that's such a problem? When the time comes to attack, you'll worry about people you're going to hurt."

Elend rode in silence for a moment. The morning mists were a normal thing to him now. They obscured the camp, masking its size. Even to his tin-enhanced eyes, distant tents became silhouetted lumps. It was as if he rode through some mythical world, a place of muffled shadows and distant noises.

Had it been a mistake for him to enter the city? Perhaps. Elend knew the theories Cett spoke of—he understood how important it was for a general to view his enemies not as individuals, but as numbers. Obstacles.

"I'm glad for my choice," Elend said.

"I know," Cett said, scratching at his thick beard. "That's what frustrates me, to be honest. You're a compassionate man. That's a weakness, but it isn't the real problem. The *problem* is your inability to deal with your own compassion."

Elend raised an eyebrow.

"You should know better than to let yourself grow attached to your enemy, Elend," Cett said. "You should have known how you would react, and planned so that you could avoid this very situation! Hell, boy, every leader has weaknesses—the ones who win are the ones who learn how to smother those weaknesses, not give them fuel!" When Elend didn't respond to that, Cett simply sighed. "All right, then, let's talk about the siege. The engineers have blocked off several streams that lead into the city, but they don't think those were the primary sources of water."

"They weren't," Elend said. "Vin has located six main wells within the city itself."

"We should poison them," Cett said.

Elend fell silent. The two halves of him still warred inside. The man he had been just wanted to protect as many people as possible. The man he was becoming, however, was more realistic. It knew that sometimes he had to kill—or at least discomfort—in order to save.

"Very well," Elend said. "I'll have Vin do it tonight—and I'll have her leave a message written on the wells saying what we've done."

"What good will that do?" Cett asked, frowning.

"I don't want to kill the people, Cett," Elend said, "I want to worry them. This way, they'll go to Yomen for water. With the entire city making demands, he should go through the water supply in his storage cache pretty quickly."

Cett grunted. He seemed pleased, however, that Elend had taken his suggestion. "And the surrounding villages?"

"Feel free to bully them," Elend said. "Organize a force of ten thousand, and send them out to harass—but not kill. I want Yomen's spies in the area to send him worried notes about his kingdom collapsing."

"You're trying to play this halfway, lad," Cett said. "Eventually, you'll have to choose. If Yomen doesn't surrender, you'll have to attack."

Elend reined in his horse outside the command tent. "I know," he said softly.

Cett snorted, but he fell silent as servants came out of the tent to unstrap him from the saddle. As they started, however, the earth began to tremble. Elend cursed, struggling to maintain control of his horse as it grew skittish. The shaking rattled tents, knocking poles free and collapsing a couple of them, and Elend heard the clang of metal as cups, swords, and other items were knocked to the ground. Eventually, the rumbling subsided, and he glanced to the side, checking on Cett. The man had managed to keep control of his mount, though one of his useless legs swung free from the saddle, and he looked as if he was about to fall off. His servants rushed to his side to help.

"Damn things are growing more and more frequent," Cett said.

Elend calmed his horse, which stood puffing in the mists. Around the camp, men cursed and yelled, dealing with the aftermath of the earthquake. They were indeed growing more frequent; the last one had only been a few weeks before. Earthquakes weren't supposed to be common in the Final Empire—during his youth, he'd never heard of one happening in the inner dominances.

He sighed, climbing from his horse and handing the beast off to an aide, then followed Cett into the command tent. The servants sat Cett in a chair, then retreated, leaving the two of them alone. Cett glanced up at Elend, looking troubled. "Did that fool Ham tell you about the news from Luthadel?"

"Or the lack of it?" Elend asked, sighing. "Yes." Not a peep had come from the capital city, let alone the supplies Elend had ordered brought down the canal.

"We don't have *that* much time, Elend," Cett said quietly. "A few months, at most. Time enough to weaken Yomen's resolve, perhaps make his people get so thirsty that they begin to look forward to invasion. But, if we don't get resupplied, there's no way we'll be able to maintain this siege."

Elend glanced at the older man. Cett sat in his chair with an arrogant expression, looking back at Elend, meeting his eyes. So much about what the crippled man did was about posturing—Cett had lost the use of his legs to disease long ago, and he couldn't intimidate people physically. So, he had to find other ways to make himself threatening.

Cett knew how to hit where it hurt. He could pick at the very faults that bothered people and exploit their virtues in ways that Elend had rarely seen even accomplished Soothers manage. And he did all this while covering up a heart that Elend suspected was far softer than Cett would ever admit.

He seemed particularly on edge this day. As if worried about something. Something important to him—something he'd been forced to leave behind, perhaps?

"She'll be all right, Cett," Elend said. "Nothing will happen to Allrianne while she's with Sazed and Breeze."

Cett snorted, waving an indifferent hand—though he did look away. "I'm better off without the damn fool of a girl around. Let that Soother have her, I say! Anyway, we're not talking about me, we're talking about you and this siege!"

"Your points have been noted, Cett," Elend said. "We will attack if I deem it necessary." As he spoke, the tent flaps parted, and Ham sauntered in, accompanied by a figure Elend hadn't seen in several weeks—at least not out of bed.

"Demoux!" Elend said, approaching the general. "You're up and about!"

"Barely, Your Majesty," Demoux said. He did still look pale. "However, I have recovered enough strength to move around a bit."

"The others?" Elend asked.

Ham nodded. "Mostly up and about as well. Demoux is among the last batch. A few more days, and the army will be back to full strength."

*Minus those who died,* Elend thought.

Cett eyed Demoux. "Most of the men recovered weeks ago. A bit weaker in the constitution than one might expect, eh, Demoux? That's what I've been hearing, at least."

Demoux blushed.

Elend frowned at this. "What?"

"It is nothing, Your Majesty," Demoux said.

"It's never 'nothing' in my camp, Demoux," Elend said. "What am I missing?"

Ham sighed, pulling over a chair. He sat on it backward, resting his muscular arms across its back. "It's just a rumor moving through the camp, El."

"Soldiers," Cett said. "They're all the same—superstitious as housewives."

Ham nodded. "Some of them have gotten it into their heads that the men who got sick from the mists were being punished."

"Punished?" Elend asked. "For what?"

"Lack of faith, Your Majesty," Demoux said.

"Nonsense," Elend said. "We all know that the mists struck randomly."

The others shared looks, and Elend had to pause and reconsider. *No. The strikes weren't random—at least, the statistics surrounding them weren't.* "Regardless," he said, deciding to change the subject, "what are your daily reports?"

The three men took turns talking about their various duties in the bivouac. Ham saw to morale and training, Demoux to supplies and camp duties, Cett to tactics and patrols. Elend stood with hands clasped behind his back, listening to the reports, but only with half an ear. They weren't much different from the previous day, though it was good to see Demoux back at his duties. He was far more efficient than his assistants.

As they talked, Elend's mind wandered. The siege was going fairly well, but a part of him—the part trained by Cett and Tindwyl—chafed at the waiting game. He might just be able to take the city straight out. He had koloss, and all accounts said that his troops were far more experienced than those inside of Fadrex. The rock formations would provide cover for the defenders, but Elend wasn't in so bad a position that he couldn't win.

But doing so would cost many, many lives.

That was the step he balked at—the last step that would take him from defender to aggressor. From protector to conqueror. And he was frustrated at his own hesitation.

There was another reason going into the city had been bad for Elend. It had been better for Elend to think of Yomen as an evil tyrant, a corrupt obligator loyal to the Lord Ruler. Now, unfortunately, he knew Yomen to be a reasonable man. And one with very good arguments. In a way, his indictment of Elend was true. Elend *was* a hypocrite. He spoke of democracy, yet he had taken his throne by force.

It was what the people had needed from him, he believed. But it did make him a hypocrite. Still, by that same logic, he knew he should send Vin to assassinate Yomen. But, could Elend order the death of a man who had done nothing wrong besides getting in his way?

Assassinating the obligator seemed as twisted an action as sending his koloss to attack the city. *Cett is right,* Elend thought. *I'm trying to play both sides on this one.* For a moment, while talking to Telden during the ball, he had felt so sure of himself. And, in truth, he still believed what he'd claimed. Elend *wasn't* the Lord Ruler. He *did* give his people more freedom and more justice.

However, he realized that this siege could tip the balance between who he was and who he feared he would become. Could he really justify invading Fadrex, slaughtering its armies and pillaging its resources, all ostensibly in the name of protecting the people of the empire? Could he dare do the opposite: back away from Fadrex, and leave the secrets in that cavern—the secrets that could potentially save the entire empire—to a man who still thought the Lord Ruler would return to save his people?

He wasn't ready to decide. For now, he was determined to exhaust every other option. Anything that would keep him from needing to invade the city. That included besieging the city to make Yomen more pliant. That also included sneaking Vin into the storage cavern. Her reports indicated that the building was very heavily guarded. She wasn't certain if she could get into it on an ordinary night. However, during a ball, defenses might be more porous. It would be the perfect time to try to get a glimpse at what was hidden in that cavern.

*Assuming Yomen hasn't simply removed the Lord Ruler's last inscription,* Elend thought. *Or that there was even something there in the first place.*

Yet, there was a chance. The Lord Ruler's final message, the last bit of help he had left for his people. If Elend could find a way to get that help without breaking his way into the city, killing thousands, he would take it.

Eventually, the men finished with their reports, and Elend dismissed them. Ham went quickly, wanting to get in on a morning sparring session. Cett was gone a few moments later, carried back to his own tent. Demoux, however, lingered. It was sometimes hard to remember just how young Demoux was—barely older than Elend himself. The balding scalp and numerous scars made the man look much older than he was, as did the still-visible effects of his extended illness.

Demoux was hesitant about something. Elend waited, and finally the man dropped his eyes, looking embarrassed. "Your Majesty," he said, "I feel that I must ask to be released from my post as general."

"And why do you say that?" Elend asked carefully.

"I don't think I'm worthy of the position anymore."

Elend frowned.

"Only a man trusted by the Survivor should command in this army, my lord," Demoux said.

"I'm sure that he does trust you, Demoux."

Demoux shook his head. "Then why did he give me the sickness? Why pick me, of all the men in the army?"

"I've told you, it was random luck, Demoux."

"My lord," Demoux said, "I hate to disagree, but we both know that isn't true. After all, you were the one who pointed out that those who fell sick did so at Kelsier's will."

Elend paused. "I did?"

Demoux nodded. "On that morning when we exposed our army to the mists, you shouted out for them to remember that Kelsier is the Lord of the Mists, and that the sickness must—therefore—be his will. I think you were right. The Survivor *is* Lord of the Mists. He proclaimed it so himself, during the nights before he died. He's behind the sickness, my lord. I know he is. He saw those who lacked faith, and he cursed them."

"That isn't what I meant, Demoux," Elend said. "I was implying that Kelsier wanted us to suffer this setback, but not that he was targeting specific individuals."

"Either way, my lord, you said the words."

Elend waved his hand dismissively.

"Then how do you explain the strange numbers, my lord?" Demoux asked.

"I'm not sure," Elend said. "I'll admit that the number of people who fell sick does produce an odd statistic, but that doesn't say anything about you specifically, Demoux."

"I don't mean that number, my lord," Demoux said, still looking down. "I mean the number who remained sick while the others recovered."

Elend paused. "Wait. What is this?"

"Haven't you heard, my lord?" Demoux asked in the quiet tent. "The scribes have been talking about it, and it's gotten around to the army. I don't think that most of them understand the numbers and such, but they understand that *something* strange is happening."

"What numbers?" Elend asked.

"Five thousand people got taken by the sickness, my lord," Demoux said.

*Exactly sixteen percent of the army,* Elend thought.

"Of those, some five hundred died," Demoux said. "Of those remaining, almost everyone recovered in one day."

"But some didn't," Elend said. "Like you."

"Like me," Demoux said softly. "Three hundred and twenty-seven of us remained sick when the others got better."

"So?" Elend asked.

"That's exactly one-sixteenth of those who fell to the sickness, my lord," Demoux said. "And we stayed sick *exactly* sixteen days. To the hour."

The tent flap rustled quietly in the breeze. Elend fell quiet, and couldn't completely suppress a shiver. "Coincidence," he finally said. "Statisticians looking for connections can *always* find odd coincidences and statistical anomalies, if they try hard enough."

"This doesn't seem like a simple anomaly, my lord," Demoux said. "It's precise. The same number keeps showing up, over and over. Sixteen."

Elend shook his head. "Even if it does, Demoux, it doesn't *mean* anything. It's just a number."

"It's the number of months the Survivor spent in the Pits of Hathsin," Demoux said.

"Coincidence."

"It's how old Lady Vin was when she became Mistborn."

"Again, coincidence," Elend said.

"There seem to be an awful lot of coincidences related to this, my lord," Demoux said.

Elend frowned, folding his arms. Demoux was right on that point. *My denials are getting us nowhere. I need to know what people are thinking, not just contradict them.*

"All right, Demoux," Elend said. "Let's say that none of these things are coincidences. You seem to have a theory of what they mean."

"It's what I said earlier, my lord," Demoux said. "The mists are of the Survivor. They take certain people and kill them, others of us they make sick—leaving the number sixteen as a proof that he really was behind the event. So, therefore, the people who grow the most sick are the ones who have displeased him the most."

"Well, except for the ones who *died* from the sickness," Elend noted.

"True," Demoux said, looking up. "So . . . maybe there's hope for me."

"That wasn't supposed to be a comforting comment, Demoux. I still don't accept all of this. Perhaps there *are* oddities, but your interpretation is based on speculation. Why would the Survivor be displeased with you? You're one of his most faithful priests."

"I took the position for myself, my lord," Demoux said. "He didn't choose me. I just . . . started teaching what I'd seen, and people listened to me. That must be what I did to offend him. If he'd wanted that from me, he'd have chosen me when he was alive, don't you think?"

*I don't think the Survivor cared much about this when he was alive,* Elend thought. *He just wanted to stir up enough anger in the skaa that they would rebel.*

"Demoux," Elend said, "you know that the Survivor didn't organize this religion when he was alive. Only men and women like you—those who looked toward his teachings *after* he died—have been able to build up a community of the faithful."

"True," Demoux. "But he *did* appear to some people after his death. I wasn't one of those people."

"He didn't appear to anyone," Elend said. "That was OreSeur the kandra wearing his body. You know that, Demoux."

"Yes," Demoux said. "But, that kandra acted at the Survivor's request. And, I wasn't on the list to get visited."

Elend laid a hand on Demoux's shoulder, looking in the man's eyes. He had seen the general, worn and grizzled beyond his age, determinedly stare down a savage koloss a full five feet taller than he was. Demoux was not a weak man, either in body or in faith.

"Demoux," Elend said, "I mean this in the kindest way, but your self-pity is getting in the way. If these mists took *you,* then we need to use that as proof that their effects have *nothing* to do with Kelsier's displeasure. We don't have time for you to question yourself right now—we both know you're twice as devoted as any other man in this army."

Demoux flushed.

"Think about it," Elend said, giving Demoux a little extra Allomantic shove in the emotions, "in you, we have obvious proof that a person's faithfulness has nothing to do with whether or not they're taken by the mists. So, rather than letting you mope, we need to move on and find the *real* reason the mists are behaving as they are."

Demoux stood for a moment, then finally nodded. "Perhaps you're right, my lord. Maybe I'm jumping to conclusions."

Elend smiled. Then, he paused, thinking about his own words. *Obvious proof that a person's faithfulness has nothing to do with whether they're taken by the mists. . . .*

It wasn't exactly true. Demoux was one of the strongest believers in the camp. What of the others who had been sick as long as he? Had they been, perhaps, men of extreme faith as well? Elend opened his mouth to ask the question of Demoux. That was when the shouting started.

*Hemalurgic decay was less obvious in Inquisitors that had been created from Mistborn. Since they already had Allomantic powers, the addition of other abilities made them awesomely strong.*

*In most cases, however, Inquisitors were created from Mistings. It appears that Seekers, like Marsh, were the favored recruits. For, when a Mistborn wasn't available, an Inquisitor with enhanced bronze abilities was a powerful tool for searching out skaa Mistings.*

# 37

SCREAMS ROSE IN THE DISTANCE. Vin started upright in her cabin. She hadn't been sleeping, though she'd been close. Another night of scouting Fadrex City had left her tired.

All fatigue was forgotten, however, as the sounds of battle clanged from the north. *Finally!* she thought, throwing off her blankets and dashing from the cabin. She wore her standard trousers and shirt, and—as always—carried several vials of metals. She downed one of these as she scrambled across the deck of the narrow-boat.

"Lady Vin!" one of the bargemen called through the daymists. "The camp has been attacked!"

"And about time, too," Vin said as she Pushed herself off the boat's cleats, hurling herself into the air. She shot through the morning mists, curls and wisps of white making her feel as a bird might flying through a cloud.

With tin, she soon found the battle. Several groups of men on horseback had ridden into the north section of camp, and were apparently trying to make their way toward the supply barges, which floated in a well-protected bend in the canal. A group of Elend's Allomancers had set up a perimeter at one side, Thugs in the front, Coinshots picking off the riders from behind. The regular soldiers held the middle, fighting well, since the horsemen were slowed by the camp's barricades and fortifications.

*Elend was right,* Vin thought with pride, descending through the air. *If we hadn't exposed our men to the mists, we'd be in trouble right now.*

The king's planning had saved their supplies and baited out one of Yomen's harrying forces. The riders had probably expected to run easily through the camp—catching the soldiers unaware and trapped by mist—then set fire to the supply barges. Instead, Elend's scouts and patrols had provided enough warning, and the enemy cavalry was bogged down in a head-on fight.

Yomen's soldiers were punching through into the camp on the south side. Though Elend's soldiers fought well, their enemies were mounted. Vin plunged down through the sky, flaring pewter and strengthening her body. She tossed a coin, Pushing on it to slow herself, and hit the dark ground, throwing up a huge spray of ash. The southern bank of riders had penetrated as far as the third line of tents. Vin chose to land right in the middle of them.

*No horseshoes,* Vin thought as soldiers began to turn toward her. *And spears—stone-tipped—instead of swords. Yomen certainly is careful.*

It almost felt like a challenge. Vin smiled, the adrenaline feeling good after so many days spent waiting. Yomen's captains began to call out, turning their attack toward Vin. In seconds, they had a force of some thirty riders galloping straight at her.

Vin stared them down. Then she jumped. She didn't need steel to get herself high—her pewter-enhanced muscles were enough for that. She crested the lead soldier's spear, feeling it pass through the air beneath her. Ash swirled in the morning mists as Vin's foot took the soldier in the face, throwing him backward from the saddle. She landed beside his rolling body, then dropped a coin and Pushed herself to the side, out of the way of galloping hooves. The unfortunate rider she'd unhorsed cried out as his friends inadvertently trampled him.

Vin's Push carried her through the open flaps of a large canvas sleeping tent. She rolled to her feet, and then—still in motion—Pushed against the tent's metal stakes, ripping them from the ground.

The walls shook, and there was a snap of canvas as the tent shot upward into the air, spread taut as its stakes all went different directions. Ash blew outward from the burst of air, and soldiers on both sides of the conflict turned toward Vin. She allowed the tent to fall down in front of her, then Pushed. The canvas caught the air, puffing out, and the stakes ripped free from the tent, shooting forward to spear horses and riders.

Men and beasts fell. Canvas fluttered to the ground before Vin. She smiled, then jumped over the discarded tangle as the riders tried to organize another assault. She didn't give them time. Elend's soldiers in the area had pulled back, shoring up the center of the defensive line, leaving Vin free to attack without fear of harming her own men.

She dashed between the horsemen, their massive mounts hindering them as they tried to keep track of her. Men and horses spun, and Vin Pulled, tearing tents out of the ground and using their metal stakes like arrows. Dozens fell before her.

The sound of galloping came from behind, and Vin spun to see that one of the enemy officers had managed to organize another charge. Ten men came straight at her, some with spears leveled, others drawing bows.

Vin didn't like killing. But she loved Allomancy—loved the challenge of using her skills, the strength and thrill of the Pushes and Pulls, the electric sense of power that came only from a body flared with pewter. When men such as these gave her an excuse to fight, she didn't restrain herself.

The arrows didn't have a chance against her. Pewter gave her speed and balance as she spun out of the way, Pulling on a metal source behind her. She jumped into the air as a rippling tent passed beneath her, carried forward by her Pull a moment before. She landed, then Pushed on several of its stakes—a couple on each of two tent corners. The tent folded upon itself, looking a bit like a napkin with someone pulling tightly on opposite corners.

And this hit the legs of the horses like a tripwire. Vin burned duralumin, then Pushed. The horses in front screamed, the improvised weapon scattering them to the ground. The canvas ripped, and the stakes pulled free, but the damage was done—those in front tripped those behind, and men tumbled beside their beasts.

Vin downed another vial to replenish her steel. Then she Pulled, whipping another tent toward her. As it grew close, she jumped, then spun and Pushed the tent toward another group of mounted men behind. The tent's stakes struck one of the soldiers in the chest, throwing him backward. He crashed through the other soldiers, causing chaos.

The man hit the ground, slumping lifeless into the ash. Still tied to him by the stakes in his chest, the canvas tent fluttered down, covering his body like a funeral shroud. Vin spun, seeking more enemies. The riders, however, were beginning to withdraw. She stepped forward, intending to chase them down, but stopped. Someone was watching her—she could see his shadow in the mist. She burned bronze.

The figure thumped with the power of metals. Allomancer. Mistborn. He was far too short to be Elend, but she couldn't tell much more than that through the shadow of mist and ash. Vin didn't pause to think. She dropped a coin and shot herself toward the stranger.

He leaped backward, Pushing himself into the air as well. Vin followed, quickly leaving the camp behind, bounding after the Allomancer. He quickly made his way to the city, and she followed, moving in vast leaps over an ashen landscape. Her quarry crested the rock formations at the front of the city, and Vin followed, landing just a few feet from a surprised guard patrol, then launching herself over crags and windswept rocks into Fadrex proper.

The other Allomancer stayed ahead of her. There was no playfulness to his motions, as there had been with Zane. This man was really trying to escape. Vin followed, now leaping over rooftops and streets. She gritted her teeth, frustrated at her inability to catch up. She timed each jump perfectly, barely pausing as she chose new anchors and Pushed herself from arc to arc.

Yet, he was good. He rounded the city, forcing her to push herself to keep up. *Fine*! she finally thought, then prepared her duralumin. She'd gotten close enough to the figure that he was no longer shadowed in mist, and she could see that he was real and corporeal, not some phantom spirit. She was increasingly certain that this was the man she'd sensed watching her when she'd first come into Fadrex. Yomen had a Mistborn.

However, to fight the man, she'd first need to catch him. She waited for the right moment, just when he was beginning to crest one of his arcing jumps, then extinguished her metals and burned duralumin. Then she Pushed.

A crash sounded behind her as her unnatural Push shattered the door she'd used as an anchor. She was thrown forward with a terrible burst of speed, like an arrow released from a bow. She approached her opponent with awesome speed.

And found nothing. Vin cursed, turning her tin back on. She couldn't leave it on while burning duralumin—otherwise, her tin would burn away in a single flash, leaving her blinded. But, she'd effectively done the same thing by turning it off. She Pulled herself down from her duralumin Push to land maladroitly atop a nearby roof. She crouched as she scanned the misty air.

*Where did you go?* she thought, burning bronze, trusting in her innate—yet still unexplained—ability to pierce copperclouds to reveal her opponent. No Allomancer could hide from Vin unless he completely turned off his metals.

Which, apparently this man had done. Again. This was the second time he'd eluded her.

It bespoke a disquieting possibility. Vin had tried very hard to keep her ability to pierce copperclouds a secret, but it had been nearly four years since her discovery of it. Zane had known about it, and she couldn't know who else had guessed, based on things she could do. Her secret could very well be out.

Vin remained on that rooftop for a few moments, but knew she'd find nothing. A man clever enough to escape her at the exact moment when her tin was down would also be clever enough to remain hidden until she was gone. In fact, it made her wonder why he had let her see him in the first . . .

Vin stood bolt upright, then downed a metal vial and Pushed herself off the rooftop, jumping with a furious anxiety back toward the camp.

She found the soldiers cleaning up the wreckage and bodies at the camp's perimeter. Elend was moving among them calling out orders, congratulating the men, and generally letting himself be seen. Indeed, sight of his white-clothed form immediately brought Vin a sense of relief.

She landed beside him. "Elend, were you attacked?"

He glanced at her. "What? Me? No, I'm fine."

*Then the Allomancer wasn't sent to distract me from an attack on Elend,* she thought, frowning. It had seemed so obvious. It—

Elend pulled her aside, looking worried. "*I'm* fine, Vin, but there's something else—something's happened."

"What?" Vin asked.

Elend shook his head. "I think this all was just a distraction—the entire attack on the camp."

"But, if they weren't after you," Vin said, "and they weren't after our supplies, then what was there to distract us from?"

Elend met her eyes. "The koloss."

"How did we miss *this*?" Vin asked, sounding frustrated.

Elend stood with a troop of soldiers on a plateau, waiting as Vin and Ham inspected the burned siege equipment. Down below, he could see Fadrex City, and his own army camped outside it. The mists had retreated a short time ago. It was disturbing that from this distance he couldn't even make out the canal—the falling ash had darkened its waters and covered the landscape to the point that everything just looked black.

At the base of the plateau's cliffs lay the remnants of their koloss army. Twenty thousand had become ten thousand in a few brief moments as a well-laid trap had rained down destruction on the beasts while Elend's troops were distracted. The daymists had kept his men from seeing what was going on until it was too late. Elend himself had felt the deaths, but had misinterpreted them as koloss sensing the battle.

"Caves in the back of those cliffs," Ham said, poking at a bit of charred wood. "Yomen probably had the trebuchets stored in the caves in anticipation of our arrival, though I'd guess they were originally being built for an assault on Luthadel. Either way, this plateau was a perfect staging area for a barrage. I'd say Yomen set them up here intending to attack our army, but when we camped the koloss just beneath the plateau . . ."

Elend could still hear the screams in his head—the koloss, full of bloodlust and frothing to fight, yet unable to attack their enemies, which were high atop the plateau. The falling rocks had done a lot of damage. And then the creatures had slipped away from him. Their frustration had been too powerful, and for a time, he hadn't been able to keep them from turning on each other. Most of the deaths had come as the koloss attacked each other. Roughly one of every two had died as they had paired off and killed each other.

*I lost control of them,* he thought. It had only been for a short while, and it had only happened because they hadn't been able to get at their enemies. However, it set a dangerous precedent.

Vin, frustrated, kicked a large chunk of burned wood, sending it tumbling down the side of the plateau.

"This was a *very* well-planned attack, El," Ham said, speaking in a soft voice. "Yomen must have seen us sending out extra patrols in the mornings, and correctly guessed that we were expecting an attack during those hours. So, he gave us one—then hit us where we should have been the strongest."

"It cost him a lot, though," Elend said. "He had to burn his own siege equipment to keep it away from us, and he has to have lost hundreds of soldiers—plus their mounts—in the attack on our camp."

"True," Ham said. "But would you trade a couple dozen siege weapons and five hundred men for ten thousand koloss? Plus, Yomen has to be worried about keeping that cavalry mobile—the Survivor only knows where he got enough grain to feed those horses as long as he did. Better for him to strike now and lose them in battle than to have them starve."

Elend nodded slowly. *This makes things more difficult. With ten thousand fewer koloss . . .* Suddenly, the forces were much more evenly matched. Elend could maintain his siege, but storming the city would be far more risky.

He sighed. "We shouldn't have left the koloss so far outside of the main camp. We'll have to move them in."

Ham didn't seem to like that.

"They're not dangerous," Elend said. "Vin and I can control them." *Mostly.*

Ham shrugged. He moved back through the smoking wreckage, preparing to send messengers. Elend walked forward, approaching Vin, who stood at the very edge of the cliff. Being up so high still made him a bit uncomfortable. Yet, she barely even noticed the sheer drop in front of her.

"I should have been able to help you regain control of them," she said quietly, staring out into the distance. "Yomen distracted me."

"He distracted us all," Elend said. "I felt the koloss in my head, but even so, I couldn't figure out what was going on. I'd regained control of them by the time you got back, but by then, a lot of them were dead."

"Yomen has a Mistborn," Vin said.

"You're sure?"

Vin nodded.

*One more thing,* he thought. He contained his frustration, however. His men needed to see him confident. "I'm giving a thousand of the koloss to you," he said. "We should have split them up earlier."

"You're stronger," Vin said.

"Not strong enough, apparently."

Vin sighed, then nodded. "Let me go down below." They'd found that proximity helped with taking control of koloss.

"I'll pull off a section of a thousand or so, then let go. Be ready to grab them as soon as I do."

Vin nodded, then stepped off the side of the plateau.

*I should have realized that I was getting caught up in the excitement of the fighting,* Vin thought as she fell through the air. It seemed so obvious to her now. And, unfortunately, the results of the attack left her feeling even more pent-up and anxious than she had before.

She tossed a coin and landed. Even a drop of several hundred feet didn't bother her anymore. It was odd to think about. She remembered timidly standing atop the Luthadel city wall, afraid to use her Allomancy to jump off, despite Kelsier's coaxing. Now she could step off a cliff and muse thoughtfully to herself on the way down.

She walked across the powdery ground. The ash came up to the top of her calves and would have been difficult to walk in without pewter to give her strength. The ashfalls were growing increasingly dense.

Human approached her almost immediately. She couldn't tell if the koloss was simply reacting to their bond, or if he was actually aware and interested enough to pick her out. He had a new wound on his arm, a result of the fighting. He fell into step beside her as she moved up to the other koloss, his massive form obviously having no trouble with the deep ash.

As usual, there was very little emotion to the koloss camp. Just a short time before, they had been screaming in bloodlust, attacking each other as stones crashed down from above. Now they simply sat in the ash, gathered in small groups, ignoring their wounds. They would have had fires going if there had been wood available. Some few dug, finding handfuls of dirt to chew on.

"Don't your people care, Human?" Vin asked.

The massive koloss looked down at her, ripped face bleeding slightly. "Care?"

"That so many of you died," Vin said. She could see corpses lying about, forgotten in the ash save for the ritual flaying that was the koloss form of burial. Several koloss still worked, moving between bodies, ripping off the skin.

"We take care of them," Human said.

"Yes," Vin said. "You pull their skin off. Why do you do that, anyway?"

"They are dead," Human said, as if that were enough of an explanation.

To the side, a large group of koloss stood up, commanded by Elend's silent orders. They separated themselves from the main camp, trudging out into the ash. A moment later, they began to look around, no longer moving as one.

Vin reacted quickly. She turned off her metals, burned duralumin, then flared zinc in a massive Pull, Rioting the koloss emotions. As expected, they snapped under her control, just as Human was.

Controlling this many was more difficult, but still well within her abilities. Vin ordered them to be calm, and to not kill, then let them return to the camp. From now on, they would remain in the back of her mind, no longer requiring Allomancy to manipulate. They were easy to ignore unless their passions grew strong.

Human watched them. "We are . . . fewer," he finally said.

Vin started. "Yes," she said. "You can tell that?"

"I . . ." Human trailed off, beady little eyes watching his camp. "We fought. We died. We need more. We have too many swords." He pointed in the distance, to a large pile of metal. Wedge-shaped koloss swords that no longer had owners.

*You can control a koloss population through the swords,* Elend had once told her. *They fight to get bigger swords as they grow. Extra swords go to the younger, smaller koloss.*

But nobody knows where those come from.

"You need koloss to use those swords, Human," Vin said.

Human nodded.

"Well," she said. "You'll need to have more children, then."

"Children?"

"More," Vin said. "More koloss."

"You need to give us more," Human said, looking at her.

"Me?"

"You fought," he said, pointing at her shirt. There was blood there, not her own.

"Yes, I did," Vin said.

"Give us more."

"I don't understand," Vin said. "Please, just show me."

"I can't," Human said, shaking his head as he spoke in his slow tone. "It's not right."

"Wait," Vin said. "Not right?" It was the first real statement of values she'd gotten from a koloss.

Human looked at her, and she could see consternation on his face. So, Vin gave him an Allomantic nudge. She didn't know exactly what to ask him to do, and that made her control of him weaker. Yet, she Pushed him to do as he was thinking, trusting—for some reason—that his mind was fighting with his instincts.

He screamed.

Vin backed away, shocked, but Human didn't attack her. He ran into the koloss camp, a massive blue monster on two legs, kicking up ash. Others backed away from him—not out of fear, for they wore their characteristic impassive faces. They simply appeared to have enough sense to stay out of the way of an enraged koloss of Human's size.

Vin followed carefully as Human approached one of the dead bodies of a koloss who still wore his skin. Human didn't rip the skin off, however, but flung the corpse over his shoulder and took off running toward Elend's camp.

*Uh, oh,* Vin thought, dropping a coin and taking to the air. She bounded after Human, careful not to outpace him. She considered ordering him back, but did not. He was acting unusually, true, but that was a good thing. Koloss generally didn't do *anything* unusual. They were predictable to a fault.

She landed at the camp's guard post and waved the soldiers back. Human continued on, barreling into the camp, startling soldiers. Vin stayed with him, keeping the soldiers away.

Human paused in the middle of camp, a bit of his passion wearing off. Vin nudged him again. After looking about, Human took off toward the broken section of camp, where Yomen's soldiers had attacked.

Vin followed, growing more and more curious. Human hadn't taken out his sword. Indeed, he didn't seem angry at all, just . . . intense. He arrived at a section where tents had fallen and men had died. The battle was still only a few hours old, and soldiers moved about, cleaning up. Triage tents had been set up just beside the battlefield. Human headed for those.

Vin rushed ahead, cutting him off just as he reached the tent with the wounded. "Human," she said warily. "What are you doing?"

He ignored her, slamming the dead koloss down on the ground. Now, finally, Human ripped the skin off the corpse. It came off easily—this was one of the smaller koloss, whose skin hung in folds, far too large for its body.

Human pulled the skin free, causing several of the watching guards to groan in disgust. Vin watched closely despite the stomach-wrenching sight. She felt like she was on the verge of understanding something very important.

Human reached down, and pulled something out of the koloss corpse.

"Wait," Vin said, stepping forward. "What was that?"

Human ignored her. He pulled out something else, and this time Vin caught a flash of bloodied metal. She followed his fingers as he moved, and this time saw the item before he pulled it free and hid it in his palm.

A spike. A small metal spike driven into the side of the dead koloss. There was a rip of blue skin beside the spikehead, as if . . .

*As if the spikes were holding the skin in place,* Vin thought. *Like nails holding cloth to a wall.*

Spikes. Spikes like . . .

Human retrieved a fourth spike, then stepped forward into the tent. Surgeons and soldiers moved back in fear, crying out for Vin to do something as Human approached the bed of a wounded soldier. Human looked from one unconscious man to another, then reached for one of them.

*Stop!* Vin commanded in her mind.

Human froze in place. Only then did the complete horror of what was happening occur to her. "Lord Ruler," she whispered. "You were going to turn them into koloss, weren't you? That's where you come from. That's why there are no koloss children."

"I am *human,*" the large beast said quietly.

*Hemalurgy can be used to steal Allomantic or Feruchemical powers and give them to another person. However, a Hemalurgic spike can also be created by killing a normal person, one who is neither an Allomancer nor a Feruchemist. In that case, the spike instead steals the very power of Preservation existing within the soul of the people. (The power that, in fact, gives all people sentience.)*

*A Hemalurgic spike can extract this power, then transfer it to another, granting them residual abilities similar to those of Allomancy. After all, Preservation's body—a tiny trace of which is carried by every human being—is the very same essence that fuels Allomancy.*

*And so, a kandra granted the Blessing of Potency is actually acquiring a bit of innate strength similar to that of burning pewter. The Blessing of Presence grants mental capacity in a similar way, while the Blessing of Awareness is the ability to sense with greater acuity and the rarely used Blessing of Stability grants emotional fortitude.*

# 38

SOMETIMES, SPOOK FORGOT THE MIST was even there. It had become such a pale, translucent thing to him. Nearly invisible. Stars in the sky blazed like a million limelights shining down on him. It was a beauty only he could see.

He turned, looking across the burned remains of the building. Skaa workers carefully sifted through the mess. It was hard for Spook to remember that they couldn't see well in the night's darkness. He had to keep them packed closely together, working as much by touch as by sight.

The scent was, of course, terrible. Yet, burning pewter seemed to help mitigate that. Perhaps the strength it gave him extended to his ability to avoid unintentional reactions, such as retching or coughing. During his youth, he had wondered about the pairing of tin and pewter. Other Allomantic pairs were opposites—steel Pushed on metals, iron Pulled on them. Copper hid Allomancers, bronze revealed Allomancers. Zinc enflamed emotions, brass depressed them. Yet, tin and pewter didn't seem opposites—one enhanced the body, the other the senses.

And yet, these *were* opposites. Tin made his sense of touch so sharp that each step had once been uncomfortable. Pewter enhanced his body, making it resistant to pain—and so as he picked his way across the blackened ruin, his feet didn't hurt as much. In a similar way, where light had once blinded him, pewter let him endure far more before needing his blindfold.

The two were opposites, yet complements—just like the other pairs of Allomantic metals. He felt *right* having the one to go with the other. How had he survived without pewter? He had been a man with only one half of an ability. Now he was complete.

And yet, he did wonder what it would be like to have the other powers too. Kelsier had given him pewter. Could he, perhaps, bless Spook with iron and steel as well?

A man directed the line of working figures. His name was Franson; he was the one who had asked Spook to rescue his sister. The execution was only a day away. Soon, the child would be thrown into a burning building of her own, but Spook was working on ways to stop that. There wasn't much he could do at the moment. So, in the meantime, Franson and his men dug.

It had been some time since Spook had gone to spy on the Citizen and his councillors. He'd shared the information he'd gleaned with Sazed and Breeze, and they'd seemed appreciative. However, with the increased security around the Citizen's home, they'd suggested that it was foolhardy to risk more spying until they'd figured out their plans for the city. Spook had accepted their guidance, though he felt himself growing anxious. He missed going to see Beldre, the quiet girl with the lonely eyes.

He didn't know her. He couldn't fool himself that he did. Yet, when they'd met and spoken that once, she hadn't screamed or betrayed him. She'd seemed intrigued by him. That was a good sign, right?

*Fool,* he thought. *She's the Citizen's own sister! Talking to her nearly got you killed. Focus on the task at hand.*

Spook watched the work for a time longer. Finally, Franson—dirty and exhausted in the starlight—approached him. "My lord," Franson said, "we've gone over this section four times now. The men in the basement pit have moved all the debris and ash to the sides, and have sifted through it twice. Whatever we were going to find, we've found it."

Spook nodded. Franson was probably right. Spook removed a small pouch from his pocket, handing it to Franson. It clinked, and the large skaa man raised an eyebrow.

"Payment," Spook said, "for the other men. They've worked here for three nights."

"They're friends, my lord," he said. "They just want to see my sister rescued."

"Pay them anyway," Spook said. "And tell them to spend the coins on food and supplies as soon as they can—before Quellion abolishes coinage in the city."

"Yes, my lord," Franson said. Then, he glanced to the side, where a mostly burned banister still stood upright. This is where the workers had placed the objects they had located in the wreckage: nine human skulls. They cast eerie shadows in the starlight. Leering, burned, and blackened.

"My lord," Franson said. "May I ask the point of this?"

"I watched this building burn down," Spook said. "I was there when these poor people were herded into the mansion, then locked inside. I couldn't do anything."

"I'm . . . sorry, my lord," Franson said.

Spook shook his head. "It's past now. However, there is something their deaths can teach us."

"My lord?"

Spook regarded the skulls. The day Spook had watched this building burn—the first time he had witnessed one of the Citizen's executions—Durn had told him something. Spook had wanted information about the Citizen's weaknesses, something to help him beat the man. Durn had only said one thing in response to this.

Count the skulls.

Spook had never had the chance to investigate that tip. He knew Durn would probably explain himself if pushed, but they both seemed to understand something important. Spook needed to see it for himself. He needed to know what the Citizen was doing.

And now he did. "Ten people were sent into this building to die, Franson," Spook said. "Ten people. Nine skulls."

The man frowned. "What does that tell us?"

"It tells us there's a way to get your sister out."

"I'm not certain what to make of this, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. They sat at a table in one of Urteau's skaa bars. The alcohol flowed freely, and skaa workers packed the place, despite the darkness and the mists.

"What do you mean?" Breeze asked. They sat alone, though Goradel and three of his toughs sat wearing street clothing at the next table over.

"This is very strange to me," Sazed said. "Skaa having their own bars is odd enough. But, skaa going out at night?"

Breeze shrugged. "Perhaps their fear of the night was more a product of the Lord Ruler's influence than the mists. With his troops on the streets watching for thieves, there were reasons other than mist to stay inside at night."

Sazed shook his head. "I have studied these things, Lord Breeze. The skaa fear of the mists was an ingrained superstitious mind-set—it was a part of their lives. And, Quellion has broken it down in little over a year."

"Oh, I think the wine and beer probably did the breaking," Breeze noted. "You'd be surprised at what men will go through in order to get themselves properly intoxicated."

Sazed eyed Breeze's own cup—the man had taken quite a liking to the skaa bars, despite the fact that he was forced to wear very mundane clothing. Of course, the clothing probably wasn't necessary anymore. If the city had even a halfway decent rumor mill, people would have already connected Breeze to the visitors who had met with Quellion a few days before. And, now that Sazed had come to the bar, any suspicions would have been confirmed. There was no way to hide Sazed's identity. His nationality was obvious. He was too tall, too bald, and he had the typical Terris long face with drooping features and earlobes stretched out by the application of numerous earrings.

The time for anonymity had passed, though Breeze had used it well. During the few days when people hadn't known who he was, he'd managed to build both goodwill and contacts in the local underground. Now, he and Sazed could sit and enjoy a quiet drink without really drawing much attention. Breeze would, of course, be Soothing the people to ensure that—but, even so, Sazed was impressed. For one as fond of high society as Breeze, the man did a remarkable job of relating to ordinary skaa workers.

A group of men laughed at the next table, and Breeze smiled, then stood and made his way over to join them. Sazed remained where he was, a mug of untouched wine on the table before him. In his opinion, there was an obvious reason why the skaa were no longer afraid to go out in the mists. Their superstitions had been overcome by something stronger: Kelsier. The one they were now calling the Lord of the Mists.

The Church of the Survivor had spread much further than Sazed had expected. It wasn't organized the same way in Urteau as in Luthadel, and the focus seemed to be different, but the fact remained that men were worshipping Kelsier. In fact, the differences were part of what made the whole phenomenon fascinating.

*What am I missing?* Sazed thought. *What is the connection here?*

The mists killed. Yet, these people went out in the mists. Why weren't the people terrified of them?

*This is not my problem,* Sazed told himself. *I need to remain focused. I've let my studies of the religions in my portfolio lapse.* He was getting close to being finished, and that worried him. So far, every single religion had proven full of inconsistencies, contradictions, and logical flaws. He was growing more and more worried that, even among the hundreds of religions in his metalminds, he would never be able to find the truth.

A wave from Breeze distracted him. So, Sazed stood—forcing himself not to show the despair he felt—and moved over to the table. The men there made room.

"Thank you," Sazed said, sitting.

"You forgot your cup, friend Terrisman," one of the men pointed out.

"I apologize," Sazed said. "I have never been one fond of intoxicants. Please, do not take offense. Your thoughtful gift was nevertheless appreciated."

"Does he always talk like that?" one of the men asked, looking at Breeze.

"You've never known a Terrismen, have you?" asked another.

Sazed flushed, to which Breeze chuckled, laying a hand on Sazed's shoulder. "All right, gentlemen. I've brought you the Terrisman, as requested. Go ahead, ask your questions."

There were six local men at the table—all mine workers, from what Sazed could tell. One of the men leaned forward, hands clasped in front of him, knuckles scarred by rock. "Breeze here says a lot of things," the man said in a low voice. "But people like him always make promises. Quellion said a lot of the same things a year ago, when he was taking control after Straff Venture left."

"Yes," Sazed. "I can understand your skepticism."

"But," the man said, raising a hand. "Terrismen don't lie. They're good people. Everyone knows that—lords, skaa, thieves, and obligators."

"So, we wanted to talk to you," another of the men said. "Maybe you're different; maybe you'll lie to us. But, better to hear it from a Terrisman than a Soother."

Breeze blinked, revealing just a faint hint of surprise. Apparently, he hadn't realized they'd been aware of his abilities.

"Ask your questions," Sazed said.

"Why did you come to this city?" one of the men asked.

"To take control of it," Sazed said.

"Why do you care?" another asked. "Why does Venture's son even want Urteau?"

"Two reasons," Sazed said. "First, because of the resources it offers. I cannot go into details, but suffice it to say that your city is very desirable for economic reasons. The second reason, however, is equally important. Lord Elend Venture is one of the best men I have ever known. He believes he can do better for this people than the current government."

"That wouldn't be hard," one of the men grumbled.

Another man shook his head. "What? You want to give the city back to the Ventures? One year, and you've forgotten the things that Straff used to do in this city?"

"Elend Venture is not his father," Sazed said. "He is a man worthy of being followed."

"And the Terris people?" one of the skaa asked. "Do they follow him?"

"In a way," Sazed said. "Once, my people tried to rule themselves, as your people now do. However, they realized the advantages of an alliance. My people have moved to the Central Dominance, and they accept the protection of Elend Venture." *Of course,* Sazed thought, *they'd rather follow me. If I would be their king.*

The table fell silent.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What business do we have even talking about this? I mean, Quellion is in charge, and these strangers don't have an army to take his throne away from him. What's the point?"

"The Lord Ruler fell to us when we had no army," Breeze pointed out, "and Quellion himself seized the government from noble rule. Change can occur."

"We're not trying to form an army or rebellion," Sazed quickly added. "We just want you to start . . . thinking. Talking with your friends. You are obviously influential men. Perhaps if Quellion hears of discontent among his people, he will begin to change his ways."

"Maybe," one of the men said.

"We don't need these outsiders," the other man repeated. "The Survivor of the Flames has come to deal with Quellion."

Sazed blinked. *Survivor of the Flames?* He caught a sly smile on Breeze's lips—the Soother had apparently heard the term before, and now he appeared to be watching Sazed for a reaction.

"The Survivor doesn't enter into this," one of the men said. "I can't believe we're even *thinking* of rebellion. Most of the world is in chaos, if you hear the reports! Shouldn't we just be happy with what we've got?"

*The Survivor?* Sazed thought. *Kelsier? But, they seem to have given him a new title. Survivor of the Flames?*

"You're starting to twitch, Sazed," Breeze whispered. "You might as well just ask. No harm in asking, right?"

No harm in asking.

"The . . . Survivor of the Flames?" Sazed asked. "Why do you call Kelsier that?"

"Not Kelsier," one of the men said. "The other Survivor. The new one."

"The Survivor of Hathsin came to overthrow the Lord Ruler," one of the men said. "So, can't we assume the Survivor of the Flames has come to overthrow Quellion? Maybe we *should* listen to these men."

"If the Survivor is here to overthrow Quellion," another man said, "then he won't need the help of these types. They just want the city for themselves."

"Excuse me," Sazed said. "But . . . might we meet this new Survivor?"

The group of men shared looks.

"Please," Sazed said. "I was a friend to the Survivor of Hathsin. I should very much like to meet a man whom you have deemed worthy of Kelsier's stature."

"Tomorrow," one of the men said. "Quellion tries to keep the dates quiet, but they get out. There will be executions near Marketpit. Be there."

*Even now, I can barely grasp the scope of all this. The events surrounding the end of the world seem even larger than the Final Empire and the people within it. I sense shards of something from long ago, a fractured presence, something spanning the void.*

*I have delved and searched, and have only been able to come up with a single name: Adonasium. Who, or what, it was, I do not yet know.*

# 39

TENSOON SAT ON HIS HAUNCHES. Horrified.

Ash rained down like shards of a broken sky, floating, making the very air look pocked and sickly. Even where he sat, atop a windswept hill, there was a layer of ash smothering the plant life. Some trees had branches broken by the weight of repeated ash pileups.

*How could they not see?* he thought. *How can they hide in their hole of a Homeland, content to let the land above die?*

Yet, TenSoon had lived for hundreds of years, and a part of him understood the tired complacency of the First and Second Generations. At times he'd felt the same thing himself. A desire to simply wait. To spend years idly, content in the Homeland. He'd seen the outside world—seen more of it than any human or koloss would ever know. What need had he of experiencing more?

The Seconds had seen him as more orthodox and obedient than his brethren, all because he had continually wanted to leave the Homeland and serve Contracts. The Second Generation had always misunderstood him. TenSoon hadn't served out of a desire to be obedient. He'd done it out of fear: fear that he'd become content and apathetic like the Seconds and begin to think that the outside world didn't matter to the kandra people.

He shook his head, then rose to all fours and loped off down the side of the hill, scattering ash into the air with each bound. As frightening as things had gotten, he was happy for one thing. The wolfhound's body felt good on him. There was such a power in it—a capacity for movement—that no human form could match. It was almost as if this were the form he *always* should have worn. What better body for a kandra with an incurable wanderlust? A kandra who had left his Homeland behind more often than any other, serving under the hated hands of human masters, all because of his fear of complacency?

He made his way through the thin forest cover, over hills, hoping that the blanket of ash wouldn't make it too difficult for him to navigate. The falling ash did affect the kandra people—it affected them greatly. They had legends about this exact event. What good was the First Contract, what good was the waiting, the protection of the Trust? To most of the kandra, apparently, these things had become a point unto themselves.

Yet, these things *meant* something. They had an origin. TenSoon hadn't been alive back then. However, he had known the First Generation and been raised by the Second. He grew up during days when the First Contract—the Trust, the Resolution—had been more than just words. The First Contract was a set of instructions. Actions to take when the world began to fall. Not just ceremony, and not just metaphor. He knew that its contents frightened some of the kandra. For them, it was better that the First Contract be a philosophical, abstract thing—for if it were still concrete, still relevant, it would require great sacrifices of them.

TenSoon stopped running; he was up to his wolfhound knees in deep black ash. The location looked vaguely familiar. He turned south, moving through a small rocky hollow—the stones now just dark lumps—looking for a place he had been over a year before. A place he'd visited after he had turned against Zane, his master, and left Luthadel to return to the Homeland.

He scrambled up a few rocks, then rounded the side of a stone outcrop, knocking lumps of ash off with his passing. They broke apart as they fell, throwing more flakes into the air.

And there it was. The hollow in rock, the place where he had stopped a year before. He remembered it, despite how the ash had transformed the landscape. The Blessing of Presence, serving him again. How would he get along without it?

*I would not be sentient without it,* he thought, smiling grimly. It was the bestowing of a Blessing on a mistwraith that brought the creature to wakefulness and true life. Each kandra got one of the four: Presence, Potency, Stability, or Awareness. It didn't matter which one a kandra gained; any of the four would give him or her sentience, changing the mistwraith into a fully conscious kandra.

In addition to sentience, each Blessing gave something else. A power. But there were stories of kandra who had gained more than one by taking them from others.

TenSoon stuck a paw into the depression, digging out the ash, working to uncover the things he had hidden a year before. He found them quickly, rolling one—then the other—out onto the rock shelf in front of him. Two small, polished iron spikes. It took two spikes to form a single Blessing. TenSoon didn't know why this was. It was simply the way of things.

TenSoon lay down, commanding the skin of his shoulder to part, and absorbed the spikes into his body. He moved them through muscles and ligaments—dissolving several organs, then re-forming them with the spikes piercing them.

Immediately, he felt power wash through him. His body became stronger. It was more than the simple adding of muscles—he could do that by re-forming his body. No, this gave each muscle an extra innate strength, making them work much better, much more powerfully, than they would have otherwise.

The Blessing of Potency. He'd stolen the two spikes from OreSeur's body. Without this Blessing, TenSoon would never have been able to follow Vin as he had during their year together. It more than doubled the power and endurance of each muscle. He couldn't regulate or change the level of that added strength—this was not Feruchemy or Allomancy, but something different. Hemalurgy.

A person had died to create each spike. TenSoon tried not to think about that too much; just as he tried not to think about how he only had this Blessing because he had killed one of his own generation. The Lord Ruler had provided the spikes each century, giving the number requested, so that the kandra could craft a new generation.

He now had four spikes, two Blessings, and was one of the most powerful kandra alive. His muscles strengthened, TenSoon jumped confidently from the top of the rock formation, falling some twenty feet to land safely on the ash-covered ground below. He took off, running far more quickly now. The Blessing of Potency resembled the power of an Allomancer burning pewter, but it was not the same. It would not keep TenSoon moving indefinitely, nor could he flare it for an extra burst of power. On the other hand, it required no metals to fuel it.

He made his path eastward. The First Contract was very explicit. When Ruin returned, the kandra were to seek out the Father to serve him. Unfortunately, the Father was dead. The First Contract didn't take that possibility into consideration. So—unable to go to the Father—TenSoon did the next best thing. He went looking for Vin.

*Originally, we assumed that a koloss was a combination of two people into one. That was wrong. Koloss are not the melding of two people, but five, as evidenced by the four spikes needed to make them. Not five bodies, of course, but five souls.*

*Each pair of spikes grants what the kandra would call the Blessing of Potency. However, each spike also distorts the koloss body a little more, making it increasingly inhuman. Such is the cost of Hemalurgy.*

# 40

"NOBODY KNOWS PRECISELY how Inquisitors are made," Elend said from the front of the tent, addressing a small group, which included Ham, Cett, the scribe Noorden, and the mostly recovered Demoux. Vin sat at the back, still trying to sort through what she had discovered. Human . . . all koloss . . . they had once been people.

"There are lots of theories about it, however," Elend said. "Once the Lord Ruler fell, Sazed and I did some research, and discovered some interesting facts from the obligators we interviewed. For instance, Inquisitors are made from ordinary men—men who remember who they were, but gain new Allomantic abilities."

"Our experience with Marsh proves that as well," Ham said. "He remembered who he was, even after he had all of those spikes driven through his body. And he gained the powers of a Mistborn when he became an Inquisitor."

"Excuse me," Cett said, "but will someone please explain what the hell this has to do with our siege of the city? There aren't any Inquisitors here."

Elend folded his arms. "This is important, Cett, because we're at war with more than just Yomen. Something we don't understand, something far greater than those soldiers inside of Fadrex."

Cett snorted. "You still believe in this talk of doom and gods and the like?"

"Noorden," Elend said, looking at the scribe. "Please tell Lord Cett what you told me earlier today."

The former obligator nodded. "Well, my lord, it's like this. Those numbers relating to the percentage of people who fall ill to the mists, they're just *too* regular to be natural. Nature works in organized chaos—randomness on the small scale, with trends on the large scale. I cannot believe that anything natural could have produced such precise results."

"What do you mean?" Cett asked.

"Well, my lord," Noorden said. "Imagine that you hear a tapping sound somewhere outside your tent. If it repeats occasionally, with no exact set pattern, then it might be the wind blowing a loose flap against a pole. However, if it repeats with exact regularity, you know that it must be a person, beating against a pole. You'd be able to make the distinction immediately, because you've learned that nature can be repetitive in a case like that, but not *exact.* These numbers are the same, my lord. They're just too organized, too repetitive, to be natural. They had to have been crafted by somebody."

"You're saying that a person made those soldiers sick?" Cett asked.

"A person? . . . No, not a person, I'd guess," Noorden said. "But *something* intelligent must have done it. That's the only conclusion I can draw. Something with an agenda, something that cares to be precise."

The room fell silent.

"And, this relates to Inquisitors somehow, my lord?" Demoux asked carefully.

"It does," Elend said. "At least, it does if you think as I do—which, I'll admit, not many people do."

"For better or for worse . . ." Ham said, smiling.

"Noorden, what do you know of how Inquisitors are made?" Elend asked.

The scribe grew uncomfortable. "I was in the Canton of Orthodoxy, as you may know, not the Canton of Inquisition."

"Surely there were rumors," Elend asked.

"Well, of course," Noorden said. "More than rumors, actually. The higher obligators were *always* trying to discover how the Inquisitors got their power. There was a rivalry between the Cantons, you see, and . . . well, I supposed you don't care about that. Regardless, we *did* have rumors."

"And?" Elend asked.

"They said . . ." Noorden began. "They said that an Inquisitor was a fusion of many different people. In order to make an Inquisitor, the Canton of Inquisition had to get a whole group of Allomancers, then combine their powers into one."

Again, silence in the room. Vin pulled her legs up, wrapping her arms around her knees. She didn't like talking about Inquisitors.

"Lord Ruler!" Ham swore quietly. "That's it! *That's* why the Inquisitors were so keen on hunting down skaa Mistings! Don't you see! It wasn't just because the Lord Ruler ordered half-breeds to be killed—it was so that the Inquisitors could perpetuate themselves! They needed Allomancers to kill so that they could make new Inquisitors!"

Elend nodded from his place at the front of the room. "Somehow, those spikes in the Inquisitors' bodies transfer Allomantic ability. You kill eight Mistings, and you give all their powers to one other man, such as Marsh. Sazed once told me that Marsh was always hesitant to speak of the day he was made an Inquisitor, but he did say that it was . . . 'messy.' "

Ham nodded. "And when Kelsier and Vin found his room the day he was taken and made an Inquisitor, they found a corpse in there. One they initially assumed was Marsh!"

"Later, Marsh said that more than one person had been killed there," Vin said quietly. "There just hadn't been enough . . . left of them to tell."

"Again," Cett said, "does this all have a point?"

"Well, it seems to be doing a good job of annoying you," Ham said lightly. "Do we *need* any other point?"

Elend gave them both hard looks. "The point is, Cett, that Vin discovered something earlier this week."

The group turned toward her.

"Koloss," Vin said. "They're made from humans."

"What?" Cett asked, frowning. "That's absurd."

"No," Vin said, shaking her head. "I'm sure of it. I've checked living koloss. Hidden in those folds and rips of skin on their bodies, they are pierced by spikes. Smaller than the Inquisitor spikes, and made from different metals, but all of the koloss have them."

"Nobody has been able to figure out where new koloss come from," Elend said. "The Lord Ruler guarded the secret, and it's become one of the great mysteries of our time. Koloss seem to kill each other with regularity when someone isn't actively controlling them. Yet, there always seem to be more of the creatures. How?"

"Because they are constantly replenishing their numbers," Ham said, nodding slowly. "From the villages they pillage."

"Did you ever wonder," Elend said, "back during the siege of Luthadel, why Jastes's koloss army attacked a random village before coming for us? The creatures needed to replenish their numbers."

"They always walk about," Vin said, "wearing clothing, talking about being human. Yet, they can't quite remember what it was like. Their minds have been broken."

Elend nodded. "The other day, Vin finally got one of them to show her how to make new koloss. From what he did, and from what he's said since, we believe that he was going to try to *combine* two men into one. That would make a creature with the strength of two men, but the mind of neither."

"A third art," Ham said, looking up. "A third way to use the metals. There is Allomancy, which draws power from the metals themselves. There is Feruchemy, which uses metals to draw power from your own body, and there is . . ."

"Marsh called it Hemalurgy," Vin said quietly.

"Hemalurgy . . ." Ham said. "Which uses the metals to draw power from *someone else's* body."

"Great," Cett said. "Point?"

"The Lord Ruler created servants to help him," Elend said. "Using this art . . . this Hemalurgy . . . he made soldiers, which we call koloss. He made spies, which we call kandra. And he made priests, which we call Inquisitors. He built them all with weaknesses, so that he could control them."

"I first learned how to take control of the koloss because of TenSoon," Vin said. "He inadvertently showed me the secret. He mentioned that the kandra and koloss were cousins, and I realized I could control one just as I had the other."

"I . . . still don't see where you're heading with this," Demoux said, glancing from Vin to Elend.

"The Inquisitors must have the same weakness, Demoux," Elend said. "This Hemalurgy leaves the mind . . . wounded. It allows an Allomancer to creep in and take control. The nobility always wondered what made the Inquisitors so fanatically devoted to the Lord Ruler. They weren't like regular obligators—they were far more obedient. Zealous to a fault."

"It happened to Marsh," Vin whispered. "The first time I met him after he'd been made an Inquisitor, he seemed different. But, he only grew even odder during the year following the Collapse. Finally, he turned on Sazed, tried to kill him."

"What we're trying to suggest," Elend said, "is that something is controlling the Inquisitors and the koloss. Something is exploiting the weakness the Lord Ruler built into the creatures and is using them as its pawns. The troubles we've been suffering, the chaos following the Collapse—it's *not* simply chaos. No more than the patterns of people who fall sick to the mists are chaotic. I know it seems obvious, but the important thing here is that we now know the method. We understand why they can be controlled and how they're being controlled."

Elend continued to pace, his feet marking the dirty tent floor. "The more I think about Vin's discovery, the more I come to believe that this is all connected. The koloss, the kandra, and the Inquisitors are not three separate oddities, but part of a single cohesive phenomenon. Now, on the surface, knowledge of this third art . . . this Hemalurgy . . . doesn't seem like much. We don't intend to use it to make more koloss, so what good is the knowledge?"

Cett nodded, as if Elend had spoken the man's own thoughts. Elend, however, had drifted off a bit, staring out the open tent flaps, losing himself in thought. It was something he'd once done frequently, back when he spent more time on scholarship. He wasn't addressing Cett's questions. He was speaking his own concerns, following his own logical path.

"This war we're fighting," Elend continued, "it isn't just about soldiers. It isn't just about koloss, or about taking Fadrex City. It's about the sequence of events we inadvertently started the moment we struck down the Lord Ruler. Hemalurgy—the origins of the koloss—is part of a pattern. The percentages that fall sick from the mists are also part of the pattern. The less we see chaos, and the more we see the *pattern,* the better we're going to be at understanding just what we fight—and just how to defeat it."

Elend turned toward the group. "Noorden, I want you to change the focus of your research. Up until now, we've assumed that the movements of the koloss were random. I'm no longer convinced that is true. Research our old scout reports. Draw up lists and plot movements. Pay particular attention to bodies of koloss that we specifically know *weren't* under the control of an Inquisitor. I want to see if we can discover why they went where they did."

"Yes, my lord," Noorden said.

"The rest of you stay vigilant," Elend said. "I don't want another mistake like last week's. We can't afford to lose any more troops, even koloss."

They nodded, and Elend's posture indicated the end of the meeting. Cett was carried away to his tent, Noorden bustled off to begin this new research, and Ham went in search of something to eat. Demoux, however, stayed. Vin stood and trailed forward, stepping up to Elend's side and taking his arm as he turned to address Demoux.

"My lord . . ." Demoux said, looking a bit embarrassed. "I assume General Hammond has spoken to you?"

*What's this?* Vin thought, perking up.

"Yes, Demoux," Elend said with a sigh. "But I really don't think it's something to worry about."

"What?" Vin asked.

"There is a certain level of . . . ostracism happening in the camp, my lady," Demoux said. "Those of us who fell sick for two weeks, rather than a few days, are being regarded with a measure of suspicion."

"Suspicion that you no longer agree with, right, Demoux?" Elend punctuated this remark with a very kingly stern look.

Demoux nodded. "I trust your interpretation, my lord. It's just that . . . well, it is difficult to lead men who distrust you. And, it's much harder for the others like me. They've taken to eating together, staying away from the others during their free time. It's reinforcing the division."

"What do you think?" Elend asked. "Should we try to force reintegration?"

"That depends, my lord," Demoux said.

"On?"

"On several factors," Demoux said. "If you're planning to attack soon, then reintegrating would be a bad idea—I don't want men fighting alongside those they don't trust. However, if we're going to continue the siege for some time, then forcing them back together might make sense. The larger segment of the army would have time to learn to trust the mistfallen again."

*Mistfallen,* Vin thought. *Interesting name.*

Elend looked down at her, and she knew what he was thinking. The ball at the Canton of Resource was only a few days away. If Elend's plan went well, then perhaps they wouldn't have to attack Fadrex.

Vin didn't have great hopes for that option. Plus, without resupply from Luthadel, they couldn't count on much anymore. They could continue the siege as planned for months, or they might end up having to attack within a few weeks.

"Organize a new company," Elend said, turning to Demoux. "Fill it with these mistfallen. We'll worry about dealing with superstition after we hold Fadrex."

"Yes, my lord," Demoux said. "I think that . . ."

They continued talking, but Vin stopped paying attention as she heard voices approaching the command tent. It was probably nothing. Even so, she moved around so that she was between the approaching people and Elend, then checked her metal reserves. Within moments, she could determine who was talking. One was Ham. She relaxed as the tent flap opened, revealing Ham in his standard vest and trousers, leading a wearied red-haired soldier. The exhausted man had ash-stained clothing and wore the leathers of a scout.

"Conrad?" Demoux asked with surprise.

"You know this man?" Elend asked.

"Yes, my lord," Demoux said. "He's one of the lieutenants I left back in Luthadel with King Penrod."

Conrad saluted, though he looked rather the worse for the wear. "My lord," the man said. "I bring news from the capital."

"Finally!" Elend said. "What word from Penrod? Where are those supply barges I sent for?"

"Supply barges, my lord?" Conrad asked. "My lord, King Penrod sent me to ask *you* for resupply. There are riots in the city, and some of the food stores have been pillaged. King Penrod sent me to ask you for a contingent of troops to help him restore order."

"Troops?" Elend asked. "What of the garrison I left with him? He should have plenty of men!"

"They're not enough, my lord," Conrad said. "I don't know why. I can only relay the message I was sent to deliver."

Elend cursed, slamming his fist against the command tent's table. "Can Penrod not do the *one* thing I asked of him? All he needed to do was hold lands we already have secure!"

The soldier jumped at the outburst, and Vin watched with concern. Elend, however, managed to keep his temper under control. He took a deep breath, waving to the soldier. "Rest yourself, Lieutenant Conrad, and get some food. I will want to speak with you further about this later."

Vin found Elend later that night, standing on the perimeter of the camp, looking up at the Fadrex watch fires on the cliffs above. She laid a hand on his shoulder, and the fact that he didn't jump indicated that he'd heard her coming. It was still a little strange to her that Elend, who had always seemed slightly oblivious of the world around him, was now a capable Mistborn, with tin to enhance his ears that let him hear even the softest footsteps approaching.

"You talked to the messenger?" she asked as he put his arm around her, still looking up at the night sky. Ash fell around them. A couple of Elend's soldier Tineyes passed on patrol, carrying no lights, silently walking the perimeter of the camp. Vin herself had just gotten back from a similar patrol, though hers had been around the perimeter of Fadrex. She did a couple of rounds every night, watching the city for unusual activity.

"Yes," Elend said. "Once he'd had some rest, I spoke to him in depth."

"Bad news?"

"Much of what he said before. Penrod apparently never got my orders to send food and troops. Conrad was one of four messengers Penrod sent to us. We don't know what happened to the other three. Conrad himself was chased by a group of koloss, and he only got away by baiting them with his horse, sending it one direction and hiding as they chased it down and butchered it. He slipped away while they were feasting."

"Brave man," Vin said.

"Lucky as well," Elend said. "Either way, it seems unlikely that Penrod will be able to send us support. There are food stores in Luthadel, but if the news of riots is true, Penrod won't be able to spare the soldiers it would take to guard supplies on their way to us."

"So . . . where does that leave us?" Vin asked.

Elend looked at her, and she was surprised to see determination in his eyes, not frustration. "With knowledge."

"What?"

"Our enemy has exposed himself, Vin. Attacking our messengers directly with hidden pockets of koloss? Trying to undermine our supply base in Luthadel?" Elend shook his head. "Our enemy *wants* this to look random, but I see the pattern. It's too focused, too intelligent, to be happenstance. He's trying to make us pull away from Fadrex."

Vin felt a chill. Elend made to say more, but she reached up and laid a hand on his lips, quieting him. He seemed confused, but then apparently understood, for he nodded. *Whatever we say, Ruin can hear,* Vin thought. *We can't give away what we know.*

Still, something passed between them. A knowledge that they had to stay at Fadrex, that they *had* to find out what was in that storage cavern. For their enemy was working hard to keep them from doing so. Was Ruin, indeed, behind the chaos in Luthadel? A ploy to draw Elend and his forces back to restore order, thereby abandoning Fadrex?

It was only speculation, but it was all they had. Vin nodded to Elend, indicating that she agreed with his determination to stay. Still, she worried. Luthadel was to have been their rock in all of this—their secure position. If it was falling apart, what did they have?

More and more, she was beginning to understand that there would be no falling back. No retreat to develop alternative plans. The world was collapsing around them, and Elend had committed himself to Fadrex.

If they failed here, there would be nowhere else to go.

Eventually, Elend squeezed her shoulder, then walked off into the mists to check on some of the guard posts. Vin remained alone, staring up at those watch fires, feeling a worrisome sense of foreboding. Her thoughts from before, in the fourth storage cavern, returned to her. Fighting wars, besieging cities, playing at politics—it wasn't enough. These things wouldn't save them if the very land itself died.

But, what else could they do? The only option they had was to take Fadrex and hope the Lord Ruler had left them some clue to help. She still felt an inexplicable desire to find the atium. Why was she so certain it would help?

She closed her eyes, not wanting to face the mists, which—as always—pulled away from her, leaving a half-inch or so of empty air around her. She'd drawn upon them once, back when she'd fought the Lord Ruler. Why had she been able to fuel her Allomancy with their power that one time?

She reached out to them, trying again, as she had so many times. She called to them, pleaded with them in her mind, tried to access their power. And, she felt as if she *should* be able to. There was a strength to the mists. Trapped within them. But it wouldn't yield to her. It was as if something kept them back, some blockage perhaps? Or, maybe, a simple whim on their part.

"Why?" she whispered, eyes still closed. "Why help me that once, but never again? Am I mad, or did you really give me power when I demanded it?"

The night gave her no answers. Finally, she sighed and turned away, seeking refuge inside of the tent.

*Hemalurgic spikes change people physically, depending on which powers are granted, where the spike is placed, and how many spikes someone has. Inquisitors, for instance, are changed drastically from the humans they used to be. Their hearts are in different places from those of humans, and their brains rearrange to accommodate the lengths of metal jabbed through their eyes. Koloss are changed in even more drastic ways.*

*One might think that kandra are changed most of all. However, one must remember that new kandra are made from mistwraiths, and not humans. The spikes worn by the kandra cause only a small transformation in their hosts—leaving their bodies mostly like that of a mistwraith, but allowing their minds to begin working. Ironically, while the spikes dehumanize the koloss, they give a measure of humanity to the kandra.*

# 41

"DON'T YOU SEE, BREEZE?" Sazed said eagerly. "This is an example of what we call ostention—a legend being emulated in real life. The people believed in the Survivor of Hathsin, and so they have made for themselves *another* survivor to help them in their time of need."

Breeze raised an eyebrow. They stood near the back of a crowd gathering in the market district, waiting for the Citizen arrive.

"It is fascinating," Sazed said. "This is an evolution of the Survivor legend that I never anticipated. I knew that they might deify him—in fact, that was almost inevitable. However, since Kelsier was once an 'ordinary' person, those who worship him can imagine *other* people achieving the same status."

Breeze nodded distractedly. Allrianne stood beside him, looking quite petulant that she'd been required to wear drab skaa clothing.

Sazed ignored their lack of excitement. "I wonder what the future of this will be. Perhaps there will be a *succession* of Survivors for this people. This could be the foundation of a religion with true lasting potential, since it could reinvent itself to suit the needs of the populace. Of course, new Survivors mean new leaders—each one with different opinions. Rather than a line of priests who promote orthodoxy, each new Survivor would seek to establish himself as distinct from those he succeeded. It could make for numerous factions and divisions in the body of worshippers."

"Sazed," Breeze said. "What ever happened to not collecting religions?"

Sazed paused. "I'm not really collecting this religion. I'm just theorizing about its potential."

Breeze raised an eyebrow.

"Besides," Sazed said. "It might have to do with our current mission. If this new Survivor is indeed a real person, he may be able to help us overthrow Quellion."

"Or," Allrianne noted, "he might present a challenge to us for leadership of the city once Quellion does fall."

"True," Sazed admitted. "Either way, I do not see why you are complaining, Breeze. Did you not *want* me to become interested in religions again?"

"That was before I realized you'd spend the entire evening, then the next morning, chattering about it," Breeze said. "Where is Quellion, anyway? If I miss lunch because of his executions, I'll be rather annoyed."

Executions. In his excitement, Sazed had nearly forgotten just what it was they had come to see. His eagerness deflated, and he remembered why Breeze was acting so solemnly. The man spoke lightly, but the concern in his eyes indicated that he was disturbed by the thought of the Citizen burning innocent people to death.

"There," Allrianne said, pointing toward the other side of the market. Something was making a stir: the Citizen, wearing a bright blue costume. It was a new "approved" color—one only he was allowed to wear. His councillors surrounded him in red.

"Finally," Breeze said, following the crowd as they bunched up around the Citizen.

Sazed followed, his steps growing reluctant. Now that he thought about it, he was tempted to use his troops to try to stop what was about to occur. Of course, he knew that would be foolish. Playing his hand now to save a few would ruin their chances of saving the entire city. With a sigh, he followed Breeze and Allrianne, moving with the crowd. He also suspected that watching the murders would remind him of the pressing nature of his duties in Urteau. Theological studies would wait for another time.

"You're going to have to kill them," Kelsier said.

Spook crouched quietly atop a building in the wealthier section of Urteau. Below, the Citizen's procession was approaching; Spook watched it through cloth-wrapped eyes. It had taken many coins—nearly the last of what he'd brought with him from Luthadel—to bribe out the location of the executions sufficiently in advance so that he could get into position.

He could see the sorry individuals that Quellion had decided to murder. Many of them were like Franson's sister—people who had been discovered to have noble parentage. Several others, however, were only spouses of those with noble blood. Spook also knew of one man in this group who had spoken out too loudly against Quellion. The man's connection to the nobility was tenuous. He had once been a craftsman catering specifically to a noble clientele.

"I know you don't want to do it," Kelsier said. "But you can't lose your nerve now."

Spook felt powerful—pewter lent him an air of invincibility that he'd never before imagined. He had slept barely a few hours in the last six days, but he didn't feel tired. He had a sense of balance that any cat would have envied, and he had strength his muscles shouldn't have been able to produce.

And yet, power wasn't everything. His palms were sweating beneath his cloak, and he felt beads of perspiration creeping down his brow. He was no Mistborn. He wasn't Kelsier or Vin. He was just Spook. What was he thinking?

"I can't do it," he whispered.

"You can," Kelsier said. "You've practiced with the cane—I've watched. Plus, you stood against those soldiers in the market. They nearly killed you, but you were fighting two Thugs. You did very well, considering."

"I . . ."

"You need to save those people, Spook. Ask yourself: What would *I* do if I were there?"

"I'm not you."

"Not yet," Kelsier whispered.

Not yet.

Below, Quellion preached against the people about to be executed. Spook could see Beldre, the Citizen's sister, at his side. Spook leaned forward. Was that really a look of sympathy, even pain, in her eyes as she watched the unfortunate prisoners herded toward the building? Or, was that just what Spook wanted to see in her? He followed her gaze, watching the prisoners. One of them was a child, holding fearfully to a woman as the group was prodded into the building that would become their pyre.

*Kelsier's right,* Spook thought. *I can't let this happen. I may not succeed, but at least I have to try.* His hands continued to shake as he moved through the hatch atop his building and dashed down the steps, cloak whipping behind him. He rounded a corner, heading for the wine cellar.

Noblemen were strange creatures. During the days of the Lord Ruler, they had often feared for their lives as much as skaa thieves did, for court intrigue often led to imprisonment or assassination. Spook should have realized what he was missing from the beginning. No thieving crew would build a lair without a bolt-hole for emergency escapes.

Why would the nobility be any different?

He leaped, cloak flapping as he dropped the last few steps. He hit the dusty floor, and his enhanced ears heard Quellion begin to rant up above. The skaa crowds were murmuring. The flames had started. There, in the darkened basement of the building, Spook found a section of the wall already open, a secret passageway leading from the building next door. A group of soldiers stood in the passageway.

"Quickly," Spook heard one of them say, "before the fire gets here."

"Please!" another voice cried, her words echoing through the passageway. "At least take the child!"

People grunted. The soldiers moved on the opposite side of the passage from Spook, keeping the people in the other basement from escaping. They had been sent by Quellion to save one of the prisoners. On the outside, the Citizen made a show of denouncing anyone with noble blood. Allomancers, however, were too valuable to kill. And so, he chose his buildings carefully—only burning those with hidden exits through which he could carefully extract the Allomancers.

It was the perfect way to show orthodoxy, yet maintain a grip on the city's most powerful resource. But it wasn't this hypocrisy that made Spook's hands stop shaking as he charged the soldiers.

It was the crying child.

"*Kill them!*" Kelsier screamed.

Spook whipped out his dueling cane. One of the soldiers finally noticed him, spinning in shock.

He fell first.

Spook hadn't realized how hard he could swing. The soldier's helmet flew through the hidden passageway, its metal crumpled. The other soldiers cried out as Spook leaped over their fallen companion in the close confines. They carried swords, but had trouble drawing them.

Spook, however, had brought daggers.

He pulled one free, wielding it with a swing powered by both pewter and fury, enhanced senses guiding his steps. He cut through two soldiers, elbowing their dying bodies aside, pressing his advantage. At the end of the passageway, four soldiers stood with a short skaa man.

Fear shone in their eyes.

Spook threw himself forward, and the shocked soldiers finally overcame their surprise. They pushed backward, throwing open the secret door and stumbling over themselves as they entered the building basement on the other side.

The structure was already well on its way to burning down. Spook could smell the smoke. The rest of the condemned people were in the room —they had probably been trying to get through the doorway to follow their friend who had escaped. Now they were forced backward as the soldiers shoved their way into the room, finally drawing their swords.

Spook gutted the slowest of the four soldiers, then left his dagger in the body, pulling out a second dueling cane. The firm length of wood felt good in his hand as he spun between shocked civilians, attacking the soldiers.

"The soldiers can't be allowed to escape," Kelsier whispered. "Otherwise, Quellion will know that the people were rescued. You have to leave him confused."

Light flickered in a hallway beyond the well-furnished basement room. Firelight. Spook could feel the heat already. Grimly, the three backlit soldiers raised their swords. Smoke began to creep in along the ceiling, spreading like a dark black mist. Prisoners cringed, confused.

Spook dashed forward, spinning as he swung both of his canes at one of the soldiers. The man took the bait, sidestepping Spook's attack, then lunging forward. In an ordinary fight, Spook would have been skewered.

Pewter and tin saved him. Spook moved on feet made light, feeling the wind of the oncoming sword, knowing where it would pass. His heart thudded inside his chest as the sword sliced through the fabric at his side, but missed the flesh. He brought a cane down, cracking the man's sword arm, then smacked another into his skull.

The soldier fell, surprise visible in his dying eyes as Spook pushed past him.

The next soldier was already swinging. Spook brought up both of his canes, crossing them to block. The sword bit through one, spinning half of the cane into the air, but got caught in the second. Spook snapped his weapon to the side, pushing the blade away, then spun inside the man's reach and took him down with an elbow to the stomach.

Spook punched the man's head as he fell. The sound of bone on bone cracked in the burning room. The soldier slumped at Spook's feet.

*I can actually do this!* Spook thought. *I am like them. Vin and Kelsier. No more hiding in basements or fleeing from danger. I can fight!*

He spun, smiling.

And found the final soldier standing with Spook's own knife held to the neck of a young girl. The soldier stood with his back to the burning hallway, eyeing escape through the hidden passage. Behind the man, flames were curling around the wooden doorframe, licking the room.

"The rest of you, get out!" Spook said, not turning from the soldier. "Go out the back door of the building you find at the end of this tunnel. You'll find men there. They'll hide you in the underground, then get you out of the city. Go!"

Some had already fled, and those who remained moved at his command. The soldier stood, watching, obviously trying to decide his course. He must have known he was facing an Allomancer—no ordinary man could have taken down so many soldiers so quickly. Fortunately, it appeared that Quellion hadn't sent his own Allomancers into the building. He likely kept them above, protecting him.

Spook stood still. He dropped the broken dueling cane, but held the other tightly to keep his hand from shaking. The girl whimpered quietly.

What would Kelsier have done?

Behind him, the last of the prisoners was fleeing into the passage. "You!" Spook said without turning. "Bar that door from the outside. Quickly!"

"But—"

"Do it!" Spook yelled.

"No!" the soldier said, pressing the knife against the girl's neck. "I'll kill her!"

"Do and you die," Spook said. "You know that. Look at me. You're not getting past me. You're—"

The door thunked closed.

The soldier cried out, dropping the girl, rushing toward the door, obviously trying to get to it before the bar fell on the other side. "That's the only way out! You'll get us—"

Spook broke the man's knees with a single crack of the dueling cane. The soldier screamed, falling to the ground. Flames burned on three of the walls, now. The heat was already intense.

The bar clicked into place on the other side of the door. Spook looked down at the soldier. Still alive.

"Leave him," Kelsier said. "Let him burn in the building."

Spook hesitated.

"He would have let all of those people die," Kelsier said. "Let him feel what he would have done to these—what he has already done several times, at Quellion's command."

Spook left the groaning man on the ground, moving over to the secret door. He threw his weight against it.

It held.

Spook cursed quietly, raising a boot and kicking the door. It, however, remained solid.

"That door was built by noblemen who feared they would be pursued by assassins," Kelsier said. "They were familiar with Allomancy, and would make certain the door was strong enough to resist a Thug's kick."

The fire was growing hotter. The girl huddled on the floor, whimpering. Spook whirled, staring down the flames, feeling their heat. He stepped forward, but his amplified senses were so keen that the heat seemed amazingly powerful to him.

He gritted his teeth, picking up the girl.

*I have pewter now,* he thought. *It can balance the power of my senses.*

That will have to be enough.

Smoke billowed out the windows of the condemned building. Sazed waited with Breeze and Allrianne, standing at the back of a solemn crowd. The people were oddly silent as they watched the flames claim their prize. Perhaps they sensed the truth.

That they could be taken and killed as easily as the poor wretches who died inside.

"How quickly we come around," Sazed whispered. "It wasn't long ago that men were forced to watch the Lord Ruler cut the heads from innocent people. Now we do it to ourselves."

Silence. What sounded like yells came from inside the building. The screams of dying men.

"Kelsier was wrong," Breeze said.

Sazed frowned, turning.

"He blamed the noblemen," Breeze said. "He thought that if we got rid of them, things like this wouldn't happen."

Sazed nodded. Then, oddly, the crowd began to grow restless, shuffling about, murmuring. And, Sazed felt himself agreeing with them. Something needed to be done about this atrocity. Why did nobody fight?

Quellion stood there, surrounded by his proud men in red. Sazed gritted his teeth, growing angry.

"Allrianne, dear," Breeze said, "this isn't the time."

Sazed started. He turned, glancing at the young woman. She was crying.

*By the Forgotten Gods,* Sazed thought, finally recognizing her touch on his emotions, Rioting them to make him angry at Quellion. *She's as good as Breeze is.*

"Why not?" she said. "He deserves it. I could make this crowd rip him apart."

"And his second-in-command would take control," Breeze said, "then execute these people. We haven't prepared enough."

"It seems that you're never done preparing, Breeze," she snapped.

"These things require—"

"Wait," Sazed said, raising a hand. He frowned, watching the building. One of the building's boarded windows—one high in a peaked attic section on top of the roof itself—seemed to be shaking.

"Look!" Sazed said. "There!"

Breeze raised an eyebrow. "Perhaps our Flame God is about to make his appearance, eh?" He smiled at what he obviously found a ridiculous concept. "I wonder what we were supposed to learn during this revolting little experience. Personally, I think the men who sent us here didn't know what they—"

One of the planks suddenly flew off of the window, spinning in the air, swirling smoke behind it. Then the window burst outward.

A figure in dark clothing leaped through the shattering mess of boards and smoke, landing on the rooftop. His long cloak actually appeared to be on fire in places, and he carried a small bundle in his arms. A child. The figure rushed along the top of the burning rooftop, then leaped off the front of the building, trailing smoke as he fell to the ground.

He landed with the grace of a man burning pewter, not stumbling despite the two-story fall, his burning cloak billowing out around him. People backed away, surprised, and Quellion spun in shock.

The man's hood fell back as he stood upright. Only then did Sazed recognize him.

Spook stood tall, seeming in the sunlight to be older than he really was. Or, perhaps, Sazed had never looked at him as anything but a child until that moment. Either way, the young man regarded Quellion proudly, eyes wrapped with a blindfold, his body smoking as he held the coughing child in his arms. He didn't seem the least bit intimidated by the troop of twenty soldiers that surrounded the building.

Breeze cursed quietly. "Allrianne, we're going to need that Riot after all!"

Sazed suddenly felt a weight pressing against him. Breeze Soothed away his distracting emotions—his confusion, his concern—and left Sazed, along with the crowd, completely open to Allrianne's focused burst of enraged anger.

The crowd exploded with motion, people crying out in the name of the Survivor, rushing the guards. For a moment, Sazed feared that Spook wouldn't take the opportunity to run. Despite the strange bandage on Spook's eyes, Sazed could tell that the boy was staring straight at Quellion—as if in challenge.

Fortunately, however, Spook finally turned away. The crowd distracted the advancing soldiers, and Spook ran on feet that seemed to move far too quickly. He ducked down an alleyway, carrying the girl he had rescued, his cloak trailing smoke. As soon as Spook had a safe head start, Breeze smothered the crowd's will to rebel, keeping them from getting themselves cut down by the soldiers. The people backed away, dispersing. The Citizen's soldiers, however, stayed close around their leader. Sazed could hear frustration in the Citizen's voice as he called for the inevitable retreat. He couldn't spare more than a few men to chase down Spook, not with the potential of a riot. He had to get himself to safety.

As soldiers marched away, Breeze turned an eye toward Sazed. "Well," he noted, "*that* was somewhat unexpected."

*I think that the koloss were more intelligent than we wanted to give them credit for being. For instance, originally, they used only spikes the Lord Ruler gave them to make new members. He would provide the metal and the unfortunate skaa captives, and the koloss would create new "recruits."*

*At the Lord Ruler's death, then, the koloss should quickly have died out. This was how he had designed them. If they got free from his control, he expected them to kill themselves off and end their own rampage.*

*However, they somehow made the deduction that spikes in the bodies of fallen koloss could be harvested, then reused.*

*They then no longer required a fresh supply of spikes. I often wonder what effect the constant reuse of spikes had on their population. A spike can only hold so much of a Hemalurgic charge, so they could not create spikes that granted infinite strength, no matter how many people those spikes killed and drew power from. However, did the repeated reuse of spikes perhaps bring more humanity to the koloss they made?*

# 42

WHEN MARSH ENTERED LUTHADEL, he was far more careful than he had been when he'd entered the nameless town at the western border of the dominance. An Inquisitor moving through the capital of Elend's empire would not go unreported, and might draw undue attention. The emperor was gone, and he had left his playground open to be used by others. No need to spoil that.

So, Marsh moved at night, hooded cloak up, burning steel and jumping about on coins. Even so, seeing the magnificent city—sprawling, dirty, yet still *home*—was hard for the watching, waiting part of Marsh. Once, Marsh himself had run the skaa rebellion in this city. He felt responsible for its occupants, and the thought of Ruin doing to them what he'd done to the people of the other town, the one where the ashmount had blown . . .

There was no ashmount that close to Luthadel. Unfortunately, there were things Ruin could do to a city that didn't involve natural forces. On his way to Luthadel, Marsh had stopped at no fewer than four villages, where he had secretly killed the men guarding their food stores, then set fire to the buildings that contained them. He knew that the other Inquisitors went about the world, committing similar atrocities as they searched for the thing Ruin desired above all others. The thing Preservation had taken from him.

He had yet to find it.

Marsh leaped over a street, landing atop a peaked rooftop, running along its edge and making his way toward the northeastern side of the city. Luthadel had changed during the year since he'd last seen it. The Lord Ruler's forced labor projects had brutalized the skaa, but had kept things clean of ash and given even the oversized city a sense of order. There was none of that now. Growing food was obviously a priority—and keeping the city clean could wait for later, if there was a later.

There were far more trash heaps now, and mounds of ash—which would have once been scraped into the river at the center of the city—slumped in alleys and against buildings. Marsh felt himself begin to smile at the beauty of the disrepair, and his little, rebellious part withdrew and hid.

He couldn't fight. Now was not the time.

He soon arrived at Keep Venture, seat of Elend's government. It had been invaded by koloss during the siege of Luthadel, its lower stained-glass windows shattered by the beasts. The windows had been replaced only by boards. Marsh smiled, then Steelpush-leaped up to a balcony on the second floor. He was familiar with this building. Before he'd been taken by Ruin, he had spent several months living here, helping Emperor Venture keep control in his city.

Marsh found Penrod's rooms easily. They were the only ones occupied, and the only ones guarded. Marsh crouched a few corridors down, watching with his inhuman eyes as he considered his next course of action.

Impaling an unwilling subject with a Hemalurgic spike was a very tricky prospect. The spike's size was, in this case, immaterial. Just as a pinch of metal dust could fuel Allomancy for a time, or a small ring could hold a small Feruchemical charge, a rather small bit of metal could work for Hemalurgy. Inquisitor spikes were made large to be intimidating, but a small pin could, in many instances, be just as effective as a massive spike. It depended on how long one wanted to leave the spike outside of a person's body after using it to kill someone.

For Marsh's purposes this day, a small spike was preferable; he didn't want to give Penrod powers, just pierce him with metal. Marsh pulled out the spike he had made from the Allomancer in the doomed town a few days back. It was about five inches long—actually bigger than it needed to be, strictly speaking. However, Marsh would need to drive this spike forcefully into a man's body, which meant it needed to be at least large enough to hold its shape. There were some two or three hundred bind points across a human's body. Marsh didn't know them all; Ruin would guide his hand when the time came to strike, making sure the spike was delivered to the right place. His master's direct attention was focused elsewhere at the moment, and he was giving Marsh general commands to get into position and prepare for the attack.

Hemalurgic spikes. The hidden part of himself shivered, remembering the day when he had unexpectedly been made into an Inquisitor. He'd thought that he had been discovered. He'd been working as a spy for Kelsier in the Steel Priesthood. Little did he know that he hadn't been singled out as suspicious—he'd been singled out as extraordinary.

The Inquisitors had come for him at night, while he'd waited nervously to meet with Kelsier and pass on what he assumed would be his final message to the rebellion. They'd burst through the door, moving more quickly than Marsh could react. They gave him no option. They'd simply slammed him down against the ground, then thrown a screaming woman on top of him.

Then, the Inquisitors had pounded a spike right through her heart and into Marsh's eye.

The pain was too great for him to remember. That moment was a hole in his memory, filled with vague images of the Inquisitors repeating this process, killing other unfortunate Allomancers and pounding their powers—their very souls, it seemed—into Marsh's body. When it was finished, he lay groaning on the floor, a new flood of sensory information making it difficult for him even to think. Around him, the other Inquisitors had danced about, cutting apart the other bodies with their axes, rejoicing in the addition of another member to their ranks.

That was, in a way, the day of his birth. What a wonderful day. Penrod, however, would not have such joy. He wasn't to be made into an Inquisitor—he would get only a single, small spike. One that had been made days ago, and been allowed to sit outside a body—leaking power—all that time.

Marsh waited for Ruin to come to him in force. Not only would the spike have to be planted precisely, but Penrod would have to leave it in long enough for Ruin to begin influencing his thoughts and emotions. The spike had to touch the blood—at first, at least. After the spike was pounded in, the skin could heal around the metal, and the spike would still work. However, to begin with, there would be blood.

How did one make a person forget about five inches of metal sprouting from their body? How did one make others ignore it? Ruin had tried to get a spike into Elend Venture on several occasions now, and had always failed. In fact, most attempts failed. The few people claimed with the process, however, were worth the effort.

Ruin came upon him, and he lost control of his body. He moved without knowing what he was going to do, following direct orders. *Down the corridor. Don't attack the guards. In through the door.*

Marsh shoved aside the two watching soldiers, kicking the door down and bursting into the antechamber.

Right. To the bedchamber.

Marsh was through the room in a heartbeat, the two soldiers belatedly screaming for help outside. Penrod was an aging man with a dignified air.

He had the presence of mind to leap from his bed at the sounds, grabbing a hardwood dueling cane from its place atop his nightstand.

Marsh smiled. A dueling cane? Against an Inquisitor? He pulled his obsidian hand axe from the sheath at his side.

*Fight him,* Ruin said, *but do not kill him. Make it a difficult battle, but allow him to feel that he's holding you off.*

It was an odd request, but Marsh's mind was so directly controlled that he couldn't even pause to think about it. He could simply leap forward to attack.

It was harder than it seemed. He had to make sure to strike with the axe in ways that Penrod could block. Several times, he had to tap speed from one of his spikes—which doubled as a Feruchemical metalmind—to suddenly inch his axe in the right direction, lest he accidentally behead the king of Luthadel.

Yet, Marsh did it. He cut Penrod a few times, fighting all the while with the small spike held hidden in his left palm, letting the king think he was doing well. Within moments, the guards had joined the fight, which allowed Marsh to keep up appearances even better. Three normal men against an Inquisitor was still no contest, but from their perspectives, maybe it would seem like one.

It wasn't long before a troop of some dozen guards burst into the chamber outside the bedroom, coming to aid their king.

*Now,* Ruin said. *Act frightened, get ready to put the spike in, and prepare to flee out the window.*

Marsh tapped speed and moved. Ruin guided his hand precisely as he slammed his left hand into Penrod's chest, driving the spike directly into the man's heart. Marsh heard Penrod scream, smiled at the sound, and leaped out the window.

A short time later, Marsh hung outside that same window, unseen and unnoticed, even by the numerous guard patrols. He was far too skilled, far too careful, to be spotted listening with tin-enhanced ears, hanging underneath an outcropping of stone near the window. Inside, surgeons conferred.

"When we try to pull the spike out, the bleeding increases dramatically, my lord," one voice explained.

"The shard of metal got dangerously close to your heart," said another.

*Dangerously close?* Marsh thought with a smile from his upside-down perch. *The spike pierced his heart.* But, of course, the surgeons couldn't know that. Since Penrod was conscious, they would assume that the spike had come close, but somehow just barely missed.

"We fear pulling it out," the first surgeon said. "How . . . do you feel?"

"Remarkably good, actually," said Penrod. "There is an ache, and some discomfort. But I feel strong."

"Then let us leave the shard, for now," the first surgeon said, sounding concerned. But, what else could he do? If he *did* pull the spike out, it *would* kill Penrod. A clever move by Ruin.

They would wait for Penrod to regain his strength, then try again to remove the spike. Again, it would threaten Penrod's life. They'd have to leave it. And, with Ruin now able to touch his mind—not control him, just nudge things in certain directions—Penrod would soon forget about the spike. The discomfort would fade, and with the spike under his clothing, no one would find it irregular.

And then he would be Ruin's as surely as any Inquisitor. Marsh smiled, let go of the outcropping, and dropped to the dark streets below.

*For all that it disgusts me, I cannot help but be impressed by Hemalurgy as an art. In Allomancy and Feruchemy, skill and subtlety come through the application of one's powers. The best Allomancer might not be the most powerful, but instead the one who can best manipulate the Pushes and Pulls of metals. The best Feruchemist is the one who is most capable of sorting the information in his copperminds, or best able to manipulate his weight with iron.*

*The art that is unique to Hemalurgy, however, is the knowledge of where to place the spikes.*

# 43

VIN LANDED WITH A HUSHED rustle of cloth. She crouched in the night, holding up her dress to keep it from brushing the ashen rooftop, then peered into the mists.

Elend dropped beside her, then fell into a crouch, asking no questions. She smiled, noting that his instincts were getting better. He watched the mists too, though he obviously didn't know what he was looking for.

"He's following us," Vin whispered.

"Yomen's Mistborn?" Elend asked.

Vin nodded.

"Where?" he asked.

"Three houses back," Vin said.

Elend squinted, and she felt one of his Allomantic pulses suddenly increase in speed. He was flaring tin.

"That lump on the right side?" Elend asked.

"Close enough," Vin said.

"So . . ."

"So, he knows I've spotted him," Vin said. "Otherwise, I wouldn't have stopped. Right now, we're studying one another."

Elend reached to his belt, slipping out an obsidian knife.

"He won't attack," Vin said.

"How do you know?"

"Because," Vin said. "When he intends to kill us, he'll try to do it when you and I aren't together—or when we're sleeping."

That seemed to make Elend even more nervous. "Is that why you've been staying up all night lately?"

Vin nodded. Forcing Elend to sleep alone was a small price to pay for keeping him safe. *Is it you back there following us, Yomen?* she wondered. *On the night of your own party? That would be quite the feat.* It didn't seem likely; but still, Vin was suspicious. She had a habit of suspecting *everyone* of being Mistborn. She still thought it was healthy, even if she had been wrong more often than not.

"Come on," she said, rising. "Once we get into the party, we shouldn't have to worry about him."

Elend nodded, and the two continued along their path to the Canton of Resource.

*The plan is simple,* Elend had said just hours before. *I'll confront Yomen, and the nobility won't be able to help gathering around to gawk. At that point, you sneak away and see if you can find your way to the storage chamber.*

It really was a simple plan—the best ones usually were. If Elend confronted Yomen, it would keep the attention of the guards on him, hopefully letting Vin slip out. She'd have to move quickly and quietly, and would probably have to eliminate some guards—all without raising an alarm. Yet, this appeared to be the only way in. Not only was Yomen's fortress-like building well lit and extremely well guarded, but his Mistborn was good. The man had detected her every other time she'd tried to sneak in—always remaining at a distance, his mere presence warning her that he could raise the alarm in a heartbeat.

Their best chance was the ball. Yomen's defenses, and his Mistborn, would be focused on their master, keeping him safe.

They landed in the courtyard, causing carriages to stop and guards to turn in shock. Vin glanced to Elend in the misty darkness. "Elend," she said quietly, "I need you to promise me something."

He frowned. "What?"

"Eventually, I'm going to get spotted," Vin said. "I'll sneak as best I can, but I doubt we'll get through this without creating a disturbance. When it hits, I want you to get out."

"Vin, I can't do that. I have to—"

"No," Vin said sharply. "Elend, you don't have to help me. You *can't* help me. I love you, but you're just not as good at this as I am. I can take care of myself, but I need to know that I won't have to take care of you, too. If anything goes wrong—or, if things go right, but the building goes on alert—I want you to get out. I'll meet you at the camp."

"And if you get into trouble?" Elend said.

Vin smiled. "Trust me."

He paused, then nodded. Trusting her was one thing he could obviously do—something he'd always done.

The two strode forward. It felt very strange to be attending a ball at a Ministry building. Vin was accustomed to stained glass and ornamentation, but Canton offices were generally austere—and this one was no exception.

It was only a single story tall, and it had sharp, flat walls with very small windows. No limelights illuminated the outside, and while a couple of large tapestry banners fluttered against the stonework, the only indication that this night was special was the cluster of carriages and nobility in the courtyard. The soldiers in the area had noted Vin and Elend, but made no move to engage—or even slow—them.

Those watching—both nobility and soldiers—were interested, but few of them looked surprised. Vin and Elend were expected. Vin's hunch about that was confirmed when she moved up the steps, and nobody moved to intercept them. The guards at the door watched suspiciously, but let her and Elend pass.

Inside, she found a long entry hall, lit by lamps. The flow of people turned left, so Vin and Elend followed, twisting through a few labyrinthine corridors until they approached a larger meeting hall.

"Not exactly the most impressive place for a ball, eh?" Elend said as they waited their turn to be announced.

Vin nodded. Most noble keeps had exterior entrances directly into their ballroom. The room ahead—from what she could see of it—had been adapted from a standard Ministry meeting room. Rivets covered the floor where benches had once been, and there was a stage on the far side of the room, where obligators had probably once stood to give instruction to their subordinates. This was where Yomen's table had been set up.

It was too small to be a truly practical ballroom. The people inside weren't cramped, exactly, but neither did they have the space the nobility preferred for forming separate little groups where they could gossip.

"Looks like there are other party rooms," Elend said, nodding to several corridors leading from the main "ballroom." People were trailing in and out of them.

"Places for people to go if they feel too crowded," Vin said. "This is going to be a tough place to escape, Elend. Don't let yourself get cornered. Looks like an exit over there to the left."

Elend followed her gaze as they walked into the main room. Flickering torchlight and trails of mist indicated a courtyard or atrium. "I'll stay close to it," he said. "And avoid going to any of the smaller side rooms."

"Good," Vin said. She also noted something else—twice during the trip through the corridors to the ballroom, she'd seen stairwells leading down. That implied a fairly large basement, something uncommon back in

Luthadel. *The Canton building goes down, rather than up,* she decided. It made sense, assuming that there really was a storage cache below.

The door herald announced them without needing a card to read from, and the two entered the room. The party was nowhere near as lavish as the one at Keep Orielle had been. There were snacks, but no dinner—likely because there wasn't room for dining tables. There was music and dancing, but the room was not draped in finery. Yomen had elected to leave the simple, stark Ministry walls uncovered.

"I wonder why he even bothers to hold balls," Vin whispered.

"He probably had to start them," Elend said. "To prompt the other nobility. Now he's part of the rotation. It's smart of him, though. It gives a man some measure of power to be able to draw the nobility into his home and be their host."

Vin nodded, then eyed the dance floor. "One dance before we split up?"

Elend wavered. "To tell you the truth, I feel a bit too nervous."

Vin smiled, then kissed him lightly, completely breaking noble protocol. "Give me about an hour before the distraction. I want to get a feel for the party before I sneak away."

He nodded, and they split, Elend heading directly for a group of men that Vin didn't recognize. Vin herself kept moving. She didn't want to get bogged down by conversation, so she avoided the women she recognized from Keep Orielle. She knew that she should probably have worked to reinforce her contacts, but the truth was that she felt a little bit of what Elend did. Not truly nervousness, but rather a desire to avoid typical ball activities. She wasn't here to mingle. She had more important tasks to be concerned with.

So, she meandered through the ballroom, sipping a cup of wine and studying the guards. There were a lot of them, which was probably good. The more guards there were in the ballroom, the fewer there would be in the rest of the building. Theoretically.

Vin kept moving, nodding to people, but withdrawing anytime one of them tried to make conversation with her. If she had been Yomen, she would have ordered a few particular soldiers to keep watch on her, just to make certain that she didn't stray anywhere sensitive. Yet, none of the men seemed to be all that focused on her. As the hour passed, she grew more and more frustrated. Was Yomen really so incompetent that he wouldn't keep watch on a known Mistborn who entered his home base?

Annoyed, Vin burned bronze. Perhaps there were Allomancers nearby. She nearly jumped in shock when she felt the Allomantic pulsings coming from just beside her.

There were two of them. Courtly puffs—women whose names she didn't know, but who looked distinctly dismissible. That was probably the idea. They stood chatting with a couple of other women a short distance from Vin. One was burning copper, the other was burning tin—Vin would never have picked them out if she hadn't had the ability to pierce copperclouds.

As Vin drifted through the room, the two followed, moving with an impressive level of skill as they slid in and out of conversations. They always stuck close enough to Vin to be within tin-enhanced hearing range, yet stayed far enough away in the relatively crowded room that Vin would never have picked them out without Allomantic help.

*Interesting,* she thought, moving toward the perimeter of the room. At least Yomen wasn't underestimating her. But now, how to give the women the slip? They wouldn't be distracted by Elend's disturbance, and they certainly wouldn't let Vin sneak away without raising an alarm.

As she wandered, working on the problem, she noted a familiar figure sitting at the edge of the ballroom. Slowswift sat in his usual suit, smoking his pipe as he relaxed in one of the chairs set out for the elderly or the overdanced. She trailed over toward him.

"I thought you didn't come to these things," she noted, smiling. Behind, her two shadows expertly worked their way into a conversation a short distance away.

"I only come when my king holds them," Slowswift said.

"Ah," Vin said, then she drifted away. Out of the corner of her eye, she noted Slowswift frowning. He'd obviously expected her to speak to him further, but she couldn't risk his saying anything incriminating. At least, not yet. Her tails extricated themselves from their conversation, the speed of Vin's departure forcing them to do so awkwardly. After walking for a bit, Vin paused, giving the women the chance to get themselves into yet another conversation.

Then, Vin spun and walked quickly back to Slowswift, trying to look as if she'd just remembered something. Her tails, intent on looking natural, had trouble following. They hesitated, and Vin gained just a few short breaths of freedom.

She leaned down to Slowswift as she passed. "I need two men," she said. "Ones you trust against Yomen. Have them meet me in a part of the party that is more secluded, a place where people can sit and chat."

"The patio," Slowswift said. "Down the left corridor, then outside."

"Good," Vin said. "Tell your men to go there, but then wait until I approach them. Also, please send a messenger to Elend. Tell him I need another half hour."

Slowswift nodded to the cryptic comment, and Vin smiled as her shadows trailed closer. "I hope you feel better soon," she said, putting on a fond smile.

"Thank you, my dear," Slowswift said, coughing slightly.

Vin trailed away again. She slowly made her way in the direction Slowswift had indicated, the exit she'd picked out earlier. Sure enough, a few moments later she passed into mist. *The mist vanishes inside buildings, eventually,* Vin thought. *Everyone always assumes it has something to do with heat, or perhaps the lack of airflow. . . .*

In a few seconds, she found herself standing on a lantern-lit garden patio. Though tables had been set up for people to relax, the patio was sparsely populated. Servants wouldn't go out in the mists, and most nobility—though they didn't like to admit it—found the mists disconcerting. Vin wandered over to an ornate metal railing, then leaned against it, looking up at the sky, feeling the mists around her and idly fingering her earring.

Soon, her two shadows appeared, chatting quietly, and Vin's tin let her hear that they were talking about how stuffy the other room had been. Vin smiled, maintaining her posture as the two women took chairs a distance away, continuing to chat. After that, two young men wandered in and sat down at another table. They weren't as natural about the process as the women, but Vin hoped they weren't suspicious enough to draw attention.

Then, she waited.

Life as a thief—a life spent preparing for jobs, watching in spy holes, and carefully choosing just the right opportunity to pick a pocket—had taught her patience. It was one urchin attribute she had never lost. She stood, staring at the sky, giving no indication at all that she intended to leave. Now, she simply had to wait for the distraction.

*You shouldn't have relied on him for the distraction,* Reen whispered in her mind. *He'll fail. Never let your life depend on the competence of someone whose life isn't also on the line.*

It had been one of Reen's favorite sayings. She didn't think of him very often, anymore—or, really, anyone from her old life. That life had been one of pain and sorrow. A brother who beat her to keep her safe, a crazy mother who had inexplicably slaughtered Vin's baby sister.

However, that life was only a faint echo, now. She smiled to herself, amused at how far she had come. Reen might have called her a fool, but she trusted Elend—trusted him to succeed, trusted him with her life. That was something she could never have done during her early years.

After about ten minutes, someone came out from the party and wandered over to the pair of women. He spoke with them just briefly, then returned to the party. Another man came twenty minutes after that, doing the same thing. Hopefully, the women were passing on the information Vin wished: that Vin had apparently decided to spend an indeterminate amount of time outside, staring at the mists. Those inside wouldn't expect her to return anytime soon.

A few moments after the second messenger returned to the party, a man rushed out and approached one of the tables. "You have to come hear this!" he whispered to the people at the table—the only ones currently on the patio who had nothing to do with Vin. That group left. Vin smiled. Elend's distraction had come.

Vin jumped into the air, then Pushed against the railing beside her, launching herself across the patio.

The women had obviously grown bored, chatting idly to themselves. It took them a few moments to notice Vin's movement. In those moments, Vin shot across the now-empty patio, dress flapping as she flew. One of the women opened her mouth to yell.

Vin extinguished her metals, then burned duralumin and brass, *Pushing* on the emotions of both women.

She'd done this only once before, to Straff Venture. A duralumin-fueled Brass-push was a terrible thing; it flattened a person's emotions, making them feel empty, completely void of all feeling. Both women gasped, and the one who had been standing stumbled to the ground instead, falling silent.

Vin landed hard, her pewter still off lest she mix it with duralumin. She put her pewter back on immediately, however, rolling up to her feet. She took one of the women with an elbow to the stomach, then grabbed her face and slammed it down into the table, knocking her out. The other woman sat dazedly on the ground. Vin grimaced, then grabbed the woman by the throat, choking her.

It felt brutal, but Vin didn't let up until the woman fell unconscious—proven by the fact that she let her Allomantic coppercloud fall. Vin sighed, releasing the woman. The unconscious spy slumped to the floor.

Vin turned. Slowswift's young men stood by anxiously. Vin waved them over.

"Stash these two in the bushes," Vin said quickly, "then sit at the table. If anyone asks after them, say that you saw them follow me back into the party. Hopefully, that will keep everyone confused."

The men flushed. "We—"

"Do as I say or flee," Vin snapped. "Don't argue with me. I left them both alive, and I can't afford to let them report that I've escaped their watch. If they stir, you'll have to knock them out again."

The men nodded reluctantly.

Vin reached up and unbuttoned her dress, letting the garment fall to the ground and revealing the sleek, dark clothing she wore underneath. She gave the dress to the men to hide as well, then moved into the building, away from the party. Inside the misty corridor, she found a stairwell, and slipped down it. Elend's distraction would be in full progress by now. Hopefully, it would last long enough.

"That's right," Elend said, arms folded, staring down Yomen. "A duel. Why make the armies fight for the city? You and I could settle this ourselves."

Yomen didn't laugh at the ridiculous idea. He simply sat at his table, his thoughtful eyes set in a bald, tattooed head, the single bead of atium tied to his forehead sparkling in the lantern-light. The rest of the crowd was reacting just as Elend had expected. Conversations had died, and people had rushed in, packing into the main ballroom to watch the confrontation between emperor and king.

"Why do you think that I would consent to such a thing?" Yomen finally asked.

"All accounts say that you are a man of honor."

"But you are not," Yomen said, pointing at Elend. "This very offer proves that. You are an Allomancer—there would be no contest between us. What honor would there be in that?"

Elend didn't really care. He just wanted Yomen occupied as long as possible. "Then choose a champion," he said. "I'll fight him instead."

"Only a Mistborn would be a match for you," Yomen said.

"Then send one against me."

"Alas, I have none. I won my kingdom through fairness, legality, and the Lord Ruler's grace—not through threat of assassination, like yourself."

*No Mistborn, you say?* Elend thought, smiling. *So, your "fairness, legality, and grace" don't preclude lying?* "You would really let your people die?" Elend said loudly, sweeping his hand across the room. More and more people were gathering to watch. "All because of your pride?"

"Pride?" Yomen said, leaning forward. "You call it pride to defend your own rule? I call it pride to march your armies into another man's kingdom, seeking to intimidate him with barbaric monsters."

"Monsters your own Lord Ruler created and used to intimidate and conquer as well," Elend said.

Yomen paused. "Yes, the Lord Ruler created the koloss," he said. "It was his prerogative to determine how they were used. Besides, he kept them far away from civilized cities—yet you march them right up to our doorstep."

"Yes," Elend said, "and they haven't attacked. That's because I can control them as the Lord Ruler did. Wouldn't that suggest that I have inherited his right to rule?"

Yomen frowned, perhaps noticing that Elend's arguments kept changing—that he was saying whatever came to mind in order to keep the discussion going.

"You may be unwilling to save this city," Elend said, "but there are others in it who are wiser. You don't think I came here without allies, do you?"

Yomen paused again.

"Yes," Elend said, scanning the crowd. "You're not just fighting me, Yomen. You're fighting your own people. Which ones will betray you, when the time comes? How well can you trust them, exactly?"

Yomen snorted. "Idle threats, Venture. What is this really about?" However, Elend could tell that his words bothered Yomen. The man *didn't* trust the local nobility. He would have been a fool to do so.

Elend smiled, preparing his next argument. He could keep this discussion going for quite some time. For, if there was one thing in particular that he had learned by growing up in his father's house it was this: how to annoy people.

*You have your distraction, Vin,* Elend thought. *Let's hope you can end the fight for this city before it really begins.*

*Each spike, positioned very carefully, can determine how the recipient's body is changed by Hemalurgy. A spike in one place creates a monstrous, near-mindless beast. In another place, a spike will create a crafty—yet homicidal—Inquisitor.*

*Without the instinctive knowledge granted by taking the power at the Well of Ascension, Rashek would never have been able to use Hemalurgy. With his mind expanded, and with a little practice, he was able to intuit where to place spikes that would create the servants he wanted.*

*It is a little-known fact that the Inquisitors' torture chambers were actually Hemalurgic laboratories. The Lord Ruler was constantly trying to develop new breeds of servant. It is a testament to Hemalurgy's complexity that, despite a thousand years of trying, he never managed to create anything with it beyond the three kinds of creatures he developed during those few brief moments holding the power.*

# 44

VIN CREPT DOWN THE STONE STAIRWELL, small sounds echoing eerily from below. She had no torch or lantern, and the stairwell was not lit, but enough light reflected up from below to let her tin-enhanced eyes see.

The more she thought about it, the more the large basement made sense. This was the Canton of Resource—the arm of the Ministry that had been in charge of feeding the people, maintaining the canals, and supplying the other Cantons. Vin supposed that this basement had once been well stocked with supplies. If the cache really was here, it would be the first that she had discovered hidden beneath a Canton of Resource building. Vin expected great things from it. What better place to hide your atium and your most important resources than with an organization that was in charge of transportation and storage across the entire empire?

The stairwell was simple, utilitarian, and steep. Vin wrinkled her nose at the musty air, which seemed all the more stuffy to her tin-enhanced sense of smell. Still, she was grateful for tin's enhanced vision, not to mention the enhanced hearing, which let her hear clinking armor below—an indication that she needed to move quite carefully.

And so she did. She reached the bottom of the stairwell and peeked around the corner. Three narrow stone corridors split off from the stairwell landing, each heading in a different direction at ninety-degree angles. The sounds were coming from the right, and as Vin leaned out a bit more, she nearly jumped as she saw a pair of guards standing lazily against the wall a short distance away.

*Guards standing in the corridors,* Vin thought, ducking back into the stairwell. *Yomen definitely wants to protect something down here.*

Vin crouched down on the rough, cool stone. Pewter, steel, and iron were of relatively little use at the moment. She could take down both guards, but it would be risky, since she couldn't afford to make any noise. She didn't know where the cache was—and therefore couldn't afford to make a disturbance, not yet.

Vin closed her eyes, burning brass and zinc. She carefully—and slowly—Soothed the emotions of the two soldiers. She heard them settle back, leaning against the side of the corridor. Then, she Rioted their sense of boredom, tugging on that single emotion. She peeked around the corner again, keeping the pressure on, waiting.

One of the men yawned. A few seconds later, the other one did. Then they both yawned at once. And Vin scuttled straight across the landing and into the shadowed hallway beyond. She pressed herself up against the wall, heart beating quickly, and waited. No cry came, though one of the guards did mumble something about being tired.

Vin smiled in excitement. It had been a long time since she'd had to truly sneak. She had spied and scouted, but had trusted on the mists, the darkness, and her ability to move quickly to protect her. This was different. It reminded her of the days when she and Reen had burgled houses.

*What would my brother say now?* she wondered, padding down the corridor on unnaturally light, quiet feet. *He'd think I've gone crazy, sneaking into a building not for wealth, but for information.* To Reen, life had been about survival—the simple, harsh facts of survival. Trust nobody. Make yourself invaluable to your team, but don't be too threatening. Be ruthless. Stay alive.

She hadn't abandoned his lessons. They'd always be part of her—they were what had kept her alive and careful, even during her years with Kelsier's crew. She just no longer listened to them exclusively. She tempered them with trust and hope.

*Your trust will get you killed someday,* Reen seemed to whisper in the back of her mind. But, of course, even Reen himself hadn't stuck to his code perfectly. He'd died protecting Vin, refusing to give her up to the Inquisitors, even though doing so might have saved his life.

Vin continued forward. It soon became evident that the basement was an extensive grid of narrow corridors surrounding larger rooms. She peeked into one, creaking the door open, and found some supplies. They were basic kinds of things, flour and the like—not the carefully canned, organized, and catalogued long-term supplies of a storage cache.

*There must be a loading dock down one of these corridors,* Vin guessed. *It probably slopes up, leading to that subcanal that runs into the city.*

Vin moved on, but she knew she wouldn't have time to search each of the basement's many rooms. She approached another intersection of corridors, and crouched down, frowning. Elend's diversion wouldn't last forever, and someone would eventually discover the women she'd knocked unconscious. She needed to get to the cache quickly.

She glanced around. The corridors were sparsely lit by the occasional lamp. Yet, there seemed to be more light coming from the left. She moved down this corridor, and the lamps became more frequent. Soon, she caught the sound of voices, and she moved more carefully, approaching another intersection. She peeked down it. To the left, she noted a pair of soldiers standing in the distance. To her right, there were four.

*Right it is, then,* she thought. However, this was going to be a little more difficult.

She closed her eyes, listening carefully. She could hear both groups of soldiers, but there seemed to be something else. Other groups in the distance. Vin picked one of these and begin to Pull with a powerful Riot of emotions. Soothing and Rioting weren't blocked by stone or steel—during the days of the Final Empire, the Lord Ruler had set up Soothers in various sections of the skaa slums, letting them Soothe away the emotions of everyone nearby, affecting hundreds, even thousands, of people at once.

She waited. Nothing happened. She was trying to Riot the men's sense of anger and irritability. However, she didn't even know if she was Pulling in the right direction. In addition, Rioting and Soothing weren't as precise as Pushing steel. Breeze always explained that the emotional makeup of a person was a complex jumble of thoughts, instincts, and feelings. An Allomancer couldn't control minds or actions. He could only nudge.

Unless . . .

Taking a deep breath, Vin extinguished all of her metals. Then, she burned duralumin and zinc, and *Pulled* in the direction of the distant guards, hitting them with a powerfully enhanced burst of emotional Allomancy.

Immediately, a curse echoed through the hallway. Vin cringed. Fortunately, the noise wasn't directed at her. The guards in the corridor perked up, and the argument in the distance grew louder, more fervent. Vin didn't need to burn tin to hear when the scuffle broke out, men yelling at each other.

The guards to the left rushed away, moving to find out what the source of the disturbance was. The ones to her right left two men behind, however, and so Vin drank a vial of metal, then Rioted their emotions, enhancing their senses of curiosity to the point of breaking.

The two men left, rushing after their companions, and Vin scurried down the corridor. She soon saw that her instincts had proven right—the four men had been guarding a door into one of the storage rooms. Vin took a deep breath, then opened the door and ducked inside. The trapdoor inside was closed, but she knew what to look for. She pulled it open, then jumped into the darkness beneath her.

She Pushed down a coin as she fell, using the sound of its hitting to let her know how far down the floor was. She landed on rough stonework, standing in complete darkness—pitch black beyond even what tin would let her see in. She felt around, however, and found a lantern on the wall. She pulled out her flint, and soon had light.

And there it was, the door in the wall leading into the storage cavern. The rock mountings had been torn apart, the door forced. The wall was still there, and the door itself was intact, but getting it open had obviously taken some great amount of work. The door was open slightly, barely wide enough for a person to get through. It had obviously taken Yomen a lot of effort to even get it that far.

*He must have known it was here,* Vin thought, standing up straight. *But . . . why break it open like this? He has a Mistborn who could have opened the door with a Steelpull.*

Heart fluttering in anticipation, Vin slipped through the opening and into the silent storage cache. She immediately jumped down to the cache floor and began searching for the plate that would contain the Lord Ruler's information. She just had to—

Stone scraped against stone behind her.

Vin spun, feeling an instant of sharp and dreadful realization.

The stone door shut behind her.

". . . and *that,"* Elend said, "is why the Lord Ruler's system of government *had* to fall."

He was losing them. He could tell—more and more people were trailing away from the argument. The problem was, Yomen actually *was* interested.

"You make a mistake, young Venture," the obligator said, tapping the table idly with his fork. "The sixth-century stewardship program was not even devised by the Lord Ruler. The newly formed Canton of Inquisition proposed it as a means of population control for the Terris, and the Lord Ruler agreed to it provisionally."

"That provision turned into a means of subjugating an entire race of people," Elend said.

"That subjugation started far earlier," Yomen said. "Everyone knows the history of this, Venture. The Terris were a people who absolutely refused to submit to imperial rule, and they had to be strictly reined in. However, can you honestly say that Terris stewards were treated poorly? They're the most honored servants in all of the empire!"

"I'd hardly call being made into a favored slave a fair return for losing one's manhood," Elend said, raising an eyebrow and folding his arms.

"There are at least a dozen sources I could quote you on that," Yomen said with a wave of his hand. "What about Trendalan? He claimed that being made a eunuch had left him free to pursue more potent thoughts of logic and of harmony, since he wasn't distracted by worldly lusts."

"He didn't have a choice in the matter," Elend said.

"Few of us have choice in our stations," Yomen replied.

"I prefer people to have that choice," Elend said. "You'll notice that I have given the skaa freedom in my lands, and given the nobility a parliamentary council by which they have a hand in ruling the city in which they live."

"High ideals," Yomen said, "and I recognize Trendalan's own words in what you claim to have done. However, even he said that it would be unlikely for such a system to continue in stability for very long."

Elend smiled. It had been a long time since he'd had such a good argument. Ham never delved deeply into topics—he liked philosophical questions, but not scholarly debates—and Sazed just didn't like to argue.

*I wish I could have met Yomen when I was younger,* Elend thought. *Back when I had time to simply worry about philosophy. Oh, the discussions we could have had. . . .*

Of course, those discussions probably would have ended up with Elend in the hands of the Steel Inquisitors for being a revolutionary. Still, he had to admit that Yomen was no fool. He knew his history and his politics—he just happened to have completely erroneous beliefs. Another day, Elend would have been happy to persuade him of that fact.

Unfortunately, this particular argument was growing increasingly tense for Elend. He couldn't maintain both Yomen's attention and that of the crowd. Each time he tried to do something to get the crowd back, Yomen seemed to get suspicious—and each time Elend actually tried to engage the king, the crowd itself grew bored with the philosophical debate.

So it was that Elend was actually relieved when the yells of surprise finally came. Seconds later, a pair of soldiers rushed into the room, carrying a dazed and bloodied young woman in a ball gown.

*Lord Ruler, Vin!* Elend thought. *Was that really necessary?*

Elend glanced back at Yomen, and the two shared a look. Then Yomen stood. "Where is the empress Venture!" he demanded.

*Time to go,* Elend thought, remembering his promise to Vin. However, something occurred to him. *I'll probably never have another chance to get this close to Yomen,* Elend thought. *And there's one sure way to prove whether or not he's an Allomancer.*

Try to kill him.

It was bold, perhaps foolish, but he was growing certain he'd never convince Yomen to surrender his city. He'd claimed that he wasn't Mistborn; it was very important to see if he was lying or not. So, trusting his instincts in this matter, Elend dropped a coin and Pushed himself up onto the stage. Ballgoers began to cry out, their idyllic world shattering as Elend whipped out a pair of glass daggers. Yomen paled and backed away. Two guards who had been pretending to be Yomen's dinner partners stood up from their seats, pulling staves from beneath the table.

"You liar," Yomen spat as Elend landed on the dining table. "Thief, butcher, *tyrant!"*

Elend shrugged, then shot coins at the two guards, easily dropping them both. He jumped for Yomen, grabbing the man around the neck, yanking him backward. Gasps and screams came from the crowd.

Elend squeezed, choking Yomen. No strength flooded the man's limbs. No Allomantic Pull or Push tried to shake him from Elend's grasp. The obligator barely even struggled.

*Either he's no Allomancer,* Elend thought, *or he's one hell of an actor.*

He let Yomen go, pushing the king back toward his dining table. Elend shook his head—that was one mystery that was—

Yomen jumped forward, pulling out a glass knife, slashing. Elend started, ducking backward, but the knife hit, slicing a gash in his forearm. The cut blazed with pain, enhanced by Elend's tin, and Elend cursed, stumbling away.

Yomen struck again, and Elend *should* have been able to dodge. He had pewter, and Yomen was still moving with the clumsiness of an unenhanced man. Yet, the attack moved with Elend, somehow managing to take him in the side. Elend grunted, blood hot on his skin, and he looked into Yomen's eyes. The king pulled the knife free, easily dodging Elend's counterstrike. It was almost like . . .

Elend burned electrum, giving himself a bubble of false atium images. Yomen hesitated immediately, looking confused.

*He's burning atium,* Elend thought with shock. *That means he* is *Mistborn!*

Part of Elend wanted to stay and fight, but the cut in his side was bad—bad enough that he knew he needed to get it taken care of soon. Cursing his own stupidity, he Pushed himself into the air, dropping blood on the terrified nobility clustered below. He should have listened to Vin—he was going to get a serious lecture when he got back to camp.

He landed, and noted that Yomen had chosen not to follow. The obligator king stood behind his table, holding a knife red with Elend's blood, watching with anger.

Elend turned, throwing up a handful of coins and Pushing them into the air above the heads of the ballgoers—careful not to hit any of them. They cowered in fear, throwing themselves to the ground. Once the coins landed, Elend Pushed off of them to send himself in a short, low jump through the room and toward the exit Vin had indicated. Soon, he entered an outdoor patio cloaked with mist.

He glanced back at the building, feeling frustrated, though he didn't know why. He had done his part—he'd kept Yomen and his guests distracted for a good half hour. True, he'd gotten himself wounded, but he *had* discovered that Yomen was an Allomancer. That was worth knowing.

He dropped a coin and shot himself into the air.

Three hours later, Elend sat in the command tent with Ham, waiting quietly.

He got his side and arm patched. Vin didn't arrive.

He told the others about what had happened. Vin didn't arrive.

Ham forced him to get something to eat. Elend paced for an hour after that, and still Vin did not return.

"I'm going back," Elend said, standing.

Ham looked up. "El, you lost *a lot* of blood. I'd guess that only pewter is keeping you on your feet."

It was true. Elend could feel the edges of fatigue beneath his veil of pewter. "I can handle it."

"You'll kill yourself that way," Ham said.

"I don't care. I—" Elend cut off as his tin-enhanced ears heard someone approaching the tent. He pulled back the flaps before the man even arrived, startling him.

"My lord!" the man said. "Message from the city."

Elend snatched the letter, ripping it open.

*Pretender Venture,* the note said, *I have her, as you have probably guessed. There's one thing I've always noted about Mistborn. To a man, they are overconfident. Thank you for the stimulating conversation. I'm glad I was able to keep you distracted for so long.*

King Yomen.

Vin sat quietly in the dark cavern. Her back rested against the stone block that was the door to her prison. Beside her, on the rock floor, sat the dwindling lantern she'd brought into the massive room.

She'd Pushed and she'd Pulled, trying to force her way out. However, she'd soon realized that the broken stones she'd seen on the outside—the work project she'd assumed had been used to open the door—had actually had a different purpose. Yomen had apparently removed the metal plates inside the door, the ones that an Allomancer could Push or Pull on to open it. That left the door as simply a stone block. With duralumin-enhanced pewter, she should have been able to push even that open. Unfortunately, she found it difficult to get leverage on the floor, which sloped down away from the block. In addition, they must have done something to the hinges—or perhaps even piled up more rock against the other side—for she couldn't get the door to budge.

She ground her teeth in frustration, sitting with her back to the stone door. Yomen had set an intentional trap for her. Had she and Elend been that predictable? Regardless, it was a brilliant move. Yomen knew he couldn't fight them. So, instead, he'd simply captured Vin. It had the same effect, but without any of the risks. And she'd fallen right into the trap.

She'd searched the entire room, trying to find a way out, but had come up with nothing. Even worse, she'd located no hidden stock of atium. It was hard to tell with all the cans of food and other sources of metal, but her initial search hadn't been promising.

"Of course it won't be in here," she muttered to herself. "Yomen wouldn't have had time to pull out all of these cans, but if he were planning to trap me, he certainly would have removed the atium. I'm such an *idiot!"*

She leaned back, annoyed, frustrated, exhausted.

*I hope Elend did what I said,* Vin thought. If he had gotten captured too . . .

Vin knocked her head back against the obstinate stones, frustrated.

Something sounded in the darkness.

Vin froze, then quickly scrambled up into a crouch. She checked her metal reserves—she had plenty, for the moment.

*I'm probably just—*

It came again. A soft footfall. Vin shivered, realizing that she had only cursorily checked the chamber, and then she'd been searching for atium and other ways out. Could someone have been hiding inside the entire time?

She burned bronze, and felt him. An Allomancer. Mistborn. The one she had felt before; the man she had chased.

*So that's it!* she thought. *Yomen* did *want his Mistborn to fight us—but he knew he had to separate us first!* She smiled, standing. It wasn't a perfect situation, but it was better than thinking about the immobile door. A Mistborn she could beat, then hold hostage until they released her.

She waited until the man was close—she could tell by the beating of the Allomantic pulses that she hoped he didn't know she could feel—then spun, kicking her lantern toward him. She jumped forward, guiding herself toward her enemy, who stood outlined by the lantern's last flickers. He looked up at her as she soared through the air, her daggers out.

And she recognized his face.

Reen.

# PART FOUR
# BEAUTIFUL DESTROYER

*A man with a given power—such as an Allomantic ability—who then gained a Hemalurgic spike granting that same power would be nearly twice as strong as a natural unenhanced Allomancer.*

*An Inquisitor who was a Seeker before his transformation would therefore have an enhanced ability to use bronze. This simple fact explains how many Inquisitors were able to pierce copperclouds.*

# 45

VIN LANDED, ABORTING HER ATTACK, but still tense, eyes narrow with suspicion. Reen was backlit by the fitful lantern-light, looking much as she remembered. The four years had changed him, of course—he was taller, broader of build—but he had the same hard face, unrelieved by humor. His posture was familiar to her; during her childhood, he had often stood as he did now, arms folded in disapproval.

It all returned to her. Things she thought she'd banished into the dark, quarantined parts of her mind: blows from Reen's hand, harsh criticism from his tongue, furtive moves from city to city.

And yet, tempering these memories was an insight. She was no longer the young girl who had borne her beatings in confused silence. Looking back, she could see the fear Reen had shown in the things he had done. He'd been terrified that his half-breed Allomancer of a sister would be discovered and slaughtered by the Steel Inquisitors. He'd beaten her when she made herself stand out. He'd yelled at her when she was too competent. He'd moved her when he'd feared that the Canton of Inquisition had caught their trail.

Reen had died protecting her. He had taught her paranoia and distrust out of a twisted sense of duty, for he'd believed that was the only way she would survive on the streets of the Final Empire. And, she'd stayed with him, enduring the treatment. Inside—not even buried all that deeply—she'd known something very important. Reen had loved her.

She looked up and met the eyes of the man standing in the cavern. Then, she slowly shook her head. *No,* she thought. *It looks like him, but those eyes are* not *his.*

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I'm your brother," the creature said, frowning. "It's only been a few years, Vin. You've grown brash—I thought I'd taught you better than that."

*He certainly has the mannerisms down,* Vin thought, walking forward warily. *How did he learn them? Nobody thought that Reen was of any importance during his life. They wouldn't have known to study him.*

"Where did you get his bones?" Vin asked, circling the creature. The cavern floor was rough and lined with burgeoning shelves. Darkness extended in all directions. "And how did you get the face so perfect? I thought kandra had to digest a body to make a good copy."

He had to be a kandra, after all. How else would someone manage such a perfect imitation? The creature turned, regarding her with a confused expression. "What is this nonsense? Vin, I realize that we're not exactly the type to reunite with a fond embrace, but I *did* at least expect you to recognize me."

Vin ignored the complaints. Reen, then Breeze, had taught her too well. She'd know Reen if she saw him. "I need information," she said. "About one of your kind. He is called TenSoon, and he returned to your Homeland a year ago. He said he was going to be put on trial. Do you know what happened to him? I would like to contact him, if possible."

"Vin," the false Reen said firmly, "I am *not* a kandra."

*We'll see about that,* Vin thought, reaching out with zinc and hitting the impostor with a duralumin-fueled blast of emotional Allomancy.

He didn't even stumble. Such an attack would have put a kandra under Vin's control, just as it did with koloss. Vin wavered. It was growing difficult to see the impostor in the waning lantern-light, even with tin enhancing her eyes.

The failed emotional Allomancy meant that he wasn't a kandra. But he wasn't Reen either. There seemed only one logical course to follow.

She attacked.

Whoever the impostor was, he knew her well enough to anticipate this move. Though he exclaimed in mock surprise, he immediately jumped back, getting out of her reach. He moved on light feet—light enough that Vin was reasonably certain he was burning pewter. In fact, she could still feel the Allomantic pulses coming from him, though for some reason it was hard for her to pin down exactly which metals he was burning.

Either way, the Allomancy was an additional confirmation of her suspicions. Reen had not been an Allomancer. True, he could have Snapped during their time apart, but she didn't think he had any noble blood to impart him an Allomantic heritage. Vin had gotten her powers from her father, the parent she and Reen had not shared.

She attacked experimentally, testing this impostor's skill. He stayed out of her reach, watching carefully as she alternately prowled and attacked. She tried to corner him against the shelves, but he was too careful to be caught.

"This is pointless," the impostor said, jumping away from her again.

*No coins,* Vin thought. *He doesn't use coins to jump.*

"You'd have to expose yourself too much to actually hit me, Vin," the impostor said, "and I'm obviously good enough to stay out of your reach. Can't we stop this and get on to more important matters? Aren't you even a bit curious as to what I've been doing these last four years?"

Vin backed into a crouch, like a cat preparing to pounce, and smiled.

"What?" the impostor asked.

At that moment, her stalling paid off. Behind them, the overturned lantern finally flickered out, plunging the cavern into darkness. But Vin, with her ability to pierce copperclouds, could still sense her enemy. She'd dropped her coin pouch back when she'd first sensed someone in the room—she bore no metal to give him warning of her approach.

She launched herself forward, intending to grab her enemy around the neck and pull him into a pin. The Allomantic pulses didn't let her see him, but they did tell her exactly where he was. That would be enough of an edge.

She was wrong. He dodged her just as easily as he had before.

Vin fell still. *Tin,* she thought. *He can hear me coming.*

So, she kicked over a storage shelf, then attacked again as the crash of the falling shelf echoed loudly in the chamber, spilling cans across the floor.

The impostor evaded her again. Vin froze. Something was very wrong. Somehow, he always sensed her. The cavern fell silent. Neither sound nor light bounced off its walls. Vin crouched, the fingers of one hand resting lightly on the cool stone before her. She could feel the thumping, his Allomantic power washing across her in waves. She focused on it, trying to differentiate the metals that had produced it. Yet, the pulses felt opaque. Muddled.

*There's something familiar about them,* she realized. *When I first sensed this impostor, I thought . . . I thought he was the mist spirit.*

There was a reason the pulses felt familiar. Without the light to distract her, making her connect the figure with Reen, she could see what she'd been missing.

Her heart began to beat quickly, and for the first time this evening—imprisonment included—she began to feel afraid. The pulses felt just like the ones she'd felt a year ago. The pulses that had led her to the Well of Ascension.

"Why have you come here?" she whispered to the blackness.

Laughter. It rang in the empty cavern, loud, free. The thumpings approached, though no footsteps marked the thing's movement. The pulses suddenly grew enormous and overpowering. They washed across Vin, unbounded by the cavern's echoes, an unreal sound that passed through things both living and dead. She stepped backward in the darkness, and nearly tripped over the shelves she'd knocked down.

*I should have known you wouldn't be fooled,* a kindly voice said in her head. The thing's voice. She'd heard it only once before, a year ago, when she'd released it from its imprisonment in the Well of Ascension.

"What do you want?" she whispered.

You know what I want. You've always known.

And she did. She had sensed it in the moment when she had touched the thing. Ruin, she called it. It had very simple desires. To see the world come to its end.

"I will stop you," she said. Yet, it was hard to not feel foolish speaking the words to a force she did not understand, a thing that existed beyond men and beyond worlds.

It laughed again, though this time the sound was only inside her head. She could still feel Ruin pulsing—though not from any one specific place. It surrounded her. She forced herself to stand up straight.

*Ah, Vin,* Ruin said, its voice almost fatherly in tone. *You act as if I were your enemy.*

"You are my enemy. You seek to end the things I love."

*And is an ending always bad?* it asked. *Must not all things, even worlds, someday end?*

"There is no need to hasten that end," Vin said. "No reason to force it."

*All things are subject to their own nature, Vin,* Ruin said, seeming to flow around her. She could feel its touch upon her—wet and delicate, like mist. *You cannot blame me for being what I am. Without me, nothing would end. Nothing* could *end. And therefore, nothing could grow. I am life. Would you fight life itself?*

Vin fell silent.

*Do not mourn because the day of this world's end has arrived,* Ruin said. *That end was ordained the very day of the world's conception. There is a beauty in death—the beauty of finality, the beauty of completion.*

For nothing is truly complete until the day it is finally destroyed.

"Enough," Vin snapped, feeling alone and smothered in the chill darkness. "Stop taunting me. Why have you come here?"

*Come here?* it asked. *Why do you ask that?*

"What is your purpose in appearing now?" Vin said. "Have you simply come to gloat over my imprisonment?"

*I have not "just appeared," Vin,* Ruin said. *Why, I have never left. I've always been with you. A part of you.*

"Nonsense," Vin said. "You only just revealed yourself."

*I revealed myself to your eyes, yes,* Ruin said. *But, I see that you do not understand. I've always been with you, even when you could not see me.*

It paused, and there was silence, both outside and inside of her head.

*When you're alone, no one can betray you,* a voice whispered in the back of her mind. Reen's voice. The voice she heard sometimes, almost real, like a conscience. She'd taken it for granted that the voice was just part of her psyche—a leftover from Reen's teachings. An instinct.

*Anyone will betray you, Vin,* the voice said, repeating a bit of advice it commonly gave. As it spoke, it slowly slid from Reen's voice into that of Ruin. *Anyone.*

I've always been with you. You've heard me in your mind since your first years of life.

*Ruin's escape deserves some explanation. This is a thing that even I had a problem understanding.*

*Ruin could not have used the power at the Well of Ascension. It was of Preservation, Ruin's fundamental opposite. Indeed, a direct confrontation of these two forces would have caused the destruction of both.*

*Ruin's prison, however, was fabricated of that power. Therefore, it was attuned to the power of Preservation—the very power of the Well. When that power was released and dispersed, rather than utilized, it acted as a key. The subsequent "unlocking" is what finally freed Ruin.*

# 46

"ALL RIGHT," BREEZE SAID, "so does somebody want to speculate on how our team's spy ended up becoming a pseudo-religious vigilante freedom fighter?"

Sazed shook his head. They sat in their cavern lair beneath the Canton of Inquisition. Breeze, declaring that he was tired of travel rations, had ordered several of the soldiers to break open some of the cavern's supplies to prepare a more suitable meal. Sazed might have complained, but the truth was that the cavern was so well stocked that even a determinedly eating Breeze wouldn't be able to make a dent in it.

They had waited all day for Spook to return to the lair. Tensions in the city were high, and most of their contacts had gone to ground, weathering the Citizen's paranoia regarding a rebellion. Soldiers walked the streets, and a sizable contingent had set up camp just outside the Ministry building. Sazed was worried that the Citizen had associated Breeze and Sazed with Spook's appearance at the executions. It appeared that their days of moving about freely in the city were at an end.

"Why hasn't he come back?" Allrianne asked. She and Breeze sat at a fine table, pilfered from an empty nobleman's mansion. They had, of course, changed back to their fine clothing—a suit on Breeze, a peach dress on Allrianne. They always changed as soon as possible, as if eager to reaffirm to themselves who they really were.

Sazed did not dine with them; he didn't have much of an appetite. Captain Goradel leaned against a bookcase a short distance away, determined to keep a close eye on his charges. Though the good-natured man wore his usual smile, Sazed could tell from the orders he'd given to his soldiers that he was worried about the possibility of an assault. He made very certain that Breeze, Allrianne, and Sazed stayed within the protective confines of the cavern. Better to be trapped than dead.

"I'm sure the boy is fine, my dear," Breeze said, finally answering Allrianne's question. "It's likely he hasn't come back because he fears implicating us in what he did today."

"Either that," Sazed said, "or he can't get past the soldiers watching outside."

"He snuck into a burning building while we were watching, my dear man," Breeze said, "I doubt he'd have trouble with a bunch of toughs, especially now that it's dark out."

Allrianne shook her head. "It would have been better if he'd managed to sneak *out* of that building as well, rather than jumping off the roof in front of everyone."

"Perhaps," Breeze said. "But, part of being a vigilante rebel is letting your enemies know what you are about. The psychological effect produced by leaping from a burning building carrying a child is quite sound. And, to do that right in front of the tyrant who tried to execute said child? I wasn't aware that dear little Spook had such a flair for drama!"

"He's not so little anymore, I think," Sazed said quietly. "We have a habit of ignoring Spook too much."

"Habits come from reinforcement, my dear man," Breeze said, wagging a fork at Sazed. "We paid little attention to the lad because he rarely had an important role to play. It isn't his fault—he was simply young."

"Vin was young as well," Sazed noted.

"Vin, you must admit, is something of a special case."

Sazed couldn't argue with that.

"Either way," Breeze said, "when we look at the facts, what happened isn't really all that surprising. Spook has had months to become known to Urteau's underground population, and he is of the Survivor's own crew. It is logical that they would begin to look to him to save them, much as Kelsier saved Luthadel."

"We're forgetting one thing, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. "He jumped from a rooftop ledge two stories up and landed on a cobbled street. Men do not survive falls like that without broken bones."

Breeze paused. "Staged, you think? Perhaps he worked out some kind of landing platform to soften the fall?"

Sazed shook his head. "I believe it a stretch to assume that Spook could plan, and execute, a staged rescue like that. He would have needed the aid of the underground, which would have ruined the effect. If they knew that his survival was a trick, then we wouldn't have heard the rumors we did about him."

"What, then?" Breeze asked, shooting a glance at Allrianne. "You're not truly suggesting that Spook has been *Mistborn* all this time, are you?"

"I do not know," Sazed said softly.

Breeze shook his head, chuckling. "I doubt he could have hidden that from us, my dear man. Why, he would have had to go through that entire mess of overthrowing the Lord Ruler, then the fall of Luthadel, without ever revealing that he was anything more than a Tineye! I refuse to accept that."

*Or,* Sazed thought, *you refuse to accept that you wouldn't have detected the truth.* Still, Breeze had a point. Sazed had known Spook as a youth. The boy had been awkward and shy, but he hadn't been deceitful. It was truly a stretch to imagine him to have been a Mistborn from the beginning.

Yet, Sazed had seen that fall. He had seen the grace of the jump, the distinctive poise and natural dexterity of one burning pewter. Sazed found himself wishing for his copperminds so that he could search for references about people spontaneously manifesting Allomantic powers. Could a man be a Misting early in life, then transform to a full Mistborn later?

It was a simple thing, related to his duties as an ambassador. Perhaps he could spend just a little time looking through his stored memories, seeking examples. . . .

He paused. *Don't be silly,* he thought. *You're just looking for excuses. You* know *that it's impossible for an Allomancer to gain new powers. You won't find any examples because there aren't any.*

He didn't need to look through his metalminds. He had set those aside for a very good reason—he could not be a Keeper, could not share the knowledge he'd collected, until he could sort the truth from the lies.

*I've let myself get distracted lately,* he thought with determination, rising from his place and leaving the others behind. He walked over to his "room" in the cache, with the sheets hung there cutting off his view of the others. Sitting on the table was his portfolio. In the corner, next to a shelf full of cans, sat his sack full of metalminds.

No, Sazed thought. *I made a promise to myself. I will keep it. I will not allow myself to become a hypocrite simply because some new religion appears and waves at me. I will be strong.*

He sat down at the table, opening his portfolio, taking out the next sheet in the line. It listed the tenets of the Nelazan people, who had worshipped the god Trell. Sazed had always been partial to this religion because of its focus on learning and study of mathematics and the heavens.

He'd saved it for near the end, but had done so more out of worry than anything else. He'd wanted to put off what he'd known would happen.

Sure enough, as he read about the religion, he saw the holes in its doctrines. True, the Nelazan had known a great deal about astronomy, but their teachings on the afterlife were sketchy—almost whimsical. Their doctrine was purposefully vague, they'd taught, allowing all men to discover truth for themselves. Reading this, however, left Sazed frustrated. What good was a religion without answers? Why believe in something if the response to half of his questions was "Ask Trell, and he will answer"?

He didn't dismiss the religion immediately. He forced himself to put it aside, acknowledging to himself that he wasn't in the right mood for studying. He didn't feel like he was in the mood for much, actually.

*What if Spook really has become Mistborn?* he wondered, mind getting drawn back to the previous conversation. It seemed impossible. Yet, a lot of things they thought they'd known about Allomancy—such as the existence of only ten metals—had turned out to be falsehoods taught by the Lord Ruler to hide some powerful secrets.

Perhaps it *was* possible for an Allomancer to spontaneously manifest new powers. Or, perhaps there was a more mundane reason Spook had managed such a long fall. It could be related to the thing that made Spook's eyes so sensitive. Drugs, perhaps?

Either way, Sazed's worry about what was happening kept him from being able to focus on studying the Nelazan religion as he should. He kept getting the feeling that something very important was occurring. And Spook was at the center of it.

Where was that boy?

"I know why you're so sad," Spook said.

Beldre turned, shock showing on her face. She didn't see him at first. He must have been too deep in the misty shadows. It was growing hard for him to tell.

He stepped forward, moving across the plot of land that had once been a garden outside the Citizen's home. "I figured it out," Spook said. "At first, I thought that sadness had to do with this garden. It must have been beautiful, once. You would have seen it in its fullness, before your brother ordered all gardens plowed under. You were related to nobility, and probably lived in their society."

She looked surprised at this.

"Yes, I know," Spook said. "Your brother is an Allomancer. He's a Coinshot; I felt his Pushes. That day at Marketpit."

She remained silent—more beautiful herself than the garden could ever have been—though she did take a step backward as her eyes finally found him in the mists.

"Eventually," Spook continued, "I decided that I must be wrong. Nobody mourns so much for a simple garden, no matter how lovely. After that, I thought the sadness in your eyes must come from being forbidden to take part in your brother's councils. He always sends you out, into the garden, when he meets with his most important officials. I know what it's like to feel useless and excluded among important people."

He took another step forward. The rough earth lay torn beneath his feet, covered by an inch of ash, the dreary remnants of what had once been fertile ground. To his right stood the lone shrub that Beldre often came to gaze at. He didn't look toward it; he kept his eyes on her.

"I was wrong," he said. "Being forbidden your brother's conferences would lead to frustration, but not such pain. Not such regret. I know that sorrow now. I killed for the first time this afternoon. I helped overthrow empires, then helped build them anew. And I'd never killed a man. Not until today."

He stopped, then looked into her eyes. "Yes, I know that sorrow. What I'm trying figure out is why *you* feel it."

She turned away. "You shouldn't be here," she said. "There are guards watching—"

"No," Spook said. "Not anymore. Quellion sent too many men into the city—he's afraid that he'll suffer a revolution, like happened in Luthadel. Like he himself inspired here when he seized power. He's right to be afraid, but he was wrong to leave his own palace so poorly guarded."

"Kill him," Kelsier whispered. "Quellion is inside; this is the perfect chance. He deserves it, you know he does."

*No,* Spook thought. *Not today. Not in front of her.*

Beldre glanced back at him, her eyes growing hard. "Why have you come? To taunt me?"

"To tell you that I understand," Spook said.

"How can you say that?" she said. "You don't understand me—you don't know me."

"I think I do," Spook said. "I saw your eyes today, when you watched those people being marched to their deaths. You feel guilty. Guilty for your brother's murders. You sorrow because you feel you should be able to stop him." He took a step forward. "You can't, Beldre. He's been corrupted by his power. He might once have been a good man, but no longer. Do you realize what he's doing? Your brother is murdering people simply to get Allomancers. He captures them, then threatens to kill their families unless they do as he asks. Are those the actions of a good man?"

"You are a simplistic fool," Beldre whispered, though she wouldn't meet his eyes.

"I know," Spook said. "What are a few deaths when it comes to securing the stability of a kingdom?" He paused, then shook his head. "He's killing children, Beldre. And he's doing it simply to cover up the fact that he's gathering Allomancers."

Beldre was silent for a moment. "Go," she finally said.

"I want you to come with me."

She looked up.

"I'm going to overthrow your brother," Spook said. "I am a member of the Survivor's own crew. We took down the Lord Ruler—Quellion will hardly provide us with a challenge. You don't have to be here when he falls."

Beldre snorted quietly in derision.

"It's not just about your safety," Spook said. "If you join with us, it will be a strong blow to your brother. Perhaps it will convince him that he is wrong. There could be a more peaceful way of making this happen."

"I'm going to start screaming in three heartbeats," Beldre said.

"I don't fear your guards," Spook said.

"I don't doubt that," Beldre said. "But if they come, you'll have to kill again."

Spook wavered. He stayed where he was, however, calling her bluff.

And so she started screaming.

"Go kill him!" Kelsier said over her screams. "Now, before it's too late! Those guards you killed—they were just following orders. *Quellion,* he's the true monster."

Spook ground his teeth in frustration, then finally ran, fleeing from Beldre and her screams, leaving Quellion alive.

For the moment.

The group of rings, clasps, ear loops, bracelets, and other bits of metal gleamed on the table like a treasure hoard of legend. Of course, most of the metals were rather mundane. Iron, steel, tin, copper. No gold or atium.

Yet, to a Feruchemist, the metals were worth far more than their economic value. They were batteries, stores that could be filled, then drawn upon. One made of pewter, for instance, could be filled with strength. Filling it would drain the Feruchemist of strength for a time—making him weak enough that simple tasks grew difficult—but the price was worthwhile. For, when necessary, he could draw that strength forth.

Many of these metalminds, spread out on the table in front of Sazed, were empty at the moment. Sazed had last used them during the horrific battle that had ended with the fall—then rescue—of Luthadel over a year before. That battle had left him drained in more ways than one. Ten rings, lined up on the side of the table, had been used to nearly kill him. Marsh had shot them at Sazed like coins, piercing his skin. That, however, had allowed Sazed to draw forth their power and heal himself.

At the very center of the collection were the most important metalminds of all. Four bracers—meant to clasp on to the upper or lower arms—sat gleaming and polished, made of the purest copper. They were the largest of his metalminds, for they held the most. Copper carried memories. A Feruchemist could take images, thoughts, or sounds that were fresh in his mind, then store them away. While inside, they wouldn't decay or change, as memories could while held in the mind.

When Sazed had been a young man, an older Feruchemist had read out the entire contents of his copperminds. Sazed had stored the knowledge in his own copperminds; they contained the sum total of Keeper knowledge. The Lord Ruler had worked hard to smother people's memories of the past. But the Keepers had gathered them—stories of how the world had been before the ash came and the sun had turned red. The Keepers had memorized the names of places and of kingdoms, had gathered the wisdom of those who were lost.

And they had memorized the religions that had been forbidden by the Lord Ruler. These he had worked the most diligently to destroy, and so the Keepers had worked with equal diligence to rescue them—to secure them away inside of metalminds, so someday they could be taught again. Above all, the Keepers had searched for one thing: knowledge of their own religion, the beliefs of the Terris people. Those had been forgotten during the destructive chaos following the Lord Ruler's ascension. However, despite centuries of work, the Keepers had never recovered this most precious knowledge of all.

*I wonder what would have happened if we* had *found it,* Sazed thought, picking up a steelmind and quietly polishing it. *Probably nothing.* He'd given up on his work with the religions in his portfolio for the moment, feeling too discouraged to study.

There were fifty religions left in his portfolio. Why was he deluding himself, hoping to find any more truth in them than he had in the previous two hundred and fifty? None of the religions had managed to survive the years. Shouldn't he just let them be? Looking through them seemed to be part of the great fallacy in the work of the Keepers. They'd struggled to remember the beliefs of men, but those beliefs had already proven they lacked the resilience to survive. Why bring them back to life? That seemed as pointless as reviving a sickly animal so it could fall to predators again.

He continued to polish. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Breeze watching him. The Soother had come to Sazed's "room," complaining that he couldn't sleep, not with Spook still outside somewhere. Sazed had nodded, but continued polishing. He didn't wish to get into a conversation; he just wanted to be alone.

Breeze, unfortunately, stood and came over. "Sometimes, I don't understand you, Sazed," Breeze said.

"I do not endeavor to be mysterious, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, moving on to polish a small bronze ring.

"Why take such good care of them?" Breeze asked. "You never wear them anymore. In fact, you seem to spurn them."

"I do not spurn the metalminds, Lord Breeze. They are, in a way, the only sacred thing I have left in my life."

"But you don't wear them, either."

Sazed continued polishing. "No. I do not."

"But why?" Breeze asked. "You think that she would have wanted this? She was a Keeper too—do you honestly think she'd want you to give up your metalminds?"

"This particular habit of mine is *not* about Tindwyl."

"Oh?" Breeze asked, sighing as he seated himself at the table. "What do you mean? Because honestly, Sazed, you're confusing me. I understand people. It bothers me that I can't understand you."

"After the Lord Ruler's death," Sazed said, putting down the ring, "do you know what I spent my time doing?"

"Teaching," Breeze said. "You left to go and restore the lost knowledge to the people of the Final Empire."

"And did I ever tell you how that teaching went?"

Breeze shook his head.

"Poorly," Sazed said, picking up another ring. "The people didn't really care. They weren't interested in the religions of the past. And why should they have been? Why worship something that people *used* to believe in?"

"People are always interested in the past, Sazed."

"Interested, perhaps," Sazed said, "but interest is not faith. These metalminds, they are a thing of museums and old libraries. They are of little use to modern people. During the years of the Lord Ruler's reign, we Keepers pretended that we were doing vital work. We *believed* that we were doing vital work. And yet, in the end, nothing we did had any real value. Vin didn't need this knowledge to kill the Lord Ruler.

"I am probably the last of the Keepers. The thoughts in these metalminds will die with me. And, at times, I can't make myself regret that fact. This is not an era for scholars and philosophers. Scholars and philosophers do not help feed starving children."

"And so you don't wear them anymore?" Breeze said. "Because you think they're useless?"

"More than that," Sazed said. "To wear these metalminds would be to pretend. I would be pretending that I find the things in them to be of use, and I have not yet decided if I do or not. To wear them now would seem like a betrayal. I set them aside, for I can do them no justice. I'm just not ready to believe, as we did before, that gathering knowledge and religions is more important than taking action. Perhaps if the Keepers had fought, rather than just memorized, the Lord Ruler would have fallen centuries ago."

"But *you* resisted, Sazed," Breeze said. "You fought."

"I don't represent myself any longer, Lord Breeze," Sazed said softly. "I represent all Keepers, since I am apparently the last. And I, as the last, do not believe in the things I once taught. I cannot with good conscience imply that I am the Keeper I once was."

Breeze sighed, shaking his head. "You don't make sense."

"It makes sense to me."

"No, I think you're just confused. This may not seem to you like a world for scholars, my dear friend, but I think you'll be proven wrong. It seems to me that now—suffering in the darkness that might just be the end of everything—is when we need knowledge the most."

"Why?" Sazed said. "So I can teach a dying man a religion that I don't believe? To speak of a god, when I know there is no such being?"

Breeze leaned forward. "Do you really believe that? That nothing is watching over us?"

Sazed sat quietly, slowing in his polishing. "I have yet to decide for certain," he finally said. "At times, I have hoped to find some truth. However, today, that hope seems very distant to me. There is a darkness upon this land, Breeze, and I am not sure that we can fight it. I am not sure that I want to fight it."

Breeze looked troubled at that. He opened his mouth, but before he could respond, a rumble rolled through the cavern. The rings and bracers on the table quivered and clinked together as the entire room shook, and there was a clatter as some foodstuffs fell—though not too many, for Captain Goradel's men had done good work in moving most of the stockpile off of shelves and to the ground, in order to deal with the quakes.

Eventually, the shaking subsided. Breeze sat with a white face, looking up at the ceiling of the cavern. "I tell you, Sazed," he said. "Every time one of those quakes comes, I wonder at the wisdom of hiding in a cave. Not the safest place during an earthquake, I should think."

"We really have no other option at the moment," Sazed said.

"True, I suppose. Do . . . does it seem to you like those quakes are coming more frequently?"

"Yes," Sazed said, picking up a few fallen bracelets from the floor. "Yes, they are."

"Maybe . . . this region is just more prone to them," Breeze said, not sounding convinced. He turned, looking to the side as Captain Goradel rounded a shelf and approached them in a rush.

"Ah, come to check on us, I see," Breeze said. "We survived the quake quite handily. No need for urgency, my dear captain."

"It's not that," Goradel said, puffing slightly. "It's Lord Spook. He's back."

Sazed and Breeze shared a look, then rose from their chairs, following Goradel to the front of the cavern. They found Spook walking down the steps. His eyes were uncovered, and Sazed saw a new hardness in the young man's expression.

*We really* haven't *been paying enough attention to the lad.*

The soldiers backed away. There was blood on Spook's clothing, though he didn't appear wounded. His cloak was burned in places, and the bottom ended in a charred rip.

"Good," Spook said, noticing Breeze and Sazed, "you're here. Did that quake cause any damage?"

"Spook?" Breeze asked. "No, we're all fine here. No damage. But—"

"We have little time for chatter, Breeze," Spook said, walking past them. "Emperor Venture wants Urteau, and we're going to deliver it to him. I need you to start spreading rumors in the city. It should be easy—some of the more important elements in the underworld already know the truth."

"What truth?" Breeze asked, joining Sazed as they followed Spook through the cavern.

"That Quellion is using Allomancers," Spook said, his voice echoing in the cavern. "I've now confirmed what I suspected before—Quellion recruits Mistings from the people he arrests. He rescues them from his own fires, then holds their families hostage. He relies on the very thing he's preaching against. The entire foundation for his rule, therefore, is a lie. Exposing that lie should cause the entire system to collapse."

"That's capital, we can certainly do that . . ." Breeze said, glancing at Sazed again. Spook kept walking, and Sazed followed, trailing Spook as he moved through the cavern. Breeze moved away, probably to fetch Allrianne.

Spook stopped beside the water's edge. He stood there for a moment, then turned toward Sazed. "You said that you have been studying the construction that brought the water down here, diverting it from the canals."

"Yes," Sazed said.

"Is there a way to reverse the process?" Spook asked. "Make the water flood the streets again?"

"Perhaps," Sazed said. "I am not certain that I have the engineering expertise to accomplish the feat, however."

"Is there knowledge in your metalminds that would help you?" Spook asked.

"Well . . . yes."

"Then use them," Spook said.

Sazed paused, looking uncomfortable.

"Sazed," Spook said. "We don't have much time—we have to take this city before Quellion decides to attack and destroy us. Breeze is going to spread the rumors, then I am going to find a way to expose Quellion as a liar before his people. He's an Allomancer himself."

"Will that be enough?"

"It will if we give them someone else to follow," Spook said, turning back to look across the waters. "Someone who can survive fires; someone who can restore water to the city streets. We'll give them miracles and a hero, then expose their leader as a hypocrite and a tyrant. Confronted with that, what would *you* do?"

Sazed didn't respond immediately. Spook made good points, even about Sazed's metalminds still being useful. Yet Sazed wasn't certain what he thought of the changes in the young man. Spook seemed to have grown far more competent, but . . .

"Spook," Sazed said, stepping in closer, speaking quietly enough that the soldiers standing behind couldn't hear. "What is it you aren't sharing with us? How did you survive the leap from that building? Why do you cover your eyes with cloth?"

"I . . ." Spook faltered, showing a hint of the insecure boy he had once been. For some reason, seeing that made Sazed more comfortable. "I don't know if I can explain, Saze," Spook said, some of his pretension evaporating. "I'm still trying to figure it out myself. I'll explain eventually. For now, can you just trust me?"

The lad had always been a sincere one. Sazed searched those eyes, so eager.

And found something important. Spook cared. He cared about this city, about overthrowing the Citizen. He'd saved those people earlier, when Sazed and Breeze had just stood outside, watching.

Spook cared, and Sazed did not. Sazed tried—he grew frustrated with himself because of his depression, which had been worse this evening than it usually was.

His emotions had been so traitorous lately. He had trouble studying, had trouble leading, had trouble being of any use whatsoever. But, looking into Spook's eager eyes, he was almost able to forget his troubles for a moment.

If the lad wanted to take the lead, then who was Sazed to argue?

He glanced toward his room, where the metalminds lay. He had gone so long without them. They tempted him with their knowledge.

*As long as I don't preach the religions they contain,* he thought, *I'm not a hypocrite. Using this specific knowledge Spook requests will, at least, bring some small meaning to the suffering of those who worked to gather knowledge of engineering.*

It seemed a weak excuse. But, in the face of Spook taking the lead and offering a good reason to use the metalminds, it was enough.

"Very well," Sazed said. "I shall do as you request."

*Ruin's prison was not like those that hold men. He wasn't bound by bars. In fact, he could move about freely.*

*His prison, rather, was one of impotence. In the terms of forces and gods, this meant balance. If Ruin were to push, the prison would push back, essentially rendering Ruin powerless. And because much of his power was stripped away and hidden, he was unable to affect the world in any but the most subtle of ways.*

*I should stop here and clarify something. We speak of Ruin being "freed" from his prison. But that is misleading. Releasing the power at the Well tipped the aforementioned balance back toward Ruin, but he was still too weak to destroy the world in the blink of an eye as he yearned to do. This weakness was caused by part of Ruin's power—his very body—having been taken and hidden from him.*

*Which was why Ruin became so obsessed with finding the hidden part of his self.*

# 47

ELEND STOOD IN THE MISTS.

Once, he had found them disconcerting. They had been the unknown—something mysterious and uninviting, something that belonged to Allomancers and not to ordinary men.

Yet, now he was an Allomancer himself. He stared up at the shifting, swirling, spinning banks of vapor. Rivers in the sky. He almost felt as if he should get pulled along in some phantom current. When he'd first displayed Allomantic powers, Vin had explained Kelsier's now-infamous motto. *The mists are our friend. They hide us. Protect us. Give us power.*

Elend continued to stare upward. It had been three days since Vin's capture.

*I shouldn't have let her go,* he thought again, heart twisting within him. *I shouldn't have agreed to such a risky plan.*

Vin had always been the one to protect him. What did they do now, when she was in danger? Elend felt so inadequate. Had their situations been reversed, Vin would have found a way to get into the city and rescue him. She'd have assassinated Yomen, would have done *something.*

And yet, Elend didn't have her flair of brash determination. He was too much of a planner and was too well acquainted with politics. He *couldn't* risk himself to save her. He'd already put himself into danger once, and in so doing, had risked the fate of his entire army. He couldn't leave them behind again and put himself in danger, particularly not by going into Fadrex, where Yomen had already proven himself a skilled manipulator.

No further word had come from Yomen. Elend expected ransom demands, and was terrified of what he might have to do if they came. Could he trade the fate of the world for Vin's life? No. Vin had faced a similar decision at the Well of Ascension, and had chosen the right option. Elend had to follow her example, had to be strong.

Yet the thought of her captured came close to paralyzing him with dread. Only the spinning mists seemed to somehow comfort him.

*She'll be all right,* he told himself, not for the first time. *She's Vin. She'll figure a way out of it. She'll be all right. . . .*

It felt odd, to Elend, that after a lifetime of finding the mists unsettling he would now find them so comforting. Vin didn't see them that way, not anymore. Elend could sense it in the way she acted, in the words she spoke. She distrusted the mists. Hated them, even. And Elend couldn't really blame her. They had, after all, changed somehow—bringing destruction and death.

Yet, Elend found it hard to distrust the mists. They just *felt* right. How could they be his enemy? They spun, swirling around him just slightly as he burned metals, like leaves spinning in a playful wind. As he stood there, they seemed to soothe away his concerns about Vin's captivity, giving him confidence that she would find a way out.

He sighed, shaking his head. Who was he to trust his own instincts about the mists over Vin's? She had the instincts born of a lifetime of struggling to survive. What did Elend have? Instincts born of a lifetime of partygoing and dancing?

Sound came from behind him. People walking. Elend turned, eyeing a pair of servants carrying Cett in his chair.

"That damn Thug isn't around here, is he?" Cett asked as the servants set him down.

Elend shook his head as Cett waved the servants away. "No," Elend said. "He's investigating some kind of disturbance in the ranks."

"What happened this time?" Cett asked.

"Fistfight," Elend said, turning away, looking back toward Fadrex City's watch fires.

"The men are restless," Cett said. "They're a little like koloss, you know. Leave them too long, and they'll get themselves into trouble."

*Koloss are like them, actually,* Elend thought. *We should have seen it earlier. They are men—just men reduced to their most base emotions.*

Cett sat quietly in the mists for a time, and Elend continued his contemplations.

Eventually, Cett spoke, his voice uncharacteristically soft. "She's as good as dead, son. You know that."

"No, I don't," Elend said.

"She's not invincible," Cett said. "She's a damn good Allomancer, true. But, take her metals away . . ."

She'll surprise you, Cett.

"You don't even look worried," Cett said.

"Of course I'm worried," Elend said, growing more certain. "I just . . . well, I trust her. If anyone can get out, Vin will."

"You're in denial," Cett said.

"Perhaps," Elend admitted.

"Are we going to attack?" Cett asked. "Try and get her back?"

"This is a siege, Cett," Elend said. "The point is to *not* attack."

"And our supplies?" Cett asked. "Demoux had to put the soldiers on half rations today. We'll be lucky not to starve ourselves before we can get Yomen to surrender."

"We have time yet," Elend said.

"Not much. Not with Luthadel in revolt." Cett was silent for a moment, then continued. "Another of my raiding parties returned today. They had the same things to report."

The same news as all the others. Elend had authorized Cett to send soldiers into nearby villages, to scare the people, perhaps pillage some supplies. Yet, each of the raiding groups had come back empty-handed, bearing the same story.

The people in Yomen's kingdom were starving. Villages barely survived. The soldiers hadn't the heart to hurt them any further, and there wasn't anything to take, anyway.

Elend turned toward Cett. "You think me a bad leader, don't you?"

Cett looked up, then scratched at his beard. "Yes," he admitted. "But, well . . . Elend, you've got one thing going for you as a king that I never did."

"And that is?"

Cett shrugged. "The people like you. Your soldiers trust you, and they know you have too good a heart for your own good. You have a strange effect on them. Lads like those, they should have been eager to rob villages, even poor ones. Especially considering how on-edge our men are and how many fights there have been in camp. And yet, they didn't. Hell, one of the groups felt so sorry for the villagers that they stayed for a few days and helped water the fields and do repairs to some of the homes!"

Cett sighed, shaking his head. "A few years ago, I would have laughed at anyone who chose loyalty as a basis for rule. But, well . . . with the world falling apart as it is, I think even *I* would rather have someone to trust, as opposed to someone to fear. I guess that's why the soldiers act as they do."

Elend nodded.

"I thought a siege was a good idea," Cett said. "But, I don't think it will work anymore, son. The ash is falling too hard now, and we don't have supplies. This whole thing is becoming a damn mess. We need to strike and take what we can from Fadrex, then retreat to Luthadel and try to hold it through the summer while our people grow crops."

Elend fell silent, then turned, looking to the side as he heard something else in the mists. Shouting and cursing. It was faint—Cett probably couldn't hear it. Elend left, hurrying toward the sound, leaving Cett behind.

*Another fight,* Elend realized as he approached one of the cooking fires. He heard yells, blustering, and the sounds of men brawling. *Cett's right. Goodhearted or not, our men are getting too restless. I need—*

"Stop this immediately!" a new voice called. Just ahead, through the dark mists, Elend could see figures moving about the firelight. He recognized the voice; General Demoux had arrived on the scene.

Elend slowed. Better to let the general deal with the disturbance. There was a big difference between being disciplined by one's military commander and one's emperor. The men would be better off if Demoux were the one to punish them.

The fighting, however, did not stop.

"Stop this!" Demoux yelled again, moving into the conflict. A few of the brawlers listened to him, pulling back. The rest, however, just continued to fight. Demoux pushed himself into the melee, reaching to pull apart two of the combatants.

And one of them punched him. Square in the face, throwing Demoux to the ground.

Elend cursed, dropping a coin and Pushing himself forward. He fell directly into the middle of the firelight, Pushing out with a Soothing to dampen the emotions of those fighting.

"Stop!" he bellowed.

They did, freezing, one of the soldiers standing over the fallen General Demoux.

"What is going on here?" Elend demanded, furious. The soldiers looked down. "Well?" Elend said, turning toward the man who had punched Demoux.

"I'm sorry, my lord," the man grumbled. "We just . . ."

"Speak, soldier," Elend said, pointing, Soothing the man's emotions, leaving him compliant and docile.

"Well, my lord," the man said. "They're cursed, you know. They're the reason Lady Vin got taken. They were speaking of the Survivor and his blessings, and that just smacked me as hypocrisy, you know? Then, *of course* their leader would show, demanding that we stop. I just . . . well, I'm tired of listening to them, is all."

Elend frowned in anger. As he did so, a group of the army's Mistings—Ham at their head—shoved through the crowd. Ham met Elend's eyes, and Elend nodded toward the men who had been fighting. Ham made quick work of them, gathering them up for reprimand. Elend walked over, pulling Demoux to his feet. The grizzled general looked more shocked than anything.

"I'm sorry, my lord," Demoux said quietly. "I should have seen that coming . . . I should have been ready for it."

Elend just shook his head. The two of them watched quietly until Ham joined them, his police pushing the troublemakers away. The rest of the crowd dispersed, returning to their duties. The solitary bonfire burned alone in the night, as if shunned as a new symbol of bad luck.

"I recognized a number of those men," Ham said, joining Elend and Demoux as the troublemakers were led away. "Mistfallen."

Mistfallen. The men who, like Demoux, had lain sick from the mists for weeks, instead of a single day. "This is *ridiculous,"* Elend said. "So they remained sick awhile longer. That doesn't make them cursed!"

"You don't understand superstition, my lord," Demoux said, shaking his head and rubbing his chin. "The men *look* for someone to blame for their ill luck. And . . . well, it's easy to see why they'd be feeling their luck was bad lately. They've been hard on *anyone* who was sickened by the mists; they're just most hard on we who were out the longest."

"I refuse to accept such idiocy in my army," Elend said. "Ham, did you see one of those men strike Demoux?"

"They *hit* him?" Ham asked with surprise. "Their general?"

Elend nodded. "The big man I was talking to. Brill is his name, I think. You know what will have to be done."

Ham cursed, looking away.

Demoux looked uncomfortable. "Maybe we could just . . . throw him in solitary or something."

"No," Elend said through his teeth. "No, we hold to the law. If he'd struck his captain, maybe we could let him off. But deliberately striking one of my generals? The man will have to be executed. Discipline is falling apart as it is."

Ham wouldn't look at him. "The other fight I had to break up was also between a group of regular soldiers and a group of mistfallen."

Elend ground his teeth in frustration. Demoux, however, met his eyes. *You know what needs to be done,* he seemed to say.

*Being a king isn't always about doing what you want,* Tindwyl had often said. *It's about doing what needs to be done.*

"Demoux," Elend said. "I think the problems in Luthadel are even more serious than our difficulties with discipline. Penrod looked toward us for support. I want you to gather a group of men and take them back along the canal with the messenger, Conrad. Lend aid to Penrod and bring the city back under control."

"Yes, my lord," Demoux said. "How many soldiers should I take?"

Elend met his eyes. "About three hundred should suffice." It was the number who were mistfallen. Demoux nodded, then withdrew into the night.

"It's the right thing to do, El," Ham said softly.

"No, it's not," Elend said. "Just like it's not right to have to execute a soldier because of a single lapse in judgment. But, we need to keep this army together."

"I guess," Ham said.

Elend turned, glancing up through the mists. Toward Fadrex City. "Cett's right," he finally said. "We can't just continue to sit out here, not while the world is dying."

"So, what do we do about it?" Ham asked.

Elend wavered. What to do about it indeed? Retreat and leave Vin—and probably the entire empire—to its doom? Attack, causing the deaths of thousands, becoming the conqueror he feared? Was there no other way to take the city?

Elend turned and struck out into the night. He found his way to Noorden's tent, Ham following curiously. The former obligator was awake, of course. Noorden kept odd hours. He stood hurriedly as Elend entered his tent, bowing in respect.

There, on the table, Elend found what he wanted. The thing he had ordered Noorden to work on. Maps. Troop movements.

The locations of koloss bands.

*Yomen refuses to be intimidated by my forces,* Elend thought. *Well, let's see if I can turn the odds back against him.*

*Once "freed," Ruin was able to affect the world more directly. The most obvious way he did this was by making the ashmounts emit more ash and the earth begin to break apart. As a matter of fact, I believe that much of Ruin's energy during those last days was dedicated to these tasks.*

*He was also able to affect and control far more people than before. Where he had once influenced only a few select individuals, he could now direct entire koloss armies.*

# 48

AS DAYS PASSED IN THE CAVERN, Vin regretted knocking over the lantern. She tried to salvage it, searching with blind fingers. However, the oil had spilled. She was locked in darkness.

With a thing that wanted to destroy the world.

Sometimes she could sense it, pulsing near her, watching silently—like some fascinated patron at a carnival show. Other times, it vanished. Obviously, walls meant nothing to it. The first time it disappeared, she felt a sense of relief. However, just moments after it vanished, she heard Reen's voice in her mind. *I haven't left you, it said. I'm always here.*

The words chilled her, and she thought—just briefly—that it had read her mind. However, she decided that her thoughts would have been easy to guess. Looking back through her life, she realized that Ruin couldn't have spoken each and every time she heard Reen's voice in her head. A lot of the time she heard Reen, it was in response to things she'd been thinking, rather than things she'd been doing. Since Ruin couldn't read minds, those comments couldn't have come from it.

Ruin had been speaking to her for so long, it was difficult to separate her own memories from its influence. Yet, she had to trust in the Lord Ruler's promise that Ruin couldn't read her mind. The alternative was to abandon hope. And she wouldn't do that. Each time Ruin spoke to her, it gave her clues about its nature. Those clues might give her the means to defeat it.

*Defeat it?* Vin thought, leaning back against a rough stone wall of the cavern. *It's a force of nature, not a man. How could I even think to defeat something like that?*

Time was very difficult to gauge in the perpetual blackness, but she figured from her sleep patterns that it had been around three or four days since her imprisonment.

*Everyone called the Lord Ruler a god,* Vin reminded herself. *I killed him.*

Ruin had been imprisoned once. That meant that it *could* be defeated, or at least bottled up. But, what did it mean to imprison an abstraction—a force—like Ruin? It had been able to speak to her while imprisoned. But its words had felt less forceful then. Less . . . directed. Ruin had acted more as an influence, giving the child Vin impressions that manifested through memories of Reen. Almost like . . . it had influenced her emotions. Did that mean it used Allomancy? It did indeed pulse with Allomantic power.

*Zane heard voices,* Vin realized. *Right before he died, he seemed to be talking to something.* She felt a chill as she rested her head back against the wall.

Zane had been mad. Perhaps there was no connection between the voices he heard and Ruin. Yet, it seemed like too much of a coincidence. Zane had tried to get her to go with him, to seek out the source of the pulsings—the pulsings that had eventually led her to free Ruin.

*So,* Vin thought, *Ruin can influence me regardless of distance or containment. However, now that it has been freed, it can manifest directly. That brings up another question. Why hasn't it already destroyed us all? Why play games with armies?*

The answer to that one, at least, seemed obvious. She sensed Ruin's boundless will to destroy. She felt as if she knew its mind. One drive. One impulse. Ruin. So, if it hadn't accomplished its goal yet, that meant it couldn't. That it was hindered. Limited to indirect, gradual means of destruction—like falling ash and the light-stealing mists.

Still, those methods *would* eventually be effective. Unless Ruin was stopped. But how?

*It was imprisoned before . . . but what did the imprisoning?* She'd once assumed that the Lord Ruler had been the one behind Ruin's imprisonment. But that was wrong. Ruin had *already* been imprisoned when the Lord Ruler had traveled to the Well of Ascension. The Lord Ruler, then known as Rashek, had gone on the quest with Alendi, in order to slay the presumed Hero of Ages. Rashek's purpose had been to *stop* Alendi from doing what Vin had eventually done: accidentally releasing Ruin.

Ironically, it had been *better* that a selfish man like Rashek had taken the power. For, a selfish man kept the power for himself, rather than giving it up and freeing Ruin.

Regardless, Ruin had already been imprisoned before the quest began. That meant that the Deepness—the mists—weren't related to Ruin. Or, at least, the connection wasn't as simple as she'd assumed. Letting Ruin go hadn't been what had prompted the mists to start coming during the day and killing people. In fact, the daymists had started to appear as much as a year *before* she'd released Ruin, and the mists had started killing people some hours before Vin had found her way to the Well.

So . . . what do I know? That Ruin was imprisoned long ago. Imprisoned by something that, perhaps, I can find and use again?

She stood up. Too much sitting and thinking had made her restless, and she began to walk, feeling her way along the wall.

During her first day of imprisonment she'd begun, by touch, to scout the cavern. It was huge, like the other caches, and the process had taken her several days. However, she'd had nothing else to do. Unlike the cache in Urteau, this one had no pool or source of water. And, as Vin investigated it, she discovered that Yomen had removed all of the water barrels from what she assumed was their place on the far right corner. He'd left the canned food and other supplies—the cavern was so enormous that he would have had trouble finding time to remove everything, let alone finding a place to store it somewhere else—however, he'd taken all of the water.

That left Vin with a problem. She felt her way along the wall, locating a shelf where she'd left an open can of stew. Even with pewter and a rock, it had taken her a frightfully long time to get into the can. Yomen had been clever enough to remove the tools she could have used for opening the food stores, and Vin only had one vial's worth of pewter remaining. She'd opened some ten cans of food on her first day, burning away what pewter she'd had inside of her. That food was already dwindling, however, and she was feeling the need for water—the stew did little to quench her thirst.

She picked up the can of stew, carefully eating only a mouthful. It was almost gone. The taste reminded her of the hunger that was a growing complement to her thirst. She pushed the feeling away. She'd dealt with hunger for her entire childhood. It was nothing new, even if it had been years since she'd last felt it.

She moved on, trailing fingers on the side of the wall to keep her bearings. It seemed like such a clever way to kill a Mistborn. Yomen couldn't defeat her, and he trapped her instead. Now, he could simply wait for her to die of dehydration. Simple, effective.

*Perhaps Ruin is speaking to Yomen, too,* she thought. *My imprisonment could all be part of Ruin's plan.*

Whatever that is.

Why had Ruin chosen her? Why not lead someone else to the Well of Ascension? Someone easier to control? She could understand why Ruin had chosen Alendi, all those years before. During Alendi's time, the Well had been sequestered high in the mountains. It would have been a very difficult trek, and Ruin would have needed just the right person to plan, then survive, the expedition.

However, during Vin's day, the Well had somehow been moved to Luthadel. Or, perhaps Luthadel had been built on top of the Well. Either way, it was there, right beneath the Lord Ruler's palace. Why had Ruin waited so long to free himself? And, of all the people he could have chosen as his pawn, why Vin?

She shook her head as she arrived at her destination—the only other thing of interest in the vast cavern. A metal plate on the wall. She reached up, brushing her fingers across the slick steel. She'd never been an excellent reader, and the last year—spent in war and travel—hadn't afforded her much time to improve her abilities. And so, it had taken her some time, feeling her way across each groove carved into the metal, to figure out what was written on the plate.

There was no map. Or, at least, not like the ones in the previous storage caverns. Instead, there was a simple circle, with a dot at the center. Vin wasn't certain what it was supposed to mean. The text was equally frustrating. Vin ran her fingers across the grooves, though she had long since memorized what the words said.

I have failed you.

I have planned these caverns, knowing a calamity is coming, hoping that I might find some secret that might be of use should I fall to the thing's scheming. Yet, I have nothing. I do not know how to defeat it. The only thing I can think of is to keep it at bay by taking the power at the Well for myself when it returns.

However, if you are reading this, I have failed. That means I am dead. As I write this, I find that prospect to be less tragic than I might previously have assumed. I would rather not deal with the thing. It has been my constant companion, the voice that whispers to me always, telling me to destroy, begging me to give it freedom.

I fear that it has corrupted my thoughts. It cannot sense what I think, but it can speak inside of my head. Eight hundred years of this has made it difficult to trust my own mind. Sometimes, I hear the voices, and simply assume that I am mad.

That would certainly be preferable.

I do know that these words must be written in steel to be preserved. I have written them in a steel sheet, then ordered them scribed into a plate, knowing that in doing so, I reveal my weakness to my own priests. The thing has whispered to me that I am a fool to expose myself by writing this and letting others see it.

That is primarily why I decided to go through with the creation of this plate. Doing so seemed to make the thing angry. That is reason enough, I think. It is good that some few of my loyal priests know of my weakness, if only for the good of the empire, should I somehow fall.

I have tried to be a good ruler. At first, I was too young, too angry. I made mistakes. Yet, I have tried so hard. I nearly destroyed the world with my arrogance, and yet I fear I have nearly destroyed it again through my rule. I can do better. I will do better. I will create a land of order.

The thoughts in my mind, however, make me wonder just how much of what I do has been twisted from my original intentions. At times, my empire seems a place of peace and justice. Yet, if that is so, why can I not stop the rebellions? They cannot defeat me, and I must order them slaughtered each time they rise up. Can they not see the perfection of my system?

Regardless, this is not the place for justification. I need no justification, for I am—after a form—God. Yet, I know there is something greater than I. If I can be destroyed, It will be the cause of that destruction.

I have no advice to give. It is more powerful than I am. It is more powerful than this world. It claims to have created this world, in fact. It will destroy us all eventually.

Perhaps these stores will let mankind survive a little longer. Perhaps not. I am dead. I doubt that I should care.

Still, I do. For you are my people. I am the Hero of Ages. That is what it must mean: Hero of Ages, a hero that lives through the ages, as I do.

Know that the thing's power is not complete. Fortunately, I have hidden his body well.

And that was the end. Vin tapped the plate with frustration. Everything about the words on it seemed contrived to frustrate her. The Lord Ruler had led them on this grand chase, then at the end, he offered no hope? Elend was betting so much on what this plaque would contain, and yet, it was virtually worthless. At least the other ones had contained some relevant information about a new metal or the like.

*I have failed you.* It was infuriating—almost crushingly so—to come all this way, then find that the Lord Ruler had been as stumped as they were. And, if he'd known more—as his words implied that he did—why hadn't he *shared* it on the plate? And yet, she could sense his instability even through these words—his washing back and forth from contrition to arrogance. Perhaps that was Ruin's influence on him. Or, perhaps it was simply the way he had always been. Either way, Vin suspected that the Lord Ruler couldn't have told her much more that would have been of use. He'd done what he could, holding Ruin at bay for a thousand years. It had corrupted him, perhaps even driven him mad.

That didn't stop her from feeling a sharp sense of disappointment at what the plate contained. The Lord Ruler had been given a thousand years to worry about what would happen to the land if he were killed before the power returned to the Well, and even he hadn't been able to come up with a way out of the problem.

She looked up toward the plate, though in the darkness, she could not see it.

*There has to be a way!* she thought, refusing to accept the Lord Ruler's implication that they were doomed. *What was it you wrote at the bottom? "I have hidden his body well."*

That part seemed important. However, she hadn't been—

A sound rung through the darkness.

Vin turned immediately, growing tense, feeling for her last metal vial. Proximity to Ruin had made her jumpy, and she found her heart beating with anxiety as she listened to the echoing sounds—sounds of stone grinding against stone.

The door to the cavern was opening.

*One might ask why Ruin couldn't have used Inquisitors to release him from his prison. The answer to this is simple enough, if one understands the workings of power.*

*Before the Lord Ruler's death, he maintained too tight a grip on them to let Ruin control them directly. Even after the Lord Ruler's death, however, such a servant of Ruin could never have rescued him. The power in the Well was of Preservation, and an Inquisitor could only have taken it by first removing his Hemalurgic spikes. That, of course, would have killed him.*

*Thus, Ruin needed a much more indirect way to achieve his purpose. He needed someone he hadn't tainted too much, but someone he could lead by the nose, carefully manipulating.*

# 49

SAZED MADE A SMALL NOTATION ON HIS DIAGRAM, comparing measurements of the waterway. From what he could tell, the Lord Ruler hadn't really needed to do much to create the underground lake. Water had already been flowing into the cavern. The Lord Ruler's engineers had simply widened the passageways, bringing in a steadier, surer flow that outpaced the natural drainage.

The result was an aquifer of good size. Some machinery in a side cave proved to be a mechanism for plugging the outlets at the bottom—presumably so that one could keep the water reserve from escaping, should something happen to the incoming supply. Unfortunately, there was no existing way to block off the inlets.

Before the Lord Ruler's creation of the reservoir, only a small amount of the water had passed into the cavern. The rest flowed instead into what were now the streets, filling the canals. So, Sazed assumed, if he could stop the water from entering the cavern, it would refill the canals.

*I'll need to know more about water pressure,* Sazed thought, *so I can provide enough weight to plug those inlets.* He thought he'd seen a book on the subject inside his metalmind.

He leaned back in his chair, tapping his metalmind. Memory blossomed inside his head as he withdrew a section of text: an index he'd made listing the titles of books he had in his storage. As soon as he pulled the text out, the words became as clear to him as if he'd just read and memorized them. He scanned through the list quickly, seeking the title he needed. When he found it, he scribbled it on a piece of paper. Then, he placed the list back inside his coppermind.

The experience was odd. After replacing the list, he could recollect having drawn the material out—but, he had no memory whatsoever of what the index had contained. There was a blank in his mind. Only the words scribbled on the paper explained things that he'd known just seconds before. With that title, he could draw the appropriate book into his mind in its entirety. He selected the chapters he wanted, then stuck the rest back into the coppermind, lest they decay.

And, with those chapters, his knowledge of engineering was as fresh as if he'd just read and studied the book. He easily figured out the proper weights and balances he'd need to craft barriers that would, he hoped, return water to the streets above.

He worked alone, sitting at a fine stolen desk, a lantern lighting the cavern around him. Even with the knowledge provided by his copperminds, it was difficult work, with many calculations—not exactly the kind of research he was accustomed to. Fortunately, a Keeper's copperminds were not limited to his own interests. Each Keeper kept all of the knowledge. Sazed could vaguely remember the years he'd spent listening and memorizing. He'd only needed to know the information well enough to remember it for a short time, then he could dump it into a coppermind. In that way, he was both one of the smartest and most ignorant men who had ever lived—he had memorized so much, but had intentionally forgotten it all.

Regardless, he had access to texts on engineering as well as religion. Knowing such things did not make him a brilliant mathematician or architect—however, it did give him enough competence to make him a good deal better than a layman.

And, as he worked, he was finding it more and more difficult to deny that scholarship was something at which he excelled. He was not a leader. He was not an ambassador. Even while he served as Elend's chief ambassador, he'd spent much of his time looking through his religions. Now, when he should be heading the team in Urteau, more and more he found himself letting Spook take the lead.

Sazed was a man of research and of letters. He found contentment in his studies. Even though engineering wasn't an area he particularly enjoyed, the truth was, he'd much rather study—no matter what the topic—than do anything else. *Is it such a shameful thing,* he thought, *to be the man who likes to provide information for others, rather than be the one who has to use that information?*

The tapping of a cane on the ground announced Breeze's arrival. The Soother didn't need a cane to walk; he just preferred to carry one to look more gentlemanly. Of all the skaa thieves Sazed had known, Breeze did by far the best job of imitating a nobleman.

Sazed quickly jotted down a few more notations, then returned the chapters on water pressure to his coppermind. No need to let them decay while speaking to Breeze. For, of course, Breeze would want to talk. Sure enough, as soon as Breeze sat at Sazed's table, he scanned the diagrams, then raised an eyebrow. "That's coming along nicely, my dear man. You may have missed your calling."

Sazed smiled. "You are kind, Lord Breeze, though I fear an engineer would find this plan unsightly. Still, I think it will be sufficient."

"You really think you can do it?" Breeze asked. "Make the waters flow as the lad asked? Is it even possible?"

"Oh, it is quite possible," Sazed said. "My expertise—not the plausibility of the task—is the item in question. The waters once filled those canals, and they can do so again. In fact, I believe that their return will be far more spectacular than the original flow. Before, much of the water was already diverted into these caverns. I should be able to block most of that and return the waters above in force. Of course, if Lord Spook wishes to keep the canals flowing, then we will have to let some of the water escape down here again. Canal works generally don't have much of a current, especially in an area where there are many locks."

Breeze raised an eyebrow.

"Actually," Sazed continued, "canals are far more fascinating than you might expect. Take, for instance, the methods of transforming a natural river into a canal—making it what is called a navigation—or perhaps look at the methods of dredging used to remove silt and ash from the depths. I have one particular book by the infamous Lord Fedre, who—despite his reputation—was an absolute genius when it came to canal architecture. Why, I've had to . . ." Sazed trailed off, then smiled wanly. "I apologize. You're not interested in this, are you?"

"No," Breeze said, "but it's enough that *you* are, Sazed. It's good to see you excited about your studies again. I don't know what it was you were working on before, but it always bothered me that you wouldn't share it with anyone. Seemed like you were almost ashamed of what you were doing. Now, however—this is like the Sazed I remember!"

Sazed looked down at his scribbled notes and diagrams. It was true. The last time that he had been so excited about a line of study was . . .

When he'd been with her. Working on their collection of myths and references regarding the Hero of Ages.

"In truth, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, "I do feel somewhat guilty."

Breeze rolled his eyes. "Sazed. Do you *always* have to be feeling guilty about something? Back in the original crew, you felt you weren't doing enough to help us overthrow the Lord Ruler. Then, once we killed him, you were distraught because you weren't doing what the other Keepers told you to. Do you want to tell me exactly how you go about feeling guilty for *studying,* of all things?"

"I enjoy it."

"That's wonderful, my dear man," Breeze said. "Why be ashamed of that enjoyment? It's not like you enjoy killing puppies or something like that. True, I think you're a bit crazy, but if you want to enjoy something so particularly esoteric, then you should feel free. It leaves more room for those of us who prefer more common delights—such as getting drunk on Straff Venture's finest wines."

Sazed smiled. He knew that Breeze was Pushing on his emotions, making him feel better, but he did not rebel against the emotions. The truth was, he *did* feel good. Better than he had in some time.

Though, still . . .

"It is not so simple, Lord Breeze," Sazed said, setting down his pen. "I feel happy being able to simply sit and read, without having to be in charge. That is why I feel guilty."

"Not everybody is meant to be a leader, Sazed."

"No," Sazed said, "but Lord Elend did put me in charge of securing this city. I should be planning our overthrow of the Citizen, not letting Lord Spook do it."

"My dear man!" Breeze said, leaning down. "Have I taught you nothing? Being in charge isn't about *doing* anything—it's about making certain that other people do what they're supposed to! Delegation, my friend. Without it, we would have to bake our own bread and dig our own latrines!" Then, Breeze leaned in. "And, trust me. You don't want to taste anything I've had a hand in baking. Ever. Particularly after I've cleaned a latrine."

Sazed shook his head. "This isn't what Tindwyl would have wanted of me. She respected leaders and politicians."

"Correct me if you must," Breeze said, "but didn't she fall in love with *you,* not some king or prince?"

"Well, love is perhaps—"

"Come now, Sazed," Breeze said. "You were mooning about as surely as any teenage boy with a new fancy. And, while she was a bit more reserved, she did love you. One didn't have to be a Soother to see that much."

Sazed sighed, looking down.

"Is this what she'd want of you, Sazed?" Breeze said. "To deny who you are? To become yet another stuffy politician?"

"I do not know, Lord Breeze," Sazed said softly. "I . . . I don't have her anymore. And so, perhaps, I can remember her by being involved in what she loved."

"Sazed," Breeze said frankly, "how is it you can be so wise in so many areas, yet be so completely *stupid* about this?"

"I . . ."

"A man *is* what he has passion about," Breeze said. "I've found that if you give up what you want most for what you *think* you should want more, you'll just end up miserable."

"And if what I want isn't what society needs?" Sazed said. "Sometimes, we just have to do what we don't enjoy. That is a simple fact of life, I think."

Breeze shrugged. "I don't worry about that. I just do what I'm good at. In my case, that's making other people do things that I don't want to. It all fits together, in the end."

Sazed shook his head. It wasn't that simple, and his depression lately hadn't *only* been tied to Tindwyl and her death. He had put off his study of the religions, but he knew that he would be driven to return to them. The work with the canals was a welcome distraction, but even so, Sazed could feel his earlier conclusions and work looming.

He didn't *want* to discover that the last religions in the group held no answers. That was part of why it was so relaxing for him to study something else, for engineering didn't threaten his worldview. However, he could not distract himself forever. He would find the answers, or the lack of answers, eventually. His portfolio sat beneath the desk, resting against the sack of metalminds.

For now, however, he allowed himself a reprieve. But even with his concern over the religions abated for the moment, there were concerns that needed addressing. He nodded his head in the direction of the lake. Spook, just barely visible, stood at the edge, speaking with Goradel and some of the soldiers.

"And what of him, Lord Breeze?" Sazed asked in a whisper, low enough that even Spook wouldn't be able to hear. "As I said, Emperor Venture placed me in charge of this matter. What if I let Spook take control, and then he fails? I worry that the young man is not . . . seasoned enough for this task."

Breeze shrugged. "He seems to be doing well so far. Remember how young Vin was when she killed the Lord Ruler."

"Yes," Sazed whispered, "but this situation is different. Spook seems . . . odd, lately. He is certainly hiding things from us. Why is he so determined to take this city?"

"I think it's good for the boy to show a little determination," Breeze said, sitting back in his chair. "That lad has been far too passive for most of his life."

"Do you not worry about his plan? This could easily collapse around us."

"Sazed," Breeze said. "Do you remember our meeting a few weeks back? Spook asked me why we couldn't just topple Quellion like we did the Lord Ruler."

"I remember," Sazed said. "You told him the reason we couldn't was because we didn't have Kelsier anymore."

Breeze nodded. "Well," he said softly, pointing his cane toward Spook, "my opinion has been revised. We don't have Kelsier, but it's looking more and more like we have something similar."

Sazed frowned.

"I'm not saying the lad has Kelsier's force of personality. His . . . presence. However, you've heard the reputation the boy is gaining among the people. Kelsier succeeded not because of who he was, but because of who people *thought* he was. That's something I didn't believe we could replicate. I'm starting to think I was wrong."

Sazed wasn't as easily convinced. Yet, he kept his reservations to himself as he turned back to his research. Spook must have noticed them looking over at him, for a few minutes later he made his way to Sazed's table. The boy blinked against the lantern-light, soft though it was, and pulled up a chair. The fine furniture looked odd to Sazed, contrasted against the rows of dusty, utilitarian shelves.

Spook looked fatigued. *How long has it been since he slept?* Sazed thought. *He's still up whenever I bed down, and awake before I rise.*

"Something doesn't feel right here," Spook said.

"Oh?" Breeze asked. "Other than the fact that we're chatting beside an underground lake in a storehouse built by the Lord Ruler underneath an Inquisitor fortress?"

Spook gave the Soother a flat look, then glanced at Sazed. "I feel like we should have been attacked by now."

"What makes you say that?" Sazed asked.

"I know Quellion, Saze. The man's a bully after the classical style. He came to power through force, and he keeps control by giving the people plenty of alcohol and tiny freedoms, like letting them go to bars at night. At the same time, however, he keeps everyone on the edge of fear."

"How *did* he take charge, anyway?" Breeze asked. "How did he get control before some nobleman with a good set of house guards could do it?"

"Mists," Spook said. "He went out in them, and declared that anyone faithful to the Survivor would be safe in them. Then, the mists started killing, and gave a handy confirmation of what he'd said. He made a big deal about the mists killing those who had evil in their hearts. The people were so worried about what was happening that they listened to him. He managed to make a law that required everyone to go out in the mists, so that they could see who died and who didn't. The ones who survived were—he declared—pure. He told them they could set up a nice little utopia. After that, they started killing nobility."

"Ah," Breeze said. "Clever."

"Yeah," Spook said. "He completely glossed over the fact that the nobility never got taken by the mists."

"Wait," Sazed said. *"What?"*

Spook shrugged. "Hard to confirm now, but that's what the stories say. The nobility seemed immune to the mistsickness. Not skaa who had noble blood, but actually nobility."

"How odd," Breeze noted.

*More than odd,* Sazed thought. *Downright strange. Does Elend know about this connection?* As Sazed considered it, it seemed unlikely that Elend did. Their army and allies were all made up of skaa. The only nobility they knew were those back in Luthadel, and they had all chosen to stay inside at night, rather than risk going into the mists.

"Either way," Spook said, "Quellion's a bully. And bullies don't like anyone in their turf who can challenge them. We should have had some kind of attempt on our lives by now."

"The lad has a point," Breeze said. "Quellion's type doesn't kill just in fancy executions. I'd bet that for every person he throws into one of those buildings, there are three dead in an alley somewhere, slowly being buried in ash."

"I've told Goradel and his men to be particularly careful," Spook said, "and I've prowled our perimeter. However, I haven't caught any assassins so much as spying on us. Quellion's troops just sit out there, watching us, but not doing anything."

Breeze rubbed his chin. "Perhaps Quellion is more afraid of us than you assume."

"Perhaps," Spook said, sighing. He rubbed his forehead.

"Lord Spook," Sazed said carefully, "you should sleep."

"I'm fine," Spook said.

*If I didn't know better, I'd say he was burning pewter to stay awake,* Sazed thought. *Or, am I just looking for signs to confirm what I worried about before?*

We never questioned when Vin or Kelsier manifested powers beyond what even normal Allomancers were capable of. Why should I be so suspicious of Spook? Is it simply because I know him too well? Do I focus on my memories of the boy when he has obviously become a man?

"Anyway," Spook said, "how goes the research?"

"Rather well, actually," Sazed said, turning around several of his diagrams so that Spook could see them. "I am about ready to begin work on the actual construction."

"How long will it take, do you think?"

"A few weeks, perhaps," Sazed said. "A rather short time, all things considered. Fortunately, the people who drained the canals left behind a large amount of rubble, which I can use. In addition, the Lord Ruler stocked this storehouse quite well. There is timber, as well as some basic carpentry supplies, and even some pulley networks."

"What was that creature preparing for?" Breeze said. "Food and water, I can understand. But, blankets? Timber? *Pulleys?*"

"Disaster, Lord Breeze," Sazed said. "He included everything that a people would need in the event that the city itself was destroyed. He even included bedrolls for sleeping and infirmary supplies. Perhaps he feared koloss rampages."

"No," Spook said. "He prepared for exactly what is happening. Now, you'll be building something to plug the water? I kind of thought you'd just collapse the tunnels."

"Oh, goodness no," Sazed said. "We don't have the manpower or equipment to cause a cave-in. Also, I wouldn't want to do anything that would risk bringing the cavern down upon us. My plans are to build a wooden blocking mechanism that can be lowered into the current. Enough weight, along with the proper framework, should provide reinforcement to stop the flow. It's actually not unlike the mechanisms used in the locks of canals."

"Which," Breeze added, "he'll be happy to tell you about. At length."

Sazed smiled. "I do think that—"

He was cut off, however, as Captain Goradel arrived, looking a fair bit more solemn than usual.

"Lord Spook," Goradel said. "Someone is waiting for you above."

"Who?" Spook asked. "Durn?"

"No, my lord. She says she's the Citizen's sister."

"I'm not here to join with you," the woman—Beldre—said.

They sat in an austere audience chamber in the Inquisition building above their cavern. The room's chairs lacked any sort of cushioning, and steel plates hung on the wooden walls as decoration—to Sazed, they were uncomfortable reminders of what he had seen when he had visited the Conventical of Seran.

Beldre was a young woman with auburn hair. She wore a simple, Citizen-approved dress, dyed red. She sat with hands in lap, and while she met the eyes of those in the room, there was a nervous apprehension to her that weakened her position considerably.

"Why *are* you here then, my dear?" Breeze asked carefully. He sat in a chair across from Beldre. Allrianne sat at his side, watching the girl with an air of disapproval. Spook paced in the background, occasionally shooting glances at the window.

*He thinks this is a feint,* Sazed realized. *That the girl is a distraction to throw us off before we get attacked.* The boy wore his dueling canes, strapped to his waist like swords. How well did Spook even know how to fight?

"I'm here . . ." Beldre said, looking down. "I'm here because you're going to kill my brother."

"Now, where did you get an idea like that!" Breeze said. "We're in the city to forge a treaty with your brother, not assassinate him! Do we look like the types who would be very good at that sort of thing?"

Beldre shot a glance at Spook.

"Him excluded," Breeze said. "Spook is harmless. Really, you shouldn't—"

"Breeze," Spook interrupted, glancing over with his strange, bandaged eyes, spectacles hidden underneath and bulging out from the face just slightly under the cloth. "That's enough. You're making us both seem like idiots. Beldre knows why we're here—everyone in the city knows why we're here."

The room fell silent.

*He . . . looks a little bit like an Inquisitor, wearing those spectacles beneath the bandages,* Sazed thought, shivering.

"Beldre," Spook said. "You honestly expect us to think that you came here simply to plead for your brother's life?"

She glanced at Spook, defiantly meeting his eyes—or, rather, his lack thereof. "You can try to sound harsh, but I know you won't hurt me. You're of the Survivor's crew."

Spook folded his arms.

"Please," Beldre said. "Quellion is a good man, like you. You have to give him more time. Don't kill him."

"What makes you think we'd kill him, child?" Sazed asked. "You just said that you thought we would never harm you. Why is your brother different?"

Beldre glanced down. "You're the ones who killed the Lord Ruler. You overthrew the entire empire. My brother doesn't believe it—he thinks that you rode the Survivor's popularity, claiming to be his friends after he'd sacrificed himself."

Spook snorted. "I wonder where your brother got an idea like that. Perhaps he knows someone else who's claimed to have the Survivor's blessing, *killing* people in his name . . ."

Beldre blushed.

"Your brother doesn't trust us," Sazed said. "Why do you?"

Beldre shrugged. "I don't know," she said quietly. "I guess . . . men who lie don't save children from burning buildings."

Sazed glanced at Spook, but couldn't read anything in the young man's hard expression. Finally, Spook spoke. "Breeze, Sazed, Allrianne, outside with me. Goradel, watch the woman."

Spook pushed his way out into the hallway, and Sazed followed with the others. Once the door was closed, Spook turned to regard the rest of them. "Well?"

"I don't like her," Allrianne said, folding her arms.

"Of course you don't, dear," Breeze said. "You never like competition."

"Competition?" Allrianne huffed. "From a timid little thing like that? Honestly."

"What do you think, Breeze?" Spook asked.

"About the girl, or about you insulting me in there?"

"The first," Spook said. "Your pride isn't important right now."

"My dear fellow," Breeze said, "my pride is *always* important. As for the girl, I'll tell you this—she's terrified. Despite what she says, she's very, very frightened—which means that she hasn't done this sort of thing very often. My guess is that she's noble."

Allrianne nodded. "Definitely. Just look at her hands—when they're not shaking from fright, you can see that they're clean and soft. She grew up being pampered."

"She's obviously a bit naive," Sazed said. "Otherwise she wouldn't have come here, expecting that we'd just listen to her, then let her go."

Spook nodded. He cocked his head, as if listening to something. Then he walked forward, pushing open the door to the room.

"Well?" Beldre asked, maintaining her false air of forcefulness. "Have you decided to listen to me?"

"In a way," Spook said. "I'm going to give you more time to explain your point. Plenty of time, actually."

"I . . . don't have long," Beldre said. "I need to get back to my brother. I didn't tell him I was leaving, and . . ." She trailed off, apparently seeing something in Spook's expression. "You're going to take me captive, aren't you?"

"Breeze," Spook said, turning. "How do you think the people would respond if I started spreading the rumor that the Citizen's own sister has turned against him, fleeing to our embassy for protection?"

Breeze smiled. "Well now. That's clever! Almost makes up for how you treated me. Have I mentioned yet how rude that was?"

"You can't!" Beldre said, standing, facing Spook. "Nobody will believe that I've deserted!"

"Oh?" Spook asked. "Did you speak to the soldiers outside before you came in here?"

"Of course not," Beldre said. "They'd have tried to stop me. I ran up the steps before they could."

"So, they can confirm that you entered the building of your own will," Spook said. "Sneaking around a guard post."

"Doesn't look good," Breeze agreed.

Beldre wilted slightly, sitting down in her chair. *By the Forgotten Gods,* Sazed thought. *She really* is *naive. The Citizen must have expended a great deal of effort in sheltering her so.*

Of course, from what Sazed had heard, Quellion rarely let the girl out of his sight. She was always with him, being watched over. *How will he react?* Sazed thought with a chill. *What will he do when he learns we have her? Attack?*

Perhaps that was the plan. If Spook could force an outright attack on the Citizen's part, it would look bad. Especially bad when Quellion was turned back by a few soldiers—he couldn't know how well fortified their position was.

When did Spook get so clever?

Beldre looked up from her seat, a few tears of frustration gleaming in her eyes. "You can't do this. This is deceitful! What would the Survivor say if he knew what you were planning?"

"The Survivor?" Spook asked, chuckling. "I have a feeling he'd approve. If he were here, actually, I think he'd suggest that we do this very thing . . ."

*One can see Ruin's craftiness in the meticulousness of his planning. He managed to orchestrate the downfall of the Lord Ruler only a short time before Preservation's power returned to the Well of Ascension. And then, within a few years of that event, he had freed himself.*

*On the time scale of gods and their power, this very tricky timing was as precise as an expert cut performed by the most talented of surgeons.*

# 50

THE DOOR TO THE CAVERN OPENED.

Vin immediately downed her last vial of metals.

She jumped, tossing a coin behind herself, leaping up onto the top of one of the freestanding shelves. The cavern echoed with the sound of stone on stone as its door opened. Vin threw herself forward—Pushing off the coin—to shoot toward the front of the room. A crack of light outlined the door, and even this small amount of illumination hurt her eyes.

She gritted her teeth against the light, blinking as she landed. She threw herself up against the wall just to the side of the door, clutching her knives, flaring pewter to help herself deal with the sudden pain of light. Tears crept down her cheeks.

The door stopped moving. A solitary man stepped into the cavern, bearing a raised lantern. He wore a fine black suit and gentleman's hat.

Vin ignored him.

She slipped around the man and ducked through the door, entering the small chamber beyond. A group of startled workers shied back, dropping ropes which were connected to the door's opening mechanisms. Vin ignored these men as well, other than to shove her way through them. Dropping a coin, she Pushed herself upward. The wooden ladder's rungs became a blur beside her as she soared up and slammed into the trapdoor in the ceiling.

And bounced off it with a grunt of pain.

She desperately caught rungs of the ladder as she began to fall, ignoring the sudden sting in her shoulder from hitting so hard. She flared pewter and pushed down on a rung with her legs, then slammed her back up against the trapdoor, trying to force it up and open.

She strained. Then, the rung broke beneath her feet, sending her toppling down again. She cursed, Pushing off her coin to slow her fall, and hit the floor in a crouch.

The workers had backed into a huddle—uncertain whether they wanted to venture into the dark cavern, but also uncertain whether they wanted to remain in the small room with a Mistborn. The suited nobleman had turned. He held his lantern high, illuminating Vin. A bit of broken ladder rung fell free and cracked to the stone floor beside her.

"The trapdoor is well secured with a very large rock on top of it, Lady Venture," the nobleman said. Vin vaguely recognized him. He was a bit overweight, but was kempt, with very short hair and a thoughtful face.

"Tell the men up above to remove the stone," Vin said quietly, raising a dagger.

"That is not going to happen, I'm afraid."

"I can make it happen," Vin said, stepping forward. The workers pulled back even further.

The nobleman smiled. "Lady Venture, let me assure you of several things. The first is that you are the only Allomancer among us, and so I have no doubt that you could slaughter us with the barest of efforts. The second is that the stone above is not moving anytime soon, so we might as well sit down and have a pleasant chat, as opposed to brandishing weapons and threatening each other."

There was something . . . disarming about the man. Vin checked with bronze, but he wasn't burning any metals. Just to be certain, she Pulled a bit on his emotions, making him more trusting and friendly, then tried to Soothe away any sense of guile he might have felt.

"I see that you're at least considering my offer," the nobleman said, waving to one of the workers. The worker hastily opened his pack, pulling out two folding chairs, then arranging them on the ground before the open stone door. The nobleman placed the lantern to the side, then sat down.

Vin crept a little closer. "Why do I recognize you?"

"I'm a friend of your husband," the nobleman said.

"Telden," Vin said, placing him. "Telden Hasting."

Telden nodded. She had seen him at the ball a few weeks back, the first one they had attended. But, she'd known him from someplace earlier than that. He'd been one of Elend's friends in Luthadel, before the Collapse.

Warily, Vin took the offered seat, trying to figure out Yomen's game. Did he think she wouldn't kill Telden, just because he'd been Elend's friend?

Telden lounged in his chair, somewhat less proper than the average nobleman. He waved a worker forward, and the man presented two bottles. "Wine," Telden said. "One is pure, the other contains an extremely powerful sedative."

Vin raised an eyebrow. "This is to be some sort of guessing game?"

"Hardly," Telden said, opening one of the bottles. "I'm far too thirsty—and from what I hear, you're not the type who possesses an excessive amount of patience for games."

Vin cocked her head as Telden accepted two cups from a servant, then poured some of the ruby wine into each. As she watched, she realized why he was so disarming. He reminded her of Elend—the old, carefree Elend. From what she could tell, this Telden was genuinely still like that.

*I have to grant Yomen that much*, she thought. *His city may not be perfect, but he has created a place where men like Telden can retain some of their innocence.*

Telden took a drink of his wine, proffering the other cup to Vin. She slid one of her knives into her sheath, then took the cup. She didn't drink—and had no intention of doing so.

"This is the wine without the sedative," Telden said. "Good vintage, too. Yomen is a true gentleman—if he's going to send one of his friends down into a pit to die, he'll at least provide them with expensive wine to soften the blow."

"I'm supposed to believe that you're here to be imprisoned too?" Vin asked flatly.

"Of course not," Telden said. "Though many consider my mission to be hopeless."

"And that mission is?"

"To get you to drink some of the drugged wine, so that you can be safely transported up above."

Vin snorted.

"I see that you agree with my detractors," Telden said.

"You just gave yourself away," Vin said. "You just said that I'm supposed to drink the wine and fall unconscious. That means you have a way to signal to those above that I've been dealt with, so they can remove the stone and let you out. You have the power to free us. And I have the power to make you do as I wish."

"Emotional Allomancy cannot control me to that extent," Telden said. "I'm no Allomancer, but I do know something of it. I suspect that you're manipulating my emotions right now, actually—which really isn't necessary, since I'm being completely frank with you."

"I don't need Allomancy to make you talk," Vin said, glancing down at the knife she still had in her other hand.

Telden laughed. "You think that King Yomen—yes, he's up above—won't be able to tell if I'm speaking under duress? I have no doubt that you'd be able to break me, but I'm not going to betray my word simply on threats, so you'd have to cut off a few fingers or something before I'd do as you ask. I'm pretty certain that Yomen and the others would hear me screaming."

"I could kill the servants," Vin said. "One at a time, until you agree to tell Yomen that I'm unconscious and have him open the door."

Telden smiled. "You think that I'd care if you kill them?"

"You're one of Elend's friends," Vin said. "You were one of those who talked philosophy with him."

"Philosophy," Telden said, "and politics. Elend, however, was the only one of us interested in the skaa. I assure you, the rest of us really didn't understand where he got such a fascination with them." He shrugged. "However, I'm not a heartless man. If you kill enough of them, perhaps I *would* break down and do as you ask. Might as well get started, then."

Vin glanced at the servants. They seemed terrified of her, and Telden's words didn't help. After a few moments of silence, Telden chuckled.

"You are Elend's wife," he noted. "Yomen is aware of this, you see. He was mostly convinced that you wouldn't kill any of us, despite your rather fearsome reputation. From what we hear, you have a habit of killing kings and gods, perhaps the occasional soldier. Skaa servants, however . . ."

Vin looked away from the servants, but didn't meet Telden's eyes, fearing that he'd see confirmation in them. He was wrong about her—she would kill those servants if she thought it would get her out. However, she was uncertain. If Yomen heard screams, he wouldn't be likely to open the trapdoor, and Vin would have slaughtered innocents for no reason.

"So," Telden said, finishing off his wine. "We are at a stalemate. We assume that you're running low on food down here, unless you've found a way to open those cans. Even if you have, there's nothing you can do down here to help up above. My guess is that unless you take the wine, we'll all end up starving to death in this cavern."

Vin sat back in her chair. *There has to be a way out—a chance to exploit this*.

However, it was incredibly unlikely that she'd be able to break through that door above. She could *maybe* use duralumin and steel to Push her way through. However, her steel and pewter would be gone, and she was out of metal vials.

Telden's words, unfortunately, held a great deal of truth. Even if Vin could survive in the cavern, she'd be stagnant and useless. The siege would continue up above—she didn't even know how that was going—and the world would continue to die by Ruin's machinations.

She needed to get out of the cavern. Even if that meant being put into Yomen's hands. She eyed the bottle of drugged wine.

*Damn*, She thought. *That obligator is far cleverer than we expected*. The wine would certainly have been prepared with enough strength to knock out an Allomancer.

*However . . .*

Pewter made the body resistant to all kinds of drugs. If she flared pewter with duralumin after drinking the wine, would it perhaps burn away the poison and leave her awake? She could pretend to be unconscious, then escape above.

It seemed like a stretch. And yet, what was she to do? Her food was almost gone, and her chances for escaping were slim. She didn't know what Yomen wanted of her—and Telden would be very unlikely to tell her—but he must not want her dead. If that had been the case, he'd simply have left her to starve.

She had a choice. Either wait longer in the cavern, or gamble on a better chance to escape up above. She thought for just a moment, then made up her mind. She reached for the bottle. Even if her trick with pewter didn't work, she'd rather gamble on getting into a better situation up above.

Telden chuckled. "They did say that you were a decisive one. That's rather refreshing—I've spent far too long with stuffy noblemen who take years to come to any firm decisions."

Vin ignored him. She easily popped the cork off of the bottle, then raised it and took a swig. The drugs began to take effect almost immediately. She settled back in her chair, letting her eyes droop, trying to give the impression that she was falling asleep. Indeed, it was very difficult to remain awake. Her mind was clouding despite flared pewter.

She slumped, feeling herself drift away. *Here goes*, she thought, then burned duralumin. Her body flared with hyperenhanced pewter. Immediately, the feeling of tiredness went away. She almost bolted upright from the sudden burst of energy. Telden was chuckling. "I'll be," he said to one of the servants. "She actually went for it."

"You'd be dead if she hadn't, my lord," the servant said. "We'd all be dead."

And then the duralumin ran out. Her pewter disappeared with a puff, and with it went her immunity to the drug, which hadn't burned away. It had been a long shot anyway.

She barely heard her weapon click as it slipped from her fingers and hit the floor. Then, she fell unconscious.

*Once Ruin was free from his prison, he was able to influence people more strongly—but impaling someone with a Hemalurgic spike was difficult no matter what the circumstances.*

*To achieve such things, he apparently began with people who already had a tenuous grip on reality. Their insanity made them more open to his touch, and he could use them to spike more stable people. Either way, it's impressive how many important people Ruin managed to spike. King Penrod, ruling Luthadel at the time, is a very good example of this.*

# 51

ELEND FLEW THROUGH THE MISTS. He'd never quite been able to manage Vin's horse shoe trick. Somehow, she could keep herself in the air, bounding from Push to Push, then Pulling each horseshoe back up behind her after she used it. To Elend, the process looked like a cyclone of potentially lethal chunks of metal with Vin at the center.

He dropped a coin, then Pushed himself in a powerful leap. He'd given up on the horseshoe method after four or five failed attempts. Vin had seemed puzzled that he couldn't get it down—she'd apparently figured it out on her own, needing only about a half hour's practice to perfect it.

But, well, that was Vin.

Elend made do with coins, of which he carried a rather large bag. Copper clips, the smallest of the old imperial coins, worked perfectly for his purposes—particularly since he was apparently much more powerful than other Mistborn. Each of his Pushes carried him farther than they should have, and he really didn't use that many coins, even when traveling a long distance.

It felt good to be away. He felt free as he plunged down from his leap, dropping through the shifting darkness, then flared pewter and landed with a muffled thump. The ground in this particular valley was relatively free of ash—it had drifted, leaving a small corridor where it only came up to his mid-calf. So, he ran for a few minutes, for the change.

A mistcloak fluttered behind him. He wore dark clothing, rather than one of his white uniforms. It seemed appropriate; besides, he'd never really had a chance to be a true Mistborn. Since discovering his powers, he'd spent his life at war. There wasn't all that much need for him to go scuttling about in the darkness, particularly not with Vin around to do it better.

*I can see why Vin would find this intoxicating*, he thought, dropping another coin and bounding between two hilltops. Even with the stress of Vin's capture and the threat to the empire, there was an exhilarating freedom about cruising through the mists. It almost allowed him to forget about the wars, the destruction, and the responsibility.

Then, he landed, ash coming up to nearly his waist. He stood for a few moments, looking down at the soft black powder. He couldn't escape it. Vin was in danger, the empire was collapsing, and his people were starving. It was his job to fix these things—that was the burden he'd taken upon himself when he'd become emperor.

He Pushed himself into the air, leaving a trail of ash fluttering in the mists behind him.

*I certainly hope Sazed and Breeze are having better luck in Urteau*, he thought. He was worried about his chances with Fadrex, and the Central Dominance was going to need the grain in the Urteau cache if they were going to plant enough food for the coming winter.

He couldn't worry about that now. He simply had to count on his friends to be effective. Elend's job was to do something to help Vin. He couldn't just sit and wait in the camp, letting Yomen pull the strings. And yet, he didn't dare try to assassinate Yomen—not after the man had tricked both of them so cleverly.

And so, Elend ran, heading northeast, toward the last known location of a koloss army. The time for subtlety and diplomacy was over. Elend needed a threat—something he could hold over Yomen's head and, if necessary, use to batter him. And nothing was better at battering a city than koloss. Perhaps he was a fool for seeking out the brutes on his own. Perhaps it was wrong to give up on diplomacy. Yet, he had made his decision. It seemed he had failed in so many things lately—protecting Vin, keeping Luthadel safe, defending his people—that he simply *needed* to act.

Ahead, he saw a light in the mists. He landed, running through a field of knee-deep ash. Only flared pewter gave him the strength to manage it. When he got closer, he saw a village. He heard screams. He saw shadows scrambling about in fright.

He leaped, dropping a coin, flaring his metals. He passed through curling mist, looming over the village and its frightened occupants, his mistcloak flaring. Several of the homes were burning. And, by that light, he could see the hulking dark forms of koloss moving through the streets. Elend picked a beast who was raising its weapon to strike, then Pulled. Below, he heard the koloss grunt, but it managed to hang onto its weapon. However, the koloss itself wasn't that much heavier than Elend—and so it was Pulled up into the air by one arm as Elend was yanked downward. Elend Pulled himself against a door hinge as he fell, edging himself just to the side of the confused flying koloss. He sprayed the beast with coins as he passed.

Beast and weapon spun in the air. Elend landed in the street before a huddled group of skaa. The flying koloss's weapon hit the ashen earth point-first beside him. The koloss itself dropped dead on the other side of the street.

A large group of koloss turned, bloodred eyes shining in the firelight, frenzy making them excited about the prospect of a challenge. He would have to frighten them first, before he'd be able to take control of them. He was looking forward to that this time.

*How could they possibly have once been people?* Elend wondered, dashing forward and yanking the fallen koloss sword from the ground as he passed it, throwing out a spray of black soil. The Lord Ruler had created the creatures. Was this what had happened to those who had opposed him? Had they become koloss to make his army? The creatures had great strength and fortitude, and could subsist on the barest of sustenance. Yet, to make men—even your enemies—into monsters such as this?

Elend ducked forward, dropping one beast by shearing its legs at the knees. Then he jumped, lopping off the arm of another. He spun, slamming his crude sword through the chest of a third. He felt no remorse at killing what had once been innocents. Those people were dead. The creatures that remained would propagate themselves by using other humans unless they were stopped.

Or unless they were controlled.

Elend cried out, spinning through the group of koloss, wielding a sword that should have been too heavy for him. More and more creatures took notice, turning to tromp down streets lit by the light of burning buildings. This was a very large group, by scout reports—some thirty thousand in number. That many would quickly overrun such a small village, annihilating it like a small pile of ash before storm winds.

Elend would not let that happen. He fought, killing beast after beast. He'd come to gain himself a new army, but as the time passed, he found himself fighting for another reason. How many villages such as this one had been destroyed without anyone in Luthadel pausing to give so much as a passing thought? How many subjects—claimed by Elend, even if they didn't know it—had he lost to the koloss? How many had he failed to protect already?

Elend sheared a koloss head free, then spun, Pushing two smaller beasts away by their swords. A massive twelve-footer was stomping forward, weapon raised. Elend gritted his teeth, then raised his own sword, flaring pewter.

Weapon met weapon in the blazing village, metal ringing like a forge under the hammer. And Elend stood his ground, matching strength with a monster twice his height.

The koloss stood, dumbfounded.

*Stronger than I should be*, Elend thought, twisting and cutting the surprised creature's arm free. *Why can't that strength protect the people I rule?*

He cried out, slicing the koloss clean through at the waist—if only to show that he could. The beast fell into two gory pieces.

*Why?* Elend thought with rage. *What strength must I possess, what must I do, to protect them?*

Vin's words, spoken months ago back in the city of Vetitan, returned to him. She'd called everything he did short-term. But, what more could he do? He was no slayer of gods, no divine hero of prophecy. He was just a man.

And, it seemed that these days, ordinary men—even Allomancers—weren't worth very much. He screamed as he killed, ripping through another pack of koloss. And yet, like his efforts back at Fadrex, it just didn't seem like enough.

Around him, the village still burned. As he fought, he could hear women crying, children screaming, men dying. Even the efforts of a Mistborn were negligible. He could kill and kill, but that would not save the people of the village. He screamed, Pushing out with a Soothing, yet the koloss resisted him. He didn't bring even a single one under his control. Did that mean that an Inquisitor controlled them? Or were they simply not frightened enough?

He fought on. And, as he did, the prevalence of death around him seemed a metaphor for all he had done over the last three years. He should have been able to protect the people—he'd tried *so hard* to protect the people. He'd stopped armies, overthrown tyrants, reworked laws, and scavenged supplies. And yet, all of that was a tiny drop of salvation in a vast ocean of death, chaos, and pain. He couldn't save the empire by protecting a corner of it, just as he couldn't save the village by killing a small fraction of the koloss.

What good was killing another monster if it was just replaced by two more? What good was food to feed his people if the ash just smothered everything anyway? What good was he, an emperor who couldn't even defend the people of a single village?

Elend had never lusted for power. He'd been a theorist and a scholar—ruling an empire had mostly been an academic exercise for him. Yet, as he fought on that dark night in the burning mists and falling ash, he began to understand. As people died around him despite his most frenzied efforts, he could see what would drive men for more and more power.

Power to protect. At that moment, he would have accepted the powers of god-hood, if it would mean having the strength to save the people around him.

He dropped another koloss, then spun as he heard a scream. A young woman was being pulled from a nearby house, despite an older man holding onto her arm, both yelling for help. Elend reached to his sash, pulling free his bag of coins. He tossed it into the air, then simultaneously Pushed on some of the coins inside and Pulled on others. The sack exploded with twinkling bits of metal, and Elend shot some forward into the body of the koloss yanking on the woman.

It grunted, but did not stop. Coins rarely worked against koloss—you had to hit them just right to kill them. Vin could do it.

Elend wasn't in a mood for such subtlety, even had he possessed it. He yelled in defiance, snapping more coins at the beast. He flipped them up off the ground toward himself, then flung them forward, shooting missile after glittering missile into the creature's blue body. Its back became a glistening mass of too-red blood, and finally it slumped over.

Elend spun, turning from the relieved father and daughter to face down another koloss. It raised its weapon to strike, but Elend just screamed at it in anger.

*I should be able to protect them!* he thought. He needed to take control of the entire group, not waste time fighting them one at a time. But, they resisted his Allomancy, even as he Pushed on their emotions again. Where was the Inquisitor guardian?

As the koloss swung its weapon, Elend flared pewter and flung himself to the side, then sheared the creature's hand free at the wrist. As the beast screamed in pain, Elend threw himself back into the fight. The villagers began to rally around him. They obviously had no training for war—they were likely under Yomen's protection and didn't need to worry about bandits or roving armies. Yet, despite their lack of skill, they obviously knew to stay close to the Mistborn. Their desperate, pleading eyes prodded Elend on, drove him to cut down koloss after koloss.

For the moment, he didn't have to worry about the right or wrong of the situation. He could simply *fight*. The desire for battle burned within him like metal—the desire, even, to kill. And so he fought on—fought for the surprise in the eyes of the townspeople, for the hope each of his blows seemed to inspire. They had given their lives up for lost, and then a man had dropped from the sky to defend them.

Two years before, during the siege of Luthadel, Vin had attacked Cett's fortification and slaughtered three hundred of his soldiers. Elend had trusted that she had good reasons for the attack, but he'd never understood how she could do such a thing. At least, not until this night, fighting in an unnamed village, too much ash in the dark sky, the mists on fire, koloss dying in ranks before him.

The Inquisitor didn't appear. Frustrated, Elend spun away from a group of koloss, leaving one dying in his wake, then extinguished his metals. The creatures surrounded him, and he burned duralumin, then burned zinc, and *Pulled*.

The village fell silent.

Elend paused, stumbling slightly as he finished his spin. He looked through the falling ash, turning toward the remaining koloss—thousands and thousands of them—who now suddenly stood motionless and patient around him, under his control at last.

*There's no way I took them all at once*, he thought warily. What had happened to the Inquisitor? There was usually one with a mob of koloss this big. Had it fled? That would explain why suddenly Elend had been able to control the koloss.

Worried, yet uncertain what else to do, he turned to scan the village. Some people had gathered to stare at him. They seemed to be in shock—instead of doing something about the burning buildings, they simply stood in the mists, watching him.

He should have felt triumphant. And yet, his victory was spoiled by the Inquisitor's absence. In addition, the village was in flames—by this point, very few structures remained that weren't burning. Elend hadn't saved the village. He'd found his koloss army, as he'd planned, but he felt as if he'd failed in some greater way. He sighed, dropping his sword from tired, bloody fingers, then walked toward the villagers. As he moved, he was disturbed by the number of koloss bodies he passed. Had he really slain so many?

Another part of him—quiescent now, but still aflame—was sorry that the time for killing had ended. He stopped before a silent group of villagers.

"You're him, aren't you?" an elderly man asked.

"Who?" Elend asked.

"The Lord Ruler," the man whispered.

Elend looked down at his black uniform, encased in a mistcloak, both of which were slick with blood.

"Close enough," he said, turning to the east—toward where his human army camped many miles away, waiting for him to return with a new koloss force to aid them. There was only one reason for him to do that. Finally, he acknowledged what he'd decided, unconsciously, the moment he'd set out to find more of the creatures.

*The time for killing hasn't ended at all,* he thought. *It has just begun.*

*Near the end, the ash began to pile up in frightening amounts. I've spoken of the special microbes that the Lord Ruler devised to help the world deal with the ashfalls. They did not "feed" on ash, really. Rather, they broke it down as an aspect of their metabolic functions. Volcanic ash itself is, actually, good for soil, depending on what one wishes to grow.*

*Too much of anything, however, is deadly. Water is necessary for survival, yet too much will drown. During the history of the Final Empire, the land balanced on the very knife-edge of disaster via the ash. The microbes broke it down about as rapidly as it fell, but when there was so much of it that it oversaturated the soil, it became more difficult for plants to survive.*

*In the end, the entire system fell apart. Ash fell so steadily that it smothered and killed, and the world's plant life died off. The microbes had no chance of keeping up, for they needed time and nutrients to reproduce.*

# 52

DURING THE DAYS OF THE LORD RULER, Luthadel had been the most crowded city in the world. Filled with three- and four-story tenements, it had been packed with the skaa who'd worked its numerous furnaces and forges, with the noble merchants who'd sold its goods, and with the high nobility who'd simply wanted to be near the imperial court. TenSoon had assumed that now, with the Lord Ruler dead and the imperial government shattered, Luthadel would become far less densely populated.

He had, apparently, been wrong.

Still wearing the wolfhound's body, he trotted along in amazement as he explored the streets. It seemed that every nook—every alleyway, every street corner, each and every tenement—had become home to a skaa family. The city smelled terrible, and refuse clogged the streets, buried in ash.

*What is going on?* he wondered. The skaa lived in filth, many of them looking sick, coughing piteously in their ash-filled gutters. TenSoon made his way toward Keep Venture. If there were answers to be found, he hoped to locate them there. Occasionally, he had to growl menacingly at skaa who looked at him hungrily, and twice he had to run from gangs that ignored his growls.

*Surely Vin and Elend would not have let this city fall so far*, he thought as he hid in an alley. It was a foreboding sign. He'd left Luthadel without knowing whether or not his friends would even survive the city's siege. Elend's banner—the spear and the scroll—flew at the front of the city, but could someone else have taken Elend's sign as their own? And what of the koloss army that had threatened to destroy Luthadel a year ago?

*I should never have left her*, TenSoon thought, feeling a stab of anxiety. *My foolish kandra sense of duty. I should have stayed here, and told her what I know, little though it is*.

*The world could end because of my foolish honor*.

He poked his head out of the alleyway, looking at Keep Venture. TenSoon's heart sank to see that its beautiful stained-glass windows had been shattered. Crude boards blocked the broken holes. There were guards at the front gates, however, which seemed a better sign.

TenSoon crept forward, trying to look like a mangy stray. He kept to the shadows, edging his way up to the gate. Then, he lay down in some refuse to watch the soldiers. He expanded his eardrums, craning to hear what the men were saying.

It turned out to be nothing. The two guards stood quietly, looking bored and not a little disconsolate as they leaned against their obsidian-tipped spears. TenSoon waited, wishing that Vin were there to Pull on the emotions of the guards, making them more talkative.

*Of course, if Vin were here, I wouldn't have to be poking about for information*, TenSoon thought with frustration. And so, he waited. Waited as the ash fell, waited even until the sky darkened and the mists came out. Their appearance finally sparked some life into the guards. "I hate night duty," one of them muttered.

"Nothing wrong with night," the other one said. "Not for us. Mists didn't kill us. We're safe from them."

*What?* TenSoon thought, frowning to himself.

"Are we safe from the king?" the first guard said quietly.

His companion shot him a glance. "Don't say such things."

The first guard shrugged. "I just hope the emperor gets back soon."

"King Penrod has all of the emperor's authority," the second guard said sternly.

*Ah*, TenSoon thought. *So Penrod managed to keep the throne. But . . . what's this about an emperor?* TenSoon feared that the emperor was Straff Venture. That terrible man had been the one poised to take Luthadel when TenSoon had left.

But what of Vin? Somehow, TenSoon just couldn't bring himself to believe that she had been defeated. He had watched her kill Zane Venture, a man who had been burning atium when Vin had none. She'd done the impossible three times, to TenSoon's count. She'd slain the Lord Ruler. She'd defeated Zane.

And she'd befriended a kandra who had been determined to hate her.

The guards fell silent again. *This is foolish*, TenSoon thought. *I don't have time to hide in corners and eavesdrop. The world is ending!* He rose, shaking the ash from his body—an action that caused the guards to start, raising their spears anxiously as they searched the darkening night for the source of the sound.

TenSoon hesitated, their nervousness giving him an idea. He turned and loped off into the night. He'd grown to know the city quite well during his year serving with Vin—she had liked to patrol the city, particularly the areas around Keep Venture. Even with his knowledge, however, it took TenSoon some time to find his way to where he was going. He had never visited the location, but he had heard it described.

Described by a person whom TenSoon had been killing at the time.

The memory still brought him chills. Kandra served Contracts—and in Contracts, they usually were required to imitate specific individuals. A master would provide the proper body—kandra were forbidden to kill humans themselves—and the kandra would emulate it. However, before any of that happened, the kandra would usually study its quarry, learning as much about them as possible.

TenSoon had killed OreSeur, his generation brother. OreSeur, who had helped overthrow the Father. At Kelsier's command, OreSeur had pretended to be a nobleman named Lord Renoux so that Kelsier would have an apparent nobleman as a front to use in his plan to overthrow the empire. But, there had been a more important part for OreSeur to play in Kelsier's plot. A secret part that not even the other members of the crew had known until after Kelsier's death.

TenSoon arrived at the old warehouse. It stood where OreSeur had said it would. TenSoon shuddered, remembering OreSeur's screams. The kandra had died beneath TenSoon's torture, torture which had been necessary, for TenSoon had needed to learn all that he could. Every secret. All that he would need in order to convincingly imitate his brother.

That day, TenSoon's hatred of humans—and at himself for serving them—had burned more deeply than ever before. How Vin had overcome that, he still didn't know.

The warehouse before TenSoon was now a holy place, ornamented and maintained by the Church of the Survivor. A plaque hung out front, displaying the sign of the spear—the weapon by which both Kelsier and the Lord Ruler had died—and giving a written explanation of why the warehouse was important.

TenSoon knew the story already. This was the place where the crew had found a stockpile of weapons, left by the Survivor to arm the skaa people for their revolution. It had been discovered the same day that Kelsier had died, and rumors whispered that the spirit of the Survivor had appeared in this place, giving guidance to his followers. Those rumors were true, after a fashion. TenSoon rounded the building, following instructions OreSeur had given as he died. The Blessing of Presence let TenSoon recall the precise words, and despite the ash, he found the spot—a place where the cobbles were disturbed. Then, he began to dig.

Kelsier, the Survivor of Hathsin, had indeed appeared to his followers that night years ago. Or, at least, his bones had. OreSeur had been commanded to take the Survivor's own body and digest it, then appear to the faithful skaa and give them encouragement. The legends of the Survivor, the whole religion that had sprung up around him, had been started by a kandra.

And TenSoon had eventually killed that kandra. But not before learning his secrets. Secrets such as where OreSeur had buried the bones of the Survivor, and how the man had looked.

TenSoon smiled as he unearthed the first bone. They were years old now, and he hated using old bones. Plus, there would be no hair, so the one he created would be bald. Still, the opportunity was too valuable to pass up. He'd only seen the Survivor once, but with his expertise in imitation . . .

Well, it was worth a try.

Wellen leaned against his spear, watching those mists again. Rittle—his companion guard—said they weren't dangerous. But, Rittle hadn't seen what they could do. What they could reveal. Wellen figured that he had survived because he respected them. That, and because he didn't think too hard about the things he had seen.

"You think Skiff and Jaston will be late to relieve us again?" Wellen asked, trying again to start a conversation.

Rittle just grunted. "Dunno, Wells." Rittle never did care for small talk.

"I think maybe one of us should go see," Wellen said, eyeing the mist. "You know, ask if they've come in yet. . . ." He trailed off.

Something was out there.

*Lord Ruler!* he thought, cringing back. *Not again!*

But, no attack came from the mists. Instead, a dark figure strode forward. Rittle perked up, lowering his spear. "Halt!"

A man walked from the mists, wearing a deep black cloak, arms at his sides, hood up. His face, however, was visible. Wellen frowned. Something about this man looked familiar. . . .

Rittle gasped, then fell to his knees, clutching something at his neck—the pendant of a silver spear that he always wore. Wellen frowned. Then he noticed the scars on this newcomer's arms.

*Lord Ruler!* Wellen thought in shock, realizing where he'd seen this man's face. It had been in a painting, one of many available in the city, that depicted the Survivor of Hathsin.

"Rise," the stranger said, speaking in a benevolent voice.

Rittle stood on shaking feet. Wellen backed away, uncertain whether to be awed or terrified, and feeling a little of both.

"I have come to commend your faith," the Survivor said.

"My lord . . ." Rittle said, his head still bowed.

"Also," Kelsier said, raising a finger. "I have come to tell you I do not approve of how this city is being run. My people are sick, they starve, and they die."

"My lord," Rittle said, "there is not enough food, and there have been riots seizing that which was stockpiled. My lord, and the mists kill! Please, why have you sent them to kill us!"

"I did no such thing," Kelsier said. "I know that food is scarce, but you must share what you have and have hope. Tell me of the man who rules this city."

"King Penrod?" Rittle asked. "He rules for Emperor Elend Venture, who is away at war."

"Lord *Elend* Venture? And he approves of how this city is being treated?" Kelsier looked angry. Wellen cringed.

"No, my lord!" Rittle said, shaking. "I . . ."

"Lord Penrod is mad," Wellen found himself saying.

The Survivor turned toward him.

"Wells, you shouldn't . . ." Rittle said, but then trailed off, the Survivor shooting him a stern look.

"Speak," the Survivor said to Wellen.

"He speaks to the air, my lord," Wellen said, averting his eyes. "Talks to himself—claims that he can see the Lord Ruler standing beside him. Penrod . . . he's given lots of strange orders, lately. Forcing the skaa to fight each other for food, claiming that only the strong should survive. He kills those who disagree with him. That kind of thing."

"I see," the Survivor said.

*Surely he knows this already*, Wellen thought. *Why bother asking?*

"Where is my Heir?" the Survivor asked. "The Hero of Ages, Vin."

"The Lady Empress?" Wellen asked. "She's with the emperor."

"Where?"

"Nobody knows for certain, my lord," Rittle said, still shaking. "She hasn't returned in a long time. My sergeant says that she and the emperor are fighting in the South, fighting koloss. But I've heard other men say the army went to the west."

"That's not very helpful," Kelsier said.

Wellen perked up, remembering something.

"What?" the Survivor asked, apparently noticing Wellen's change in posture.

"An army troop stopped by the city a few months ago," Wellen said, feeling proud. "They kept it quiet, but I was in the group that helped them resupply. Lord Breeze was with them, and he spoke of meeting up with others of your crew."

"Where?" Kelsier asked. "Where were they going?"

"North," Wellen said. "To Urteau. That must be where the emperor is, my lord. The Northern Dominance is in rebellion. He must have taken his armies to quell it."

The Survivor nodded. "Very well," he said. He turned as if to go, then paused, looking back. "Pass what news you can," he said. "There isn't much time left. Tell the people that when the mists leave, they should immediately find shelter. A place underground, if possible."

Wellen paused, then nodded. "The caverns," he said. "Where you trained your army?"

"That will do," Kelsier said. "Farewell."

The Survivor disappeared into the mists.

TenSoon left the gates of Keep Venture behind, running off into the mists. He could, perhaps, have gotten himself into the building. However, he wasn't certain how well his imitation of the Survivor would hold up under closer scrutiny.

He didn't know how reliable the two guards' information was. However, he had no better leads. Other people he had talked to in the night hadn't been able to provide any information about the army's movements. Evidently, Vin and Elend had been gone from Luthadel for quite some time.

He rushed back to the patch of earth behind the warehouse where he'd found Kelsier's body. He knelt in the darkness, uncovering the sack he'd stuffed with bones. He needed to get the dog's body back and head north. Hopefully he would—

"You there!" a voice said.

TenSoon looked up reflexively. A man stood in the doorway of the warehouse, looking through the mists at TenSoon. A lantern flared to life behind him, revealing a group of people who had apparently taken up residence inside of the holy place.

*Uh, oh . . .* TenSoon thought as those at the front adopted shocked expressions.

"My lord!" the man in front said, quickly kneeling in his sleeping robe. "You've returned!"

TenSoon stood, stepping carefully to hide the sack of bones behind him. "I have," he said.

"We knew that you would," the man said as others began to whisper and cry out behind him. Many fell to their knees. "We stayed in this place, praying for you to come give us counsel. The king is mad, my lord! What do we do?"

TenSoon was tempted to expose himself as a kandra, but looking into their hopeful eyes, he found that he could not. Besides, perhaps he could do some good. "Penrod has been corrupted by Ruin," he said. "The thing that seeks to destroy the world. You must gather the faithful and escape this city before Penrod kills you all."

"My lord, where should we go?"

TenSoon hesitated. Where? "There are a pair of guards at the front of Keep Venture. They know of a place. Listen to them. You *must* get to a place underground. Do you understand?"

"Yes, lord," the man said. Behind, more and more people were edging forward, straining to catch a glimpse of TenSoon. He bore their scrutiny with some nervousness. Finally, he bid them be careful, then fled into the night.

He found an empty building and quickly changed back to the dog's bones before anyone else could see him. When he was done, he eyed the Survivor's bones, feeling a strange . . . reverence.

*Don't be silly*, he told himself. *They're just bones, like hundreds of other sets you've used.* Still, it seemed foolish to leave such a potentially powerful tool behind. He carefully packed them into the sack he'd pilfered, then—using paws he'd created to have more dexterity than those of a real wolfhound—he tied the sack on his back.

After that, TenSoon left the city by the northern gate, running at full wolfhound speed. He would go to Urteau and hope that he was on the right path.

*The pact between Preservation and Ruin is a thing of gods, and difficult to explain in human terms. Indeed, initially, there was a stalemate between them. On one hand, each knew that only by working together could they create. On the other hand, both knew that they would never have complete satisfaction in what they created. Preservation would not be able to keep things perfect and unchanging, and Ruin would not be able to destroy completely.*

*Ruin, of course, eventually acquired the ability to end the world and gain the satisfaction he wanted. But, then, that wasn't originally part of the bargain.*

# 53

SPOOK FOUND HER SITTING on the rocky lakeshore, looking out across the deep black waters, so still in the cavern's windless air. In the near distance, Spook could hear Sazed—with a large contingent of Goradel's men—working on their project to stanch the flow of water into the cavern.

Spook approached Beldre quietly, carrying a mug of warmed tea. It almost seemed to burn his flesh, which meant that it would be just right for normal people. He let his own food and drinks sit out until they cooled to room temperature.

He didn't wear his eye bandage. With pewter, he'd found that he could withstand a little lantern-light. She didn't turn as he approached, so he cleared his throat. She jumped slightly. It was no wonder that Quellion worked so hard to shelter the girl—one could not fake Beldre's level of innocence. She wouldn't survive three heartbeats in the underground. Even Allrianne, who did her best to look like a puff, had an edge to her that bespoke an ability to be as hard as necessary in order to survive. Beldre, though . . .

*She's normal*, Spook thought. *This is how people would be, if they didn't have to deal with Inquisitors, armies, and assassins*. For that, he actually envied her. It was a strange feeling, after so many years spent wishing that he were someone more important.

She turned back toward the waters, and he approached and sat beside her. "Here," he said, handing her the mug. "I know it gets a bit chilly down here, with the lake and the water."

She paused, then took the mug. "Thank you," she whispered. Spook let her roam free in the cavern—there was very little she could sabotage, though he had warned Goradel's men to keep an eye on her. Either way, there was no way she was going to get out. Spook kept two dozen men guarding the exit, and had ordered the ladder up to the trapdoor above removed, to be replaced only with proper authorization.

"Hard to believe this place was beneath your city all along, isn't it?" Spook said, trying to work into a conversation. Oddly, it had seemed easier to speak to her when he was confronting her in her gardens, surrounded by danger.

Beldre nodded. "My brother would have loved to find this place. He worries about food supplies. Fewer and fewer fish are being caught in the northern lakes. And crops . . . well, they're not doing so well, I hear."

"The mists," Spook said. "They don't let enough sunlight through for most plants."

Beldre nodded, looking down at her mug. She hadn't taken a sip yet.

"Beldre," Spook said, "I'm sorry. I actually considered kidnapping you from those gardens, but decided against it. However, with you showing up here, alone . . ."

"It was just too good an opportunity," she said bitterly. "I understand. It's my own fault. My brother always says I'm too trusting."

"There are times that would be an advantage."

Beldre sniffed quietly. "I've never known such times as that. It seems my entire life, I've just trusted and been hurt. This is no different."

Spook sat, feeling frustrated with himself. *Kelsier, tell me what to say!* he thought. Yet, God remained silent. The Survivor didn't seem to have much advice about things that didn't relate to securing the city.

It had all seemed so simple when Spook had given the order to capture her. Why, now, was he sitting here with this empty pit in his stomach?

"I believed in him, you know," Beldre said.

"Your brother?"

"No," she said with a slight shake of her head. "The Lord Ruler. I was a good little noblewoman. I always gave my payments to the obligators—paying extra, even, and calling them in to witness the smallest things. I also paid them to come tutor me in the history of the empire. I thought everything was perfect. So neat; so peaceful. And then, they tried to kill me. Turns out I'm half skaa. My father wanted a child so desperately, and my mother was barren. He had two children with one of the maidservants—my mother even approved."

She shook her head. "Why would someone do that?" she continued. "I mean, why not pick a noblewoman? No. My father chose the servant woman. I guess he fancied her or something. . . ." She looked down.

"For me, it was my grandfather," Spook said. "I never knew him. Grew up on the streets."

"Sometimes I wish *I* had," Beldre said. "Then maybe this would all make sense. What do you do when the priests you've been paying to tutor you since you were a child—men you trusted more than your own parents

—come to take you away for execution? I would have died, too. I just went with them. Then . . ."

"Then what?" Spook asked.

"You saved me," she whispered. "The Survivor's crew. You overthrew the Lord Ruler, and in the chaos, everybody forgot about people like me. The obligators were too busy trying to please Straff."

"And then, your brother took over."

She nodded quietly. "I thought he'd be a good ruler. He really is a good man! He just wants everything to be stable and secure. Peace for everyone. Yet, sometimes, the things he *does* to people . . . the things he *asks* of people . . ."

"I'm sorry," Spook said.

She shook her head. "And then you came. You rescued that child, right in front of Quellion and me. You came to my gardens, and you didn't even threaten me. I thought . . . maybe he really is as the stories say. Maybe he'll help. And, like the idiot I always am, I just came."

"I wish things were simple, Beldre," Spook said. "I wish I could let you go. But, this is for the greater good."

"That's just what Quellion always says, you know," she said.

Spook paused.

"You're a lot alike, you two," she said. "Forceful. Commanding."

Spook chuckled. "You really don't know me very well, do you?"

She flushed. "You're the Survivor of the Flames. Don't think I haven't heard the rumors—my brother can't keep me out of *all* of his conferences."

"Rumors," Spook said, "are rarely reliable."

"You're a member of the Survivor's crew."

Spook shrugged. "That's true. Though, I became a member by accident."

She frowned, glancing at him.

"Kelsier handpicked the others," Spook said. "Ham, Breeze, Sazed—even Vin. He chose my uncle too. And, by doing so, he got me as a bonus. I . . . I was never really part of it all, Beldre. I was kind of like an observer. They posted me on watch and things like that. I sat in on the planning sessions, and everyone just treated me like an errand boy. I must have refilled Breeze's cup a hundred times during that first year!"

A hint of amusement showed on her face. "You make it sound like you were a servant."

"Pretty much," Spook said, smiling. "I couldn't talk very well—I'd grown used to speaking in an Eastern street slang, and everything I said came out garbled. I've still got an accent, they tell me. So, I just stayed quiet most of the time, embarrassed. The crew was nice to me, but I knew I was pretty much just ignored."

"And now you're in charge of them all."

Spook laughed. "No. Sazed's the one really in charge of us here. Breeze ranks me too, but he lets me give orders because he's too lazy to do so. He likes to make people do things without them knowing it. Half the time, I'm certain that the things I'm saying are just ideas he somehow got into my head."

Beldre shook her head. "The Terrisman is in charge? But, he looks to you!"

"He just lets me do what he doesn't want to," Spook said. "Sazed's a great man—one of the best I've known. But, well, he's a scholar. He's better off studying a project and writing notes than he is giving commands. So, that only leaves me. I'm just doing the job that everyone else is too busy to do."

Beldre sat quietly for a moment, then finally took a sip of her tea. "Ah," she said. "It's good!"

"The Lord Ruler's own brew, for all we know," Spook said. "We found it down here, with the rest of this stuff."

"This is why you came, isn't it?" Beldre asked, nodding to the cavern. "I wondered why your emperor cared about Urteau. We haven't really been an important force in the world since the Venture line moved its center of power to Luthadel."

Spook nodded. "This is part of it, though Elend is also worried about the rebellion up here. It's dangerous, having a foe who is slaughtering noblemen controlling one of the major cities just a short distance north of Luthadel. That's all I can really tell you, though. Most of the time, I feel like I'm *still* just a bystander in all of this. Vin and Elend, they're the ones who really know what's going on. To them, I'm the guy they could spare to spend months spying in Urteau while they did important work in the South."

"They are wrong to treat you so," Beldre said.

"No, it's all right," Spook said. "I've kind of enjoyed being up here. I feel like I've been able to do something, finally."

She nodded. After a short time, she set down her cup, wrapping her arms around her knees. "What are they like?" she asked. "I've heard so many stories. They say that Emperor Venture always wears white, and that the ash refuses to stick to him! He can quell an army just by looking at them. And his wife, the Survivor's heir. Mistborn . . ."

Spook smiled. "Elend is a forgetful scholar—twice as bad as Sazed ever was. He gets lost in his books and forgets about meetings he himself called. He only dresses with any sense of fashion because a Terriswoman bought him a new wardrobe. War has changed him some, but on the inside, I think he's still just a dreamer caught in a world with too much violence.

"And Vin . . . well, she really *is* different. I've never been sure what to make of her. Sometimes, she seems as frail as a child. And then she kills an Inquisitor. She can be fascinating and frightening at the same time. I tried to court her once."

"Really?" Beldre said, perking up.

Spook smiled. "I gave her a handkerchief. I heard that's how you do it in noble society."

"Only if you're a romantic," Beldre said, smiling wistfully.

"Well, I gave her one," Spook said. "But I don't think she knew what I meant by it. And, of course, once she *did* figure it out, she turned me down. I'm not sure what I was thinking, trying to court her. I mean, I'm just Spook. Quiet, incomprehensible, forgettable Spook."

He closed his eyes. *What am I saying?* Women didn't want to hear men talk about how insignificant they were. He'd heard that much. *I shouldn't have come to talk to her. I should have just gone about, giving orders. Looking like I was in charge*.

The damage had been done, however. She knew the truth about him. He sighed, opening his eyes.

"I don't think you're forgettable," Beldre said. "Of course, I'd be *more* likely to think fondly of you if you were to let me go."

Spook smiled. "Eventually. I promise."

"Are you going to use me against him?" Beldre asked. "Threaten to kill me if he doesn't give in?"

"Threats like that are hollow if you know you'll never do what you say," Spook said. "Honestly, Beldre, I'm not going to hurt you. In fact, I've got a feeling you'll be safer here than back in your brother's palace."

"Please don't kill him, Spook," Beldre said. "Maybe . . . maybe you can help him somehow, help him see that he's being too extreme."

Spook nodded. "I'll . . . try."

"Do you promise?" she said.

"All right," Spook said. "I promise to at least try to save your brother. If I can."

"And the city too."

"And the city," Spook said. "Trust me. We've done this before—the transition will go smoothly."

Beldre nodded, and she actually seemed to believe him. *What kind of woman is still able to trust people after everything she's been through?* If she'd been Vin, she would have stabbed him in the back at the first opportunity, and that would have probably been the right thing to do. Yet, this girl just continued to trust. It was like finding a beautiful plant growing alone in a field of burnt ash.

"Once we're done, maybe you could introduce me to the emperor and empress," Beldre said. "They sound like interesting people."

"I'll never argue with that statement," Spook said. "Elend and Vin . . . well, they're certainly *interesting*. Interesting people with heavy burdens. Sometimes, I wish I were powerful enough to do important works like them."

Beldre laid a hand on his arm, and he glanced down, a bit surprised. *What?*

"Power can be a terrible thing, Spook," she said quietly. "I'm . . . not pleased with what it's done to my brother. Don't wish so hard for it."

Spook met her eyes, then nodded and rose. "If you need anything, ask Sazed. He'll see to your comforts."

She looked up. "Where are you going?"

"To be seen."

"I want primary trade contracts on all the canals," Durn said. "And a title from the emperor."

"You?" Spook said. "A title? You think a 'lord' in front of your name is going to make that face any less ugly?"

Durn raised an eyebrow.

Spook just chuckled. "Both are yours. I cleared it with Sazed and Breeze—they'll even draft you a contract, if you want."

Durn nodded appreciatively. "I do. Lords pay attention to things like that." They sat in one of his many backroom chambers—not in his private home, but in a place attached to a particular inn. An old set of drums hung on the wall.

Spook had had little trouble sneaking out past Quellion's soldiers standing watch at the front of the Ministry building. Even before he'd gained enhanced abilities with tin, and long before he'd been able to burn pewter, he'd learned to sneak about in the night and spy. A group of soldiers had barely posed an obstacle for him. He couldn't remain cooped up in the cavern like the others. He had too much work to do.

"I want the Harrows dammed off," Spook said. "We'll flood the canals during the evening, when the markets are empty. Nobody lives in the streetslots except for those of you here in the slums. If you want to keep this place from flooding, you'll need a good *watertight* blockade in place."

"Already taken care of," Durn said. "When the Harrows were new, we pulled off the lock system from its mouth, but I know where it is. It'll fit back in place well enough to keep the water out, assuming we can install it correctly."

"You'd better," Spook said. "I don't want the deaths of half the city's beggar population on my conscience. I'll warn you the day we intend to pull this off. See if you can get some of the goods out of the market, as well as keep people out of the streetslots. That, plus what you're doing for my reputation, will guarantee you the title you want."

Durn nodded, rising. "Well, let's go work on that reputation, then." He led the way out of the back room, bringing Spook out into the commons of the bar. As always, Spook wore his burned cloak—it had become something of a symbol for him. He'd never worn a mistcloak, but somehow, this felt even better.

The people rose when he entered. He smiled, motioning for Durn's men to bring out wineskins—stolen from the storage cavern and carried by Spook as he snuck out several nights in a row. "Tonight," he said, "you don't have to pay for Quellion's stolen liquor. That's his way of keeping you happy and content."

And that was the only speech he gave. He wasn't Kelsier, able to impress people with his words. Instead—at Breeze's suggestion—he stayed mostly quiet. He visited tables, trying to not be aloof, but also speaking little. He looked thoughtful, and asked the people about their problems. He listened to stories of loss and hardship, and drank with them to the memory of those Quellion had murdered. And, with his pewter, he never got drunk. He already had a reputation for that—the people regarded it mystically, as they did his ability to survive fire.

After that bar, they visited another, and another after that, Durn careful to keep him to the safest—and yet most populated—of the locations. Some were in the Harrows, others were above. Through it all, Spook felt an amazing thing: his confidence growing. He really *was* a little like Kelsier. Vin might have been the one trained by the Survivor, but Spook was the one who was doing just what he'd done—encouraging the people, leading them to rise up for their own sakes.

As the evening passed, the various bars became a blur. Spook breathed curses against Quellion, speaking of the murders and of the Allomancers the Citizen retained. Spook didn't spread the rumors that Quellion was himself an Allomancer—he let Breeze do that more carefully. That way, it wouldn't look like Spook was too eager to set the man up.

"To the Survivor!"

Spook looked up, holding his mug of wine, smiling as the bar patrons cheered.

"To the Survivor!" another said, pointing at Spook. "Survivor of the Flames!"

"To the death of the Citizen!" Durn said, raising his own mug—though he rarely drank from it. "Down with the man who said he'd let us rule, then took it all for himself!"

Spook smiled, taking a drink. He hadn't realized how exhausting it could be to simply sit around and speak to people. His flared pewter kept his body's weariness at bay, but it couldn't prevent the mental fatigue.

*I wonder what Beldre would think if she saw this*, he thought. *The men cheering me. She'd be impressed, wouldn't she? She'd forget about how I droned on about how useless I was*.

Perhaps the visits to the bars had been fatiguing simply because he had something else he wished he could be doing. It was silly—she was his captive. He'd betrayed her trust. She was obviously just warming up to him in an effort to get him to let her go. Yet, he couldn't help thinking back to their conversation, going over it again and again in his mind. Despite the stupid things he'd said, she'd laid her hand on his arm. That meant something, didn't it?

"You all right?" Durn asked, leaning in. "That's your tenth mug tonight."

"I'm fine," Spook said.

"You were looking a little distant there."

"I have a lot on my mind," Spook said.

Durn leaned back, frowning, but didn't say anything more.

Some things about his conversation with Beldre bothered Spook, even more than his own stupid comments. She seemed to really be worried by the things that her brother had done. When Spook himself was in power, would she see him as she did Quellion? Would that be a bad thing, or a good thing? She already said they were similar.

*Power can be a terrible thing. . . .*

He looked up, glancing at the people of the bar as they cheered him again, just as the men had in the other bars. Kelsier had been able to handle adulation like this. If Spook wanted to be like Kelsier, then he'd have to deal with it as well, right?

Wasn't it a good thing to be liked? To have people willing to follow him? He could finally break away from the old Spook. He could stop being that boy, the one so insignificant and easily forgotten. He could leave that child behind, and become a man who was respected. And why shouldn't he be respected? He *wasn't* that boy anymore. He wore his bandages across his eyes, heightening his mystical reputation as a man who did not need light to see. Some even said that anywhere that fire burned, Spook could see.

"They love you," Kelsier whispered. "You deserve it."

Spook smiled. That was all the confirmation he needed. He stood, raising his arms before the crowd. They cheered in response.

It had been a long time coming. And it felt all the sweeter for the wait.

*Preservation's desire to create sentient life was what eventually broke the stalemate. In order to give mankind awareness and independent thought, Preservation knew that he would have to give up part of himself—his own soul—to dwell within mankind. This would leave him just a tiny bit weaker than his opposite, Ruin.*

*That tiny bit seemed inconsequential, compared with their total vast sums of power. However, over aeons, this tiny flaw would allow Ruin to overcome Preservation, thereby bringing an end to the world.*

*This, then, was their bargain. Preservation got mankind, the only creations that had more Preservation than Ruin in them, rather than a balance. Independent life that could think and feel. In exchange, Ruin was given a promise—and proof—that he could bring an end to all they had created together. It was the pact.*

*And Preservation eventually broke it.*

# 54

WHEN VIN AWOKE, she was not surprised to find herself bound. She *was* surprised to feel that she was wearing metal manacles.

The first thing she did—even before she opened her eyes—was reach inside for her metals. With steel and iron, perhaps she could use the manacles as weapons. With pewter . . .

Her metals were gone.

She kept her eyes closed, trying not to display the panic she felt, thinking through what had happened. She'd been in the cavern, trapped with Ruin. Elend's friend had come in, given her the wine, and she'd taken it. Gambled.

How long had it been since she'd fallen unconscious?

"Your breathing has changed," a voice reported. "You are obviously awake."

Vin cursed herself quietly. There was a very easy way to take away an Allomancer's powers—easier, even, than making them burn aluminum. You just had to keep them drugged long enough for them to pass the metals through their body. As she thought about it, her mind shrugging off the effects of extended sleep, she realized this was what must have happened to her.

The silence continued. Finally, Vin opened her eyes. She expected to see cell bars. Instead, she saw a sparsely furnished, utilitarian room. She lay on a bench, head cushioned by a hard pillow. Her manacles were connected to a chain several feet long, which was in turn locked to the base of the bench. She tugged on the chain carefully, and determined that it was very well affixed.

The motion drew the attention of a pair of guards who stood beside the bench. They jumped slightly, raising staffs and eyeing her warily. Vin smiled to herself; part of her was proud that she could evoke such a response even when chained and metalless.

"You, Lady Venture, present something of a problem." The voice came from the side. Vin raised herself up on one arm, looking over the bench's armrest. On the other side of the room—perhaps fifteen feet away—a bald figure in robes stood with his back to her. He stared out a large window, facing west, and the setting sun was a violent crimson blaze around his silhouette.

"What do I do?" Yomen asked, still not turning toward her. "A single flake of steel, and you could slaughter my guards with their own buttons. A taste of pewter, and you could lift that bench and smash your way out of the room. The logical thing to do would be to gag you, keep you drugged at all times, or kill you."

Vin opened her mouth to reply, but all that came out was a cough. She immediately tried to burn pewter to strengthen her body. The lack of metal was like missing a limb. As she sat up, coughing further and growing dizzy, she found herself craving the metal more than she'd imagined that she ever would. Allomancy wasn't supposed to be addictive, not like certain herbs or poisons. However, at that moment, she could have sworn that all the scientists and philosophers were flat-out wrong.

Yomen made a sharp gesture with one arm, still not turning from the sunset. A servant approached, bearing a cup for Vin. She eyed it uncertainly.

"If I wanted to poison you, Lady Venture," Yomen said without turning, "I could do it without guile."

*Good point*, Vin thought wryly, accepting the cup and drinking the water it contained.

"Water," Yomen said. "Collected from rain, then strained and purified. You will find no trace metals in it to burn. I specifically ordered it kept in wooden containers only."

*Clever*, Vin thought. Years before she'd become consciously aware of her Allomantic powers, she'd been burning the tiny bits of metal she haphazardly got from groundwater or dining utensils.

The water quenched her thirst and stilled her cough. "So," she finally said, "if you're so worried about me eating metals, why leave me ungagged?"

Yomen stood quietly for a moment. Finally, he turned, and she could see the tattoos across his eyes and face, his skin reflecting the deep colors of the falling sun outside. On his forehead, he wore his single, silvery bead of atium.

"Various reasons," said the obligator king.

Vin studied him, then raised the cup to take another drink. The motion jangled her manacles, which she eyed in annoyance as they again restricted her movement.

"They're made of silver," Yomen said. "A particularly frustrating metal for Mist-born, or so I am told."

Silver. Useless, unburnable silver. Like lead, it was one of the metals that provided no Allomantic powers at all.

"An unpopular metal indeed . . ." Yomen said, nodding to the side. A servant approached Vin, bearing something on a small platter. Her mother's earring. It was a dull thing, Allomantically, made of bronze with some silver plating. Much of the gilding had worn off years ago, and the brownish bronze showed through, making the earring look to be the cheap bauble it was.

"Which is why," Yomen continued, "I am so curious as to why you would bother with an ornament such as this. I have had it tested. Silver on the outside, bronze on the inside. Why those metals? One useless to Allomancers, the other granting what is considered the weakest of Allomantic powers. Would not an earring of steel or of pewter make more sense?"

Vin eyed the earring. Her fingers itched to grab it, if only to feel metal between her fingers. If she'd had steel, she could have Pushed on the earring, using it as a weapon. Kelsier had once told her to keep wearing it for that simple reason. Yet, it had been given to her by her mother. A woman Vin had never known. A woman who had tried to kill her.

Vin snatched the earring. Yomen watched curiously as she stuck it in her ear. He seemed . . . wary. As if waiting for something.

*If I really did have some trick planned*, she thought, *he'd be dead in an instant. How can he stand there so calmly? Why give me my earring? Even if it isn't made of useful metals, I might find a way to use it against him*.

Her instincts told her he was trying an old street ploy—kind of like throwing your enemy a dagger to make him attack. Yomen wanted to spring any traps she was planning. It seemed a silly move. How could he possibly hope to best a Mistborn?

*Unless he himself is a Mistborn*, Vin thought. *He feels he can beat me*.

*He has atium, and is ready to burn it when I try something*.

Vin did nothing; made no attack. She wasn't certain if her instincts about Yomen were right, but that didn't really matter. She couldn't attack, for the earring had no hidden secret. The truth was, she simply wanted it back because it felt comfortable in her ear. She was accustomed to wearing it.

"Interesting," Yomen said. "Regardless, you are about to discover one of the reasons I have left you without a gag . . ." With that, he raised a hand toward the door. He clasped his hands behind his back as a servant opened the door, showing in an unarmed soldier in the white and brown of Elend's livery.

*You should kill him*, Ruin whispered in her mind. *All of them*.

"Lady Venture," Yomen said without looking at her. "I must ask you not to speak to this man except when I indicate, and answer only as I request. Otherwise, he will have to be executed, and a fresh messenger sent for from your army."

The soldier paled. Vin just frowned, eyeing the obligator king. Yomen was obviously a calm man, and he wanted to appear harsh. How much of it was an act?

"You can see that she is alive, as promised," Yomen said to the soldier.

"How do we know this is not a kandra in disguise?" the soldier asked.

"You can ask your question," Yomen said.

"Lady Venture," the soldier said, "what did you have for dinner the night before you went to the party inside the city?"

It was a good question to ask. A kandra would have interrogated her about important moments—such as her first meeting with Elend. Something like a meal, however, was so random that no kandra would have thought to ask about it. Now, if Vin could remember. . . .

She looked at Yomen. He nodded—she could answer. "Eggs," she said. "Fresh eggs that I bought in the city, during one of my spying trips."

The man nodded.

"You have your answer, soldier," Yomen said. "Report to your king that his wife is still alive."

The soldier withdrew and the servants closed the door. Vin sat back on the bench, waiting for a gag.

Yomen remained where he was, looking at her.

Vin looked back. Finally, she spoke. "How long do you think that you can keep Elend placated? If you know anything of him at all, then you will realize that he is a king first, and a man second. He will do what he needs to do, even if it means my death."

"Eventually, perhaps," Yomen said. "However, for now, the stall is effective. They say that you are a blunt woman, and appreciate brevity.

Therefore, I will be straightforward with you. My purpose in capturing you was not to use you as leverage against your husband."

"Is that so," she said flatly. "Why *did* you capture me, then?"

"It is simple, Lady Venture," Yomen said. "I captured you so that I could execute you."

If he expected surprise from her, she didn't give it. She just shrugged. "Sounds like an unnecessarily formal term. Why not just cut my throat while I was drugged?"

"This city is a place of law," Yomen said. "We do not kill indiscriminately."

"This is war," Vin said. "If you wait for 'discrimination' before you kill, you'll have a lot of unhappy soldiers."

"Your crime is not one of war, Lady Venture."

"Oh? And am I to know this crime, then?"

"It is the most simple of all crimes. Murder."

Vin raised an eyebrow. Had she killed someone close to this man? Perhaps one of the noble soldiers in Cett's retinue, back a year ago when she'd assaulted Keep Hasting?

Yomen met her eyes, and she saw something in them. A loathing that he kept hidden behind the calm front. No, she hadn't killed one of his friends or relatives. She'd killed someone far more important to him.

"The Lord Ruler," she said.

Yomen turned away again.

"You can't honestly intend to try me for *that*," Vin said. "It's ridiculous."

"There will be no trial," Yomen said. "I am the authority in this city, and need no ceremony to give me direction or permission."

Vin snorted. "I thought you said this was a place of law."

"And I am that law," Yomen said calmly. "I believe in letting a person speak for themselves before I make my decision. I will give you time to prepare your thoughts—however, the men who will be guarding you have orders to kill you if it ever looks like you are putting something unapproved into your mouth."

Yomen glanced back at her. "I'd be very careful while I eat or drink, if I were you. Your guards have been told to err on the side of safety, and they know that I will not punish them if they accidentally kill you."

Vin paused, cup of water still held lightly in her fingers.

*Kill him*, Ruin's voice whispered. *You could do it. Take a weapon from one of those soldiers, then use it on Yomen*.

Vin frowned. Ruin still used Reen's voice—it was familiar, something that had always seemed a part of her. Discovering that it belonged to that *thing* . . . it was like finding out that her reflection really belonged to someone else, and that she'd never actually seen herself.

She ignored the voice. She wasn't sure why Ruin would want her to try killing Yomen. After all, Yomen had captured her—the obligator king was working on Ruin's side. Plus, Vin doubted her ability to cause the man any harm. Chained, lacking offensive metals . . . she'd be a fool to attack.

She also didn't trust Yomen's comments about keeping her alive so that she could "speak" in her defense. He was up to something. Yet, she couldn't fathom what it might be. Why leave her alive? He was too clever a man to lack a reason.

Giving no hint of his motivations, Yomen turned away from her again, looking back out his window. "Take her away."

*By sacrificing most of his consciousness, Preservation created Ruin's prison, breaking their deal and trying to keep Ruin from destroying what they had created. This event left their powers again nearly balanced—Ruin imprisoned, only a trace of himself capable of leaking out. Preservation reduced to a mere wisp of what he once was, barely capable of thought and action.*

*These two minds were, of course, independent of the raw force of their powers. Actually, I am uncertain of how thoughts and personalities came to be attached to the powers in the first place—but I believe they were not there originally. For both powers could be detached from the minds that ruled them.*

# 55

IT TOOK ELEND MUCH LONGER to get back from the village than it had taken to get there. For one thing, he had left a lot of his coins with the villagers. He wasn't certain how much good money would do them in the coming weeks, but he'd felt that he had to do something. They were going to have a rough time of it the next few months. Their food stores nearly depleted, their homes burned by koloss, their water sources contaminated by ash, their capital—and king—besieged by Elend himself . . .

*I have to stay focused*, he told himself, walking through the falling ash. *I can't help every village. I have to worry about the larger picture*.

A picture that included using a force of koloss to destroy another man's city. Elend gritted his teeth, continuing to walk. The sun was creeping toward the horizon, and the mists had already started to appear, lit by the blazing fire of red sunlight. Behind him tromped some thirty thousand koloss. His new army.

That was another reason it took him a bit longer to get back. He wanted to walk with the koloss army, rather than jumping ahead of them, in case their Inquisitor appeared to steal them back. He still couldn't believe that such a large group hadn't been under any kind of direction.

*I attacked a koloss army on my own*, he thought as he slogged through a patch of thigh-deep ash. *I did it without Vin's help, intent on defeating their Inquisitor by myself*.

How had he thought to fight an Inquisitor on his own? Kelsier himself had only barely been able to defeat one of the things.

*Vin has killed three now*, he thought. *We took them on together, but she was the one who killed each one*.

He didn't begrudge her the abilities she had, but he did feel occasional glimmers of envy. That amused him. It had never bothered him when he'd been an ordinary man, but now that he was Mistborn too, he found himself coveting her skill.

And even with her skill, she had been captured. Elend tromped along, feeling a weight he couldn't shake. Everything just seemed *wrong* to him. Vin imprisoned, while he was free. Mist and ash suffocating the land.

Elend, despite all his powers, was unable to do anything to protect the people—and the woman—he loved.

And that was the third reason that he walked ploddingly with his koloss, rather than returning immediately to his camp. He needed some time to think. Some time alone. Perhaps that was what had driven him to leave in the first place.

He'd known that their work was dangerous, but he'd never *really* thought that he might lose her. She was Vin. She always got out. She survived.

But what if, this time, she didn't?

He'd always been the vulnerable one—the common person in a world of Mist-born and koloss. The scholar who couldn't fight, who had to depend on Vin for protection. Even during the last year of fighting, she'd stayed close to him. If she'd been in danger, he'd been in danger, and there hadn't really been time to think about what would happen if he survived and she didn't.

He shook his head, pushing through the ash. He could have used koloss to force a trail for him. For the moment, however, he wanted to be apart even from them. So, he walked ahead, a lone figure in black on a field of solid ash backlit by a setting red sun.

The ashfalls were getting far worse. Before he'd left the village, he'd spent a day having his koloss clear the streets and rebuild some of the homes. Yet, with the rate at which the ash was falling, the mist and even the possibility of other wandering koloss were becoming secondary problems. The ash. *It* alone would kill them. Already, it buried trees and hills. It was up to his waist in places.

*Perhaps if I'd stayed in Luthadel*, he thought, *working with my scholars, we could have discovered a way to stop this. . . .*

No, that was foolish. What would they do? Plug the ashmounts? Find a way to wash all of the ash out into the sea? In the distance ahead of him through the evening mists, he could see a red glow in the sky, even though the sun set on the opposite horizon. He could only assume that the light to the east came from fire and lava rising out of the ashmounts.

What did he do about a dying sky, ash so thick he could barely move through it, and erupting volcanoes? So far, his way of dealing with these things had been to ignore them.

Or, rather, to let Vin worry about them.

*That's really what has me worried*, he thought. *Losing the woman I love is bad enough. But, losing the one I trusted to fix all this . . . that's truly frightening*.

It was an odd realization. The deep truth was, he really *did* trust Vin as more than a person. She was more like a force. Almost a god, even? It seemed silly, thinking about that directly. She was his wife. Even if he was a member of the Church of the Survivor, it felt wrong to worship her, to think her divine.

And he didn't, not really. But he did trust her. Vin was a person of instinct, while Elend was one of logic and thought. Sometimes, it seemed she could do the impossible simply because she didn't stop to *think* about how impossible it really was. If Elend came to a cliff, he stopped, gauging the distance to the other side. Vin just jumped.

What would happen on the day she didn't reach the other side? What if the events they were tied up in were bigger than two people could hope to solve, even if one of those people was Vin? As he considered it, even the possibility of discovering helpful information in the cache at Fadrex had been a slim hope.

*We need help*, Elend thought with frustration. He stopped in the ash, the darkness closing around him as night proper finally fell. The mists swirled.

Help. So, what did that mean? Help from some mysterious god like the ones that Sazed had once preached about? Elend had never known a god other than the Lord Ruler. And he'd never really had faith in that creature—though, meeting Yomen had changed his perspective on how some people worshipped the Lord Ruler.

Elend stood, looking up at the sky, watching the flakes of ash fall. Continuing their silent, yet ceaseless, barrage against the land. Like the raven feathers of a soft pillow used to suffocate a sleeping victim.

*We are doomed*, he thought. Behind him, the koloss stopped their march, waiting upon his silent order. *That's it. It's all going to end*.

The realization wasn't crushing. It was gentle, like a final tendril of smoke from a dying candle. He suddenly knew that they couldn't fight—that everything they'd done over the last year had been pointless.

Elend slumped to his knees. The ash came up to his chest. Perhaps this was one final reason why he'd wanted to walk home alone. When others were around, he felt as if he had to be optimistic. But, alone, he could face the truth.

And there, in the ash, he finally just gave up.

Someone knelt down beside him.

Elend jumped backward, scrambling to his feet and scattering ash. He flared pewter belatedly, giving himself the tense strength of a Mistborn about to attack. But, there was nobody beside him. He froze, wondering if he'd been imagining things. And then, burning tin and squinting in the darkness of the ashen night, he finally saw it. A creature of mist.

It wasn't really *composed* of mist. Rather, it was outlined in mist. The random shiftings suggested its figure, which was roughly that of a man. Elend had seen this creature twice before. The first time, it had appeared to him in the wilderness of the Northern Dominance.

The second time, it had stabbed him in the gut, leaving him to bleed to death.

Yet, that had been an attempt to get Vin to take the power at the Well of Ascension and use it to heal Elend. The thing's intentions had been good, even if it had nearly killed Elend. Plus, Vin said that this creature had led her to the bit of metal that had somehow turned Elend into an Allomancer.

The mist spirit watched him, its figure barely distinguishable in the patterns of flowing mists.

"What?" Elend asked. "What do you want of me?"

The mist spirit raised its arm and pointed to the northeast.

*That's what it did the first time it met me. It just pointed, as if trying to get me to go somewhere. I didn't understand what it meant* then *either.*

"Look," Elend said, suddenly feeling exhausted. "If you want to say something, why not just say it?"

The mist spirit stood quietly in the mists.

"At least write it," Elend said. "The pointing just isn't working." He knew that the creature—whatever it was—had some corporeality. After all, it had managed to stab Elend handily enough.

He expected the creature to just continue standing there. However, to Elend's surprise, it followed the command, kneeling down in the ash. It reached out with a misty hand, and began to scratch in the ash. Elend took a step forward, cocking his head to see what the thing was writing.

*I will kill you*, the words said. *Death, death, death*.

"Well . . . that's pleasant," Elend said, feeling an eerie chill.

The mist spirit seemed to slump. It knelt in the ash, making no impression in the ground.

*Such odd words to write*, Elend thought, *when it seemed to be trying to get me to trust it. . .* "It can change your words, can't it?" Elend asked. "The other force. It can rewrite pieces of text on paper, so why not things scratched in ash?"

The mist spirit looked up.

"That's why you ripped the corners off of Sazed's papers," Elend said. "You couldn't write him a note, because the words would just get changed. So, you had to do other things. More blunt things—like pointing."

The creature stood.

"So, write more slowly," Elend said. "Use exaggerated motions. I'll watch the movements of your arm, and form the letters in my mind."

The mist spirit began immediately, waving its arms about. Elend cocked his head, watching its motions. He couldn't make any sense of them, let alone form letters out of them.

"Wait," he said, holding up a hand. "That isn't working. Either it's changing things, or you just don't know your letters."

Silence.

*Wait*, Elend thought, glancing at the text on the ground. *If the text changed . . .*

"It's here, isn't it," he said, feeling a sudden and icy chill. "It's here with us now."

The mist spirit remained still.

"Bounce around for a yes," Elend said.

The mist spirit began to wave its arms as it had before.

"Close enough," Elend said, shivering. He glanced around, but could see nothing else in the mists. If the thing Vin had released was there, then it made no impression. Yet, Elend thought he *could* feel something different. A slight increase in wind, a touch of ice in the air, the mists moving about more agitatedly. Perhaps he was just imagining things.

He focused his attention back on the mist spirit. "You're . . . not as solid as you were before."

The creature remained still.

"Is that a no?" Elend said, frustrated. The creature remained still.

Elend closed his eyes. Forcing himself to focus, thinking back to the logic puzzles of his youth. *I need to approach this more directly. Use* *questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no*. Why would the mist spirit be harder to see now than before? Elend opened his eyes.

"Are you weaker than you were before?" he asked.

The thing waved its arms.

*Yes*, Elend thought.

"Is it because the world is ending?" Elend asked.

More waving.

"Are you weaker than the other thing? The thing Vin set free?"

Waving.

*"A lot* weaker?" Elend asked.

It waved, though it seemed a bit disconsolate this time.

*Great*, Elend thought. Of course, he could have guessed that. Whatever the mist spirit was, it wasn't a magical answer to their problems. If it were, it would have saved them by now.

*What we lack most is information*, Elend thought. *I need to learn what I can from this thing*.

"Are you related to the ash?" he asked.

No motion.

"Are you causing the ashfalls?" he asked.

No motion.

"Is the other thing causing the ashfalls?"

This time, it waved.

*Okay*. "Is it causing the mists to come in the day too?"

No motion.

"Are *you* causing the mists to come in the day?"

It seemed to pause in thought at this one, then it waved about less vigorously than before.

*Is that a "maybe"?* Elend wondered. *Or a "partially"?*

The creature fell still. It was getting harder and harder to see it in the mists. Elend flared his tin, but that didn't make the creature any more distinct. It seemed to be . . . fading.

"Where was it you wanted me to go?" Elend asked, more for himself than expecting an answer. "You pointed . . . east? Did you want me to go back to Luthadel?"

It waved with half-enthusiasm again.

"Do you want me to attack Fadrex City?"

It stood still.

"Do you *not* want me to attack Fadrex City?"

It waved vigorously.

*Interesting*, he thought.

"The mists," Elend said. "They're connected to all this, aren't they?"

Waving.

"They're killing my men," Elend said.

It stepped forward, then stood still, somehow looking urgent.

Elend frowned. "You reacted to that. You mean to say they *aren't* killing my men?"

It waved.

"That's ridiculous. I've *seen* the men fall dead."

It stepped forward, pointing at Elend. He glanced down at his sash. "The coins?" he asked, looking up.

It pointed again. Elend reached into his sash. All that was there were his metal vials. He pulled one out. "Metals?"

It waved vigorously. It just continued to wave and wave. Elend looked down at the vial. "I don't understand."

The creature fell still. It was getting more and more vague, as if it were evaporating.

"Wait!" Elend said, stepping forward. "I have another question. One more before you go!"

It stared him in the eyes.

"Can we beat it?" Elend asked softly. "Can we survive?"

Stillness. Then, the creature waved just briefly. Not a vigorous wave—more of a hesitant one. An uncertain one. It evaporated, maintaining that same wave, the mists becoming indistinct and leaving no sign that the creature had been there.

Elend stood in the darkness. He turned and glanced at his koloss army, who waited like the trunks of dark trees in the distance. Then he turned back, scanning for any further signs of the mist spirit. Finally, he just turned and began to tromp his way back to Fadrex. The koloss followed.

He felt . . . stronger. It was silly—the mist spirit hadn't really given him any useful information. It had been almost like a child. The things it had told him were mostly just confirmations of what he'd already suspected.

Yet, as he walked, he moved with more determination. If only because he knew there were things in the world he didn't understand—and that meant, perhaps, there were possibilities he didn't see. Possibilities for survival.

Possibilities to land safely on the other side of the chasm, even when logic told him not to jump.

*I don't know why Preservation decided to use his last bit of life appearing to Elend during his trek back to Fadrex. From what I understand, Elend didn't really learn that much from the meeting. By then, of course, Preservation was but a shadow of himself—and that shadow was under immense destructive pressure from Ruin.*

*Perhaps Preservation—or, the remnants of what he had been—wanted to get Elend alone. Or, perhaps he saw Elend kneeling in that field, and knew that the emperor of men was very close to just lying down in the ash, never to rise again. Either way, Preservation did appear, and in doing so exposed himself to Ruin's attacks. Gone were the days when Preservation could turn away an Inquisitor with a bare gesture, gone—even—were the days when he could strike a man down to bleed and die.*

*By the time Elend saw the "mist spirit," Preservation must have been barely coherent. I wonder what Elend would have done, had he known that he was in the presence of a dying god—that on that night, he had been the last witness of Preservation's passing. If Elend had waited just a few more minutes on that ashen field, he would have seen a body—short of stature, black hair, prominent nose—fall from the mists and slump dead into the ash.*

*As it was, the corpse was left alone to be buried in ash. The world was dying. Its gods had to die with it.*

# 56

SPOOK STOOD IN THE DARK CAVERN, looking at his board and paper. He had it propped up, like an artist's canvas, though he wasn't sketching images, but ideas. Kelsier had always outlined his plans for the crew on a charcoal board. It seemed like a good idea, even though Spook wasn't explaining plans to a crew, but rather trying to work them out for himself.

The trick was going to be getting Quellion to expose himself as an Allomancer before the people. Durn had told them what to look for, and the crowds would be ready, waiting for confirmation of what they had been told. However, for Spook's plan to work, he'd have to catch the Citizen in a public place, then get the man to use his powers in a way that was obvious to those watching.

*I can't let him just Push on a distant metal, then*, he thought, scratching a note to himself on the charcoal board. *I'll need him to shoot into the air, or perhaps blast some coins. Something visible, something we can tell everyone to watch for*.

That would be tough, but Spook was confident. He had several ideas scratched up on the board, ranging from attacking Quellion at a rally to tricking him into using his powers when he thought nobody was looking. Slowly, the thoughts were jelling into a cohesive plan.

*I really* can *do this*, Spook thought, smiling. *I always felt such awe for Kelsier's leadership abilities. But, it's not as hard as I thought*.

Or, at least, that was what he told himself. He tried not to think about the consequences of a failure. Tried not to think about the fact that he still held Beldre hostage. Tried not to worry about the fact that when he awoke some mornings—his tin having burned away during the night—his body felt completely numb, unable to feel anything until he got more metal as fuel. Tried not to focus on the riots and incidents his appearances, speeches, and work among the people were causing.

Kelsier kept telling him not to worry. That should be enough for him. Shouldn't it?

After a few minutes, he heard someone approaching, footsteps quiet—but not too quiet for him—on the stone. The rustle of a dress, yet without perfume, let him know exactly who it was.

"Spook?"

He lowered the charcoal and turned. Beldre stood at the far side of his "room." He'd made himself an alcove between several of the storage shelves, partitioned off with sheets—his own personal office. The Citizen's sister wore a beautiful noble gown of green and white.

Spook smiled. "You like the dresses?"

She looked down, flushing slightly. "I . . . haven't worn anything like this in years."

"Nobody in this city has," Spook said, setting down the charcoal and wiping his fingers on a rag. "But, then, that makes it pretty easy to get them, if you know which buildings to loot. It looks like I matched your size pretty well, eh?"

"Yes," she said quietly, drifting forward. The gown really did look good on her, and Spook found it a little difficult to focus as she drew closer. She eyed his charcoal board, then frowned. "Is . . . that supposed to make any sense?"

Spook shook himself free of his trance. The charcoal board was a mess of scratches and notations. That, in itself, would have made it difficult enough to read. There was, however, something else that made it even more incomprehensible.

"It's mostly written in Eastern street slang," Spook said.

"The language you grew up speaking?" she said, fingering the board's edge, careful not to touch the writing itself, lest she smudge it.

Spook nodded.

"Even the words are different," she said. "Wasing?"

"It kind of means 'was doing,' " Spook explained. "You start sentences with it. 'Wasing the run of there' would mean 'I was running to that place.' "

"Wasing the where of how of the finds," Beldre said, smiling slightly to herself as she read from the board. "It sounds like gibberish!"

"Wasing the how of wanting the doing," Spook said, smiling, falling into a full accent. Then he flushed, turning away.

"What?" she asked.

*Why do I always act so foolish around her?* he thought. *The others always made fun of my slang—even Kelsier thought it was silly. Now I start speaking it before her?*

He'd been feeling confident and sure as he studied his plans before she arrived. Why was it that the girl could always make him fall out of his leadership role and go back to being the old Spook? The Spook who had never been important.

"You shouldn't be ashamed of the accent," Beldre said. "I think it's kind of charming."

"You just said it was gibberish," Spook said, turning back to her.

"But that's the best part!" Beldre said. "It's gibberish on *purpose*, right?"

Spook remembered with fondness how his parents had responded to his adoption of the slang. It had been a kind of power, being able to say things that only his friends could understand. Of course, he'd started speaking in it so much that it had been hard to switch back.

"So," Beldre said, eyeing the board. "What does it say?"

Spook hesitated. "Just random thoughts," he said. She was his enemy—he had to remember that.

"Oh," she said. Something unreadable crossed her face, then she turned away from the board.

*Her brother always banished her from his conferences*, Spook thought. *Never told her anything important. Left her feeling like she was useless*. . . .

"I need to get your brother to use his Allomancy in front of the people," Spook found himself saying. "To let them see that he's a hypocrite."

Beldre looked back.

"The board is filled with my ideas," Spook said. "Most of them aren't very good. I'm kind of leaning toward just attacking him, making him defend himself."

"That won't work," Beldre said.

"Why not?"

"He won't use Allomancy against you. He wouldn't expose himself like that."

"If I threaten him strongly enough he will."

Beldre shook her head. "You promised not to hurt him. Remember?"

"No," Spook said, raising a finger. "I promised to *try* to find another way. And, I don't intend to kill him. I just need to make him *think* that I'd kill him."

Beldre fell silent again. His heart lurched.

"I won't do it, Beldre," Spook said. "I won't kill him."

"You promise that?"

Spook nodded.

She looked up at him, then smiled. "I want to write him a letter. Perhaps I can talk him into listening to you; we could avoid the need for this in the first place."

"All right . . ." Spook said. "But, you realize I'll have to read the letter to make certain you're not revealing anything that could hurt my position."

Beldre nodded.

Of course, he'd do more than read it. He'd rewrite it on another sheet of paper, changing the line order, and then add a few unimportant words. He'd worked on too many thieving crews to be unaware of ciphers. But, assuming that Beldre was being honest with him, a letter from her to Quellion was a good idea. It couldn't help but strengthen Spook's position.

He opened his mouth to ask whether or not her sleeping accommodations were acceptable, but cut himself off as he heard someone approaching. Harder footsteps this time. Captain Goradel, he guessed.

Sure enough, the soldier appeared around the corner to Spook's "room" a short time later.

"My lord," the soldier said. "You should see this."

The soldiers were gone.

Sazed looked through the window with the others, inspecting the empty plot of ground where Quellion's troops had been camped for the last few weeks, watching the Ministry building.

"When did they leave?" Breeze asked, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Just now," Goradel explained.

The move felt ominous to Sazed for some reason. He stood beside Spook, Breeze, and Goradel—though the others seemed to take the soldiers' retreat as a good sign.

"Well, it will make sneaking out easier," Goradel noted.

"More than that," Spook said. "It means I can incorporate our own soldiers in the plan against Quellion. We'd never have gotten them out of the building secretly with half an army on our doorstep, but now . . ."

"Yes," Goradel said. "But where did they go? Do you think Quellion is suspicious of us?"

Breeze snorted. "That, my dear man, sounds like a question for your scouts. Why not have them search out where that army went?"

Goradel nodded. But then, to Sazed's slight surprise, the soldier looked toward Spook for a confirmation. Spook nodded, and the captain moved off to give the orders.

*He looks to the boy over Breeze and I*, Sazed thought. He shouldn't have been surprised. Sazed himself had agreed to let Spook take the lead, and to Goradel, all three of them—Sazed, Breeze, Spook—were probably equal. All were in Elend's inner circle, and of the three, Spook was the best warrior. It made sense for Goradel to look to him as a source of authority.

It just felt strange to see Spook giving orders to the soldiers. Spook had always been so quiet during the days of the original crew. And yet, Sazed was beginning to respect the boy too. Spook knew how to give orders in a way that Sazed could not, and he had shown remarkable foresight in his preparations in Urteau, as well as his plans to overthrow Quellion. He had a flair for the dramatic that Breeze kept saying was remarkable.

And yet, there was that bandage on the boy's eyes, and the other things he hadn't explained. Sazed knew that he should have pushed harder for answers, but the truth was that he trusted Spook. Sazed had known Spook from the lad's young teenage years, when he'd barely been capable of communicating with others.

As Goradel moved off, Spook looked to Sazed and Breeze. "Well?"

"Quellion is planning something," Breeze said. "Seems too early to jump to conclusions, though."

"I agree," Spook said. "For now, we go forward with the plan."

With that, they split up. Sazed turned, making his way back down and over to the far side of the cavern—to where a large group of soldiers worked in an area well lit with lanterns. On his arms, he wore the familiar weight of his copperminds—two on his forearms, two on his upper arms. In them sat the knowledge of engineering he needed to complete the task Spook had assigned him.

Lately, Sazed didn't know what to think. Each time he climbed the ladder and looked out over the city, he saw worse signs. The ashfalls were heavier. The earthquakes were growing more and more frequent, and more and more violent. The mists were lingering later and later in the day. The sky grew dark, the red sun more like a vast bleeding scar than a source of light and life. The ashmounts made the horizon red even during the night.

It seemed to him that the end of the world should be a time when men *found* faith, not a time when they lost it. Yet, the little time that he'd devoted to studying the religions in his portfolio had not been encouraging. Twenty more religions eliminated, leaving just thirty potential candidates.

He shook his head to himself, moving among the toiling soldiers. Several groups worked on wooden contraptions filled with rocks—weight systems that would fall to block off the water running into the cavern. Others worked on the system of pulleys that would lower the mechanism. After about a half hour or so, Sazed determined that they were all doing their tasks well, and returned to his calculations. However, as he walked to his table, he saw Spook approaching him.

"Riots," Spook said, falling into step beside Sazed.

"Excuse me, Lord Spook?"

"That's where the soldiers went. Some people started a fire, and the soldiers guarding us were needed to put it out before the whole city went up. There's a lot more wood here than there is in Central Dominance cities."

Sazed frowned. "Our actions here are becoming dangerous, I fear."

Spook shrugged. "Seems like a good thing to me. This city is on the edge of snapping, Saze. Just like Luthadel was when we took control."

"Only the presence of Elend Venture kept that city from destroying itself," Sazed said quietly. "Kelsier's revolution could easily have turned into a disaster."

"It will be all right," Spook said.

Sazed eyed the young man as the two of them walked through the cavern. Spook seemed to be trying very hard to project an air of confidence. Perhaps Sazed was just growing cynical, but he found it difficult to be as optimistic as Spook.

"You don't believe me," Spook said.

"I'm sorry, Lord Spook," Sazed said. "It's not that . . . it's just that I seem to have trouble having faith in anything lately."

"Oh."

They walked silently for a while, eventually finding themselves at the edge of the glassy underground lake. Sazed paused beside the waters, his worries chewing at his insides. He stood for a long moment, feeling frustrated, but not really having an outlet.

"Don't you even worry, Spook?" Sazed finally asked. "Worry that we'll fail?"

"I don't know," Spook said, shuffling.

"And, it's so much more than *this*," Sazed said, waving back at the work crews. "The very sky seems to be our enemy. The land is dying. Don't you wonder what good any of this is? Why we even struggle? We're all doomed anyway!"

Spook flushed. Then, finally, he looked down. "I don't know," he repeated. "I . . . I understand what you're doing, Sazed. You're trying to find out if I doubt myself. I guess you can see through me."

Sazed frowned, but Spook wasn't looking.

"You're right," the young man said then, wiping his brow, "I *do* wonder if I'll fail. I guess Tindwyl would be annoyed at me, wouldn't she? She didn't think that leaders should doubt themselves."

That gave Sazed pause. *What am I doing?* he thought, horrified at his outburst. *Is this what I've really become? During most of my life, I resisted the Synod, rebelling against my own people. Yet, I was at peace, confident that I was doing the right thing.*

Now I come here, where people need me most, and I just sit around and snap at my friends, telling them that we're just going to die?

"But," Spook said, looking up, "though I doubt myself, I still think we'll be all right."

Sazed was surprised at the hope he saw in the boy's eyes. *That's what I've lost.*

"How can you say that?" Sazed asked.

"I don't know, really," Spook said. "I just . . . Well, do you remember that question you asked me when you first got here? We were standing by the lake, just over there. You asked me about faith. You asked what good it was, if it just led people to hurt each other, like Quellion's faith in the Survivor has done."

Sazed looked out over the lake. "Yes," he said softly. "I remember."

"I've been thinking about that ever since," Spook said. "And . . . I think I might have an answer."

"Please."

"Faith," Spook said, "means that it doesn't matter what happens. You can trust that somebody is watching. Trust that somebody will make it all right."

Sazed frowned.

"It means that there will always be a way," Spook whispered, staring forward, eyes glazed, as if seeing things that Sazed could not.

*Yes*, Sazed thought. *That is what I have lost. And it's what I need to get back*.

*I have come to see that each power has three aspects: a physical one, which can be seen in the creations made by Ruin and Preservation; a spiritual one in the unseen energy that permeates all of the world; and a cognitive one in the minds which controlled that energy*.

*There is more to this. Much more that even I do not yet comprehend*.

# 57

YOU SHOULD KILL THEM.

Vin looked up as she heard a pair of guards pass the door to her cell. There was one good thing about Ruin's voice—it tended to warn her when people were nearby, even if it did always tell her to kill them.

A part of her did wonder if, in fact, she was mad. After all, she saw and heard things that nobody else could. However, if she were mad, there would really be no way for her to realize it. So, she simply decided to accept what she heard, and move on.

In truth, she was glad for Ruin's voice on occasion. Other than Ruin, she was alone in the cell. All was still. Even the soldiers did not speak—likely at Yomen's orders. Plus, each time Ruin spoke, she felt as if she learned something. For instance, she had learned that Ruin could either manifest in person or affect her from a distance. When its actual presence was not with her in the cell, Ruin's words were far more simple and vague.

Take, for instance, Ruin's order that she kill the guards. She couldn't follow that suggestion, not from within the cell. It wasn't so much a specific order as it was an attempt to change her inclinations. Again, that reminded her of Allomancy, which could exert a general influence over a person's emotions.

*General influence . . .*

Something suddenly occurred to her. She quested out, and—sure enough—she could still feel the thousand koloss that Elend had given her. They were under her control still, distant, obeying the general orders she'd given them before.

Could she use them somehow? Deliver a message to Elend, perhaps? Get them to attack the city and free her? As she considered them, both plans seemed flawed. Sending them to Fadrex would just get them killed, as well as risk upsetting whatever plans Elend had for a potential attack. She could send them to find Elend, but that would probably just get them killed by the camp guards, who would be afraid they were bloodlusting. Plus, what would she have them do if they did get to him? She could order them to take actions, like attack or pick someone up, but she'd never tried something as delicate as ordering one to speak certain words.

She tried forming those words in her head and getting them to the koloss, but all she sensed back was confusion. She'd have to work on that some more. And, as she considered, she wondered if getting a message to Elend would really be the best way to use them. It would let Ruin know about a potential tool she had that, maybe, he hadn't noticed.

"I see that he finally found a cell for you," a voice said.

Vin looked up, and there he was. Still wearing Reen's form, Ruin stood in the small cell with her. He maintained a straight-backed posture, standing almost benevolently over her. Vin sat up on her cot. She'd never thought that of all her metals, she would miss bronze so much. When Ruin returned to visit in "person," burning bronze had let her feel him via bronzepulses and gave her warning that he had arrived, even if he didn't appear to her.

"I'll admit that I'm disappointed in you, Vin," Ruin said. He used Reen's voice, but he imbued it with a sense of . . . age. Of quiet wisdom. The fatherly nature of that voice, mixed with Reen's face and her own knowledge of the thing's desire to destroy, was disturbing.

"The last time you were captured and locked away without metals," Ruin continued, "not a night passed before you'd killed the Lord Ruler and overthrown the empire. Now you've been soundly imprisoned for what . . . a week now?"

Vin didn't respond. *Why come taunt me? Does it expect to learn something?*

Ruin shook its head. "I would have thought at the very least that you'd have killed Yomen."

"Why are you so concerned with his death?" Vin asked. "It seems to me that he's on your side."

Ruin shook its head, standing with hands clasped behind its back. "You still don't understand, I see. You're *all* on my side, Vin. I created you. You're my tools—each and every one of you. Zane, Yomen, you, your dear Emperor Venture . . ."

"No. Zane was yours, and Yomen is obviously misguided. But Elend . . . he'll fight against you."

"But he can't," Ruin said. "That's what you refuse to understand, child. You *cannot* fight me, for by the mere act of fighting you advance my goals."

"Evil men, perhaps, help you," Vin said. "But not Elend. He's a good person, and not even you can deny that."

"Vin, Vin. *Why* can't you see? This isn't about good or evil. Morality doesn't even enter into it. Good men will kill as quickly for what they want as evil men—only the things they want are different."

Vin fell silent.

Ruin shook its head. "I keep trying to explain. This process we are engaged in, the end of all things—it's not a *fight*, but a simple culmination of inevitability. Can any man make a pocket watch that won't eventually wind down? Can you imagine a lantern that won't eventually burn out? All things end. Think of me as a caretaker—the one who watches the shop and makes certain that the lights are turned out, that everything is cleaned up, once closing time arrives."

For a moment, he made her question. There was some truth in his words, and seeing the changes in the land these last few years—changes that started before Ruin was even released—did make her wonder.

Yet, something about the conversation bothered her. If what Ruin said was completely true, then why did he care about her? Why return and speak to her?

"I guess that you've won, then," she said quietly.

"Won?" Ruin asked. "Don't you understand? There was nothing for me to win, child. Things happen as they must."

"I see," Vin said.

"Yes, perhaps you do," Ruin said. "I think that *you* just might be able to." It turned and began to walk quietly from one side of the cell toward the other. "You are a piece of me, you know. Beautiful destroyer. Blunt and effective. Of all those I've claimed over this brief thousand years, you are the only one I think just might be able to understand me."

*Why*, Vin thought, *it's gloating! That's why Ruin is here—because it wants to make certain that someone understands what it has accomplished!* There was a feeling of pride and victory in Ruin's eyes. They were human emotions, emotions that Vin could understand.

At that moment, Ruin stopped being an *it* in her mind, and instead became a *he*.

Vin began to think—for the first time—that she could find a way to beat Ruin. He was powerful, perhaps even incomprehensible. But she had seen humanity in him, and that humanity could be deceived, manipulated, and broken. Perhaps it was this same conclusion that Kelsier had drawn, after looking into the Lord Ruler's eyes that fateful night when he had been captured. She finally felt as if she understood him, and what it must have felt like to undertake something so bold as the defeat of the Lord Ruler.

*But Kelsier had years to plan*, Vin thought. *I . . . I don't even know how long I have. Not long, I would guess*. Even as she thought, another earthquake began. The walls trembled, and Vin heard guards cursing in the hallway as something fell and broke. And Ruin . . . he seemed to be in a state of bliss, his eyes closed, mouth open slightly and looking pleasured as the building and city rumbled.

Eventually, all fell still. Ruin opened his eyes, staring her down. "This work I do, it's about *passion*, Vin. It's about dynamic events; it's about change! That is why you and your Elend are so important to me. People with passion are people who will destroy—for a man's passion is not *true* until he proves how much he's willing to sacrifice for it. Will he kill? Will he go to war? Will he break and discard that which he has, all in the name of what he *needs?*"

*It's not just that Ruin feels that he's accomplished something*, Vin thought, *he feels that he's overcome. Despite what he claims, he feels that he's won—that he's defeated something . . . but who or what? Us? We would be no adversary for a force like Ruin*.

A voice from the past seemed to whisper to her from long ago. *What's the first rule of Allomancy, Vin?*

Consequence. Action and reaction. If Ruin had power to destroy, then there was something that opposed him. It had to be. Ruin had an opposite, an opponent. Or, he once had.

"What did you do to him?" Vin asked.

Ruin hesitated, frowning as he turned toward her.

"Your opposite," Vin said. "The one who once stopped you from destroying the world."

Ruin was silent for a long moment. Then he smiled, and Vin saw something chilling in that smile. A knowledge that he was right. Vin *was* part of him. She understood him.

"Preservation is dead," Ruin said.

"You killed him?"

Ruin shrugged. "Yes, but no. He gave of himself to craft a cage. Though his throes of agony have lasted several thousand years, now, finally, he is gone. And the bargain has come to its fruition."

*Preservation*, Vin thought, a piece of a gigantic whole clicking into place. *The opposite of Ruin. A force like that couldn't have* destroyed *his enemy, because he would represent the opposite of destruction. But imprisonment, that would be within his powers*.

*Imprisonment that ended when I gave up the power at the Well*.

"And so you see the inevitability," Ruin said softly.

"You couldn't create it yourself, could you?" Vin asked. "The world, life. You can't create, you can only destroy."

"He couldn't create either," Ruin said. "He could only preserve. Preservation is not creation."

"And so you worked together," Vin said.

"Both with a promise," Ruin said. "My promise was to work with him to create you—life that thinks, life that loves."

"And his promise?" Vin asked, fearing that she knew the answer.

"That I could destroy you eventually," Ruin said softly. "And I have come to claim what was promised me. The only point in creating something is to watch it die. Like a story that must come to a climax, what I have done will not be fulfilled until the end has arrived."

*It can't be true*, Vin thought. *Preservation. If he really represents a power in the universe, then he couldn't really have been destroyed, could he?*

"I know what you are thinking," Ruin said. "You cannot enlist Preservation's power. He is dead. He couldn't kill me, you see. He could only imprison me."

Yes. I figured that last part out already. You really can't read my mind, can you?

Ruin continued. "It was a villainous act, I must say. Preservation tried to escape our bargain. Would you not call that an evil deed? It is as I said before—good and evil have little to do with ruin or preservation. An evil man will protect that which he desires as surely as a good man."

*But something is keeping Ruin from destroying the world now*, she thought. *For all his words about stories and endings, he is not a force that would wait for an "appropriate" moment. There is more to this, more that I'm not understanding*.

What is holding him back?

"I've come to you," Ruin said, "because I want you, at least, to watch and see. To know. For it has come."

Vin perked up. "What? The end?"

Ruin nodded.

"How long?" Vin asked.

"Days," Ruin said. "But not weeks."

Vin felt a chill, realizing something. He had come to her, finally revealing himself, because she was captured. He thought that there was no further chance for mankind. He assumed that he had won.

*Which means that there is a way to beat him*, she thought with determination. *And it involves me. But I can't do it here, or he wouldn't have come to gloat*.

And that meant she had to get free. Quickly.

*Once you begin to understand these things, you can see how Ruin was trapped even though Preservation's mind was gone, expended to create the prison. Though Preservation's consciousness was mostly destroyed, his spirit and body were still in force. And, as an opposite force of Ruin, these could still prevent Ruin from destroying.*

*Or, at least, keep him from destroying things too quickly. Once his mind was "freed" from its prison the destruction accelerated quickly*.

# 58

"THROW YOUR WEIGHT HERE," Sazed said, pointing at a wooden lever. "The counterweights will fall, swinging down all four floodgates and stemming the flow into the cavern. I warn you, however—the explosion of water above will be rather spectacular. We should be able to fill the city's canals in a matter of hours, and I suspect that a portion of the northern city will be flooded."

"To dangerous levels?" Spook asked.

"I do not think so," Sazed said. "The water will burst out through the conduits in the interchange building beside us. I've inspected the equipment there, and it appears sound. The water *should* flow directly into the canals, and from there exit the city. Either way, I would not want to be in those streetslots when this water comes. The current will be quite swift."

"I've taken care of that," Spook said. "Durn is going to make certain the people know to be clear of the waterways."

Sazed nodded. Spook couldn't help but be impressed. The complicated construct of wood, gears, and wire looked like it should have taken months to build, not weeks. Large nets of rocks weighed down the four gates, which hung, ready to block off the river.

"This is amazing, Saze," Spook said. "With a sign as spectacular as the reappearance of the canal waters, the people will be *certain* to listen to us instead of the Citizen." Breeze and Durn's men had been working hard over the last few weeks, whispering to the people to watch for a miracle from the Survivor of the Flames. Something extraordinary, something to prove—once and for all—who was the rightful master of the city.

"It is the best I could do," Sazed said with a modest bow of the head. "The seals won't be perfectly tight, of course. However, that should matter little."

"Men?" Spook said, turning to four of Goradel's soldiers. "You understand what you are to do?"

"Yes, sir," the lead soldier said. "We wait for a messenger, then throw the lever there."

"If no messenger comes," Spook said, "throw the switch at nightfall."

"And," Sazed said, raising a finger, "don't forget to twist the sealing mechanism in the other room, plugging the water flow *out* of this chamber. Otherwise, the lake will eventually empty. Better that we keep this reservoir full, just in case."

"Yes, sir," the soldier said with a nod.

Spook turned, looking back over the cavern. Soldiers bustled about, preparing. He was going to need most of them for the night's activities. They looked eager—they'd spent too long holed up in the cavern and the building above. To the side, Beldre regarded Sazed's contraption with interest. Spook broke away from the soldiers, approaching her with a quick step.

"You're really going to do it?" she said. "Return the water to the canals?"

Spook nodded.

"I sometimes imagined what it would be like to have the waters back," she said. "The city wouldn't feel as barren—it would become important, like it was during the early days of the Final Empire. All those beautiful waterways. No more ugly gashes in the ground."

"It will be a wonderful sight," Spook said, smiling.

Beldre just shook her head. "It . . . amazes me that you can be such different people at the same time. How can the man who would do such a beautiful thing for my city also plan such destruction?"

"Beldre, I'm not planning to destroy your city."

"Just its government."

"I do what needs to be done."

"Men say that so easily," Beldre said. "Yet, everybody seems to have a different opinion of what 'needs' to be done."

"Your brother had his chance," Spook said.

Beldre looked down. She still carried with her the letter they'd received earlier in the day—a response from Quellion. Beldre's plea had been heartfelt, but the Citizen had responded with insults, implying that she had been forced to write the words because she was being held prisoner.

*I do not fear a usurper*, the letter read. *I am protected by the Survivor himself. You will not have this city, tyrant.*

Beldre looked up. "Don't do it," she whispered. "Give him more time. Please."

Spook hesitated.

"There is no more time," Kelsier whispered. "Do what must be done."

"I'm sorry," Spook said, turning from her. "Stay with the soldiers—I'm leaving four men to guard you. Not to keep you from fleeing, though they will do that. I want you inside this cavern. I can't promise that the streets will be safe."

He heard her sniffle quietly behind him. He left her standing there, then walked toward the gathering group of soldiers. One man brought Spook his dueling canes and singed cloak. Goradel stood at the front of his soldiers, looking proud. "We're ready, my lord."

Breeze walked up beside him, shaking his head, dueling cane tapping the ground. He sighed. "Well, here we go again. . . ."

The evening's occasion was a speech Quellion had been publicizing for some time. He had stopped executions recently, as if finally realizing that the deaths were contributing to the instability of his rule. He apparently intended to swing back toward benevolence, holding rallies, emphasizing the wonderful things he was doing for the city.

Spook walked alone, a little ahead of Breeze, Allrianne, and Sazed, who chatted behind. Some of Goradel's soldiers followed as well, wearing common Urteau garb. Spook had split their force, sending it by different paths. It wasn't dark yet—to Spook the falling sun was bright, forcing him to wear his blindfold and spectacles. Quellion liked to hold his speeches in the evening, so that the mists arrived during them. He liked the implied connection to the Survivor.

A figure hobbled out of a side streetslot next to Spook. Durn walked with a stooped posture, a cloak obscuring his figure. Spook respected the twisted man's insistence on leaving the security of the Harrows, going out to run jobs himself. Perhaps that was why he'd ended up as leader of the city's underground.

"People are gathering, as expected," Durn said, coughing quietly. "Some of your soldiers are already there."

Spook nodded.

"Things are . . . unsettled in the city," Durn said. "It worries me. Segments I can't control have already started looting some of the prohibited noble mansions. My men are all busy trying to get people out of the streetslots."

"It will be all right," Spook said. "Most of the populace will be at the speech."

Durn was silent for a moment. "Word is that Quellion is going to use his speech to denounce you, then finally order an attack on the Ministry building where you're staying."

"It's a good thing we won't be there, then," Spook said. "He shouldn't have withdrawn his soldiers, even if he *did* need them to keep order in the city."

Durn nodded.

"What?" Spook said.

"I just hope you can handle this, lad. Once this night is through, the city will be yours. Treat it better than Quellion did."

"I will," Spook said.

"My men will create a disturbance for you at the meeting. Farewell." Durn took the next left, disappearing down another streetslot alleyway.

Ahead, the crowds were already gathering. Spook put up the hood of his cloak, keeping his eyes obscured as he wove his way through the crowd. He quickly left Sazed and the others behind, pushing his way up a ramp to the old city square—the place Quellion had chosen for his speech. His men had erected a wooden stage, from which the Citizen could face the crowd. The speech was already in progress. Spook stopped just a short distance away from a guard patrol. Many of Quellion's soldiers surrounded the stage, eyeing the crowd.

Minutes passed, and Spook spent them listening to Quellion's voice ring, yet paying no attention to the words. Ash fell around him, dusting the crowd. Mists began to twist in the air.

He listened, listened with ears no other man had. He used Allomancy's strange ability to filter and ignore—hearing through the chatter and whispers and shuffles and coughs, just as he could somehow see through the obscuring mists. He heard the city. Yells in the distance.

It was beginning.

"Too fast!" a voice whispered, a beggar moving up to Spook's side. "Durn sends word. Riots in the streets, ones he didn't start! Durn cannot control them. My lord, the city is beginning to burn!"

"It was a night not unlike this one," another voice whispered. Kelsier's voice. "A glorious night. When I took the city of Luthadel, and made it mine."

A disturbance began at the back of the crowd; Durn's men were causing their distraction. Some of Quellion's guards pulled away to quell this nearby riot. The Citizen continued to shout his accusations. Spook heard his own name in Quellion's words, but the context was simply noise.

Spook tilted his head back, looking up at the sky. Ash fell toward him, as if he were sailing through it into the air. Like a Mistborn.

His hood fell back. Men around him whispered in surprise.

A clock rang in the distance. Goradel's soldiers rushed the stage. Around him, Spook could feel a glow rising. The fires of rebellion, burning in the city. Just like the night he had overthrown the Lord Ruler. The torches of revolution. Then the people had put Elend on the throne.

This time, it would be Spook they elevated.

*Weak no more,* he thought. *Never weak again!*

The last of Quellion's soldiers rushed away from the stage, moving into combat with Goradel's men. The crowd shied away from the battle, but nobody ran. They had been prepared well for the night's events. Many would be waiting, watching for the signs Spook and Durn had promised—signs revealed just a few hours before, to minimize the risk of Quellion's spies learning Spook's plan. A miracle in the canals, and proof that Quellion was an Allomancer.

If the Citizen—or even any of his guards on the stage—shot coins or used Allomancy to leap into the air, the people would see. They would know that they had been deceived. And that would be the end. The crowd surged away from the cursing soldiers, and their withdrawal left Spook standing alone. Quellion's voice finally trailed off. Some of his soldiers were rushing up to get him off the stage.

Quellion's eyes found Spook. Only then did they show fear.

Spook leaped. He couldn't Steelpush himself, but his legs were fueled by the power of flared pewter. He soared up, easily cresting the lip of the stage, landing in a crouch. He pulled free a dueling cane, then rushed the Citizen.

Behind him, people began to cry out. Spook heard his name, Survivor of the Flames. Survivor. He wouldn't just kill Quellion, but destroy him. Undermining his rule, just as Breeze had suggested. At that moment, the Soother and Allrianne would be manipulating the crowd, keeping them from running away in a panic. Holding them there.

So they could watch the show Spook was about to give.

The guards at Quellion's side saw Spook too late. He dropped the first one easily, crushing the man's skull inside his helmet. Quellion screamed for more help.

Spook swung at another man, but his target moved out of the way, supernaturally quick. Spook pulled to the side just in time to dodge a blow, the weapon grazing the side of his cheek. The man was an Allomancer—a pewter burner. The large brute who carried no sword, but instead an obsidian-edged cudgel.

*Pewter isn't spectacular enough,* Spook thought. *The people won't know how to tell if a man is swinging too quickly or enduring too much. I have to make Quellion shoot coins.*

The Thug backed away, obviously noting Spook's own increased speed. He kept his weapon raised warily, but did not attack. He just had to stall, letting his companion pull Quellion away. The Thug would be no easy fight—he would be more skilled than Spook, and even stronger.

"Your family is free," Spook lied quietly. "We saved them earlier. Help us capture Quellion—he no longer has a hold on you."

The Thug paused, lowering his weapon.

"Kill him!" Kelsier snapped.

That hadn't been Spook's plan, but he responded to the prompting. He dodged inside the Thug's reach. The man turned in shock, and as he did, Spook delivered a backhanded blow to the skull. Spook's dueling cane shattered. The Thug stumbled to the ground, and Spook snatched up the man's fallen weapon, the obsidian-lined cudgel.

Quellion was at the edge of the stage. Spook jumped, sailing across the wooden platform. It was all right for him to use Allomancy; he hadn't preached against it. Only Quellion the hypocrite needed to fear using his powers.

Spook cut down the remaining guard as he landed—the jagged shards of obsidian ripping through flesh. The soldier fell, and Quellion spun.

"I don't fear you!" Quellion said, voice shaking. "I'm protected!"

"Kill him," Kelsier ordered, appearing visibly on the stage a short distance away. Usually, the Survivor only spoke in his mind; he hadn't actually appeared since that day in the burning building. It meant important things were happening.

Spook grabbed the Citizen by the front of his shirt, yanking him forward. Spook raised the length of wood, blood dripping from the obsidian shards onto the side of his hand.

"*No!*"

Spook froze at that voice, then glanced to the side. *She* was there, shoving her way through the crowd, approaching the open space before the stage.

"*Beldre*?" Spook asked. "How did you get out of the cavern?"

But, of course, she couldn't hear him. Only Spook's supernatural hearing had allowed him to pick her voice out of the sounds of fear and battle. He met her eyes across the distance, and saw her whispered words more than he heard them.

Please. You promised.

"Kill him!"

Quellion chose that moment to try and pull away. Spook turned, yanking back again—harder this time, nearly ripping Quellion's shirt free as he threw the man down to the wooden platform. Quellion cried out in pain, and Spook raised his brutal weapon with both hands.

Something sparked in the firelight. Spook barely felt the impact, though it shook him. He stumbled, looking down, seeing blood on his side. Something had pierced the flesh of his left arm and shoulder. Not an arrow, though it had moved like one. His arm drooped, and though he couldn't feel the pain, it seemed that his muscles weren't working properly.

Something hit me. A . . . coin.

He turned. Beldre stood at the front of the crowd, crying, her hand raised toward him.

*She was there that day I was captured,* Spook thought numbly, *at her brother's side. He always keeps her near. To protect her, we thought.*

Or the other way around?

Spook stood up straighter, Quellion whimpering in front of him. Spook's arm dripped a trail of blood from where Beldre's coin had hit, but he ignored it, staring at her.

"You were always the Allomancer," he whispered. "Not your brother."

And then, the crowd began to scream—likely prompted by Breeze. "The Citizen's sister is an Allomancer!"

"Hypocrite!"

"Liar!"

"He killed my uncle, yet left his own sister alive!"

Beldre cried out as the people, carefully prepared and planted, saw the proof that Spook had promised them. It didn't have the target he had intended, but the machine he had set in motion could not be halted now. The people gathered around Beldre, yelling in anger, shoving her among themselves.

Spook stepped toward her, raising his wounded arm. Then a shadow fell on him.

"She was always planning to betray you, Spook," Kelsier said.

Spook turned, looking at the Survivor. He stood tall and proud, like the day when he'd faced the Lord Ruler.

"You kept waiting for an assassin," Kelsier said. "You didn't realize that Quellion had already sent one. His sister. Didn't it strike you as strange that he'd let her get away from him and enter the enemy's own base? She was sent there to kill you. You, Sazed, and Breeze. The problem is, she was raised a pampered rich girl. She's not used to killing. She never was. You were never really in danger from her."

The crowd surged, and Spook spun, worried about Beldre. However, he calmed a bit as he realized that the people were simply pulling her toward the stage. "Survivor!" people were chanting. "Survivor of the Flames!"

"King!"

They cast Beldre before him, pushing her up onto the platform. Her scarlet clothing was ripped, her figure battered, her auburn hair a mess. To the side, Quellion groaned. Spook appeared to have broken his arm without realizing it.

Spook moved to help Beldre. She was bleeding from several small cuts, but she was alive. And she was crying.

"She was his bodyguard," Kelsier said, stepping over to Beldre. "That's why she was always with him. Quellion isn't an Allomancer. He never was."

Spook knelt beside the girl, cringing at her bruised form.

"Now, you must kill her," Kelsier said.

Spook looked up, blood seeping from the cut on the side of his face, where the Thug had grazed him. Blood dripped from his chin. "*What?*"

"You want power, Spook?" Kelsier said, stepping forward. "You want to be a better Allomancer? Well, power must come from somewhere. It is never free. This woman is a Coinshot. Kill her, and you can have her ability. I will give it to you."

Spook looked down at the weeping woman. He felt surreal, as if he were not quite there. His breathing was labored, each breath coming as a gasp, his body shaking despite his pewter. People chanted his name. Quellion was mumbling something. Beldre continued to cry.

Spook reached up with his bloodied hand, ripping off his blindfold, spectacles tumbling free. He stumbled to his feet, looking out over the city.

And saw it burning.

The sounds of rioting echoed through the streets. Flames burned in a dozen different spots, lighting the mists, casting a hellish haze over the city. Not the fires of rebellion at all. The fires of destruction.

"This is wrong . . ." Spook whispered.

"You will take the city, Spook," Kelsier said. "You will have what you always wanted! You'll be like Elend, and like Vin. Better than either! You'll have Elend's titles and Vin's power! You'll be like a god!"

Spook turned away from the burning city as something caught his attention. Quellion was reaching out with his good arm, reaching toward . . .

Toward Kelsier.

"Please," Quellion whispered. It seemed as if he could *see* the Survivor, though nobody else around them could. "My lord Kelsier, why have you forsaken me?"

"I gave you pewter, Spook," Kelsier said angrily, not looking at Quellion. "Will you deny me now? You must pull free one of the steel spikes that support this stage. Then, you must take the girl, and press her to your chest. Kill her with the spike, and drive it into your own body. That is the only way!"

*Kill her with the spike . . .* Spook thought, feeling numb. *This all began that day when I nearly died. I was fighting a Thug in the market; I used him as a shield. But . . . the other soldier struck anyway, stabbing through his friend and into me.*

Spook stumbled away from Beldre, kneeling beside Quellion. The man cried out as Spook forced him down against the wooden planks.

"That's right," Kelsier said. "Kill him first."

But Spook wasn't listening. He ripped Quellion's shirt, looking at the shoulder and chest. There was nothing odd about either. The Citizen's upper arm, however, had a length of metal piercing it. It appeared to be bronze. Hand shaking, Spook pulled the metal free. Quellion screamed.

But so did Kelsier.

Spook turned, bloodied bronze spike in his hand. Kelsier was enraged, hands like claws, stepping forward.

"What *are* you?" Spook asked.

The thing screamed, but Spook ignored it, looking down at his own chest. He ripped open his shirt, exposing the mostly healed wound in his shoulder. A glimmer of metal still shone there, the tip of the sword. The sword that had passed through an Allomancer—killing the man—and then entered Spook's own body. Kelsier had told him to leave the broken shard there. As a symbol of what Spook had gone through.

The point of the shard protruded from Spook's skin. How had he forgotten about it? How had he ignored such a relatively large piece of metal inside of his body? Spook reached for it.

"No!" Kelsier said. "Spook, do you want to go back to being normal? Do you want to be useless again? You'll lose your pewter, and go back to being weak, like you were when you let your uncle die!"

Spook wavered.

*No,* Spook thought. *Something is wrong. I was supposed to expose Quellion, get him to use his Allomancy, but I just attacked instead. I wanted to kill. I forgot about plans and preparation. I brought destruction to this city.*

This is not right!

He pulled the glass dagger from his boot. Kelsier screamed terribly in his ears, but Spook reached up anyway, slicing the flesh of his chest. He reached in with pewter-enhanced fingers and grabbed the steel shard that was embedded inside.

Then, he ripped the bit of metal free, casting it across the stage, crying out at the shock of pain. Kelsier vanished immediately. And so did Spook's ability to burn pewter.

It hit him all at once—the fatigue of pushing himself so hard during his time in Urteau. The wounds he'd been ignoring. The sudden explosion of light, sound, smell, and sensation that pewter had let him resist. It overcame him like a physical force, crushing him down. He collapsed to the platform.

He groaned, unable to think anymore. He could simply let the blackness take him. . . .

Her city is burning.

Blackness . . .

Thousands will die in the flames.

The mists tickled his cheeks. In the cacophony, Spook had let his tin dim, relieving him of sensation, leaving him feeling blissfully numb. It was better that way.

You want to be like Kelsier? Really like Kelsier? Then fight when you are beaten!

"Lord Spook!" The voice was faint.

Survive!

With a scream of pain, Spook flared tin. As the metal always did, it brought a wave of sensations—thousands of them, shocking him at once. Pain. Feeling. Hearing. Sounds, smells, lights.

And lucidity.

Spook forced himself to his knees, coughing. Blood still streamed down his arm. He looked up. Sazed was running toward the platform.

"Lord Spook!" Sazed said, puffing as he arrived. "Lord Breeze is trying to damp down riots, but we pushed this city too far, I think! The people will destroy it in their rage."

"The flames," Spook croaked. "We have to put out the fires. The city is too dry; it has too much wood. It will burn, with everyone in it."

Sazed looked grave. "There is no way. We must get out! This riot will destroy us."

Spook glanced to the side. Beldre was kneeling beside her brother. She'd bound his wound, and then made a makeshift sling for his arm. Quellion glanced at Spook, looking dazed. As if he'd just awoken from a dream.

Spook stumbled to his feet. "We won't abandon the city, Sazed."

"But—"

"*No!*" Spook said. "I ran from Luthadel and left Clubs to die. I will not run again! We can stop the flames. We just need water."

Sazed paused.

"Water," Beldre said, standing.

"The canals will fill soon," Spook said. "We can organize fire brigades—use the flood to stop the flames."

Beldre glanced down. "There will be no flood, Spook. The guards you left . . . I attacked them with coins."

Spook felt a chill. "Dead?"

She shook her head, hair disheveled, her face scratched. "I don't know," she said quietly. "I didn't look."

"The waters have not come yet," Sazed said. "They . . . should have been released by now."

"Then we will bring them!" Spook snapped. He spun at Quellion, then stumbled, feeling dizzy. "You!" he said, pointing at the Citizen. "You would be king of this city? Well, lead this people, then. Get control of them and prepare them to put out the fires."

"I can't," Quellion said. "They'll kill me for what I've done."

Spook wobbled, light-headed. He steadied himself against a beam, holding his head. Beldre took a step toward him.

Spook looked up, meeting Quellion's eyes. The fires of the city were so bright that his flared tin made it difficult to see. Yet, he dared not release the metal—only the power of noise, heat, and pain was keeping him conscious.

"You *will* go to them," Spook said. "I don't give a damn if they rip you apart, Quellion. You're going to try to save this city. If you don't, I'll kill you myself. *Do you understand?*"

The Citizen froze, then nodded.

"Sazed," Spook said, "take him to Breeze and Allrianne. I'm going to the cache. I'll bring the floodwaters to the canals, one way or another. Have Breeze and the others form fire brigades to douse the flames as soon as there is water."

Sazed nodded. "It is a good plan. But Goradel will lead the Citizen. I am coming with you."

Spook nodded wearily. Then, as Sazed moved off to get the guard captain—who had apparently established a defensive perimeter around the square—Spook climbed from the stage and forced himself to begin moving toward the cache.

Soon, he noticed someone catch up to him. Then, after a few moments, that person passed him and ran on. Part of his mind knew it was a good thing that Sazed had decided to move on—the Terrisman had created the mechanism that would flood the city. He would throw the lever. Spook wasn't needed.

Keep moving.

He did, walking on, as if each step were in atonement for what he had done to the city. After a short time, he realized that someone was at his side, tying a bandage on his arm.

He blinked. "Beldre?"

"I betrayed you," she said, looking down. "But, I didn't have a choice. I couldn't let you kill him. I . . ."

"You did the right thing," Spook said. "Something . . . something was interfering, Beldre. It had your brother. It almost had me. I don't know. We have to keep walking, though. The lair is close. Just up the ramp."

She supported him as they walked. Spook smelled the smoke before he got there. He saw the light, and felt the heat. He and Beldre climbed up to the top of the ramp, practically crawling, for she was nearly as battered as he was. However, Spook knew what he would find.

The Ministry building, like so much of the town, was burning. Sazed stood before it, hand raised before his eyes. To Spook's overenhanced senses, the brilliance of the flames was so great that he had to look away. The heat made him feel as if he were standing just inches from the sun.

Sazed tried to get closer to the building, but was forced back. He turned toward Spook, shielding his face. "It's too hot!" he said. "We need to find some water, or perhaps some sand. Put out the fire before we can get below."

"Too late . . ." Spook whispered. "It will take too long."

Beldre turned, looking over her city. To Spook's eyes, smoke seemed to twist and rise everywhere in the bright sky, reaching up, as if to meet the falling ash.

He set his jaw, then stumbled forward, toward the fire.

"Spook!" she cried out. But, she needn't have worried. The flames were too hot. The pain was so strong that he had to pull back before he'd crossed even half the distance. He stumbled away, joining Beldre and Sazed, gasping quietly, blinking tears. His heightened senses made it even more difficult for him to approach the flames.

"There is nothing we can do here," Sazed said. "We must gather crews and come back."

"I've failed," Spook whispered.

"No more than any of us," Sazed said. "This is my fault. The emperor put me in command."

"We were supposed to bring security to the city," Spook said. "Not destruction. I should be able to stop those fires. But, it hurts too much."

Sazed shook his head. "Ah, Lord Spook. You are no god, to command fire at your whim. You are a man, like the rest of us. We're all just . . . men."

Spook allowed them to pull him away. Sazed was right, of course. He was just a man. Just Spook. Kelsier had chosen his crew with care. He'd left a note for them, when he died. It had listed the others—Vin, Breeze, Dockson, Clubs, and Ham. He'd spoken of them, of why he'd picked them.

But not Spook. The only one who didn't fit in.

I named you, Spook. You were my friend.

Isn't that enough?

Spook froze, forcing the others to stop. Sazed and Beldre looked at him. Spook stared into the night. A night that was far too bright. The fires burned. The smoke was pungent.

"No," Spook whispered, feeling fully lucid for the first time since the evening's violence had started. He pulled himself free of Sazed's grip and ran back toward the burning building.

"Spook!" Two voices yelled in the night.

Spook approached the flames. His breathing grew forced, and his skin grew hot. The fire was bright—consuming. He dashed right for it. Then, at the moment when the pain became too great, he extinguished his tin.

And became numb.

It happened just as it had before, when he had been trapped in the building without any metals. Flaring tin for so long had expanded his senses, but now that he wasn't burning it at all, those same senses became dull. His entire body grew deadened, lacking feeling or sensation.

He burst through the doorway into the building, flames raining around him.

His body burned. But, he couldn't feel the flames, and the pain could not drive him back. The fire was bright enough that even his weakened eyes could still see. He dashed forward, ignoring fire, heat, and smoke.

Survivor of the Flames.

He knew the fires were killing him. Yet, he forced himself onward, continuing to move long after the pain should have rendered him unconscious. He reached the room at the back, skidding and sliding down the broken ladder.

The cavern was dark. He stumbled through it, pushing his way past shelves and furniture, making his way along the wall, moving with a desperation that warned him that his time was short. His body wasn't working right anymore—he had pushed it too far, and he no longer had pewter.

He was glad for the darkness. As he finally stumbled against Sazed's machine, he knew that he would have been horrified to see what the flames had done to his arms.

Groaning quietly, he felt for and found the lever—or, through numb hands, what he hoped was the lever. His fingers no longer worked. So, he simply threw his weight against it, moving the gears as required.

Then he slid down to the ground, feeling only cold and dark.

# PART FIVE
# TRUST

*I do not know what went on in the minds of the koloss—what memories they retained, what human emotions they truly still knew. I do know that our discovery of the one creature, who named himself Human, was tremendously fortunate. Without his struggle to become human again, we might never have understood the link between the koloss, Hemalurgy, and the Inquisitors.*

*Of course, there was another part for him to play. Granted, not large, but still important, all things considered.*

# 59

URTEAU HAD SEEN BETTER DAYS.

*Vin certainly did her work here well,* TenSoon thought as he padded through the city, shocked at the destruction. About two years ago—before he'd been sent to spy on Vin—he had been Straff Venture's kandra, and had often visited Urteau. While it had never matched Luthadel's noble majesty or sprawling poverty, it had been a fine city, worthy of being the seat of a Great House.

Now, a good third of the city was a burned ruin. Those buildings that hadn't burned down were either abandoned or overcrowded—an odd mixture, in TenSoon's opinion. Apparently, noble homes were avoided, while skaa buildings were overpacked.

More remarkable, however, were the canals. They had been refilled somehow. TenSoon sat on his haunches, watching the occasional makeshift boat push its way through a canal, displacing the patina of ash that covered the water. Here and there, debris and refuse clogged the waterways, but they were passable in most places.

He rose, shaking his canine head, continuing on his way. He'd stowed the bag with Kelsier's bones outside, not wanting to look odd carrying a pack on his back.

What had been the purpose of burning the city, then restoring its canals? He would likely have to wait to find the answer. He'd seen no army camped outside; if Vin had been here, she'd already moved on to another location. His goal now was to find what passed for leadership in the remains of the city, then continue on his way, hunting down the Hero of Ages.

As he walked, he heard the people talking—speaking of how they'd managed to survive the fires that had claimed much of the city. They actually seemed cheerful. There was despair, too, but there seemed an inordinate amount of happiness. This was not a city whose people had been conquered.

*They feel they defeated the fire,* TenSoon thought, making his way along a more crowded street. *They don't see losing a third of the city as a disaster—they see saving two-thirds of it as a miracle.*

He followed the flow of traffic toward the center of town, where he finally found the soldiers he'd expected. They were definitely Elend's, bearing the spear and the scroll on the arms of their uniforms. However, they defended an unlikely location: a Ministry building.

TenSoon sat back on his haunches, cocking his head. The building was obviously a center of operations. People bustled about under the eyes of the watchful soldiers, moving in and out. If he wanted answers, he'd need to get inside. He briefly considered going to fetch Kelsier's bones from outside the city. However, he discarded that thought. He wasn't certain if he wanted to deal with the ramifications of making the Survivor appear again. There was another way to get in—equally shocking, perhaps, but far less theologically disturbing.

He padded over to the front of the building and walked up the steps, drawing a few startled looks. As he approached the front doors, one of the guards shouted at him, waving the butt of a spear his direction.

"Here now!" the man said. "This is no place for dogs. Whose hound is this?"

TenSoon sat back on his haunches. "I belong to no man," he said.

The guard jumped back in shock, and TenSoon got a twisted sense of pleasure. He immediately chided himself. The world was ending, and he went about startling random soldiers. Still, it *was* an advantage of wearing a dog's body that he'd never considered. . . .

"Wha . . ." the soldier said, looking around to see if he were the victim of some joke.

"I said," TenSoon repeated, "that I belong to no man. I am my own master."

It was a strange concept—the weight of which, undoubtedly, the guard could never grasp. TenSoon, a kandra, was outside of the Homeland without a Contract. As far as he knew, he was the first of his people to do such a thing in seven hundred years. It felt oddly . . . satisfying.

Several people were staring at him now. Other guards had approached, looking to their comrade for an explanation.

TenSoon gambled. "I've come from Emperor Venture," he said. "I bear a message for your leaders here."

To TenSoon's satisfaction, several of the other guards jumped. The first one, however—now an old hand when it came to talking dogs—raised a hesitant finger, pointing into the building. "In there."

"Thank you," TenSoon said, rising and walking through a now-quiet crowd as he made his way into the Ministry offices. He heard comments about "trick" and "well-trained" behind him, and noticed several guards running past him, faces urgent. He wound his way through groups and lines of people, all ignorant of the odd occurrence at the entrance to the building. At the end of the lines, TenSoon found . . .

Breeze. The Soother sat in a throne-like chair, holding a cup of wine, looking very pleased with himself as he made proclamations and settled disputes. He looked much as he had when TenSoon had served as Vin's servant. One of the guards stood whispering to Breeze. Both eyed TenSoon as he padded up to the front of the line. The guard paled slightly, but Breeze just leaned forward, smiling.

"So," he said, tapping his cane lightly against the marble floor. "Were you always a kandra, or did you eat the bones of Vin's hound recently?"

TenSoon sat. "I was always a kandra."

Breeze nodded. "I knew there was something odd about you—far too well behaved for a wolfhound." He smiled, sipping his wine. "Lord Renoux, I presume? It's been a while."

"I'm not him, actually," TenSoon said. "I'm a different kandra. It's . . . complicated."

That gave Breeze pause. He eyed TenSoon, and TenSoon felt just a moment of panic. Breeze was a Soother—and, like all Soothers, he held the power to take control of TenSoon's body. The Secret.

*No,* TenSoon told himself forcefully. *Allomancers are weaker now than they once were. Only with duralumin could they take control of a kandra, and Breeze is only a Misting—he can't burn duralumin.*

"Drinking on the job, Breeze?" TenSoon asked, raising a canine eyebrow.

"Of course," Breeze said, raising the cup. "What good is being in charge if you can't set your own working conditions?"

TenSoon snorted. He hadn't ever really liked Breeze—though perhaps that came from his bias against Soothers. Or, perhaps, his bias against all humans. Regardless, he wasn't inclined toward small talk. "Where is Vin?" he asked.

Breeze frowned. "I thought you brought a message from her?"

"I lied to the guards," TenSoon said. "I've actually come searching for her. I bring news she needs to hear—news regarding the mists and ash."

"Well, then, my dear man . . . um . . . I suppose I mean my dear *doggie.* Anyway, let us retire; you can talk to Sazed. He's far more useful than I am regarding these sorts of things."

". . . and, with Spook barely having survived the ordeal," said the Terrisman, "I thought it best to let Lord Breeze take command. We set up shop in a different Ministry building—it seemed equipped to be a bureaucratic center—and had Breeze start listening to petitions. He is better at dealing with people than I am, I think, and seems to enjoy taking care of the day-to-day concerns of the citizenry."

The Terrisman sat in his chair, a portfolio open on the desk before him, a pile of notes beside it. Sazed looked different to TenSoon for some reason that he couldn't pin down. The Keeper wore the same robes, and had the same Feruchemical bracers on his arms. There was something missing, however.

That, however, was the least of TenSoon's problems.

"*Fadrex City?*" TenSoon asked, sitting on his own chair. They were in one of the smaller rooms at the Ministry building—one that had once been an obligator's sleeping quarters. Now, it simply held a desk and chairs, the walls and floor as austere as one might expect for Ministry furnishings.

Sazed nodded. "She and the emperor hoped to find another of these storage caverns there."

TenSoon slumped. Fadrex was halfway across the empire. Even with the Blessing of Potency, it would take weeks for him to get there. He had a very, very long run ahead of him.

"Might I ask what business you have with Lady Vin, kandra?" Sazed asked.

TenSoon paused. It felt very odd, in a way, to speak so openly with Breeze, and now Sazed. These were men that TenSoon had watched for months while he acted like a dog. They'd never known him, yet he felt as if he knew them.

He knew, for instance, that Sazed was dangerous. The Terrisman was a Keeper—a group that TenSoon and his brethren had been trained to avoid. Keepers were always prying for rumors, legends, and tales. The kandra had many secrets; if the Keepers were ever to discover the riches of kandra culture, it could be disastrous. They'd want to study, ask questions, and record what they found.

TenSoon opened his mouth to say "Nothing." However, he stopped. Didn't he *want* someone to help with kandra culture? Someone who focused on religions, and who—perhaps—knew much of theology? Someone who knew about the legends of the Hero of Ages? Of all the members of the crew other than Vin, TenSoon had held Sazed in the highest regard.

"It has to do with the Hero of Ages," TenSoon said carefully. "And the advent of the world's end."

"Ah," Sazed said, rising. "Very well then. I shall give you whatever provisions you need. Will you be starting out immediately? Or, will you be staying here to rest for a time?"

*What?* TenSoon thought. Sazed hadn't even twitched at the mention of religious matters. It didn't seem like him at all.

Yet, Sazed continued speaking, as if TenSoon hadn't just hinted at one of the greatest religious secrets of their age.

*I'll never understand humans,* he thought, shaking his head.

*The prison Preservation created for Ruin was not created out of Preservation's power, though it was* of *Preservation. Rather, Preservation sacrificed his consciousness—one could say his mind—to fabricate that prison. He left a shadow of himself, but Ruin, once escaped, began to suffocate and isolate this small remnant vestige of his rival. I wonder if Ruin ever thought it strange that Preservation had cut himself off from his own power, relinquishing it and leaving it in the world, to be gathered and used by men.*

*In Preservation's gambit, I see nobility, cleverness, and desperation. He knew that he could not defeat Ruin. He had given too much of himself and, beyond that, he was the embodiment of stasis and stability. He could not destroy, not even to protect. It was against his nature. Hence the prison.*

*Mankind, however, had been created by both Ruin and Preservation—with a hint of Preservation's own soul to give them sentience and honor. In order for the world to survive, Preservation knew he had to depend upon his creations. To give them his trust.*

*I wonder what he thought when those creations repeatedly failed him.*

# 60

THE BEST WAY TO FOOL SOMEONE, in Vin's estimation, was to give them what they wanted. Or, at the very least, what they expected. As long as they assumed that they were one step ahead, they wouldn't look back to see if there were any steps that they'd completely missed.

Yomen had designed her prison well. Any metal used in the construction of her cot or facilities was Allomantically useless. Silver, while expensive, seemed the metal of choice—and there was very little even of that. Just a few screws in the cot that Vin managed to work free with her fingernails.

Her meals—a greasy, flavorless gruel—were served in wooden bowls, with wooden spoons. The guards were hazekillers: men who carried staves and wore no metal on their bodies, and who had been trained to fight Allomancers. Her room was a simple stone construction with a solid wooden door, its hinges and bolts made of silver.

She knew from her guards' behavior that they expected something from her. Yomen had prepared them well, and so when they slid her food through the slit, she could see the tension in their bodies and the speed of their retreat. It was like they were feeding a viper.

So, the next time they came to take her to Yomen, she attacked.

She moved as soon as the door opened, wielding a wooden leg she'd pulled off her cot. She dropped the first guard with a club to the arm, then a second hit on the back of his head. Her blows felt weak without pewter, but it was the best she could manage. She scrambled past the second guard in line, then slammed her shoulder into the stomach of the third. She didn't weigh much, but it was enough to get him to drop his staff—which she immediately grabbed.

Ham had spent a long time training her with the staff, and he'd often made her fight without Allomancy. Even with all of their preparation, the guards were obviously surprised to see a metalless Allomancer make so much trouble, and she dropped two more of them as she scurried to escape.

Unfortunately, Yomen was not a fool. He had sent so many guards to bring her that even dropping four of them made little difference. There had to be at least twenty men in the hallway outside her cell, clogging her exit, if nothing else.

Her goal was to give them what they expected, not get herself killed. So, as soon as she confirmed that her "escape attempt" really was doomed, she let one of the soldiers hit her on the shoulder and she dropped her staff with a grunt. Disarmed, she raised her hands and backed away. The soldiers, of course, swept her feet out from beneath her and piled on top of her, holding her down while one manacled her arms.

Vin suffered the treatment, shoulder pulsing with pain. How long would she have to go without metal before she'd stop instinctively trying to burn pewter? She hoped she'd never actually find out.

Eventually, the soldiers pulled her to her feet and pushed her down the hallway. The three she'd knocked down—not to mention the one that she'd disarmed—grumbled a bit, rubbing their wounds. All twenty men regarded her even more warily, if that was possible.

She didn't give them any trouble until they got her into Yomen's audience chamber. When they moved to chain her manacles to the bench, she squirmed a bit, earning herself a knee in the stomach. She gasped, then slumped to the floor beside the bench. There, groaning, she rubbed her hands and wrists with the gruel grease that she'd soaked into her undershirt. It was smelly and grimy, but it was very slick—and the guards, distracted by her escape attempt, had completely forgotten to search her.

"Surely you didn't think to escape without any metals to burn," Yomen asked.

Vin lifted her head. He stood with his back to her again, though this time he was looking out a dark window. Vin found it very odd to see the mists curling up against the window glass. Most skaa couldn't afford glass, and most noblemen chose the colored kind. The darkness outside of Yomen's window seemed a waiting beast, the mists its fur brushing against the glass as it shifted.

"I would think that you'd be flattered," Yomen continued. "I didn't know if you were really as dangerous as reported, but I decided to assume that you were. You see, I—"

Vin didn't give him any more time. There were only two ways she could escape from the city: the first would be to find some metals, the second would be to take Yomen captive. She planned to try both.

She yanked her greased hands free from the manacles, which had been fastened to her arms when they were squirming and flexed. She ignored the pain and the blood as the manacles scraped her hands, then she leaped to her feet, reaching into a fold in her shirt and pulling out the silver screws that she'd taken from her cot. These, she threw at the soldiers.

The men, of course, yelled in surprise and threw themselves to the ground, ducking her presumed Steelpush. Their own preparation and worry worked against them—for Vin had no steel. The screws bounced against the wall ineffectively, and the guards lay confused by her feint. She was halfway to Yomen before the first one thought to scramble back to his feet.

Yomen turned. As always, he wore the little drop of atium at his forehead. Vin lunged for it.

Yomen stepped casually out of the way. Vin lunged again, this time feinting, then trying to elbow him in the stomach. Her attack didn't land, however, as Yomen—hands still clasped behind his back—sidestepped her again.

She knew that look on his face—that look of complete control, of power. Yomen obviously had very little battle training, but he dodged her anyway.

He was burning atium.

Vin stumbled to a halt. *No wonder he wears that bit on his forehead,* she thought. *It's for emergencies.* She could see in his smile that he really *had* anticipated her. He'd known that she would try something, and he'd baited her, letting her get close. But, he'd never really been in danger.

The guards finally caught up with her, but Yomen raised a hand, waving them back. Then he gestured toward the bench. Quietly, Vin returned and sat down. She had to think, and she certainly wasn't going to get anywhere with Yomen burning atium.

As she sat, Ruin appeared next to her—materializing as if from dark smoke, wearing Reen's body. None of the others reacted; they obviously couldn't see him.

"Too bad," Ruin said. "In a way, you almost had him. But . . . then, in a way, you were never really close, either."

She ignored Ruin, looking up at Yomen. "You're Mistborn."

"No," he said, shaking his head. He didn't turn back toward his window, however. He stood facing her, wary. He'd probably turned off his atium—it was far too valuable to leave burning—but he'd have it in reserve, careful to watch her for signs of another attack.

"No?" Vin said, raising a skeptical eyebrow. "You were burning atium, Yomen. I saw that much."

"Believe as you wish," Yomen said. "But know this, woman: I do not lie. I've never needed lies, and I find that is particularly true now, when the entire world is in chaos. People need truth from those they follow."

Vin frowned.

"Regardless, it is time," Yomen said.

"Time?" Vin asked.

Yomen nodded. "Yes. I apologize for leaving you for so long in your cell. I have been . . . distracted."

*Elend,* Vin thought. *What has he been doing? I feel so blind!*

She glanced at Ruin, who stood on the other side of the bench, shaking his head as if he understood far more than he was telling her. She turned back to Yomen. "I still don't understand," she said. "Time for what?"

Yomen met her eyes. "Time for me to make a decision about your execution, Lady Venture."

*Oh,* she thought. *Right.* Between her dealings with Ruin and her plans to escape, she'd nearly forgotten Yomen's declaration that he intended to let her "defend" herself before he executed her.

Ruin walked across the room, circling Yomen in a leisurely stroll. The obligator king stood, still meeting Vin's eyes. If he could see Ruin, he didn't show it. Instead, he waved to a guard, who opened a side door, leading in several obligators in gray robes. They seated themselves on a bench across the room from Vin.

"Tell me, Lady Venture," Yomen said, turning back to her, "why did you come to Fadrex City?"

Vin cocked her head. "I thought this wasn't to be a trial. You said that you didn't need that sort of thing."

"I would think," Yomen replied, "that you would be pleased with any delay in the process."

A delay meant more time to think—more time to possibly escape. "Why did we come?" Vin asked. "We knew you had one of the Lord Ruler's supply caches beneath your city."

Yomen raised an eyebrow. "How did you know about it?"

"We found another one," Vin said. "It had directions to Fadrex."

Yomen nodded to himself. She could tell that he believed her, but there was something . . . else. He seemed to be making connections that she didn't understand, and probably didn't have the information to understand. "And the danger my kingdom posed to yours?" Yomen asked. "That didn't have anything at all to do with your invasion of my lands?"

"I wouldn't say that," Vin said. "Cett had been pushing Elend to move into this dominance for some time."

The obligators conferred quietly at this comment, though Yomen stood aloof, arms folded as he regarded her. Vin found the experience unnerving. It had been years—from her days in Camon's crew—since she had felt so much in another's power. Even when she'd faced the Lord Ruler, she'd felt differently. Yomen seemed to see her as a tool.

But a tool to do what? And, how could she manipulate his needs so that he kept her alive long enough for her to escape?

*Make yourself indispensable,* Reen had always taught. *Then a crewleader can't get rid of you without losing power himself.* Even now, the voice of her brother still seemed to whisper the words in her mind. Were they memories, interpretations of his wisdom, or effects of Ruin's influence? Regardless, it seemed like good advice at the moment.

"So, you came with the express purpose of invasion?" Yomen asked.

"Elend intended to try diplomacy first," Vin said carefully. "However, we both knew that it's a bit hard to play the diplomat when you camp an army outside of someone's city."

"You admit to being conquerors, then," Yomen said. "You *are* more honest than your husband."

"Elend is more sincere than either of us, Yomen," Vin snapped. "Just because he interprets things differently from you or me does not mean he's being dishonest when he expresses his view."

Yomen raised an eyebrow, perhaps at the quickness of her response. "A valid point."

Vin sat back on the bench, wrapping her cut hands with a bit of clean cloth from her shirt. Yomen stood beside the windows of the large, stark room. It felt very odd to be speaking to him. On one hand, she and he seemed very different. He was a bureaucrat obligator whose lack of muscle or warrior's grace proved that he'd spent his life concerned with forms and records. She was a child of the streets and an adult practiced in war and assassination.

Yet, his mannerisms, his way of speaking, seemed to resemble her own. *Is this what I might have been more like*, she wondered, *had I not been born a skaa? A blunt bureaucrat rather than a terse warrior?*

As Yomen contemplated her, Ruin walked in a slow circle around the obligator king. "This one is a disappointment," Ruin said quietly.

Vin glanced at Ruin just briefly. He shook his head. "Such destruction this one could have caused, had he struck out, rather than staying huddled in his little city, praying to his dead god. Men would have followed him. I could never get through to him on the long term, unfortunately. Not every ploy can be successful, particularly when the will of fools like him must be accounted for."

"So," Yomen said, drawing her attention back to him, "you came to take my city because you heard of my stockpile, and because you feared a return of the Lord Ruler's power."

"I didn't say that," Vin said, frowning.

"You said that you feared me."

"As a foreign power," Vin said, "with a proven ability to undermine a government and take it over."

"I didn't take over," Yomen said. "I returned this city, and the dominance, to its rightful rule. But that is beside the point. I want you to tell me of this religion your people preach."

"The Church of the Survivor?"

"Yes," Yomen said. "You are one of its heads, correct?"

"No," Vin said. "They revere me. But I've never felt that I properly fit as part of the religion. Mostly, it's focused around Kelsier."

"The Survivor of Hathsin," Yomen said. "He died. How is it that people worship him?"

Vin shrugged. "It used to be common to worship gods that one couldn't see."

"Perhaps," Yomen said. "I have . . . read of such things, though I find them difficult to understand. Faith in an unseen god—what sense does that make? Why reject the god that they lived with for so long—the one that they could see, and feel—in favor of one that died? One that the Lord Ruler himself struck down?"

"You do it," Vin said. "You're still worshipping the Lord Ruler."

"He's not gone," Yomen said.

Vin paused.

"No," Yomen said, apparently noting her confusion. "I haven't seen or heard of him since his disappearance. However, neither do I put any credence in reports of his death."

"He was rather dead," Vin said. "Trust me."

"I don't trust you, I'm afraid," Yomen said. "Tell me of that evening. Tell me precisely what happened."

So Vin did. She told him of her imprisonment, and of her escape with Sazed. She told him of her decision to fight the Lord Ruler, and of her reliance on the Eleventh Metal. She left out her strange ability to draw upon the power of the mists, but she explained pretty much everything else—including Sazed's theory that the Lord Ruler had been immortal through the clever manipulation of his Feruchemy and Allomancy in combination.

And Yomen actually listened. Her respect for the man increased as she spoke, and as he didn't interrupt her. He wanted to hear her story, even if he didn't believe it. He was a man who accepted information for what it was—another tool to be used, yet to be trusted no more than any other tool.

"And so," Vin finished, "he is dead. I stabbed him through the heart myself. Your faith in him is admirable, but it can't change what happened."

Yomen stood silently. The older obligators—who still sat on their benches—had grown white in the face. She knew that her testimony might have damned her, but for some reason she felt that honesty—plain, blunt honesty—would serve her better than guile. That's how she usually felt.

*An odd conviction for one who grew up in thieving crews,* she thought. Ruin had apparently grown bored during her account, and had walked over to look out the window.

"What I need to find out," Yomen finally said, "is why the Lord Ruler thought it necessary for you to *think* that you had killed him."

"Didn't you listen to what just I said?" Vin demanded.

"I did," Yomen said calmly. "And do not forget that you are a prisoner here—one who is very close to death."

Vin forced herself to be quiet.

"You find my words ridiculous?" Yomen said. "More ridiculous than your own? Think of how I see you, claiming to have slain a man I *know* to be God. Is it not plausible that he wanted this to happen? That he's out there, still, watching us, waiting . . ."

*That's what this is all about,* she realized. *Why he captured me, why he's so eager to speak with me. He's convinced that the Lord Ruler is still* *alive. He just wants to figure out where I fit into all of this. He wants me to give him the proof that he's so desperately wishing for.*

"Why don't you think you should be part of the skaa religion, Vin?" Ruin whispered.

She turned, trying not to look directly at him, lest Yomen see her staring into empty space.

"Why?" Ruin asked. "Why don't you want them worshipping you? All of those happy skaa? Looking toward you for hope?"

"The Lord Ruler *must* be behind all of this," Yomen mused out loud. "That means that he wanted the world to see you as his killer. He wanted the skaa to worship you."

"Why?" Ruin repeated. "Why be so uncomfortable? Is it because you know you *can't* offer them hope? What is it they call him, the one you are supposed to have replaced? The Survivor? A word of Preservation, I think. . . ."

"Perhaps he intends to return dramatically," Yomen said. "To depose you and topple you, to prove that faith in him is the only true faith."

*Why don't you fit?* Ruin whispered in her head.

"Why else would he want them to worship you?" Yomen asked.

"*They're wrong!*" Vin snapped, raising hands to her head, trying to stop the thoughts. Trying to stop the guilt.

Yomen paused.

"They're wrong about me," Vin said. "They don't worship me, they worship what they think I should be. But I'm not the Heir of the Survivor. I didn't do what Kelsier did. He freed them."

*You conquered them,* Ruin whispered.

"Yes," Vin said, looking up. "You're looking in the wrong direction, Yomen. The Lord Ruler won't return."

"I told you that—"

"No," Vin said, standing. "No, he's not coming back. He doesn't need to. *I* took his place."

Elend had worried that he was becoming another Lord Ruler, but his concern had always seemed flawed to Vin. He hadn't been the one to conquer and reforge an empire, she had. She'd been the one who made the other kings submit.

She'd done exactly as the Lord Ruler had. A Hero had risen up, and the Lord Ruler had killed him, then taken the power of the Well of Ascension.

Vin had killed the Lord Ruler, then taken that same power. She'd given up the power, true, but she'd filled the same role.

It all came to a head. The reason why the skaa worshipping her, calling her their savior, felt so wrong. Suddenly, her real role in it all seemed to snap into place.

"I'm not the Survivor's Heir, Yomen," she said sickly. "I'm the Lord Ruler's."

He shook his head dismissively.

"When you first captured me," she said, "I wondered why you kept me alive. An enemy Mistborn? Why not just kill me and be done with it? You claimed that you wanted to give me a trial, but I saw through that. I knew you had another motive. And now I know what it is." She looked him in the eyes. "You said earlier that you planned to execute me for the Lord Ruler's murder, but you just admitted that you think he's still alive. You say that he'll return to topple me from my place, so you can't kill me, lest you interfere with your god's plans."

Yomen turned away from her.

"You *can't* kill me," she said. "Not until you're certain of my place in your theology. That's why you kept me alive, and that's why you risk bringing me in here to talk. You need information only I can give—you have to get testimony from me in a trial of sorts because you want to know what happened that night. So you can try to convince yourself that your god still lives."

Yomen didn't respond.

"Admit it. I'm in no danger here." She stepped forward.

And Yomen moved. His steps suddenly became more fluid—he didn't have the grace of pewter or the knowledge of a warrior, but he moved just *right.* She dodged instinctively, but his atium let him anticipate her, and before she could so much as think, he'd thrown her to the floor, holding her pinned with a knee against her back.

"I may not kill you yet," he said calmly, "but that hardly means that you're in 'no danger,' Lady Venture."

Vin grunted.

"I want something from you," he said. "Something more than what we've discussed. I want you to tell your husband to send his army away."

"Why would I do that?" Vin said, face pressed against the cold stone of the floor.

"Because," Yomen said, "you claim to want my storage cache, yet you claim to be good people. You now know that I will use the food in it wisely, to feed my people. If your Elend really is as altruistic as you claim, he certainly won't be so selfish as to throw away lives to war, just so you can steal away our food and use it to feed your own."

"We can grow crops," Vin said. "We get enough light in the Central Dominance, while you don't. The seed stock you have will be useless to you!"

"Then trade me for it."

"You won't *talk* to us!"

Yomen stepped back, releasing the pressure on her back. She rubbed her neck, sitting up, feeling frustrated. "It's about more than the food in that cache, Yomen," she said. "We control the other four of them. The Lord Ruler, he left clues in them. There is something to the whole group that can save us."

Yomen snorted. "You were down there all that time, and you didn't read the plaque that the Lord Ruler left?"

"Of course I did."

"Then you know that there *is* nothing more in those caches," Yomen said. "They're all part of his plan, true. And for some reason that plan requires that men think he is dead. Regardless, you know now what he said. So, why take the city from me?"

*Why take the city from me?* The real reason itched inside of Vin. Elend had always found it an unimportant one, but to her, it held powerful appeal. "You know full well why we have to take the city," Vin said. "As long as you have *it,* we have reason to conquer you."

"It?" Yomen asked.

Ruin stepped forward, curious.

"You know what I mean. The atium. The Lord Ruler's supply."

"That?" Yomen asked, laughing. "This is all about the atium? Atium is worthless!"

Vin frowned. "Worthless? It's the single most valuable commodity in the Final Empire!"

"Oh?" Yomen asked. "And how many people are there around to burn it? How many noble houses remain to play petty politics and vie for power by showing how much atium they can leach from the Lord Ruler? The value of atium was based in the economy of an empire, Lady Venture.

Without the trappings of a reserve system and an upper class giving the metal implied worth, atium has no real value." Yomen shook his head. "To a starving man, what is more important—a loaf of bread, or an entire jar of atium he can't use, eat, or sell?"

He waved for the guards to take her. They pulled her to her feet, and she struggled, holding Yomen's eyes.

Yomen turned away from her again. "Those lumps of metal do me no good, save—perhaps—to keep you in check. No, the food was the real resource. The Lord Ruler left me the riches I required to establish his power again. I just need to figure out what he wants me to do next."

The soldiers finally succeeded in pulling her away.

*I don't wonder that we focused far too much on the mists during those days. But from what I now know of sunlight and plant development, I realize that our crops weren't in as much danger from misty days as we feared. We might very well have been able to find plants to eat that did not need as much light to survive.*

*True, the mists did also cause some deaths in those who went out in them, but the number killed was not a large enough percentage of the population to be a threat to our survival as a species. The ash, that was our real problem. The smoke filling the atmosphere, the black flakes covering up everything beneath, the eruptions of the volcanic ashmounts . . . Those were what would kill the world.*

# 61

"ELEND!" HAM CALLED, rushing up to him. "You're back!"

"Surprised?" Elend asked, reading his friend's expression.

"Of course not," Ham said, a little too quickly. "The scouts reported your approach."

*My arrival may not surprise you,* Elend thought tiredly, *but the fact that I'm still alive does. Did you think I'd run off to get myself killed, or did you simply think that I'd wander away and abandon you?*

It wasn't a line of reasoning he wanted to pursue. So, he simply smiled, resting a hand on Ham's shoulder and looking toward the camp. It looked strange, bunkered down as it was, ash piled up outside of it. It looked a little like it was dug into the ground several feet. There was so much ash. . . .

*I can't worry about everything at once,* Elend thought with determination. *I just have to trust. Trust in myself and keep going.*

He had pondered the mist spirit the rest of his trip. Had it really told him not to attack Fadrex, or was Elend simply misinterpreting its gestures? What had it wanted him to learn by pointing at his vial of metals?

Beside him, Ham was regarding the mass of new koloss. To the side of the army, his other koloss sat—still under his control. Though he had grown increasingly adept at keeping a hold on the creatures, it was still nice to be back close to them. It made him feel more comfortable.

Ham whistled quietly. "Twenty-eight thousand?" he asked. "Or, at least, that's what the scouts say."

Elend nodded.

"I hadn't realized how large the group was," Ham said. "With that many . . ."

*Thirty-seven thousand total,* Elend thought. *More than enough to storm Fadrex.*

He began to walk down the incline, toward the camp. Though he hadn't needed much pewter to help him through the hike, he was still tired. "Any news of Vin?" he said hopefully, though he knew that if she'd managed to escape, she would have already found him.

"We sent a messenger into the city while you were gone," Ham said as they began to walk. "Yomen said a soldier could come and confirm that Vin was still alive, and so we complied in your name, thinking it best if Yomen thought you were here."

"You did well," Elend said.

"It's been a while since then," Ham said. "We haven't heard anything of her since."

"She's still alive," Elend said.

Ham nodded. "I believe so too."

Elend smiled. "It's not just faith, Ham," he said, nodding toward the koloss that had remained behind. "Before she was captured, I gave some of those to her. If she'd died, then they would have gone out of control. As long as she lives—whether or not she has metals—she will remain bonded to them."

Ham paused. "That . . . would have been something good to tell us earlier, El."

"I know," Elend said. "It's too easy to forget how many I'm controlling—I didn't even think that not all of those are mine. Post scouts, keep an eye on them. I'll take them back if they go wild."

Ham nodded. "Could you contact her through them?"

Elend shook his head. How did he explain? Controlling the koloss wasn't a subtle thing—their minds were too dull for much beyond simple commands. He could order them to attack, or to freeze, or to follow and carry things. But he couldn't direct them precisely, couldn't instruct them to speak a message or even *how* to accomplish a goal. He could only say "Do this" and watch them go.

"We've had scout reports from the Central Dominance, El," Ham said, voice troubled.

Elend looked at him.

"Most of our scouts didn't return. Nobody knows what happened to Demoux and the men you sent—we hope they reached Luthadel, but the capital is in bad shape. The scouts who have returned bear some pretty frustrating news. We've lost many of the cities you conquered during this last year. The people are starving, and a lot of villages are empty save for the dead. Those who can flee to Luthadel, leaving trails of corpses on the road, buried in ash."

Elend closed his eyes. But Ham wasn't done.

"There are tales of cities swallowed by the rumbling earth," Ham said, voice almost a whisper. "King Lekal and his city fell to lava from one of the ashmounts. We haven't heard from Janarle in weeks; his entire retinue seems to have vanished, and the Northern Dominance is in chaos. The entire Southern Dominance is said to be burning. . . . Elend, what do we do?"

Elend continued to stride forward, walking onto an ash-free pathway and then into the camp proper. Soldiers were gathering about, whispering, looking at him. He didn't know how to answer Ham's question. What did he do? What *could* he do?

"We'll help them, Ham," he said. "We won't give up."

Ham nodded, looking slightly bolstered. "Though, before you do anything else, what you should probably do is go change your clothing. . . ."

Elend glanced down, remembering that he was still wearing the black uniform, bloodied from killing koloss, then stained by ash. His appearance caused quite a stir in the men. *They've only seen me in the white, pristine outfit. Many of them have never even seen me fight—never seen me bloodied, never seen me dirtied by ash.*

He wasn't certain what bothered him about that.

Ahead, Elend could see a bearded figure sitting in a chair beside the pathway, as if he were simply out there for an afternoon repast. Cett eyed him as he passed. "More koloss?"

Elend nodded.

"We're going to attack, then?" Cett asked.

Elend stopped.

The mist spirit apparently didn't want him to attack. But, he couldn't be certain what it had wanted him to know or think—he didn't even know if he should trust it. Could he base the future of his empire on vague impressions he got from a ghost in the mists?

He had to get into that storage, and he couldn't afford to wait in siege—not any longer. Plus, attacking seemed the best way to get Vin back safely. Yomen would never return her—Elend either had to sit around and wait, or he had to attack, hoping that in the chaos of battle, Yomen would leave her in a dungeon somewhere. True, attacking risked an execution, but letting Yomen use her as a bargaining chip seemed just as dangerous for her.

*I have to be the man who makes the hard decisions,* he told himself. *It's what Vin was trying to teach me at the ball—that I can be both Elend the man, and Elend the king. I took these koloss for a purpose. Now I need to use them.*

"Inform the soldiers," Elend said. "But don't have them form ranks. We attack in the morning, but do so in surprise—koloss first, breaking through their defenses. The men can form up after that, then go in and seize control."

We'll rescue Vin, get into that cavern, then get back to Luthadel with the food supplies.

And survive as long as we can.

*I suspect that Alendi, the man Rashek killed, was himself a Misting—a Seeker. Allomancy, however, was a different thing in those days, and much more rare. The Allomancers alive in our day are the descendants of the men who ate those few beads of Preservation's power. They formed the foundation of the nobility, and were the first to name him emperor.*

*The power in these few beads was so concentrated that it could last through ten centuries of breeding and inheritance.*

# 62

SAZED STOOD OUTSIDE THE ROOM, looking in. Spook lay in his bed, still swaddled in bandages. The boy had not awakened since his ordeal, and Sazed wasn't certain if he ever would. Even if he did live, he'd be horribly scarred for the rest of his life.

*Though,* Sazed thought, *this proves one thing. The boy doesn't have pewter.* If Spook *had* been able to burn pewter, then he would have healed far more quickly. Sazed had administered a vial of pewter just in case, and it had made no difference. The boy hadn't mystically become a Thug.

It was comforting, in a way. It meant that Sazed's world still made sense.

Inside the room, the girl—Beldre—sat at Spook's side. She came every day to spend time with the lad. More time, even, than she spent with her brother, Quellion. The Citizen had a broken arm and some other wounds, but nothing lethal. Though Breeze ruled in Urteau, Quellion was still an authority, and he seemed to have grown far more . . . civil. He now seemed willing to consider an alliance with Elend.

It seemed strange to Sazed that Quellion would become so accommodating. They had entered his city, sown chaos, and nearly killed him. Now he listened to their offers of peace? Sazed was suspicious, to be sure. Time would tell.

Inside, Beldre turned slightly, finally noticing Sazed at the doorway. She smiled, standing.

"Please, Lady Beldre," he said, entering. "Don't stand."

She seated herself again as Sazed walked forward. He surveyed his bandage work on Spook, checking the young man's condition, comparing notes from inside the medical texts of his copperminds. Beldre watched quietly.

Once he was finished, he turned to leave.

"Thank you," Beldre said from behind.

Sazed stopped.

She glanced at Spook. "Do you think . . . I mean, has his condition changed?"

"I am afraid that it has not, Lady Beldre. I cannot promise anything in regard to his recovery."

She smiled faintly, turning back toward the wounded lad. "He'll make it," she said.

Sazed frowned.

"He's not just a man," Beldre said. "He's something special. I don't know what he did to bring my brother back, but Quellion is just like his old self—the way he was before all of this insanity began. And the city. The people have hope again. That's what Spook wanted."

*Hope . . .* Sazed thought, studying the girl's eyes. *She really does love him.*

It seemed, in a way, silly to Sazed. How long had she known the boy? A few weeks? During that short time, Spook had not only earned Beldre's love, but had become a hero to the people of an entire city.

*She sits and hopes, having faith that he will recover,* Sazed thought. *Yet, upon seeing him, the first thing I thought of was how relieved I was that he wasn't a Pewterarm.* Had Sazed really become that callous? Just two years before, he had been willing to fall hopelessly in love with a woman who had spent most of her life chastising him. A woman with whom he had only had a few precious days.

He turned and left the room.

Sazed walked to his quarters in the nobleman's mansion they had taken, their new home now that their former residence was a burned-out ruin. It was nice to have ordinary walls and steps again, rather than endless shelves bounded by cavern walls.

On his desk sat the open portfolio, its cloth-wrapped coverboard stained with ash. One stack of pages sat to its left, and one stack sat to its right. There were only ten pages left in the right stack.

Taking a deep breath, Sazed approached and sat down. It was time to finish.

It was late morning the next day before he set the final sheet onto the top of the left stack. He'd moved quickly through these last ten, but he'd been able to give them his undivided attention, not being distracted by riding as he worked or other concerns. He felt that he'd given each one due consideration.

He sat for a time, feeling fatigued, and not just from lack of sleep. He felt . . . numb. His task was done. After a year's work, he'd sifted through each and every religion in his stack. And he'd eliminated every one.

It was odd, how many common features they all had. Most claimed ultimate authority, denouncing other faiths. Most taught of an afterlife, but could offer no proof. Most taught about a god or gods, yet—again—had little justification for their teachings. And every single one of them was riddled with inconsistencies and logical fallacies.

How did men believe in something that preached love on one hand, yet taught destruction of unbelievers on the other? How did one rationalize belief with no proof? How could they honestly expect him to have faith in something that taught of miracles and wonders in the far past, but carefully gave excuses for why such things didn't occur in the present day?

And then, of course, there was the final flake of ash on the pile—the thing that each and every faith had, in his opinion, failed to prove. All taught that believers would be blessed. And all had absolutely no answer as to why their gods had allowed the faithful to be captured, imprisoned, enslaved, and slaughtered by a heretic known as Rashek, the Lord Ruler.

The stack of pages sat face down on the desk before him. They meant that there was no truth. No faith that would bring Tindwyl back to him. Nothing watching over men, contrary to what Spook had affirmed so strongly. Sazed ran his fingers across the final page, and finally, the depression he'd been fighting—barely holding at bay for so long—was too strong for him to overcome. The portfolio had been his final line of defense.

It was pain. That's what the loss felt like. Pain and numbness at the same time; a barb-covered wire twisting around his chest combined with an absolute inability to do anything about it. He felt like huddling in a corner, crying, and just letting himself die.

*No!* he thought. *There must be something. . . .*

He reached under his desk, trembling fingers seeking his sack of metalminds. However, he didn't pull one of these out, but instead removed a large, thick tome. He put it on the table beside his portfolio, then opened it to a random page. Words written in two different hands confronted him. One was careful and flowing. His own. The other was terse and determined. Tindwyl's.

He rested his fingers on the page. He and Tindwyl had compiled this book together, deciphering the history, prophecies, and meanings surrounding the Hero of Ages. Back before Sazed had stopped caring.

*That's a lie,* he thought, forming a fist. *Why do I lie to myself? I still care. I never stopped caring. If I'd stopped caring, then I wouldn't still be searching. If I didn't care so much, then being betrayed wouldn't feel so painful.*

Kelsier had spoken of this. Then Vin had done the same. Sazed had never expected to have similar feelings. Who was there that could hurt him so deeply that he felt betrayed? He was not like other men. He acknowledged that not out of arrogance, but out of simple self-knowledge. He forgave people, perhaps to a fault. He simply wasn't the type to feel bitter.

He'd assumed, therefore, that he would never have to deal with these emotions. That's why he'd been so unprepared to be betrayed by the only thing he couldn't accept as being flawed.

He couldn't believe. If he believed, it meant that God—or the universe, or whatever it was that watched over man—had failed. Better to believe that there was nothing at all. Then, all of the world's inadequacies were simply mere chance. Not caused by a god who had failed them.

Sazed glanced at his open tome, noticing a little slip of paper sticking out between its pages. He pulled it free, surprised to find the picture of a flower that Vin had given him, the one that Kelsier's wife had carried. The one she'd used to give herself hope. To remind her of a world that had existed before the coming of the Lord Ruler.

He glanced upward. The ceiling was of wood, but red sunlight—refracted by the window—sprayed across it. "Why?" he whispered. "Why leave me like this? I studied everything about you. I learned the religions of *five hundred* different peoples and sects. I taught about you when other men had given up a thousand years before.

"Why leave *me* without hope, when others can have faith? Why leave *me* to wonder? Shouldn't I be more certain than any other? Shouldn't my knowledge have protected me?"

And yet, his faith had made him even more susceptible. *That's what trust is,* Sazed thought. *It's about giving someone else power over you. Power to hurt you.* That's why he'd given up his metalminds. That's why he had decided to sort through the religions one at a time, trying to find one that had no faults. Nothing to fail him.

It just made sense. Better to not believe, rather than be proven wrong. Sazed looked back down. Why did he think to talk to the heavens? There was nothing there.

There never had been.

Outside, in the hallway, he could hear voices. "My dear doggie," Breeze said, "surely you'll stay for another day."

"No," said TenSoon the kandra, speaking in his growling voice. "I must find Vin as soon as possible."

*Even the kandra,* Sazed thought. *Even an inhuman creature has more faith than I.*

And yet, how could they understand? Sazed closed his eyes tight, feeling a pair of tears squeeze from the corners. How could anyone understand the pain of a faith betrayed? He had *believed.* And yet, when he had needed hope the most, he had found only emptiness.

He picked up the book, then snapped closed his portfolio, locking the inadequate summaries inside. He turned toward the hearth. Better to simply burn it all.

*Belief* . . . He remembered a voice from the past. His own voice, speaking to Vin on that terrible day after Kelsier's death. *Belief isn't simply a thing for fair times and bright days, I think. What is belief—what is faith—if you don't continue in it after failure. . . .*

How innocent he had been.

*Better to trust and be betrayed,* Kelsier seemed to whisper. It had been one of the Survivor's mottos. *Better to love and be hurt.*

Sazed gripped the tome. It was such a meaningless thing. Its text could be changed by Ruin at any time. *And do I believe in that?* Sazed thought with frustration. *Do I have faith in this Ruin, but not in something better?*

He stood quietly in the room, holding the book, listening to Breeze and Ten-Soon outside. The book was a symbol to him. It represented what he had once been. It represented failure. He glanced upward again. *Please,* he thought. *I want to believe. I really do. I just . . . I just need something. Something more than shadows and memories. Something real.*

Something true. Please?

"Farewell, Soother," TenSoon said. "Give my regards to the Announcer." Then, Sazed heard Breeze thump away. TenSoon padded down the hallway on his quieter dog's feet.

Announcer. . . .

Sazed froze.

That word. . . .

Sazed stood, stunned for a moment. Then, he threw his door open and burst into the hallway. The door slammed back against the wall, making Breeze jump. TenSoon stopped at the end of the hallway, near the stairs. He turned back, looking at Sazed.

"What did you call me?" Sazed demanded.

"The Announcer," TenSoon said. "You are, are you not, the one who pointed out Lady Vin as the Hero of Ages? That, then, is your title."

Sazed fell to his knees, slapping his tome—the one he had written with Tindwyl—on the floor before him. He flipped through the pages, locating one in particular, penned in his own hand. *I thought myself the Holy Witness,* it said, *the prophet foretold to discover the Hero of Ages.* They were the words of Kwaan, the man who had originally named Alendi the Hero. From these writings, which were their only clues about the original Terris religion, Sazed and the others had gleaned what little they knew of the prophecies about the Hero of Ages.

"What is this?" Breeze asked, leaning down, scanning the words. "Hum. Looks like you've got the wrong term, my dear doggie. Not 'Announcer' at all, but 'Holy Witness.' "

Sazed looked up. "This is one of the passages that Ruin changed, Breeze," he said quietly. "When I wrote it, it read differently—but Ruin altered it, trying to trick me and Vin into fulfilling his prophecies. The skaa had started to call me the Holy Witness, their own term. So Ruin retroactively changed Kwaan's writings so that they seemed prophetic and reference me."

"Is that so?" Breeze asked, rubbing his chin. "What did it say before?"

Sazed ignored the question, instead meeting TenSoon's canine eyes. "How did you know?" he demanded. "How do you know the words of the ancient Terris prophecies?"

TenSoon fell back on his haunches. "It strikes me as odd, Terrisman. There's one great inconsistency in this all, a problem *no one* has ever thought to point out. What happened to the packmen who traveled with Rashek and Alendi up to the Well of Ascension?"

Rashek. The man who had become the Lord Ruler.

Breeze stood up straight. "That's easy, kandra," he said, waving his cane. "Everyone knows that when the Lord Ruler took the throne of Khlennium, he made his trusted friends into noblemen. That's why the nobility of the Final Empire were so pampered—they were the descendants of Rashek's good friends."

TenSoon sat quietly.

*No*, Sazed thought with wonder. *No . . . that couldn't be!* "He *couldn't* have made those packmen into nobles."

"Why ever not?" Breeze asked.

"Because the nobility gained Allomancy," Sazed said, standing. "Rashek's friends were *Feruchemists.* If he'd made them into noblemen, then . . ."

"Then they could have challenged him," TenSoon said. "They could have become both Allomancers and Feruchemists as he was, and had his same powers."

"Yes," Sazed said. "He spent ten centuries trying to breed Feruchemy *out* of the Terris population—all in fear that someday someone would be born with both Feruchemy and Allomancy! His friends who went to the Well with him would have been dangerous, since they were obviously powerful Feruchemists, and they knew what Rashek had done to Alendi. Rashek would have had to do something else with them. Something to sequester them, perhaps even kill them. . . ."

"No," TenSoon said. "He didn't kill them. You call the Father a monster, but he was not an evil man. He didn't kill his friends, though he did recognize the threat their powers posed to him. So, he offered them a bargain, speaking directly to their minds while he was holding the power of creation."

"What bargain?" Breeze asked, obviously confused.

"Immortality," TenSoon said quietly. "In exchange for their Feruchemy. They gave it up, along with something else."

Sazed stared at the creature in the hallway, a creature who thought like a man but had the form of a beast. "They gave up their humanity," Sazed whispered.

TenSoon nodded.

"They live on?" Sazed asked, stepping forward. "The Lord Ruler's companions? The very Terrismen who climbed to the Well with him?"

"We call them the First Generation," TenSoon said. "The founders of the kandra people. The Father transformed every living Feruchemist into a mistwraith, beginning that race. His good friends, however, he returned to sentience with a few Hemalurgic spikes. You've done your work poorly, Keeper. I expected that you'd drag this out of me *long* before I had to leave."

*I've been a fool,* Sazed thought, blinking away tears. *Such a fool.*

"What?" Breeze asked, frowning. "What's going on? Sazed? My dear man, why are you so flustered? What do this creature's words mean?"

"They mean hope," Sazed said, pushing into his room, hurriedly throwing some of his clothing into a travel pack.

"Hope?" Breeze asked, peeking in.

Sazed looked back, toward where Breeze stood. The kandra had walked up, and stood behind him in the hallway. "The Terris religion, Breeze," Sazed said. "The thing my sect was founded for, the thing my people have spent lifetimes searching to discover. It lives on. Not in written words that can be corrupted or changed. But in the minds of men who actually practiced it. *The Terris faith is not dead!*"

There was one more religion to add to his list. His quest was not yet over.

"Quickly, Keeper," TenSoon said. "I was prepared to go without you, since everyone agreed that you had stopped caring about these things. However, if you will come, I will show you the way to my Homeland—it is along the path I must travel to find Vin. Hopefully, you will be able to convince the First Generation of the things I have not."

"And that is?" Sazed asked, still packing.

"That the end has arrived."

*Ruin tried many times to get spikes into other members of the crew. Though some of what happened makes it seem like it was easy for him to gain control of people, it really was not.*

*Sticking the metal in just the right place—at the right time—was incredibly difficult, even for a subtle creature like Ruin. For instance, he tried very hard to spike both Elend and Yomen. Elend managed to avoid it each time, as he did on the field outside of the small village that contained the next-to-last storage cache.*

*Ruin did actually manage to get a spike into Yomen, once. Yomen, however, removed the spike before Ruin got a firm grip on him. It was much easier for Ruin to get a hold on people who were passionate and impulsive than it was for him to hold on to people who were logical and prone to working through their actions in their minds.*

# 63

"WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND," Vin said, "is why you chose me. You had a thousand years and hundreds of thousands of people to choose from. Why lead *me* to the Well of Ascension to free you?"

She was in her cell, sitting on her cot—which now lay legless on the floor, having collapsed when she removed the screws. She'd asked for a new one. She'd been ignored.

Ruin turned toward her. He came often, wearing Reen's body, still indulging himself in what Vin could only assume was a kind of gloating. As he often did, however, he ignored her question. Instead, he turned to the east, eyes seeming as if they could see directly through the cell wall.

"I wish you could see it," he said. "The ashfalls have grown beautiful and deep, as if the sky itself has shattered, raining down shards of its corpse in flakes of black. You feel the ground tremble?"

Vin didn't respond.

"Those quakes are the earth's final sighs," Ruin said. "Like an old man, moaning as he dies, calling for his children so that he can pass on his last bits of wisdom. The very ground is pulling itself apart. The Lord Ruler did much of this himself. You can blame him, if you wish."

Vin perked up. She didn't draw attention to herself by asking more questions, but instead just let Ruin ramble on. Again, she noted just how *human* some of his mannerisms seemed.

"He thought he could solve the problems himself," Ruin continued. "He rejected me, you know."

*And that happened exactly a thousand years ago,* Vin thought. *A thousand years has passed since Alendi failed in his quest; a thousand years since Rashek took the power for himself and became the Lord Ruler. That's part of the answer to my question. The glowing liquid at the Well of Ascension—it was gone by the time I finished freeing Ruin. It must have disappeared after Rashek used it too.*

A thousand years. Time for the Well to regenerate its power? But what was that power? Where did it come from?

"The Lord Ruler didn't really save the world," Ruin continued. "He just postponed its destruction—and, in doing so, he helped me. That's the way it must always be, as I told you. When men think they are helping the world, they actually do more harm than good. Just like you. You tried to help, but you just ended up freeing me."

Ruin glanced at her, then smiled in a fatherly way. She didn't react.

"The ashmounts," Ruin continued, "the dying landscape, the broken people—those were all Rashek's. The twisting of men to become koloss, kandra, and Inquisitor, all his . . ."

"But, you hated him," Vin said. "He didn't free you—so you had to wait another thousand years."

"True," Ruin said. "But a thousand years is not much time. Not much time at all. Besides, I couldn't refuse to help Rashek. I help everyone, for my power is a tool—the only tool by which things can change."

*It's all ending,* Vin thought. *It really is. I don't have time to sit and wait. I need to do something.* Vin stood, causing Ruin to glance toward her as she walked to the front of the cell. "Guards!" she called. Her voice echoed in her own chamber. "Guards!" she repeated.

Eventually, she heard a thump outside. "What?" a rough voice demanded.

"Tell Yomen that I want to deal."

There was a pause.

"Deal?" the guard finally asked.

"Yes," Vin said. "Tell him I have information that I want to give him."

She wasn't certain how to read the guard's response, since it was simply more silence. She thought she heard him walking away, but without tin, she couldn't tell.

Eventually, however, the guard returned. Ruin watched her, curious, as the door unlocked and then opened. The customary troop of soldiers stood outside.

"Come with us."

* * *

As Vin entered Yomen's audience chamber, she was immediately struck by the differences in the man. He looked much more haggard than he had the last time they'd met, as if he'd gone far too long without sleep.

*But . . . he's Mistborn,* Vin thought with confusion. *That means he could burn pewter to keep that fatigue out of his eyes.*

Why doesn't he? Unless . . . he can't burn it. Unless there's only one metal available to him.

She'd always been taught that there was no such thing as an atium Misting. But, more and more, she was realizing that the Lord Ruler perpetuated a lot of misinformation to keep himself in control and in power. She had to learn to stop depending on what she'd been *told* was true, and focus on the facts as she found them.

Yomen watched her as she entered, guards surrounding her. She could read the expectation of a trick in his eyes—yet, as always, he waited for her to act first. Hovering very close to the edge of danger seemed his way. The guards took stations at the doors, leaving her standing in the middle of the room.

"No manacles?" she asked.

"No," Yomen said. "I don't expect you to be here long. The guards tell me that you've offered information."

"I have."

"Well," Yomen said, arms clasped behind his back, "I told them to bring you to me if they even so much as suspected a trick. Apparently, they didn't believe your pleas that you want to deal. I wonder why." He raised an eyebrow toward her.

"Ask me a question," Vin said. To the side, Ruin trailed through the wall, stepping with an idle, unconcerned gait.

"Very well," Yomen said. "How does Elend control the koloss?"

"Allomancy," Vin said. "Emotional Allomancy, when used on a koloss, will bring them under the Allomancer's control."

"I find that hard to believe," Yomen said flatly. "If it were that simple, someone other than yourself would have discovered it."

"Most Allomancers are too weak to manage it," Vin said. "You need to use a metal that enhances your power."

"There is no such metal."

"You know of aluminum?"

Yomen paused, but Vin could see in his eyes that he did. "Duralumin is the Allomantic alloy of aluminum," Vin said. "Where aluminum dampens the power of other metals, duralumin enhances them. Mix duralumin and zinc or brass, then Pull on the emotions of a koloss, and he will be yours."

Yomen didn't dismiss her comments as lies. Ruin, however, strolled forward, walking around Vin in a circle.

"Vin, Vin. What is your game now?" Ruin asked, amused. "Lead him on with little tidbits, then betray him?"

Yomen apparently came to the same conclusion. "Your facts are interesting, Empress, but completely unprovable in my present situation. Therefore, they are—"

"There were five of these storage caverns," Vin said, stepping forward. "We found the others. They led us here."

Yomen shook his head. "And? Why should I care?"

"Your Lord Ruler planned something for those caverns—you can tell that much from the plate he left here in this one. He says that he came up with no way to fight what is happening to us in the world, but do you believe that? I feel there has to be more, some clue hidden in the text of all five plaques."

"You expect me to believe that *you* care what the Lord Ruler wrote?" Yomen asked. "You, his purported murderer?"

"I couldn't care less about him," Vin admitted. "But Yomen, you *have* to believe that I care what happens to the people of the empire! If you've gathered any intelligence about Elend or myself, you know that is true."

"Your Elend is a man who thinks far too highly of himself," Yomen said. "He has read many books, and assumes that his learning makes him capable of being a king. You . . . I still don't know what to think about you." His eyes showed a bit of the hatred she had seen in him during their last meeting. "You claim to have killed the Lord Ruler. Yet . . . he couldn't really have died. You're part of all this, somehow."

*That's it,* Vin thought. *That's my in.* "He wanted us to meet," Vin said. She didn't believe it, but Yomen would.

Yomen raised an eyebrow.

"Can't you see?" Vin said. "Elend and I discovered the other storage caverns, the first one under Luthadel itself. Then, we came here. This was the *last* of the five. The end of the trail. For some reason, the Lord Ruler wanted to lead us here. To you."

Yomen stood for a few moments. To the side, Ruin mimed applause.

"Send for Lellin," Yomen said, turning toward one of his soldiers. "Tell him to bring his maps."

The soldier saluted and left. Yomen turned to Vin, still frowning. "This is not to be an exchange. You will give me the information I request, then I will decide what to do with it."

"Fine," Vin said. "But, you yourself just said that I was connected to all of this. It's *all* connected, Yomen. The mists, the koloss, me, you, the storage caverns, the ash . . ."

He flinched slightly as Vin mentioned that last one.

"The ash is getting worse, isn't it?" she asked. "Falling more thickly?"

Yomen nodded.

"We were always worried about the mists," Vin said. "But the ash, it's going to be what kills us. It will block the sunlight, bury our cities, cover our streets, choke our fields. . . ."

"The Lord Ruler won't let that happen," Yomen said.

"And if he really is dead?"

Yomen met her eyes. "Then you have doomed us all."

*Doomed. . . .* The Lord Ruler had said something similar right before Vin had killed him. She shivered, waiting in awkward silence, suffering Ruin's smiling stare until a scribe scuttled into the room, bearing several rolled maps.

Yomen took one of the maps, waving the man away. He spread it out on a table, waving Vin forward. "Show me," he said, stepping back to keep out of her reach as she approached.

She picked up a piece of charcoal, then began to mark the locations of the storage caverns. Luthadel. Satren. Vetitan. Urteau. All five that she had found—all near the Central Dominance, one in the center, the other four forming a box around it. She put a final "X" beside Fadrex City.

Then, with charcoal gripped in her fingers, she noticed something. *Sure are a lot of mines shown on this map around Fadrex,* she thought. *A lot of metal in the area.*

"Step back," Yomen said.

Vin moved away. He approached, scanning the map. Vin stood in silence, thinking. *Elend's scribes could never find a pattern to the cache locations. Two were in small cities, two in large ones. Some near canals, others not. The scribes claimed that they just didn't have a large enough set from which to determine patterns.*

"This seems completely random," Yomen said, echoing her own thoughts.

"I didn't make up those locations, Yomen," she said, folding her arms. "Your spies can confirm where Elend has taken his armies and sent his emissaries."

"Not all of us have the resources for extensive spy networks, Empress," Yomen said flatly, looking back at the map. "There should be some pattern. . . ."

*Vetitan,* Vin thought. *The place where we found the cavern just before this one. It was a mining town as well. And Urteau too.*

"Yomen?" she said, looking up. "Does one of those maps list mineral deposits?"

"Of course," he said distractedly. "We *are* the Canton of Resource, after all."

"Get it out."

Yomen raised an eyebrow, indicating what he thought of her giving him orders. However, he waved for his scribe to do as she had requested. A second map overlaid the first, and Vin walked forward. Yomen immediately shied backward, keeping out of reach.

*He has good instincts, for a bureaucrat*, she thought, slipping the charcoal out from underneath the map. She quickly made her five marks again. With each one, her hand grew more tense. Each cavern was in a rocky area, near metal mines. Even Luthadel bore rich mineral deposits. Lore said that the Lord Ruler had constructed his capital in that location *because* of the mineral content in the area, particularly the groundwater. That much the better for Allomancers.

"What are you trying to imply?" Yomen asked. He'd edged close enough to see what she'd marked.

"This is the connection," Vin said. "He built his storages near sources of metal."

"Or, it was simple chance."

"No," Vin said, looking up, glancing at Ruin. "No, metal equals Allomancy, Yomen. There's a pattern here."

Yomen waved her away again, approaching the map. He snorted. "You've included marks near each of the most productive mines in the inner empire. You expect me to believe that you're not just playing me, offering some phantom 'evidence' that these really are the locations of the storage caverns?"

Vin ignored him. *Metal. The words of Kwaan were written in metal, because he said they were safe. Safe. Safe from being changed, we assumed.*

Or, did he mean safe from being read?

The Lord Ruler had drawn his maps on metal plates.

So, what if Ruin couldn't find the storages on his own because of the metal shielding them? He would have needed someone to lead him. Someone to visit each one, read the map it contained, then lead him on. . . .

Lord Ruler! We've made the same mistake again! We did exactly what he wanted. No wonder he's let us live!

However, instead of feeling ashamed, this time Vin felt herself growing angry. She glanced over at Ruin, who stood there with his air of cosmic wisdom. His knowing eyes, his fatherly tone, and his deific arrogance.

*Not again,* Vin thought, gritting her teeth. *This time, I'm on to him. That means I can trick him. But . . . I need to know why. Why was he so interested in the storages? What is it he needs before he wins this battle? What is the reason he's waited so long?*

Suddenly, the answer seemed obvious to her. As she examined her feelings, she realized that one of her main reasons for searching out the caches had repeatedly been discredited by Elend. Yet, Vin had continued to pursue the caches, searching for this one thing. She'd *felt,* for reasons she couldn't explain, that it was important.

The thing that had driven the imperial economy for a thousand years. The most powerful of Allomantic metals.

Atium.

Why had she been so infatuated with it? Elend and Yomen were both right—atium was of little importance in the current world. But, her feelings denied that. Why? Was it because *Ruin* wanted it, and Vin had some unexplained connection to him?

The Lord Ruler had said Ruin couldn't read her mind. But she knew that he could affect her emotions. Change how she regarded things, push her forward. Drive her to search out the thing he wanted.

Looking at the emotions that had affected her, she could see Ruin's plan, the way he had manipulated her, the way he thought. Ruin wanted the atium! And, with a chill of terror, Vin realized that she had led him right to it. *No wonder he was so smug before!* Vin thought. *No wonder he assumed that he'd won!*

Why would a god-like force would be so interested in a simple thing like an Allomantic metal? The question made her doubt her conclusions slightly. But at that moment, the doors to the chamber burst open.

And an Inquisitor stood beyond them.

Immediately, Yomen and the soldiers all fell to one knee. Vin took an involuntary step backward. The creature stood tall, like most of its kind, and still wore the gray robes of its pre-Collapse office. The bald head was wrinkled with intricate tattoos, mostly black, one stark red. And, of course, there were the spikes driven point-first through its eyes. One of the spikes had been pounded in farther than the other, crushing the socket around the spikehead. The creature's face, twisted by an inhuman sneer, had once been familiar to Vin.

"Marsh?" Vin whispered in horror.

"My lord," Yomen said, spreading his hands out. "You have finally come! I sent messengers, searching for—"

"Silence," Marsh said in a grating voice, striding forward. "On your feet, obligator."

Yomen hastily stood. Marsh glanced at Vin, smiled slightly, but then pointedly ignored her. He did, however, look directly at Ruin and bow his head in subservience.

Vin shivered. Marsh's features, even twisted as they were, reminded her of his brother. Kelsier.

"You are about to be attacked, obligator," Marsh said, sweeping forward, throwing open the large window at the other side of the room. Through it, Vin could see over the rocky shelves to where Elend's army camped beside the canal.

Except, there was no canal. There were no rocky shelves. Everything was just a uniform black. Ash filled the sky, as thick as a snowstorm.

*Lord Ruler!* Vin thought. *It's gotten so bad!*

Yomen hurried over to the window. "Attacked, my lord? But, they haven't even broken camp!"

"The koloss will attack in surprise," the Inquisitor said. "They don't need to form up ranks—they will simply charge."

Yomen froze for a second, then turned to his soldiers. "Hasten to the defenses. Gather the men on the forward rises!"

Soldiers scuttled from the room. Vin stood quietly. *The man I know as Marsh is dead,* she thought. *He tried to kill Sazed, now he's fully one of* *them. Ruin has . . .*

Has taken control of him. . . .

An idea began to spark in her mind.

"Quickly, obligator," Marsh said. "I did not come to protect your foolish little city. I've come for the thing you discovered in that cache."

"My lord?" Yomen said, surprised.

"Your atium, Yomen," the Inquisitor said. "Give it to me. It *cannot* be in this city when that attack comes, just in case you fall. I shall take it someplace safe."

Vin closed her eyes.

"My . . . lord?" Yomen finally said. "You are, of course, welcome to anything I possess. But, there was no atium in the storage cache. Just the seven beads I had gathered myself, held as a reserve for the Canton of Resource."

Vin opened her eyes. "*What?*"

"Impossible!" Marsh roared. "But, you told the girl earlier that you had it!"

Yomen paled. "Misdirection, my lord. She seemed convinced that I had some wealth of atium, so I let her think that she was right."

"*NO!*"

Vin jumped at the sudden yell. However, Yomen didn't even flinch—and a second later, she realized why. Ruin was the one who had screamed. He had become indistinct, losing Reen's form, his figure blossoming outward in a kind of tempest of whirling darkness. Almost like mist, only far, far blacker.

She'd seen that blackness before. She'd walked through it, in the cavern beneath Luthadel, on her way to the Well of Ascension.

A second later, Ruin was back. He looked like Reen again. He folded his arms behind his back, and didn't look at her, as if trying to pretend that he had not lost control. In his eyes, however, she could see frustration. Anger. She edged away from him—edging *closer* to Marsh.

"You fool!" Marsh said, walking away from her, speaking to Yomen. "You idiot!"

*Damn,* Vin thought in annoyance.

"I . . ." Yomen said, confused. "My lord, why do you care for atium? It is worthless without Allomancers and house politicians to pay for it."

"You know nothing," Marsh snapped. Then, he smiled. "But you are doomed. Yes . . . doomed indeed. . . ."

Outside, she could see that Elend's army was breaking camp. Yomen turned back to the window, and Vin edged closer, ostensibly to give herself a better look. Elend's forces were gathering—men and koloss. Most likely, they had noticed the buildup of city defenses, and had realized that they'd lost any opportunity for surprise.

"He's going to ravage this city," Ruin said, stepping up beside Vin. "Your Elend is a good servant, child. One of my finest. You should be proud of him."

"So many koloss . . ." she heard Yomen whisper. "My lord, there is no way we can fight so many. We need your help."

"Why should I help you?" Marsh asked. "You who fail to deliver to me what I need?"

"But I've remained faithful," Yomen said. "When all others abandoned the Lord Ruler, I have continued to serve him."

"The Lord Ruler is dead," Marsh said with a snort. "He was an unprofitable servant as well."

Yomen paled.

"Let this city burn before the wrath of forty thousand koloss," Marsh said.

*Forty thousand koloss,* Vin thought. He'd found more, somewhere. Attacking seemed the logical thing to do—he could finally capture the city, perhaps giving Vin a chance to escape in the chaos. Very logical, very smart. And yet, suddenly, Vin became sure of one thing.

"Elend won't attack," she announced.

Six eyes—two steel, two flesh, and two incorporeal—turned toward her.

"Elend won't loose that many koloss upon the city," she said. "He's trying to intimidate you, Yomen. And you should listen. Would you still obey this creature, this Inquisitor? He disdains you. He wants you to die. Join with us instead."

Yomen frowned.

"You could fight him with me," Vin said. "You're an Allomancer. These monsters *can* be defeated."

Marsh smiled. "Idealism from you, Vin?"

"Idealism?" she asked, facing the creature. "You think it's idealistic to believe I can kill an Inquisitor? You know I've done it before."

Marsh waved a dismissive hand. "I'm not talking about your foolish threats. I'm talking about *him.*" He nodded toward the army outside. "Your Elend belongs to Ruin, just as I do—just as you do. We all resist, but we all bow before him eventually. Only then do we understand the beauty there is in destruction."

"Your god does not control Elend," Vin said. "He keeps trying to claim that he does, but that only makes him a liar. Or, perhaps, something of an idealist himself."

Yomen watched, confused.

"And if he *does* attack?" Marsh asked with a quiet, eager voice. "What would that mean, Vin? What if he does send his koloss against this city in a blood frenzy, sends them to slaughter and kill, all so that he can get what he *thinks* he needs so badly? Atium and food couldn't get him to come in . . . but you? How would that make you feel? You killed for him. What makes you think that Elend won't do the same for you?"

Vin closed her eyes. Memories of her assault upon Cett's tower returned to her. Memories of wanton killing, Zane at her side. Memories of fire, and death, and an Allomancer loosed.

She'd never killed like that again.

She opened her eyes. Why wouldn't Elend attack? Attacking made so much sense. He knew he could take the city easily. However, he also knew he had trouble controlling the koloss when they reached too great a frenzy. . . .

"Elend won't attack," she said quietly. "Because he's a better person than I am."

*One might notice that Ruin did not send his Inquisitors to Fadrex until after Yomen had—apparently—confirmed that the atium was there in the city. Why not send them as soon as the final cache was located? Where were his minions in all of this?*

*One must realize that, in Ruin's mind, all men were his minions, particularly those whom he could manipulate directly. He didn't send an Inquisitor because they were busy doing other tasks. Instead, he sent someone who—in his mind—was exactly the same thing as an Inquisitor.*

*He tried to spike Yomen, failed, and by that time, Elend's army had arrived. So, he used a different pawn to investigate the cache for him and discover if the atium really was there or not. He didn't commit too many resources to the city at first, fearing a deception on the Lord Ruler's part. Like him, I still wonder if the caches were, in part, intended for just that purpose—to distract Ruin and keep him occupied.*

# 64

". . . AND THAT'S WHY YOU ABSOLUTELY *must* get that message sent, Spook. The pieces of this thing are all spinning about, cast to the wind. You have a clue that nobody else does. Send it flying for me."

Spook nodded, feeling fuzzy. Where was he? What was going on? And why, suddenly, did everything hurt so much?

"Good lad. You did well, Spook. I'm proud."

He tried to nod again, but everything was fuzz and blackness. He coughed, prompting some gasps from a place far off. He groaned. Parts of him hurt quite sharply, though others just tingled. Still others . . . well, those he couldn't feel at all, though he thought he *should* have been able to.

*I was dreaming,* he realized as he slowly came to consciousness. *Why have I been asleep? Was I on watch? Should I go on watch? The shop . . .*

His thoughts trailed off as he opened his eyes. There was someone standing above him. A face. One . . . quite a bit uglier than the face he'd hoped to see.

"Breeze?" he tried to say, though it came out as a croak.

"Ha!" Breeze said with uncharacteristic tears in his eyes. "He *is* waking!"

Another face hovered over him, and Spook smiled. *That's* the one he'd been waiting for. Beldre. "What's going on?" Spook whispered.

Hands brought something to his lips—a water skin. They poured carefully, giving him a drink. He coughed, but got it down. "Why . . . why can't I move?" Spook asked. The only thing he seemed able to twitch was his left hand.

"Your body is being held in casts and bandages, Spook," Beldre said. "Sazed's orders."

"The burns," Breeze said. "Well, they aren't *that* bad, but . . ."

"To hell with the burns," Spook croaked. "I'm alive. I wasn't expecting that."

Breeze looked up at Beldre, smiling.

Send it flying. . . .

"Where is Sazed?" Spook asked.

"You should really try to rest," Beldre said, rubbing his cheek softly. "You've been through a lot."

"And slept through more, I expect," Spook said. "Sazed?"

"Gone, my dear boy," Breeze said. "He went off south with Vin's kandra."

Vin.

Feet clomped across the floor, and a second later, Captain Goradel's face appeared beside the other two. The square-jawed soldier smiled broadly. "Survivor of the Flames indeed!"

You have a clue that nobody else does. . . .

"How is the city?" Spook asked.

"Mostly safe," Beldre said. "The canals flooded, and my brother organized fire brigades. Most of the buildings that burned weren't inhabited anyway."

"You saved it, my lord," Goradel said.

I'm proud. . . .

"The ash is falling even more thickly, isn't it?" Spook asked.

The three above shared looks. Their troubled expressions were enough of a confirmation.

"We're getting a lot of refugees into the city," Beldre said. "From surrounding cities and villages, some as far as Luthadel. . . ."

"I need to send a message," Spook said. "To Vin."

"All right," Breeze said soothingly. "We'll do that as soon as you are better."

"Listen to me, Breeze," Spook said, staring up at the ceiling, unable to do much more than twitch. "Something was controlling me and the Citizen. I *saw* it—the thing that Vin released at the Well of Ascension. The thing that is bringing ash down to destroy us. It wanted this city, but we fought it off. Now, I need to warn Vin."

That's what he'd been sent to do in Urteau. Find information, then report it back to Vin and Elend. He was only just beginning to understand how important a duty that could be.

"Travel is difficult right now, my boy," Breeze said. "It isn't exactly perfect conditions for sending messages."

"Rest some more," Beldre said. "We'll worry about it when you're healed."

Spook gritted his teeth in frustration.

*You* must *get that message sent, Spook. . . .*

"I'll take it," Goradel said quietly.

Spook looked to the side. Sometimes, it was easy to ignore the soldier, with his simple, straightforward manner and his pleasant demeanor. However, the determination in his voice made Spook smile.

"Lady Vin saved my life," Goradel said. "The night of the Survivor's rebellion, she could have left me to die at the hands of the mob. She could have killed me herself. But she took the time to tell me that she understood what I'd been through, and convinced me to switch sides. If she needs this information, Survivor, then I *will* get it to her, or I will die trying."

Spook tried to nod, but his head was held tight by the bandages and wrappings. He flexed his hand. It seemed to work . . . or, at least, work well enough.

He met Goradel's eyes. "Go to the armory and have a sheet of metal pounded thin," Spook said. "Then, return here with something I can use to scratch the metal. These words must be written in steel, and I cannot speak them aloud."

*In those moments when the Lord Ruler both held the power at the Well and was feeling it drain away from him, he understood a great many things. He saw the power of Feruchemy, and rightly feared it. Many of the Terris people, he knew, would reject him as the Hero, for he didn't fulfill their prophecies well. They'd see him as a usurper who killed the Hero they sent. Which, in truth, he was.*

*I think, over the years, Ruin would subtly twist him and make him do terrible things to his own people. But at the beginning, I suspect his decision against them was motivated more by logic than emotion. He was about to unveil a grand power in the Mistborn.*

*He could have, I suppose, kept Allomancy secret and used Feruchemists as his primary warriors and assassins. However, I think he was wise to choose as he did. Feruchemists, by the nature of their powers, have a tendency toward scholarship. With their incredible memories, they would have been very difficult to control over the centuries. Indeed, they* were *difficult to control, even when he suppressed them. Allomancy not only provided a spectacular new ability without that drawback, it offered a mystical power he could use to bribe kings to his side.*

# 65

ELEND STOOD UPON A SMALL ROCK outcropping to look over his troops. Below, the koloss stalked forward, stomping a pathway in the ash for his humans to use after the initial koloss assault.

Elend waited, Ham standing just a few steps below.

*I wear white,* Elend thought. *The color of purity. I try to represent what is good and right. For my men.*

"The koloss should have no trouble with those fortifications," Ham said quietly. "They can leap to the top of city walls; they'll be able to climb those broken stone ridges."

Elend nodded. There probably wouldn't be any need for the human soldiers to attack. With his koloss alone, Elend had the numerical advantage, and it was unlikely Yomen's soldiers had ever fought the creatures before.

The koloss sensed a fight. He could feel them getting excited. They strained against him, wishing to attack.

"Ham," he said, glancing down. "Is this right?"

Ham shrugged. "This move does make sense, El," he said, rubbing his chin. "Attacking is our only real chance of saving Vin. And, we can't hold the siege—not any longer." Ham paused, then shook his head, his tone of voice taking on that uncertain quality it always did when he considered one of his logic problems. "Yet, loosing a group of koloss on a city does seem immoral. I wonder if you'll be able to control them, once they begin to rampage. Is saving Vin worth the possibility of killing even one innocent child? I don't know. Then again, maybe we'll save more children by bringing them into our empire. . . ."

*I shouldn't have bothered to ask Ham,* Elend thought. *He never has been able to give a straight answer.* He looked out over the field, blue koloss against a plain of black. With tin, he could see men cowering on the tops of the Fadrex City ridges.

"No," Ham said.

Elend glanced down at the Thug.

"No," Ham repeated. "We shouldn't attack."

"Ham?" Elend said, feeling a surreal amusement. "Did you actually come to a *conclusion?*"

Ham nodded. "Yes." He didn't offer explanation or rationalization.

Elend looked up. *What would Vin do?* His first instinct was to think that she'd attack. But then, he remembered when he had discovered her years before, after she'd assaulted Cett's tower. She'd been huddled up in a corner, crying.

*No,* he thought. *No, she wouldn't do this thing. Not to protect me. She's learned better.*

"Ham," he said, surprising himself. "Tell the men to pull back and disassemble camp. We're returning to Luthadel."

Ham looked back, surprised—as if he hadn't expected Elend to come to the same conclusion he had. "And Vin?"

"I'm not going to attack this city, Ham," Elend said. "I won't conquer these people, even if it is for their own good. We'll find another way to get Vin free."

Ham smiled. "Cett's going to be furious."

Elend shrugged. "He's a paraplegic. What's he going to do? Bite us? Come on, let's get down off this rock and go deal with Luthadel."

"They're pulling back, my lord," the soldier said.

Vin sighed in relief. Ruin stood, expression unreadable, hands folded behind his back. Marsh stood with one hand claw-like on Yomen's shoulder, both watching out the window.

*Ruin brought in an Inquisitor,* she thought. *He must have grown tired of my efforts to get the truth out of Yomen, and instead brought in someone he knew the obligator would obey.*

"This is very odd," Ruin finally said.

Vin took a breath, then gambled. "Don't you see?" she asked quietly.

Ruin turned toward her.

She smiled. "You really don't understand, do you?"

This time, Marsh turned as well.

"You think I didn't realize?" Vin asked. "You think I didn't know you were after the atium all along? That you were following us from cavern to cavern, Pushing on my emotions, forcing me to search it out for you? You were so obvious. Your koloss always drew close to a city only *after* we discovered that it was the next in line. You moved in to threaten us, make us move more quickly, but you never got your koloss there *too* fast. The thing is, we knew all along."

"Impossible," Ruin whispered.

"No," Vin said. "Quite possible. Atium is metal, Ruin. You can't see it. Your vision gets fuzzy when too much of it is around, doesn't it? Metal is your power; you use it to make Inquisitors, but it's like light to you—blinding. You never saw when we actually discovered the atium. You just followed along with our ruse."

Marsh let go of Yomen, then rushed across the room, grabbing Vin by the arms.

"*WHERE IS IT!*" the Inquisitor demanded, lifting her, shaking her.

She laughed, distracting Marsh as she carefully reached for his sash. Marsh shook her too much, however, and her fingers couldn't find their mark.

"You will tell me where the atium is, child," Ruin said calmly. "Haven't I explained this? There is no fighting against me. You think yourself clever, perhaps, but you really don't understand. You don't even know what that atium is."

Vin shook her head. "You think I'd actually lead you to it?"

Marsh shook her again, rattling her, making her grit her teeth. When he stopped, her vision swam. To the side, she could barely make out Yomen watching with a frown. "Yomen," she said. "Your people are safe now—can you not finally trust that Elend is a good man?"

Marsh tossed her aside. She hit hard, rolling.

"Ah, child," Ruin said, kneeling down beside her. "Must I *prove* that you cannot fight me?"

"Yomen!" Marsh said, turning. "Prepare your men. I want you to order an assault!"

"What?" Yomen said. "My lord, an assault?"

"Yes," Marsh said. "I want you to take all of your soldiers and have them attack Elend Venture's position."

Yomen paled. "Leave behind our fortifications? Charge an army of *koloss?*"

"That is my order," Marsh said.

Yomen stood quietly for a moment.

"Yomen . . ." Vin said, crawling to her knees. "Don't you see that he's manipulating you?"

Yomen didn't respond. He looked troubled. *What would make him even consider an order like that?*

"You see," Ruin whispered. "You see my power? You see how I manipulate even their faith?"

"Give the order," Yomen said, turning from Vin, facing his soldier captains. "Have the men attack. Tell them that the Lord Ruler will protect them."

"Well," Ham said, standing beside Elend in the camp. "I didn't expect that."

Elend nodded slowly, watching the flood of men pour through the Fadrex gateway. Some stumbled in the deep ash; others pushed their way forward, their charge hampered to a slow crawl.

"Some stayed back," Elend said, pointing up at the wall top. Not having tin, Ham wouldn't be able to see the men who lined the wall, but he'd trust Elend's words. Around them, Elend's human soldiers were breaking camp. The koloss still waited silently in their positions, surrounding the camp.

"What is Yomen thinking?" Ham asked. "He's throwing an inferior force against an army of koloss?"

*Like we did, attacking the koloss camp back in Vetitan.* Something about it made Elend very uncomfortable.

"Retreat," Elend said.

"Huh?" Ham asked.

"I said sound the retreat!" Elend said. "Abandon position. Pull the soldiers back!"

At his silent command, the koloss began to charge away from the city. Yomen's soldiers were still pushing their way through the ash. Elend's koloss, however, would clear the way for his men. They should be able to stay ahead.

"Strangest retreat *I've* ever seen," Ham noted, but moved back to give the orders.

*That's it,* Elend thought in annoyance. *It's time to figure out what the hell is going on in that city.*

Yomen was crying. They were small, quiet tears. He stood straight-backed, not facing the window.

*He fears that he's ordered his men to their deaths,* Vin thought. She moved up to him, limping slightly from where she'd hit the ground. Marsh stood watching out the window. Ruin eyed her curiously.

"Yomen," she said.

Yomen turned toward her. "It's a test," he said. "The Inquisitors are the Lord Ruler's most holy priests. I'll do as commanded, and the Lord Ruler will protect my men and this city. Then you will see."

Vin gritted her teeth. Then, she turned and forced herself to walk up beside Marsh. She glanced out the window—and was surprised to see that Elend's army was retreating away from Yomen's soldiers. Yomen's force wasn't running with very much conviction. Obviously, they were content to let their superior enemy run away before them. The sun was finally setting.

Marsh did not seem to find Elend's retreat amusing. That was enough to make Vin smile—which made Marsh grab her again.

"You think you have won?" Marsh asked, leaning down, his uneven spikeheads hanging just before Vin's face.

Vin reached for his sash. *Just a little farther. . . .*

"You claim to have been playing with me, child," Ruin said, stepping up next to her. "But you are the one who has been played. The koloss who serve you, they get their strength from *my* power. You think that I would let you control them if it weren't for my eventual gain?"

Vin felt a moment of chill.

Oh, no. . . .

Elend felt a terrible *ripping* sensation. It was like a part of his innards had been suddenly, and forcibly, pulled away from him. He gasped, releasing his Steelpush. He fell through the ash-filled sky, and landed unevenly on a rock shelf outside of Fadrex City.

He gasped, breathing in and out, trembling.

*What in the hell was that?* he thought, standing up, holding his thumping head.

And then he realized it. He couldn't feel the koloss anymore. In the distance, the massive blue creatures stopped running away. And then, to Elend's horror, he watched them turn around.

They began to charge his men.

Marsh held her. "Hemalurgy is *his* power, Vin!" he said. "The Lord Ruler used it unwittingly! The fool! Each time he built an Inquisitor or a koloss, he made another servant for his enemy! Ruin waited patiently, knowing that when he finally broke free, he'd have an entire army waiting for him!"

Yomen was at another window. He gasped quietly, watching. "You did deliver my men!" the obligator said. "The koloss have turned to attack their own army!"

"They'll come after your men next, Yomen," Vin said, dizzily. "Then they'll destroy your city."

"It is ending," Ruin whispered. "Everything needs to fit into place. Where is the atium? It's the last piece."

Marsh shook her. She finally managed to reach his sash—and slipped her fingers into it. Fingers trained by her brother, and by a lifetime on the street.

The fingers of a thief.

"You can't fool me, Vin," Ruin said. "I am God."

Marsh raised one hand—releasing her arm—then raised a fist as if to hit her. He moved with power, pewter obviously burning inside of him. He was an Allomancer, like all Inquisitors. Which meant he tended to keep metals on his person. Vin flipped her hand up and downed the vial of metals she'd stolen from his sash.

Marsh froze, and Ruin fell silent.

Vin smiled.

Pewter flared in her stomach, restoring her to life. Marsh moved to complete his slap, but she pulled out of the way, then yanked him off balance by pulling her other arm—which he still held—to the side. He hung on, barely, but when he turned to face Vin, he found her holding her earring in one hand.

And she duralumin-Pushed it directly into his forehead. It was a tiny bit of metal, but it threw up a drop of blood as it hit, ripping through his head and passing out the other side.

Marsh dropped, and Vin was thrown backward by her own Push. She crashed into the wall, causing soldiers to scatter and yell, raising weapons. Yomen turned toward her, surprised.

"Yomen!" she said. "Bring your men back! Fortify the city!" Ruin had disappeared in the chaos of her escape. Perhaps he was out overseeing the control of the koloss.

Yomen seemed indecisive. "I . . . No. I will not lose faith. I must be strong."

Vin gritted her teeth, climbing to her feet. *Nearly as frustrating as Elend is at times,* she thought, scrambling over to Marsh's body. She reached into his sash, pulling out the second—and final—vial he had stored there. She downed this, restoring the metals she'd lost to duralumin.

Then, she hopped up on the windowsill. Mist puffed around her—the sun was still up, but the mists were arriving earlier and earlier. Outside, she could see Elend's forces beleaguered by rampaging koloss on one side, Yomen's soldiers not attacking—yet blocking retreat—on the other. She moved to jump out and join the fight, and then she noticed something.

A small group of koloss. A thousand in number, small enough to apparently have been ignored by both Elend's forces and Yomen's. Even Ruin appeared to have paid them no heed, for they simply stood in the ash, partially buried, like a collection of quiet stones.

Vin's koloss. The ones that Elend had given her, Human at their lead. With a devious smile, she ordered them forward.

To attack Yomen's men.

"I'm telling you, Yomen," she said, hopping off of the windowsill and back into the room. "Those koloss don't care which side the humans are on—they'll kill anyone. The Inquisitors have gone mad, now that the Lord Ruler is dead. Didn't you pay any attention to what this one said?"

Yomen looked thoughtful.

"He even admitted that the Lord Ruler was dead, Yomen," Vin said with exasperation. "Your faith is commendable. But sometimes, you just have to know when to *give up and move on*!"

One of the soldier captains yelled something, and Yomen spun back toward the window. He cursed.

Immediately, Vin felt something. Something *Pulling* on her koloss. She cried out as they were yanked away from her, but the damage had been done. Yomen looked troubled. He'd seen the koloss attack his soldiers. He looked into Vin's eyes, silent for a moment. "Retreat into the city!" he finally yelled, turning to his messengers. "And order the men to allow Venture's soldiers refuge inside as well!"

Vin sighed in relief. And then, something grabbed her leg. She looked down with shock as Marsh climbed to his knees. She had sliced through his brain itself, but the amazing Inquisitor healing powers seemed to be able to deal even with that.

"Fool," Marsh said, standing. "Even if Yomen turns against me, I can kill him, and his soldiers will follow me. He's given them a belief in the Lord Ruler, and I hold that belief by right of inheritance."

Vin took a deep breath, then hit Marsh with a duralumin-Soothing. If it worked on koloss and kandra, why not Inquisitors?

Marsh stumbled. Vin's Push lasted a brief moment, but during it she *felt* something. A wall, like she'd felt the first time she'd tried to control TenSoon or the first time she'd taken control of a group of koloss.

She *Pushed,* Pushed with everything she had. In a burst of power, she came close to seizing control of Marsh's body, but not close enough. The wall within his mind was too strong, and she only had one vial's worth of metal to use. The wall shoved her back. She cried out in frustration.

Marsh reached out, growling, and grabbed her by the neck. She gasped, eyes widening as Marsh began to grow in size. Getting stronger, like . . .

A *Feruchemist,* she realized. *I'm in serious trouble.*

People in the room were yelling, but she couldn't hear them. Marsh's hand—now large and beefy—gripped her throat, strangling her. Only flared pewter was keeping her alive. She flashed back to the day, many years ago, when she'd been held by another Inquisitor. Standing in the Lord Ruler's throne room.

On that day, Marsh himself had saved her life. It seemed a twisted irony that she would struggle now, being strangled by him.

Not. Yet.

The mists began to swirl around her.

Marsh started, though he continued to hold her.

Vin drew upon the mists.

It happened again. She didn't know how, or why, but it just *happened.* She breathed the mists into her body, as she had on that day so long ago when she'd killed the Lord Ruler. She somehow pulled them into her and used them to fuel her body with an incredible Allomantic surge of power.

And, with that power, she *Pushed* on Marsh's emotions.

The wall inside of him cracked, then burst. For a moment, Vin felt a sense of vertigo. She saw things through Marsh's eyes—indeed, she felt like she *understood* him. His love of destruction, and his hatred of himself. And through him, she caught a brief glimpse of something. A hateful, destructive thing that hid behind a mask of civility.

Ruin was *not* the same thing as the mists.

Marsh cried out, dropping her. Her strange burst of power dissipated, but it didn't matter, for Marsh fled out the window and Pushed himself away through the mists. Vin picked herself up, coughing.

I did it. I drew upon the mists again. But why now? Why, after all the trying, did it happen now?

There was no time to consider it at the moment—not with the koloss attacking. She turned to the baffled Yomen. "Continue to retreat into the city!" she said. "I'm going out to help."

Elend fought desperately, cutting down koloss after koloss. It was difficult, dangerous work, even for him. These koloss couldn't be controlled—no matter how he Pushed or Pulled on their emotions, he couldn't bring even one of them under his power.

That only left fighting. And, his men weren't prepared for battle—he'd forced them to abandon camp too quickly.

A koloss swung, its sword whooshing dangerously close to Elend's head. He cursed, dropping a coin and Pushing himself backward through the air, over his fighting men and back into camp. They'd managed to retreat back to the positioning of their original fortification, which meant that they had a small hill for defense and didn't have to fight in ash. A group of his Coinshots—he only had ten—stood firing wave after wave of coins into the main bulk of the koloss, and archers threw similar volleys. The main line of soldiers was supported by Lurchers from behind, who would Pull on koloss weapons and throw them off balance, giving the regular men extra openings. Thugs ran around the perimeter in groups of two or three, shoring up weak spots and acting as reserves.

Even with all of that, they were in serious trouble. Elend's army couldn't stand against so many koloss any more easily than Fadrex could have. Elend landed in the middle of the half-disassembled camp, breathing heavily, covered in koloss blood. Men yelled as they fought a short distance away, holding the camp perimeter with the help of Elend's Allomancers. The bulk of the koloss army was still bunched around the northern section of camp, but Elend couldn't pull his men back any farther toward Fadrex without exposing them to Yomen's archers.

Elend tried to catch his breath as a servant rushed up with a cup of water for him. Cett sat a short distance away, directing the battle tactics. Elend tossed aside the empty cup and moved over to the general, who sat at a small table. It held a map of the area, but hadn't been marked on. The koloss were so close, the battle happening just yards away, that it wasn't really necessary to keep an abstract battle map.

"Never did like having those things in the army," Cett said as he downed a cup of water himself. A servant moved over, leading a surgeon, who pulled out a bandage to begin working on Elend's arm—which, up until that moment, he hadn't noticed was bleeding.

"Well," Cett noted, "at least we'll die in battle, rather than of starvation!"

Elend snorted, picking up his sword again. The sky was nearly dark. They didn't have much time before—

A figure landed on the table in front of Cett. "Elend!" Vin said. "Retreat to the city. Yomen will let you in."

Elend started. "Vin!" Then, he smiled. "What took you so long?"

"I got delayed by an Inquisitor and a dark god," she said. "Now, hustle. I'll go see if I can distract some of those koloss."

*Inquisitors had little chance of resisting Ruin. They had more spikes than any of his other Hemalurgic creations, and that put them completely under his domination.*

*Yes, it would have taken a man of supreme will to resist Ruin even slightly while bearing the spikes of an Inquisitor.*

# 66

SAZED TRIED NOT TO THINK about how dark the ash was in the sky, or how terrible the land looked.

*I've been such a fool,* he thought, riding in the saddle. *Of all the times that the world needed something to believe in, this is it. And I wasn't there to give it to them.*

He hurt from so much riding, yet he clung to the saddle, still somewhat amazed at the creature who ran beneath him. When Sazed had first decided to go with TenSoon south, he had despaired at making the trip. Ash fell like the snows of a blizzard, and it had piled terribly high in most places. Sazed had known travel would be difficult, and he'd feared slowing TenSoon, who could obviously travel far more quickly as a wolfhound.

TenSoon considered this concern, then had ordered a horse and a large hog to be brought to him. TenSoon first ingested the hog to give himself extra mass, then molded his gel-like flesh around the horse to digest it as well. Within an hour, he'd formed his body into a replica of the horse—but one with enhanced muscles and weight, creating the enormous, extra-strong marvel which Sazed now rode.

They'd been running nonstop since then. Fortunately, Sazed had some wakefulness he'd stored in a metalmind a year ago, after the siege of Luthadel. He used this to keep himself from falling asleep. It still amazed him that TenSoon could enhance a horse's body so well. It moved with ease through the thick ash, where a real horse—and certainly a human—would have balked at the difficulty. *Another thing I've been a fool about. These last few days, I could have been interrogating TenSoon about his powers. How much more is there that I don't know?*

Despite his shame, however, Sazed felt something of peace within himself. If he'd continued to teach about religions after he'd stopped believing in them, then he would have been a true hypocrite. Tindwyl had believed in giving people hope, even if one had to tell them lies to do so. That's the credit she had given to religion: lies that made people feel better.

Sazed couldn't have acted the same way—at least, he couldn't have done so and remained the person he wanted to be. However, he now had hope. The Terris religion was the one that had taught about the Hero of

Ages in the first place. If any contained the truth, it would be this one. Sazed needed to interrogate the First Generation of kandra and discover what they knew.

Though, if I do find the truth, what will I do with it?

The trees they passed were stripped of leaves. The landscape was covered in a good four feet of ash. "How can you keep going like this?" Sazed asked as the kandra galloped over a hilltop, shoving aside ash and ignoring obstructions.

"My people are created from mistwraiths," TenSoon explained, not even sounding winded. "The Lord Ruler turned the Feruchemists into mistwraiths, and they began to breed true as a species. You add a Blessing to a mistwraith, and they become awakened, turning into a kandra. One such as I, created centuries after the Ascension, was born as a mistwraith but became awakened when I received my Blessing."

". . . Blessing?" Sazed asked.

"Two small metal spikes, Keeper," TenSoon said. "We are created like Inquisitors, or like koloss. However, we are more subtle creations than either of those. We were made third and last, as the Lord Ruler's power waned."

Sazed frowned, leaning low as the horse ran beneath some skeletal tree branches.

"What is different about you?"

"We have more independence of will than the other two," TenSoon said. "We only have two spikes in us, while the others have more. An Allomancer can still take control of us, but free we remain more independent of mind than koloss or Inquisitors, who are both affected by Ruin's impulses even when he isn't directly controlling them. Did you never wonder why both of them are driven so powerfully to kill?"

"That doesn't explain how you can carry me, all our baggage, and still run through this ash."

"The metal spikes we carry grant us things," TenSoon said. "Much as Feruchemy gives you strength, or Allomancy gives Vin strength, my Blessing gives me strength. It will never run out, but it isn't as spectacular as the bursts your people can create. Still, my Blessing—mixed with my ability to craft my body as I wish—allows me a high level of endurance."

Sazed fell silent. They continued to gallop.

"There isn't much time left," TenSoon noted.

"I can see that," Sazed said. "It makes me wonder what we can do."

"This is the only time in which we could succeed," TenSoon said. "We must be poised, ready to strike. Ready to aid the Hero of Ages when she comes."

"Comes?"

"She will lead an army of Allomancers to the Homeland," TenSoon said, "and there will save all of us—kandra, human, koloss, and Inquisitor."

*An army of Allomancers?* "Then . . . what am I to do?"

"You must convince the kandra how dire the situation is," TenSoon explained, slowing to a stop in the ash. "For there is . . . something they must be prepared to do. Something very difficult, yet necessary. My people will resist it, but perhaps you can show them the way."

Sazed nodded, then climbed off of the kandra to stretch his legs.

"Do you recognize this location?" TenSoon asked, turning to look at him with a horse's head.

"I do not," Sazed said. "With the ash . . . well, I haven't really been able to follow our path for days."

"Over that ridge, you will find the place where the Terris people have set up their refugee camp."

Sazed turned with surprise. "The Pits of Hathsin?"

TenSoon nodded. "We call it the Homeland."

"The *Pits?*" Sazed asked with shock. "But . . ."

"Well, not the Pits themselves," TenSoon said. "You know that this entire area has cave complexes beneath it?"

Sazed nodded. The place where Kelsier had trained his original army of skaa soldiers was just a short trip to the north.

"Well, one of those cave complexes is the kandra Homeland. It abuts the Pits of Hathsin—in fact, several of the kandra passages run into the Pits, and had to be kept closed off, lest workers in the Pits find their way into the Homeland."

"Does your Homeland grow atium?" Sazed asked.

"Grow it? No, it does not. That is, I suppose, what separates the Homeland from the Pits of Hathsin. Either way, the entrance to my people's caverns is right there."

Sazed turned with a start. "Where?"

"That depression in the ash," TenSoon said, nodding his large head toward it. "Good luck, Keeper. I have my own duties to attend to."

Sazed nodded, feeling shocked that they had traveled so far so quickly, and untied his pack from the kandra's back. He left the bag containing bones—those of the wolfhound, and another set that looked human. Probably a body TenSoon carried to use should he need it.

The enormous horse turned to go.

"Wait!" Sazed said, raising a hand.

TenSoon looked back.

"Good luck," Sazed said. "May . . . our god preserve you."

TenSoon smiled with a strange equine expression, then took off, galloping through the ash.

Sazed turned to the depression in the ground. Then, he hefted his pack—filled with metalminds and a solitary tome—and walked forward. Even moving that short distance in the ash was difficult. He reached the depression and—taking a breath—began to dig his way into the ash.

He didn't get far before he slid down into a tunnel. It didn't open straight down, fortunately, and he didn't fall far. The cavern around him came up at an incline, opening to the outside world in a hole that was half pit, half cave. Sazed stood up in the cavern, then reached into his pack and pulled out a tinmind. With this, he tapped eyesight, improving his vision as he walked into the darkness.

A tinmind didn't work as well as an Allomancer's tin—or, rather, it didn't work in the same way. It could allow one to see very great distances, but it was of far less help in poor illumination. Soon, even with his tinmind, Sazed was walking in darkness, feeling his way along the tunnel.

And then, he saw light.

"Halt!" a voice called. "Who returns from Contract?"

Sazed continued forward. A part of him was frightened, but another part was just curious. He knew a very important fact.

Kandra could not kill humans.

Sazed stepped up to the light, which turned out to be a melon-sized rock atop a pole, its porous material coated with some kind of glowing fungus. A pair of kandra blocked his path. They were easily identifiable as such since they wore no clothing and their skins were translucent. They appeared to have bones carved from rock.

*Fascinating!* Sazed thought. *They make their own bones. I really do have a new culture to explore. A whole new society—art, religion, mores, gender interactions. . . .*

The prospect was so exciting that, for a moment, even the end of the world seemed trivial by comparison. He had to remind himself to focus. He needed to investigate their religion first. Other things were secondary.

"Kandra, who are you? Which bones do you wear?"

"You are going to be surprised, I think," Sazed said as gently as he could. "For, I am no kandra. My name is Sazed, Keeper of Terris, and I have been sent to speak with the First Generation."

Both kandra guards started.

"You don't have to let me pass," Sazed said. "Of course, if you don't take me into your Homeland, then I'll have to leave and tell everyone on the outside where it is. . . ."

The guards turned to each other. "Come with us," one of them finally said.

*Koloss also had little chance of breaking free. Four spikes, and their diminished mental capacity, left them fairly easy to dominate. Only in the throes of a blood frenzy did they have any form of autonomy.*

*Four spikes also made them easier for Allomancers to control. In our time, it required a duralumin Push to take control of a kandra. Koloss, however, could be taken by a determined regular Push, particularly when they were frenzied.*

# 67

ELEND AND VIN STOOD ATOP the Fadrex City fortifications. The rock ledge had once held the bonfires they'd watched in the night sky—she could see the blackened scar from one of them just to her left.

It felt good to be held by Elend again. His warmth was a comfort, particularly when looking out of the city, over the field that Elend's army had once occupied. The koloss army was growing. It stood silently in the blizzard-like ash, thousands strong. More and more of the creatures were arriving each day, amassing to an overwhelming force.

"Why don't they just attack?" Yomen asked with annoyance. He was the only other one who stood on the overlook; Ham and Cett were down below, seeing to the army's preparation. They'd need to be ready to defend the moment that the koloss assaulted the city.

"He wants us to know just how soundly he's going to beat us," Vin said. *Plus,* she added in her mind, *he's waiting. Waiting on that last bit of information.*

Where is the atium?

She'd fooled Ruin. She'd proven to herself that it could be done. Yet, she was still frustrated. She felt like she'd spent the last few years of her life reacting to every wiggle of Ruin's fingers. Each time she thought herself clever, wise, or self-sacrificing, she discovered that she'd simply been doing his will the entire time. It made her angry.

But what could she do?

*I have to make Ruin play his hand*, she thought. *Make* him *act*, *expose himself.*

For a brief moment, back in Yomen's throne room, she had felt something amazing. With the strange power she'd gained from the mists, she'd touched Ruin's own mind—via Marsh—and seen something therein.

Fear. She remembered it, distinct and pure. At that moment, Ruin had been afraid of her. That's why Marsh had fled.

Somehow, she'd taken the power of the mists into her, then used them to perform Allomancy of surpassing might. She'd done it before, when fighting the Lord Ruler in his palace. Why could she only draw on that power at random, unpredictable times? She'd wanted to use it against Zane, but had failed. She'd tried a dozen times during the last few days, just as she'd tried during the days following the Lord Ruler's death. She'd never been able to access even a hint of that power.

It struck like a thunderclap.

A massive, overpowering quake rolled across the land. The rock ledges around Fadrex broke, some of them tumbling to the ground. Vin remained on her feet, but only with the help of pewter, and she barely snatched Yomen by the front of his obligator robes as he careened and almost fell from their ledge. Elend grabbed her arm, reinforcing her as the sudden quake shook the land. Inside the city, several buildings fell.

Then, all went still. Vin breathed heavily, forehead slicked with sweat, Yomen's robes clutched in her grip. She glanced at Elend.

"That one was far worse than the previous ones," he said, cursing quietly to himself.

"We're doomed," Yomen said softly, forcing himself to his feet. "If the things you say are true, then not only is the Lord Ruler dead, but the thing he spent his life fighting has now come to destroy the world."

"We've survived this long," Elend said firmly. "We'll make it yet. Earthquakes may hurt us, but they hurt the koloss too—look, and you'll see that some of them were crushed by toppling rocks. If things get rough up here, we can retreat inside the cavern."

"And will it survive quakes like that one?" Yomen asked.

"Better than the buildings up here will. None of this was built for earthquakes—but if I know the Lord Ruler, he anticipated the quakes, and picked caverns that were solid and capable of withstanding them."

Yomen seemed to take little comfort in the words, but Vin smiled. Not because of what Elend said, but because of how he said it. Something about him had changed. He seemed confident in a way he'd never been before. He had some of the same idealistic air he'd expressed when he'd been a youth at court—yet he also had the hardness of the man who'd led his people in war.

He'd finally found the balance. And, oddly enough, it had come from deciding to retreat.

"He does have a point, however, Vin," Elend said in a softer tone. "We need to figure out our next step. Ruin obviously intended to defeat us here, but he has been pushed back for a time, at least. What now?"

We have to trick him, she thought. Perhaps . . . use the same strategy Yomen used on me?

She paused, considering the idea. She reached up, fingering her earring. It had been mangled after its trip through Marsh's head, of course, but it had been a simple matter to have a smith bend it back into shape.

The first time she'd met with Yomen, he'd given her back the earring. It had seemed like a strange move, giving metal to an Allomancer. Yet, in a controlled environment, it had been very clever. He'd been able to test and see if she had any hidden metals—all the while reserving the fact that he could burn atium and protect himself.

Later, he'd been able to get her to reveal her hand, to attack and show him what she was planning, so that he could defuse it in a situation where he was in power. Could she do the same to Ruin?

That thought mixed with another one. Both times when the mists had helped her, they had come in a moment of pure desperation. It was as if they reacted to her need. So, was there a way to put herself in a situation where her need was even greater than before? It was a thin hope, but—mixed with her desire to force Ruin's hand—it formed a plan in her head.

Put herself in danger. Make Ruin bring his Inquisitors, putting Vin in a situation where the mists *had* to help her. If that didn't work, maybe she could get Ruin to play his hand or spring any hidden traps he had waiting for her.

It was incredibly risky, but she could feel that she didn't have much time. Ruin would win soon—very soon—unless she did *something.* And, this was all she could think of to do. But, how could she make it happen without explaining it to Elend? She couldn't speak of the plan, lest she reveal to Ruin what she was doing.

She looked up at Elend, a man she seemed to know better than herself. He hadn't needed to tell her that he'd reconciled the two halves of himself, she'd simply been able to tell it from looking at him. With a person like that, did she even really need to speak her plans? Perhaps . . . "Elend," she said, "I think there's only one way to save this city."

"And that is?" he said slowly.

"I have to go get *it*."

Elend frowned, then opened his mouth. She looked into his eyes, hoping. He paused.

"The . . . atium?" he guessed.

Vin smiled. "Yes. Ruin knows that we have it. He'll find it even if we don't use it. But, if we bring it here, at least we can fight."

"It would be safer here anyway," Elend said slowly, eyes confused, but trusting her. "I'd rather have an army between those riches and our enemies. Perhaps we could use it to bribe some local warlords to help us."

It seemed a flimsy ruse to her. And yet, she knew that was because she could see Elend's confusion, could read his lies in his eyes. She understood him, as he understood her. It was an understanding that required love.

And she suspected that was something that Ruin would never be able to comprehend.

"I need to leave, then," she said, embracing him tightly, closing her eyes.

"I know."

She held him close for a few moments longer, feeling the ash fall around her, blow against her skin and cheek. Feeling Elend's heart beat beneath her ear. She leaned up and kissed him. Finally, she pulled back, then checked her metals. She met his eyes, and he nodded, so she jumped down into the city to gather some horseshoes.

A few moments later, she was shooting through the ashy air toward Luthadel, a maelstrom of metal around her. Elend stood silently behind, on the rock ledge, watching her go.

*Now,* she thought to Ruin, who she knew was watching her carefully, even though he hadn't revealed himself since she'd drawn upon the mists. *Let's have a chase, you and I.*

*When the Lord Ruler offered his plan to his Feruchemist friends—the plan to change them into mistwraiths—he was making them speak on behalf of all the land's Feruchemists. Though he changed his friends into kandra to restore their minds and memories, the rest he left as nonsentient mistwraiths. These bred more of their kind, living and dying, becoming a race unto themselves. From these children of the original mistwraiths, he made the next generations of kandra.*

*However, even gods can make mistakes, I have learned. Rashek, the Lord Ruler, thought to transform all of the living Feruchemists into mistwraiths. However, he did not think of the genetic heritage left in the other Terris people, whom he left alive. So it was that Feruchemists continued being born, if only rarely.*

*This oversight cost him much, but gained the world so much more.*

# 68

SAZED WALKED IN WONDER, led by his guards. He saw kandra after kandra, each one with a more interesting body than the one before. Some were tall and willowy, with bones made of white wood. Others were stocky, with bones thicker than any human's. All stuck generally to human body shapes, however.

*They used to be human,* he reminded himself. *Or, at least, their ancestors were.*

The caverns around him felt old. The pathways were worn smooth, and while there were no real "buildings," he passed many smaller caverns, varied drapery hanging in front of their openings. There was a sense of exquisite craftsmanship to it all, from the carved poles that held the fungus lights, to the very bones of the people around him. It wasn't the detailed ornamentation of a nobleman's keep, for there were no patterns, leaves, or knots carved into the stonework or bones. Instead, things were polished smooth, carved with rounded sides, or woven in broad lines and shapes.

The kandra seemed afraid of him. It was a strange experience for Sazed. He had been many things in his life: rebel, servant, friend, scholar. However, never before had he found himself an object of fear. Kandra ducked around corners, peeking at him. Others stood in shock, watching him pass. Obviously, news of his arrival had spread quickly, otherwise they would have just assumed him to be a kandra wearing human bones.

His guards led him to a steel door set into a large cavern wall. One of them moved inside, while the other guarded Sazed. Sazed noticed shards of metal twinkling in the kandra's shoulders. They appeared to be spikes, one in each shoulder.

*Smaller than Inquisitor spikes,* Sazed thought. *But still very effective. Interesting.*

"What would you do if I were to run?" Sazed asked.

The kandra started. "Um . . ."

"Can I assume from your hesitance that you are still forbidden to harm, or at least kill, a human?" Sazed asked.

"We follow the First Contract."

"Ah," Sazed said. "Very interesting. And, with whom did you make the First Contract?"

"The Father."

"The Lord Ruler?" Sazed asked.

The kandra nodded.

"He is, unfortunately and truly, dead. So, is your Contract no longer valid?"

"I don't know," the kandra said, looking away.

So, Sazed thought, not all of them are as forceful of personality as TenSoon. Even when he was playing the part of a simple wolfhound, I found him to be intense.

The other soldier returned. "Come with me," he said.

They led Sazed through the open metal doors. The room beyond had a large metal pedestal a few feet high. The guards did not step on it, but led Sazed around it toward a place before a group of stone lecterns. Many of the lecterns were empty, though kandra with twinkling bones stood behind two of them. These creatures were tall—or, at least, they used tall bones—and very fine-featured.

*Aristocrats,* Sazed thought. He had found that class of people very easy to identify, no matter what the culture or—apparently—species.

Sazed's guards gestured for him to stand before the lecterns. Sazed ignored the gestures, walking in a circle around the room. As he had expected, his guards didn't know what to do—they followed, but refrained from putting their hands on him.

"There is metal plating surrounding the entire chamber," Sazed noted. "Is it ornamental, or does it serve a function?"

"We will be asking the questions here, Terrisman!" said one of the aristocratic kandra.

Sazed paused, turning. "No," he said. "No, you will not. I am Sazed, Keeper of Terris. However, among your people, I have another name. Holy Announcer."

The other kandra leader snorted. "What does an outsider know of such things?"

"An outsider?" Sazed asked. "You should better learn your own doctrine, I think." He began to walk forward. "I am Terris, as are you. Yes, I know your origins. I know how you were created—and I know the heritage you bring with you."

He stopped before their lecterns. "I announce to you that I have discovered the Hero. I have lived with her, worked with her, and watched her. I handed her the very spear she used to slay the Lord Ruler. I have seen her take command of kings, watched her overcome armies of both men and koloss. I have come to announce this to you, so that you may prepare yourselves."

He paused, eyeing them. "For the end is here," he added.

The two kandra stood quietly for a few moments. "Go get the others," one finally said, his voice shaking.

Sazed smiled. As one of the guards ran off, Sazed turned to face down the second soldier. "I shall require a table and chair, please. Also, something with which to write."

A few minutes later, all was ready. His kandra attendants had swelled from four to over twenty—twelve of them being the aristocratic ones with the twinkling bones. Some attendants had set up a small table for Sazed, and he seated himself as the kandra nobles spoke together in anxious whispers.

Carefully, Sazed placed his pack on the table and began to remove his metal-minds. Small rings, smaller earrings and studs, and large bracers soon lined the table. He pushed up his sleeves, then clasped on his copperminds—two large bracers on the upper arms, then two bracers on the forearms. Finally, he removed his tome from the pack and set it on the table. Some kandra approached with thin plates of metal. Sazed watched curiously as they arranged them for him, along with what appeared to be a steel pen, capable of making indentations in the soft writing metal. The kandra servants bowed and withdrew.

*Excellent,* Sazed thought, picking up the metal pen and clearing his throat. The kandra leaders turned toward him.

"I assume," Sazed said, "that you are the First Generation?"

"We are the Second Generation, Terrisman," one of the kandra said.

"Well, I apologize for taking your time, then. Where can I find your superiors?"

The lead kandra snorted. "Do not think you have us quelled just because you were able to draw us together. I see no reason for you to speak with the First Generation, even if you can blaspheme quite accurately."

Sazed raised an eyebrow. "Blaspheme?"

"You are not the Announcer," the kandra said. "This is not the end."

"Have you seen the ash up above?" Sazed said. "Or, has it stopped up the entrances to this cavern complex so soundly that nobody can escape to see that the world is falling apart?"

"We have lived a very long time, Terrisman," one of the other kandra said. "We have seen periods where the ash fell more copiously than others."

"Oh?" Sazed asked. "And you have, perhaps, seen the Lord Ruler die before as well?"

Some of the kandra looked uncomfortable at this, though the one at the lead shook his head. "Did TenSoon send you?"

"He did," Sazed admitted.

"You can make no arguments other than those he has already made," the kandra said. "Why would he think that you—an outsider—could persuade us, when he could not?"

"Perhaps because he understood something about me," Sazed said, tapping his book with his pen. "Are you aware of the ways of Keepers, kandra?"

"My name is KanPaar," the kandra said. "And yes, I understand what Keepers do—or, at least, what they did, before the Father was killed."

"Then," Sazed said, "perhaps you know that every Keeper has an area of specialty. The intention was that when the Lord Ruler finally did fall, we would already be divided into specialists who could teach our knowledge to the people."

"Yes," KanPaar said.

"Well," Sazed said, rubbing fingers over his book. "My specialty was religion. Do you know how many religions there were before the Lord Ruler's Ascension?"

"I don't know. Hundreds."

"We have record of five hundred and sixty-three," Sazed said. "Though that includes sects of the same religions. In a more strict count, there were around three hundred."

"And?" KanPaar asked.

"Do you know how many of these survived until this day?" Sazed asked.

"None?"

"One," Sazed said, holding up a finger. "Yours. The Terris religion. Do you think it a coincidence that the religion you follow not only still exists, but also foretells this exact day?"

KanPaar snorted. "You are saying nothing new. So my religion is real, while others were lies. What does that explain?"

"That you should listen, perhaps, to members of your faith who bring you tidings." Sazed began to flip through his book. "At the very least, I would think that you'd be interested in this book, as it contains the collected information about the Hero of Ages that I was able to discover. Since I knew little of the true Terris religion, I had to get my information from secondhand accounts—from tales and stories, and from texts written during the intermediate time.

"Unfortunately," Sazed continued, "much of this text was changed by Ruin when he was trying to persuade the Hero to visit the Well of Ascension and set him free. Therefore, it is quite well corrupted and tainted by his touch."

"And why would I be interested?" KanPaar asked. "You just told me that your information is corrupt and useless."

"Useless?" Sazed asked. "No, not useless at all. Corrupt, yes. Changed by Ruin. My friend, I have a tome here filled with Ruin's lies. You have a mind filled with the original truths. Apart, we know very little. However, if we were to *compare*—discovering precisely which items Ruin changed—would it not tell us exactly what his plan is? At the very least, it would tell us what he didn't want us to focus on, I think."

The room fell silent.

"Well," KanPaar finally said, "I—"

"That will be enough, KanPaar," a voice said.

Sazed paused, cocking his head. The voice hadn't come from any of those beside the pedestals. Sazed glanced around the room, trying to discover who had spoken.

"You may leave, Seconds," another voice said.

One of the Seconds gasped. "Leave? Leave you with this one, an outsider?"

"A descendant," one of the voices said. "A Worldbringer. We will hear him."

"Leave us," said another voice.

Sazed raised an eyebrow, sitting as the Second Generationers—looking rattled—left their lecterns and quietly made their way from the room. A pair of guards pushed the doors shut, blocking the view of those kandra who had been watching outside. Sazed was left alone in the room with the phantoms who had spoken.

Sazed heard a scraping sound. It echoed through the steel-lined chamber, and then a door opened at the back of the room. From this came what he assumed was the First Generation. They looked . . . old. Their kandra flesh literally hung from their bodies, drooping, like translucent tree moss dripping from bone branches. They were stooped, seeming older than the other kandra he had seen, and they didn't walk so much as shuffle.

They wore simple robes, with no sleeves, but the garments still looked odd on the creatures. In addition, beneath their translucent skin, he could see that they had white, normal skeletons. "Human bones?" Sazed asked as the elderly creatures made their way forward, walking with canes.

"Our own bones," one of them said, speaking with a tired near-whisper of a voice. "We hadn't the skill or knowledge to form True Bodies when this all began, and so took our original bones again when the Lord Ruler gave them to us."

The First Generation appeared to have only ten members. They arranged themselves on the benches. And, out of respect, Sazed moved his table so that he was seated before them, like a presenter before an audience.

"Now," he said, raising his metal scratching pen. "Let us begin—we have much work to do."

*The question remains, where did the original prophecies about the Hero of Ages come from? I now know that Ruin changed them, but did not fabricate them. Who first taught that a Hero would come, one who would be an emperor of all mankind, yet would be rejected by his own people? Who first stated he would carry the future of the world on his arms, or that he would repair that which had been sundered?*

*And who decided to use the neutral pronoun, so that we wouldn't know if the Hero was a woman or a man?*

# 69

MARSH KNELT IN A PILE OF ASH, hating himself and the world. The ash fell without cease, drifting onto his back, covering him, and yet he did not move.

He had been cast aside, told to sit and wait. Like a tool forgotten in the yard, slowly being covered in snow.

*I was there*, he thought. *With Vin. Yet . . . I couldn't speak to her. Couldn't tell her anything.*

Worse . . . he hadn't wanted to. During his entire conversation with her, his body and mind had belonged to Ruin completely. Marsh had been helpless to resist, hadn't been able to do anything that might have let Vin kill him.

Except for a moment. A moment near the end, when she'd almost taken control of him. A moment when he'd seen something inside of his master—his god, his *self*—that gave him hope.

For in that moment, Ruin had feared her.

And then, Ruin had forced Marsh to run, leaving behind his army of koloss—the army that Marsh had been ordered to let Elend Venture steal, then bring to Fadrex. The army that Ruin had eventually stolen back.

And now Marsh waited in the ash.

*What is the point?* he thought. His master wanted something . . . needed something . . . and he feared Vin. Those two things gave Marsh hope, but what could he do? Even in Ruin's moment of weakness, Marsh had been unable to take control.

Marsh's plan—to wait, keeping the rebellious sliver of himself secret until the right moment, then pull out the spike in his back and kill himself—seemed increasingly foolish. How could he hope to break free, even for that long?

Stand.

The command came wordlessly, but Marsh reacted instantly. And Ruin was back, controlling his body. With effort, Marsh retained some small control of his mind, though only because Ruin seemed distracted. Marsh started dropping coins, Pushing off them, using and reusing them in the same way Vin used horseshoes. Horseshoes—which had far more metal—

would have been better, for they would have let him Push farther with each one. But, he made coins work.

He propelled himself through the late-afternoon sky. The red air was unpleasantly abrasive, so crowded with ash. Marsh watched it, trying to keep himself from seeing beauty in the destruction without alerting Ruin that he wasn't completely dominated.

It was difficult.

After some time—after night had long since fallen—Ruin commanded Marsh to the ground. He descended quickly, robes flapping, and landed atop a short hill. The ash came up to his waist, and he was probably standing on a few feet of packed ash underneath.

In the distance, down the slope, a solitary figure pushed resolutely through the ash. The man wore a pack and led an exhausted horse.

*Who is this?* Marsh thought, looking closer. The man had the build of a soldier, with a square face and balding head, his jaw bearing several days' worth of beard. Whoever he was, he had an impressive determination. Few people would brave the mists—yet this man not only walked through them, but forged his way through ash that was as high as his chest. The man's uniform was stained black, as was his skin. Dark . . . ashen . . .

Beautiful.

Marsh launched himself from the hilltop, hurling through the mist and ash on a Push of steel. The man below must have heard him coming, for he spun, reaching anxiously for the sword at his side.

Marsh landed atop the horse's back. The creature cried out, rearing, and Marsh jumped, placing one foot on the beast's face as he flipped over it and landed in the ash. The soldier had worn a path straight ahead, and Marsh felt as if he were looking down a tight, black corridor.

The man whipped his sword free. The horse whinnied nervously, stamping in the ash.

Marsh smiled, and pulled an obsidian axe from the sheath by his side. The soldier backed away, trying to clear room in the ash for a fight. Marsh saw the worry in the man's eyes, the dreadful anticipation.

The horse whinnied again. Marsh spun and sheared off its front legs, causing it to scream in pain. Behind, the soldier moved. And—surprisingly—instead of running, he attacked.

The man rammed his sword through Marsh's back. It hit a spike, veering to the side, but still impaled him. Marsh turned, smiling, and tapped healing to keep himself standing.

The man kept moving, reaching up for Marsh's back, obviously intending to try and pull free the back spike. Marsh burned pewter, however, and spun out of the way, ripping away the soldier's weapon.

*Should have let him grab it . . .* the free sliver said, struggling, yet useless.

Marsh swung for the man's head, intending to take it off with a single sweep of the axe, but the soldier rolled in the ash, whipping a dagger from his boot and swiping in an attempt to hamstring Marsh. A clever move, which would have left Marsh on the ground, healing power or not.

However, Marsh tapped speed. He suddenly moved several times faster than a normal person, and he easily dodged the slice, instead planting a kick in the soldier's chest.

The man grunted as his ribs cracked. He fell in the ash, rolling and coughing, blood on his lips. He came to a stop, covered in ash. Weakly, he reached for his pocket.

*Another dagger?* Marsh thought. However, the man pulled out a folded sheet. Metal?

Marsh had a sudden and overpowering desire to grab that sheet of metal. The soldier struggled to crumple the thin sheet, to destroy its contents, but Marsh screamed and brought his axe down on the man's arm, shearing it off. Marsh raised the axe again, and this time took off the man's head.

He didn't stop, however, the blood fury driving him to slam his axe into the corpse over and over again. In the back of his head, he could feel Ruin exulting in the death—yet, he could also sense frustration. Ruin tried to pull him away from the killing, to make him grab that slip of metal, but in the grip of the bloodlust, Marsh couldn't be controlled. Just like koloss.

*Couldn't be controlled. . . . That's—*

He froze, Ruin taking control once again. Marsh shook his head, the man's blood rolling down his face, dripping from his chin. He turned and glanced at the dying horse, which screamed in the quiet night. Marsh stumbled to his feet, then reached for the disembodied arm, pulling free the sheet of metal the soldier had tried to destroy with his dying strength.

Read it!

The words were distinct in Marsh's mind. Rarely did Ruin bother to address him—it just used him like a puppet.

Read it aloud!

Marsh frowned, slowly unfolding the letter, trying to give himself time to think. Why would Ruin need him to read it? Unless . . . Ruin couldn't read? But, that didn't make sense. The creature had been able to change the words in books.

It had to be able to read. Then, was it the metal that stopped Ruin?

He had the flap of metal unfolded. There were indeed words scratched into its inside surface. Marsh tried to resist reading the words. In fact, he longed to grab his axe from where it had fallen dripping blood in the ash, then use it to kill himself. But, he couldn't manage. He didn't even have enough freedom to drop the letter. Ruin pushed and pulled, manipulating Marsh's emotions, eventually getting him so that . . .

Yes. Why should he bother disagreeing? Why argue with his god, his lord, his self? Marsh held the sheet up, flaring his tin to get a better look at its contents in the darkness.

" 'Vin,' " he read. " 'My mind is clouded. A part of me wonders what is real anymore. Yet, one thing seems to press on me again and again. I must tell you something. I don't know if it will matter, but I must say it nonetheless.

" 'The thing we fight is real. I have seen it. It tried to destroy me, and it tried to destroy the people of Urteau. It got control of me through a method I wasn't expecting. Metal. A little sliver of metal piercing my body. With that, it was able to twist my thoughts. It couldn't take complete control of me, like you control the koloss, but it did something similar, I think. Perhaps the piece of metal wasn't big enough. I don't know.

" 'Either way, it appeared to me, taking the form of Kelsier. It did the same thing to the king here in Urteau. It is clever. It is subtle.

" 'Be careful, Vin. Don't trust anyone pierced by metal! Even the smallest bit can taint a man.

" 'Spook.' "

Marsh, again completely controlled by Ruin, crumpled the metal up until its scratchings were unreadable. Then, he tossed it into the ash and used it as an anchor to Push himself into the air. Toward Luthadel.

He left the corpses of horse, man, and message to lie dead in the ash, slowly being buried.

Like forgotten tools.

*Quellion actually placed his spike himself, as I understand it. The man was never entirely stable. His fervor for following Kelsier and killing the nobility was enhanced by Ruin, but Quellion had already had the impulses. His passionate paranoia bordered on insanity at times, and Ruin was able to prod him into placing that crucial spike.*

*Quellion's spike was bronze, and he made it from one of the first Allomancers he captured. That spike made him a Seeker, which was one of the ways he was able to find and blackmail so many Allomancers during his time as king of Urteau.*

*The point, however, is that people with unstable personalities were more susceptible to Ruin's influence, even if they didn't have a spike in them. That, indeed, is likely how Zane got his spike.*

# 70

"I STILL DON'T SEE what good this does," Yomen said, walking beside Elend as they passed Fadrex's gate.

Elend ignored the comment, waving a greeting to a group of soldiers. He stopped beside another group—not his, but Yomen's—and inspected their weapons. He gave them a few words of encouragement, then moved on. Yomen watched quietly, walking at Elend's side as an equal, not a captured king.

The two had an uneasy truce, but the field of koloss outside was more than enough of a motivation to keep them working together. Elend had the larger army of the two, but not by much—and they were growing increasingly outnumbered as more and more koloss arrived.

"We should be working on the sanitation problem," Yomen continued once they were out of the men's earshot. "An army exists on two principles: health and food. Provide those two things, and you will be victorious."

Elend smiled, recognizing the reference. Trentison's *Supplying in Scale.* A few years earlier, he would have agreed with Yomen, and the two would probably have spent the afternoon discussing the philosophy of leadership in Yomen's palace. However, Elend had learned things in the last few years that he simply hadn't been able to get from his studies.

Unfortunately, that meant he really couldn't explain them to Yomen—particularly not in the time they had. So, instead, he nodded down the street. "We can move on to the infirmary now, if you wish, Lord Yomen."

Yomen nodded, and the two turned toward another section of the city. The obligator had a no-nonsense approach to just about everything. Problems should be dealt with quickly and directly. He had a good mind, despite his fondness for making snap judgments.

As they walked, Elend was careful to keep an eye out for soldiers—on duty or off—in the streets. He nodded to their salutes, met their eyes. Many were working to repair the damages caused by the increasingly powerful earthquakes. Perhaps it was just in Elend's mind, but it seemed that the soldiers walked a little taller after he passed.

Yomen frowned slightly as he watched Elend do this. The obligator still wore the robes of his station, despite the little bead of atium at his brow that he used to mark his kingship. The tattoos on the man's forehead almost seemed to curl toward the bead, as if they had been designed with it in mind.

"You don't know much about leading soldiers, do you, Yomen?" Elend asked.

The obligator raised an eyebrow. "I know more than you ever will about tactics, supply lines, and the running of armies between distinct points."

"Oh?" Elend said lightly. "So, you've read Bennitson's *Armies in Motion,* have you?" The "distinct points" line was a dead giveaway.

Yomen's frown deepened.

"One thing that we scholars tend to forget about, Yomen, is the impact *emotion* can have on a battle. It isn't just about food, shoes, and clean water, necessary as those are. It's about hope, courage, and the will to live. Soldiers need to know that their leader will be in the fight—if not killing enemies, then directing things personally from behind the lines. They can't think of him as an abstract force up on a tower somewhere, watching out a window and pondering the depths of the universe."

Yomen fell silent as they walked through streets that, despite being cleaned of ash, had a forlorn cast to them. Most of the people had retreated to the back portions of the city, where the koloss would go last, if they broke through. They were camping outside, since buildings were unsafe in the quakes.

"You are an . . . interesting man, Elend Venture," Yomen finally said.

"I'm a bastard," Elend said.

Yomen raised an eyebrow.

"In composition, not in temperament or by birth," Elend said with a smile. "I'm an amalgamation of what I've needed to be. Part scholar, part rebel, part nobleman, part Mistborn, and part soldier. Sometimes, I don't even know myself. I had a devil of a time getting all those pieces to work together. And, just when I'm starting to get it figured out, the world up and ends on me. Ah, here we are."

Yomen's infirmary was a converted Ministry building—which, in Elend's opinion, showed that Yomen was willing to be flexible. His religious buildings weren't so sacred to him that he couldn't acknowledge that they were the best facilities for taking care of the sick and wounded. Inside, they found physicians tending those who had survived the initial clash with the koloss. Yomen bustled off to speak with the infirmary bureaucrats—apparently, he was worried about the number of infections that the men had suffered. Elend walked over to the section with the most serious cases, and began visiting them, offering encouragement.

It was tough work, looking at the soldiers who had suffered because of his foolishness. How could he have missed seeing that Ruin could take the koloss back? It made so much sense. And yet, Ruin had played its hand well—it had misled Elend, making him think that the Inquisitors were controlling the koloss. Making him feel the koloss could be counted on.

*What would have happened,* he thought, *if I'd attacked this city with them as originally planned?* Ruin would have ransacked Fadrex, slaughtering everyone inside, and *then* turned the koloss on Elend's soldiers. Now the fortifications defended by Elend and Yomen's men had given Ruin enough pause to make it build up its forces before attacking.

*I have doomed this city,* Elend thought, sitting beside the bed of a man who had lost his arm to a koloss blade.

It frustrated him. He knew he'd made the right decision. And, in truth, he'd rather be inside the city—almost certainly doomed—than be outside besieging it, and winning. For he knew that the winning side wasn't always the right side.

Still, it came back to his continuing frustration at his inability to protect his people. And, despite Yomen's rule of Fadrex, Elend considered its people to be his people. He'd taken the Lord Ruler's throne, named himself emperor. The entirety of the Final Empire was his to care for. What good was a ruler who couldn't even protect one city, let alone an empire full of them?

A disturbance at the front of the infirmary room caught his attention. He cast aside his dark thoughts, then bid farewell to the soldier. He rushed to the front of the hospital, where Yomen had already appeared to see what the ruckus was about. A woman stood holding a young boy, who was shaking uncontrollably with the fits.

One of the physicians rushed forward, taking the boy. "Mistsickness?" he asked.

The woman, weeping, nodded. "I kept him inside until today. I knew! I knew that it wanted him! Oh, please . . ."

Yomen shook his head as the physician took the boy to a bed. "You should have listened to me, woman," he said firmly. "Everyone in the city was to have been exposed to the mists. Now your son will take a bed that we may need for wounded soldiers."

The woman slumped down, still crying. Yomen sighed, though Elend could see the concern in the man's eyes. Yomen was not a heartless man, just a pragmatic one. In addition, his words made sense. It was no use hiding someone inside all of their lives, just because of the possibility that they might fall to the mists.

*Fall to the mists* . . . Elend thought idly, glancing at the boy in bed. He had stopped convulsing, though his face was twisted in an expression of pain. It looked like he hurt so much. Elend had only hurt that much once in his life.

*We never did figure out what this mistsickness was all about,* he thought. The mist spirit had never returned to him. But, perhaps Yomen knew something.

"Yomen," he said, walking up to the man, distracting him from his discussion with the surgeons. "Did any of your people ever figure out the reason for the mist-sickness?"

"Reason?" Yomen asked. "Does there need to be a reason for a sickness?"

"There does for one this strange," Elend said. "Did you realize that it strikes down exactly sixteen percent of the population? Sixteen percent—to the man."

Instead of being surprised, Yomen just shrugged. "Makes sense."

"Sense?" Elend asked.

"Sixteen is a powerful number, Venture," Yomen said, looking over some reports. "It was the number of days it took the Lord Ruler to reach the Well of Ascension, for instance. It figures prominently in Church doctrine."

*Of course,* Elend thought. *Yomen wouldn't be surprised to find order in nature—he believes in a god who ordered that nature.*

"Sixteen . . ." Elend said, glancing at the sick boy.

"The number of original Inquisitors," Yomen said. "The number of Precepts in each Canton charter. The number of Allomantic metals. The—"

"Wait," Elend said, looking up. "What?"

"Allomantic metals," Yomen said.

"There are only fourteen of those."

Yomen shook his head. "Fourteen we know of, assuming your lady was right about the metal paired to aluminum. However, fourteen is not a number of power. Allomantic metals come in sets of two, with groupings of four. It seems likely that there are two more we haven't discovered, bringing the number to sixteen. Two by two by two by two. Four physical metals, four mental metals, four enhancement metals, and four temporal metals."

Sixteen metals . . .

Elend glanced at the boy again. Pain. Elend had known such pain once—the day his father had ordered him beaten. Beaten to give him such pain that he thought he might die. Beaten to bring his body to a point near death, so that he would Snap.

Beaten to discover if he was an Allomancer.

*Lord Ruler!* Elend thought with shock. He dashed away from Yomen, pushing back into the soldiers' section of the infirmary.

"Who here was taken by the mists?" Elend demanded.

The wounded regarded him with quizzical looks.

"Did any of you get sick?" Elend asked. "When I made you stand out in the mists? Please, I must know!"

Slowly, the man with one arm raised his remaining hand. "I was taken, my lord. I'm sorry. This wound is probably punishment for—"

Elend cut the man off, rushing forward, pulling out his spare metal vial. "Drink this," he commanded.

The man paused, then did as asked. Elend knelt beside the bed eagerly, waiting. His heart pounded in his chest. "Well?" he finally asked.

"Well . . . what, my lord?" the soldier asked.

"Do you feel anything?" Elend asked.

The soldier shrugged. "Tired, my lord?"

Elend closed his eyes, sighing. *It was a silly*—

"Well, that's odd," the soldier suddenly said.

Elend snapped his eyes open.

"Yes," the soldier said, looking a bit distracted. "I . . . I don't know what to make of *that*."

"Burn it," Elend said, turning on his bronze. "Your body knows how, if you let it."

The soldier's frown deepened, and he cocked his head. Then, he began to thump with Allomantic power.

Elend closed his eyes again, exhaling softly.

Yomen was walking up behind Elend. "What is this?"

"The mists were never our enemy, Yomen," Elend said, eyes still closed. "They were just trying to help."

"Help? Help how? What are you talking about?"

Elend opened his eyes, turning. "They weren't killing us, Yomen. They weren't making us sick. They were *Snapping* us. Bringing us power. Making us able to fight."

"My lord!" a voice suddenly called. Elend turned as a frazzled soldier stumbled into the room. "My lords! The koloss are attacking! They're charging the city!"

Elend felt a start. *Ruin. It knows what I just discovered—it knows it needs to attack now, rather than wait for more troops.*

Because I know the secret!

"Yomen, gather every bit of powdered metal you can find in this city!" Elend yelled. "Pewter, tin, steel, and iron! Get it to anyone who has been stricken by the mists! Make them drink it down!"

"Why?" Yomen said, still confused.

Elend turned, smiling. "Because they are now Allomancers. This city isn't going to fall as easily as everyone assumed. If you need me, I'll be on the front lines!"

*There is something special about the number sixteen. For one thing, it was Preservation's sign to mankind.*

*Preservation knew, even before he imprisoned Ruin, that he wouldn't be able to communicate with humankind once he diminished himself. And so, he left clues—clues that couldn't be altered by Ruin. Clues that related back to the fundamental laws of the universe. The number was meant to be proof that something unnatural was happening, and that there was help to be found.*

*It may have taken us long to figure this out, but when we eventually did understand the clue—late though it was—it provided a much-needed boost.*

*As for the other aspects of the number . . . well, even I am still investigating that. Suffice it to say that it has great ramifications regarding how the world, and the universe itself, works.*

# 71

SAZED TAPPED HIS PEN against the metal paper, frowning slightly. "Very little of this last chunk is different from what I knew before," he said. "Ruin changed small things—perhaps to keep me from noticing the alterations. It's obvious that he wanted to make me realize that Vin was the Hero of Ages."

"He wanted her to release him," said Haddek, leader of the First Generation. His companions nodded.

"Perhaps she was never the Hero," one of the others offered.

Sazed shook his head. "I believe that she is. These prophecies still refer to her—even the unaltered ones that you have told me. They talk of one who is separate from the Terris people, a king of men, a rebel caught between two worlds. Ruin just *emphasized* that Vin was the one, since he wanted her to come and free him."

"We always assumed that the Hero would be a man," Haddek said in his wheezing voice.

"So did everyone else," Sazed said. "But, you said yourself that all the prophecies use gender-neutral pronouns. That had to be intentional—one does not use such language in old Terris by accident. The neutral case was chosen so that we wouldn't know whether the Hero was male or female."

Several of the ancient Terrismen nodded. They worked by the quiet blue light of the glowing stones, still sitting in the chamber with the metal walls—which, from what Sazed had been able to gather, was something of a holy place for the kandra.

He tapped his pen, frowning. What was bothering him? *They say I will hold the future of the entire world on my arms. . . .* Alendi's words, from his logbook written so long ago. The words of the First Generation confirmed that was true.

There was still something for Vin to do. Yet, the power at the Well of Ascension was gone. Used up. How could she fight without it? Sazed looked up at his audience of ancient kandra. "What *was* the power at the Well of Ascension, anyway?"

"Even we are not certain of that, young one," Haddek said. "By the time we lived as men, our gods had already passed from this world, leaving the Terris with only the hope of the Hero."

"Tell me of this thing," Sazed said, leaning forward. "How did your gods pass from this world?"

"Ruin and Preservation," said one of the others. "They created our world, and our people."

"Neither could create alone," Haddek said. "No, they could not. For, to preserve something is not to create it—and neither can you create through destruction only."

It was a common theme in mythology—Sazed had read it in dozens of the religions he'd studied. The world being created out of a clash between two forces, sometimes rendered as chaos and order, sometimes named destruction and protection. That bothered him a little bit. He was hoping to discover something *new* in the things men were telling him.

And yet . . . just because something was common, did that make it false? Or, could all of those mythologies have a shared, and true, root?

"They created the world," Sazed said. "Then left?"

"Not immediately," Haddek said. "But, here is the trick, young one. They had a deal, those two. Preservation wanted to create men—to create life capable of emotion. He obtained a promise from Ruin to help make men."

"But at a cost," one of the others whispered.

"What cost?" Sazed asked.

"That Ruin could one day be allowed destroy the world," Haddek replied.

The circular chamber fell silent.

"Hence the betrayal," Haddek said. "Preservation gave his life to imprison Ruin, to keep him from destroying the world."

Another common mythological theme—the martyr god. It was one that Sazed himself had witnessed in the birth of the Church of the Survivor.

*Yet . . . this time it's my own religion,* he thought. He frowned, leaning back, trying to decide how he felt. For some reason, he had assumed that the truth would be *different.* The scholarly side of him argued with his desire for belief. How could he believe in something so filled with mythological clichés?

He'd come all this way, believing that he'd been given one last chance to find the truth. Yet, now that he studied it, he was finding that it was shockingly similar to religions he had rejected as false.

"You seem disturbed, child," Haddek said. "Are you that worried about the things we say?"

"I apologize," Sazed said. "This is a personal problem, not related to the fate of the Hero of Ages."

"Please, speak," one of the others said.

"It is complicated," Sazed said. "For some time now, I have been searching through the religions of mankind, trying to ascertain which of their teachings were true. I had begun to despair that I would ever find a religion that offered the answers I sought. Then, I learned that my own religion still existed, protected by the kandra. I came here, hoping to find the truth."

"This is the truth," one of the kandra said.

"That's what *every* religion teaches," Sazed said, frustration mounting. "Yet, in each of them I find inconsistencies, logical leaps, and demands of faith I find impossible to accept.

"It sounds to me, young one," Haddek said, "that you're searching for something that cannot be found."

"The truth?" Sazed said.

"No," Haddek replied. "A religion that requires no faith of its believers."

Another of the kandra elders nodded. "We follow the Father and the First Contract, but our faith is not in him. It's in . . . something higher. We trust that Preservation planned for this day, and that his desire to protect will prove more powerful than Ruin's desire to destroy."

"But you don't know," Sazed said. "You are offered proof only once you believe, but if you believe, you can find proof in anything. It is a logical conundrum."

"Faith isn't about logic, son," Haddek said. "Perhaps that's your problem. You cannot 'disprove' the things you study, any more than we can prove to you that the Hero will save us. We simply must believe it, and accept the things Preservation has taught us."

It wasn't enough for Sazed. However, for the moment, he decided to move on. He didn't have all the facts about the Terris religion yet. Perhaps once he had them, he would be able to sort this all out.

"You spoke of the prison of Ruin," Sazed said. "Tell me how this relates to the power that Lady Vin used."

"Gods don't have bodies like those of men," Haddek said. "They are . . . forces. Powers. Preservation's mind passed, but he left his power behind."

"In the form of a pool of liquid?" Sazed said.

The members of the First Generation nodded.

"And the dark black smoke outside?" Sazed asked.

"Ruin," Haddek said. "Waiting, watching, during his imprisonment."

Sazed frowned. "The cavern of smoke was very much larger than the Well of Ascension. Why the disparity? Was Ruin *that* much more powerful?"

Haddek snorted quietly. "They were equally powerful, young one. They were *forces,* not men. Two aspects of a single power. Is one side of a coin more 'powerful' than the other? They pushed equally upon the world around them."

"Though," one of the others added, "there is a story that Preservation gave too much of himself to make mankind, to create something that had *more* of Preservation in them than they had of Ruin. Yet, it would be only a small amount in each individual. Tiny . . . easy to miss, except over a long, long time . . ."

"So, why the difference in size?" Sazed asked.

"You aren't seeing, young one," Haddek said. "The power in that pool, that wasn't Preservation."

"But, you just said—"

"It was *part* of Preservation, to be sure," Haddek continued. "But, he was a force—his influence is everywhere. Some of it, perhaps, concentrated into that pool. The rest is . . . elsewhere and everywhere."

"But Ruin, his mind was focused there," another kandra said. "And so, his power tended to coalesce there. Much more of it, at least, than that of Preservation."

"But not all of it," another one said, laughing.

Sazed cocked his head. "Not all of it? It, too, was spread out across the world, I assume?"

"In a way," Haddek said.

"We now speak of things in the First Contract," one of the other kandra warned.

Haddek paused, then turned, studying Sazed's eyes. "If what this man says is true, then Ruin has escaped. That means he will be coming for his body. His . . . power."

Sazed felt a chill. "It's here?" he asked quietly.

Haddek nodded. "We were to gather it. The First Contract, the Lord Ruler named it—our charge in this world."

"The other Children had a purpose," another kandra added. "The koloss, they were created to fight. The Inquisitors, they were created to be priests. Our task was different."

"Gather the power," Haddek said. "And protect it. Hide it. Keep it. For the Father knew Ruin would escape one day. And on that day, he would begin searching for his body."

The group of aged kandra looked past Sazed. He frowned, turning to follow their eyes. They were looking toward the metal dais.

Slowly, Sazed stood, walking across the stone floor. The dais was large—perhaps twenty feet across—but not very high. He stepped onto it, causing one of the kandra behind him to gasp. Yet, none of them called out to stop him.

There was a seam down the middle of the circular platform, and a hole—perhaps the size of a large coin—at the center. Sazed peered through the hole, but it was too dark to see anything.

He stepped back.

*I should have a little left,* he thought, glancing toward his table, with its metal-minds. *I refilled that ring for a few months before I gave up on my metalminds.*

He walked over quickly, selecting a small pewter ring off of the table. He slipped it on, then looked up at the members of the First Generation. They turned from his querying look.

"Do what you must, child," Haddek said, his aged voice echoing in the room. "We could not stop you if we wished."

Sazed walked back to the dais, then tapped his pewtermind for the strength he had stored in it over a year ago. His body immediately grew several times stronger than normal, and his robes suddenly felt tight. With hands now thick with muscles, he reached down and—bracing himself against the rough floor—shoved against one side of the disk on the floor.

It ground against stone as it moved, uncovering a large pit. Something glittered beneath.

Sazed froze, his strength—and body—deflating as he released his pewtermind. His robes became loose again. The room was silent. Sazed stared at the half-covered pit, and at the enormous pile of nuggets hidden in the floor.

"The Trust, we call it," Haddek said with a soft voice. "Given for our safekeeping by the Father."

Atium. Thousands upon thousands of beads of it. Sazed gasped. "The Lord Ruler's atium stockpile . . . It was here all along."

"Most of that atium never left the Pits of Hathsin," Haddek said. "There were obligators on staff at all times—but never Inquisitors, for the Father knew that they could be corrupted. The obligators broke the geodes in secret, inside of a metal room constructed for the purpose, then took out the atium. The noble family then transported the empty geodes to Luthadel, never knowing that they didn't have any atium in their possession at all. What atium the Lord Ruler did get, and distribute, to the nobility was brought in by the obligators. They disguised the atium as Ministry funds and hid the beads in piles of coins so that Ruin wouldn't see them as they were transported in convoys full of new acolytes to Luthadel."

Sazed stood, dumbstruck. *Here . . . all along. Just a short distance from the very caves where Kelsier raised his army. A short journey from Luthadel, completely unprotected all these years.*

Yet hidden so well.

"You worked for atium," Sazed said, looking up. "The kandra Contracts, they were paid in atium."

Haddek nodded. "We were to gather all of it we could. What didn't end up in our hands, the Mistborn burned away. Some of the houses kept small stockpiles, but the Father's taxes and fees kept most of the atium flowing back to him as payments. And, eventually, almost all of it ended up here."

Sazed looked down. *Such a fortune,* he thought. *Such . . . power.* Atium never *had* fit in with the other metals. Every one of them, even aluminum and duralumin, could be mined or created through natural processes. Atium, however—it had only ever come from a single place, its appearance mysterious and strange. Its power had allowed one to do something unlike anything else in Allomancy or Feruchemy.

It let one see the future. Not a thing of men at all, more . . . a thing of gods.

It was more than just a metal. It was condensed concentrated power. Power that Ruin would want. Very badly.

TenSoon pushed toward the crest of the hill, moving through ash that was so high that he was glad he had switched to the horse's body, for a wolfhound could never have moved through piles so deep.

The ash fell strongly where he was, limiting his visibility. *I will never make it to Fadrex at this rate,* he thought with anger. Even pushing hard, moving in the massive horse's body, he was moving too slowly to get far from the Homeland.

He finally crested the hill, his breath coming in puffing snorts out the horse's snout.

At the top of the hill he froze, shocked. The landscape before him was burning.

Tyrian, closest of the ashmounts to Luthadel, stood in the near distance, half of its top blown free from some violent eruption. The air itself seemed to burn with tongues of flame, and the broad plain in front of TenSoon was clogged with flowing lava. It was a deep, powerful red. Even from a distance, he could feel the heat pushing against him.

He stood for a long moment, deep in ash, gazing upon a landscape that had once contained villages, forests, and roads. All was now gone, burnt away. The earth had cracked in the distance, and more lava seemed to be spilling out of it.

*By the First Contract,* he thought with despair. He could detour to the south, continue on to Fadrex as if he'd come in a straight line from Luthadel, but for some reason, he found it hard to get up the motivation.

It was too late.

*Yes, there are sixteen metals. I find it highly unlikely that the Lord Ruler did not know of them all. Indeed, the fact that he spoke of several on the plates in the storage caches meant that he knew at least of those.*

*I must assume that he did not tell mankind of them earlier for a reason. Perhaps he held them back to give him a secret edge, much as he kept back the single nugget of Preservation's body that made men into Mistborn.*

*Or, perhaps he simply decided that mankind had enough power in the ten metals they already understood. Some things we shall never know. Part of me still finds what he did regrettable. During the thousand-year reign of the Lord Ruler, how many people were born, Snapped, lived, and died never knowing that they were Mistings, simply because their metals were unknown?*

*Of course, this did give us a slight advantage, at the end. Ruin had a lot of trouble giving duralumin to his Inquisitors, since they'd need an Allomancer who could burn it to kill before they could use it. And, since none of the duralumin Mistings in the world knew about their power, they didn't burn it and reveal themselves to Ruin. That left most Inquisitors without the power of duralumin, save in a few important cases—such as Marsh—where they got it from a Mistborn. This was usually considered a waste, for if one killed a Mistborn with Hemalurgy, one could draw out only one of their sixteen powers and lost the rest. Ruin considered it much better to try to subvert them and gain access to all of their power.*

# 72

IT BEGAN RAINING just before Vin reached Luthadel. A quiet, cold drizzle that wetted the night, but did not banish the mists.

She flared her bronze. In the distance, she could sense Allomancers. Mistborn. Chasing her. There were at least a dozen of them, homing in on her position.

She landed on the city wall, bare feet slipping just slightly on the stones. Beyond her stretched Luthadel, even now proud in its sprawl. Founded a thousand years before by the Lord Ruler, it was built atop the Well of Ascension itself. During the ten centuries of his reign, Luthadel had burgeoned, becoming the most important—and most crowded—place in all of the empire.

And it was dying.

Vin stood up straight, looking out over the vast city. Pockets of flame flared where buildings had caught fire. The flames defied the rain, illuminating the various slums and other neighborhoods like watch fires in the night. In their light, she could see that the city was a wreck. Entire swathes of the town had been torn apart, the buildings broken or burned. The streets were eerily vacant—nobody fought the fires, nobody huddled in the gutters.

The capital, once home to hundreds of thousands, seemed empty. Wind blew through Vin's rain-wetted hair and she felt a shiver. The mists, as usual, stayed away from her—pushed aside by her Allomancy. She was alone in the largest city in the world.

No. Not alone. She could feel them approaching—Ruin's minions. She had led them here, made them assume that she was bringing them to the atium. There would be far more of them than she could fight. She was doomed.

That was the idea.

She launched off the wall, shooting through the mist, ash, and rain. She wore her mistcloak, more out of nostalgia than utility. It was the same one she'd always had—the one that Kelsier had given her on her very first night of training.

She landed with a splash atop a building, then leaped again, bounding over the city. She wasn't certain if it was poetic or ominous that it was raining this night. There had been another night when she had visited Kredik Shaw in the rain. A part of her still thought she should have died that night.

She landed on the street, then stood upright, her tasseled mistcloak falling around her, hiding her arms and chest. She stood quietly, looking up at Kredik Shaw, the Hill of a Thousand Spires. The Lord Ruler's palace, location of the Well of Ascension.

The building was an assemblage of several low wings topped by dozens of rising towers, spires, and spines. The awful near-symmetry of the amalgamation was only made more unsettling by the presence of the mists and ash. The building had been abandoned since the Lord Ruler's death. The doors were broken, and she could see shattered windows in the walls. Kredik Shaw was as dead as the city it once had dominated.

A figure stepped up beside her. "Here?" Ruin said. "This is where you lead me? We have searched this place."

Vin remained quiet, looking up at the spires. Black fingers of metal reaching up into a blacker sky.

"My Inquisitors are coming," Ruin whispered.

"You shouldn't have revealed yourself," Vin said, not looking toward him. "You should have waited until I retrieved the atium. I'll never do it now."

"Ah, but I no longer believe that you *have* it," Ruin said in his fatherly voice. "Child . . . child. I believed you at first—indeed, I gathered my powers, ready to face you. When you came here, however, I knew that you had misled me."

"You don't know that for certain," Vin said softly, voice complemented by the quiet rain.

Silence. "No," Ruin finally said.

"Then you'll have to try to make me talk," she whispered.

"*Try?* You realize the forces I can bring to bear against you, child? You realize the power I have, the destruction I represent? I am mountains that crush. I am waves that crash. I am storms that shatter. I am *the end.*"

Vin continued to stare up into the falling rain. She didn't question her plan—it wasn't really her way. She'd decided what to do. It was time to spring Ruin's trap.

She was tired of being manipulated.

"You will never have it," Vin said. "Not while I live."

Ruin screamed, a sound of primal anger, of something that *had* to destroy. Then, he vanished. Lightning flared, its light a wave of power moving through the mist. It illuminated robed figures in the blackened rain, walking toward her. Surrounding her.

Vin turned toward a ruined building a short distance away, watching as a figure climbed up over the rubble. Now lit only faintly by starlight, the figure had a bare chest, a stark rib cage, and taut muscles. Rain ran down his skin, dripping from the spikes that sprouted from his chest. One between each set of ribs. His face bore spikes in the eyes—one of which had been pounded back into his skull, crushing the socket.

Normal Inquisitors had nine spikes. The one she'd killed with Elend had ten. Marsh appeared to have upward of twenty. He growled softly.

And the fight began.

Vin flung back her cloak, spraying water from the tassels, and Pushed herself forward. Thirteen Inquisitors hurtled through the night sky toward her. Vin ducked a flight of axe swings, then slammed a Push toward a pair of Inquisitors, burning duralumin. The creatures were thrown backward by their spikes, and Vin accelerated in a sudden lurch to the side.

She hit another Inquisitor, feet against his chest. Water sprayed, flecked with ash, as Vin reached down and grabbed one of the spikes in the Inquisitor's eyes. Then she Pulled herself backward and flared pewter.

She lurched, and the spike came free. The Inquisitor screamed, but did not fall dead. It looked at her, one side of the head a gaping hole, and hissed. Removing one eye-spike, apparently, wasn't enough to kill.

Ruin laughed in her head.

The spikeless Inquisitor reached for her, and Vin Pulled herself into the sky, yanking on one of the metal spires of Kredik Shaw. She downed the contents of a metal vial as she flew, restoring her steel.

A dozen figures in black robes sprang up through the falling rain to follow. Marsh remained below, watching.

Vin gritted her teeth, then whipped out a pair of daggers and Pushed herself back down—directly toward the Inquisitors. She passed among them, surprising several, who had probably expected her to jump away. She slammed directly into the creature she'd pulled the spike from, spinning him in the air, ramming her daggers into his chest. He gritted his teeth, laughing, then slapped her arms apart and kicked her back toward the ground.

She fell with the rain.

Vin hit hard, but managed to land on her feet. The Inquisitor hit the cobblestones back-first, her daggers still in his chest. But he stood up easily, tossing the daggers aside, shattering them on the cobblestones.

Then he moved suddenly. *Too* quickly. Vin didn't have time to think as he splashed through the misty rain, grabbing her by the throat.

*I've seen that speed before*, she thought as she struggled. *Not just from Inquisitors. From Sazed. That's a Feruchemical power. Just like the strength Marsh used earlier.*

That was the reason for the new spikes. These other Inquisitors didn't have as many as Marsh, but they obviously had some new powers. Strength. Speed. Each of these creatures was, essentially, another Lord Ruler.

*You see?* Ruin asked.

Vin cried out, duralumin-Pushing against the Inquisitor, tearing herself out of his grasp. The move left her throat bleeding from his fingernails, and she had to down another vial of metals—her last—to restore her steel as she hydroplaned across the wet ground.

*Feruchemical storages run out,* she told herself. *Even Allomancers make mistakes. I can win.*

Yet, she wavered, breathing heavily as she came to a rest, one hand to the ground, up to the wrist in cold rainwater. Kelsier had struggled fighting one Inquisitor. What was she doing fighting thirteen?

Sodden-robed figures landed around her. Vin kicked, slamming a foot into an Inquisitor chest, then Pulled herself off to spin away from another one. She rolled across the slick cobblestones, an obsidian axe nearly taking off her head as she came up and kicked two pewter-enhanced feet at the knees of an opponent.

Bones crunched. The Inquisitor screamed and fell. Vin pushed herself to her feet with one hand, then Pulled on the spires up above, throwing herself up about ten feet to dodge the multitude of swings that came after her.

She landed back on the ground, grabbing the handle of the fallen Inquisitor's axe. She swung it up, spraying water, her skin stained with wet ash as she blocked a blow.

*You cannot fight, Vin,* Ruin said. *Each blow only helps me. I am Ruin.*

She screamed, throwing herself forward in a reckless attack, shouldering aside one Inquisitor, then slamming her axe into the side of another. They growled and swung, but she stayed a step ahead, barely dodging their attacks. The one she had knocked down stood back up, his knees healed. He was smiling.

A blow she didn't see took her in the shoulder, throwing her forward. She felt warm blood running down her back, but pewter deadened the pain. She threw herself to the side, regaining her feet, clutching her axe.

The Inquisitors stalked forward. Marsh watched quietly, rain dripping down his face, spikes protruding from his body like the spires of Kredik Shaw. He did not join the fight.

Vin growled, then Pulled herself into the sky again. She shot ahead of her foes, and bounded from spire to spire, using their metal as anchors. The twelve Inquisitors followed like a flock of ravens, leaping between spires, robes flapping, taking different paths than she. She lurched through the mists, which continued to spin around her in defiance of the rain.

An Inquisitor landed against the spike she was aiming for. She yelled, swinging her axe in an overhand blow as she landed, but he Pushed off—dodging her swing—then Pulled himself right back. She kicked at his feet, sending both herself and her opponent sprawling into the air. Then, she grabbed his robe as they fell.

He looked up, teeth clenched in a smile, knocking her axe out of her hand with an inhumanly strong hand. His body began to swell, gaining the unnatural bulk of a Feruchemist tapping strength. He laughed at Vin, grabbing her neck. He didn't even notice as Vin Pulled them both slightly to the side as they fell through the air.

They hit one of the lower spikes, the metal piercing the surprised Inquisitor's chest. Vin wrenched herself to the side, out of the way, but hung on to his head, her weight pulling him down the spire. She didn't look as the spike ripped through his body, but when she hit the ground below, she was holding only a head. A disembodied spike splashed into an ashen puddle beside her, and she dropped the dead creature's head beside it.

Marsh screamed in anger. Four more Inquisitors landed around her. Vin kicked at one, but it moved with Feruchemical speed, catching her foot. Another grabbed her by the arm and wrenched her to the side. She cried out, kicking her way free, but a third one grabbed her, his grip enhanced by both Allomantic and Feruchemical strength. The other three followed, holding her with claw-like fingers.

Taking a deep breath, Vin extinguished her tin, then burned duralumin, steel, and pewter. She Pushed outward with a sudden wave of power; Inquisitors were thrown back by their spikes. They sprawled, falling to the ground, cursing.

Vin hit the cobblestones. Suddenly, the pain in her back and her throat seemed impossibly strong. She flared tin to clear her mind, but still stumbled, woozily, as she climbed to her feet. She'd used up all of her pewter in that one burst.

She moved to run, and found a figure standing in front of her. Marsh was silent, though another wave of lightning lit the mists.

Her pewter was gone. She was bleeding from a wound that probably would have killed anyone else. She was desperate.

*Okay. Now!* she thought as Marsh slapped her. The blow threw her to the ground.

Nothing happened.

*Come on!* Vin thought, trying to draw upon the mists. Terror twisted within her as Marsh loomed, a black figure in the night. *Please!*

Each time the mists had helped her, they had done so when she was most desperate. This was her plan, weak though it seemed: to put herself in more trouble than she'd ever been in before, then count on the mists to help her. As they had twice before.

Marsh knelt over her. Images flashed like bursts of lightning through her tired mind.

Camon, raising a meaty hand to beat her. Rain falling on her as she huddled in a dark corner, her side aching from a deep gash. Zane turning toward her as they stood at the top of Keep Hasting, one of his hands dripping a slow stream of blood.

Vin tried to scramble away across the slick, cold cobblestones, but her body wasn't working right. She could barely crawl. Marsh slammed a fist down on her leg, shattering the bone, and she cried out in shocked, icy pain. No pewter tempered the blow. She tried to pull herself up to grab one of Marsh's spikes, but he snatched her leg—the broken one—and her own effort just made her scream in agony.

*Now,* Ruin said in his kindly voice, *we will begin. Where is the atium, Vin? What do you know of it?*

"Please . . ." Vin whispered, reaching toward the mists. "Please, please, please . . ."

Yet, they remained aloof. Once, they had swirled playfully around her body, but now they pulled back instead. Just as they'd done for the entire last year. She was crying, reaching for them, but they puffed away. Shunning her like a victim of the plague.

It was the same way the mists treated the Inquisitors.

The creatures rose, surrounding her, silhouettes in the dark night. Marsh yanked her back to him, then reached for her arm. She heard her bone snap before she felt the pain. It came, however, and she screamed.

It had been a long time since she'd known torture. The streets had not been kind, but during the last few years, she'd been able to repress most of those experiences. She'd become a Mistborn. Powerful. Protected.

*Not this time,* she realized through the haze of agony. *Sazed won't come for me this time. Kelsier won't save me. Even the mists have abandoned me. I'm alone.*

Her teeth began to chatter, and Marsh raised her other arm. He looked down at her with spiked eyes, expression unreadable. Then snapped the bone.

Vin screamed, more from the terror than the pain.

Marsh watched her scream, listening to its sweetness. He smiled, then reached down for her unbroken leg. If only Ruin weren't holding him back. Then he could kill her. He strained against his bonds, lusting to do her more harm.

*No* . . . a tiny piece of him thought.

The rain fell, marking a beautiful night. The city of Luthadel lay bedecked in its funereal best, smoldering, some parts still burning despite the wet night. How he wished he'd arrived in time to see the riots and the death. He smiled, the passionate love of a fresh kill rising in him.

*No,* he thought.

He knew, somehow, that the end was very near. The ground trembled beneath his feet, and he had to steady himself with one hand before continuing his work, snapping Vin's other leg. The final day had arrived. The world would not survive this night. He laughed gleefully, fully in the throes of a blood frenzy, barely controlled as he broke Vin's body.

NO!

Marsh awakened. Though his hands still moved as ordered, his mind rebelled. He took in the ash, and the rain, the blood and the soot, and it disgusted him. Vin lay nearly dead.

*Kelsier treated her like a daughter,* he thought as he broke her fingers, one at a time. She was screaming. *The daughter he never had with Mare.*

I've given up. Just like I did with the rebellion.

It was the great shame of his life. Years ago, before the Collapse, he had led the skaa rebellion. But, he'd given in. He'd withdrawn, giving up leadership of the group. And he'd done it only one year before the rebellion—with Kelsier's help—finally overthrew the Final Empire. Marsh had been its leader, but had given up. Just before the victory.

*No*, he thought as he broke the fingers on her other hand. *Not again. No more giving up!*

His hand moved up to her collarbone. And then he saw it. A single bit of metal, glittering in Vin's ear. Her earring. She'd explained it to him once.

*I don't remember it,* Vin's voice whispered to him from the past. A memory of when Marsh himself had sat with her on a quiet veranda at Mansion Renoux, watching Kelsier organize a caravan below, just before Marsh left to infiltrate the ranks of the Steel Priesthood.

Vin had spoken of her insane mother. *Reen said that he came home one day and found my mother covered in blood,* Vin had said. *She'd killed my baby sister. Me, however, she hadn't touched—except to give me an earring . . .*

*Don't trust anyone pierced by metal.* Spook's letter. *Even the smallest bit can taint a man.*

The smallest bit.

As he looked closer, the earring—though twisted and chipped—looked almost like a tiny spike.

He didn't think. He didn't give Ruin time to react. Amid the thrill of killing the Hero of Ages, Ruin's control was weaker than it had ever been. Summoning all the will he had remaining, Marsh reached out.

And ripped the earring from Vin's ear.

Vin's eyes snapped open.

Ash and water fell on her. Her body burned with pain, and the echoing screams of Ruin's demands still reverberated in her head.

But the voice spoke no further. It had been stifled midsentence.

What?

The mists returned to her with a snap. They flowed around her, sensing the Allomancy of her tin, which she still burned faintly. They spun around her as they once had, playful, friendly.

She was dying. She knew it. Marsh was done with her bones, and was obviously growing impatient. He screamed, holding his head. Then, he reached down, grabbing his axe from the puddle beside him. Vin couldn't have run if she'd wanted to.

Fortunately, the pain was fading. Everything was fading. It was black.

*Please,* she thought, reaching out to the mists with one final plea. They felt so familiar all of a sudden. Where had she felt that feeling before? Where did she know them?

*From the Well of Ascension, of course,* a voice whispered in her head. *It's the same power, after all. Solid in the metal you fed to Elend. Liquid in the pool you burned. And vapor in the air, confined to night. Hiding you. Protecting you.*

Giving you power!

Vin gasped, drawing in breath—a breath that sucked in the mists. She felt suddenly warm, the mists surging within her, lending her their strength. Her entire body burned like metal, and the pain disappeared in a flash.

Marsh swung his axe for her head, spraying water.

And she caught his arm.

*I have spoken of Inquisitors, and their ability to pierce copperclouds. As I said, this power is easily understood when one realizes that many Inquisitors were Seekers before their transformation, and that meant their bronze became twice as strong.*

*There is at least one other case of a person who could pierce copperclouds. In her case, however, the situation was slightly different. She was a Mistborn from birth, and her sister was the Seeker. The death of that sister–and subsequent inheritance of power via the Hemalurgic spike used to kill that sister–left her twice as good at burning bronze as a typical Mistborn. And that let her see through the copperclouds of lesser Allomancers.*

# 73

THE MISTS CHANGED.

TenSoon looked up through the ash. He lay, exhausted and numb, atop the hill before the field of lava that barred his path eastward. His muscles felt lethargic—signs that he had been pushing too hard. Even the Blessing of Potency could only do so much.

He stood, forcing his horse's body to rise, looking at his nighttime surroundings. Endless fields of ash extended behind him; even the track he had worn up to the top of the hill was close to being filled in. The lava burned ahead of him. However, something seemed different. What?

The mists flowed, moving about, swirling. Generally, the mists had a very chaotic pattern. Some parts would flow one way, while others would spin about in other directions. There were often rivers of motion, but they never conformed to one another. Most often, they followed the wind; this night the wind was still.

And yet, the mist seemed to be flowing in one direction. As soon as he noticed it, TenSoon found it one of the most singularly strange sights he had ever beheld. Instead of swirling or spinning, the mists moved together in a seemingly purposeful flow. They coursed around him, and he felt like a stone in a huge, incorporeal river.

The mists flowed toward Luthadel. *Perhaps I'm not too late!* he thought, regaining some of his hope. He shook himself from his stupor, and took off in a gallop back the way he had come.

"Breezy, come look at this."

Breeze rubbed his eyes, looking across the room to where Allrianne sat in her nightgown, looking out the window. It was late—too late. He should have been asleep.

He looked back toward his desk, and the treaty he had been working on. It was the sort of thing Sazed or Elend should have had to write, not Breeze. "You know," he said, "I distinctly remember telling Kelsier that I did *not* want to end up in charge of anything important. Running kingdoms and cities is work for fools, not thieves! Government is far too inefficient to provide a suitable income."

"Breezy!" Allrianne said insistently, Pulling on his emotions quite blatantly.

He sighed, rising. "Very well," he grumbled. *Honestly,* he thought. *How is it, of all the qualified people in Kelsier's little crew, that* I *end up the one leading a city?*

He joined Allrianne at the window, peeking out. "What is it exactly I'm supposed to see, dear? I don't . . ."

He trailed off, frowning. Beside him, Allrianne touched his arm, seeming concerned as she looked out the window.

"Now, that *is* strange," he said. The mists flowed by outside, moving like a river—and they seemed to be accelerating.

The door to his room slammed open. Breeze jumped, and Allrianne squeaked. They spun to find Spook standing in the doorway, still half covered in bandages.

"Gather the people," the boy croaked, holding the doorframe to keep from collapsing. "We need to move."

"My dear boy," Breeze said, unsettled. Allrianne took Breeze's arm, holding on quietly, yet tightly. "My dear boy, what is this? You should be in bed!"

"Gather them, Breeze!" Spook said, suddenly sounding very authoritative. "Take them to the storage cavern. Pack them in! Quickly! We don't have much time!"

"What do you make of it?" Ham asked, wiping his brow. Blood immediately oozed from the cut again, running down the side of his face.

Elend shook his head, breathing deeply—almost in gasps—as he leaned back against the side of a jagged rock outcropping. He closed his eyes, fatigue making his body shake despite his pewter. "I don't really care about mists right now, Ham," he whispered. "I can barely think straight."

Ham grunted in agreement. Around them, men screamed and died, fighting the endless waves of koloss. They had some of the creatures bottled up in the natural stone corridor leading into Fadrex, but the real fights were happening on the rugged rock formations that enclosed the city. Too many koloss, tired of waiting outside, had begun crawling up to attack from the sides.

It was a precarious battlefield, one that often demanded Elend's attention. They had a large number of Allomancers, but most of them were inexperienced—they hadn't even known about their powers until this very day. Elend was a oneman reserve force, bounding across the defensive lines, plugging holes while Cett directed tactics below.

More screams. More death. More metal hitting metal, rock, and flesh. *Why?* Elend thought with frustration. *Why can't I protect them?* He flared pewter, taking a deep breath and standing up in the night.

The mists flowed overhead, as if pulled by some invisible force. For a moment, even exhausted as he was, he froze.

"Lord Venture!" someone shouted. Elend spun, looking toward the sound. A youthful messenger scrambled up the side of the rock outcropping, wide-eyed.

*Oh, no* . . . Elend thought, tensing.

"My lord, they're retreating!" the lad said, stumbling to a halt before Elend.

"What?" Ham asked, standing.

"It's true, my lord. They pulled back from the city gates! They're leaving."

Elend immediately dropped a coin, shooting himself into the sky. Mist flowed around him, its tendrils a million tiny strings being yanked eastward. Below, he saw the hulking, dark forms of the koloss running away in the night.

*So many of them,* he thought, landing on a rock formation. *We'd never have beaten them. Even with Allomancers.*

But, they were leaving. Running away at an inhuman speed. Moving . . .

Toward Luthadel.

Vin fought like a tempest, spraying rainwater through the dark night as she threw back Inquisitor after Inquisitor.

She shouldn't have been alive. She'd run out of pewter, yet she felt it flaring inside, burning brighter than it ever had before. She felt as if the bleeding sun itself blazed within her, running molten through her veins.

Her every Steelpush or Ironpull slammed against her as if it were made with the power of duralumin. Yet, the metal reserves within her did not vanish. Instead, they grew stronger. Vaster. She wasn't certain what was happening to her. However, she *did* know one thing.

Suddenly, fighting twelve Inquisitors at once did not seem like an impossible task.

She cried out, slapping an Inquisitor to the side, then ducking a pair of axes. She crouched, then jumped, leaping in an arc through the rain, coming down beside Marsh, who still lay stunned from where she had thrown him after her rebirth.

He looked up, finally seeming to focus on her, then cursed and rolled away as Vin punched downward. Her fist shattered a cobblestone, throwing back a ripple of dark rainwater, splashing her arms and face, leaving specks of black ash behind.

She looked up toward Marsh. He stood erect, bare-chested, his spikes glistening in the darkness.

Vin smiled, then spun on the Inquisitors rushing her from behind. She yelled, dodging a swinging axe. Had these creatures ever seemed quick to her? Within the embrace of limitless pewter, she seemed to move as the mist itself did. Light. Quick.

Unchained.

The sky spun in a tempest of its own as she attacked, moving in a swirling frenzy. The mists whirled around her arm in a vortex as she punched one Inquisitor in the face, throwing him backward. The mists danced before her as she caught the fallen Inquisitor's axe, then sheared the arm off another of the creatures. She took his head next, leaving the others stunned with the speed of her motion.

That's two dead.

They attacked again. She bounded backward, Pulling herself toward the spires above. The trail of ravens launched after her, their robes snapping in the wet darkness. She hit a spire feet-first, then launched upward and Pulled on an Inquisitor's spikes, something that was easy to do with her new power. Her chosen quarry lurched upward ahead of his companions.

Vin shot downward, meeting the Inquisitor in the air. She grabbed him by the eye-spikes and pulled, ripping them out with her newfound strength. Then she kicked off the creature and Pushed against the spikes in his chest.

She shot upward in the air, leaving a corpse flipping end over end in the rain beneath her, massive gaps in its head where the spikes had been. They could lose some spikes and live, she knew, but the removal of others was deadly. Losing both eye-spikes appeared to be enough to kill them.

Three.

Inquisitors hit the spire she had Pushed off of, and they leaped up to follow her. Vin smiled, then threw the spikes she still carried, catching one of the Inquisitors in the chest with them. Then, she Pushed. The unfortunate Inquisitor was thrown downward, and he hit a flat rooftop so violently that it pushed several of his spikes up out of his body. They sparkled and spun in the air, then fell beside his immobile corpse.

Four.

Vin's mistcloak fluttered as she shot upward in the sky. Eight Inquisitors still chased her, reaching for her. Crying out, Vin raised her hands toward the creatures as she began to fall. Then, she *Pushed.*

She hadn't realized how strong her new powers were. They were obviously akin to duralumin, since she could affect the spikes inside of an Inquisitor's body. Her overpowering Push forced the whole flock of them downward, as if they'd been swatted. In fact, her Push also hit the metal spire directly beneath her.

The stone architecture holding the spire in place exploded, spraying chips and dust outward as the spire itself crushed the building beneath it. And Vin was thrown upward.

Very quickly.

She blasted through the sky, mists streaking past her, the force of her Push straining even her mist-enhanced body with the stress of sudden acceleration.

And then she was out. She emerged into the open air, like a fish leaping from the water. Beneath her, the mists covered the nighttime land like an enormous white blanket. Around her, there was only open air. Unsettling, strange. Above her, a million stars—normally visible only to Allomancers—watched her like the eyes of those long dead.

Her momentum ran out, and she spun quietly, whiteness below, light above. She notice that she'd trailed a line of mist up out of the main cloud. This hung like a tether ready to pull her back down. In fact, all the mists were spinning slightly in what looked like an enormous weather pattern. A whirlpool of white.

The heart of the whirlpool was directly beneath her.

She fell, plummeting back down toward the earth below. She entered the mists, drawing them behind her, breathing them in. Even as she fell, she could feel them surging about her in a massive, empire-wide spiral. She welcomed them into herself, and the vortex of mist around her grew more and more violent.

Instants later, Luthadel appeared, a massive black welt upon the land. She fell down, streaking toward Kredik Shaw and its spires, which seemed to be pointing toward her. The Inquisitors were still there—she could see them standing on a flat rooftop amid the spires, looking up. Waiting. There were only eight, not counting Marsh. One lay impaled on a nearby spike from her last push; the blow had apparently torn the center spike out of his back.

*Five,* Vin thought, landing a short distance from the Inquisitors.

If a single Push could throw her up so far she passed out of the mists, then what would happen if she Pushed outward?

She waited quietly as the Inquisitors charged. She could see desperation in their movements. Whatever was happening to Vin, Ruin was apparently willing to risk every one of the creatures in the hopes that they would kill her before she was complete. Mists pulled toward her, moving more and more quickly, drawn into her like water being sucked down a drain.

When the Inquisitors had almost reached her, she *Pushed* outward again, throwing metal away from her with all the force as she could muster, while at the same time strengthening her body with a massive flare of pewter. Stone cracked. Inquisitors cried out.

And Kredik Shaw exploded.

Towers toppled from their foundations. Doors ripped free from their frames. Windows shattered. Blocks burst, the entire structure torn to pieces as its metals lurched away. She screamed as she Pushed, the ground trembling beneath her. Everything—even the rock and stone, which obviously contained residual traces of metal ore—was thrown violently back.

She gasped, stopping her Push. She drew in breath, feeling the rain splatter against her. The building that had been the Lord Ruler's palace was gone, flattened to rubble which spread out and away from her like an impact crater.

An Inquisitor burst from the rubble, face bleeding from where one of his spikes had ripped free. Vin raised a hand, Pulling and steadying herself from behind. The Inquisitor's head lurched, his other eye-spike pulling free. He toppled forward, and Vin caught the spike, Pushing it toward another Inquisitor who was rushing her. He raised a hand to Push it back at her.

And she drove it forward anyway, ignoring his Push with a quick Push backward to stabilize herself. He was thrown away and slammed into the remnants of a wall. The spike continued forward, Pushed like a fish darting through water, ignoring the current. The spike slammed into the Inquisitor's face, crushing it, pinning his head back against the granite.

Six and seven.

Vin stalked across the rubble, mists storming. Overhead, they swirled furiously, forming a funnel cloud with her at its focus. It was like a tornado, but with no air currents. Just impalpable mists, as if painted on the air. Spinning, swirling, coming to her silent command.

She stepped over an Inquisitor corpse that had been crushed by the rubble; she kicked his head free to make certain he was dead.

Eight.

Three rushed her at once. She screamed, turning, Pulling on a fallen spire. The massive piece of metal—nearly as big as a building itself—lurched into the air, spinning at her command. She slammed it into the Inquisitors like a club, crushing them. She turned, leaving the enormous iron pillar resting atop their corpses.

Nine. Ten. Eleven.

The storm broke, though the mists continued to swirl. The rain let up as Vin walked across the shattered building, eyes searching for Allomantic blue lines that were moving. She found one trembling before her, and she picked up and tossed aside an enormous marble disk. An Inquisitor groaned beneath; she reached for him, and realized that her hand was leaking mist. It didn't just swirl around her, it came from her, smoking forth from the pores in her skin. She breathed out, and mist puffed before her, then immediately entered the vortex and was pulled in again.

She grabbed the Inquisitor, pulling him up. His skin began to heal as he used his Feruchemical powers, and he struggled, growing stronger. Yet, even the awesome strength of Feruchemy made little difference against Vin. She pulled his eye-spikes free, tossed them aside, then left the corpse slumping in the rubble.

Twelve.

She found the last Inquisitor huddled in a pool of rainwater. It was Marsh. His body was broken, and he was missing one of the spikes from his side. The spike hole was bleeding, but that one apparently wasn't enough to kill him. He turned his pair of spikeheads to look up at her, expression stiff.

Vin paused, breathing deeply, feeling rainwater trail down her arms and drip off her fingers. She still burned within, and she looked up, staring into the vortex of mists. It was spinning so powerfully, twisting down. She was having trouble thinking for all the energy that coursed through her.

She looked down again.

*This isn't Marsh,* she thought. *Kelsier's brother is long dead. This is something else. Ruin.*

The mist swirled in a final tempest, the circular motion growing faster—yet tighter—as the final wisps of mist spun down and were pulled into Vin's body.

Then the mists were gone. Starlight shone above, and flecks of ash fell in the air. The night landscape was eerie in its stillness, blackness, and clarity. Even with tin—which let her see at night far better than a normal person could—the mists had always been there. To see the night landscape without them was . . . wrong.

Vin began to tremble. She gasped, feeling the fire within her blaze hotter and hotter. It was Allomancy as she'd never known it. It felt as if she had never understood it. The power was far greater than metals, mere Pushes and Pulls. It was something awesomely more vast. A power that men had used, yet never comprehended.

She forced her eyes open. There was one Inquisitor left. She had drawn them to Luthadel, forced them to expose themselves, laying a trap for someone far more powerful than herself. And the mists had responded.

It was time to finish what she had come to do.

Marsh watched limply as Vin fell to her knees. Shaking, she reached for one of his eye-spikes.

There was nothing he could do. He'd used up most of the healing in his metal-mind, and the rest would do him no good. Stored healing worked by way of speed. He could either heal himself a small amount very quickly, or wait and heal himself slowly, yet completely. Either way, he was dead as soon as Vin pulled those spikes free.

*Finally,* he thought with relief as she grabbed the first spike. *Whatever I did . . . it worked. Somehow.*

He felt Ruin's rage, felt his master realizing his mistake. In the end, Marsh had mattered. In the end, Marsh hadn't given up. He'd done Mare proud.

Vin pulled the spike free. It hurt, of course—hurt far more than Marsh would have thought possible. He screamed—both in pain and in joy—as Vin reached for the other eye-spike.

And then, she hesitated. Marsh waited expectantly. She shook, then coughed, cringing. She gritted her teeth, reaching toward him. Her fingers touched the spike.

And then, Vin vanished.

She left behind the misty outline of a young woman. That dissipated and was soon gone, too, leaving Marsh alone in the wreckage of a palace, head blazing with pain, body covered in sickly, sodden ash.

*She once asked Ruin why he had chosen her. The primary answer is simple. It had little to do with her personality, attitudes, or even skill with Allomancy.*

*She was simply the only child Ruin could find who was in a position to gain the right Hemalurgic spike—one that would grant her heightened power with bronze, which would then let her sense the location of the Well of Ascension. She had an insane mother, a sister who was a Seeker, and was—herself—Mistborn. That was precisely the combination Ruin needed.*

*There were other reasons, of course. But even Ruin didn't know them.*

# 74

DAY BROKE WITH NO MISTS.

Elend stood atop the rocky heights in front of Fadrex City, looking out. He felt far better with a night's rest behind him, though his body ached from fighting, his arm throbbed where he'd been wounded, and his chest hurt where he'd carelessly allowed a koloss to punch him. The massive bruise would have crippled another man.

Koloss corpses littered the ground before the city, piled particularly high in the corridor leading into Fadrex itself. The whole area smelled of death and dried blood. Far more often than Elend would have liked, the field of blue corpses was broken by the lighter skin of a human. Still, Fadrex had survived—if only because of the last-minute addition of several thousand Allomancers and the eventual retreat of the koloss.

*Why did they leave?* Elend wondered, thankful yet frustrated. *And, perhaps more importantly, where are they going?*

Elend turned at the sound of footsteps on rock and saw Yomen climbing the rough-hewn steps to join him, puffing slightly, still pristine in his obligator's robes. Nobody had expected him to fight. He was, after all, a scholar, and not a warrior.

*Like me,* Elend thought, smiling wryly.

"The mists are gone," Yomen said.

Elend nodded. "Both day and night."

"The skaa fled inside when the mists vanished. Some still refuse to leave their homes. For centuries, they feared being out at night because of the mists. Now the mists disappear, and they find it so unnatural that they hide again."

Elend turned away, looking back out. The mists were gone, but the ash still fell. And it fell hard. The corpses that had fallen during the night hours were nearly buried.

"Has the sun always been this hot?" Yomen asked, wiping his brow.

Elend frowned, noticing for the first time that it *did* seem hot. It was still early morning, yet it already felt like noon.

*Something is still wrong,* he thought. *Very wrong. Worse, even.* The ash choked the air, blowing in the breeze, coating everything. And the heat . . .

shouldn't it have been getting *colder* as more ash flew into the air, blocking the sunlight? "Form crews, Yomen," Elend said. "Have them pick through the bodies and search for wounded among that mess down there. Then, gather the people and begin moving them into the storage cavern. Tell the soldiers to be ready for . . . for something. I don't know what."

Yomen frowned. "You sound as if you're not going to be here to help me."

Elend turned eastward. "I won't be."

Vin was still out there somewhere. He didn't understand why she had said what she had about the atium, but he trusted her. Perhaps she had intended to distract Ruin with lies. Elend suspected that somehow, the people of Fadrex owed her their lives. She'd drawn the koloss away—she'd figured something out, something that he couldn't even guess at.

*She always complains that she's not a scholar,* he thought, smiling to himself. *But that's just because she lacks education. She's twice as quick-witted as half the "geniuses" I knew during my days at court.*

He couldn't leave her alone. He needed to find her. Then . . . well, he didn't know what they'd do next. Find Sazed, perhaps? Either way, Elend could do no more in Fadrex. He moved to walk down the steps, intending to find Ham and Cett. However, Yomen caught his shoulder.

Elend turned.

"I was wrong about you, Venture," Yomen said. "The things I said were undeserved."

"You let me into your city when my men were surrounded by their own koloss," Elend said. "I don't care *what* you said about me. You're a good man in my estimation."

"You're wrong about the Lord Ruler, though," Yomen said. "He's guiding this all."

Elend just smiled.

"It doesn't bother me that you don't believe," Yomen said, reaching up to his forehead. "I've learned something. The Lord Ruler uses unbelievers as well as believers. We're all part of his plan. Here."

Yomen pulled the bead of atium free from its place at his brow. "My last bead. In case you need it."

Elend accepted the bit of metal, rolling it over in his fingers. He'd never burned atium. For years, his family had overseen its mining—but, by the time Elend himself had become Mistborn, he'd already either spent what he'd been able to obtain, or had given it to Vin to be burned.

"How did you do it, Yomen?" he asked. "How did you make it seem you were an Allomancer?"

"I *am* an Allomancer, Venture."

"Not a Mistborn," Elend said.

"No," Yomen said. "A Seer—an atium Misting."

Elend nodded. He'd assumed that was impossible, but it was hard to rely on assumptions about *anything* anymore. "The Lord Ruler knew about your power?"

Yomen smiled. "Some secrets, he worked very hard to guard."

*Atium Mistings,* Elend thought. *That means there are others too . . . gold Mistings, electrum Mistings . . .* Though, as he thought about it, some—like aluminum Mistings or duralumin Mistings—would be impossible to find because they couldn't use their metals without being able to burn other metals.

"Atium was too valuable to use in testing people for Allomantic powers anyway," Yomen said, turning away. "I never really found the power all that useful. How often does one have both atium and the desire to use it up in a few heartbeats? Take that bit and go find your wife."

Elend stood for a moment, then tucked the bead of atium away and went down to give Ham some instructions. A few minutes later, he was streaking across the landscape, doing his best to fly with the horseshoes as Vin had taught him.

*Each Hemalurgic spike driven through a person's body gave Ruin some small ability to influence them. This was mitigated, however, by the mental fortitude of the one being controlled.*

*In most cases—depending on the size of the spike and the length of time it had been worn—a single spike gave Ruin only minimal powers over a person. He could appear to them, and could warp their thoughts slightly, making them overlook certain oddities—for instance, their compulsion for keeping and wearing a simple earring.*

# 75

SAZED GATHERED HIS NOTES, carefully stacking the thin sheets of metal. Though the metal served an important function in keeping Ruin from modifying—or perhaps even reading—their contents, Sazed found them a bit frustrating. The plates were easily scratched, and they couldn't be folded or bound.

The kandra elders had given him a place to stay, and it was surprisingly lush for a cave. Kandra apparently enjoyed human comforts—blankets, cushions, mattresses. Some even preferred to wear clothing, though those who didn't declined to create genitals for their True Bodies. That left him wondering about scholarly sorts of questions. They reproduced by transforming mistwraiths into kandra, so genitals would be redundant. Yet, the kandra identified themselves by gender—each was definitely a "he" or a "she." So, how did they know? Did they choose arbitrarily, or did they actually know what they would have been, had they been born human rather than as a mistwraith?

He wished he had more time to study their society. So far, everything he'd done in the Homeland had been focused on learning more of the Hero of Ages and the Terris religion. He'd made a sheet of notes about what he'd discovered, and it sat at the top of his metallic stack. It looked surprisingly, even depressingly, similar to any number of sheets in his portfolio.

The Terris religion, as one might have expected, focused heavily on knowledge and scholarship. The Worldbringers—their word for Keepers—were holy men and women who imparted knowledge, but also wrote of their god, Terr. It was the ancient Terris word for "to preserve." A central focus of the religion had been the histories of how Preservation—or Terr—and Ruin had interacted, and these included various prophecies about the Hero of Ages, who was seen as a successor to Preservation.

Aside from the prophecies, however, the Worldbringers had taught temperance, faith, and understanding to their people. They had taught that it was better to build than to destroy, a principle at the core of their teachings. Of course there had been rituals, rites, initiations, and traditions. There were also lesser religious leaders, required offerings, and codes of conduct. It all seemed good, but hardly original. Even the focus on scholarship was something shared by several dozen other religions Sazed had studied.

That, for some reason, depressed him. It was just another religion.

What had he expected? Some astounding doctrine that would prove to him once and for all that there was a god? He felt like a fool. Yet, he also felt betrayed. This was what he'd ridden across the empire, feeling elated and anticipatory, to discover? This was what he'd expected to save them? These were just more words. Pleasant ones, like most in his portfolio, but hardly compelling. Was he supposed to believe just because it was the religion his people had followed?

There were no promises here that Tindwyl still lived. Why was it that people had followed this, or any, of the religions? Frustrated, Sazed dipped into his metalminds, dumping a group of accounts into his mind. Writings the Keepers had discovered—journals, letters, other sources from which scholars had pieced together what had once been believed. He looked through them, thought of them, read them.

What had made these people so willing to accept their religions? Were they simply products of their society, believing because it was tradition? He read of their lives, and tried to persuade himself that the people were simpletons, that they hadn't ever truly questioned their beliefs. Surely they would have seen the flaws and inconsistencies if they'd just taken the time to be rational and discerning.

Sazed sat with closed eyes, a wealth of information from journals and letters in his mind, searching for what he expected to find. However, as the time passed, he did not discover what he sought. The people did not seem like fools to him. As he sat, something began to occur to him. Something about the words, the feelings, of the people who had believed.

Before, Sazed had looked at the doctrines themselves. This time, he found himself studying the people who had believed, or what he could find of them. As he read their words over again in his mind, he began to see something. The faiths he had looked at, they couldn't be divorced from the people who had adhered to them. In the abstract, those religions were stale. However, as he read the words of the people—really *read* them—he began to see patterns.

Why did they believe? Because they saw miracles. Things one man took as chance, a man of faith took as a sign. A loved one recovering from disease, a fortunate business deal, a chance meeting with a long lost friend.

It wasn't the grand doctrines or the sweeping ideals that seemed to make believers out of men. It was the simple magic in the world around them.

*What was it Spook said?* Sazed thought, sitting in the shadowy kandra cavern. *That faith was about trust. Trusting that somebody was watching. That somebody would make it all right in the end, even though things looked terrible at the moment*.

To believe, it seemed, one had to *want* to believe. It was a conundrum, one Sazed had wrestled with. He wanted someone, something, to force him to have faith. He wanted to have to believe because of the proof shown to him.

Yet, the believers whose words now filled his mind would have said he already had proof. Had he not, in his moment of despair, received an answer? As he had been about to give up, TenSoon had spoken. Sazed had begged for a sign, and received it.

Was it chance? Was it providence?

In the end, apparently, it was up to him to decide. He slowly returned the letters and journals to his metalminds, leaving his specific memory of them empty—yet retaining the feelings they had prompted in him. Which would he be? Believer or skeptic? At that moment, neither seemed a patently foolish path.

*I* do *want to believe,* he thought. *That's why I've spent so much time searching. I can't have it both ways. I simply have to decide*.

Which would it be? He sat for a few moments, thinking, feeling, and—most important—remembering.

*I sought help,* Sazed thought. *And something answered*.

Sazed smiled, and everything seemed a little bit brighter. *Breeze was right,* he thought, standing and organizing his things as he prepared to go. *I was not meant to be an atheist*.

The thought seemed a little too flippant for what had just happened to him. As he picked up his metal sheets and prepared to go meet with the First Generation, he realized that kandra passed outside his humble little cavern, completely oblivious to the important decision he'd just made.

But, that was how things often went, it seemed. Some important decisions were made on a battlefield or in a conference room. But others happened quietly, unseen by others. That didn't make the decision any less important to Sazed. He would believe. Not because something had been proven to him beyond his ability to deny. But because he chose to.

As, he realized, Vin had once chosen to believe and trust in the crew. Because of what Kelsier had taught her. *You taught me too, Survivor,* Sazed thought, moving out into the stone tunnel to meet with the kandra leaders. *Thank you*.

Sazed made his way through the cavern corridors, suddenly eager at the prospect of another day interviewing the members of the First Generation. Now that he had covered most of their religion, he planned to find out more about the First Contract.

As far as he knew, he was the only human other than the Lord Ruler to have ever read its words. The members of the First Generation treated the metal bearing the contract with noticeably less reverence than the other kandra. That had surprised him.

*Of course,* Sazed thought, turning a corner, *it does make some kind of sense. To the members of the First Generation, the Lord Ruler was a friend. They remember climbing that mountain with him—their leader, yes, but not a god. Kind of like the members of the crew, who had trouble seeing Kelsier in a religious light*.

Still lost in thought, Sazed wandered into the Trustwarren, whose broad metallic doors were open. He paused, however, just inside. The First Generation waited in their alcoves, as was common. They didn't come down until Sazed closed the doors. Oddly, however, the members of the Second Generation stood at their lecterns, addressing the crowds of kandra—who, despite being far more reserved than a similar group of humans would have been, still displayed an air of anxiety.

". . . does it mean, KanPaar?" one lesser kandra was asking. "Please, we are confused. Ask the First Generation."

"We have spoken of this thing already," said KanPaar, leader of the Seconds. "There is no need for alarm. Look at you, crowding together, murmuring and rumormongering as if you were humans!"

Sazed moved up to one of the younger kandra, who stood gathered outside the doorway to the Trustwarren. "Please," he whispered. "What is the source of this concern?"

"The mists, Holy Worldbringer," the kandra—a female, he thought—whispered back.

"What of them?" Sazed asked. "The fact that they are staying later and later in the day?"

"No," the kandra girl replied. "The fact that they're *gone*."

Sazed started. "*What?*"

The kandra nodded. "Nobody noticed it until early this morning. It was still dark out, and a guard walked by to check one of the exits. He says there was no mist at all outside, despite it being night! Others went out too. They all agree."

"This is a simple matter," KanPaar said to the chamber. "We know that it was raining last night, and sometimes rain disperses the mists for a short time. They will return tomorrow."

"But, it's not raining now," one of the kandra said. "And, it wasn't raining when TarKavv went out on patrol. There have been mists in the morning for months now. Where are they?"

"Bah," KanPaar said, waving his hand. "You worried when the mists started staying in the mornings, now you complain that they are gone? We are *kandra*. We are eternal—we outwait everything and anything. We don't gather in rowdy mobs. Go back to what you were doing. This means nothing."

"No," a voice whispered into the cavern. Heads turned up, and the entire group hushed.

"No," Haddek—leader of the First Generation—whispered from his hidden alcove. "This is important. We have been wrong, KanPaar. Very . . . very wrong. Clear the Trustwarren. Leave only the Keeper behind. And spread the word. The day of the Resolution may have come."

This comment only served to agitate the kandra further. Sazed stood frozen with wonder; he had never seen such a reaction in the normally calm creatures. They did as they were told—kandra appeared to be very good at that—and left the room, but there were whispers and debates. The Seconds slunk out last, looking humiliated. Sazed watched them go, thinking about KanPaar's words.

*We are eternal—we outwait everything and anything*. Suddenly, the kandra began to make more sense to Sazed. How easy it would be to ignore the outside world if one were immortal. They had outlasted so many problems and predicaments, upheavals and riots, that anything occurring on the outside must have seemed trivial.

So trivial, in fact, that it was even possible to ignore the prophecies of one's own religion as they started to come true. Eventually, the room was empty, and a pair of beefy members of the Fifth Generation pushed the doors closed from outside, leaving Sazed alone on the floor of the room. He waited patiently, arranging his notes on his desk as the members of the First Generation hobbled out of their hidden stairwells and joined him on the floor of the Trustwarren.

"Tell me, Keeper," Haddek said as his brothers seated themselves, "what do you make of this event?"

"The departure of the mists?" Sazed asked. "It does seem portentous—though, admittedly, I cannot give a specific reason why."

"That is because there are things we have not yet explained to you," Haddek said, looking toward the others. They seemed very troubled. "Things relating to the First Contract, and the promises of the kandra."

Sazed readied a sheet of metal paper. "Please, continue."

"I must ask that you not record these words," Haddek said.

Sazed paused, then set down his pen. "Very well—though I warn you. The memory of a Keeper, even without his metalminds, is very long."

"That cannot be helped," said one of the others. "We need your counsel, Keeper. As an outsider."

"As a son," another whispered.

"When the Father made us," Haddek said. "He . . . gave us a charge. Something different from the First Contract."

"To him, it was almost an afterthought," one of the others added. "Though once he mentioned it, he implied it was very important."

"He made us promise," Haddek said. "Each of us. He told us that someday, we might be required to remove our Blessings."

"Pull them from our bodies," one of the others added.

"Kill ourselves," Haddek said.

The room fell silent.

"You are certain this would kill you?" Sazed asked.

"It would change us back to mistwraiths," Haddek said. "That is the same thing, essentially."

"The Father said we would have to do it," another said. "There wasn't a 'might' about it. He said that we would have to make certain the other kandra knew of this charge."

"We call it the Resolution," Haddek said. "Each kandra is told of it when he or she is first birthed. They are given the charge—sworn and ingrained—to pull their Blessing free, should the First Generation command it. We have never invoked this charge."

"But you're considering it now?" Sazed asked, frowning. "I do not understand. Simply because of the way that the mists are acting?"

"The mists are the body of Preservation, Keeper," Haddek said. "This is a *very* portentous event."

"We have been listening to our children discuss it all morning," another said. "And it troubles us. They do not know all the mists represent, but they are aware of their importance."

"Rashek said that we'd know," another said. "He told us. 'The day will come when you have to remove your Blessings. You'll know when it arrives.' "

Haddek nodded. "He said that we'd know. And . . . we are very worried."

"How can we order the deaths of all of our people?" another asked. "The Resolution has always bothered me."

"Rashek saw the future," Haddek said, turning. "He held the power of Preservation and wielded it. He is the only man ever to have done so! Even this girl of whom the Keeper speaks did not *use* the power. Only Rashek! The Father."

"Where, then, are the mists?" another asked.

The room fell silent again. Sazed sat, pen held in his hand, yet not writing anything. He leaned forward. "The mists are the body of Preservation?"

The others nodded.

"And . . . it has disappeared?"

Again, a nod.

"Does this not mean, then, that Preservation has returned?"

"That is impossible," Haddek said. "Preservation's power remains, for power cannot be destroyed. His mind, however, was all but destroyed—for this was the sacrifice he made to imprison Ruin."

"The sliver remains," another reminded. "The shadow of self."

"Yes," Haddek said. "But that is not Preservation, just an image—a remnant. Now that Ruin has escaped, I think we can assume that even it has been destroyed."

"I think it is more," another began. "We could—"

Sazed held up his hands, getting their attention. "If Preservation has not returned, then has, perhaps, someone else taken up his power to use in this fight? Is that not what your teachings say will happen? That which has been sundered must again begin to find its whole."

Silence.

"Perhaps," Haddek said.

*Vin,* Sazed thought, growing excited. *This is what it means to be the Hero of Ages! I am right to believe. She* can *save us!*

Sazed took a piece of metal paper, beginning to scribble down his thoughts. At that moment, however, the doors to the Trustwarren burst open.

Sazed paused, turning with a frown. A group of rock-boned Fifth Generationers clomped into the room, followed by the willowy members of the Second Generation. Outside, the cavern hallway was empty of its earlier crowd.

"Take them," KanPaar said furtively, pointing.

"What is this!" Haddek exclaimed.

Sazed sat where he was, pen held in his fingers. He recognized the urgent, tense posture in the figures of the Second Generationers. Some looked frightened, others determined. The Fifth Generationers moved forward quickly, their movements enhanced by the Blessing of Potency.

"KanPaar!" Haddek said. "What is this?"

Sazed slowly stood up. Four Fifth Generationers came over to surround him, bearing hammers as weapons.

"It's a coup," Sazed said.

"You can no longer lead," KanPaar said to the First Generation. "You would destroy what we have here, polluting our land with outsiders, letting the talk of revolutionaries cloud kandra wisdom."

"This is not the time, KanPaar," Haddek said, the members of the First Generation crying out as they were prodded and grappled.

"Not the time?" KanPaar asked angrily. "You spoke of the Resolution! Have you no idea the panic this has caused? You would destroy *everything* we have."

Sazed turned calmly, looking at KanPaar. Despite his angry tone, the kandra was smiling slightly through translucent lips.

*He had to strike now,* Sazed thought, *before the First Generation said more to the common people—making the Seconds redundant. KanPaar can stuff them all away somewhere, and then prop up dummies in the alcoves.*

Sazed reached for his pewtermind. One of the Fifths snapped it away with a too-quick grab of the hand, and two others took Sazed by the arms. He struggled, but his kandra captors were inhumanly strong.

"KanPaar!" Haddek yelled. The First's voice was surprisingly strong. "You are of the Second Generation—you owe obedience to me. We created you!"

KanPaar ignored him, directing his kandra to bind the members of the First Generation. The other Seconds stood in a cluster behind him, looking increasingly apprehensive and shocked at what they were doing.

"The time for the Resolution may indeed be here!" Haddek said. "We must—" He cut off as one of the Fifths gagged him.

"That is exactly why I must take leadership," KanPaar said, shaking his head. "You are too unstable, old one. I will not trust the future of our people to a creature who could, at a whim, order them to kill themselves."

"You fear change," Sazed said, meeting the kandra's eyes.

"I fear instability," KanPaar said. "I will make certain the kandra people have a firm and immutable leadership."

"You make the same argument as many revolutionaries," Sazed said. "And I can see your concern. However, you *must* not do this thing. Your own prophecies are coming to a head. I understand now! Without the part the kandra are to play, you could inadvertently cause the end of all things. Let me continue my research—lock us in this room if you must—but do not—"

"Gag him," KanPaar said, turning.

Sazed struggled, with no success, as his mouth was bound and he was pulled from the Trustwarren, leaving the atium—the body of a god—behind, and in the hands of traitors.

*I've always wondered about the strange ability Allomancers have to pierce the mists. When one burned tin, he or she could see farther at night, looking through the mists. To the layman, this might seem like a logical connection—tin, after all, enhances the senses.*

*The logical mind, however, may find a puzzle in this ability. How, exactly, would tin let one see through the mists? As an obstruction, they are unconnected with the quality of one's eyesight. Both the nearsighted scholar and the long-sighted scout would have the same trouble seeing into the distance if there were a wall in the way.*

*This, then, should have been our first clue. Allomancers could see through the mists because the mists were, indeed, composed of the very same power as Allomancy. Once attuned by burning tin, the Allomancer was almost part of the mists. And therefore, they became more translucent to him*.

# 76

VIN . . . FLOATED. She wasn't asleep, but she didn't quite feel awake either. She was disoriented, uncertain. Was she still lying in the broken courtyard of Kredik Shaw? Was she sleeping in her cabin aboard the narrowboat with Elend? Was she in her palace quarters, back in Luthadel, the city under siege? Was she in Clubs's shop, worried and confused by the kindness of this strange new crew?

Was she huddled in an alleyway, crying, back hurting from another of Reen's beatings?

She felt about her, trying to make sense of her surroundings. Her arms and legs didn't seem to work. In fact, she couldn't even really focus on them. The longer she floated, however, the clearer her vision became. She was . . . in Luthadel. After killing the Inquisitors.

Why couldn't she feel anything? She tried to reach down, to push herself to her knees, but the ground seemed strangely far away. And, she saw no arms in front of her. She just continued to float.

*I'm dead,* she thought.

Even as that occurred to her, she woke up a bit more. She could see, though it was as if she looked through a very blurry, distorting pane of glass. She felt . . . a power buzzing within her. A strength unlike that of limbs—but somehow more versatile.

She managed to turn, getting a sweeping view of the city. And, halfway through her turn, she came face-to-face with something dark.

She couldn't tell how far away it was. It seemed close and distant at the same time. She could view it with detail—far more detail than she could see in the actual world—but she couldn't touch it. She knew, instinctively, what it was.

Ruin no longer looked like Reen. Instead, he manifested as a large patch of shifting black smoke. A thing without a body, but with a consciousness greater than that of a simple human.

*That . . . is what I've become,* Vin realized, thoughts becoming clearer.

*Vin,* Ruin spoke. His voice was not that of Reen, but instead something more . . . guttural. It was a vibration that washed across her, like an Allomantic pulse.

*Welcome,* Ruin said, *to godhood*.

Vin remained silent, though she quested out with her power, trying to get a sense of what she could do. Understanding seemed to open to her. It was like before, when she'd taken the power at the Well of Ascension. She immediately *knew* things. Only this time, the power was so vast—the understanding so great—that it seemed to have shocked her mind. Fortunately, that mind was expanding, and she was growing.

Awakening.

She rose above the city, knowing that the power spinning through her—the core of her existence—was simply a hub. A focus for power that stretched across the entire world. She could be anywhere she wished. Indeed, a part of her was in all places at once. She could see the world as a whole.

And it was dying. She felt its tremors, saw its life ebbing. Already, most of the plant life on the planet was dead. Animals would go quickly—the ones who survived were those who could find a way to chew on dead foliage now covered by ash. Humans would not be far behind, though Vin found it interesting to note that a surprising percentage of them had found their way down into one or another of the storage caverns.

*Not storage caverns* . . . Vin thought, finally understanding the Lord Ruler's purpose. *Shelters. That's why they're so vast. They're like fortresses for people to hide in. To wait, to survive a little longer*.

Well, she would fix that. She felt electrified with power. She reached out and plugged the ashmounts. She soothed them, deadened them, smothered their ability to spray ash and lava. Then, she reached into the sky and wiped the smoke and darkness from the atmosphere—like a maid wiping soot from a dirty window. She did all of this in a matter of instants; not more than five minutes would have passed on the world below.

Immediately, the land began to burn.

The sun was amazingly powerful—she hadn't realized how much the ash and smoke had done to shield the land. She cried out, spinning the world quickly so that the sun moved to its other side. Darkness fell. And, as soon as she did that, tempests began to swoop across the landscape. Weather patterns were disrupted by the motion, and in the sea a sudden wave appeared, enormously large. It rolled toward the coast, threatening to wipe away several cities.

Vin cried out again, reaching to stop the wave. And something blocked her.

She heard laughter. She turned in the air, looking to where Ruin sat like a shifting, undulating thundercloud.

*Vin, Vin . . .* he said. *Do you realize how like the Lord Ruler you are? When he first took the power, he tried to solve everything. All of man's ills.*

She saw it. She wasn't omniscient—she couldn't see the entirety of the past. However, she *could* see the history of the power she held. She could see when Rashek had taken it, and she could see him, frustrated, trying to pull the planet into a proper orbit. Yet, he pulled it too far, leaving the world cold and freezing. He pushed it back again, but his power was too vast—too terrible—for him to control properly at that time. So, he again left the world too hot. All life would have perished.

He opened the ashmounts, clogging the atmosphere, turning the sun red. And, in doing so, he saved the planet—but doomed it as well.

*You are so impetuous,* Ruin thought. *I have held this power for a period of time longer than you can imagine. It takes care and precision to use it correctly.*

*Unless, of course, you just want to destroy.*

He reached out with a power Vin could feel. Immediately, without knowing how or why, she blocked him. She threw her power up against his, and he halted, unable to act.

Below, the tsunami crashed into the coast. There were still people down there. People who had hidden from the koloss, who had survived on fish from the sea when their crops failed. Vin felt their pain, their terror, and she cried out as she reached to protect them.

And, again, was stopped.

*Now you know the frustration,* Ruin said as the tsunami destroyed villages. *What was it your Elend said? For every Push, there is a Pull. Throw something up, and it will come back down. Opposition.*

*For Ruin, there is Preservation. Time immemorial! Eternity! And each time I push, YOU push back. Even when dead, you stopped me, for we are forces. I can do nothing! And you can do nothing! Balance! The curse of our existence.*

Vin suffered as the people below were crushed, washed away, and drowned. *Please,* she said. *Please just let me save them.*

*Why?* Ruin asked. *What is it I told you before? Everything you do serves me. It is out of kindness that I stop you. For, even if you were to reach your hand out for them, you would destroy more than you preserve.*

*That is always the way it is.*

Vin hung, listening to the screams. And yet, a part of her mind—now so vast, now capable of many thoughts at once—dissected Ruin's words.

They were untrue. He said that all things destroyed, yet he complained about balance. He warned that she would only destroy more, but she could not believe that he would stop her out of kindness. He wanted her to destroy.

It couldn't be both ways. She knew herself as his opposite. She *could* have saved those people, if he hadn't stopped her. True, she probably didn't have the accuracy to do it yet. That wasn't the power's fault, however, but hers. He had to stop her so that she wouldn't learn, as the Lord Ruler had, and become more capable with the power.

She spun away from him, moving back toward Luthadel. Her awareness was still expanding, but she was confused by something she saw. Bright points of light, dotting the landscape, shining like flares. She drew closer, trying to figure out what they were. Yet, just as it was difficult to look directly at a bright lantern and see what was emitting the light, it was difficult to discern the source of this power.

She figured it out as she reached Luthadel. A large glow was coming from the broken palace. Most of the light was shaped vaguely like . . .

Spires. Metal. *That's* what caused the glowing power. *I was right. Metal is power, and it's why Ruin couldn't read things written in steel.* Vin turned away from a brightly shining spire. Ruin was there, as always, watching her.

*I was surprised when Preservation said he wanted to create you,* Ruin said, a bit of curiosity in his voice. *Other life is ordered by way of nature. Balanced. But Preservation . . . he wanted to create something intentionally unbalanced. Something that could choose to preserve at times, but to ruin at others. Something in the form of that which we'd seen before. It was intriguing.*

*I find it odd that he expended so much of himself to create you. Why would he weaken himself, eventually giving me the strength to destroy the world, simply to place human beings on his world? I know that others call* *his death to imprison me a sacrifice, but that wasn't the sacrifice. His sacrifice came much earlier.*

*Yes, he still tried to betray me—to imprison me. But, he could not stop me. He could only slow me. Forestall. Delay. Since the day we created you, there has been an imbalance. I was stronger. And he knew it.*

Vin frowned—or, at least, she felt as if she were frowning, though she no longer had a body. His words . . .

*He says he's stronger,* Vin thought. *Yet, we are equally matched. Is he lying again?*

No . . . he didn't lie. Looking back with her ever-expanding mind, she saw that everything Ruin said, he *believed*. He truly thought that whatever she did helped him. He saw the world through the lenses of destruction.

He wasn't lying about being more powerful than she. Yet, they were obviously matched at the moment. Which meant . . .

*There's another piece of Ruin out there,* Vin thought. *Preservation* is *weaker because he gave up a piece of himself to create mankind. Not his consciousness—that he used to fuel Ruin's prison—but an actual bit of his power.*

What she had suspected before, she now knew with certainty. Ruin's power was concentrated, hidden somewhere by Preservation. *The atium.* Ruin *was* stronger. Or, he would be, once he recovered the last part of his self. Then, he would be able to destroy completely—they would no longer be balanced.

She swung about in frustration, a glowing white aura of mist with wispy tendrils expanding across the entire world. *There's so much I still don't know,* Vin thought.

It was an odd thing to acknowledge, with her mind broadening to include so much. Yet, her ignorance was no longer that of a person. Her ignorance was related to experience. Ruin had such a huge head start on her. He had created for himself servants who could act without his direction, and so she could not block them.

She saw his planning manifest in the world. She saw him subtly influencing the Lord Ruler a thousand years ago. Even while Rashek held the power of Preservation, Ruin had whispered in his ear, directing him toward an understanding of Hemalurgy. And, Rashek had obeyed without realizing it, creating minions—armies—for Ruin to take when the time was right.

Vin could see them—the koloss—converging toward Luthadel.

*I will give you credit, Vin,* Ruin said, hovering nearby. *You destroyed my Inquisitors. All but one, at least. They were very difficult to make. I . . .*

She stopped focusing on him, at least with most of her mind. Something else drew her attention. Something moving into Luthadel, flying on spears of light.

Elend.

*Looking back, we should have been able to see the connection between the mists, Allomancy, and the power at the Well of Ascension. Not only could Allomancers' vision pierce the mists, but there was the fact that the mists swirled slightly around the body of a person using any kind of Allomancy.*

*More telling, perhaps, was the fact that when a Hemalurgist used his abilities, it drove the mists away. The closer one came to Ruin, the more under his influence, and the longer one bore his spikes, the more the mists were repelled.*

# 77

ELEND STOOD IN THE RUBBLE of Kredik Shaw, mind numb as he contemplated the destruction.

It seemed . . . impossible. What force could have leveled such an enormous, majestic building? What could have caused such destruction, breaking apart buildings and flinging rubble several streets away? And, all of the destruction was focused here, at what had once been the center of the Lord Ruler's power.

Elend skidded down some rubble, approaching the center of what looked like an impact crater. He turned around in the dark night, looking at the fallen blocks and spires.

"Lord Ruler . . ." he swore quietly, unable to help himself. Had something happened at the Well of Ascension? Had it exploded?

Elend turned, looking across his city. It appeared to be empty. Luthadel, largest metropolis in the Final Empire, seat of his government. Empty. Much of it in ruins, a good third of it burned, and Kredik Shaw itself flattened as if it had been pounded by the fist of a god.

Elend dropped a coin and shot away, heading along his original path toward the northeastern section of the city. He'd come to Luthadel hoping to find Vin, but had been forced to take a slight detour to the south in order to get around a particularly large swath of lava burning the plains around Mount Tyrian. That sight, along with the sight of Luthadel in ruin, left him very disturbed.

Where was Vin?

He jumped from building to building. He kicked up ash with each leap. Things were happening. The ash was slowly trickling away—in fact, it had mostly stopped falling. That was good, but he remembered well a short time ago when the sun had suddenly blazed with an amazing intensity. Those few moments had burned him so that his face still hurt.

Then, the sun had . . . dropped. It had fallen below the horizon in less than a second, the ground lurching beneath Elend's feet. Part of him assumed that he was going mad. Yet, he could not deny that it was now nighttime, even if his body—and one of the city clocks he had visited—indicated that it should have been afternoon.

He landed on a building, then jumped off, Pushing against a broken door handle. He shivered as he moved in the open air of darkness. It was night—the stars blazing uncomfortably above—and there was no mist. Vin had told him that the mists would protect him. What would protect him now that they were gone?

He made his way to Keep Venture, his palace. He found the building to be a burned-out husk. He landed in the courtyard, staring up at his home—the place he had been raised—trying to make sense of the destruction. Several guards in the brown colors of his livery lay decomposing on the cobblestones. All was still.

*What in the hell happened here?* he thought with frustration. He poked through the building, but found no clues. All had been burned. He left via a broken window on the top floor, then paused at something he saw in the rear courtyard.

He dropped to the ground. And there, beneath a patio canopy that had kept off much of the ash, he found a corpse in a fine gentlemen's suit lying on the cobbles. Elend rolled it over, noting the sword thrust through its stomach and the posture of a suicide. The corpse's fingers still held the weapon. *Penrod,* he thought, recognizing the face. Dead, presumably, by his own hand.

Something lay scrawled in charcoal on the patio floor. Elend wiped away the drifted ash, smudging the letters in the process. Fortunately, he could still read them. *I'm sorry,* it read. *Something has taken control of me . . . of this city. I am lucid only part of the time. Better to kill myself than to cause more destruction. Look toward the Terris Dominance for your people*.

Elend turned toward the north. Terris? That seemed like a very odd place in which to seek refuge. If the people of the city had fled, then why would they have left the Central Dominance, the place where the mists were the weakest?

He eyed the scribbles.

*Ruin* . . . a voice seemed to whisper. *Lies* . . .

Ruin could change text. Words like Penrod's couldn't be trusted. Elend bid a silent farewell to the corpse, wishing he had the time to bury the old statesman, then dropped a coin to Push himself into the air.

The people of Luthadel had gone *somewhere*. If Ruin had found a way to kill them, then Elend would have found more corpses. He suspected that if he took the time to search, he could probably find people still hiding in the city. Likely, the disappearance of the mists—then the sudden change from day to night—had driven them into hiding. Perhaps they had made it to the storage cavern beneath Kredik Shaw. Elend hoped that not many had gone there, considering the damage that had been done to the palace. If there were people there, they would be sealed in.

*West* . . . the wind seemed to whisper. *Pits* . . .

*Ruin usually changes text so that it's very similar to what it said before,* Elend thought. *So . . . Penrod probably did write most of those words, trying to tell me where to go to find my people. Ruin made it sound like they went to the Terris Dominance, but what if Penrod originally wrote that they went to the Terris people?*

It made good sense. If he'd fled Luthadel, he would have gone there—it was a place where there was already an established group of refugees, a group with herds, crops, and food.

Elend turned west, leaving the city, cloak flapping with each Allomantic bound.

Suddenly, Ruin's frustration made even more sense to Vin. She felt she held the power of all creation. Yet, it took everything she had to get even a few words to Elend.

She wasn't even certain if he'd heard her or not. She knew him so well, however, that she felt a . . . connection. Despite Ruin's efforts to block her, she felt as if some part of her had been able to get through to some part of Elend. Perhaps in the same way Ruin was able to communicate with his Inquisitors and followers?

Still, her near-impotence was infuriating.

*Balance,* Ruin spat. *Balance imprisoned me. Preservation's sacrifice—that was to siphon off the part of me that was stronger, to lock it away, to leave me equal with him again. For a time.*

Only for a time. And what is time to us, Vin?

*Nothing.*

*It may seem odd to those reading this that atium was part of the body of a god. However, it is necessary to understand that when we said "body" we generally meant "power." As my mind has expanded, I've come to realize that objects and energy are actually composed of the very same things, and can change state from one to another. It makes perfect sense to me that the power of godhood would be manifest within the world in physical form.*

*Ruin and Preservation were not nebulous abstractions. They were integral parts of existence. In a way, every object that existed in the world was composed of their power.*

*Atium, then, was an object that was one-sided. Instead of being composed of half Ruin and half Preservation—as, say, a rock would be—atium was completely of Ruin. The Pits of Hathsin were crafted by Preservation as a place to hide the chunk of Ruin's body that he had stolen away during the betrayal and imprisonment. Kelsier didn't truly destroy this place by shattering those crystals, for they would have regrown eventually—in a few hundred years—and continued to deposit atium, as the place was a natural outlet for Ruin's trapped power.*

*When people burned atium, then, they were drawing upon the power of Ruin—which is, perhaps, why atium turned people into such efficient killing machines. They didn't use up this power, however, but simply made use of it. Once a nugget of atium was expended, the power would return to the Pits and begin to coalesce again—just as the power at the Well of Ascension would return there again after it had been used.*

# 78

*THIS IS*, SAZED THOUGHT, *without a doubt, the oddest dungeon I have ever been in*.

Granted, it was only the second time he had been imprisoned. Still, he had observed several prisons in his lifetime, and had read of others. Most were like cages. This one, however, consisted only of a hole in the ground with an iron grate covering the top. Sazed scrunched down inside of it, stripped of his metalminds, his legs cramped.

*It was probably built for a kandra,* he thought. *One without bones, perhaps?* What would a kandra without bones be like? A pile of goo? Or, perhaps, a pile of muscles?

Either way, this prison had not been meant to hold a man—particularly not one as tall as Sazed. He could barely move. He reached up, pushing against the grate, but it was secure. A large lock held it in place.

He wasn't certain how long he had been in the pit. Hours? Perhaps even days. They still hadn't given him anything to eat, though a member of the Third Generation had poured some water on him. Sazed was still wet with it, and he had taken to sucking on the cloth of his robes to assuage his thirst.

*This is silly,* he thought, not for the first time. *The world is ending, and I'm in prison?* He was the final Keeper, the Announcer. He should be up above, recording events.

Because, truth be told, he was beginning to believe that the world would not end. He had accepted that something, perhaps Preservation itself, was watching over and protecting mankind. He was more and more determined to follow the Terris religion—not because it was perfect, but because he would rather believe and have hope.

The Hero *was* real. Sazed believed that. And he had faith in her.

He had lived with Kelsier and had helped the man. He had chronicled the rise of the Church of the Survivor during the first years of its development. He had even researched the Hero of Ages with Tindwyl and taken it upon himself to announce Vin as the one who fulfilled the prophecies. But it was only recently that he'd started to have faith in her. Perhaps it was his decision to be someone who saw miracles. Perhaps it was the daunting fear of the ending that seemed to loom just ahead. Perhaps it was the tension and anxiety. Regardless, somehow, from the chaos, he drew peace.

She would come. She would preserve the world. However, Sazed needed to be ready to help. And that meant escaping.

He eyed the metal grate. The lock was of fine steel, the grate itself of iron. He reached up tentatively, touching the bars, draining a bit of his weight and putting it into the iron. Immediately, his body grew lighter. In Feruchemy, iron stored physical weight, and the grate was pure enough to hold a Feruchemical charge. It went against his instincts to use the grate as a metalmind—it wasn't portable, and if he had to flee, he'd leave behind all of the power he'd saved. Yet, what good would it be to simply sit in the pit and wait?

He reached up with the other hand, touching the steel lock with one finger. Then, he began to fill it as well, draining his body of speed. He instantly began to feel lethargic, as if his every motion—even his breathing—was more difficult. It was like he had to push through some thick substance each time he moved.

He stayed that way. He had learned to enter a kind of meditative trance when he filled metalminds. Often, he would fill many at once, leaving himself sickly, weak, slow, and dull-minded. When he could, it was better to simply . . .

Drift.

He wasn't certain how long the meditation lasted. Occasionally, the guard came to pour water on him. When the sounds came, Sazed would let go and huddle down, pretending to sleep. But, as soon as the guard withdrew, he would reach back up and continue to fill the metalminds.

More time passed. Then, he heard sounds. Sazed huddled down again, then waited expectantly for the shower of water.

"When I sent you back to save my people," a voice growled, "this wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

Sazed popped his eyes open, glancing upward, and was surprised to see a canine face looking through the grate. "TenSoon?" Sazed asked.

The kandra grunted and stepped back. Sazed perked up as another kandra appeared. She wore a delicate True Body made of wood, willowy and almost inhuman. And, she held some keys.

"Quickly, MeLaan," TenSoon growled with his dog's voice. He had apparently switched back to the wolfhound, which made sense. Moving as a horse through the sometimes steep and narrow tunnels of the Homeland would have been difficult.

The female kandra unlocked the grate, then pulled it back. Sazed eagerly climbed free. In the room, he found several other kandra wearing deviant True Bodies. In the corner, the prison guard lay bound and gagged.

"I was seen entering the Homeland, Terrisman," TenSoon said. "So we have little time. What has happened here? MeLaan told me of your imprisonment—KanPaar announced that the First Generation had ordered you taken. What did you do to antagonize them?"

"Not them," Sazed said, stretching his cramped legs. "It was the Second Generation. They have taken the Firsts captive, and plan to rule in their stead."

The girl—MeLaan—gasped. "They would never!"

"They did," Sazed said, standing. "I fear for the safety of the Firsts. KanPaar may have been afraid to kill me because I am human. However, the Firsts . . ."

"But," MeLaan said, "the Seconds are kandra. They wouldn't do something like that! We're not that kind of people."

TenSoon and Sazed shared a look. *All societies have people who break the rules, child,* Sazed thought. *Particularly when power is concerned.*

"We have to find the Firsts," TenSoon said. "And recover the Trustwarren."

"We will fight with you, TenSoon," one of the other kandra said.

"We're finally throwing them off!" another said. "The Seconds, and their insistence that we serve the humans!"

Sazed frowned at this. What did humans have to do with this conflict? Then, however, he noticed how the others regarded TenSoon. *The dog's body,* he realized. *To them, TenSoon is a revolutionary of the highest order—all because of something Vin ordered him to do.*

TenSoon met Sazed eyes again, opening his mouth to speak. Then, however, he paused. "They're coming," he said with a curse, his dog's ears flattening.

Sazed spun with concern, noticing shadows on the rock wall of the corridor leading into the prison chamber. The chamber was small, with six or so pit cells in the floor. There were no other entrances.

Despite their brave words, TenSoon's companions immediately shied back, huddling against the wall. They were obviously not accustomed to conflict, particularly with their own kind. TenSoon shared none of their timidity. He charged forward as soon as the group of Fifths entered the room, ramming his shoulder into one's chest, howling and clawing at another.

*There is a kandra who fits in with his people as poorly as I do with my own,* Sazed thought, smiling. He stepped backward, moving up onto the top of the prison grate, touching its metals with his bare feet.

The Fifths had trouble fighting TenSoon—he had trained with Vin, and was apparently quite confident in his dog's body. He kept moving, knocking them over. However, there were five of them, and only one TenSoon. He was forced to retreat.

*The wounds in his body close as he orders them,* Sazed noticed. *That must be why the guards usually carry hammers*.

Which made it fairly obvious how one had to fight kandra. TenSoon backed up beside Sazed. "I apologize," the dog growled. "This isn't much of a rescue."

"Oh, I don't know," Sazed said with a smile, the Fifths surrounding them. "You needn't give up so quickly, I think."

The Fifths charged, and Sazed tapped iron from the grate beneath his bare feet. Immediately, his body grew several times heavier than normal, and he grabbed a kandra guard by the arms.

Then fell on him.

Sazed always said he wasn't a warrior. However, the number of times he'd said that, then been forced to fight anyway, made him think he was losing that excuse. The truth was, he'd been in far more battles over the last few years than he felt he had any right to have survived.

Either way, he knew some rudimentary moves—and, with both Feruchemy and surprise to aid him, that was about all he needed. Tapping weight increased the density of his body and of his bones, keeping him from damaging himself as he collapsed on top of the soldier. Sazed felt a satisfying crack as they hit the grate, Sazed's greatly increased weight crushing the kandra guard's bones. They used stone True Bodies, but even that wasn't enough.

Sazed released the metalmind, then began to fill it instead, making his body incredibly light. He touched his foot to the steel lock, and tapped speed. Suddenly, he was faster than any man had a right to be. He stood up even as the other four guards turned toward him in surprise.

He stopped filling his ironmind, regaining normal weight, then reached with a blurring speed to pick up the hammer of the fallen soldier. He didn't have enhanced strength, but he had speed. He slammed the hammer down on a kandra shoulder, growing heavier to add to the momentum of his blow.

The kandra's bones shattered. Sazed snapped his foot on the lock and tapped all of the remaining speed. He crouched, pivoting, and slammed his hammer into the knees of two kandra who were trying to attack him with their own hammers.

They cried out, falling, as Sazed's speed ran out.

He stood up straight. TenSoon was sitting atop the final guard, pinning him to the ground. "I thought you were a scholar," the dog noted, his captive squirming.

Sazed tossed aside the hammer. "I am," he said. "Vin would have fought her way free from this prison days ago. Now, I believe we should deal with these . . ." He waved toward the fallen Fifths, who seemed to have quite a bit of trouble moving with their bones broken.

TenSoon nodded. He motioned for some of his friends to help him with the one he was sitting on. They held the captive tentatively, but there were enough of them to keep the prisoner still.

"What have you done here, FhorKood?" TenSoon demanded of the captive. Sazed kept an eye on the other Fifths, and was forced to slam a mallet against one of them, breaking more bones as he tried to sneak away.

FhorKood spat. "Dirty Third," he muttered.

"*You* are the traitor this time," TenSoon said, smiling slightly. "KanPaar brands me a Contract-breaker, then he overthrows the First Generation? If the world weren't ending, I'd find that far more amusing. Now, speak!"

Sazed paused as he noticed something. The other cells in the floor were occupied. He leaned down, recognizing something about the muscles he saw inside. They were . . . discolored, and a bit deformed. Like . . . hanging moss.

"TenSoon!" he said, looking up. "Perhaps the First Generation *is* still alive. Come here."

TenSoon moved over, then looked down at the pit, frowning with canine lips. "MeLaan! The keys!"

She rushed over, unlocking the grate. With some consternation, Sazed was able to determine that there were multiple sets of squirming muscles in the pit, each of a slightly different color.

"We need bones," TenSoon said, standing.

MeLaan nodded, rushing from the room. Sazed shared a look with TenSoon.

"They must have killed the other kandra in these cells," TenSoon said softly. "Traitors to our kind, imprisoned endlessly. It was to have been my fate. Either way, it is clever—everyone thinks that these cells hold dire criminals. It wouldn't be odd for the Fifths to continue feeding them, and nobody would suspect that the occupants had been replaced with the First Generation, assuming they didn't look too closely at the color of the muscles."

"We need to keep moving," Sazed said. "Get to KanPaar."

TenSoon shook his head. "We won't get far without the Firsts to tell our story, Terrisman. Go and store more of your Feruchemy. We may need it."

With that, TenSoon moved over, crouching over to their captive. "You have two options, FhorKood," he said. "Either relinquish those bones, or I'll digest your body and kill you, as I did OreSeur."

Sazed frowned, watching. The captured kandra seemed terrified of TenSoon. The Fifth's body liquefied, and he moved slug-like away from the granite bones. TenSoon smiled.

"What is that for?" Sazed asked.

"Something Zane taught me," TenSoon said, his dog's body beginning to melt, the hair falling out. "Nobody expects a *kandra* to be an impostor. In a few moments, FhorKood here will return to the Second Generation and tell them that the traitor TenSoon has been captured. I should be able to stall long enough for the Firsts to regenerate—they will take far longer than I do to make bodies."

Sazed nodded. MeLaan returned a short time later with a large sack full of bones, and TenSoon—having re-created FhorKood's body with incredible speed—moved out of the chamber on his mission.

Then, Sazed sat down, removing the lock and holding it to use as a metalmind, using an iron hammer in the other hand to store weight. It felt odd to just sit there, but apparently the Firsts would need a few hours to regenerate their bodies.

*There really isn't a rush, is there?* Sazed thought. *I have the First Generation here—they're the ones I needed. I can continue to question them, learn what I want. TenSoon will have KanPaar distracted. It doesn't matter that the Seconds will be in charge for a few more hours.*

What harm could they possibly do?

*I believe that the mists were searching for someone to become a new host for them. The power needed a consciousness to direct it. In this matter, I am still rather confused. Why would power used to create and destroy need a mind to oversee it? And yet, it seems to have only a vague will of its own, tied in to the mandate of its abilities. Without a consciousness to direct it, nothing could actually be created or destroyed. It's as if the power of Preservation understands that its tendency to reinforce stability is not enough. If nothing changed, nothing would ever come to exist.*

*That makes me wonder who or what the minds of Preservation and Ruin were.*

*Regardless, the mists—the power of Preservation—chose someone to become their host long before all of this happened. That someone, however, was immediately seized by Ruin and used as a pawn. He must have known that by giving her a disguised Hemalurgic spike, he would keep the mists from investing themselves in her as they wished.*

*The three times she drew upon their power, then, were the three times when her earring had been removed from her body. When she had fought the Lord Ruler, his Allomancy had ripped it free. When fighting Marsh in Fadrex, she had used the earring as a weapon. And, at the end, Marsh ripped it out, freeing her and allowing the mists—which were now desperate for a host, since Preservation's last wisp was gone—to finally pour themselves into her.*

# 79

SOMETHING CHANGED.

Vin arose from her contemplation of the world. Something important was happening. She didn't have enough experience to tell what it was immediately, but she did see Ruin's nexus suddenly shoot away.

She followed. Speed wasn't an issue. In fact, she didn't even really feel like she was moving. She "followed" because that was how her mind interpreted the experience of instantly moving her consciousness to the place where Ruin had focused his.

She recognized the area. The Pits of Hathsin, or a place nearby. As a portion of her mind had noticed earlier, the Pits themselves had become a massive refugee camp, the people there quickly consuming the resources that the Terris people had carefully stored. A part of her smiled. The Terris gave of their goods freely, helping those who had fled Luthadel. The Lord Ruler had worked to breed the Terris so they were docile. However, had he expected that in making his perfect servants, he would also create a thoughtful, kindly people who would give of their last flocks to help those who were starving?

The thing that she'd noticed earlier didn't have to do with the Terris or their guests. She saw it as she drew closer. A shining blaze of . . . something. Powerful, more mighty than the sun itself to her eyes. She focused on it, but could see little. What could shine so magnificently?

"Take this," a voice said. "Find humans, and trade for weapons and supplies."

"Yes, Lord KanPaar," a second voice said. They were coming from the center of the shining area. It was to the side of the Pits, only a few minutes' travel from the refugees.

*Oh, no* . . . Vin thought, feeling a sudden dread.

"The foolish Firsts have sat on this treasure for far too long," KanPaar said. "With these riches, we could be *ruling,* not serving, mankind."

"I . . . thought we didn't want to change things?" the second voice said.

"Oh, we won't. Not quickly, at least. For now, just this small amount needs to be sold . . ."

*Hidden beneath the ground,* Vin thought, heightened mind making the connections. *In a place that already shines because of the large number of metal deposits. Ruin would never have been able to know where the atium was*.

The depth of the Lord Ruler's strategies amazed her. He had held on for a thousand years, maintaining such an amazing secret, keeping atium safe. She imagined obligators communicating only on metal plates, giving instructions for the operations at the Pits. She imagined caravans traveling from the Pits, carrying atium mixed with gold and coins to hide where it was moving and what exactly was going on.

*You don't know what I do for mankind,* the Lord Ruler had said.

*And I didn't,* Vin thought. *Thank you*.

She felt Ruin surge with power, and she blocked him. But just as she had been able to get a tendril of power past Ruin to Elend, Ruin was able to get the tiniest thread through. It was enough, for the one who had spoken was tainted with Hemalurgy. A spike in each shoulder drew Ruin's power and allowed him to speak to their bearer.

*A kandra?* Vin thought, her senses finally managing to peer through the atium glare to see a creature with a translucent body standing in a cavern, just beneath the ground. Another kandra was crawling out of a hole nearby, carrying a small pouch of atium.

Ruin seized control of the kandra KanPaar. The creature stiffened, his metal spikes betraying him.

*Speak of this,* Ruin said to KanPaar, Vin feeling his words as they pulsed into the kandra. *How much atium is there?*

"Wha . . . who are you?" KanPaar said. "Why are you in my head?"

*I am God,* the voice said. *And you are mine*.

*All of you are mine*.

Elend landed outside the Pits of Hathsin, throwing up a puff of ash. Oddly, some of his own soldiers were there, guarding the perimeter. They rushed forward, spears held anxiously, then froze when they recognized him.

"Lord *Venture?*" one of the men asked with shock.

"I know you," Elend said, frowning. "From my army at Fadrex."

"You sent us back, my lord," the other soldier said. "With General Demoux. To help Lord Penrod in Luthadel."

Elend glanced up at the night sky, speckled with stars. Some time had passed during his travel to the Pits from Luthadel. If time were now passing normally, the night was halfway through. What would happen when the sun rose again?

"Quickly," Elend said. "I need to speak with the leaders of this camp."

The return of the First Generation was accomplished with as much flair as Sazed had hoped. The old kandra, now wearing larger bodies, still bore the distinctive colorings and aged skin of their generation. He had feared that the ordinary kandra would not recognize them. However, he hadn't counted on the long life spans of the kandra people. Even if the Firsts only emerged once every century, most of the kandra would have seen them several times.

Sazed smiled as the group of Firsts moved into the main kandra chamber, continuing to cause shock and surprise in the others. They proclaimed KanPaar had betrayed them and imprisoned them, then called the kandra people to assemble. Sazed stayed back behind MeLaan and the others, watching for snags in their plan.

To the side, he saw a familiar kandra approaching.

"Keeper," TenSoon said, still wearing the body of a Fifth. "We need to be careful. There are strange things afoot."

"Such as?" Sazed asked.

Then, TenSoon attacked him.

Sazed started, and his moment of confusion cost him dearly. TenSoon—or whoever it was—got his hands around Sazed's throat and began to choke him. They fell backward, drawing the attention of the surrounding kandra. Sazed's assailant—bearing bones of rock—weighed far more than Sazed, and was easily able to roll to the top, his hands still on Sazed's neck.

"TenSoon?" MeLaan asked, sounding terrified.

*It's not him,* Sazed thought. *It can't be. . . .*

"Keeper," his assailant said between clenched teeth. "Something is very wrong."

*You're telling me!* Sazed tried to gasp for breath, reaching toward the pocket of his robe, struggling to grab the metalmind lock inside.

"I can barely keep myself from crushing your throat right now," the kandra continued. "Something has control of me. It wants me to kill you."

*You're doing a pretty good job!* Sazed thought.

"I'm sorry," TenSoon said.

The Firsts had gathered around them. Sazed was barely able to focus, panic controlling him as he fought a much stronger, much heavier foe. He grabbed hold of his impromptu steelmind, but only then realized that speed would do him little good when he was being held so tightly.

"It has come, then," whispered Haddek, leader of the Firsts. Sazed barely noticed as one of the other Firsts began to shake. People were crying out but the blood thumping in Sazed's ears kept him from hearing what they were saying.

Haddek turned away from the gasping Sazed. And then, in a loud voice, yelled something. "The Resolution has come!"

Above him, TenSoon jerked. Something within the kandra seemed to be fighting—tradition and a lifetime of training warred against the control of an outside force. TenSoon released Sazed with one hand, but kept choking him with the other. Then, with his free hand, the kandra reached toward his own shoulder.

Sazed blacked out.

*The kandra people always said they were of Preservation, while the koloss and Inquisitors were of Ruin. Yet, the kandra bore Hemalurgic spikes, just like the others. Was their claim, then, simple delusion?*

*No, I think not. They were created by the Lord Ruler to be spies. When they said such things, most of us interpreted that as meaning he planned to use them as spies in his new government, because of their ability to imitate other people. Indeed, they were used for this purpose.*

*But I see something much more grand in their existence. They were the Lord Ruler's double agents, planted with Hemalurgic spikes, yet trusted—taught, bound—to pull them free when Ruin tried to seize them. In Ruin's moment of triumph, when he'd always assumed the kandra would be his on a whim, the vast majority of them immediately switched sides and left him unable to seize his prize.*

*They* were *of Preservation all along.*

# 80

"THE TERRISMEN DID A GOOD job with this place, my lord," Demoux said.

Elend nodded, walking through the quiet nighttime camp with hands clasped behind his back. He was glad he'd stopped to change into a fresh white uniform before leaving Fadrex. As it was supposed to, the clothing attracted attention. The people seemed to take hope simply from seeing him. Their lives had been cast into chaos—they needed to know that their leader was aware of their situation.

"The camp is enormous, as you can see," Demoux continued. "Several hundred thousand people now live here. Without the Terrismen, I doubt that the refugees would have survived. As it is, they managed to keep sickness to a minimum, to organize crews to filter and bring fresh water to the camp, and to distribute food and blankets."

Demoux hesitated, glancing at Elend. "Food is running out, however," the general said quietly. Apparently, when he'd discovered that Penrod was dead and that most of Luthadel's population was at the Pits, he decided to keep his men there to help.

They passed another campfire, and the people there rose. They watched Elend and his general with hope. At this campfire, Demoux stopped as a young Terris-woman approached and handed him and Elend some warm tea to drink. Her eyes lingered fondly on Demoux, and he thanked her by name. The Terris people were affectionate toward Demoux—they were thankful to him for bringing soldiers to help organize and police the mass of refugees.

The people needed leadership and order in these times. "I shouldn't have left Luthadel," Elend said quietly.

Demoux didn't respond immediately. The two of them finished their tea, then continued on, walking with an honor guard of about ten soldiers, all from Demoux's group. The general had sent several messengers back to Elend. They had never arrived. Perhaps they hadn't been able to get around the lava field. Or perhaps they had run afoul of the very same army of koloss Elend had passed on his way to Luthadel.

*Those koloss . . .* Elend thought. *The ones we drove away from Fadrex, plus more, are coming directly in this direction. There are even more people here than there were in Fadrex. And they don't have a city wall, or many soldiers at all, to protect them.*

"Have you been able to figure out what happened in Luthadel, Demoux?" Elend asked quietly, pausing in a darkened area between campfires. It still felt so strange to be out with no mists to obscure the night. He could see so much further—yet, oddly, the night didn't seem as bright.

"Penrod, my lord," Demoux said softly. "They say he went mad. He began finding traitors in the nobility, even within his own army. He divided the city, and it turned into another house war. Almost all of the soldiers killed one another, and the city half burned down. The majority of the people escaped, but they have very little by way of protection. A determined group of bandits could probably wreak havoc on this whole group."

Elend fell silent. *House war,* he thought with frustration. *Ruin, using our own tricks against us. That's the same method Kelsier used to seize the city.*

"My lord . . ." Demoux said tentatively.

"Speak," Elend said.

"You were right to send me and my men back," Demoux said. "The Survivor is behind this, my lord. He wanted us here for some reason."

Elend frowned. "What makes you say that?"

"These people," Demoux said, "they fled Luthadel because of Kelsier. He appeared to a pair of soldiers, then a group of people, in the city. They say he'd told them to be ready for disaster, and to lead the people out of the city. It's because of them that so many escaped. Those two soldiers and their friends had supplies prepared, and they had the presence of mind to come here."

Elend's frown deepened. Yet, he had seen too much to reject even such a strange story. "Send for these men," he said.

Demoux nodded, waving for a soldier.

"Also," Elend said, remembering that Demoux and his men had been sick from the mists, "see if anyone here has any Allomantic metals. Pass them out to your soldiers and have them ingest them."

"My lord?" Demoux said, confused, as he turned.

"It's a long story, Demoux," Elend said. "Suffice it to say that your god—or somebody—has made you and your men into Allomancers. Divide your men by the metal it turns out they can burn. We're going to need all of the Coinshots, Thugs, and Lurchers we can get."

Sazed's eyes fluttered open, and he shook his head, groaning. How long had he been out? Probably not long, he realized, as his vision cleared. He'd passed out from lack of air. That kind of thing usually only left one unconscious for a short time.

Assuming one woke up at all.

*Which I did,* he thought, coughing and rubbing his throat, sitting up. The kandra cavern glowed with the quiet light of its blue phosphorescent lanterns. By that light, he could see that he was surrounded by something strange.

Mistwraiths. The cousins of the kandra, the scavengers that hunted at night and fed on corpses. They moved about Sazed, masses of muscle, flesh, and bone—but with those bones combined in strange, unnatural ways. Feet hanging off at angles, heads connected to arms. Ribs used like legs.

Except, these bones were not actually bone at all, but stone, metal, or wood. Sazed stood up solemnly as he looked over the remnants of the kandra people. Littered across the floor, among the jumbled mass of mistwraiths—who oozed about like giant, translucent slugs—were discarded spikes. Kandra Blessings. The things that had brought them sentience.

They had done it. They had held to their oath, and had removed their spikes rather than be taken over by Ruin. Sazed looked over them with pity, amazement, and respect.

*The atium,* he thought. *They did this to stop Ruin from getting the atium. I have to protect it!*

He stumbled away from the main chamber, regaining his strength as he made his way to the Trustwarren. He paused, however, as he approached, noticing sounds. He peeked around a corner, and looked down the corridor through the open Trustwarren doorway. Inside, he found a group of kandra—perhaps twenty in number—working to push back the plate on the floor that covered the atium.

*Of course they didn't all become mistwraiths,* he thought. Some would have been outside of the hearing of the Firsts, or wouldn't have had the courage to pull their spikes free. In fact, as he thought about it, he was even more impressed that so many *had* obeyed the command from the First Generation.

Sazed easily recognized KanPaar directing the work inside. The kandra would take the atium and would deliver it to Ruin. Sazed had to stop them. But it was twenty against one—with Sazed having only one small metalmind. It didn't seem like good odds for him.

However, then Sazed noticed something sitting outside the doors of the Trust-warren. A simple cloth sack, of little note save for the fact that Sazed recognized it. He'd carried his metalminds in it for years. They must have tossed it there after taking Sazed captive. It lay about twenty feet down the corridor from him, right beside the doorway into the Trustwarren.

In the other room, KanPaar looked up, staring directly toward Sazed's position. Ruin had noticed him.

Sazed didn't pause to think further. He reached into his pocket, grabbed the steel lock, and tapped it. He rushed through the corridor on inhumanly quick feet, snatching his sack from the ground as kandra began to cry out.

Sazed snapped open the sack, and found a collection of bracelets, rings, and bracers inside. He dumped them out, spilling the precious metalminds to the floor and grabbed two particular ones. Then, still moving at blurring speed, he dashed to the side.

His steelmind ran out. One of the rings he'd grabbed was pewter. He tapped it for strength, growing in size and bulk. Then, he slammed the doors to the Trustwarren closed, causing those now trapped inside to cry out in shock. Finally, he tapped the other ring—this one iron. He grew several times heavier, making himself into a doorstop, holding the massive metal doors to the Trustwarren closed.

It was a delaying tactic. He stood, holding the doors shut, his metalminds depleting at an alarming rate. They were the same rings he'd worn at the siege of Luthadel, the ones that had been embedded within him. He'd replenished them following the siege, before he'd given up Feruchemy. They would not last long. What would he do when the kandra burst through the door? He searched desperately for a way to bar or block the portal, but could see nothing. And, if he let go for even a moment, the kandra inside would burst free.

"Please," he whispered, hoping that—like before—the thing that listened would give him a miracle. "I'm going to need help. . . ."

"I swear it was him, my lord," said the soldier, a man named Rittle. "I've believed in the Church of the Survivor since the day of Kelsier's own death, my lord. He preached to me, converted me to the rebellion. I was there when he visited the caves and had Lord Demoux fight for his honor. I'd know Kelsier like I'd know my father. It *was* the Survivor."

Elend turned to the other soldier, who nodded in agreement. "I didn't know him, my lord," said this man. "However, he matched the descriptions. I think it was really him, I do."

Elend turned to Demoux, who nodded. "They described Lord Kelsier very accurately, my lord. He *is* watching over us."

*Elend. . . .*

A messenger arrived and whispered something to Demoux. The night was dark, and in the torchlight, Elend turned to study the two soldiers who had seen Kelsier. They didn't look like highly reliable witnesses—Elend hadn't exactly left his best soldiers behind when he'd gone campaigning. Still, others had apparently seen the Survivor too. Elend would want to speak with them.

He shook his head. And, where in the world was Vin?

*Elend. . . .*

"My lord," Demoux said, touching his arm, looking concerned. Elend dismissed the two soldier witnesses. Accurate or not, he owed them a great debt—they had saved many lives with their preparation.

"Scout's report, my lord," Demoux said, face illuminated by a pole-top torch flickering in the night breeze. "Those koloss you saw, they *are* heading this way. Moving quickly. Scouts saw them approaching in the distance from a hilltop. They . . . could be here before the night is over."

Elend cursed quietly.

*Elend. . . .*

He frowned. Why did he keep hearing his name on the wind? He turned, looking into the darkness. Something was pulling him, guiding him, whispering to him. He tried to ignore it, turning back to Demoux. And yet, it was there, in his heart.

*Come. . . .*

It seemed like Vin's voice.

"Gather an honor guard," Elend said, grabbing the torch by its shaft, then throwing on an ashcloak and buttoning it down to his knees. Then, he turned toward the darkness.

"My lord?" Demoux said.

"Just do it!" Elend said, striding off into the darkness.

Demoux called for some soldiers, following in a hurry.

*What am I doing?* Elend thought, pushing his way through the waist-deep ash, using the cloak to keep his uniform somewhat clean. *Chasing at dreams? Maybe I'm going mad.*

He could see something in his mind. A hillside with a hole in it. A memory, perhaps? Had he come this way before? Demoux and his soldiers followed quietly, looking apprehensive.

Elend pushed onward. He was almost—

He stopped. There it was, the hillside. It would have been indistinguishable from the others around it, except there were tracks leading up to it. Elend frowned, pushing forward through the deep ash, moving to the point where the tracks ended. There, he found a hole in the ground, leading down.

*A cave,* he thought. *Perhaps . . . a place for my people to hide?*

It wouldn't be big enough for that, likely. Still, the caves Kelsier had used for his rebellion had been large enough to hold some ten thousand men. Curious, Elend poked down into the cave, walking down its steep incline, throwing off the cloak. Demoux and his men followed with curiosity.

The tunnel went down for a bit, and Elend was surprised to find that there was light coming from ahead. Immediately, he flared pewter, growing tense. He tossed aside his torch, then burned tin, enhancing his vision. He could see several poles that glowed blue at the top. They appeared to be made of rock.

What in the world . . .?

He moved forward quickly, motioning for Demoux and his men to follow. The tunnel led to a vast cavern. Elend stopped. It was as large as one of the storage caverns. Larger, perhaps. Down below, something moved.

*Mistwraiths?* he realized with surprise. *Is this where they hide? In holes in the ground?*

He dropped a coin, shooting himself through the poorly lit cavern to land on the stone floor a distance away from Demoux and the others. The mistwraiths weren't as large as others he had seen. And . . . why were they using rocks and wood in place of bones?

He heard a sound. Only tin-enhanced ears let him catch it, but it sounded distinctly unlike a sound a mistwraith would make. Stone against metal. He waved sharply to Demoux, then moved carefully down a side corridor.

At its end, he stopped in surprise. A familiar figure stood against a pair of large metal doors, grunting, apparently trying to hold them closed.

"*Sazed?*" Elend asked, standing up straighter.

Sazed looked up, saw Elend, and was apparently so surprised that he lost control of the doors. They burst open, throwing the Terrisman aside, revealing a group of angry, translucent-skinned kandra.

"Your Majesty!" Sazed said. "Do not let them escape!"

Demoux and his soldiers clanked up behind Elend. *That's either Sazed, or a kandra who ate his bones,* Elend thought. He made a snap decision. He'd trusted the voice in his ear. He'd trust that this was Sazed.

The group of kandra tried to get past Demoux's soldiers. However, the kandra weren't particularly good warriors, and their weapons were made of metal. It took Elend and Demoux all of about two minutes to subdue the group, breaking their bones to keep them from healing and escaping.

Afterward, Elend walked over to Sazed, who had stood up and dusted himself off. "How did you find me, Your Majesty?"

"I honestly don't know," Elend said. "Sazed, what is this place?"

"The Homeland of the kandra people, Your Majesty," Sazed said. "And the hiding place of the Lord Ruler's atium hoard."

Elend raised an eyebrow, following Sazed's pointed finger. There was a room beyond the doors, and a pit in the floor.

*Great,* Elend thought. *Now we find it*.

"You don't look too excited, Your Majesty," Sazed noted. "Kings, armies, Mistborn—even Kelsier himself—have been searching for this cache for years."

"It's worthless," Elend said. "My people are starving, and they can't eat metal. This cavern, however . . . it might prove useful. What do you think, Demoux?"

"If there are any other chambers like that first one, my lord, it could hold a substantial percentage of our people."

"There are four large caverns," Sazed said. "And four entrances that I know of."

Elend turned to Demoux. He was already giving orders to his soldiers. *We have to get the people down here before the sun rises,* Elend thought, remembering the heat. *At the very least, before those koloss arrive*.

After that . . . well, they would have to see. For now, Elend had only one goal.

Survival.

*Snapping has always been the dark side of Allomancy. A person's genetic endowment may make them a potential Allomancer, but in order for the power to manifest, the body must be put through extraordinary trauma. Though Elend spoke of how terrible his beating was, during our day, unlocking Allomancy in a person was easier than it had once been, for we had the infusion of Preservation's power into the human bloodlines via the nuggets granted to nobility by the Lord Ruler.*

*When Preservation set up the mists, he was afraid of Ruin escaping his prison. In those early days, before the Ascension, the mists began to Snap people as they did during our time—but this action of the mists was one of the only ways to awaken Allomancy in a person, for the genetic attributes were buried too deeply to be brought out by a simple beating. The mists of that day created Mistings only, of course—there were no Mistborn until the Lord Ruler made use of the nuggets.*

*The people misinterpreted the mists' intent, as the process of Snapping Allomancers caused some—particularly the young and the old—to die. This hadn't been Preservation's desire, but he'd given up most of his consciousness to form Ruin's prison, and the mists had to be left to work as best they could without specific direction.*

*Ruin, subtle as ever, knew that he couldn't stop the mists from doing their work. However, he could do the unexpected and* encourage *them. And so, he helped make them stronger. That brought death to the plants of the world, and created the threat that became known as the Deepness.*

# 81

VIN TURNED TOWARD RUIN, projecting a smile. The cloud of twisting black mist seemed agitated.

*So, you can influence a single minion,* Ruin snapped, turning upon itself, rising in the air. Vin followed, streaking up to loom over the entire Central Dominance. Below, she could see Demoux's soldiers rushing to the camp, waking the people, organizing them to flight. Already, some of them were making their way along the tracks in the ash toward the safety of the caverns.

She could feel the sun, and knew that the planet was far too near it to be safe. Yet, she could do nothing more. Not only would Ruin have stopped her, but she didn't understand her power yet. She felt as the Lord Ruler must have—almighty, yet clumsy. If she tried to move the world, she would only make things worse.

But, she had accomplished something. Ruin had his koloss pounding toward them at breakneck speed, but they still wouldn't arrive at the Pits for several hours. Plenty of time to get the people to the caverns.

Ruin must have noticed what she was studying, or perhaps he sensed her smugness. *You think you've won?* he asked, sounding amused. *Why, because you managed to stop a few kandra? They were always the weakest of the minions the Lord Ruler created for me. I have made a habit of ignoring them. Either way, Vin, you cannot really think that you have beaten me*.

Vin waited, watching as the people fled to the relative safety of the caverns. Even as the bulk of them arrived—soldiers separating them into groups, sending them to the different entrances—her good humor began to fade. She had managed to get through to Elend, and while it had seemed like a great victory at the moment, she could now see that it was little more than another stalling tactic.

*Have you counted the koloss in my army, Vin?* Ruin asked. *I've made them from your people, you know. I've gathered hundreds of thousands*.

Vin focused, enumerating instantly. He was telling the truth.

*This is the force I could have thrown at you at any time,* Ruin said. *Most of them kept to the Outer Dominances, but I've been bringing them in,* *marching them toward Luthadel. How many times must I tell you, Vin? You can't win. You could never win. I've just been playing with you.*

Vin pulled back, ignoring his lies. He hadn't been playing with them—he'd been trying to discover the secrets that Preservation had left, the secret that the Lord Ruler had kept. Still, the numbers Ruin had finally managed to marshal were awe-inspiring. There were far more koloss than there were people climbing into the caverns. With a force like that, Ruin could assault even a well-fortified position. And, by Vin's count, Elend had fewer than a thousand men with any battle training.

On top of that, there was the sun and its destructive heat, the death of the world's crops, the tainting of water and land with several feet of ash . . . Even the lava flows, which she had stopped, were beginning again, her plugging of the ashmounts having provided only a temporary solution. A bad one, even. Now that the mountains couldn't erupt, great cracks were appearing in the land, and the magma, the earth's burning blood, was boiling out that way.

*We're just so far behind!* Vin thought. *Ruin had centuries to plan this. Even when we thought we were being clever, we fell for his plots. What good is it to sequester my people beneath the ground if they're just going to starve?*

She turned toward Ruin, who sat billowing and shifting upon himself, watching his koloss army. She felt a hatred that seemed incompatible with the power she held. The hatred made her sick, but she didn't let go of it.

This thing before her . . . it would destroy everything she knew, everything she loved. It couldn't understand love. It built only so that it could destroy. At that moment, she reversed her earlier decision. She'd never again call Ruin a "him." Humanizing the creature gave it too much respect.

Seething, watching, she didn't know what else to do. So, she attacked.

She wasn't even certain how she did it. She threw herself at Ruin, forcing her power up against its power. There was friction between them, a clash of energy, and it tormented her divine body. Ruin cried out, and—mixing with Ruin—she knew its mind.

Ruin was surprised. It didn't expect Preservation to be able to attack. Vin's move smacked too much of destruction. Ruin didn't know how to respond, but it threw its power back against her in a protective reflex. Their selves crashed, threatening to dissolve. Finally, Vin pulled back, lacerated, rebuffed.

Their power was too well matched. Opposite, yet similar. Like Allomancy.

*Opposition,* Ruin whispered. *Balance. You'll learn to hate it, I suspect, though Preservation never could*.

"So, *this* is the body of a god?" Elend asked, rolling the bead of atium around in his palm. He held it up next to the one that Yomen had given him.

"Indeed, Your Majesty," Sazed said. The Terrisman looked eager. Didn't he understand how dangerous their situation was? Demoux's scouts—the ones that had returned—reported that the koloss were only minutes away. Elend had ordered his troops posted at the doorways to the Homeland, but his hope—that the koloss wouldn't know where to find his people—was a slim one, considering what Sazed had told him about Ruin.

"Ruin can't help but come for it," Sazed explained. They stood in the metal-lined cavern called the Trustwarren, the place where the kandra had spent the last thousand years gathering and guarding the atium. "This atium is *part* of him. It's what he's been searching for all this time."

"Which means we'll have a couple hundred thousand koloss trying to climb down our throats, Sazed," Elend said, handing back the bead of atium. "I say we give it to him."

Sazed paled. "Give it to him? Your Majesty, my apologies, but that would mean the end of the world. Instantly. I am certain of it."

*Great,* Elend thought.

"It will be all right, Elend," Sazed said.

Elend frowned up at the Terrisman, who stood peacefully in his robes.

"Vin will come," Sazed explained. "She is the Hero of Ages—she will arrive to save this people. Don't you see how perfect this all is? It's arranged, planned. That you would come here, find me, at this exact moment . . . That you'd be able to lead the people to safety in these caverns . . . Well, it all fits together. She'll come."

*Interesting time for him to get his faith back,* Elend thought. He rolled Yomen's bead between his fingers, thinking. Outside the room, he could hear whispers. People—Terris stewards, skaa leaders, even a few soldiers—stood listening. Elend could hear the anxiety in their voices. They had heard of the approaching army. As Elend watched, Demoux carefully pushed his way through them and entered the room.

"Soldiers posted, my lord," the general said.

"How many do we have?" Elend asked.

Demoux looked grim. "The two hundred and eighty I brought with me," he said. "Plus about five hundred from the city. Another hundred ordinary citizens that we armed with those kandra hammers, or spare weapons from our soldiers. And, we have four different entrances to this cavern complex we need to guard."

Elend closed his eyes.

"She'll come," Sazed said.

"My lord," Demoux said, pulling Elend aside. "This is bad."

"I know," Elend said, exhaling softly. "Did you give the men metals?"

"What we could find," Demoux said quietly. "The people didn't think to bring powdered metal with them when they fled Luthadel. We've found a couple of noblemen who were Allomancers, but they were only Copperclouds or Seekers."

Elend nodded. He'd bribed or pressed the useful nobleman Allomancers into his army already.

"We gave those metals to my soldiers," Demoux said. "But none of them could burn them. Even if we had Allomancers, we cannot hold this location, my lord! Not with so few soldiers, not against that many koloss. We'll delay them at first, because of the narrow entrances. But . . . well . . ."

"I realize that, Demoux," Elend said with frustration. "But do you have any other options?"

Demoux was silent. "I was hoping you'd have some, my lord."

"None here," Elend said.

Demoux grew grim. "Then we die."

"What about faith, Demoux?" Elend asked.

"I believe in the Survivor, my lord. But . . . well, this looks pretty bad. I've felt like a man waiting his turn before the headsman ever since we spotted those koloss. Maybe the Survivor doesn't want us to succeed here. Sometimes, people just have to die."

Elend turned away, frustrated, clenching and unclenching his fist around the bead of atium. It was the same problem, the same trouble he always had. He'd failed back during the siege of Luthadel—it had taken Vin to protect the city. He'd failed in Fadrex City—only the koloss getting distracted had rescued him there.

A ruler's most basic duty was to protect his people. In this one area, Elend continually felt impotent. Useless.

*Why can't I do it?* Elend thought with frustration. *I spend a year searching out storage caverns to provide food, only to end up trapped with my people starving. I search all that time looking for the atium—hoping to use it to buy safety for my people—and then I find it too late to spend it on anything*.

*Too late. . . .*

He paused, glancing back toward the metal plate in the floor.

*Years searching for . . . atium*.

None of the metals Demoux had given his soldiers had worked. Elend had been working under the assumption that Demoux's group would be like the other mistfallen back in Urteau—that they'd be composed of all kinds of Mistings. Yet, there had been something *different* about Demoux's group. They had fallen sick for far longer than the others.

Elend pushed forward, rushing past Sazed, grabbing a handful of beads. A vast wealth, unlike anything any man had ever possessed. Valuable for its rarity. Valuable for its economic power. Valuable for its *Allomancy*.

"Demoux," he snapped, rising and tossing the bead to him. "Eat this."

Demoux frowned. "My lord?"

"Eat it," Elend said.

Demoux did as asked. He stood for a moment.

*Two hundred and eighty men,* Elend thought. *Sent away from my army because of all the ones who fell sick, they were the* most *sick. Sixteen days*.

*Two hundred and eighty men. One-sixteenth of those who fell sick. One out of sixteen Allomantic metals*.

Yomen had proven that there was such a thing as an atium Misting. If Elend hadn't been so distracted, he would have made the connection earlier. If one out of sixteen who fell sick remained that way the longest, would that not imply that they'd gained the most powerful of the sixteen abilities?

Demoux looked up, eyes widening.

And Elend smiled.

Vin hovered outside the cavern, watching with dread as the koloss approached. They were already in a blood frenzy—Ruin had that much control over them. There were thousands upon thousands of them. The slaughter was about to begin.

Vin cried out as they drew closer, throwing herself against Ruin again, trying to drive her power to destroy the thing. As before, she was rebuffed. She felt herself screaming, trembling as she thought about the impending deaths below. It would be like the tsunami deaths on the coast, only worse.

For these were people she knew. People she loved.

She turned back toward the entrance. She didn't want to watch, but she wouldn't be able to do anything else. Her self was everywhere. Even if she pulled her nexus away, she knew that she'd still feel the deaths—that they would make her tremble and weep.

From within the cavern, echoing, she sensed a familiar voice. "Today, men, I ask of you your lives." Vin hovered down, listening, though she couldn't see into the cavern because of the metals in the rock. She could hear, however. If she'd had eyes, she would have been crying, she knew.

"I ask of you your lives," Elend said, voice echoing, "and your courage. I ask of you your faith, and your honor—your strength, and your compassion. For today, I lead you to die. I will not ask you to welcome this event. I will not insult you by calling it well, or just, or even glorious. But I will say this.

"Each moment you fight is a gift to those in this cavern. Each second we fight is a second longer that thousands of people can draw breath. Each stroke of the sword, each koloss felled, each breath earned is a victory! It is a person protected for a moment longer, a life extended, an enemy frustrated!"

There was a brief pause.

"In the end, they will kill us," Elend said, voice loud, ringing in the cavern. "But first, they shall *fear* us!"

The men yelled at this, and Vin's enhanced mind could pick out around two hundred and fifty distinct voices. She heard them split, rushing toward the different cavern entrances. A moment later, someone appeared from the front entrance near her.

A figure in white slowly stepped out into the ash, brilliant white cape fluttering. He held a sword in one hand.

*Elend!* she tried to cry at him. *No! Go back! Charging them is madness! You'll be killed!*

Elend stood tall, watching the waves of koloss as they approached, trampling down the black ash, an endless sea of death with blue skin and red eyes. Many carried swords, the others just bore rocks and lengths of wood. Elend was a tiny white speck before them, a single dot on an endless canvas of blue.

He raised his sword high and charged.

ELEND!

Suddenly, Elend burst with a brilliant energy, so bright that Vin gasped. He met the first koloss head-on, ducking beneath the swinging sword and decapitating the creature in one stroke. Then, instead of jumping away, he spun to the side, swinging. Another koloss fell. Three swords flashed around him, but all missed by just a breath. Elend ducked to the side, taking a koloss in the stomach, then whipped his sword around—his head barely passing beneath another swing—and took off a koloss arm.

He still didn't Push himself away. Vin froze, watching as he took down one koloss, then beheaded another in a single, fluid stroke. Elend moved with a grace she had never seen from him—she had always been the better warrior, yet at this moment, he put her to shame. He wove between koloss blades as if he were taking part in a prerehearsed stage fight, body after body falling before his gliding blade.

A group of soldiers in Elend's colors burst from the cavern entrance, charging. Like a wave of light, their forms exploded with power. They, too, moved into the koloss ranks, striking with incredible precision. Not a single one of them fell as Vin watched. They fought with miraculous skill and fortune, each koloss blade falling just a little too late. Blue corpses began to pile up around the glowing force of men.

Somehow, Elend had found an entire army who could burn atium.

Elend was a god.

He'd never burned atium before, and his first experience with the metal filled him with wonder. The koloss around him all emitted atium shadows—images that moved before they did, showing Elend exactly what they would do. He could see into the future, if only a few seconds. In a battle, that was just what one needed.

He could feel the atium enhancing his mind, making him capable of reading and using all of the new information. He didn't even have to pause and think. His arms moved of their own volition, swinging his sword with awesome precision.

He spun amid a cloud of phantom images, striking at flesh, feeling almost as if he were in the mists again. No koloss could stand against him. He felt energized—he felt amazing. For a time, he was invincible. He'd swallowed so many atium beads he felt as if he'd throw up. For its entire history, atium had been a thing that men had needed to save and hoard. Burning it had seemed such a shame that it had been used only sparingly, only in instances of great need.

Elend didn't need to worry about any of that. He just burned as much as he wanted. And it made him into a disaster for the koloss—a whirlwind of exact strikes and impossible dodges, always a few steps ahead of his opponents. Foe after foe fell before him. And, when he began to get low on atium, he Pushed himself off a fallen sword back to the entrance. There, with plenty of water to wash it down, Sazed waited with another bag of atium.

Elend downed the beads quickly, then returned to the battle.

Ruin raged and spun, trying to stop the slaughter. Yet, this time, Vin was the force of balance. She blocked Ruin's every attempt to destroy Elend and the others, keeping it contained.

*I can't decide if you're a fool,* Vin thought toward it, *or if you simply exist in a way that makes you incapable of considering some things*.

Ruin screamed, buffeting against her, trying to destroy her as she had tried to destroy it. However, once again, their powers were too evenly matched. Ruin was forced to pull back.

*Life,* Vin said. *You said that the only reason to create something was so that you could destroy it*.

She hovered beside Elend, watching him fight. The deaths of the koloss should have pained her. Yet, she did not think of the death. Perhaps it was the influence of Preservation's power, but she saw only a man, struggling, fighting, even when hope seemed impossible. She didn't see death, she saw life. She saw faith.

*We create things to watch them grow, Ruin,* she said. *To take pleasure in seeing that which we love become more than it was before. You said that you were invincible—that all things break apart. All things are Ruined. But there are things that fight against you—and the ironic part is, you can't even understand those things. Love. Life. Growth*.

*The life of a person is more than the chaos of its passing. Emotion, Ruin. This is your defeat*.

Sazed watched anxiously from the mouth of the cavern. A small group of men huddled around him. Garv, leader of the Church of the Survivor in Luthadel. Harathdal, foremost of the Terris stewards. Lord Dedri Vasting, one of the surviving Assembly members from the city government. Aslydin, the young woman whom Demoux had apparently come to love during his few short weeks at the Pits of Hathsin. A smattering of others, important—or faithful—enough to get near the front of the crowd and watch.

"Where is she, Master Terrisman?" Garv asked.

"She'll come," Sazed promised, hand resting on the rock wall. The men fell quiet. Soldiers—those without the blessing of atium—waited nervously with them, knowing they were next in line, should Elend's assault fail.

*She has to come,* Sazed thought. *Everything points toward her arrival.*

"The Hero *will* come," he repeated.

Elend sheared through two heads at once, dropping the koloss. He spun his blade, taking off an arm, then stabbed another koloss through the neck. He hadn't seen that one approaching, but his mind had seen and interpreted the atium shadow before the real attack came.

Already he stood atop of carpet of blue corpses. He did not stumble. With atium, his every step was exact, his blade guided, his mind crisp. He took down a particularly large koloss, then stepped back, pausing briefly.

The sun crested the horizon in the east. It started to grow hotter.

They had been fighting for hours, yet the army of koloss still seemed endless. Elend slew another koloss, but his motions were beginning to feel sluggish. Atium enhanced the mind, but it did not boost the body, and he'd started to rely on his pewter to keep him going. Who would have known that one could get tired—exhausted, even—while burning atium? Nobody had ever used as much of the metal as Elend had.

But he had to keep going. His atium was running low. He turned back toward the mouth of the cavern, just in time to see one of his atium soldiers go down in a spray of blood.

Elend cursed, spinning as an atium shadow passed through him. He ducked the swing that followed, then took off the creature's arm. He beheaded the one that followed, then cut another's legs out from beneath it. For most of the battle, he hadn't used fancy Allomantic jumps or attacks, just straightforward swordplay. His arms were growing tired, however, and he was forced to begin Pushing koloss away from him to manage the battlefield. The reserve of atium—of *life*—within him was dwindling. Atium burned so quickly.

Another man screamed. Another soldier dead.

Elend began to back toward the cavern. There were just *so many* koloss. His band of two hundred and eighty had slain thousands, yet the koloss didn't care. They kept attacking, a brutal wave of endless determination, resisted only by the pockets of atium Mistings protecting each of the entrances to the Homeland.

Another man died. They were running out of atium.

Elend screamed, swinging his sword about him, taking down three koloss in a maneuver that never should have worked. He flared steel and Pushed the rest away from him.

*The body of a god, burning within me,* he thought. He gritted his teeth, attacking as more of his men fell. He scrambled up a pile of koloss, slicing off arms, legs, heads. Stabbing chests, necks, guts. He fought on, alone, his clothing long since stained from white to red.

Something moved behind him, and he spun, raising his blade, letting the atium lead him. Yet, he froze, uncertain. The creature behind him was no koloss. It stood in a black robe, one eye socket empty and bleeding, the other bearing a spike that had been crushed back into its skull. Elend could see straight into the empty eye socket, through the creature's head, and out the back.

Marsh. He had a cloud of atium shadows around him—he was burning the metal too, and would be immune to Elend's own atium.

Human led his koloss soldiers through the tunnels. They killed any person in their path.

Some had stood at the entrance. They had fought long. They had been strong. They were dead now.

Something drove Human on. Something stronger than anything that had controlled him before. Stronger than the little woman with the black hair, though she had been very strong. This thing was stronger. It was Ruin. Human knew this.

He could not resist. He could only kill. He cut down another human.

Human burst into a large open chamber filled with other little people. Controlling him, Ruin made him turn away and not kill them. Not that Ruin didn't want him to kill them. It just wanted something else *more*.

Human rushed forward. He crawled over tumbled rocks and stones. He shoved aside crying humans. Other koloss followed him. For the moment, all of his own desires were forgotten. There was only his overpowering desire to get to . . .

A small room. There. In front of him. Human threw open the doors. Ruin yelled in pleasure as he entered this room. It contained the thing Ruin wanted.

"Guess what I found," Marsh growled, stepping up, Pushing against Elend's sword. The weapon was ripped from his fingers, flying away. "Atium. A kandra was carrying it, looking to sell it. Foolish creature."

Elend cursed, ducking out of the way of a koloss swing, pulling his obsidian dagger from the sheath at his leg.

Marsh stalked forward. Men screamed—cursing, falling—as their atium died out. Elend's soldiers were being overrun. The screams tapered off as the last of his men guarding this entrance died. He doubted the others would last much longer.

Elend's atium warned him of attacking koloss, letting him dodge—barely—but he couldn't kill them very effectively with the dagger. And, as the koloss took his attention, Marsh struck with an obsidian axe. The blade fell, and Elend leaped away, but the dodge left him off balance.

Elend tried to recover, but his metals were running low—not just his atium, but his basic metals. Iron, steel, pewter. He hadn't been paying much attention to them, since he had atium, but he'd been fighting for so long now. If Marsh had atium, then they were equal—and without basic metals, Elend would die.

An attack from the Inquisitor forced Elend to flare pewter to get away. He cut down three koloss with ease, his atium still helping him, but Marsh's immunity was a serious challenge. The Inquisitor crawled over the fallen bodies of koloss, scrambling toward Elend, his single spikehead reflecting the too-bright light of the sun overhead.

Elend's pewter ran out.

"You cannot beat me, Elend Venture," Marsh said in a voice like gravel. "We've killed your wife. I will kill you."

*Vin*. Elend didn't believe it. *Vin will come,* he thought. *She'll save us*.

Faith. It was a strange thing to feel at that moment. Marsh swung.

Pewter and iron suddenly flared to life within Elend. He didn't have time to think about the oddity; he simply reacted, Pulling on his sword, which lay stuck into the ground a distance away. It flipped through the air and he caught it, swinging with a too-quick motion, blocking Marsh's axe. Elend's body seemed to pulse, powerful and vast. He struck forward instinctively, forcing Marsh backward across the ashen field. Koloss backed away for the moment, shying from Elend, as if frightened. Or awed.

Marsh raised a hand to Push on Elend's sword, but nothing happened. It was . . . as if something deflected the blow. Elend screamed, charging, beating back Marsh with the strikes of his silvery weapon. The Inquisitor looked shocked as it blocked with the obsidian axe, its motions too quick for even Allomancy to explain. Yet Elend still forced him to retreat, across fallen corpses of blue, ash stirring beneath a red sky.

A powerful peace swelled in Elend. His Allomancy flared bright, though he knew the metals inside of him should have burned away. Only atium remained, and its strange power did not—could not—give him the other metals. But it didn't matter. For a moment, he was embraced by something greater. He looked up, toward the sun.

And he saw—just briefly—an enormous figure in the air just above him. A shifting, brilliant personage of pure white. Her hands held to his shoulders with her head thrown back, white hair streaming, mist flaring behind her like wings that stretched across the sky.

*Vin,* he thought with a smile.

Elend looked back down as Marsh screamed and leaped forward, attacking with his axe in one hand, seeming to trail something vast and black like a cloak behind him. Marsh raised his other hand across his face, as if to shield his dead eyes from the image in the air above Elend.

Elend burned the last of his atium, flaring it to life in his stomach. He raised his sword in two hands and waited for Marsh to draw close. The Inquisitor was stronger and was a better warrior. Marsh had the powers of both Allomancy and Feruchemy, making him another Lord Ruler. This was not a battle Elend could win. Not with a sword.

Marsh arrived, and Elend thought he understood what it had been like for Kelsier to face the Lord Ruler on that square in Luthadel, all those years ago. Marsh struck with his axe; Elend raised his sword in return and prepared to strike.

Then, Elend burned duralumin with his atium.

Sight, Sound, Strength, Power, Glory, Speed!

Blue lines sprayed from his chest like rays of light. But those were all overshadowed by one thing. Atium plus duralumin. In a flash of knowledge, Elend felt a mind-numbing wealth of information. All became white around him as knowledge saturated his mind.

"I see now," he whispered as the vision faded, and along with it his remaining metals. The battlefield returned. He stood upon it, his sword piercing Marsh's neck. It had gotten caught on the spikehead jutting out of Marsh's back, between the shoulder blades.

Marsh's axe was buried in Elend's chest.

The phantom metals Vin had given him burned to life within Elend again. They took the pain away. However, there was only so much that pewter could do, no matter how high it was flared. Marsh ripped his axe free, and Elend stumbled backward, bleeding, letting go of his sword. Marsh pulled the blade free from his neck, and the wound vanished, healed by the powers of Feruchemy.

Elend fell, slumping into a pile of koloss bodies. He would have been dead already, save for the pewter. Marsh stepped up to him, smiling. His empty eye socket was wreathed in tattoos, the mark that Marsh had taken upon himself. The price he had paid to overthrow the Final Empire.

Marsh grabbed Elend by the throat, pulling him back up. "Your soldiers are dead, Elend Venture," the creature whispered. "Our koloss rampage inside the kandra caverns. Your metals are gone. You have lost."

Elend felt his life dripping away, the last trickle from an empty glass. He'd been here before, back in the cavern at the Well of Ascension. He should have died then and he'd been terrified. This time, oddly, he was not. There was no regret. Just satisfaction.

Elend looked up at the Inquisitor. Vin, like a glowing phantom, still hovered above them both. "Lost?" Elend whispered. "We've won, Marsh."

"Oh, and how is that?" Marsh asked, dismissive.

Human stood at the side of the pit in the center of the cavern room. The pit where Ruin's body had been. The place of victory.

Human stood, dumbfounded, a group of other koloss stepping up to him, looking equally confused.

The pit was empty.

"Atium," Elend whispered, tasting blood. "Where is the atium, Marsh? Where do you think we got the power to fight? You came for that atium? Well it's *gone*. Tell your master that! You think my men and I expected to kill all of these koloss? There are tens of thousands of them! That wasn't the point at all."

Elend's smile widened. "Ruin's body is gone, Marsh. We burned it all away, the others and I. You might be able to kill me, but you'll *never* get what you came for. And that is why we win."

Marsh screamed in anger, demanding the truth, but Elend had spoken it. The deaths of the others meant that they had run out of atium. His men had fought until it was gone, as Elend had commanded, burning away every last bit.

The body of a god. The power of a god. Elend had held it for a moment. More important, he'd destroyed it. Hopefully, that would keep his people safe.

*It's up to you now, Vin,* he thought, still feeling the peace of her touch upon his soul. *I've done what I can*.

He smiled at Marsh again, defiantly, as the Inquisitor raised his axe.

The axe took off Elend's head.

Ruin raged and thrashed about, enraged and destructive. Vin only sat quietly, watching Elend's headless body slump back into the pile of blue corpses.

*How do you like that!* Ruin screamed. *I killed him! I Ruined everything you love! I took it from you!*

Vin floated above Elend's body, looking down. She reached out with incorporeal fingers, touching his head, remembering how it had felt to use her power to fuel his Allomancy. She didn't know what she had done. Something akin to what Ruin did when it controlled the koloss, perhaps. Only opposite. Liberating. Serene.

Elend was dead. She knew that, and knew that there was nothing she could do. That brought pain, true, but not the pain she had expected. *I let him go long ago,* she thought, stroking his face. *At the Well of Ascension. Allomancy brought him back to me for a time*.

She didn't feel the pain or terror that she had known before, when she'd thought him dead. This time, she felt only peace. These last few years had been a blessing—an extension. She'd given Elend up to be his own man, to risk himself as he wished, and perhaps to die. She would always love him. But she would not cease to function because he was gone.

The opposite, perhaps. Ruin floated directly above her, throwing down insults, telling her how it would kill the others. Sazed. Breeze. Ham. Spook.

*So few left of the original crew,* she thought. *Kelsier dead so long ago. Dockson and Clubs slaughtered at the Battle of Luthadel. Yeden dead with his soldiers. OreSeur taken at Zane's command. Marsh, fallen to become an*

*Inquisitor. And the others who joined us, now gone as well. Tindwyl, TenSoon, Elend . . .*

Did Ruin think she would let their sacrifices be for nothing? She rose, gathering her power. She forced it against the power of Ruin, as she had the other times. Yet, this time was different. When Ruin pushed back, she didn't retreat. She didn't preserve herself. She drove onward.

The confrontation made her divine body tremble in pain. It was the pain of a cold and hot meeting, the pain of two rocks being smashed together and ground to dust. Their forms undulated and rippled in a tempest of power.

And Vin drove on.

*Preservation could never destroy you!* she thought, almost screaming it against the agony. *He could only protect. That's why he needed to create humankind. All along, Ruin, this was part of his plan!*

*He didn't give up part of himself, making himself weaker, simply so that he could create intelligent life! He knew he needed something of both Preservation and of Ruin. Something that could both protect and destroy. Something that could destroy to protect.*

*He gave up his power at the Well, and into the mists, giving it to us so that we could take it. He always intended this to happen. You think this was your plan? It was his. His all along.*

Ruin cried out. Still, she drove on.

*You created the thing that can kill you, Ruin,* Vin said. *And you just made one huge final mistake. You shouldn't have killed Elend.*

*You see, he was the only reason I had left to live.*

She didn't shy back, though the conflict of opposites ripped her apart. Ruin screamed in terror as the force of her power completely melded with Ruin's.

Her consciousness—now formed and saturated with Preservation—moved to touch that of Ruin. Neither would yield. And, with a surge of power, Vin bid farewell to the world, then pulled Ruin into the abyss with her.

Their two minds puffed away, like mist under a hot sun.

*Once Vin died, the end came quickly. We were not prepared for it—but even all of the Lord Ruler's planning could not have prepared us for this. How did one prepare for the end of the world itself?*

# 82

SAZED WATCHED QUIETLY from the mouth of the cavern. Outside, the koloss raged and stomped about, looking confused. Most of the men who had been watching with Sazed had fled. Even most of the soldiers had retreated into the caverns, calling him a fool for waiting. Only General Demoux, who had managed to crawl back to the cavern after his atium ran out, remained, just a few steps into the tunnel. The man was bloody, his arm ending in a tourniquet, his leg crushed. He coughed quietly, waiting for Aslydin to return with more bandages.

Outside, the sun rose into the sky. The heat was incredible, like an oven. Cries of pain echoed from deep within the cavern behind Sazed. Koloss were inside.

"She'll come," Sazed whispered.

He could see Elend's body. It had fallen back down the pile of koloss corpses. It was stark, bright white and red against the black and blue of the koloss and ash.

"Vin will come," Sazed said insistently.

Demoux looked dazed. Too much blood lost. He slumped back, closing his eyes. Koloss began to move toward the cavern mouth, though they didn't have the direction or frenzy they'd displayed before.

"The Hero *will* come!" Sazed said.

Outside, something appeared, as if from mists, then slumped down in the bodies beside Elend's corpse. It was followed immediately by something else, a second figure, which also fell motionless.

*There!* Sazed thought, scrambling out of the cavern. He dashed past several koloss. They tried to swing for him, but Sazed wore his metalminds. He felt he should have his copperminds to use in case he needed to record something important. He wore his ten rings, the ones he'd used to fight during the siege of Luthadel, for he knew that he might need them.

He tapped a bit of steel and dodged the koloss attacks. He moved quickly through the mass of confused-looking koloss, climbing over bodies, moving up to the scrap of white cloak that marked Elend's resting place. His corpse was there, headless.

A small body lay beside his. Sazed fell to his knees, grabbing Vin by the shoulders. Beside her, atop the pile of dead koloss, lay another body. It was that of a man with red hair, one whom Sazed did not recognize, but he ignored it.

For Vin was not moving.

*No!* he thought, checking for a pulse. There was none. Her eyes were closed. She looked peaceful, but very, very dead.

"This can *not* be!" he yelled, shaking her body again. Several koloss lumbered toward him.

He glanced upward. The sun was rising. It was getting hard to breathe for the heat. He felt his skin burning. By the time the sun reached its zenith, it would likely be so hot the land would burn.

"Is this how it ends?" he screamed toward the sky. "Your Hero is dead! Ruin's power may be broken, the koloss may be lost to him as an army, but *the world will still die!*"

The ash had killed the plants. The sun would burn away anything that remained. There was no food. Sazed blinked out tears, but they dried on his face.

"This is how you leave us?" he whispered.

And then, he felt something. He looked down. Vin's body was smoking slightly. Not from the heat. It seemed to be leaking something . . . or, no. It was connected to something. The twists of mist he saw, they led to a vast white light. He could just barely see it.

He reached out and touched the mist, and felt an awesome power. A power of stability. To the side, the other corpse—the one he didn't recognize—was also leaking something. A deep black smoke. Sazed reached out with his other hand, touching the smoke, and felt a different power—more violent. The power of change.

He knelt, stunned, between the bodies. And, only then, did it start to make sense.

*The prophecies always used the gender-neutral,* he thought. *So that they could refer to either a man or a woman, we assumed. Or . . . perhaps because they referred to a Hero who wasn't really either one?*

He stood up. The sun's power overhead felt insignificant compared to the twin—yet opposite—powers that surrounded him.

*The Hero would be rejected of his people,* Sazed thought. *Yet, he would save them. Not a warrior, though he would fight. Not born a king, but would* *become one anyway.*

He looked upward again.

Is this what you planned all along?

He tasted of the power, but drew back, daunted. How could he use such a thing? He was just a man. In the brief glimpse of forces that he touched, he knew that he'd have no hope of using it. He didn't have the training.

"I can't do this," he said through cracked lips, reaching to the sky. "I don't know how. I cannot make the world as it was—I never saw it. If I take this power, I will do as the Lord Ruler did, and will only make things worse for my trying. I am simply a man."

Koloss cried out in pain from the burning. The heat was terrible, and around Sazed, trees began to pop and burst into flames. His touch on the twin powers kept him alive, he knew, but he did not embrace them.

"I am no Hero," he whispered, still reaching to the sky.

His arms twinkled, golden. His copperminds, worn on his forearms, reflected the light of the sun. They had been with him for so long, his companions. His knowledge.

Knowledge. . . .

*The words of the prophecy were very precise,* he thought suddenly. *They say . . . they say that the Hero will bear the future of the world on his arms.*

*Not on his shoulders. Not in his hands.* On his arms.

By the Forgotten Gods!

He slammed his arms into the twin mists and seized the powers offered to him. He drew them in, feeling them infuse his body, making him burn. His flesh and bones evaporated, but as they did, he tapped his copperminds, dumping their entire contents into his expanding consciousness.

The copperminds, now empty, dropped with his rings to the pile of blue corpses beside the bodies of Vin, Elend, and Ruin's nameless body. Sazed opened eyes as large as the world itself, drawing in power that latticed all of creation.

*The Hero will have the power to save the world. But he will also have the power to destroy it.*

*We never understood. He wouldn't simply bear the power of Preservation. He needed the power of Ruin as well.*

The powers were opposites. As he drew them in, they threatened to annihilate each other. And yet, because he was of one mind on how to use them, he could keep them separate. They could touch *without* destroying each other, if he willed it. For these two powers had been used to create all things. If they fought, they destroyed. If they were used together, they created.

Understanding swelled within him. Over a thousand years, the Keepers had collected the knowledge of mankind and stored it in their copperminds. They had passed it down from Keeper to Keeper, each man or woman carrying the entire bulk of knowledge, so that he or she could pass it on when necessary. Sazed had it all.

And, in a moment of transcendence, he understood it all. He saw the patterns, the clues, the secrets. Men had believed and worshipped for as long as they had existed, and within those beliefs, Sazed found the answers he needed. Gems, hidden from Ruin in all the religions of mankind.

There had been a people called the Bennett. They had considered mapmaking to be a solemn duty; Sazed had once preached their religion to Kelsier himself. From their detailed maps and charts, Sazed discovered how the world had once looked. He used his powers to restore the continents and oceans, the islands and coastlines, the mountains and rivers.

There had been a people known as the Nelazan. They had worshipped the stars, had called them the Thousand Eyes of their god, Trell, watching them. Sazed remembered well offering the religion to the young Vin while she had sat, captive, undergoing her first haircut with the crew. From the Nelazan, the Keepers had recovered star charts, and had dutifully recorded them—even though scholars had called them useless, since they hadn't been accurate since the days before the Ascension. Yet, from these star charts, and from the patterns and movements of the other planets in the solar system they outlined, Sazed could determine exactly where the world was supposed to sit in orbit. He put the planet back into its old place—not pushing too hard, as the Lord Ruler once had, for he had a frame of reference by which to measure.

There had been a people known as the Canzi who had worshipped death; they had provided detailed notes about the human body. Sazed had offered one of their prayers over the bodies they had found in Vin's old crew hideout, back when Kelsier had still lived. From the Canzi teachings about the body, Sazed determined that the physiology of mankind had changed—

either by the Lord Ruler's intention or by simple evolution—to adapt to breathing ash and eating brown plants. In a wave of power, Sazed restored the bodies of men to the way they had been before, leaving each person the same, yet fixing the problems that living for a thousand years on a dying world had caused. He didn't destroy men, warping and twisting them as the Lord Ruler had when he'd created the kandra, for Sazed had a guide by which to work.

He learned other things too. Dozens of secrets. One religion worshipped animals, and from it Sazed drew forth pictures, explanations, and references regarding the life that *should* have lived on the earth. He restored it. From another—Dadradah, the religion he had preached to Clubs before the man died—Sazed learned about colors and hues. It was the last religion Sazed had ever taught, and with its poems about color and nature, he could restore the plants, sky, and landscape to the way they had once been. Every religion had clues in it, for the faiths of men contained the hopes, loves, wishes, and lives of the people who had believed them.

Finally, Sazed took the religion of the Larsta, the religion that Kelsier's wife—Mare—had believed in. Its priests had composed poetry during their times of meditation. From these poems—and from a scrap of paper that Mare had given to Kelsier, who had given it to Vin, who had given it to Sazed—he learned of the beautiful things that the world had once held.

And he restored flowers to the plants that had once borne them.

*The religions in my portfolio weren't useless after all,* he thought, the power flowing from him and remaking the world. *None of them were. They weren't all true.*

*But they all had truth.*

Sazed hovered over the world, changing things as he felt he must. He cradled the hiding places of mankind, keeping the caverns safe—even if he did move them about—as he reworked the world's tectonics. Finally, he exhaled softly, his work finished. And yet, the power did not evaporate from him, as he had expected it to.

*Rashek and Vin only touched small pieces of it at the Well of Ascension,* he realized. *I have something more. Something endless.*

Ruin and Preservation were dead, and their powers had been joined together. In fact, they belonged together. How had they been split? Someday, perhaps, he would discover the answer to that question.

Somebody would need to watch over the world, care for it, now that its gods were gone. It wasn't until that moment that Sazed understood the term Hero of Ages. Not a Hero that came once in the ages.

But a Hero who would span the ages. A Hero who would preserve mankind throughout all its lives and times. Neither Preservation nor Ruin, but both.

God.

*Vin was special.*

*Preservation chose her from a very young age, as I have mentioned. I believe that he was grooming her to take his power. Yet, the mind of Preservation was very weak at that point, reduced only to the fragment that we knew as the mist spirit.*

*What made him choose this girl? Was it because she was a Mistborn? Was it because she had Snapped so early in life, coming to her powers even as she went through the pains of the unusually difficult labor her mother went through to bear her?*

*Vin was unusually talented and strong with Allomancy, even from the beginning. I believe that she must have drawn some of the mist into her when she was still a child, in those brief times when she wasn't wearing the earring. Preservation had mostly gotten her to stop wearing it by the time Kelsier recruited her, though she put it back in for a moment before joining the crew. Then, she'd left it there at his suggestion.*

*Nobody else could draw upon the mists. I have determined this. Why were they open to Vin and not others? I suspect that she couldn't have taken them all in until after she'd touched the power at the Well of Ascension. It was always meant, I believe, to be something of an attuning force. Something that, once touched, would adjust a person's body to be able to accept the mists.*

*Yet, she did make use of a small crumb of Preservation's power when she defeated the Lord Ruler, a year before she even began hearing the thumping of the power's return to the Well.*

*There is much more to this mystery. Perhaps I will tease it out eventually, as my mind grows more and more accustomed to its expanded nature. Perhaps I will determine why I was able to take the powers myself. For now, I only wish to make a simple acknowledgment of the woman who held the power just before me.*

*Of all of us who touched it, I feel she was the most worthy.*

# EPILOGUE

SPOOK AWOKE FROM THE NIGHTMARE, then sat up. The cavern around him was dark, lit only by candles and lamps.

He stood, stretching. Around him, people gasped. He walked past them, seeking out his friends. The cavern was packed—holding everyone from Urteau who had been willing to come and hide. As such, it was difficult for Spook to pick his way through the shuffling, coughing, chatting bodies. As he walked, the whispers grew louder, and people stood, following.

Beldre came running up to him, wearing a white dress. "Spook?" she asked with wonder. "What . . . what happened?"

He just smiled, putting his arm around her. They made their way to the front of the cavern. Breeze sat at a table—of course, *he* would have furniture, while pretty much everyone else sat on the rock floor. Spook smiled at him, and the Soother raised an eyebrow.

"You're looking well, my boy," Breeze said, taking a drink of his wine.

"You could say that," Spook said.

"That's all you're going to say?" Beldre said to Breeze. "Look at him! He's been healed!"

Breeze shrugged, putting down his wine and standing. "My dear, with all the oddities that have been happening lately, young Spook's appearance doesn't measure up. A simple healing? Why, that's rather mundane, if you ask me."

Breeze smiled, catching Spook's eye.

"Shall we then?" Spook asked.

Breeze shrugged. "Why not? What do you think that we'll find?"

"I'm not sure," Spook admitted, stepping into the antechamber beyond the cavern. He started to climb the ladder.

"Spook," Beldre said warily. "You know what the scouts said. The entire city was burning from the heat of the sun. . . ."

Spook looked up, noting the light shining between the cracks of the trapdoor. He smiled, then pushed it open.

There was no city outside. Just a field of grass. Green grass. Spook blinked at the strange sight, then crawled out onto the soft earth, making room for Breeze. The Soother's head popped out, then cocked to the side. "Now, *there's* a sight," he said, crawling out beside Spook.

Spook stood up in the grass. It came up to his thighs. Green. Such a strange color for plants.

"And . . . the sky," Breeze said, shading his eyes. "Blue. Not a hint of ash or smoke. Very odd. Very odd indeed. I'll bet Vin had something to do with this mess. That girl never *could* do things the proper way."

Spook heard a gasp from behind, and turned to see Beldre climbing out of the cavern. He helped her step up onto the ground, then they walked in silent wonder through the tall grass. The sun was so bright overhead, yet it wasn't uncomfortably hot.

"What happened to the city?" Beldre whispered, holding Spook's arm.

He shook his head. Then, however, he heard something. He turned, thinking he saw motion on the horizon. He walked forward, Beldre at his side, Breeze calling down for Allrianne to come up and see what had happened.

"Are those . . . people?" Beldre asked, finally seeing what Spook had. The people in the distance saw them, too, and as soon as they drew close, Spook smiled and waved at one.

"Spook?" Ham called. "Kid, is that you?"

Spook and Beldre hurried forward. Ham stood with others, and behind them Spook could see another trapdoor in the middle of the grassy meadow floor. People he didn't recognize—some wearing uniforms from Elend's army—were climbing out. Ham rushed over, wearing his usual vest and trousers, and grabbed Spook in an embrace.

"What are you doing here?" Ham asked, letting go.

"I don't know," Spook said. "Last I knew, I was in Urteau."

Ham looked up at the sky. "I was in Fadrex! What happened?"

Spook shook his head. "I don't know if the places we used to know have meaning anymore, Ham. . . ."

Ham nodded, turning as one of the soldiers pointed. Another batch of people was emerging from a hole a short distance away. Spook and Ham walked forward—at least, until Ham saw someone in the other batch of people. Spook vaguely recognized her as Ham's wife, who had been back in Luthadel. The Thug let out a cry of excitement, then rushed forward to greet his family.

Spook made his way from hole to hole. There appeared to be six of them, some well populated, others not so much. One stood out. It wasn't a trapdoor, like the others, but a slanted cave entrance. Here, he found General Demoux speaking with a small group of people, a pretty Terriswoman holding his arm.

"I was in and out of consciousness for it," Demoux was saying, "but I saw him. The Survivor. It *had* to be him—hanging in the sky, glowing. Waves of color moved through the air, and the ground trembled, the land spinning and moving. He came. Just like Sazed said he would."

"Sazed?" Spook spoke up, Demoux noticing him for the first time. "Where is he?"

Demoux shook his head. "I don't know, Lord Spook." Then he paused. "Where did you come from, anyway?"

Spook ignored the question. The openings and holes formed a pattern. Spook walked through the thick grass, leading Beldre, making his way to the very center of the pattern. The wind blew softly, bending the stalks of grass in wave-like undulations. Ham and Breeze rushed to catch up to him, already arguing about something trivial, Ham with a child on one arm, his other around his wife's shoulders.

Spook froze as he caught sight of a bit of color in the grass. He held up a hand, warning the others, and they stepped forward more quietly. There, in the center of the grass, was a field of . . . somethings. Colorful somethings, growing from the ground, with tops like bright-colored leaves. They were shaped like upside-down bells, with long straight stalks, the petals at the top open toward the sun. As if reaching for its light and gaping to drink it in.

"Beautiful . . ." Beldre whispered.

Spook stepped forward, moving among the plants. *Flowers,* he thought, recognizing them from the picture Vin had carried. *Kelsier's dream finally came true.*

At the center of the flowers, he found two people. Vin lay wearing her customary mistcloak, shirt, and trousers. Elend was in a brilliant white uniform, complete with cape. They were holding hands as they lay amid the flowers.

And they were both dead.

Spook knelt beside them, listening to Ham and Breeze cry out. They examined the bodies, checking for vital signs, but Spook focused on something else, almost hidden in the grass. He picked it up—a large leather tome.

He opened it, reading the first page.

*I am, unfortunately, the Hero of Ages,* read the delicate, careful letters. Spook thought he recognized the handwriting. As he flipped through the book, a slip of paper fell free. Spook picked it up—one side had a faded drawing of a flower, the very picture he'd been thinking about moments before. On the other side was a note scrawled in the same handwriting as the book.

*Spook,* it read. *I tried to bring them back, but apparently fixing the bodies doesn't return the souls. I will get better at this with time, I expect. However, be assured that I have spoken with our friends, and they are quite happy where they are. They deserve a rest, I think.*

*The book contains a short record of the events that led up to the world dying and being reborn, along with some musings I have made about the history, philosophy, and science of recent occurrences. If you look to your right, you will find a much larger group of books in the grass. These contain all of the knowledge—repeated verbatim—that was contained in my metalminds. Let the knowledge of the past not be forgotten.*

*Rebuilding will be difficult, I think—but likely far easier than living beneath the Lord Ruler or surviving Ruin's attempt to destroy the world. I think you'll be surprised at the number of people who fled to the storage caverns. Rashek planned very well for this day. He suffered much beneath Ruin's hand, but he was a good man, who ultimately had honorable intentions.*

*You did well. Know that the message you sent via Captain Goradel saved us all, in the end. The people will need leadership in the years to come. Likely, they will look to you. I'm sorry that I cannot be there in person to help you, but know that I am . . . about.*

*I have made you Mistborn, and healed the damage you did to your body by flaring tin so much. I hope you don't mind. It was Kelsier's request, actually. Consider it a parting gift from him.*

*Watch over them for me.*

*P.S. There are still two metals that nobody knows about. You might want to poke about and see if you can figure out what they are. I think they'll interest you.*

Spook looked up, staring at the strangely empty, blue sky. Beldre came over and knelt beside him, looking over his paper, then giving him a quizzical look.

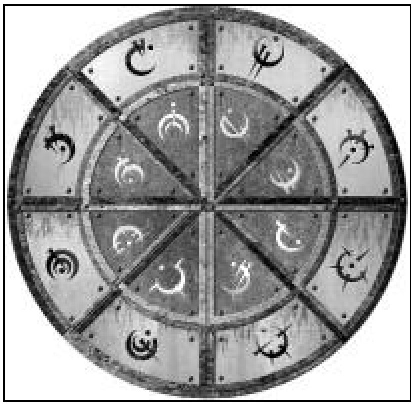
"You look troubled," she said.

Spook shook his head. "No," he said, folding up the little slip of paper and putting it in his pocket. "No, I'm not troubled. In fact, I actually think everything is going to be all right. Finally."

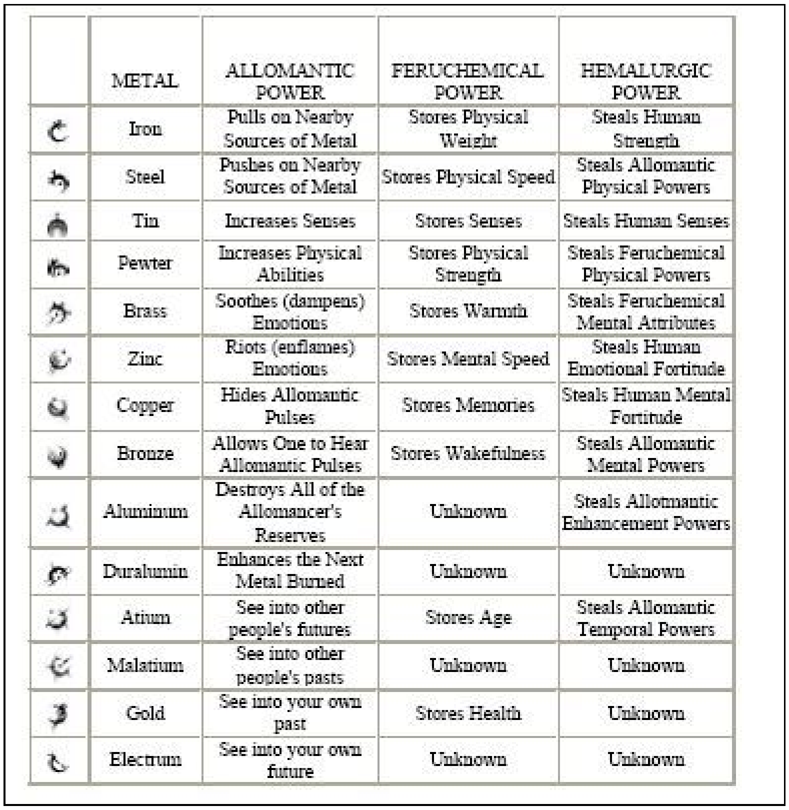
# ARS ARCANUM

1. Metals Quick Reference Chart
2. Names and Terms
3. Summaries of Previous Books

*You can also find extensive annotations of every chapter in the book, along with deleted scenes, a very active blog, and expanded world information at www.brandonsanderson.com.*



## *METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART*



| | METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER | HEMALURGIC POWER |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Iron | Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Weight | Steals Human Strength |
| | Steel | Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Speed | Steals Allomantic Physical Powers |
| | Tin | Increases Senses | Stores Senses | Steals Human Senses |
| | Pewter | Increases Physical Abilities | Stores Physical Strength | Steals Feruchemical Physical Powers |
| | Brass | Soothes (dampens) Emotions | Stores Warmth | Steals Feruchemical Mental Attributes |
| | Zinc | Riots (enflames) Emotions | Stores Mental Speed | Steals Human Emotional Fortitude |
| | Copper | Hides Allomantic Pulses | Stores Memories | Steals Human Mental Fortitude |
| | Bronze | Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses | Stores Wakefulness | Steals Allomantic Mental Powers |
| | Aluminum | Destroys All of the Allomancer's Reserves | Unknown | Steals Allotmantic Enhancement Powers |
| | Duralumin | Enhances the Next Metal Burned | Unknown | Unknown |
| | Atium | See into other people's futures | Stores Age | Steals Allomantic Temporal Powers |
| | Malatium | See into other people's pasts | Unknown | Unknown |
| | Gold | See into your own past | Stores Health | Unknown |
| | Electrum | See into your own future | Unknown | Unknown |

## *NAMES AND TERMS*

ALENDI: A man who conquered the world a thousand years ago, before the Lord Ruler's Ascension. Vin found his journal in the Lord Ruler's palace, and thought—at first—that he had become the Lord Ruler. It was later discovered that his servant, Rashek, killed Alendi and took his place. Alendi was a friend and protégé of Kwaan, a Terris scholar who thought that Alendi might be the Hero of Ages.

ALLOMANCY: A mystical hereditary power allowing the burning of metals inside the body to gain special abilities.

ALLOMANTIC METALS: There are eight basic Allomantic metals. These come in pairs, comprising a base metal and its alloy. They can also be divided into two groups of four as internal metals (tin, pewter, copper, bronze) and external metals (iron, steel, zinc, brass). It was long assumed that there were only ten Allomantic metals: the eight basic metals, along with gold and atium. However, the discovery of active alloys for gold and atium expanded the number of metals to twelve. The discovery of aluminum and duralumin brought this number to fourteen.

ALLOMANTIC PULSE: The signal given off by an Allomancer who is burning metals. Only someone who is burning bronze can "hear" an Allomantic pulse.

ALLRIANNE: Lord Ashweather Cett's only daughter. She is romantically involved with Breeze.

ALUMINUM: Once known only to the Steel Inquisitors, this metal—when burned—depletes all of an Allomancer's other metal reserves.

ANCHOR (ALLOMANTIC): A term used to refer to a piece of metal that an Allomancer Pushes on or Pulls on when burning steel or iron.

ASCENSION (OF THE LORD RULER): The Ascension is the term used to describe what happened to Rashek when he took the power at the Well of Ascension and became the Lord Ruler. It is also sometimes used in connection with Vin, as she did something similar in taking the power, though she released it instead of using it.

ASCENSION, WELL OF: Historically the location of a great power, the Well of Ascension was the place to which it was prophecied the Hero of Ages would travel in order to gain the power he needed to defeat the Deepness. Vin located it beneath Kredik Shaw in Luthadel (though it had always been thought to be in the Terris Mountains). It was deep within a large cavern filled with supplies and foodstuffs. (*See also* Storage Cavern.)

ASHFALLS: A term that refers to the rain of ash, which falls frequently from the sky in the Final Empire because of the ashmounts.

ASHMOUNTS: Seven large ash volcanoes which appeared in the Final Empire during the Ascension. They eject mainly ash, rather than magma.

ASHWEATHER: Lord Cett's first name.

ATIUM: A strange metal formerly produced in the Pits of Hathsin. It condensed inside of small geodes that formed in crystalline pockets within caves there.

BELDRE: Quellion's sister.

BLESSING, KANDRA: Each kandra was granted one of four powers by the Lord Ruler. These are the Blessing of Potency, the Blessing of Presence, the Blessing of Awareness, and the Blessing of Stability.

BOXING: The slang name for an imperial gold coin. The name comes from the picture on its back of Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's palace—or, the "box" in which he lived.

BREEZE: A Soother on Kelsier's crew, now one of Elend's foremost counselors and diplomats. He is thought by the rest of the crew to be half-skaa, like all of them, but he's actually a full-blooded nobleman who was forced during his youth to hide in the underground. He is romantically involved with Allrianne Cett.

BRONZEPULSE: Another term for an Allomantic pulse.

BURN (ALLOMANCY): Allomancers utilizing or expending the metals in their stomachs are said to be "burning" them. They must swallow a metal, usually in an alcohol suspension, then Allomantically metabolize it to access its power.

BURNLANDS: The deserts at the edges of the Final Empire.

CAMON: Vin's old crewleader. A harsh man who often beat her, Camon was cast out by Kelsier. The Inquisitors eventually killed him.

CANTON: A department of the Steel Ministry.

CETT: Lord Ashweather Cett marched on the Central Dominance during the siege of Luthadel. He feared that Straff Venture would capture the city, and its atium, and was himself suffering rebellions in his homeland. He escaped Fadrex with an army and made a desperate play for the capital. He eventually joined with Elend's forces at the end of the siege, helping Vin fight Straff Venture, and earning himself a place of trust as one of Elend's advisors. Although known as "King" Cett, he rules no lands, for they are still in rebellion. (*See also* Yomen.)

CHANNEREL, RIVER: The river that runs through the middle of Luthadel.

CITIZEN, THE: Quellion's title. (*See also* Quellion.)

CLADENT: Clubs's real name.

CLIP: The nickname for an imperial copper coin in the Final Empire. Commonly used by Mistborn and Coinshots for jumping and attacking.

CLUBS: A Smoker on Kelsier's crew, Spook's uncle, once general of Elend's armies. Clubs was killed by koloss during the siege of Luthadel.

COINSHOT: A Misting who can burn steel.

COLLAPSE, THE: A term used to refer to the death of the Lord Ruler and the fall of the Final Empire.

CONVENTICAL OF SERAN: A stronghold of the Inquisitors where Sazed and Marsh discovered Kwaan's last words.

COPPERCLOUD: The invisible, obscuring field set up by someone burning copper. If an Allomancer burns metals while within a coppercloud, their Allomantic pulses are hidden from those burning bronze. The term *Coppercloud* can also refer to a Smoker (a Misting who can burn copper).

DEEPNESS, THE: The mysterious monster or force that threatened the world just before the rise of the Lord Ruler and the Final Empire. The Lord Ruler claimed to have defeated it when he Ascended, but it was later revealed that the Deepness was the mists, and that the Lord Ruler didn't defeat them so much as hold them back. The Deepness is attacking again, the mists increasingly covering the land during the day now, causing crops to fail.

DEMOUX, GENERAL: An officer in Elend's army, known for his faith in the Survivor.

DOCKSON: Kelsier's old right-hand man, a member of the original crew. He was killed during the siege of Luthadel.

DOMINANCE (FINAL EMPIRE): A province of the Final Empire. Luthadel is in the Central Dominance. The four surrounding dominances are called the Inner Dominances, and include most of the population and culture of the Final Empire. After the Collapse, the Final Empire shattered, and different kings took power, trying to claim leadership of the various dominances, effectively turning each one into a separate kingdom. Elend now rules the Central Dominance along with most of the Northern Dominance and portions of the Eastern and Southern Dominances.

DOX: Dockson's nickname.

DURALUMIN: The Allomantic alloy of aluminum, duralumin is a mixture of aluminum, copper, manganese, and magnesium. If an Allomancer burns duralumin, the next metal (or metals) he or she burns will be given explosive power, at the cost of burning away all at once every bit of that metal inside the Allomancer.

ELEND VENTURE: Emperor of the New Empire, husband of Vin Venture, a Mistborn and scholar.

EXTINGUISH (ALLOMANTIC): To cease burning an Allomantic metal.

FADREX: A modestly sized, well-fortified city in the Western Dominance. Once home and capital city of Ashweather Cett, it was an important warehousing and distribution center for the Canton of Resource. As Cett left, it was seized by the obligator known as Lord Yomen.

FATREN: Also known as Fats. The skaa man who rules the city of Vetitan.

FEDRE, LORD: An infamous scoundrel of a nobleman who lived in the eighth century of the Lord Ruler's reign. Known for his fondness for cats and canals.

FELT: Once one of Straff's spies, the man was (like most of Straff's employees) left behind at the fall of Luthadel. He gave his allegiance to Elend instead, and now serves as an officer in Elend's army.

FINAL EMPIRE: The empire established by the Lord Ruler. The name came from his certainty that since he was immortal, it would be the last empire the world would ever know.

FLARE (ALLOMANTIC): To draw a little extra power from an Allomantic metal at the expense of making it burn faster.

GENERATIONS, KANDRA: The kandra people are divided into generations, based on when they were created. The First Generation is made up of the original kandra and still survives. Each century after them, the Lord Ruler allowed another group of kandra to be created, and they were named the Second Generation, the Third Generation, and so forth.

GNEORNDIN: Ashweather Cett's only son.

GORADEL, CAPTAIN: Once a soldier in the Luthadel Garrison, Goradel was guarding the palace when Vin decided to infiltrate and kill the Lord Ruler. Vin convinced him to switch sides, and he later led Elend through the palace to try and rescue her. He is now an officer in Elend's army.

HADDEK: Leader of the First Generation of kandra.

HAM: A Thug on Kelsier's crew, now a general in Elend's army. Known for his enjoyment of philosophical puzzles, and for wearing only a vest no matter what the temperature.

HAMMOND: Ham's real name.

HATHSIN: *See* Pits of Hathsin.

HAZEKILLER: A soldier with no Allomantic or Feruchemical powers who is trained to fight and kill Allomancers.

HERO OF AGES, THE: The prophecied savior of the Terris people. It was foretold that he would come, take the power at the Well of Ascension, then be selfless enough to give it up in order to save the world from the Deepness. Alendi was thought to be the Hero of Ages, but was killed before he could complete his quest. Vin followed in his footsteps, and got further, taking the power, then giving it up. The prophecies, however, proved to be falsified—a ruse intended to allow a force named Ruin to escape imprisonment. (*See also* Ruin.)

HOID: A mystery yet to be solved.

HOMELAND, KANDRA: The cavern complex that the kandra use as their secret home. It is known to no human other than the Lord Ruler (who is now dead). Kandra who serve well in Contracts are allowed periods of rest in the Homeland.

INQUISITOR, STEEL: A group of strange priests who served the Lord Ruler. They have spikes driven completely through their heads—point-first through the eyes—yet continue to live. They were fanatically devoted to him, and were used primarily to hunt out and kill skaa with Allomantic powers. They have the abilities of a Mistborn granted to them via Hemalurgy, and some other powers gained by that art as well.

IRONEYES: Marsh's nickname when he was a member of the crew, before he became an Inquisitor.

IRONPULL: Pulling on a metal when Allomantically burning iron. This Pull exerts a force on the metal item, yanking it directly toward the Allomancer. If the metallic item, known as an "anchor," is heavier than the Allomancer, he or she will instead be Pulled toward it.

JANARLE, KING: Once Straff Venture's second-in-command, Janarle was forced to swear allegiance to Elend Venture. He now rules the Northern Dominance on Elend's behalf.

JASTES LEKAL: Heir to the Lekal house title and one of Elend's former friends. He and Elend often discussed politics and philosophy along with Telden. Jastes gathered an army of koloss and marched on Luthadel during the siege begun by Straff and Cett, then lost control of them. Elend executed Jastes for the death and destruction he caused.

KANDRA: A race of creatures who can ingest a person's dead body, then reproduce that body with their own flesh. As relatives of mistwraiths, kandra have no bones, so they keep and use the bones of the person they imitate. Natural spies, they serve Contracts with mankind—which must be paid for with atium. Kandra are immortal. (*See also* Homeland *and* Generations.)

KANPAAR: Foremost of the Second Generation of kandra.

KEEPER (TERRIS): Often used loosely as another term for a Feruchemist. The Keepers were actually an organization of Feruchemists dedicated to discovering, then memorizing, all of the knowledge and religions that existed before the Ascension. The Lord Ruler hunted them to near-extinction, forcing them to remain hidden. After the Collapse, they began teaching and revealing their knowledge. However, they were attacked by the Inquisitors about the time of the siege of Luthadel, and are all presumed dead, save Sazed.

KELL: Kelsier's nickname.

KELSIER: The most famous thieving crewleader in the Final Empire, Kelsier raised a rebellion of skaa and overthrew the Lord Ruler, but was killed in the process. He was Mistborn, and was Vin's teacher. His death spawned a religion known as the Church of the Survivor.

KHLENNIUM: An ancient kingdom that existed before the rise of the Final Empire. It was Alendi's homeland.

KOLOSS: A race of bestial warriors created by the Lord Ruler during his Ascension, then used by him to conquer the world.

KREDIK SHAW: The Lord Ruler's palace in Luthadel. It means "the Hill of a Thousand Spires" in the old Terris language.

KWAAN: A Terris scholar before the Collapse. He was a Worldbringer, and was the first to mistake Alendi for the Hero of Ages. He later changed his mind, betraying his former friend by recruiting Rashek to stop him.

LADRIAN: Breeze's real name.

LEKAL, KING: A distant relative of Jastes Lekal, King Audil Lekal took power over Jastes's kingdom after the siege of Luthadel. He has slowly lost most of that kingdom to banditry and koloss incursions.

LESTIBOURNES: Spook's real name.

LLAMAS, MISTBORN: Brandon's former writing group, who helped and advised on all three Mistborn books. Mistborn Llamas chew various kinds of plants to gain super-llaman powers. T-shirts can be found on the Web site, if you know where to look.

LORD RULER: The emperor who ruled the Final Empire for a thousand years. He was once named Rashek, and was a Terris servant who was hired by Alendi. He killed Alendi, however, and went to the Well of Ascension in his place, and there took the power and Ascended. He was finally killed by Vin, but not before warning her that she was making a terrible mistake.

LURCHER: A Misting who can burn iron.

LUTHADEL: Capital of the Final Empire, and largest city in the land. Luthadel is known for its textiles, its forges, and its majestic noble keeps. It was nearly destroyed during the siege of Luthadel by rampaging koloss and is now ruled by King Penrod, one of the subject kings under Elend.

MALATIUM: The metal discovered by Kelsier, often dubbed the Eleventh Metal. Nobody knows where he found it, or why he thought it could kill the Lord Ruler, but it is an alloy of atium and gold. Malatium eventually provided the clue Vin needed to defeat the Lord Ruler, as it allows an Allomancer to see a shadow from another person's past.

MARE: Kelsier's wife, a friend of Sazed's who was very active in the skaa rebellion before her death in the Pits of Hathsin.

MELAAN: A kandra of the Seventh Generation. She was trained and "raised" by TenSoon.

METALMIND: A piece of metal that a Feruchemist uses as a kind of battery, filling it with certain attributes that he or she can later withdraw. Specific metal-minds are named after the different metals they are made of: tinmind, steelmind, etc.

MIST: The strange, omnipresent fog that falls on the Final Empire every night. Thicker than a common fog, it swirls and churns about, almost as if it were alive. Just before Vin took the power at the Well of Ascension, the mists changed and began randomly killing people who went out in them.

MISTBORN: An Allomancer who can burn all of the Allomantic metals.

MISTCLOAK: A garment worn by many Mistborn as a mark of their station. Mistcloaks are constructed from dozens of thick ribbons of cloth that are sewn together at the top, but allowed to spread free from the chest down.

MISTING: An Allomancer who can burn only one metal. They are much more common than Mistborn. (Note: An Allomancer either has one power or all of them. There are no in-betweens with two or three.) The Lord Ruler and his priests always taught that there were only eight kinds of Mistings, based on the first eight Allomantic metals.

MISTSICKNESS: The name used for the strange malady that strikes people who go out into the mists. Though most who do so are unharmed, a sizable minority fall to the shakes and grow sick. This sickness can last just a few days or over two weeks, and is sometimes fatal. One need only go out in the mists once, however, to become inoculated—and immune—to mistsickness. Nobody knows why it began, though the first reports of it came just before Vin took the power at the Well of Ascension.

MISTWRAITH: A nonsentient relative of the kandra people. Mistwraiths are globs of boneless flesh that scavenge the land at night, eating any carcass they find, then using the skeletons for their own bodies. Kandra are actually made from mistwraiths, which they call the "unbirthed."

NEW EMPIRE: The name Elend gave his realm after he took power from Cett and Straff at the end of the siege of Luthadel. It currently includes the Central Dominance and the Northern Dominance, with parts of the Eastern and Southern Dominances as well.

NOORDEN: One of the only obligators who chose to stay in Luthadel and serve Elend.

OBLIGATOR: A member of the Lord Ruler's priesthood. Obligators were more than just religious figures, however—they were civil bureaucrats, and even a spy network. A business deal or promise that wasn't witnessed by an obligator was not considered legally or morally binding.

ORESEUR: A kandra employed by Kelsier. OreSeur once played the part of Lord Renoux, Vin's uncle. He was killed by TenSoon, who impersonated him to get close to Vin.

PATRESEN, LADY: A noblewoman in Fadrex known for her proofreading abilities.

PENROD, FERSON: One of the most prominent noblemen who remained in Luthadel after the Collapse, Penrod made a play for the throne, eventually succeeding in taking it away from Elend via a democratic process. He later accepted Elend as his emperor, and now rules Luthadel.

PEWTERARM: Another term for a Thug, a Misting who can burn pewter.

PITS OF HATHSIN, THE: A network of caverns and crevasses that were the only place in the Final Empire that produced atium. The Lord Ruler used prisoners to work them. Kelsier destroyed their ability to produce atium shortly before he died. Now home to the Terris refugees.

PRESERVATION: An ancient Terris god, Preservation was Ruin's opposite—the force for stability, stasis, and continuity. He gave up most of his mental force to imprison Ruin at the Well of Ascension.

PULL (ALLOMANTIC): Using Allomancy to Pull on something—either on people's emotions with zinc, or on metals with iron.

PUSH (ALLOMANTIC): Using Allomancy to Push on something—either on people's emotions with brass, or on metals with steel.

QUELLION: Ruler of Urteau, Quellion considers himself a pure follower of the Survivor, and tries to uphold Kelsier's injunction to overthrow and execute the nobility. Beldre is his sister.

RASHEK: A Terris packman before the Ascension, Rashek was hired by Alendi to help him make the trek to the Well of Ascension. Rashek deeply resented Alendi, and eventually killed him. He took the power at the Well himself, and became the Lord Ruler.

REEN: Vin's half-brother, who protected her and trained her as a thief. Reen was brutal and unforgiving, but he did save Vin from their insane mother, then protect her during her childhood. He was killed by the Inquisitors when he refused to give them Vin's location. Sometimes, Vin hears the words of his lessons in her memory, and he has come to represent the more brutal side of life in Vin's mind.

RELEASE (FERUCHEMICAL): When a Feruchemist stops tapping a metalmind, no longer drawing forth its power.

RENOUX, LORD: A nobleman whom Kelsier killed, then hired the kandra OreSeur to impersonate. Before the Collapse, Vin played the part of his niece, Valette Renoux.

RIOT (ALLOMANTIC): When an Allomancer burns zinc and Pulls on a person's emotions, enflaming them.

RIOTER (ALLOMANTIC): A Misting who can burn zinc.

RUIN: An ancient Terris god, Ruin is the force of destruction, entropy, and decay in the world. Once imprisoned near the Well of Ascension, Ruin was accidentally released by Vin. Ruin's power is not yet complete, and he mostly affects the world subtly, by whispering in the ears of his servants and by changing the text of documents. He cannot change things written in metal.

SATREN: A city in the East that has a storage cavern.

SAZE: Sazed's nickname on the crew.

SAZED: A Terris Keeper who joined Kelsier's crew against the wishes of his people, then helped overthrow the Final Empire. He was romantically involved with Tindwyl, and her death has pushed him into a long bout of depression. He now serves as chief ambassador in Elend's empire, and has been named by Elend third in line for the throne, should Elend and Vin both die.

SEEKER (ALLOMANTIC): A Misting who can burn bronze.

SHANE LARIEL: Elend's former fiancée, a Mistborn whom Vin killed.

SIEGE OF LUTHADEL: The term used to refer to the month-long attack upon the Central Dominance by Ashweather Cett, Straff Venture, and Jastes Lekal. It ended with Jastes losing control of his koloss army, which attacked Luthadel. Vin managed to stop this army, then turn it against Straff. At the last minute, Cett joined her.

SKAA: The peasantry of the Final Empire. They were once of different races and nationalities. Over the thousand-year span of the empire the Lord Ruler worked hard to stamp out any sense of identity in the people, eventually succeeding in creating a single, homogeneous race of slave workers. Elend freed them when he took over Luthadel. Many of them have now joined the Church of the Survivor.

SLOWSWIFT: The nickname of a certain nobleman in Fadrex. He bears a striking resemblance to a well-known storyteller.

SMOKER (ALLOMANTIC): Misting who can burn copper. Also known as a Coppercloud.

SOOTHE (ALLOMANTIC): When an Allomancer burns brass and Pushes on a person's emotions, dampening them.

SOOTHER: A Misting who can burn brass.

SPOOK: A Tineye from Kelsier's crew. The youngest member of the crew, Spook was only fifteen when the Lord Ruler was overthrown. He is Clubs's nephew, and was once known for his use of garbled street slang. At the command of the other members of the crew, he fled Luthadel before its fall, but felt terribly guilty for doing so. He now serves as a scout and spy for Elend, and has been stationed in Urteau, where he is gathering information about the rebels there.

STEEL MINISTRY: The Lord Ruler's priesthood, consisting of a small number of Steel Inquisitors and a larger body of priests called obligators. The Steel Ministry was more than just a religious organization; it was the civic framework of the Final Empire.

STORAGE CAVERN: The Lord Ruler left behind five caches of supplies hidden in caverns beneath certain cities. Each one contains a metal plate giving the location of the next cavern, and providing some advice from the Lord Ruler. The first cavern was discovered beneath Luthadel itself.

STRAFF VENTURE: Elend's father, once king of the Northern Dominance. He was killed by Vin at the climax of the siege of Luthadel.

STREETSLOT: The name for the sunken streets of Urteau. They are really just drained canals. Rather than fill them in, the people of the city walk along their bottoms.

SURVIVOR OF HATHSIN: A cognomen of Kelsier, referring to the fact that he is the only known prisoner to ever escape the prison camps at the Pits of Hathsin.

SYNOD (TERRIS): Once the elite leaders of the Terris Keepers, the entire Synod was attacked and carried off by the Inquisitors. They are presumed dead.

TAP (FERUCHEMICAL): Drawing power from within a Feruchemist's metalminds. It is parallel to the term "burn" used by Allomancers.

TATHINGDWEN: Once capital of the Terris Dominance, Tathingdwen was burned by the Inquisitors during their assault on the Keepers.

TELDEN: One of Elend's old friends, with whom he talked politics and philosophy. Known for being something of a playboy and dandy.

TENSOON: Once Straff Venture's kandra, TenSoon was loaned to Zane for use in spying on Vin. TenSoon killed OreSeur and took his place, acting as Vin's companion. He came to like her, despite his natural inclination to hate all humans, and eventually betrayed Zane—breaking his Contract—to help her. In consequence of this action, he returned to the Homeland to accept punishment from his people. He has the Blessing of Presence, as well as the Blessing of Potency, which he stole from OreSeur.

TERRIS: The dominance in the far north of the Final Empire. During the days of the Lord Ruler, it was the only dominance to retain the name of the kingdom it used to be, perhaps a sign of the Lord Ruler's fondness for his homeland. (Though it was later discovered that the current Dominance of Terris is not actually where the old kingdom stood.) The Terris people abandoned their homeland after the Inquisitor assault a year ago, fleeing to the Central Dominance, where Elend took them in. They now make their home in the valleys surrounding the Pits of Hathsin.

THUG (ALLOMANTIC): A Misting who can burn pewter.

TIN DWYL: A Terris Keeper and a member of the Synod. Once romantically involved with Sazed, Tindwyl was killed during the siege of Luthadel. She was one of Elend's primary teachers in the art of leadership.

TINEYE: A Misting who can burn tin.

TRUSTWARREN: The holiest place in the kandra Homeland.

TYRIAN, MOUNT: The closest of the ashmounts to Luthadel.

UNBIRTHED: *See* Mistwraith.

URTEAU: Capital of the Northern Dominance, and once the seat of House Venture. Now in rebellion, it is ruled by a man known as Quellion the Citizen. Site of a storage cavern.

VALETTE RENOUX: The alias that Vin used when infiltrating noble society during the days before the Collapse.

VEDLEW: A senior elder of the Terris people.

WELL OF ASCENSION: *See* Ascension, Well of.

WELLEN: Also known as Wells. One of Cett's soldiers whom he brought with him into Luthadel during the siege. Wells was the sole survivor of a large group of men who were on watch the night when Vin and Zane assaulted Cett's position.

WORLDBRINGERS: A sect of scholarly Terris Feruchemists before the Collapse, of which Kwaan was a member. The later order of Keepers was based on the Worldbringers.

YEDEN: A member of Kelsier's crew and the skaa rebellion. He was killed during the fight against the Lord Ruler.

YOMEN, LORD ARADAN: An obligator in Urteau who was politically opposed to Cett. A member of the Canton of Resource, Yomen took control of Fadrex—and Cett's kingdom—when Cett left to besiege Luthadel.

## *SUMMARIES OF PREVIOUS BOOKS*

### BOOK ONE

*Mistborn: The Final Empire* introduced the Final Empire, a land ruled over by a powerful immortal known as the Lord Ruler. A thousand years ago, the Lord Ruler took the power at the Well of Ascension and supposedly defeated a powerful force or creature known only as the Deepness.

The Lord Ruler conquered the known world and founded the Final Empire. He ruled for a thousand years, stamping out all remnants of the individual kingdoms, cultures, religions, and languages that used to exist in his land. In their place he set up his own system. Certain peoples were dubbed "skaa," a word that meant something akin to slave or peasant. Other peoples were dubbed nobility, and most of these were descendants of those who had supported the Lord Ruler during his years of conquest. The Lord Ruler had supposedly given them the power of Allomancy in order to gain powerful assassins and warriors with intelligence, as opposed to the brutish koloss, and had used them well in conquering and maintaining his empire.

Skaa and nobility were forbidden to interbreed. During the thousand years of the Lord Ruler's reign, many rebellions occurred among the skaa, but none were successful.

Finally, a half-breed Mistborn known as Kelsier decided to challenge the Lord Ruler. Once the most famous gentleman thief in the Final Empire, Kelsier was known for his daring schemes. Those eventually ended with his capture, however, and he was sent to the Lord Ruler's death camp at the Pits of Hathsin, the secret source of atium.

It was said that nobody ever escaped the Pits of Hathsin alive—but Kelsier did just that. He gained the powers of a Mistborn during that time, and managed to free himself, earning the title "the Survivor of Hathsin." At this point, he turned from his selfish ways and decided to try his most daring plan yet: the overthrow of the Final Empire.

He recruited a team of thieves, mostly half-breed Mistings, to help him achieve his goal. During this time, he also discovered a young half-breed Mistborn girl named Vin. Vin was as yet unaware of her powers, and Kelsier brought her into the crew to train her, theoretically to have someone to whom he could pass his legacy.

Kelsier's crew slowly gathered an underground army of skaa rebels. Despite their progress, the crew began to wonder if Kelsier was setting himself up to be another Lord Ruler. He sought to make himself a legend among the skaa, becoming almost a religious figure to them. At the same time, Vin—who had been raised on the streets by a cruel brother—grew to trust people for the first time in her life. As this happened, Vin began to believe in Kelsier and his purpose.

Even before mastering her Allomantic talents, Vin was used as a spy among the nobility, and was trained to infiltrate their balls and parties playing the part of "Valette Renoux," a young noblewoman from the countryside. During the first of these balls, she met Elend Venture, a young, idealistic nobleman and heir of his house. He eventually convinced her that not all noblemen were deserving of their poor reputation, and the two fell in love, despite Kelsier's best efforts.

The crew also discovered a journal, apparently written by the Lord Ruler himself during the days before the Ascension. This book painted a different picture of the tyrant—it depicted a melancholy, tired man who was trying his best to protect the people against the Deepness, despite the fact that he didn't really understand it.

In the end, it was revealed that Kelsier's plan had been much broader than simply using a skaa army to overthrow the empire. In part the effort to raise troops provided an opportunity to spread rumors about himself. He also used it to train his crew in the arts of leadership and persuasion. The true extent of his plan was revealed when he sacrificed his life in a very visible way, making himself a martyr to the skaa and finally convincing them to rise up and overthrow the Lord Ruler.

One of Kelsier's crewmembers—a man who had been playing the part of "Lord Renoux," Valette's uncle—turned out to be a kandra named OreSeur. OreSeur took on Kelsier's form, then went about creating rumors that Kelsier had returned from the grave, further inspiring the skaa. After this, OreSeur's Contract passed to Vin.

It was Vin who actually killed the Lord Ruler. She discovered that he wasn't actually a god, or even immortal—he had simply found a way to extend his life and his power by using Allomancy and Feruchemy at the same time. He wasn't the hero from the logbook—but, instead, was that man's servant, a Feruchemist of some great power. Still, he was much stronger in Allomancy than Vin. While she was fighting him, she drew upon the mists somehow, burning them in place of metals. She still doesn't know why or how this happened. With that power—and with the knowledge of his true nature—she was able to defeat and kill the Lord Ruler.

The Final Empire was thrown into chaos. Elend Venture took control of Luthadel, the capital, and put Kelsier's crew in prime governmental positions.

## BOOK TWO

The fledgling kingdom managed to survive for a year under Elend's leadership. Elend set up a type of parliament, named the Assembly, and gave them a great deal of power. While Elend showed expertise in the theories of leadership, he lacked practical experience. His rule became unstable as various members of the Assembly began to jockey for power.

Rumors of the Lord Ruler's atium cache—combined with the prize that was Luthadel, the largest city in the empire—eventually drew several predators to the Central Dominance. The worst of these was Straff Venture, Elend's own father. Straff marched a sizable army to Luthadel, secretly bringing with him a Mistborn son, named Zane. Fortunately for Luthadel, Breeze managed to convince a second army—led by Ashweather Cett—to march on the city as well. Surprised by the presence of the other, each tyrant realized that he couldn't afford to attack the city, for afterward he would be vulnerable to the other army. So, they settled down into a siege, more worried about each other than they were about Elend.

About this time, a Keeper named Tindwyl arrived in Luthadel. Sazed invited her to come and help Elend learn to be a better king. She worked with him, trying to teach him to temper his idealism with a measure of realism. Elend convinced the crew to help him play Straff and Cett against each other, with the ultimate goal of getting them to fight. Elend hoped that if the two invaders weakened their armies against one another, his own force—by far the smallest of the three—could defeat the remnants. He began to meet with Straff and Cett, trying to manipulate them. During his maneuvering, however, a faction in the Assembly managed to depose him via a law he himself had written.

Elend refused to use his army to seize back the city, a decision that Tindwyl and the crew thought was foolishly idealistic. Instead, he decided to play the political game and try to convince the Assembly to reinstate him.

During all of this, Vin had troubles of her own. She had discovered a mysterious "mist spirit" that came out at nights, watching her. She noticed that the logbook author—Alendi—had seen a similar manifestation before he arrived at the Well of Ascension. In addition, Vin began to hear strange thumpings when she burned bronze.

Vin's emotions regarding Elend and her own worth to him went through a great deal of turmoil. She loved him, but didn't think that the two of them were right for each other. She worried that she was too brutal, and not enough of a politician, to make him a good wife. Complicating this was Zane, Straff's Mistborn son and Elend's half-brother, who spent many evenings sparring with Vin, tempting her and driving a wedge between her and Elend. Vin began to rely upon the kandra OreSeur, who was—by Elend's order—to remain by her side at all times and watch over her. The two became friends despite their initial dislike for one another.

About this time, Sazed returned to Luthadel, having discovered some very alarming facts during his wanderings. First, it appeared that the mists were beginning to come during the day. Second, the mists were somehow causing people to fall sick and die. Third, there was a large army of koloss marching on Luthadel, led by Jastes Lekal. Sazed began to work on researching these things, along with translating a strange inscription he had discovered in the South while traveling with Marsh. This inscription turned out to record the last words of Kwaan, a scholar who—some thousand years earlier—had been deeply involved with Alendi, Rashek, and the Terris prophecies. Sazed also began to interact with Tindwyl, who disapproved of his rebellious nature, yet harbored some deep feelings for him.

Elend's campaign in the Assembly failed, and they elected Ferson Penrod as their king instead of Elend. Oddly, however, being deposed finally made Elend begin to understand what it meant to be a king and leader. He began to intertwine his philosophies about justice with the things Tindwyl was teaching him, and actually started to become an inspiring and effective leader—even if he no longer held the throne. The city's problems, however, grew even worse as Jastes Lekal's koloss arrived. It quickly became clear that he had only marginal control over the murderous beasts.

Eventually, Zane prompted Vin to assault Cett's base inside of Luthadel. (Cett had entered to make a play for the throne himself.) She and Zane slaughtered their way to the top floor of the keep, where Vin had a breakdown prompted by what she'd just done. She fled, leaving Cett alive. Soon after, Zane attacked her, driven to madness by strange voices in his head. Vin and Zane fought, and OreSeur revealed himself as a spy, another kandra named TenSoon, who had killed and impersonated the real OreSeur. Vin managed to kill Zane, even though he had atium, then she ran to Elend. Her emotional problems in remission, she convinced Sazed to marry Elend and her.

Following his near-assassination, Cett retreated from Luthadel and withdrew his armies from the siege. Elend's attempts to get Jastes to withdraw were unsuccessful. Outside, Straff realized that if he simply pulled back, the koloss would probably attack and destroy the city—leaving

Straff himself to return and take control once the beasts had exhausted themselves in combat.

Many of the crewmembers realized that this was what would happen. Sazed convinced them that they should lie to Vin and Elend, telling them that the city would be safe and sending them north to search for the Well of Ascension. This ploy succeeded. Vin and Elend left, taking Spook with them, and in their absence the koloss finally attacked. The city's army fought well, Sazed himself holding one of the city gates against terrible odds. During the fighting, Clubs, Dockson, and Tindwyl were killed. As the koloss were about to destroy everything, Vin returned to the city, having learned from Spook that she had been deceived.

Vin exploited an Allomantic weakness in the koloss revealed to her by TenSoon/OreSeur the kandra, taking control of the koloss in the same way the Lord Ruler once had. She used those koloss to attack Straff's army when it returned, and she was joined by Cett at the last moment. With Straff dead, Vin forced Penrod, Cett, and Straff's second-in-command to swear allegiance to Elend, naming him emperor.

The city was saved. However, Vin continued to hear the strange thumpings in her mind. She'd become convinced that she—not the ancient man Alendi—was the Hero of Ages. She soon realized that the Well of Ascension wasn't actually in the northern mountains, but instead beneath Luthadel. She and Elend investigated this, discovering that beneath Kredik Shaw, there was a large secret cavern stockpiled with food. Beyond that cavern was another, filled with dark smoke. Beyond that, a pool of glowing power. The Well of Ascension.

Sazed, up above, was still reeling from Tindwyl's death. He had thrown himself into his studies, and discovered—to his alarm—that something was very wrong with the prophecies. He rushed after Vin and Elend, intent on stopping them from taking the power at the Well, but was blocked by Marsh. As the two fought, Vin took the power and did what she thought was the right thing. Though the mist spirit stabbed Elend, Vin didn't use the Well's power to heal him. Instead, she released it as the prophecies said she had to do in order to stop the mists from destroying the world.

She made the wrong choice. A dark force imprisoned near the Well of Ascension had altered the prophecies and led Vin to do what was necessary to release it. The thing burst free, leaving Vin with the horror of what she had done. The mist spirit, however, provided a way for her to save Elend by making him into a Mist-born.

The book ended with Vin and Elend on the walls of Luthadel, having saved the city but also having released a terrible force upon the world. Sazed, crushed by Tindwyl's death, had come to believe that his faith was worthless. Spook was riddled with guilt for abandoning Clubs to die in the city, and both Breeze and Ham bore emotional scars from their seemingly hopeless fight against the koloss. On top of all this, as Sazed had reported, the mists had changed somehow, and they now killed people who went into them.

Elend, however, was determined to consolidate their new empire and find a way to fight the thing that Vin had released. When she asked him what they were going to do now, he had only one answer for her: They were going to survive. No matter what.

One year has passed.

# THE
# ALLOY OF LAW

A MISTBORN NOVEL

BRANDON SANDERSON

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# THE
# ALLOY OF LAW

## A MISTBORN NOVEL

BRANDON SANDERSON

TOR
A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

**FOR JOSHUA BILMES**

*Who is never afraid to tell me what is wrong with a book, then fight for that same book no matter who else gives up on it.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first pitched the idea of later-era Mistborn novels to my editor back in 2006, I believe. It had long been my plan for Scadrial, the planet these books take place upon. I wanted to move away from the idea of fantasy worlds as static places, where millennia would pass and technology would never change. The plan then was for a second epic trilogy set in an urban era, and a third trilogy set in a futuristic era—with Allomancy, Feruchemy, and Hemalurgy being the common threads that tied them together.

This book isn't part of that second trilogy. It's a side deviation, something exciting that grew quite unexpectedly out of my planning for where the world would go. The point of telling you all of this, however, is to explain that it would be impossible to list all of the people who have helped me along the years. Instead, the best I can do is list some of the wonderful people who helped me with this specific book.

Alpha readers included, as always, my agent, Joshua Bilmes, and my editor, Moshe Feder. This book is dedicated to Joshua, actually. Professionally, he's believed in my work longer than anyone outside my writing group. He has been a wonderful resource and a good friend.

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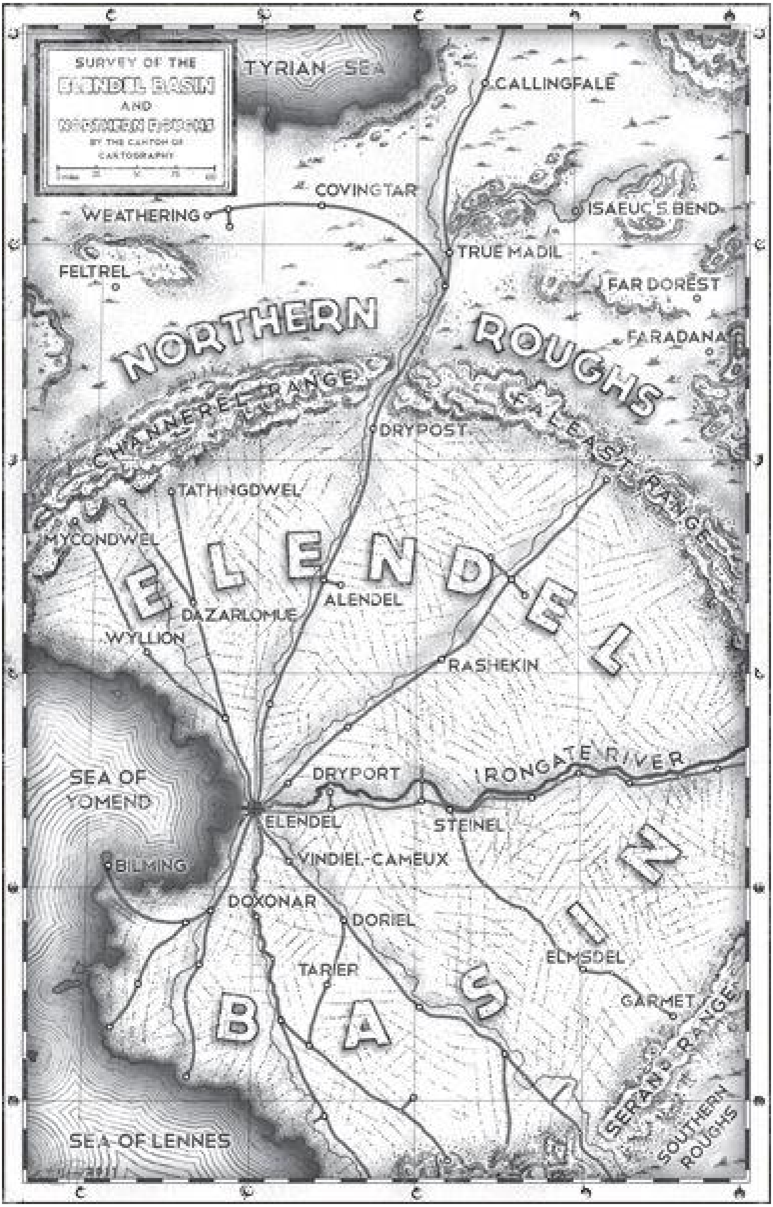
Beta readers included Jeff Creer and Dominique Nolan. A special thanks to Dom for being a resource in regards to weaponry and guns. If you ever need anything shot properly, he's the one to call.

Note the lovely cover by Chris McGrath, whom I asked for specifically because of his work on the Mistborn paperback covers. Both Ben McSweeney and Isaac Stewart returned to provide interior art for this book, as their work on *The Way of Kings* was just plain awesome. They've continued in their awesomeness. Ben also provided

equally awesome illustrations for the recently released Mistborn RPG from Crafty Games. Check it out at crafty-games.com, especially if you're interested in Kelsier's origin story.

Last of all I'd like to once again thank Emily, my wonderful wife, for her support, commentary, and love.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MYCONDWEL
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WYLLION
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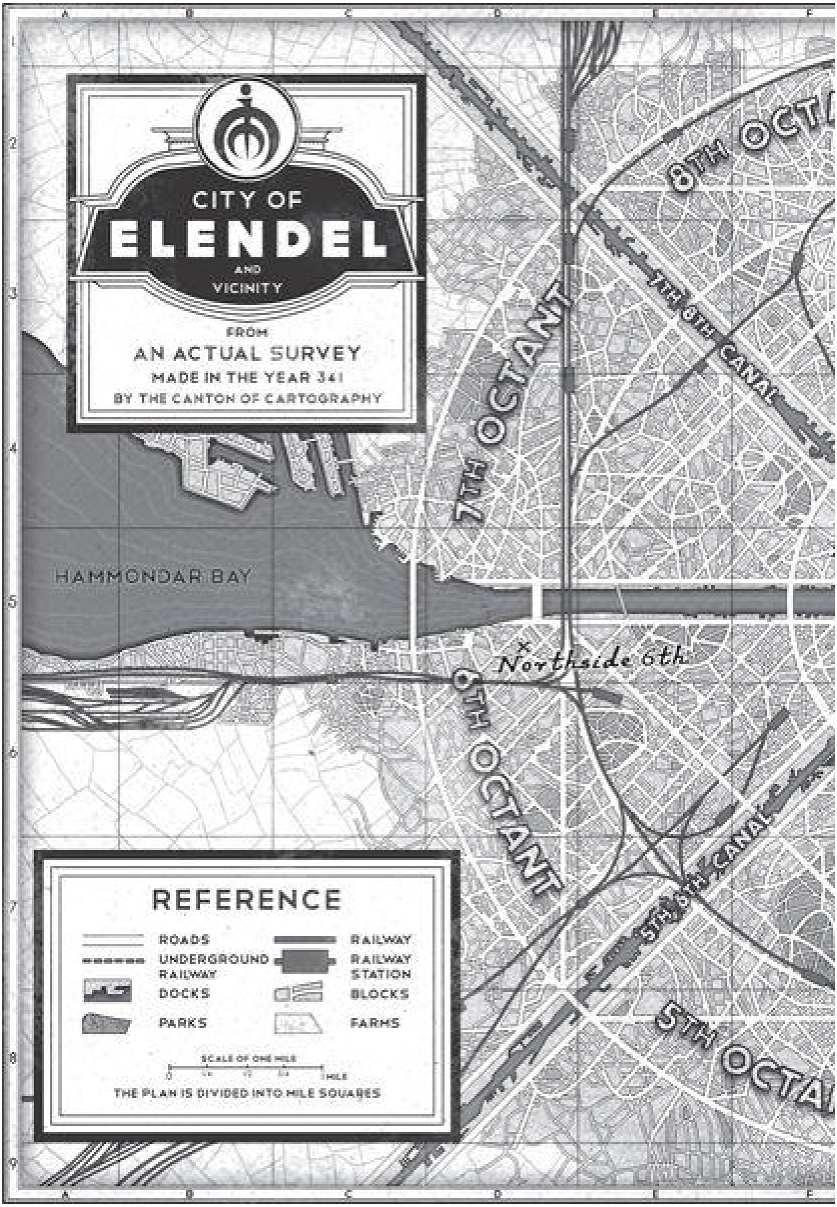
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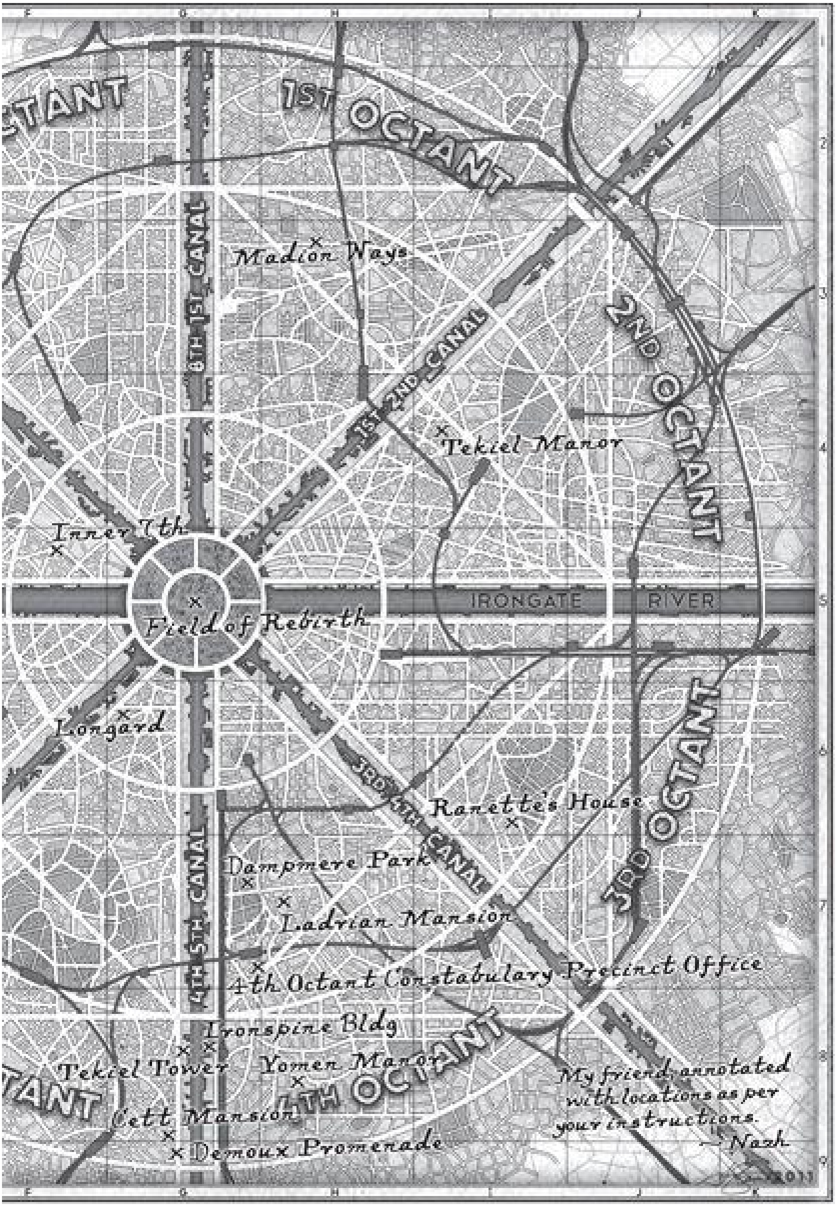
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Ironspine Bldg
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My friend annotated
with locations as per
your instructions.
— Nazh

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# PROLOGUE

Wax crept along the ragged fence in a crouch, his boots scraping the dry ground. He held his Sterrion 36 up by his head, the long, silvery barrel dusted with red clay. The revolver was nothing fancy to look at, though the six-shot cylinder was machined with such care in the steel-alloy frame that there was no play in its movement. There was no gleam to the metal or exotic material on the grip. But it fit his hand like it was meant to be there.

The waist-high fence was flimsy, the wood grayed with time, held together with fraying lengths of rope. It smelled of age. Even the worms had given up on this wood long ago.

Wax peeked up over the knotted boards, scanning the empty town. Blue lines hovered in his vision, extending from his chest to point at nearby sources of metal, a result of his Allomancy. Burning steel did that; it let him see the location of sources of metal, then Push against them if he wanted. His weight against the weight of the item. If it was heavier, he was pushed back. If he was heavier, it was pushed forward.

In this case, however, he didn't Push. He just watched the lines to see if any of the metal was moving. None of it was. Nails holding together buildings, spent shell casings lying scattered in the dust, or horseshoes piled at the silent smithy—all were as motionless as the old hand pump planted in the ground to his right.

Wary, he too remained still. Steel continued to burn comfortably in his stomach, and so—as a precaution—he gently Pushed outward from himself in all directions. It was a trick he'd mastered a few years back; he didn't Push on any specific metal objects, but created a kind of defensive bubble around himself. Any metal that came streaking in his direction would be thrown slightly off course.

It was far from foolproof; he could still get hit. But shots would go wild, not striking where they were aimed. It had saved his life on a couple of occasions. He wasn't even certain how he did it; Allomancy was often an instinctive thing for him. Somehow he even managed to exempt the metal he carried, and didn't Push his own gun from his hands.

That done, he continued along the fence—still watching the metal lines to make sure nobody was sneaking up on him. Feltrel had once been a prosperous town. That had been twenty years back. Then a clan of koloss had taken up residence nearby. Things hadn't gone well.

Today, the dead town seemed completely empty, though he knew it wasn't so. Wax had come here hunting a psychopath. And he wasn't the only one.

He grabbed the top of the fence and hopped over, feet grinding red clay. Crouching low, he ran in a squat over to the side of the old blacksmith's forge. His clothing was terribly dusty, but well tailored: a fine suit, a silver cravat at the neck, twinkling cuff links on the sleeves of his fine white shirt. He had cultivated a look that appeared out of place, as if he were planning to attend a fine ball back in Elendel rather than scrambling through a dead town in the Roughs hunting a murderer. Completing the ensemble, he wore a bowler hat on his head to keep off the sun.

A sound; someone stepped on a board across the street, making it creak. It was so faint, he almost missed it. Wax reacted immediately, flaring the steel that burned inside his stomach. He Pushed on a group of nails in the wall beside him just as the crack of a gunshot split the air.

His sudden Push caused the wall to rattle, the old rusty nails straining in their places. His Push shoved him to the side, and he rolled across the ground. A blue line appeared for an eyeblink—the bullet, which hit the ground where he had been a moment before. As he came up from his roll, a second shot followed. This one came close, but bent just a hair out of the way as it neared him.

Deflected by his steel bubble, the bullet zipped past his ear. Another inch to the right, and he'd have gotten it in the forehead—steel bubble or no. Breathing calmly, he raised his Sterrion and sighted on the balcony of the old hotel across the street, where the shot had come from. The balcony was fronted by the hotel's sign, capable of hiding a gunman.

Wax fired, then Pushed on the bullet, slamming it forward with extra thrust to make it faster and more penetrating. He wasn't using typical lead or copper-jacketed lead bullets; he needed something stronger.

The large-caliber steel-jacketed bullet hit the balcony, and his extra power caused it to puncture the wood and hit the man behind. The blue line leading to the man's gun quivered as he fell. Wax stood up slowly, brushing the dust from his clothing. At that moment another shot cracked in the air.

He cursed, reflexively Pushing against the nails again, though his instincts told him he'd be too late. By the time he heard a shot, it was too late for Pushing to help.

This time he was thrown to the ground. That force had to go somewhere, and if the nails couldn't move, he had to. He grunted as he hit and raised his revolver, dust sticking to the sweat on his hand. He searched frantically for the one who'd fired at him. They'd missed. Perhaps the steel bubble had—

A body rolled off the top of the blacksmith's shop and thumped down to the ground with a puff of red dust. Wax blinked, then raised his gun to chest level and moved over behind the fence again, crouching down for cover. He kept an eye on the blue Allomantic lines. They could warn him if someone got close, but only if the person was carrying or wearing metal.

The body that had fallen beside the building didn't have a single line pointing to it. However, another set of quivering lines pointed to something moving along the back of the forge. Wax leveled his gun, taking aim as a figure ducked around the side of the building and ran toward him.

The woman wore a white duster, reddened at the bottom. She kept her dark hair pulled back in a tail, and wore trousers and a wide belt, with thick boots on her feet. She had a squarish face. A strong face, with lips that often rose slightly at the right side in a half smile.

Wax heaved a sigh of relief and lowered his gun. "Lessie."

"You knock yourself to the ground again?" she asked as she reached the cover of the fence beside him. "You've got more dust on your face than Miles has scowls. Maybe it's time for you to retire, old man."

"Lessie, I'm *three months* older than you are."

"Those are a long three months." She peeked up over the fence. "Seen anyone else?"

"I dropped a man up on the balcony," Wax said. "I couldn't see if it was Bloody Tan or not."

"It wasn't," she said. "He wouldn't have tried to shoot you from so far away."

Wax nodded. Tan liked things personal. Up close. The psychopath lamented when he had to use a gun, and he rarely shot someone without being able to see the fear in their eyes.

Lessie scanned the quiet town, then glanced at him, ready to move. Her eyes flickered downward for a moment. Toward his shirt pocket.

Wax followed her gaze. A letter was peeking out of his pocket, delivered earlier that day. It was from the grand city of Elendel, and was addressed to Lord Waxillium Ladrian. A name Wax hadn't used in years. A name that felt wrong to him now.

He tucked the letter farther into his pocket. Lessie thought it implied more than it did. The city didn't hold anything for him now, and House Ladrian would get along without him. He really should have burned that letter.

Wax nodded toward the fallen man beside the wall to distract her from the letter. “Your work?”

“He had a bow,” she said. “Stone arrowheads. Almost had you from above.”

“Thanks.”

She shrugged, eyes glittering in satisfaction. Those eyes now had lines at the sides of them, weathered by the Roughs’ harsh sunlight. There had been a time when she and Wax had kept a tally of who had saved the other most often. They’d both lost track years ago.

“Cover me,” Wax said softly.

“With what?” she asked. “Paint? Kisses? You’re already covered with dust.”

Wax raised an eyebrow at her.

“Sorry,” she said, grimacing. “I’ve been playing cards too much with Wayne lately.”

He snorted and ran in a crouch to the fallen corpse and rolled it over. The man had been a cruel-faced fellow with several days of stubble on his cheeks; the bullet wound bled out his right side. *I think I recognize him,* Wax thought to himself as he went through the man’s pockets and came out with a drop of red glass, colored like blood.

He hurried back to the fence.

“Well?” Lessie asked.

“Donal’s crew,” Wax said, holding up the drop of glass.

“Bastards,” Lessie said. “They couldn’t just leave us to it, could they?”

“You *did* shoot his son, Lessie.”

“And you shot his brother.”

“Mine was self-defense.”

“Mine was too,” she said. “That kid was *annoying*. Besides, he survived.”

“Missing a toe.”

“You don’t need ten,” she said. “I have a cousin with four. She does just fine.” She raised her revolver, scanning the empty town. “Of course, she does look kind of ridiculous. Cover me.”

“With what?”

She just grinned and ducked out from behind the cover, scrambling across the ground toward the smithy.

*Harmony,* Wax thought with a smile, *I love that woman.*

He watched for more gunmen, but Lessie reached the building without any further shots being fired. Wax nodded to her, then dashed across the street toward the hotel. He ducked inside, checking the corners for foes. The taproom was empty, so he took cover beside the doorway, waving toward Lessie. She ran down to the next building on her side of the street and checked it out.

Donal's crew. Yes, Wax had shot his brother—the man had been robbing a railway car at the time. From what he understood, though, Donal hadn't ever cared for his brother. No, the only thing that riled Donal was losing money, which was probably why he was here. He'd put a price on Bloody Tan's head for stealing a shipment of his bendalloy. Donal probably hadn't expected Wax to come hunting Tan the same day he did, but his men had standing orders to shoot Wax or Lessie if seen.

Wax was half tempted to leave the dead town and let Donal and Tan have at it. The thought of it made his eye twitch, though. He'd promised to bring Tan in. That was that.

Lessie waved from the inside of her building, then pointed toward the back. She was going to go out in that direction and creep along behind the next set of buildings. Wax nodded, then made a curt gesture. He'd try to hook up with Wayne and Barl, who had gone to check the other side of the town.

Lessie vanished, and Wax picked his way through the old hotel toward a side door. He passed old, dirty nests made by both rats and men. The town picked up miscreants the way a dog picked up fleas. He even passed a place where it looked like some wayfarer had made a small firepit on a sheet of metal with a ring of rocks. It was a wonder the fool hadn't burned the entire building to the ground.

Wax eased open the side door and stepped into an alleyway between the hotel and the store beside it. The gunshots earlier would have been heard, and someone might come looking. Best to stay out of sight.

Wax edged around the back of the store, stepping quietly across the red clay ground. The hillside here was overgrown with weeds except for the entrance to an old cold cellar. Wax wound around it, then paused, eyeing the wood-framed pit.

Maybe …

He knelt beside the opening, peering down. There had been a ladder here once, but it had rotted away—the remnants were visible below in a pile of old splinters. The air smelled musty and wet … with a hint of smoke. Someone had been burning a torch down there.

Wax dropped a bullet into the hole, then leaped in, gun out. As he fell, he filled his iron metalmind, decreasing his weight. He was Twinborn—a Feruchemist as well as an Allomancer. His Allomantic power was Steelpushing, and his Feruchemical power, called Skimming, was the ability to grow heavier or lighter. It was a powerful combination of talents.

He Pushed against the round below him, slowing his fall so that he landed softly. He returned his weight to normal—or, well, normal for him. He often went about at three-quarters of his unadjusted weight, making himself lighter on his feet, quicker to react.

He crept through the darkness. It had been a long, difficult road, finding where Bloody Tan was hiding. In the end, the fact that Feltrel had suddenly emptied of other bandits, wanderers, and unfortunates had been a major clue. Wax stepped softly, working his way deeper into the cellar. The scent of smoke was stronger here, and though the light was fading, he made out a firepit beside the earthen wall. That and a ladder that could be moved into place at the entrance.

That gave him pause. It indicated that whoever was making their hideout in the cellar—it could be Tan, or it could be someone else entirely—was still down here. Unless there was another way out. Wax crept forward a little farther, squinting in the dark.

There was light ahead.

Wax cocked his gun softly, then drew a little vial out of his mistcoat and pulled the cork with his teeth. He downed the whiskey and steel in one shot, restoring his reserves. He flared his steel. Yes … there was metal ahead of him, down the tunnel. How long was this cellar? He had assumed it would be small, but the reinforcing wood timbers indicated something deeper, longer. More like a mine adit.

He crept forward, focused on those metal lines. Someone would have to aim a gun if they saw him, and the metal would quiver, giving him a chance to Push the weapon out of their hands. Nothing moved. He slid forward, smelling musty damp soil, fungus, potatoes left to bud. He approached a trembling light, but could hear nothing. The metal lines did not move.

Finally, he got close enough to make out a lamp hanging by a hook on a wooden beam near the wall. Something else hung at the center of the tunnel. A body? Hanged? Wax cursed softly and hurried forward, wary of a trap. It *was* a corpse, but it left him baffled. At first glance, it seemed years old. The eyes were gone from the skull, the skin pulled back against the bone. It didn't stink, and wasn't bloated.

He thought he recognized it. Geormin, the coachman who brought mail into Weathering from the more distant villages around the area. That was his uniform, at least, and it seemed like his hair. He'd been one of Tan's first victims, the disappearance that sent Wax hunting. That had only been two months back.

*He's been mummified,* Wax thought. *Prepared and dried like leather.* He felt revolted—he'd gone drinking with Geormin on occasion, and though the man cheated at cards, he'd been an amiable enough fellow.

The hanging wasn't an ordinary one, either. Wires had been used to prop up Geormin's arms so they were out to the sides, his head cocked, his mouth pried open. Wax turned away from the gruesome sight, his eye twitching.

*Careful,* he told himself. *Don't let him anger you. Keep focused.* He would be back to cut Geormin down. Right now, he couldn't afford to make the noise. At least he knew he was on the right track. This was certainly Bloody Tan's lair.

There was another patch of light in the distance. How long *was* this tunnel? He approached the pool of light, and here found another corpse, this one hung on the wall sideways. Annarel, a visiting geologist who had vanished soon after Geormin. Poor woman. She'd been dried in the same manner, body spiked to the wall in a very specific pose, as if she were on her knees inspecting a pile of rocks.

Another pool of light drew him onward. Clearly this wasn't a cellar—it was probably some kind of smuggling tunnel left over from the days when Feltrel had been a booming town. Tan hadn't built this, not with those aged wooden supports.

Wax passed another six corpses, each lit by its own glowing lantern, each arranged in some kind of pose. One sat in a chair, another strung up as if flying, a few stuck to the wall. The later ones were more fresh, the last one recently killed. Wax didn't recognize the slender man, who hung with hand to his head in a salute.

*Rust and Ruin,* Wax thought. *This isn't Bloody Tan's lair … it's his gallery.*

Sickened, Wax made his way to the next pool of light. This one was different. Brighter. As he approached, he realized that he was seeing sunlight streaming down from a square cut in the ceiling. The tunnel led up to it, probably to a former trapdoor that had rotted or broken away. The ground sloped in a gradual slant up to the hole.

Wax crawled up the slope, then cautiously poked his head out. He'd come up in a building, though the roof was gone. The brick walls were mostly intact, and there were four altars in the front, just to Wax's left. An old chapel to the Survivor. It seemed empty.

Wax crawled out of the hole, his Sterrion at the side of his head, coat marred by dirt from below. The clean, dry air smelled good to him.

"Each life is a performance," a voice said, echoing in the ruined church.

Wax immediately ducked to the side, rolling up to an altar.

"But we are not the performers," the voice continued. "We are the puppets."

"Tan," Wax said. "Come out."

"I have seen God, lawkeeper," Tan whispered. Where was he? "I have seen Death himself, with the nails in his eyes. I have seen the Survivor, who is life."

Wax scanned the small chapel. It was cluttered with broken benches and fallen statues. He rounded the side of the altar, judging the sound to come from the back of the room.

"Other men wonder," Tan's voice said, "but I know. I know I'm a puppet. We all are. Did you like my show? I worked so hard to build it."

Wax continued along the building's right wall, his boots leaving a trail in the dust. He breathed shallowly, a line of sweat creeping down his right temple. His eye was twitching. He saw corpses on the walls in his mind's eye.

"Many men never get a chance to create true art," Tan said. "And the best performances are those which can never be reproduced. Months, years, spent preparing. Everything placed right. But at the end of the day, the rotting will begin. I couldn't truly mummify them; I hadn't the time or resources. I could only preserve them long enough to prepare for this one show. Tomorrow, it will be ruined. You were the only one to see it. Only you. I figure … we're all just puppets … you see…"

The voice *was* coming from the back of the room, near some rubble that was blocking Wax's view.

"Someone else moves us," Tan said.

Wax ducked around the side of the rubble, raising his Sterrion.

Tan stood there, holding Lessie in front of him, her mouth gagged, her eyes wide. Wax froze in place, gun raised. Lessie was bleeding from her leg and her arm. She'd been shot, and her face was growing pale. She'd lost blood. That was how Tan had been able to overpower her.

Wax grew still. He didn't feel anxiety. He couldn't afford to; it might make him shake, and shaking might make him miss. He could see Tan's face behind Lessie; the man held a garrote around her neck.

Tan was a slender, fine-fingered man. He'd been a mortician. Black hair, thinning, worn greased back. A nice suit that now shone with blood.

"Someone else moves us, lawman," Tan said softly.

Lessie met Wax's eyes. They both knew what to do in this situation. Last time, he'd been the one captured. People always tried to use them against each other. In Lessie's opinion, that wasn't a disadvantage. She'd have explained that if Tan *hadn't* known the two of them were a couple, he'd have killed her right off. Instead, he'd kidnapped her. That gave them a chance to get out.

Wax sighted down the barrel of his Sterrion. He drew in the trigger until he balanced the weight of the sear right on the edge of firing, and Lessie blinked. One. Two. Three.

Wax fired.

In the same instant, Tan yanked Lessie to the right.

The shot broke the air, echoing against clay bricks. Lessie's head jerked back as Wax's bullet took her just above the right eye. Blood sprayed against the clay wall beside her. She crumpled.

Wax stood, frozen, horrified. *No … that isn't the way … it can't …*

"The best performances," Tan said, smiling and looking down at Lessie's figure, "are those that can only be performed once."

Wax shot him in the head.

# 1

Five months later, Wax walked through the decorated rooms of a large, lively party, passing men in dark suits with tailcoats and women in colorful dresses with narrow waists and lots of folds through long pleated skirts. They called him “Lord Waxillium” or “Lord Ladrian” when they spoke to him.

He nodded to each, but avoided being drawn into conversation. He deliberately made his way to one of the back rooms of the party, where dazzling electric lights—the talk of the city—produced a steady, too-even light to ward off the evening’s gloom. Outside the windows, he could see mist tickling the glass.

Defying decorum, Wax pushed his way through the room’s enormous glass double doors and stepped out onto the mansion’s grand balcony. There, finally, he felt like he could breathe again.

He closed his eyes, taking the air in and out, feeling the faint wetness of the mists on the skin of his face. *Buildings are so … suffocating here in the city,* he thought. *Have I simply forgotten about that, or did I not notice it when I was younger?*

He opened his eyes, and rested his hands on the balcony railing to look out over Elendel. It was the grandest city in all the world, a metropolis designed by Harmony himself. The place of Wax’s youth. A place that hadn’t been his home for twenty years.

Though it had been five months since Lessie’s death, he could still hear the gunshot, see the blood sprayed on the bricks. He had left the Roughs, moved back to the city, answering the desperate summons to do his duty to his house at his uncle’s passing.

Five months and a world away, and he could still hear that gunshot. Crisp, clean, like the sky cracking.

Behind him, he could hear musical laughter coming from the warmth of the room. Cett Mansion was a grand place, full of expensive woods, soft carpets, and sparkling chandeliers. No one joined him on the balcony.

From this vantage, he had a perfect view of the lights down Demoux Promenade. A double row of bright electric lamps with a steady, blazing whiteness. They glowed like bubbles along the wide boulevard, which was flanked by the even wider canal, the still and quiet waters reflecting the light. An evening railway engine called a greeting as it chugged through the distant center of the city, hemming the mists with darker smoke.

Down Demoux Promenade, Wax had a good view of both the Ironspine Building and Tekiel Tower, one on either side of the canal. Both were unfinished, but their steelwork lattices already rose high into the sky. Mind-numbingly high.

The architects continued to release updated reports of how high they intended to go, each one trying to outdo the other. Rumors he'd heard at this very party, credible ones, claimed that both would eventually top out at over fifty stories. Nobody knew which would end up proving the taller, though friendly wagers were common.

Wax breathed in the mists. Out in the Roughs, Cett Mansion—which was three stories high—would have been as tall as a building got. Here, it felt dwarfed. The world had gone and changed on him during his years out of the city. It had grown up, inventing lights that needed no fire to glow and buildings that threatened to rise higher than the mists themselves. Looking down that wide street at the edge of the Fifth Octant, Wax suddenly felt very, very old.

"Lord Waxillium?" a voice asked from behind.

He turned to find an older woman, Lady Aving Cett, peeking out the door at him. Her gray hair was up in a bun and she wore rubies at her neck. "By Harmony, my good man. You'll take a chill out here! Come, there are some people you will wish to meet."

"I'll be along presently, my lady," Wax said. "I'm just getting a little air."

Lady Cett frowned, but retreated. She didn't know what to make of him; none of them did. Some saw him as a mysterious scion of the Ladrian family, associated with strange stories of the realms beyond the mountains. The rest assumed him to be an uncultured, rural buffoon. He figured he was probably both.

He'd been on show all night. He was *supposed* to be looking for a wife, and pretty much everyone knew it. House Ladrian was insolvent following his uncle's imprudent management, and the easiest path to solvency was marriage. Unfortunately, his uncle had *also* managed to offend three-quarters of the city's upper crust.

Wax leaned forward on the balcony, the Sterrion revolvers under his arms jabbing his sides. With their long barrels, they weren't meant to be carried in underarm holsters. They had been awkward all night.

He should be getting back to the party to chat and try to repair House Ladrian's reputation. But the thought of that crowded room, so hot, so close, sweltering, making it difficult to breathe.…

Giving himself no time to reconsider, he swung off over the side of the balcony and began falling three stories toward the ground. He burned steel, then dropped a spent bullet casing slightly behind himself and Pushed against it; his weight sent it speeding down to the earth faster than he fell. As always, thanks to his Feruchemy, he was lighter than he should have been. He hardly knew anymore what it felt like to go around at his full weight.

When the casing hit the ground, he Pushed against it and sent himself horizontally in a leap over the garden wall. With one hand on its stone top, he vaulted out of the garden, then reduced his weight to a fraction of normal as he fell down the other side. He landed softly.

*Ah, good,* he thought, crouching down and peering through the mists. *The coachmen's yard.* The vehicles everyone had used to get there were arranged here in neat rows, the coachmen themselves chatting in a few cozy rooms that spilled orange light into the mists. No electric lights here; just good, warmth-giving hearths.

He walked among the carriages until he found his own, then opened the trunk strapped to the back.

Off came his gentleman's fine dinner coat. Instead he threw on his mistcoat, a long, enveloping garment like a duster with a thick collar and cuffed sleeves. He slipped a shotgun into its pocket on the inside, then buckled on his gun belt and moved the Sterrions into the holsters at his hips.

*Ah,* he thought. *Much better.* He really needed to stop carrying the Sterrions and get some more practical weapons for concealment. Unfortunately, he'd never found anything as good as Ranette's work. Hadn't she moved to the city, though? Perhaps he could look her up and talk her into making him something. Assuming she didn't shoot him on sight.

A few moments later, he was running through the city, the mistcoat light upon his back. He left it open at the front, revealing his black shirt and gentleman's trousers. The ankle-length mistcoat had been divided into strips from just above the waist, the tassels streaming behind him with a faint rustle.

He dropped a bullet casing and launched himself high into the air, landing atop the building across the street from the mansion. He glanced back at it, the windows ablaze in the evening dark. What kind of rumors was he going to start, vanishing from the balcony like that?

Well, they already knew he was Twinborn—that was a matter of public record. His disappearance wasn't going to do much to help patch his family's reputation. For the moment, he didn't care. He'd spent almost every evening since his return to the city at one social function or another, and they hadn't had a misty night in weeks.

He needed the mists. This was who he was.

Wax dashed across the rooftop and leaped off, moving toward Demoux Promenade. Just before hitting the ground, he flipped a spent casing down and Pushed on it, slowing his descent. He landed in a patch of decorative shrubs that caught his coat tassels and made a rustling noise.

*Damn.* Nobody planted decorative shrubs out in the Roughs. He pulled himself free, wincing at the noise. A few weeks in the city, and he was already getting rusty?

He shook his head and Pushed himself into the air again, moving out over the wide boulevard and parallel canal. He angled his flight so he crested that and landed on one of the new electric lamps. There was one nice thing about a modern city like this; it had a *lot* of metal.

He smiled, then flared his steel and Pushed off the top of the streetlamp, sending himself in a wide arc through the air. Mist streamed past him, swirling as the wind rushed against his face. It was thrilling. A man never truly felt free until he'd thrown off gravity's chains and sought the sky.

As he crested his arc, he Pushed against another streetlight, throwing himself farther forward. The long row of metal poles was like his own personal railway line. He bounded onward, his antics drawing attention from those in passing carriages, both horse-drawn and horseless.

He smiled. Coinshots like himself were relatively rare, but Elendel was a major city with an enormous population. He wouldn't be the first man these people had seen bounding by metal through the city. Coinshots often acted as high-speed couriers in Elendel.

The city's size still astonished him. Millions lived here, maybe as many as *five* million. Nobody had a sure count across all of its wards—they were called octants, and as one might expect, there were eight of them.

Millions; he couldn't picture that, though he'd grown up here. Before he'd left Weathering, he'd been starting to think it was getting too big, but there couldn't have been ten thousand people in the town.

He landed atop a lamp directly in front of the massive Ironspine Building. He craned his neck, looking up through the mists at the towering structure. The unfinished top was lost in the darkness. Could he climb something so high? He couldn't Pull on metals, only Push—he wasn't some mythological Mistborn from the old stories, like the Survivor or the Ascendant Warrior. One Allomantic power, one Feruchemical power, that was all a man could have. In fact, having just one was a rare privilege—being Twinborn like Wax was truly exceptional.

Wayne claimed to have memorized the names of all of the different possible combinations of Twinborn. Of course, Wayne also claimed to have once stolen a horse that belched in perfect musical notes, so one learned to take what he said with a pinch of copper. Wax honestly didn't pay attention to all of the definitions and names for Twinborn; he was called a Crasher, the mix of a Coinshot and a Skimmer. He rarely bothered to think of himself that way.

He began to fill his metalminds—the iron bracers he wore on his upper arms—draining himself of more weight, making himself even lighter. That weight would be stored away for future use. Then, ignoring the more cautious part of his mind, he flared his steel and *Pushed.*

He shot upward. The wind became a roar, and the lamp was a good anchor—lots of metal, firmly attached to the ground—capable of pushing him quite high. He'd angled slightly, and the building's stories became a blur in front of him. He landed about twenty stories up, just as his Push on the lamp was reaching its limit.

This portion of the building had been finished already, the exterior made of a molded material that imitated worked stone. Ceramics, he'd heard. It was a common practice for tall buildings, where the lower levels would be actual stone, but the higher reaches would use something lighter.

He grabbed hold of an outcropping. He wasn't so light that the wind could push him away—not with his metalminds on his forearms and the weapons he wore. His lighter body did make it easier to hold himself in place.

Mist swirled beneath him. It seemed almost playful. He looked upward, deciding his next step. His steel revealed lines of blue to nearby sources of metal, many of which were the structure's frame. Pushing on any of them would send him away from the building.

*There,* he thought, noting a decent-sized ledge about five feet up. He climbed up the side of the building, gloved fingers sure on the complexly ornamented surface. A Coinshot quickly learned not to fear heights. He hoisted himself up onto the ledge, then dropped a bullet casing, stopping it with his booted foot.

He looked upward, judging his trajectory. He drew a vial from his belt, then uncorked it and downed the liquid and steel shavings inside it. He hissed through his teeth as the whiskey burned his throat. Good stuff, from Stagin's still. *Damn, I'm going to miss that when my stock runs out,* he thought, tucking the vial away.

Most Allomancers didn't use whiskey in their metal vials. Most Allomancers were missing out on a perfect opportunity. He smiled as his internal steel reserves were restored; then he flared the metal and launched himself.

He flew up into the night sky. Unfortunately, the Ironspine was built in set-back tiers, the upper stories growing progressively narrower as you went higher. That meant that even though he Pushed himself directly up, he was soon soaring in open darkness, mists around him, the building's side a good ten feet away.

Wax reached into his coat and removed his short-barreled shotgun from the long, sleevelike pocket inside. He turned—pointing it outward—braced it against his side, and fired.

He was light enough that the kick flung him toward the building. The boom of the blast echoed below, but he had spray shot in the shells, too small and light to hurt anyone when it fell dispersed from such a height.

He slammed into the wall of the tower five stories above where he'd been, and grabbed hold of a spikelike protrusion. The decoration up here really was marvelous. Who did they think would be looking at it? He shook his head. Architects were curious types. Not practical at all, like a good gunsmith. Wax climbed to another shelf and jumped upward again.

The next jump was enough to get him to the open steelwork lattice of the unfinished upper floors. He strolled across a girder, then shimmied up a vertical member—his reduced weight making it easy—and climbed atop the very tallest of the beams jutting from the top of the building.

The height was dizzying. Even with the mists obscuring the landscape, he could see the double row of lights illuminating the street below. Other lights glowed more softly across the town, like the floating candles of a seafarer's ocean burial. Only the absence of lights allowed him to pick out the various parks and the bay far to the west.

Once, this city had felt like home. That was before he'd spent twenty years living out in the dust, where the law was sometimes a distant memory and people considered carriages a frivolity. What would Lessie have thought of one of these horseless contraptions, with the thin wheels meant for driving on a city's fine paved streets? Vehicles that ran on oil and grease, not hay and horseshoes?

He turned about on his perch. It was difficult to judge locations in the dark and the mists, but he did have the advantage of a youth spent in this section of the city. Things had changed, but not *that* much. He judged the direction, checked his steel reserves, then launched himself out into the darkness.

He shot outward in a grand arc above the city, flying for a good half a minute on the Push off those enormous girders. The skyscraper became a shadowed silhouette behind him, then vanished. Eventually, his impetus ran out, and he dropped back through the mists. He let himself fall, quiet. When the lights grew close—and he could see that nobody was below him—he pointed his shotgun at the ground and pulled the trigger.

The jolt punched him upward for a moment, slowing his descent. He Pushed off the birdshot in the ground to slow him further; he landed easily in a soft crouch. He noticed with dissatisfaction that he'd all but ruined some good paving stones with the shot.

*Harmony!* he thought. This place really was going to take some getting used to. *I'm like a horse blundering through a narrow marketplace,* he thought, hooking his shotgun back under his coat. *I need to learn more finesse.* Out in the Roughs, he'd been considered a refined gentleman. Here, if he didn't watch himself, he'd soon prove himself to be the uncultured brute that most of the nobility already assumed that he was. It—

Gunfire.

Wax responded immediately. He Pushed himself sideways off an iron gate, then ducked in a roll. He came up and reached for a Sterrion with his right hand, his left steadying the shotgun in its sleeve in his coat.

He peered into the night. Had his thoughtless shotgun blasts drawn the attention of the local constables? The guns fired again, and he frowned. *No. Those are too distant. Something's happening.*

This actually gave him a thrill. He leaped into the air and down the street, Pushing off that same gate to get height. He landed atop a building; this area was filled with three- and four-story apartment structures that had narrow alleyways between. How could people live without any space around them? He'd have gone mad.

He crossed a few buildings—it was handy that the rooftops were flat—and then stopped to listen. His heart beat excitedly, and he realized he'd been hoping for something like this. It was why he'd been driven to leave the party, to seek out the skyscraper and climb it, to run through the mists. Back in Weathering, as the town grew larger, he'd often patrolled at night, watching for trouble.

He fingered his Sterrion as another shot was fired, closer this time. He judged his distance, then dropped a bullet casing and Pushed himself into the air. He'd restored his weight to three-quarters and left it there. You needed some weight on you to fight effectively.

The mists swirled and spun, teasing him. One could never tell which nights would bring out the mists; they didn't conform to normal weather patterns. A night could be humid and chill, and yet not a wisp of mists would appear. Another night could begin dry as brittle leaves, but the mists would consume it.

They were thin this night, and so visibility was still good. Another crack broke the silence. *There,* Wax thought. Steel burning with a comfortable warmth within him, he leaped over another street in a flurry of mistcoat tassels, spinning mist, and calling wind.

He landed softly, then raised his gun in front of him as he ran in a crouch across the roof. He reached the edge and looked down. Just below him, someone had taken refuge behind a pile of boxes near the mouth of an alley. In the dark, misty night, Wax couldn't make out many details, but the person was armed with a rifle resting on a box. The barrel was pointed toward a group of people down the street who wore the distinctive domed hats of city constables.

Wax Pushed out lightly from himself in all directions, setting up his steel bubble. A latch on a trapdoor at his feet rattled as his Allomancy affected it. He peered down at the man firing upon the constables. It would be good to do something of actual value in this city, rather than just standing around chatting with the overdressed and the overprivileged.

He dropped a bullet casing, and his Allomancy pressed it down onto the rooftop beneath him. He Pushed more forcefully on it, launching himself up and through the swirling mists. He decreased his weight dramatically and pushed on a window latch as he fell, positioning himself so he landed right in the middle of the alleyway.

With his steel, he could see lines pointing toward four different figures in front of him. Even as he landed—the men muttering curses and spinning toward him—he raised his Sterrion and sighted on the first of the street thugs. The man had a patchy beard and eyes as dark as the night itself.

Wax heard a woman whimpering.

He froze, hand steady, but unable to move. The memories, so carefully dammed up in his head, crashed through and flooded his mind. Lessie, held with a garrote around her neck. A single shot. Blood on the redbrick walls.

The street thug jerked his rifle toward Wax and fired. The steel bubble barely deflected it, and the bullet tugged through the fabric of Wax's coat, just missing his ribs.

He tried to fire, but that whimpering …

*Oh, Harmony,* he thought, appalled at himself. He pointed his gun downward and fired into the ground, then Pushed on the bullet and threw himself backward, up out of the alleyway.

Bullets pierced the mists all around him. Steel bubble or not, he should have fallen to one of them. It was pure luck that saved his life as he landed on another roof and rolled to a stop, prone, protected from the gunfire by a parapet wall.

Wax gasped for breath, hand on his revolver. *Idiot,* he thought to himself. *Fool.* He'd never frozen in combat before, even when he'd been green. *Never.* This, however, was the first time he'd tried to shoot someone since the disaster in the ruined church.

He wanted to duck away in shame, but he gritted his teeth and crawled forward to the edge of the roof. The men were still down there. He could see them better now, gathering and preparing to make a run for it. They probably wanted nothing to do with an Allomancer.

He aimed at the apparent leader. However, before Wax could fire, the man fell to gunfire from the constables. In moments, the alleyway swarmed with men in uniforms. Wax raised his Sterrion beside his head, breathing deeply.

*I could have fired that time,* he told himself. *It was just that one moment where I froze. It wouldn't have happened again.* He told himself this several times as the constables pulled the malefactors out of the alley one at a time.

There was no woman. The whimpering he'd heard had been a gang member who'd taken a bullet before Wax arrived. The man was still groaning in pain as they took him away.

The constables hadn't seen Wax. He turned and disappeared into the night.

* * *

A short time later, Wax arrived at Ladrian Mansion. His residence in the city, his ancestral home. He didn't feel like he belonged there, but he used it anyway.

The stately home lacked expansive grounds, though it did have four elegant stories, with balconies and a nice patio garden out back. Wax dropped a coin and bounded over the front fence, landing atop the gatehouse. *My carriage is back,* he noticed. Not surprising. They were getting used to him; he wasn't certain whether to be pleased by that or ashamed of it.

He Pushed off the gates—which rattled at the weight—and landed on a fourth-story balcony. Coinshots had to learn precision, unlike their cousin Allomancers, Ironpullers—also known as Lurchers. Those would just pick a target and Pull themselves toward it, but they usually had to grind up the side of a building, making noise. Coinshots had to be delicate, careful, accurate.

The window was unlatched; he'd left it that way. He didn't fancy dealing with people at the moment; his abortive confrontation with the criminals had rattled him. He slipped into the darkened room, then padded across it and listened at the door. No sounds in the hallway. He opened the door silently, then moved out.

The hallway was dark, and he was no Tineye, capable of enhancing his senses. He felt his way with each step, being careful not to trip on the edge of a rug or bump into a pedestal.

His rooms were at the end of the hallway. He reached for the brass knob with gloved fingers. Excellent. He carefully pushed the door open, stepping into his bedroom. Now he just had to—

A door opened on the other side of his room, letting in bright yellow light. Wax froze in place, though his hand quickly reached into his coat for one of his Sterrions.

An aging man stood in the doorway, holding a large candelabrum. He wore a tidy black uniform and white gloves. He raised an eyebrow at Wax. “High Lord Ladrian,” he said, “I see that you’ve returned.”

“Um…” Wax said, sheepishly removing his hand from inside his coat.

“Your bath is drawn, my lord.”

“I didn’t ask for a bath.”

“Yes, but considering your night’s … entertainments, I thought it prudent to prepare one for you.” The butler sniffed. “Gunpowder?”

“Er, yes.”

“I trust my lord didn’t shoot anyone too important.”

*No,* Wax thought. *No, I couldn’t.*

Tillaume stood there, stiff, disapproving. He didn’t say the words he was undoubtedly thinking: that Wax’s disappearance from the party had caused a minor scandal, that it would be even *more* difficult to procure a proper bride now. He didn’t say that he was disappointed. He didn’t say these things because he was, after all, a proper lord’s servant.

Besides, he could say them all with a glance anyway.

“Shall I draft a letter of apology to Lady Cett, my lord? I believe she will expect it, considering that you sent one to Lord Stanton.”

“Yes, that would be well,” Wax said. He lowered his fingers to his belt, feeling the metal vials there, the revolver at each hip, the weight of the shotgun strapped inside his coat. *What am I doing? I’m acting like a fool.*

He suddenly felt exceedingly childish. Leaving a party to go patrolling through the city, looking for trouble? What was wrong with him?

He felt as if he’d been trying to recapture something. A part of the person he’d been before Lessie’s death. He had known, deep down, that he might have trouble shooting now and had wanted to prove otherwise.

He’d failed that test.

“My lord,” Tillaume said, stepping closer. “May I speak … boldly, for a moment?”

“You may.”

“The city has a large number of constables,” Tillaume said. “And they are quite capable in their jobs. Our house, however, has but one high lord. Thousands depend on you, sir.” Tillaume nodded his head in respect, then moved to begin lighting some candles in the bedroom.

The butler’s words were true. House Ladrian was one of the most powerful in the city, at least historically. In the city’s government, Wax represented the interests of all of the people his house employed.

True, they'd also have a representative based on votes in their guild, but it was Wax they depended on most.

His house was nearly bankrupt—rich in potential, in holdings, and in workers, but poor in cash and connections because of his uncle's foolishness. If Wax didn't do something to change that, it could mean jobs lost, poverty, and collapse as other houses pounced on his holdings and seized them for debts not paid.

Wax ran his thumbs along his Sterrions. *The constables handled those street toughs just fine,* he admitted to himself. *They didn't need me. This city doesn't need me, not like Weathering did.*

He was trying to cling to what he had been. He wasn't that person any longer. He couldn't be. But people did need him for something else.

"Tillaume," Wax said.

The butler looked back from the candles. The mansion didn't have electric lights yet, though workmen were coming to install them soon. Something his uncle had paid for before dying, money Wax couldn't recover now.

"Yes, my lord?" Tillaume asked.

Wax hesitated, then slowly pulled his shotgun from its place inside his coat and set it into the trunk beside his bed, placing it beside a companion he'd left there earlier. He took off his mistcoat, wrapping the thick material over his arm. He held the coat reverently for a moment, then placed it in the trunk. His Sterrion revolvers followed. They weren't his only guns, but they represented his life in the Roughs.

He closed the lid of the trunk on his old life. "Take this, Tillaume," Wax said. "Put it somewhere."

"Yes, my lord," Tillaume said. "I shall have it ready for you, should you need it again."

"I won't be needing it," Wax said. He had given himself one last night with the mists. A thrilling climb up the tower, an evening spent with the darkness. He chose to focus on that—rather than his failure with the toughs—as his night's accomplishment.

One final dance.

"Take it, Tillaume," Wax said, turning away from the trunk. "Put it somewhere safe, but put it away. For good."

"Yes, my lord," the butler said softly. He sounded approving.

*And that,* Wax thought, *is that.* He then walked into the washroom. Wax the lawkeeper was gone.

It was time to be Lord Waxillium Ladrian, Sixteenth High Lord of House Ladrian, residing in the Fourth Octant of Elendel City.

# 2

### SIX MONTHS LATER

"How's my cravat?" Waxillium asked, studying himself in the mirror, turning to the side and tugging at the silver necktie again.

"Impeccable as always, my lord," Tillaume said. The butler stood with hands clasped behind his back, a tray with steaming tea sitting beside him on the serving stand. Waxillium hadn't asked for tea, but Tillaume had brought it anyway. Tillaume had a thing about tea.

"Are you certain?" Waxillium asked, tugging at the cravat again.

"Indeed, my lord." He hesitated. "I'll admit, my lord, that I've been curious about this for months. You are the first high lord I've ever waited upon who can tie a decent cravat. I'd grown quite accustomed to providing that assistance."

"You learn to do things on your own, when you live out in the Roughs."

"With all due respect, my lord," Tillaume said, his normally monotone voice betraying a hint of curiosity, "I wouldn't have thought that one would need to learn that skill in the Roughs. I wasn't aware that the denizens of those lands had the slightest concern for matters of fashion and decorum."

"They don't," Waxillium said with a smile, giving one final adjustment to the cravat. "That's part of why *I* always did. Dressing like a city gentleman had an odd effect on the people out there. Some immediately respected me, others immediately underestimated me. It worked for me in both cases. And, I might add, it was unspeakably satisfying to see the looks on the faces of criminals when they were hauled in by someone they had assumed to be a city dandy."

"I can imagine, my lord."

"I did it for myself too," Waxillium said more softly, regarding himself in the mirror. Silver cravat, green satin vest. Emerald cuff links. Black coat and trousers, stiff through the sleeves and legs. One steel button on his vest among the wooden ones, an old tradition of his. "The clothing was a reminder, Tillaume. The land around me may have been wild, but I didn't need to be."

Waxillium took a silver pocket square off his dressing stand, deftly folded it in the proper style, and slipped it into his breast pocket. A sudden chiming rang through the mansion.

"Rust and Ruin," Waxillium cursed, checking his pocket watch. "They're early."

"Lord Harms is known for his punctuality, my lord."

"Wonderful. Well, let's get this over with." Waxillium strode out into the hallway, boots gliding on the green velvet-cut rug. The mansion had changed little during his two-decade absence. Even after six months of living here, it still didn't feel like it was *his*. The faint smell of his uncle's pipe smoke still lingered, and the decor was marked by a fondness for deep dark woods and heavy stone sculpture. Despite modern tastes, there were almost no portraits or paintings. As Waxillium knew, many of those had been valuable, and had been sold before his uncle's death.

Tillaume walked alongside him, hands clasped behind his back. "My lord sounds as though he considers this day's duty to be a chore."

"Is it that obvious?" Waxillium grimaced. What did it say about him that he'd rather face down a nest of outlaws—outgunned and outmanned—than meet with Lord Harms and his daughter?

A plump, matronly woman waited at the end of the hallway, wearing a black dress and a white apron. "Oh, Lord Ladrian," she said with fondness. "Your mother would be so pleased to see this day!"

"Nothing has been decided yet, Miss Grimes," Waxillium said as the woman joined the two of them, walking along the balustrade of the second-floor gallery.

"She *did* so hope that you'd marry a fine lady someday," Miss Grimes said. "You should have heard how she worried, all those years."

Waxillium tried to ignore the way those words twisted at his heart. He *hadn't* heard how his mother worried. He'd hardly ever taken time to write his parents or his sister, and had only visited that one time, just after the railway reached Weathering.

Well, he was making good on his obligations now. Six months of work, and he was finally getting his feet under him and pulling House Ladrian—along with its many forgeworkers and seamstresses—from the brink of financial collapse. The last step came today.

Waxillium reached the top of the staircase, then hesitated. "No," he said, "I mustn't rush in. Need to give them time to make themselves comfortable."

"That is—" Tillaume began, but Waxillium cut him off by turning the other way and marching back along the balustrade.

"Miss Grimes," Waxillium said, "are there other matters that will need my attention today?"

"You wish to hear of them now?" she asked, frowning as she bustled to keep up.

"Anything to keep my mind occupied, dear woman," Waxillium said. Rust and Ruin … he was so nervous that he caught himself reaching inside his jacket to finger the grip of his Immerling 44-S.

It was a fine weapon; not as good as one of Ranette's make, but a proper, and small, sidearm for a gentleman. He'd decided he would be a lord, and not a lawman, but that didn't mean he was going to go about unarmed. That … well, that would just be plain insane.

"There is one matter," Miss Grimes said, grimacing. She was the Ladrian house steward, and had been for the last twenty years. "We lost another shipment of steel last night."

Waxillium froze on the walkway. "What? Again!"

"Unfortunately, my lord."

"Damn it. I'm starting to think the thieves are targeting only us."

"It's only our second shipment," she said. "House Tekiel has lost five shipments so far."

"What are the details?" he asked. "The disappearance. Where did it happen?"

"Well—"

"No, don't tell me," he said, raising a hand. "I can't afford to be distracted."

Miss Grimes gave him a flat look, since that was probably why she'd avoided telling him about it before his meeting with Lord Harms. Waxillium rested a hand on the railing, and felt his left eye twitch. Someone was out there, running an organized, highly efficient operation stealing the contents of entire railcars. They were being called the Vanishers. Perhaps he could poke around a little and …

*No,* he told himself sternly. *It is not my duty. Not anymore.* He would go to the proper authorities, perhaps hire some guards or personal investigators. He would not go chasing bandits himself.

"I'm sure the constables will find those responsible and bring them to justice," Waxillium said with some difficulty. "Do you think that's long enough to make Lord Harms wait? I think that's long enough. It hasn't been too long, has it?" Waxillium turned and walked back the way he'd come. Tillaume rolled his eyes as he passed.

Waxillium reached the stairs. A young man in a green Ladrian vest and a white shirt was climbing them. "Lord Ladrian!" Kip said. "Post has arrived."

"Any parcels?"

"No, my lord," the boy said, handing over a signet-sealed letter as Waxillium passed. "Only this. Looked important."

"An invitation to the Yomen-Ostlin wedding dinner," Miss Grimes guessed. "Might be a good place to have your first public appearance with Miss Harms."

"The details haven't been decided!" Waxillium protested as they stopped at the bottom of the staircase. "I've barely broached the topic with Lord Harms, yet you practically have us married. It's entirely possible that they will upend this entire matter, like what happened with Lady Entrone."

"It will go well, young master," Miss Grimes said. She reached up, adjusting the silk square in his pocket. "I've got a Soother's sense for these matters."

"You do realize I'm forty-two years old? 'Young master' doesn't exactly fit any longer."

She patted his cheek. Miss Grimes considered any unmarried man to be a child—which was terribly unfair, considering that *she* had never married. He refrained from speaking to her about Lessie; most of his family back in the city hadn't known about her.

"Right, then," Waxillium said, turning and striding toward the sitting room. "Into the maw of the beast I go."

Limmi, head of the ground-floor staff, waited by the doorway. She raised her hand as Waxillium approached, as if to speak, but he slid the dinner-party invitation between two of her fingers.

"Have an affirmative response drafted to this, if you would, Limmi," he said. "Indicate I'll be dining with Miss Harms and her father, but hold the letter until I'm done with my conference here. I'll let you know whether to send it or not."

"Yes, my lord, but—"

"It's all right," he said, pushing the door open. "I mustn't keep the…"

Lord Harms and his daughter were *not* in the sitting room. Instead, Waxillium found a lanky man with a round, sharp-chinned face. He was about thirty years of age, and had a few days of stubble on the chin and cheeks. He wore a wide-brimmed Roughs-style hat, the sides curving up slightly, and had on a leather duster. He was playing with one of the palm-sized upright clocks on the mantel.

"'Ello Wax," the man said brightly. He held up the clock. "Can I trade you for this?"

Waxillium swiftly pulled the door shut behind him. "Wayne? What are you *doing* here?"

"Looking at your stuff, mate," Wayne said. He held up the clock appraisingly. "Worth what, three or four bars? I've got a bottle of good whiskey that might be worth the same."

"You have to get out of here!" Waxillium said. "You're supposed to be in Weathering. Who's watching the place?"

"Barl."

"Barl! He's a miscreant."

"So am I."

"Yes, but you're the miscreant *I* chose to do the job. You could have at least sent for Miles."

*"Miles?"* Wayne said. "Mate, Miles is a right *horrible* human being. He'd rather shoot a man than bother actually finding out if the bloke was guilty or not."

"Miles keeps his town clean," Waxillium said. "And he's saved my life a couple of times. This is beside the point. I told *you* to watch over Weathering."

Wayne tipped his hat to Waxillium. "True, Wax, but you ain't a lawkeeper no longer. And me, I've got important stuff to be about." He looked at the clock, then pocketed it and set a small bottle of whiskey on the mantel in its place. "Now, sir, I'll need to be asking you a few questions." He pulled a small notepad and pencil from inside his duster. "Where were you last night at around midnight?"

"What does that—"

Waxillium was interrupted by chimes sounding at the door again. "Rust and Ruin! These are high-class people, Wayne. I've spent months persuading them that I'm not a ruffian. I need you *out* of here." Waxillium walked forward, trying to usher his friend toward the far exit.

"Now, that's right suspicious behavior, innit?" Wayne said, scrawling something on his notepad. "Dodging questions, acting all anxious. What are you hiding, sir?"

"Wayne," Waxillium said, grabbing the other man's arm. "Part of me is appreciative that you'd come all this way to aggravate me, and I *am* glad to see you. But *now is not the time*."

Wayne grinned. "You assume I'm here for you. Don't you think that's a pinch arrogant?"

"What else would you be here for?"

"Shipment of foodstuffs," Wayne said. "Railway car left Elendel four days ago and arrived in Weathering with the entire contents of a single car empty. Now, I hear that you recently lost two shipments of your own to these 'Vanishers.' I've come to question you. Right suspicious, as I said."

"Suspicious … Wayne, I *lost* two shipments. I'm the one who got robbed! Why would that make me a suspect?"

"How am I to know how your devious, criminal genius mind works, mate?"

Footsteps sounded outside the room. Waxillium glanced at the door, then back at Wayne. "Right now, my criminal genius mind is wondering if I can stuff your corpse anywhere that wouldn't be too obvious."

Wayne grinned, stepping back.

The door opened.

Waxillium spun, looking as Limmi sheepishly held the door open. A corpulent man in a very fine suit stood there, holding a dark wooden cane. He had mustaches that drooped all the way down to his thick neck, and his waistcoat framed a deep red cravat.

"… saying it doesn't matter whom he's seeing!" Lord Harms said. "He'll want to speak with me! We had an *appointment,* and…" Lord Harms paused, realizing the door was open. "Ah!" He strode into the room.

He was followed by a stern-looking woman with golden hair fixed into a tight bun—his daughter, Steris—and a younger woman who Waxillium didn't recognize.

"Lord Ladrian," Harms said, "I find it *very* unbefitting to be made to wait. And who is this that you're meeting with in my stead?"

Waxillium sighed. "It's my old—"

"Uncle!" Wayne said, stepping forward, voice altered to sound gruff and lose all of its rural accent. "I'm his uncle Maksil. Popped in unexpectedly this morning, my dear man."

Waxillium raised an eyebrow as Wayne stepped forward. He'd removed his hat and duster, and had plastered his upper lip with a realistic-looking fake mustache with a bit of gray in it. He was scrunching his face up just slightly to produce a few extra wrinkles at the eyes. It was a good disguise, making him look like he might be a few years older than Waxillium, rather than ten years younger.

Waxillium glanced over his shoulder. The duster sat folded on the floor beside one of the couches, hat atop it, a pair of dueling canes lying crossed beside the pile. Waxillium hadn't even noticed the swap—of course, Wayne had naturally done it while inside a speed bubble. Wayne was a Slider, a bendalloy Allomancer, capable of creating a bubble of compressed time around himself. He often used the power to change costumes.

He was also Twinborn, like Waxillium, though his Feruchemical ability—healing quickly from wounds—wasn't so useful outside of combat. Still, the two made for a very potent combination.

"Uncle, you say?" Lord Harms asked, taking Wayne's hand and shaking it.

"On the mother's side!" Wayne said. "Not the Ladrian side, of course. Otherwise I'd be running this place, eh?" He sounded nothing like himself, but that was Wayne's specialty. He said that three-quarters of a disguise was in the accent and voice. "I've wanted for a long time to come check up on the lad. He's had something of a rough-and-tumble past, you know. He needs a firm hand to make certain he doesn't return to such unpleasant ways."

"I've often thought the very same thing!" Lord Harms said. "I assume we're given leave to sit, Lord Ladrian?"

"Yes, of course," Waxillium said, covertly glaring at Wayne. *Really?* that glare said. *We're doing this?*

Wayne just shrugged. Then he turned and took Steris's hand and bowed his head politely. "And who is this lovely creature?"

"My daughter, Steris." Harms sat. "Lord Ladrian? You didn't tell your uncle of our arrival?"

"I was so surprised by his appearance," Waxillium said, "that I did not have an opportunity." He took Steris's hand and bowed his head to her as well.

She looked him up and down with a critical gaze, and then her eyes flicked toward the duster and hat in the corner. Her lips turned down. Doubtless she assumed they were his.

"This is my cousin Marasi," Steris said, nodding to the woman behind her. Marasi was dark-haired and large-eyed, with bright red lips. She looked down demurely as soon as Waxillium turned to her. "She has spent most of her life in the Outer Estates and is rather timid, so please don't upset her."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Waxillium said. He waited until the women were seated beside Lord Harms, then sat on the smaller sofa facing them, and facing the doorway. There was another exit from the room, but he'd discovered that there was a squeaky floorboard leading to it, which was ideal. This way, someone couldn't sneak up on him. Lawman or lord, he didn't fancy getting shot in the back.

Wayne primly settled himself in a chair directly to Waxillium's right. They all stared at one another for an extended moment. Wayne yawned.

"Well," Waxillium said. "Perhaps I should begin by asking after your health."

"Perhaps you should," Steris replied.

"Er. Yes. How's your health?"

"Suitable."

"So is Waxillium," Wayne added.

They all turned to him.

"You know," he said. "He's wearing a suit, and all. Suitable. Ahem. Is that mahogany?"

"This?" Lord Harms said, holding up his cane. "Indeed. It's a family heirloom."

"My lord Waxillium," Steris cut in, voice stern. She did not seem to enjoy small talk. "Perhaps we can dispense with empty prattle. We all know the nature of this meeting."

"We do?" Wayne asked.

"Yes," Steris said, voice cool. "Lord Waxillium. You are in the position of having an unfortunate reputation. Your uncle, may he rest with the Hero, tarnished the Ladrian name with his social reclusiveness, occasional reckless forays into politics, and blatant adventurism. You have come from the Roughs, lending no small additional measure of poor reputation to the house, particularly considering your insulting actions to various houses during your first few weeks in town. Above all this, your house is nearly destitute.

“We, however, are in a desperate circumstance of our own. Our financial status is excellent, but our name is unknown in the highest of society. My father has no male heir upon which to bestow his family name, and so a union between our houses makes perfect sense.”

“How very logical of you, my dear,” Wayne said, the upper-class accent rolling off his tongue as if he’d been born with it.

“Indeed,” she said, still watching Waxillium. She reached into her satchel. “Your letters and conversations with my father have been enough to persuade us of your serious intent, and during these last few months in the city your public comportment has proven more promisingly sober than your initial boorishness. So I have taken the liberty of drawing up an agreement that I think will suit our needs.”

“An … agreement?” Waxillium asked.

“Oh, I’m so eager to see it,” Wayne added. He reached into his pocket absently and got out something that Waxillium couldn’t quite discern.

The “agreement” turned out to be a large document, at least twenty pages long. Steris handed one copy to Waxillium and one to her father, and retained another for herself.

Lord Harms coughed into his hand. “I suggested she write down her thoughts,” he said. “And … well, my daughter is a very thorough woman.”

“I can see that,” Waxillium said.

“I suggest that you never ask her to pass the milk,” Wayne added under his breath, so only Waxillium could hear. “As she seems likely to throw a cow at you, just to be certain the job is done thoroughly.”

“The document is in several parts,” Steris said. “The first is an outline of our courtship phase, wherein we make obvious—but not too speedy—progress toward engagement. We take just long enough for society to begin associating us as a couple. The engagement mustn’t be so quick as to seem a scandal, but cannot come too slowly either. Eight months should, by my estimates, fulfill our purposes.”

“I see,” Waxillium said, flipping through the pages. Tillaume entered, bringing a tray of tea and cakes, and deposited it on a serving table beside Wayne.

Waxillium shook his head, closing the contract. “Doesn’t this seem a little … stiff to you?”

“Stiff?”

“I mean, shouldn’t there be room for romance?”

"There is," Steris said. "Page thirteen. Upon marriage, there shall be no more than three conjugal encounters per week and no fewer than one until a suitable heir is provided. After that, the same numbers apply to a two-week span."

"Ah, of course," Waxillium said. "Page thirteen." He glanced at Wayne. Was that a *bullet* the other man had taken from his pocket? Wayne was rolling it between his fingers.

"If that is not enough to satisfy your needs," Steris added, "the next page details proper mistress protocols."

"Wait," Waxillium said, looking away from Wayne. "Your document allows *mistresses*?"

"Of course," Steris said. "They are a simple fact of life, and so it's better to account for them than to ignore them. In the document, you will find requirements for your potential mistresses along with the means by which discretion will be maintained."

"I see," Waxillium said.

"Of course," Steris continued, "I will follow the same guidelines."

"You plan to take a mistress, my lady?" Wayne asked, perking up.

"I would be allowed my own dalliances," she said. "Usually the coachman is the object of choice. I would abstain until heirs were produced, of course. There mustn't be any confusion about lineage."

"Of course," Waxillium said.

"It's in the contract," she said. "Page fifteen."

"I don't doubt that it is."

Lord Harms coughed into his hand again. Marasi, Steris's cousin, maintained a blank expression, though she looked down at her feet during the conversation. Why had she been brought?

"Daughter," Lord Harms said, "perhaps we should move the conversation to less personal topics for a span."

"Very well," Steris said. "There *are* a few things I wanted to know. Are you a religious man, Lord Ladrian?"

"I follow the Path," Waxillium said.

"Hmmm," she said, tapping her fingers against her contract. "Well, that's a safe choice, if somewhat dull. I, for one, have never understood why people would follow a religion whose god *specifically* prohibits worshipping him."

"It's complicated."

"So Pathians like to say. With the same breath as you try to explain how simple your religion is."

"That's complicated too," Waxillium said. "A simple kind of complicated, though. You're a Survivorist, I assume?"

"I am."

*Delightful,* Waxillium thought. Well, Survivorists weren't *too* bad. Some of them, at least. He stood up. Wayne was still playing with that round. “Would anyone else like some tea?”

“No,” Steris said with a wave of her hand, looking through her document.

“Yes, please,” Marasi said softly.

Waxillium crossed the room to the tea stand.

“Those are very nice bookshelves,” Wayne said. “Wish I had shelves like those. My, my, my. And … we’re in.”

Waxillium turned. The three guests had glanced at the shelves, and as they turned away, Wayne had started burning bendalloy and thrown up a speed bubble.

The bubble was about five feet across, including only Wayne and Waxillium, and once Wayne had it up he couldn’t move it. Years of familiarity let Waxillium discern the boundary of the bubble, which was marked by a faint wavering of the air. For those inside the bubble, time would flow much more quickly than for those outside.

“Well?” Waxillium asked.

“Oh, I think the quiet one’s kinda cute,” Wayne said, his accent back in place. “The tall one is insane, though. Rust on my arms, but she is.”

Waxillium poured himself some tea. Harms and the two women looked frozen as they sat on their couch, almost like statues. Wayne was flaring his metal, using as much strength as he could to create a few private moments.

These bubbles could be very useful, though not in the way most people expected. You couldn’t shoot out of them—well, you could, but something about the barrier interfered with objects passing through it. If you fired a shot in a speed bubble, the bullet would slow as soon as it hit ordinary time and would be moved erratically off course. That made it nearly impossible to aim from within one.

“She’s a very good match,” Waxillium said. “It’s an ideal situation for both of us.”

“Look, mate. Just because Lessie—”

“This is *not* about Lessie.”

“Whoa, hey.” Wayne raised a hand. “No need to get angry.”

“I’m not—” Waxillium took a deep breath, then continued more softly. “I’m not angry. But it’s not about Lessie. This is about my duties.”

*Damn you, Wayne. I’d almost gotten myself to stop thinking about her.* What would Lessie say, if she saw what he was doing? Laugh, probably. Laugh at how ridiculous it was, laugh at his discomfort. She hadn’t been the jealous type, perhaps because she’d never had any reason to be. With a woman like her, why would Waxillium have wanted to look elsewhere?

Nobody would ever live up to her, but fortunately it didn’t matter. Steris’s contract actually seemed a good thing, in that regard. It would help him divide himself. Maybe help with a little of the pain.

"This *is* my duty now," Waxillium repeated.

"Your duties used to involve saving folks," Wayne said, "not marrying 'em."

Waxillium crouched down beside the chair. "Wayne. I can't go back to what I was. You sauntering in here, meddling in my life, isn't going to change that. I'm a different person now."

"If you were going to become a different person, couldn't you have chosen one without such an ugly face?"

"Wayne, this is *serious*."

Wayne raised his hand, spinning the cartridge between his fingers and proffering it. "So is this."

"What *is* that?"

"Bullet. You shoot folks with 'em. Hopefully bad ones—or at least ones what owes you a bar or two."

"Wayne—"

"They're turning back." Wayne set the cartridge on the tea-serving tray.

"But—"

"Time to cough. Three. Two. One."

Waxillium cursed under his breath, but pocketed the round and stood back up. He started coughing loudly as the speed bubble collapsed, restoring normal time. To the three visitors, only seconds had passed, and to their ears Waxillium and Wayne's conversation would be sped up to the point that most of it would be inaudible. The coughing would cover anything else.

None of the three visitors seemed to have noticed anything unusual. Waxillium poured the tea—it was a deep cherry color today, likely a sweet fruit tea—and brought a cup over to Marasi. She took it, and he sat down, holding his own cup in one hand, taking out and gripping the cartridge with the other. Both the casing and the medium-caliber bullet's jacket looked like steel, but the entire thing seemed too light. He frowned, hefting it.

*Blood on her face. Blood on the brick wall.*

He shivered, fighting off those memories. *Damn you, Wayne,* he thought again.

"The tea is delicious," Marasi said softly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Waxillium said, forcing his mind back to the conversation. "Lady Steris, I will consider this contract. Thank you for producing it. But really, I was hoping this meeting might allow me to learn more about you."

"I have been working on an autobiography," she said. "Perhaps I will send you a chapter or two of it by post."

"That's … very unconventional of you," Waxillium said. "Though it would be appreciated. But please, tell me of yourself. What are your interests?”

“Normally, I like plays.” She grimaced. “At the Coolerim, actually.”

“Am I missing something?” Waxillium asked.

“The Coolerim Playhouse,” Wayne said, leaning forward. “Two nights ago, it was robbed in the middle of the performance.”

“Haven’t you heard?” Lord Harms asked. “It was in all the broadsheets.”

“Was anyone harmed?”

“Not at the event itself,” Lord Harms said, “but they did take a hostage as they escaped.”

“Such a *horrid* thing,” Steris said. “Nobody has heard from Armal yet.” She looked sick.

“You knew her?” Wayne asked, his accent slipping faintly as he grew interested.

“Cousin,” Steris said.

“Same as…” Waxillium asked, nodding toward Marasi.

The three regarded him with confused expressions for a moment, but then Lord Harms jumped in. “Ah, no. Different side of the family.”

“Interesting,” Waxillium said, leaning back in his chair, tea sitting ignored in his hand. “And ambitious. Robbing an entire playhouse? How many of the robbers were there?”

“Dozens,” Marasi said. “Maybe as many as thirty, so the reports say.”

“Quite a band. That means as many as another eight just to drive them away. And vehicles for escaping. Impressive.”

“It’s the Vanishers,” Marasi said. “The ones stealing from the railway also.”

“That hasn’t been proven,” Wayne replied, pointing at her.

“No. But one of the witnesses from a railway robbery described several men who were at the theater robbery.”

“Wait,” Waxillium said. “There were witnesses to one of the railway robberies? I thought they happened in secret. Something about a ghostly railcar appearing on the tracks?”

“Yes,” Wayne said. “The railway engineers stop to investigate and—probably—panic. But the phantom railcar vanishes before they can investigate it. They continue on, but when they reach the end of the line, one of their train’s cars is empty. Still locked, no signs of forced entry. But the goods are all gone.”

“So nobody sees the culprits,” Waxillium said.

“The recent ones have been different,” Marasi said, growing animated. “They’ve started robbing passenger cars as well. When the train stops because of the phantom on the tracks, men jump into the cars and start going through, collecting jewelry and pocketbooks from the occupants. They take a woman hostage—threatening to kill her if anyone follows—and go. The freight car is still robbed as well."

"Curious," Waxillium said.

"Yes," Marasi said. "I think—"

"My dear," Lord Harms cut in. "You are bothering Lord Ladrian."

Marasi blushed, then looked down.

"It wasn't a bother," Waxillium said, tapping his teacup with his finger. "It—"

"Is that a *bullet* in your fingers?" Steris asked, pointing.

Waxillium looked down, realizing that he was rolling the cartridge between forefinger and thumb. He closed his fist around it before his memories could return. "It's nothing." He shot a glare at Wayne.

The other man mouthed something. *Push on it.*

"You are *quite* certain your unconventional past is behind you, Lord Ladrian?" Steris asked.

"Oh, he's certain," Wayne said, grimacing. "You don't have to worry about *him* being unconventional. Why, he's downright boring! Unbelievably, comically, nonsensically *boring*. You could squeeze more excitement out of a beggar waiting in line at the soup kitchen on rat meat day. It—"

"Thank you, *Uncle,*" Waxillium said dryly. "Yes, Steris, my past is just that. Past. I am committed to my duties as head of House Ladrian."

"Very well," she said. "We will need a formal entrance into high society as a couple. A public event of some sort."

"How about the Yomen-Ostlin wedding dinner?" Waxillium said absently. *Push on it.* "I received an invitation just this morning."

"An excellent idea," Lord Harms said. "We were invited as well."

*Push on it.* Waxillium reached into his left sleeve and covertly took a small pinch of steel shavings from the pouch he kept there. He dropped it into his tea and took a drink. That didn't give him much of a reserve, but it was enough.

He burned the steel, the familiar lines of blue springing up around him. They pointed to all nearby sources of metal.

Except the one in his fingers.

*Aluminum,* he realized. *No wonder it's light.*

Aluminum and a few of its alloys were Allomantically inert; you couldn't Push or Pull on them. It was also *very* expensive. It cost more than even gold or platinum.

The bullet was designed to kill Coinshots and Lurchers, men like Waxillium himself. That gave him a shiver, though he gripped the round more tightly. There were days when he'd have given his best gun for a few aluminum bullets, though he hadn't heard of an alloy that would produce a bullet with sound ballistics.

*Where?* he mouthed to Wayne. *Where did you find it?*

Wayne just nodded to the guests, who were looking right at Waxillium.

"Are you quite all right, Lord Ladrian?" Steris asked. "I know a good zinc counselor if you have need of some emotional aid."

"Er … no. Thank you. I am quite all right, and I think this has been a very productive meeting. Wouldn't you agree?"

"That depends," she said, rising, apparently taking that as an invitation to end the conversation. "The wedding party is on the morrow, I believe. I can count on you having reviewed the contract by then?"

"You can," Waxillium said, rising as well.

"*I* think this meeting was wonderful," Wayne said as he stood. "You're just what my nephew needs, Lady Steris! A firm hand. None of this rabble-rousing he's been used to."

"I agree!" Lord Harms said. "Lord Ladrian, perhaps your uncle can attend the dinner—"

"No," Waxillium said quickly before Wayne could say anything. "No, unfortunately, he has to return to his estates. Told me just earlier. He has a very important foaling to attend."

"Oh, well then," Lord Harms said, helping Marasi to her feet. "We will send you word of confirmation once we have accepted the Yomen invitation."

"And I will do likewise," Waxillium said, escorting them to the door of the room. "Farewell until then." Tillaume bowed to them there, then escorted them out. Their departure felt rushed to Waxillium, but he was relieved to see them go. Considering Wayne's sudden intrusion, that had actually gone pretty well. Nobody had ended up trying to shoot him.

"Nice bunch," Wayne said. "I now see what you're doing. With a wife and in-laws like those, you'll feel quite at home here—just like the jailhouse and its occupants back in Weathering!"

"Very nice," Waxillium said under his breath, waving one last time as the Harms family walked out the mansion doors. "Where did you get the bullet?"

"It was dropped at the theater robbery. Traded the constables for it this morning."

Waxillium closed his eyes. Wayne had a very liberal interpretation of what "trading" entailed.

"Oh, don't get that way," Wayne said. "I left them a nice cobblestone for it. I think Steris and her pop are convinced you're a loon, by the way." He grinned.

"That's nothing new. My association with you has been convincing people I'm insane for years now."

"Ha! And here I thought you'd lost your sense of humor." Wayne walked back into the room. He slid his pencil out of his pocket as he passed a table, trading it for one of Waxillium's pens.

"My humor isn't lost, Wayne," Waxillium said, "just strained. What I told you is true, and this bullet doesn't change anything."

"Maybe it doesn't," Wayne said, retrieving his hat, duster, and dueling canes. "But I'm still gonna see what I can find."

"It's not your job."

"And it wasn't your job to start hunting down criminals out in the Roughs. Doesn't change what needs to be done, mate." Wayne walked up to Waxillium, then handed him the hat. Once Waxillium took it, Wayne threw on his coat.

"Wayne…"

"People are being taken, Wax," he said, taking back his hat and putting it on. "Four hostages so far. None returned. Stealing jewelry is one thing. Taking food from Roughs towns is another. Kidnapping people … well, there's something goin' on here. I'm gonna find out what it is. With or without you."

"Without me."

"Fine." He hesitated. "But I need something, Wax. A place to look. You always did the thinking."

"Yes, having a brain helps with that, surprisingly."

Wayne narrowed his eyes at him. Then he raised his eyebrows, pleadingly.

"All right," Waxillium said, sighing and fetching his teacup. "How many robberies now?"

"Eight. Seven railway cars and, most recently, the theater."

"Four hostages?"

"Yeah. Across three of the latest robberies. Two were taken from one of the trains, then one from the robbery at the theater. All four hostages are women."

"Easier to overpower," Waxillium said idly, tapping his cup, "and more likely to make the men worry about getting them killed if they try to give chase."

"Do you need to know what was stolen?" Wayne said, reaching into the pocket of his duster. "I traded one of the constables for a list.…"

"It doesn't matter." Waxillium took a drink from his cup. "Or, at least, most of it probably doesn't. It's not about the robberies."

"It's … not?"

"No. Large gang. Well funded—too well funded." He pulled out the round and looked it over. "If they really wanted money, they'd be robbing gold transports or banks. The robberies are probably a distraction. If you want a man's horses, sometimes the best thing to do is let his hogs loose. While he's chasing them down, you ride off.

"I'd lay money on these Vanishers being after something else, something unlikely. Perhaps an item that is easy to overlook in all that has been taken. Or maybe it's really about extortion—and they plan to start asking for protection money from people in town. See if anyone's been contacted about that. I haven't, by the way.

"If that goes nowhere, look at the hostages. One of them might have been carrying something that was the *real* target of the robbery. I wouldn't be surprised if this turned out to be about clandestine blackmail."

"But they robbed a few trains before taking any hostages."

"Yes," Waxillium said. "And they got away with it. There was no reason to expose themselves by robbing passengers if they could make off with cargo unseen and unstopped. They're after something else, Wayne. Trust me."

"All right." The wiry man rubbed his face, then finally pulled off the fake mustache. He stuffed it into his pocket. "But tell me. Don't you even want to know? Doesn't it itch at you?"

"No." That wasn't completely true.

Wayne snorted. "I'd believe you if you could say that without your eye twitching, mate." He nodded toward the bullet. "I notice you didn't offer to give that back."

"I didn't." Waxillium pocketed it.

"And you still wear your metalminds," Wayne said, nodding to the bracers hidden mostly by the cuffs of Waxillium's sleeves. "Not to mention that you're still keeping steel inside your sleeve. I noticed a gun catalogue over on the table, too."

"A man must have hobbies."

"If you say so," Wayne said, then stepped forward, tapping Waxillium on the chest. "But you know what I think? I think you're looking for excuses to not let go. This thing, it's who you are. And no mansion, no marriage, and no mere *title* is going to change that." Wayne tipped his hat. "You're meant to be helping people, mate. It's what you do."

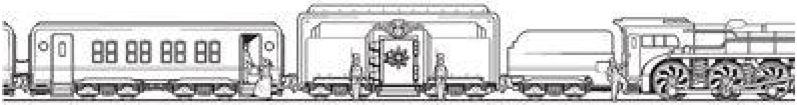
With that, Wayne left, his duster brushing against the doorframe as he walked out.

The Elen

Newsworthy Conten

The 4th of Doxil, 341

Edition



## A New Tale of the Roughs!

### “EXPLORING THE PITS OF ELTANIA”

In our exclusive series, Allomancer Jak continues his exploits exploring the distant Roughs.

In this installment, he writes of the days he spent in the infamous Pits of Eltania, where Koloss tribes rule the land and precious, unknown metals can be discovered. Full story below the fold. One hundred percent true and from the pen of the explorer himself!

# HOUSE TEKIEL UNVEILS THE “BREAKNAUGHT”

Claiming it will revolutionize security and transportation, Reshelle Tekiel announced her House’s new vault-style train car, intended for the transportation and protection of valuable goods via railway. The car is on display for the public at the Evergall Trainyards until the 19th.

Designed specifically as a response to the terrible and ever-increasing rise in bandit attacks by such groups as the infamous “Vanishers,” the new Breaknaught train car is fabricated from the finest steel, designed upon the latest modern lines and sealed by a massive door and lock identical to those found upon the vaults of Tekiel’s own banking houses.

The timing mechanism of this scientifically advanced lock guarantees that once sealed, the railcar cannot be reopened until well after it has reached its destination. Thus the Breaknaught allows even the most concerned of gentlemen to rest secure in the certainty that their valued cargo may travel unmolested along the lines of the Elendel Basin and the lands beyond.

Indeed, this is a greater concern than ever in light of the recent attacks upon those traveling the railways near our fair Elendel itself. None are safe from the ravenous ways of the Vanishers, stripping ladies and lords of their precious valuables at gunpoint. While blood has yet to be spilled in their attacks, they have recently begun adding kidnapping to their list of sins, and it seems only a matter of time before injury results.

Rather than wait for the painfully slow machinations of other house lords to defend lives and goods from these thieves through Senate procedure, House Tekiel has stepped forward once again with an ingenious solution that takes an active hand in battling these villains.

## THE PHANTOM RAILCAR!

### Described by Witnesses!

In this harrowing report, three witnesses tell of the night their train was robbed by the Vanishers. One of them is the train engineer herself, and she explains in great detail the ghostly apparition. Discover the facts for yourself, and see why this phantom is too quiet, too bright, and too unworldly to be anything other than a force from beyond. Experts from the university compare train disasters to determine which is the apparition’s origin, and the death lists give insight as to what the phantoms may desire. Exclusive reporting, only found here! Reverse side.

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## Union Leader Abandons Solidarity with Trade Union Party Members

In a surprise switch from party line position, Trade Union Leader Eloes Durnsed announced his intention to set aside any objection to the closure of further negotiations between representatives greeted with near-violent derision from members of the Trade Union Party interviewed by this broadsheet. A Line Riveter at the site of the Ironspine Building who gave his name as Brill told this reporter that Mr. Durnsed should “bloody well keep his head clear of these parts if he knows what’s what.” Before he could expand upon this statement, his local union representative intervened and gave assurances that the man was speaking metaphorically. However, the mood of

## RELIEF FROM YOUR PAINS!

Mistress Halex, Allomancer, has opened a new Soothing Parlor. Within its relaxing confines, one can find relief from stress, anxiety, and concern—leaving with a light heart and a soaring mind. Our reporter visits the parlor to give a detailed report of what goes on. A luxurious massage, sweet scents, and a Soother on duty to give a unique “Emotional Massage” leave you feeling as good on the inside as you

## Exploring the Pits of Eltania!

My dear editor, and by way of you, my dearest readers: I trust that my missive finds you well and in the possession of a willing ear, for the incredible events that transpired in my recent experience may strike you with incredulity and shock. I vow to you

# 3

Eight hours later, Waxillium stood at an upper window of his mansion. He watched the last broken fragments of a dying day. They dimmed, then grew black. He waited, hoping. But no mist came.

*What does it matter?* he thought to himself. *You're not going to go outside anyway.* Still, he wished the mists were out; he felt more at peace when they were out there, watching. The world became a different place, one he felt he better understood.

He sighed and crossed his study to the wall. He turned the switch, and the electric lights came on. They were still a wonder to him. Even though he knew the Words of Founding had given hints regarding electricity, what men had achieved still seemed incredible.

He crossed the room to his uncle's desk. His desk. Back in Weathering, Waxillium had used a rough, flimsy table. Now he had a sturdy, smoothly polished desk of stained oak. He sat down and began leafing through ledgers of house finances. It wasn't long, however, before his eyes started flicking toward the stack of broadsheets lying on his easy chair. He'd asked Limmi to go gather a few of them for him.

He usually ignored the broadsheets these days. Reports of crimes had a way of setting his mind running in circles and keeping him from focusing on his business. Of course, now that thoughts of the Vanishers had been planted in his mind, he'd have trouble letting go and doing anything productive, at least until he had scratched a few itches about what they'd been doing.

*Perhaps just a little reading,* he told himself. *To catch up on current events.* It wouldn't hurt to be informed; in fact, it might be important to his ability to entertain discussions with others.

Waxillium fetched the stack and returned to his desk. He easily found an account of the robberies in the day's paper. Other broadsheets in the stack had even more information. He'd mentioned the Vanishers to Limmi, and so she'd gathered a few broadsheets that were intended for people who wanted a collection of all of the recent stories on them. These reprinted articles from weeks or even months ago, with the original dates of the stories' publication. Those types of broadsheets were popular, he could tell, as he had three different ones from three different publishers. It seemed everyone wanted to stay up to date on items they'd missed.

By the dates listed on the reprinted articles, the first robbery had happened much earlier than he'd assumed. Seven months ago, just before he'd arrived back in Elendel. There had been a lapse of four months between the first railway cargo disappearance and the second. The name "Vanishers" hadn't started being used until this second attack.

The robberies were all similar, save for the one at the playhouse. A train was stopped because of a distraction on the tracks—early on, a fallen tree. Later, a ghostly phantom railcar that appeared from the mists, traveling directly at the train. The engineers stopped in a panic, but the phantom ahead vanished.

The engineers would start their train again. When it reached its destination, one of their cars was found to have been emptied of all goods. People were ascribing all kinds of mystical powers to the robbers, who seemed to be able to pass through walls and locked cargo cars without trouble. *But what goods were stolen?* Waxillium thought, frowning. The reports of the first theft didn't say, though it did mention the cargo had belonged to Augustin Tekiel.

Tekiel was one of the richest houses in the city, based over in the Second Octant, though it was building its new skyscraper in the financial district of the Fourth Octant. Waxillium read the articles over again, then searched through the broadsheets, scanning them for any further mention of the first robbery before the second occurred.

*What's this?* he thought, holding up a broadsheet that included a reprint of a letter Augustin Tekiel had written for publication a few months back. The letter denounced the Elendel constables for failure to protect or recover Tekiel's goods. The broadsheet had happily printed it, even made a headline of it: "Constables Incompetent, Tekiel Slams."

Three months. It had taken three months for Tekiel to say anything. Waxillium put aside these compilation broadsheets, then searched through the more recent broadsheets for other mentions. There was no shortage of them; the robberies were dramatic and mysterious, two things that sold a lot of papers.

The second and third robberies had been of steel shipments. Odd, that. An impractically heavy substance to take, and not as valuable as simply robbing the passenger cars. The fourth robbery had been the one that caught Wayne's attention: packaged foodstuffs from a train on its way to the northern Roughs. The fifth robbery had been the first to involve the passengers. The sixth and seventh had done so as well, the seventh being the only time the Vanishers had taken two hostages instead of one.

All three of the later robberies had involved stealing from a freight car as well as from passengers. Metals in two cases, foodstuffs in another case—at least, that was all the newspaper reported. With each case, the details had grown more interesting, as the cargo cars had been better secured. More sophisticated locks, guards riding along. The robberies happened incredibly quickly, considering the weight of goods taken.

*Did they use a speed bubble, like Wayne makes?* Waxillium thought. But no. You couldn't move in or out of a speed bubble once one was up, and it would be impossible to make one large enough to facilitate this kind of robbery. So far as he knew, at least.

Waxillium continued reading. There were a great many articles with theories, quotes, and eyewitness reports. Many suggested a speed bubble, but editorials cut those to shreds. Too much manpower would be needed, more than could fit in a speed bubble. They thought it more likely that a Feruchemist who could increase his strength was lifting the heavy materials out of the cars and carrying them off.

But to where? And why? And how were they bypassing the locks and the guards? Waxillium cut out articles he found interesting. Few had any solid information.

A soft knock at the door interrupted him in the middle of spreading the articles out on his desk. He looked up to see Tillaume in the doorway holding a tray of tea and a basket, the handle over his arm. "Tea, my lord?"

"That would be wonderful."

Tillaume strode forward and set up a small stand beside the desk, getting a cup and a sharp white napkin. "Do you have a preference?" Tillaume could manufacture dozens of varieties of tea from the simplest of starting points, blending and making what he considered ideal.

"Whatever."

"My lord. There is *great* importance to tea. It should never merely be 'whatever.' Tell me. Are you planning to sleep soon?"

Waxillium looked over the array of cut-out reports. "Definitely not."

"Very well. Would you prefer something to help clear your mind?"

"That might be nice."

"Sweet or not?"

"Not."

"Minty or spicy?"

"Minty."

"Strong or weak?"

"Er … strong."

"Excellent," Tillaume said, taking several jars and some silver spoons from his basket. He began mixing powders and bits of herbs into a cup. “My lord looks very intent.”

Waxillium tapped the table. “My lord is annoyed. Broadsheets make for *terrible* research opportunities. I need to know what was in the first shipment.”

“The first shipment, my lord?”

“The first railcar that the thieves stole from.”

“Miss Grimes would note that you seem to be slipping into old habits, my lord.”

“Miss Grimes isn’t here, fortunately. Besides, Lord Harms and his daughter seemed *aghast* that I didn’t know about the robberies. I must keep abreast of events in the city.”

“That’s a very excellent excuse, my lord.”

“Thank you,” Waxillium said, taking the cup of tea. “I almost have myself completely persuaded.” He took a sip. “Preservation’s Wings, man! This is *good.*”

“Thank you, my lord.” Tillaume took out the napkin and snapped it in his hands, then folded it down the middle and laid it across the arm of Waxillium’s chair. “And I *believe* that the first thing stolen was a shipment of wool. I heard it being discussed at the butcher’s earlier in the week.”

“Wool. That makes no sense.”

“None of these crimes make much sense, my lord.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said. “Unfortunately, those are the most interesting kind of crimes.” He took another sip of the tea. The strong, minty scent seemed to clear his nose and mind. “I need paper.”

“What—”

“A large sheet,” Waxillium continued. “As big as you can find.”

“I will see what is available, my lord,” Tillaume said. Waxillium caught a faint sigh of exasperation from the man, though he left the room to do as asked.

How long had it been since Waxillium had started his research? He glanced at the clock, and was surprised at the time. Well into the night already.

Well, he was into it now. He’d never sleep until he’d worked it through. He rose and began to pace, holding his teacup and saucer before him. He stayed away from the windows. He was backlit, and would make an excellent target for a sniper outside. Not that he really thought there *would* be one, but … well, he felt more comfortable working this way.

*Wool,* he thought. He walked over and opened a ledger, looking up some figures. He grew so absorbed that he didn’t notice the passing of time until Tillaume returned.

“Will this do, my lord?” he asked, bringing in an artist’s easel with a large pad of paper clipped to it. “The old Lord Ladrian kept this for your sister. She did love to draw."

Waxillium looked at it, and felt his heart clench. He hadn't thought of Telsin in ages. They had been so distant most of their lives. Not by intent, like his distance from his uncle; Waxillium and the previous Lord Ladrian had often been at odds. No, his distance from Telsin had been one born more of laziness. Twenty years apart, only seeing his sister occasionally, had let him slide along without much contact.

And then she'd died, in the same accident as his uncle. He wished the news had been harder for him to hear. It *should* have been harder for him to hear. She'd been a stranger by then, though.

"My lord?" the butler asked.

"The paper is perfect," Waxillium said, rising and fetching a pencil. "Thank you. I was worried we'd have to hang the paper on the wall."

"Hang it?"

"Yes. I used to use some bits of tar."

That idea seemed to make Tillaume *very* uncomfortable. Waxillium ignored him, walking over and beginning to write on the pad. "This is nice paper."

"I'm pleased, my lord," Tillaume said uncertainly.

Waxillium drew a little train in the top left corner, putting in a track ahead of it. He wrote a date beneath it. "First robbery. Fourteenth of Vinuarch. Target: wool. Supposedly." In like manner, he added more trains, tracks, dates, and details down the paper.

Wayne had always mocked him when he'd sketched out crimes to help him think. But it worked, though he frequently had to put up with Wayne's playful additions of little stick-figure bandits or mistwraiths rampaging across the otherwise neat and orderly sketchwork and notes.

"Second robbery happened much later," Waxillium continued. "Metals. For the first robbery, Lord Tekiel didn't make any kind of fuss until months had passed." He tapped the paper, then crossed out the word "wool." "He didn't lose a shipment of wool. It was early summer then, and wool prices would be too low to justify the freight charges. As I recall, the rates were unusually high in Vinuarch because the eighteenth railway line was out of service. It would take a man with breadcrumbs for brains to pay a premium to ship out-of-season wares to people who didn't want them."

"So…" Tillaume said.

"Just a moment," Waxillium said. He walked over and pulled a few ledgers off the shelf beside his desk. His uncle had some shipping manifests here.…

Yes. The old Lord Ladrian had kept *very* good track of what his competitor houses had been shipping. Waxillium scanned the lists for oddities. It took him a little while, but he eventually came up with a theory.

“Aluminum,” Waxillium said. “Tekiel was probably shipping aluminum, but avoiding taxes by claiming it as something else. In here, his stated aluminum shipments for the last two years are much smaller than they were for previous years. His smelters are still producing, however. I’d bet my best gun that Augustin Tekiel—with the help of some railway workers—has been running a nice, profitable little smuggling operation. That’s why he didn’t make a big commotion about the theft at first; he didn’t want to draw attention.”

Waxillium walked over and wrote some notations on his paper. He lifted his cup of tea to his lips, nodding to himself. “That also explains the long wait between the first and second robberies. The bandits were making use of that aluminum. They probably sold some of it on the black market to fund their operation, then used the rest to make aluminum bullets. But why would they *need* aluminum bullets?”

“For killing Allomancers?” Tillaume asked. He had been tidying the room while Waxillium read the ledgers.

“Yes.” Waxillium drew in images of faces above three of the robberies, the ones where they’d taken hostages.

“My lord?” Tillaume asked, stepping up beside him. “You think the captives are Allomancers?”

“The names have all been released,” Waxillium said. “All four are women from wealthy families, but none of them openly have Allomantic powers.”

Tillaume remained quiet. That didn’t mean everything. Many Allomancers among the upper crust were discreet about their powers. There were plenty of situations where that could be useful. For instance, if you were a Rioter or Soother—capable of influencing people’s emotions—you wouldn’t want people to suspect.

In other cases, Allomancy was flaunted. A recent candidate for the orchard-growers seat on the Senate had run solely on the platform that he was a Coppercloud, and was therefore impossible to affect with zinc or brass. The candidate won by a landslide. People hated thinking that someone might secretly be pulling their leaders’ strings.

Waxillium started noting his speculations around the margins of the paper. Motives, possible ways they were emptying the freight cars so quickly, similarities and differences among the heists. As he wrote he hesitated, then added a couple of stick-figure bandits at the top, drawn in Wayne’s sloppy style. Crazy though it was, he felt better having them there.

“I’ll bet the captives were all Allomancers, secretly,” Waxillium said. “The thieves had aluminum bullets to deal with Coinshots, Lurchers, and Thugs. And if we were able to catch any of the thieves, I’ll bet good money that we’d find them wearing aluminum linings in their hats to shield their emotions from being Pushed or Pulled on." That wasn't uncommon among the city's elite as well, though the common men couldn't afford such luxury.

The robberies *weren't* about money; they were about the captives. That was why no bounty had been demanded, and why the bodies of the captives hadn't been discovered dumped somewhere. The robberies were meant to obscure the true motives for the kidnappings. The victims were not the spur-of-the-moment hostages they were meant to appear. The Vanishers were gathering Allomancers. And Allomantic metals—so far raw steel, pewter, iron, zinc, brass, tin, and even some bendalloy had been stolen.

"This is dangerous," Waxillium whispered. "Very dangerous."

"My lord…" Tillaume said. "Weren't you going to go over the house account ledgers?"

"Yes," Waxillium said distractedly.

"And the lease for the new offices in the Ironspine?"

"I can still get to that tonight too."

"My lord. When?"

Waxillium paused, then checked his pocket watch. Again, he was surprised to see how much time had passed.

"My lord," Tillaume said. "Did I ever tell you about your uncle's horse-racing days?"

"Uncle Edwarn was a gambler?"

"Indeed he was. It was a great problem to the house, soon after his rise to high lord. He would spend most of his days at the tracks."

"No wonder we're destitute."

"Actually, he was quite *good* at the gambling, my lord. He usually came out ahead. Far ahead."

"Oh."

"He stopped anyway," Tillaume said, collecting his tray and Waxillium's empty teacup. "Unfortunately, my lord, while he was winning a small fortune at the races, the house lost a *large* fortune in mismanaged business and financial dealings." He walked toward the door, but turned. His normally somber face softened. "It is not my place to lecture, my lord. Once one becomes a man, he can and must make his own decisions. But I do offer warning. Even a good thing can become destructive if taken to excess.

"Your house *needs* you. Thousands of families rely upon you. They need your leadership and your guidance. You did not ask for this, I understand. But the mark of a great man is one who knows when to set aside the important things in order to accomplish the vital ones."

The butler left, closing the door behind him.

Waxillium stood alone beneath the uncannily steady glow of the electric lights, looking at his diagram. He tossed the pencil aside, suddenly feeling drained, and fished out his pocket watch. It was two fifteen. He should be getting some sleep. Normal people slept at these hours.

He dimmed the lights to not be backlit, then walked to the window. He was still depressed not to see any mists, even though he hadn't expected them. *I never said daily prayers,* he realized. *Things have been too chaotic today.*

Well, it was better to arrive late than not at all. He reached into his pocket, fishing out his earring. It was a simple thing, stamped on the head with the ten interlocking rings of the Path. He slipped it into his ear, which was pierced for the purpose, and leaned against the window to stare out at the darkened city.

There was no specific prescribed posture for praying as a Pathian. Just fifteen minutes of meditation and pondering. Some liked to sit with legs crossed, eyes closed, but Waxillium had always found it *harder* to think in that posture. It made his back hurt and his spine tingle. What if someone sneaked around behind him and shot him in the back?

So, he just stood. And pondered. *How are things up there in the mists?* he thought. He was never sure how to talk to Harmony. *Life's good, I assume? What with you being God, and all?*

In response, he felt a sense of … amusement. He could never tell if he created those sensations himself or not.

*Well, since I'm not God myself,* Waxillium thought, *perhaps you could use that omniscience of yours to drum up some answers for me. It feels like I'm in a bind.*

A discordant thought. This wasn't like most of the binds he'd been in. He wasn't tied up, about to be murdered. He wasn't lost in the Roughs, without water or food, trying to find his way back to civilization. He was standing in a lavish mansion, and while his family was having financial troubles, it was nothing they couldn't weather. He had a life of luxury and a seat on the city Senate.

Why, then, did he feel like these last six months had been among the hardest he'd ever lived? An endless series of reports, ledgers, dinner parties, and business deals.

The butler was right; many *did* rely on him. The Ladrian house had started as several thousand individuals following the Origin, and had grown large in three hundred years, adopting under its protection any who came to work on its properties or in its foundries. The deals Waxillium negotiated determined their wages, their privileges, their lifestyle. If his house collapsed, they'd find employment elsewhere, but would be considered lesser members of those houses for a generation or two until they obtained full rights.

*I've done hard things before,* he thought. *I can do this one. If it's right.*

*Is it right?*

Steris had called the Path a simple religion. Perhaps it was. There was only one basic tenet: Do more good than harm. There were other aspects—the belief that all truth was important, the requirement to give more than one took. There were over three hundred examples listed in the Words of Founding, religions that could have been. Might have been. In other times, in another world.

The Path was to study them, learn from their moral codes. A few rules were central. Do not seek lust without commitment. See the strengths in all flaws. Pray and meditate fifteen minutes a day. And don't waste time worshipping Harmony. Doing good *was* the worship.

Waxillium had been converted to the Path soon after leaving Elendel. He was still convinced that the woman he'd met on that train ride must have been one of the Faceless Immortals, the hands of Harmony. She'd given him his earring; every Pathian wore one while praying.

The problem was, it was hard for Waxillium to feel like he was doing anything useful. Luncheons and ledgers, contracts and negotiations. He knew, logically, that all of it was important. But those, even his vote on the Senate, were all abstractions. No match for seeing a murderer jailed or a kidnapped child rescued. In his youth, he'd lived in the City—the world's center of culture, science, and progress—for two decades, but he hadn't found himself until he'd left it and wandered the dusty, infertile lands out beyond the mountains.

*Use your talents,* something seemed to whisper inside of him. *You'll figure it out.*

That made him smile ruefully. He couldn't help wondering why, if Harmony really *was* listening, he didn't give more specific answers. Often, all Waxillium got from prayer was a sense of encouragement. Keep going. It's not as difficult as you feel it is. Don't give up.

He sighed, just closing his eyes, losing himself in thought. Other religions had their ceremonies and their meetings. Not the Pathians. In a way, its very simplicity made the Path much harder to follow. It left interpretation up to one's own conscience.

After meditating for a time, he couldn't help feeling that Harmony wanted him to study the Vanishers *and* to be a good house lord. Were the two mutually exclusive? Tillaume thought they were.

Waxillium glanced back at the stack of broadsheets and the easel with the drawing pad on it. He reached into his pocket, taking out the bullet Wayne had left.

And against his will, he saw in his mind's eye Lessie, head jerking back, blood spraying into the air. Blood covering her beautiful brown hair. Blood on the floor, on the walls, on the murderer who had been standing behind her. But that murderer hadn't been the one to shoot her.

*Oh, Harmony,* he thought, raising a hand to his head and slowly sitting down, back to the wall. *It really is about her, isn't it? I can't do that again. Not again.*

He dropped the round, pulled off his earring. He stood, walked over, cleaned up the broadsheets, and closed the drawing pad. Nobody had been hurt by the Vanishers yet. They were robbing people, but they weren't harming them. There wasn't even proof that the hostages were in danger. Likely they'd be returned after ransom demands were met.

Waxillium sat down to work on his house's ledgers instead. He let them draw his attention well into the night.

# 4

“Harmony’s forearms,” Waxillium mumbled, stepping into the grand ballroom. “This is what passes for a modest wedding dinner these days? There are more people in here than live in entire *towns* in the Roughs.”

Waxillium had visited the Yomen mansion once in his youth, but that time, the grand ballroom had been empty. Now it was filled. Rows and rows of tables lined the hardwood floor of the cavernous chamber; there had to be over a hundred of them. Ladies, lords, elected officials, and the wealthy elite moved and chatted in a low hum, all dressed in their finest. Sparkling jewels. Crisp black suits with colorful cravats. Women with dresses after the modern fashion: deep colors, skirts that went down to the floor, thick outer layers with lots of folds and lace. Most women wore tight, vestlike coats over the top, and the necklines were much lower now than he remembered them being in his childhood. Perhaps he was simply more likely to notice.

“What was that, Waxillium?” Steris asked, turning to the side and letting him help off her overcoat. She wore a fine red dress that seemed calculatedly designed to be completely in fashion but not too daring.

“I was simply noting the size of this gathering, my dear,” Waxillium said, folding her coat and handing it—along with his bowler hat—to a waiting attendant. “I’ve been to quite a number of functions since my return to the city, and none were this enormous. Practically half the city seems to have been invited.”

“Well, this is something special,” she said. “A wedding involving two very well-connected houses. They wouldn’t want to leave anyone out. Except, of course, the ones they left out on purpose.”

Steris held out her arm for him to take. He’d received a detailed lecture during the carriage ride on how, precisely, he was to hold it. His arm above hers, taking her hand lightly, fingers wrapping down under her palm. It looked horribly unnatural, but she insisted that it would convey the exact meaning they intended. Indeed, as they stepped down onto the ballroom floor, they drew a number of interested looks.

“You imply,” Waxillium said, “that one purpose of this wedding dinner is not in who is invited, but who is *not*."

"Precisely," she said. "And, in order to fulfill that purpose, *everybody* else must be invited. The Yomens are powerful, even if they do believe in Sliverism. Horrid religion. Imagine, revering Ironeyes himself. Anyway, nobody will ignore an invitation to this celebration. And so, those to be slighted will not only find themselves without a party to attend, but unable to arrange their own diversions, as anyone they might have wanted to invite will be here. That leaves them to either associate with other uninviteds—therefore reinforcing their outcast status—or to sit alone at home, thinking about how they have been insulted."

"In my experience," Waxillium said, "that sort of unhappy brooding leads to a high probability of people getting shot."

She smiled, waving with calculated fondness to someone they passed. "This isn't the Roughs, Waxillium. It is the City. We don't do such things here."

"No, you don't. Shooting people would be too charitable for City folks."

"You haven't even seen the worst of it," she noted, waving to someone else. "You see that person turned away from us? The stocky man with the longer hair?"

"Yes."

"Lord Shewrman. An infamously dreadful party guest. He's a complete bore when not drunk and a complete buffoon when he is drunk—which is most of the time, I might add. He is probably the least likable person in all of upper society. Most people here would rather spend an hour amputating one of their own *toes* than spend a few moments chatting with him."

"So why is he here?"

"For the insult factor, Waxillium. Those who were snubbed will be even more aghast to learn that Shewrman was here. By including a few bad alloys like him—men and women who are utterly undesirable, but who don't realize it—House Yomen is essentially saying, 'We'd even prefer spending time with *these* people to spending it with you.' Very effective. Very nasty."

Waxillium snorted. "If you tried something that rude out in Weathering, it would end with you strung up by your heels from the rafters. If you're lucky."

"Hum. Yes." A servant stepped forward, gesturing for them to follow as she led them to a table. "You understand," Steris continued more softly, "that I am no longer responding to your 'ignorant frontiersman' act, Waxillium."

"Act?"

"Yes," she said distractedly. "You are a man. The prospect of marriage makes men uncomfortable, and they clutch for freedom. Therefore, you have begun regressing, tossing out savage comments to provoke a reaction from me. This is your instinct for masculine independence; an exaggeration meant, unconsciously, to undermine the wedding."

"You assume it's an exaggeration, Steris," Waxillium said as they approached the table. "Maybe this is what I am."

"You are what you choose to be, Waxillium," she said. "As for these people here, and choices made by House Yomen, I did not make these rules. Nor do I approve of them; many are inconvenient. But it is the society in which we live. Therefore, I make of myself something that can survive in this environment."

Waxillium frowned as she released his arm and fondly kissed cheeks with a few women from a nearby table—distant relatives, it seemed. He found himself clasping hands behind his back and nodding with a civil smile to those who came to greet Steris and him.

He'd made a good showing for himself these last months while moving among upper society, and people treated him far more amiably than they once had. He was even fond of some of those who approached. However, the nature of what he was doing with Steris still made him uncomfortable, and he found it difficult to enjoy much of the conversation.

In addition, this many people in one place still made his back itch. Too much confusion, too difficult to watch the exits. He preferred the smaller parties, or at least the ones spread across a large number of rooms.

The bride and groom arrived, and people rose to clap. Lord Joshin and Lady Mi'chelle; Waxillium didn't know them, though he did wonder why they were speaking with a scruffy man who looked like a beggar, dressed all in black. Fortunately, it didn't seem Steris intended to drag him over to wait with those intent upon congratulating the newlyweds at the earliest possible moment.

Soon, the first tables were served their meals. Silverware began to clatter. Steris sent for a servant to prepare their table; Waxillium passed the time by inspecting the room. There were two balconies, one at each shorter end of the rectangular ballroom. There appeared to be space for dining up there, though no tables had been set up. They were being used for musicians today, a group of harpists.

Majestic chandeliers hung from the ceiling—six enormous ones down the center, outfitted with thousands of sparkling pieces of crystal. Twelve smaller ones hung at their sides. *Electric lights,* he noted. *Those chandeliers must have been a horrible pain to light before the conversion.*

The sheer cost of a party like this numbed his senses. He could have fed Weathering for a year on what was being spent for this single evening. His uncle had sold the Ladrian ballroom a few years back—it had been a separate building, in a different neighborhood from the mansion. That made Waxillium happy; from what he remembered, it had been as large as this one. If they'd still owned it, people might have expected him to throw lavish parties like this.

"Well?" Steris asked, holding out her arm for him again as the servant returned to lead them to their table. He could see Lord Harms and Steris's cousin Marasi sitting at the table already.

"I'm remembering why I left the City," Waxillium said honestly. "Life is so damn *hard* here."

"Many would say that of the Roughs."

"And few of them have lived in both," Waxillium said. "Living here is a different kind of hard, but it's still hard. Marasi is joining us again?"

"Indeed."

"What *is* going on with her, Steris?"

"She's from the Outer Estates and badly wanted the chance to attend university here in the City. My father took pity on her, as her own parents haven't the means to support her. He is allowing her to reside with us for the duration of her studies."

A valid explanation, though it seemed to roll out of Steris's mouth far too quickly. Was it a practiced excuse, or was Waxillium assuming too much? Either way, further discussion was interrupted as Lord Harms rose to greet his daughter.

Waxillium shook hands with Lord Harms, took Marasi's hand and bowed, then sat. Steris began speaking with her father about the people she'd noted to be attending or absent, and Waxillium rested elbows on the table, listening with half an ear.

*Hard room to defend,* he thought absently. *Snipers on those balconies would work, but you'd need some on each one, watching to make sure nobody gets beneath the other.* Anyone with a strong enough gun—or the right Allomantic powers—could take out snipers from below. The pillars below the balconies would also be good shelter, though.

The more cover there was, the better the situation for the one who was outnumbered. Not that you ever wanted to be outnumbered, but he'd rarely been in any fight where he wasn't. So he looked for cover. In the open, a gunfight came down to who could field the most men with weapons. But once you could hide, skill and experience started to compensate. Maybe this room wouldn't be too bad a place to fight after all. He—

He hesitated. What was he doing? He'd *made* his decision. Did he have to keep remaking it every few days?

"Marasi," he said, forcing himself into conversation. "Your cousin tells me you've entered into university studies?"

"I'm in my final year," she said.

He waited for a further reply, and didn't get one.

"And how go your studies?"

"Well," she said, and looked down, holding her napkin.

*That was productive,* he thought with a sigh. Fortunately, it looked like a server was approaching. The lean man began pouring wine for them. "The soup will be along presently," he explained with a faint Terris accent, lofty vowels, and a slightly nasal tone.

The voice froze Waxillium stiff.

"Today's soup," the server continued, "is a delightfully seasoned prawn bisque with a hint of pepper. You shall find it quite enjoyable, I think." He glanced at Waxillium, eyes twinkling in amusement. Though he wore a false nose and a wig, those were Wayne's eyes.

Waxillium groaned softly.

"My lord doesn't like prawns?" Wayne asked with horror.

"The bisque is quite good," Lord Harms said. "I've had it at a Yomen party before."

"It's not the soup," Waxillium said. "I've just recalled something I forgot to do." *It involves strangling someone.*

"I shall return shortly with your soup, my lords and ladies," Wayne promised. He even had a fake line of Terris earrings in his ears. Of course, Wayne *was* part Terris, as was Waxillium himself—as evidenced by their Feruchemical abilities. That was rare in the population; though nearly a fifth of the Originators had been Terris, they weren't prone to marrying other ethnicities.

"Does that server look familiar?" Marasi asked, turning and watching him go.

"He must have served us last time we were here," Lord Harms said.

"But I wasn't with you last—"

"Lord Harms," Waxillium jumped in, "has anything been heard of your relative? The one who was kidnapped by the Vanishers?"

"No," he said, taking a sip of his wine. "Ruin those thieves. This kind of thing is *absolutely* unacceptable. They should confine such behavior to the Roughs!"

"Yes," Steris said, "it does somewhat undermine one's respect for the constabulary when things like this occur. And the robbery *inside* the city! How terrible."

"What was it like?" Marasi suddenly asked. "Lord Ladrian? Living where there was no law?" She seemed genuinely curious, though her comment earned a glare from Lord Harms, likely for bringing up Waxillium's past.

"It was difficult sometimes," Waxillium admitted. "Out there, some people just believe they can take what they want. It would actually *surprise* them when someone stood up to them. As if I were some spoiler, the only one who didn't understand the game they were all playing."

"Game?" Lord Harms said, frowning.

"A figure of speech, Lord Harms," Waxillium said. "You see, they all seemed to think that if you were skilled or well armed, you could take whatever you want. I was both, and yet instead of taking, I *stopped* them. They found it baffling."

"It was very brave of you," Marasi said.

He shrugged. "It wasn't bravery, honestly. I just kind of fell into things."

"Even stopping the Surefires?"

"They were a special case. I—" He froze. "How did you know about *that*?"

"Reports trickle in," Marasi said, blushing. "From the Roughs. Most of them get written up by someone. You can find them at the university or at the right bookshop."

"Oh." Uncomfortable, he picked up his cup and drank some wine.

As he did, something slipped into his mouth. He nearly spat out the entire mouthful in surprise. He contained himself. Barely.

*Wayne, I really* am *going to throttle you.* He moved the object into his hand, covering the act with a cough.

"Well," Steris said, "hopefully the constables will soon deal with these ruffians and we can return to peace and law."

"Actually," Marasi said, "I don't think that's likely."

"Child," Lord Harms said sternly. "That's quite enough."

"I'd like to hear what she has to say, my lord," Waxillium said. "For the sake of conversation."

"Well … all right … I suppose."

"It's simply a theory I had," Marasi said, blushing. "Lord Ladrian, when you were lawkeeper in Weathering, what was the population of the city?"

He fingered the item in his hand. A spent bullet casing that had been capped with a dab of wax. "Well, it started to grow rapidly in the last few years. But for most of the time, I'd say it was around fifteen hundred."

"And the surrounding area?" she asked. "All the places you'd patrol, but didn't have their own lawkeepers?"

"Maybe three thousand total," Waxillium said. "Depending. There are a lot of transients out in the Roughs. People looking to find a mineral claim or to start up a farmstead. Workers moving from place to place."

"Let's say three thousand," Marasi said. "And how many of you were there? Those who helped you keep the law?"

"Five or six, depending," he said. "Wayne and I, and Barl most of the time. A few others on and off."

*And Lessie,* he thought.

"Let's say six per three thousand," she said. "Gives us an easy number to work with. One lawman per five hundred people."

"What is the point of this?" Lord Harms asked sufferingly.

"The population of our octant is around six hundred thousand," she explained. "By the same ratio Lord Ladrian described, we should have roughly twelve hundred constables. But we don't. It's somewhere closer to six hundred, last I looked over the numbers. So, Lord Ladrian, your 'savage' wildlands actually had *double* the number of lawmen watching over it as we have here in the city."

"Huh," he said. *Odd information for a young woman of means to have.*

"I'm not trying to diminish your accomplishments," she said quickly. "You more likely had a higher percentage of lawbreakers as well, since the reputation of the Roughs draws that type. But I think it's a matter of perception. As you said, out of the city, people expect to get away with their crimes.

"Here, they are more circumspect—and many of the crimes are smaller in scope. Instead of the bank getting robbed, you get a dozen people being robbed on their way home at night. The nature of the urban environment makes it easier to hide if you keep your crimes below a certain level of visibility. But I wouldn't say life is really *safer* in the city, despite what people think.

"I'll bet more people are murdered here, by percentage of the population, than out in the Roughs. There is so much more going on in the City, however, that people pay less attention to it. By contrast, when a man is murdered in a small town, it's a very disruptive event—even if it's the only murder that's happened in years.

"And all of this isn't even counting the fact that much of the wealth in the world is concentrated in a few places inside the city. Wealth draws men looking for opportunity. There are a whole *host* of reasons why the City is more dangerous than the Roughs. It's just that we pretend that it isn't."

Waxillium folded his arms in front of him on the table. *Curious.* Once she started talking, she didn't seem shy at all.

"You see, my lord," Harms said. "This is why I tried to still her."

"It would have been a shame if you had," Waxillium said, "as I believe that's the most interesting thing anyone has said to me since I returned to Elendel."

Marasi smiled, though Steris just rolled her eyes. Wayne returned with the soup. Unfortunately, the area right around them was crowded—Wayne wouldn't be able to create a speed bubble around just Waxillium and himself. It would catch someone else, and anyone caught in it would have time sped up for them as well. Wayne couldn't shape the bubble or choose whom it affected.

While the others were distracted by the soup, Waxillium broke the wax off the sealed shell casing and found a small rolled-up piece of paper inside. He glanced at Wayne, then unrolled it.

*You were right,* it read.

"I usually am," he muttered as Wayne placed a bowl in front of him. "What are you up to, Wayne?"

"One seventy, thank you," Wayne said under his breath. "I've been lifting weights and eating steak."

Waxillium gave him a flat stare, but got ignored as Wayne proceeded to explain—with his slight Terris accent—that he'd soon return with a bread basket and more wine for the group.

"Lord Ladrian," Steris said as they began eating, "I suggest that we begin compiling a list of conversational topics we can employ when in the company of others. The topics should not touch on politics or religion, yet should be memorable and give us opportunities to appear charming. Do you know any particularly witty sayings or stories that can be our starting point?"

"I once shot the tail off a dog by mistake," Waxillium said idly. "It's kind of a funny story."

"Shooting dogs is hardly appropriate dinner conversation," Steris said.

"I know. Particularly since I was aiming for its balls."

Marasi just about spat her soup across the table.

"Lord Ladrian!" Steris exclaimed, though her father seemed amused.

"I thought you said I couldn't shock you any longer," he said to Steris. "I was merely testing your hypothesis, my dear."

"Honestly. You *will* eventually overcome this rural lack of decorum, won't you?"

He stirred his soup to make sure Wayne hadn't hidden anything in it. *I hope he at least washed that bullet casing.* "I suspect that I will, indeed, eventually overcome it," he said, raising the spoon to his lips. The soup was good, but too cold. "The amusing thing is that when I was in the Roughs, I was considered to be highly refined—so much so, in fact, that they thought me haughty."

"Calling a man 'refined' by Roughs standards," Lord Harms said, raising a finger, "is like saying a brick is 'soft' by building-material standards—right before you smash it into a man's face."

"Father!" Steris said. She glared at Waxillium, as if the comment were his fault.

"It was a perfectly legitimate simile," Lord Harms said.

"We will have no further talk of hitting people with bricks or of shootings, *regardless* of the target!"

"Very well, cousin," Marasi said. "Lord Ladrian, I once heard that you threw a man's own knife at him and hit him right through the eye. Is the story true?"

"It was actually Wayne's knife," Waxillium said. He hesitated. "And the eye was an accident. I was aiming for the balls that time too."

"Lord Ladrian!" Steris said, nearly livid.

"I know. That's quite off target. I've got *really* bad aim with throwing knives."

Steris looked at them, growing red as she saw that her father was snickering, but trying to cover it up with his napkin. Marasi met her gaze with innocent equanimity. "No bricks," Marasi said, "and no guns. I was making conversation as you requested."

Steris stood. "I'm going to see myself to the women's washroom while you three compose yourselves."

She stalked away, and Waxillium felt a stab of guilt. Steris was stiff, but she seemed earnest and honest. She did not deserve mockery. It was very hard not to try provoking her, however.

Lord Harms cleared his throat. "That was uncalled for, child," he said to Marasi. "You must not make me regret my promise to start bringing you to these functions."

"Don't blame her, my lord," Waxillium said. "I was the primary offender. I'll offer a suitable apology to Steris when she returns, and will guard my tongue for the rest of the evening. I shouldn't have allowed myself to go so far."

Harms nodded, sighing. "I'll admit, I've been tempted to such lengths myself a time or two. She's much as her mother was." He gave Waxillium a pitying look.

"I see."

"This is our lot, son," Lord Harms said, standing. "To be lord of a house requires certain sacrifices. Now, if you'll excuse me, I see Lord Alernath over at the bar and I think I'll grab a nip of something harder with him before the main course. If I don't go before Steris gets back, she'll bully me into staying. I shouldn't be long." He nodded to the two of them, then waddled toward a group of higher-built tables off to the side, next to an open bar.

Waxillium watched him go, idly thinking and rolling Wayne's note in his fingers. Previously, he'd assumed Lord Harms had driven Steris to be as she was, but it appeared he was more under *her* thumb than vice versa. *Another curiosity,* he thought.

"Thank you for your defense of me, Lord Ladrian," Marasi said. "It appears that you are as quick to come to a lady's aid with words as you are with pistols."

"I was merely stating the truth as I saw it, my lady."

"Tell me. Did you really shoot off a dog's tail when aiming for his …

er…”

“Yes,” Waxillium said, grimacing. “In my defense, the damn thing was attacking me. Belonged to a man I hunted down. The aggressiveness wasn’t the dog’s fault; the poor thing looked like it hadn’t been fed in days. I was trying to shoot it somewhere nonlethal, scare it off. That part about the man I hit in the eye was fabricated, though. I wasn’t actually aiming for any body part in particular—I was just hoping I’d hit.”

She smiled. “Might I ask you something?”

“Please.”

“You looked crestfallen when I spoke of the statistics dealing with lawman ratios. I didn’t mean to offend or downplay your heroics.”

“It’s all right,” he said.

“But?”

He shook his head. “I’m not sure if I can explain it. When I found my way out to the Roughs, when I started bringing in the warranted, I started to … Well, I thought I’d found a place where I was needed. I thought I’d found a way to do something that nobody else would do.”

“But you did.”

“And yet,” he said, stirring his soup, “it appears that all along, the place I left behind might have needed me even more. I’d never noticed.”

“You did important work, Lord Ladrian. *Vital* work. Besides, I understand that before you arrived, nobody was upholding the law in that area.”

“There was Arbitan,” he said, smiling, remembering the older man. “And, of course, the lawkeepers over in Far Dorest.”

“A distant city and with a short reach,” she said, “which had a single capable lawman to serve a large population. Jon Deadfinger had his own problems. By the time you had built things up, Weathering was protected better than those in the City—but it did not start that way.”

He nodded, though—again—he was curious about how much she knew. Were people *really* telling stories about him and Wayne all the way over here in the city? Why hadn’t he heard of them before now?

Her statistics *did* bother him. He hadn’t thought of the City as dangerous. It was the Roughs, wild and untamed, that needed rescuing. The City was the land of plenty that Harmony had created to shelter mankind. Here, trees grew fruit in abundance and cultivated lands had water without need for irrigation. The ground was always fertile, and somehow never got farmed out.

This land was supposed to be different. Protected. He’d put away his guns in part because he’d convinced himself that the constables could do their jobs without help. *But don’t the Vanishers prove that might not* *be the case?*

Wayne returned with the bread and a bottle of wine, then stopped, looking at the two empty seats. “Oh dear,” he said. “Did you grow so tired of waiting that you *devoured* your two companions?”

Marasi glanced at him and smiled.

*She knows,* Waxillium realized. *She recognizes him.*

“If I may note something, my lady,” Waxillium said, drawing her attention back. “You are far less unassuming than you were at our first meeting.”

She winced. “I’m not very good at being shy, am I?”

“I wasn’t aware it was something that required practice.”

“I try all the time,” Wayne said, sitting down at the table and taking the baguette out of his basket. He took a healthy bite. “Nobody gives me any credit for it. ’S because I’m misunderstood, I tell you.” His Terris accent had vanished.

Marasi looked confused. “Should I pretend to be aghast at what he’s doing?” she asked Waxillium in a hushed tone.

“He saw that you’d recognized him,” Waxillium said. “Now he’s going to sulk.”

“Sulk?” Wayne started eating Steris’s soup. “That’s right unkind, Wax. *Ugh.* This stuff is far worse than I was telling you guys. Sorry ’bout that.”

“It will reflect in my tip,” Waxillium said dryly. “Lady Marasi, I was serious in my inquiry. To be frank, it seems that you’ve been trying to act with exaggerated timidity.”

“Always looking down after you speak,” Wayne agreed. “Raising the pitch of your tone a little too much with questions.”

“Not the type to be studying at the university at her own request,” Waxillium noted. “Why the act?”

“I’d rather not say.”

“You’d rather not,” Waxillium said, “or Lord Harms and his daughter would rather you not?”

She blushed. “The latter. But please. I would really prefer to leave the topic.”

“Ever charming, Wax,” Wayne said, taking another bite from the loaf of bread. “See that? You’ve pushed the lady almost to tears.”

“I’m not—” Marasi began.

“Ignore him,” Waxillium said. “Trust me. He’s like a rash. The more you scratch him, the more irritating he gets.”

“Ouch,” Wayne said, though he grinned.

“Aren’t you worried?” Marasi asked softly of Wayne. “You’re wearing a waiter’s uniform. If they see you sitting at the table and eating…”

“Oh, that’s a good point,” Wayne said, tipping his chair back. The person behind him had left, and with Lord Harms gone, Wayne had just enough room to—

—and there it was. He leaned his chair forward again, clothing changed back to a duster with a loose button-down shirt and thick Roughs trousers underneath. He spun his hat on his finger. The earrings were gone.

Marasi jumped. "Speed bubble," she whispered, sounding awed. "I thought I'd be able to see something from outside!"

"You could, if you were watching closely," Waxillium said. "A blur. If you look at the next table over, the sleeve of his waiter's coat is sticking out from where he tossed it. His hat folds—though the sides are stiff, you can compress it between your hands. I'm still trying to figure out where he had the duster."

"Under your table," Wayne said, sounding very self-satisfied.

"Ah, of course," Waxillium said. "He had to know beforehand which table would be ours so he could be assigned as our waiter." *I really should have looked under the table before we sat,* Waxillium thought. *Would that have seemed too paranoid?* He didn't feel paranoid; he didn't lie awake at nights, worried that he'd be shot, or think that conspiracies were trying to destroy him. He just liked to be careful.

Marasi was still looking at Wayne; she seemed bemused.

"We aren't what you expected," Waxillium said. "From the reports you read?"

"No," she admitted. "The accounts usually omitted matters of personality."

"There are stories 'bout us?" Wayne asked.

"Yes. Many."

"Damn." He sounded impressed. "Do we get royalties for them or something? If we do, I want Wax's share, seeing as to how I did all the stuff they say he did. Plus he's already rich and all."

"They are news-style reports," Marasi said. "Those don't pay royalties to their subjects."

"Filthy cheats." Wayne paused. "I wonder if any of the other fine ladies in this establishment have heard of my outrageously heroic and masculine exploits…."

"Lady Marasi is a student at the university," Waxillium said. "I'm assuming she read reports that are collected there. Most of the public won't be familiar with them."

"That is true," she said.

"Oh," Wayne said, sounding disappointed. "Well, maybe Lady Marasi herself might be interested in hearing more of my outrageously —"

"Wayne?"

"Yes."

"Enough."

"Right."

"I do apologize for him," Waxillium said, turning to Marasi. She still wore the bemused expression on her face.

"He does that a lot," Wayne said. "Apologizing. I think it's one of his personal failings. I try to help him out by being damn near perfect, but so far, that hasn't been enough."

"It's quite all right," she said. "I do wonder if I should write something for my professors describing how … unique it was to meet you two."

"What is it, exactly, that you are studying at the university?" Waxillium asked.

She hesitated, then blushed deeply.

"Ah, see!" Wayne said. "Now, *that's* how to act shy. You're getting much better! Bravo."

"It's just that…" She raised a hand to shade her eyes and looked down in embarrassment. "It's just … Oh, all right. I'm studying legal justice and criminal behavioristics."

"That's something to be ashamed of?" Waxillium said, sharing a confused look with Wayne.

"Well, I've been told it's not very feminine," she said. "But beyond that … well, I'm sitting with you two … and … well, you know … you're two of the most famous lawkeepers in the world, and all…"

"Trust me," Waxillium said. "We don't know as much as you might think."

"Now, if you were studying buffoonery and idiotic behavior," Wayne added, "*that* is something we're experts on."

"That's two things," Waxillium said.

"Don't care." Wayne continued eating the bread. "So where *are* the other two? I'm assuming you didn't really devour them. Wax only eats people on the weekend."

"Both will likely be returning soon, Wayne," Waxillium said. "So if you had a purpose to your visit, you may wish to be on with it. Unless this is just normal, run-of-the-mill tormenting."

"I told you what it was about," Wayne said. "You didn't accidentally eat my note, did you?"

"No. It didn't say much."

"It said enough," Wayne said, leaning in. "Wax, you told me to look at the hostages. You were right."

"They're all Allomancers," Waxillium guessed.

"More than that," Wayne said. "They're all relatives."

"It's only been three hundred years since the Originators, Wayne. We're *all* relatives."

"Does that mean you'll take responsibility for me?"

"No."

Wayne chuckled, pulling a folded piece of paper from his duster pocket. "It's more than that, Wax. Look. Each of the women kidnapped was from a particular line. I did some *researchin'*. Real, serious stuff." He paused. "Why do they call it *re*search if I've only done it this one time?"

"Because I'll bet you had to look things up twice," Waxillium said, taking the paper and studying it. It was written awkwardly, but was decipherable. It explained the basic lines of descent of each of the women kidnapped.

Several things stood out. Each of them could trace back to the Lord Mistborn himself. Because of that, most of them *also* had a strong heritage of Allomancy in their past. They were all fairly closely related, third or fourth cousins, some first.

Waxillium looked up, and noticed Marasi smiling broadly, regarding him and Wayne.

"What?" Waxillium asked.

"I *knew* it!" she exclaimed. "I knew you were in town to investigate the Vanishers. You showed up to become house lord only one month after the first robbery happened. You're going to catch them, aren't you?"

"Is *that* why you insisted that Lord Harms bring you to meetings with me?"

"Maybe."

"Marasi," Waxillium said, sighing. "You're jumping to conclusions. Do you think the deaths in my family, making me house lord, were fabrications?"

"Well, no," she said. "But I was surprised that you'd accepted the title until I realized that you probably saw it as a chance to find out what is going on with these robberies. You have to admit, they *are* unusual."

"So is Wayne," Waxillium said. "But I wouldn't uproot myself, change my entire lifestyle, and accept responsibility for an entire house just to study him."

"Look, Wax," Wayne jumped in—ignoring the barb, which was unusual for him. "Please tell me you brought a gun with you."

"What? No, I didn't." Waxillium folded up the paper and handed it back. "Why would you care?"

"Because," Wayne said, snatching the paper from his hand and leaning in. "Don't you see? The thieves are looking for places they can rob where the wealthy upper class of Elendel can be found—because *among* those wealthy upper-class types, they find their targets. People with the right heritage. Those types, rich types, have stopped traveling on the railway."

Waxillium nodded. “Yes, if the women really *are* the true targets, the high-profile robberies will make potential future targets much less likely to travel. A valid connection. That must be why the thieves attacked the theater.”

“And where else are there wealthy individuals with the right heritage?” Wayne asked. “A place where people wear their finest jewelry, which will let you rob them as a distraction? A place where you can find the right hostage to take as the real prize?”

Waxillium’s mouth grew dry. “A large wedding reception.”

The doors at both ends of the ballroom suddenly burst open.

# 5

The bandits didn't look like the kind Waxillium was used to. They didn't mask their faces with kerchiefs or wear dusters and wide-brimmed Roughs hats. Most of them wore vests and bowler-style city hats, dull trousers, and loose, buttoned shirts that were rolled to the elbows. They weren't *better* dressed, really, just different.

They were well armed. Rifles held at shoulders for many, pistols in the hands of others. People throughout the ballroom noticed immediately, silverware clanking and curses sounding. There were at least two dozen bandits, perhaps three. Waxillium noticed with dissatisfaction that some more were coming in from the right, through the doors to the kitchens. They would have left men behind to watch the staff and keep them from running for help.

"Hell of a time to leave your guns," Wayne said. He moved off his seat and crouched beside the table, slipping his twin hardwood dueling canes out from underneath.

"Put those down," Waxillium said softly, counting. Thirty-five men he could see. Most were congregated at the two ends of the rectangular ballroom, directly in front of and behind Waxillium. He was in almost the very center of the room.

"What?" Wayne said sharply.

"Put the canes down, Wayne."

"You can't mean—"

"Look at this room!" Waxillium hissed. "How many bystanders are there in here? Three hundred, four? What will happen if we provoke a firefight?"

"You could protect them," Wayne said. "Push them out of the way."

"Maybe," Waxillium said. "It would be very risky. So far, none of these robberies have turned violent. I won't have you turning this one into a bloodbath."

"I don't have to listen to you," Wayne said sullenly. "You're not in charge of me anymore, Wax."

Waxillium met his eyes and held them as the room filled with cries of alarm and concern. Looking reluctant, Wayne slid back up into his seat. He didn't put down the dueling canes, but he did keep his hands under the tablecloth, hiding them from view.

Marasi had turned, watching the thieves begin to move through the room, her eyes wide and her rose lips parted. “Oh my.” She spun around, digging out her pocketbook with trembling fingers. She whipped out a small notepad and a pencil.

“What are you doing?” Waxillium asked.

“Writing down descriptions,” she said, her hand shaking. “Did you know that, statistically, only one out of two witnesses can accurately describe a criminal who assaulted them? Worse, seven out of ten will pick the wrong man out of a lineup if a similar but more threatening man is presented. In the moment, you are far more likely to overestimate the height of an assailant, and you will often describe him as being similar to a villain from a story you’ve recently heard. It’s vital, if you are witnessing a crime, to pay special attention to the details of those involved. Oh, I’m babbling, aren’t I?”

She looked terrified, but she started writing anyway, jotting down descriptions of every criminal.

“We never needed to do stuff like that,” Wayne said, eyeing the thieves as they leveled guns at the partygoers, silencing them. “Seein’ as to how if we witness a crime, the guys doing it are usually dead by the end.” He shot Waxillium a glare.

Several thieves began forcing cooks and servers out of the kitchens to join the guests. “If you please!” one of the robbers bellowed, shouldering a shotgun. “Sit down! Remain calm! And *be quiet.*” He had a faint Roughs accent and a solid—though not tall—build, with bulging forearms and a mottled, grayish complexion, almost as if his face were made of granite.

*Koloss blood,* Waxillium thought. *Dangerous.*

People quieted save for a few whimperings from the overtaxed. The bride’s mother appeared to have fainted, and the wedding party was hunkered down, the groom looking angry, with a protective arm over his new wife.

A second Vanisher stepped forward. This one, in contrast to the others, wore a mask: a knit cloth covering his face, with a Roughs hat atop it. “That’s better,” he said in a firm, controlled voice. Something about that voice struck Waxillium.

“If you’re sensible, we’ll be done with this in a matter of moments,” the masked Vanisher said calmingly, walking amid the tables as about a dozen of the bandits began to fan through the room, opening large sacks. “All we want is your jewelry. Nobody needs to get hurt. It would be a shame to spoil such a fine party as this with bloodshed. Your jewelry isn’t worth your life.”

Waxillium glanced toward Lord Harms, who was still sitting by the bar. He’d begun patting his face with a handkerchief. The men with the sacks quickly fanned out through the room, stopping at each table and gathering necklaces, rings, earrings, pocketbooks, and watches. Sometimes the items were tossed in readily, sometimes reluctantly.

"Wax…" Wayne said, voice strained.

Marasi continued writing, pen and paper down in her lap.

"We need to get through this alive," Waxillium said softly. "Without anyone getting hurt. Then we can give our reports to the constables."

"But—"

"I will *not* be the cause of these people dying, Wayne," Waxillium snapped, voice much louder than he'd intended.

Blood on the bricks. A body in a leather coat, slumping to the ground. A grinning face, dying with a bullet in the forehead. Winning, even as he died.

Not again. Never again.

Waxillium squeezed his eyes closed.

Never again.

"How *dare* you!" a voice suddenly yelled. Waxillium glanced to the side. A man at a nearby table had stood up, shaking off the hand of the stout woman beside him. He had a thick, graying beard and wore a suit of an older cut, tails in the back reaching all the way down to his ankles. "I will *not* stay quiet, Marthin! I am a constable of the Eighth Guard!"

This drew the attention of the bandit leader. The masked man strolled toward the outspoken man, shotgun resting easily on his shoulder. "Ah," he said, "Lord Peterus, I believe it is." He waved to a pair of bandits, and they rushed forward, weapons trained on Peterus. "Retired chief of the Eighth constabulary. We'll be needing you to give up your weapon."

"How dare you commit a robbery here, at a wedding celebration," Peterus said. "This is *outrageous*! You should be ashamed of yourself."

"Ashamed?" the bandit leader said as his minions patted down Peterus and pulled a pistol—Granger model 28, optional thick grip—out of his shoulder holster. "*Ashamed?* To rob these? After what you people have done to the Roughs all these years? This isn't shameful. This here, this is *payback*."

*There* is *something about that voice,* Waxillium thought, tapping the table. *Something familiar. Quiet down, Peterus. Don't provoke them!*

"In the name of the law, I will see you hunted down and hanged for this!" Peterus cried.

The outlaw leader smacked Peterus across the face, knocking him to the ground. "What know your sort of the law?" the bandit leader growled. "And be careful about warning people you're going to see them executed. That gives them less reason to hold back. Rust and *Ruin,* you people sicken me."

He waved for his lackeys to resume gathering riches. The bride's mother had recovered, and was sobbing as her family was shaken down for its cash, including even the bridal necklace.

"The bandits really *are* interested in the money," Waxillium said softly. "See? They make each person at the table speak, to find jewelry hidden in mouths. Notice how they make each one stand up and then do a quick check of their pockets and around their seats."

"Of course they're interested in the money," Marasi whispered back. "That's the expected motive for robbery, after all."

"It's the hostages too, though," Waxillium said. "I'm sure of it." Originally, he'd assumed the robberies were just a cover for the bandits' real purpose. If that were the case, however, they wouldn't be so thorough about the money. "Hand me your notebook."

She glanced at him.

"Now," he said, sprinkling steel dust into his wine, then reaching under the table. She hesitantly handed over the notebook as a bandit walked toward their table. It was the gray-skinned one with the thick neck.

"Wayne," Waxillium said, "bat on the wall."

Wayne nodded curtly, sliding over his dueling canes. Waxillium drank his wine, and pressed the spiral-bound notebook and the dueling canes against his side of their square table. He slipped a small metal rod from his sleeve and pressed it against the canes, then burned steel.

Lines sprang up around him. One pointed toward the rod, and another to the notebook's wire coil. He lightly Pushed against them, then let go. The canes and the notebook remained pressed against the table's side, obscured by the tablecloth, which draped down over them. He had to be careful not to Push too hard, lest he move the table.

The bandit came to their table, proffering his sack. Marasi was forced to take off her small pearl necklace, the only jewelry she was wearing. With shaking hands, she searched in her pocketbook for any bills, but the bandit just snatched the entire thing and dumped it into his sack.

"Please," Waxillium said, making his voice shake. "Please, don't hurt us!" He pulled out his pocket watch, then dumped it to the table, as if in haste. He yanked its chain free of his vest and threw it in the sack. Then he got out his pocketbook and tossed it in, conspicuously pulling out both of his pockets with shaking hands to show he had nothing else. He began patting his coat pockets.

"That'll do, mate," the koloss-blooded man said, grinning.

"Don't hurt me!"

"Sit back down, you rusting git," the bandit said, looking back at Marasi. He leered, then patted her down, making her speak so he could check her mouth. She bore it with a deep blush, particularly when the patting down turned into a few solid gropes.

Waxillium felt his eye begin to twitch.

“Nothing else,” the bandit said with a grunt. “Why’d I get the poor tables? And you?” He glanced at Wayne. Behind them, another of the bandits found Wayne’s servant’s coat under the table, holding it up with a confused expression.

“Do I *look* like I’ve got anything of value, mate?” Wayne asked, dressed in his duster and Roughs trousers. He’d turned up his Roughs accent. “I’m just ’ere by mistake. Was begging in the kitchen when I heard you blokes come in.”

The bandit grunted, but patted Wayne’s pockets anyway. He found nothing, then checked under the table and made them all stand up. Finally he swore at them for being “too poor” and snatched Wayne’s hat off his head. He threw away his own hat—he was wearing a knit cap underneath, aluminum peeking through the holes—then walked off, sticking Wayne’s hat on his head over the cap.

They sat back down.

“He took my lucky hat, Wax,” Wayne growled.

“Steady,” Waxillium said, handing Marasi back her notebook so she could return to taking covert notes.

“Why didn’t you hide your pocketbook,” she whispered, “as you did the notebook?”

“Some of the bills in it are marked,” Waxillium said distractedly, watching the masked leader. He was consulting something in his hand. Looked like a couple of crinkled-up sheets of paper. “That’ll allow the constables to track where they get spent, if they do get spent.”

“Marked!” Marasi said. “So you *did* know we’d be robbed!”

“What? Of course I didn’t.”

“But—”

“Wax always carries some marked bills,” Wayne said, eyes narrowing as he noticed what the leader was doing. “Just in case.”

“Oh. That’s … very unusual.”

“Wax is his own special brand of paranoid, miss,” Wayne said. “Is that bloke doing what I think he’s doing?”

“Yes,” Waxillium said.

“What?” Marasi asked.

“Comparing faces to drawings in his hand,” Waxillium said. “He’s looking for the right person to take as a hostage. Look how he’s strolling through the tables, checking every woman’s face. He’s got a few others doing it too.”

They fell silent as the leader strolled past them. He was accompanied by a fine-featured fellow with a scowl on his face. “I’m tellin' you," the second man said, "the boys are gettin' jumpy. You can't give 'em all this and never let 'em fire the bloody things."

The masked leader was silent, studying everyone at Wax's table for a moment. He hesitated briefly, then moved on.

"You're gonna have to let the boys loose sooner or later, boss," the second man said, his voice trailing off. "I think…" They were soon too far for Waxillium to make out what they were saying.

Nearby, Peterus—the former constable—had gotten back up into his seat. His wife was holding a napkin to his bleeding head.

*This* is *the best way,* Waxillium told himself firmly. *I've seen their faces. I'll be able to track down who they are when they spend my money. I'll find them, and fight them on my own terms. I'll …*

But he wouldn't. He'd let the constables do that part, wouldn't he? Wasn't that what he kept telling himself?

A sudden disturbance from the far side of the chamber drew his eyes. A few bandits led a couple of frazzled-looking women into the hall, one of them Steris. It looked like they'd finally thought to sweep the ladies' room. The other bandits were making pretty good time gathering goods. There were enough of them that it didn't take too long, even with this large crowd.

"All right," the boss called out. "Grab a hostage."

*Too loud,* Waxillium thought.

"Who should we take?" one of the bandits yelled back.

*They're making a show of it.*

"I don't care," the boss said.

*He wants us to think he's picking one at random.*

"Any of them will do," the boss continued. "Say … that one." He waved at Steris.

*Steris.* One of the previous abductees was her cousin. Of course. She was in the same line.

Waxillium's eye twitching grew worse.

"Actually," the boss said. "We'll take two this time." He sent his koloss-blooded lackey running back toward the tables of people. "Now, nobody follow, or they'll get hurt. Remember, a few jewels aren't worth your life. We'll cut the hostages loose once we're sure we aren't being followed."

*Lies,* Waxillium thought. *What do you want with them? Why are you—*

The koloss-blooded man who had stolen Wayne's hat stepped up to Wax's table and grabbed Marasi by the shoulder. "You'll do," he said. "You're coming for a ride with us, pretty."

She jumped as he touched her, dropping her notepad.

"Here now," another bandit said. "What's this?" He picked it up, looking through it. "All it's got is words, Tarson."

"Idiot," the koloss-blooded man—Tarson—said. "You can't read, can you?" He craned over. "Here, now. That's a description of *me*, isn't it?"

"I…" Marasi said. "I just wanted to remember, for my journal, you see.…"

"I'm sure," Tarson said, tucking the notebook into a pocket. His hand came out with a pistol, which he lowered at her head.

Marasi grew pale.

Waxillium stood up, steel burning in his stomach. The other bandit's pistol was trained at his head a second later.

"Your lady will be just fine with us, old boy," Tarson said with a smile on his grayish lips. "Up you go." He pulled Marasi to her feet, then pushed her before him toward the northern exit.

Waxillium stared down the barrel of the other bandit's pistol. With a mental Push, he could send that gun with a snap back into its owner's face, perhaps break his nose.

The bandit looked like he wanted to pull the trigger. He looked eager, excited by the thrill of the robbery. Waxillium had seen men like that before. They were dangerous.

The bandit hesitated, then glanced at his friends, and finally broke off, jogging toward the exit. Another was shoving Steris toward the door.

"Wax!" Wayne hissed.

How could a man of honor watch something like this? Every instinct of justice Waxillium had *demanded* he do something. Fight.

"Wax," Wayne said softly. "Mistakes happen. Lessie wasn't your fault."

"I…"

Wayne grabbed his dueling canes. "Well, *I'm* going to do something."

"It's not worth the cost of lives, Wayne," Waxillium said, shaking out of his stupor. "This isn't just about me. It's true, Wayne. We—"

"How *dare* you!" a familiar voice bellowed. Lord Peterus, the former constable. The aging man removed the napkin from his head, stumbling to his feet. "Cowards! *I* will be your hostage, if you require one."

The bandits ignored him, most jogging toward the exits of the room, waving their guns about and enjoying making the dinnergoers cringe.

"Cowards!" Peterus yelled. "You are *dogs*, each and every one of you. I'll see you hanged! Take me instead of one of those girls, or it will happen. I swear it by the Survivor himself!" He stumbled after the retreating boss, passing lords, ladies, and the wealthy—most of whom had gotten down and were hiding under their tables.

*There goes the only man in this room with any courage,* Waxillium thought, suddenly feeling a powerful shame. *Him and Wayne.*

Steris was almost to the door. Marasi and her captor were catching up to the boss.

*I can't let this happen. I—*

"COWARD!"

The masked bandit leader suddenly spun, hand snapping out, a gunshot cracking the air, echoing across the large ballroom. It was over in a heartbeat.

The aged Peterus collapsed in a heap. Smoke curled in the air over the bandit boss's pistol.

"Oh…" Wayne said softly. "You just made a bad mistake, mate. A *very* bad mistake."

The boss turned away from the body, holstering his gun. "Fine," he yelled, walking toward the door. "You can have some fun, boys. Burn it out of your blood quickly and meet me outside. Let's—"

Everything froze. People stopped in place. The curling smoke hung motionless. Voices quieted. Whimpering halted. In a circle around Waxillium's table, the air rippled just faintly.

Wayne stood up, shouldering his dueling canes, inspecting the room. He was placing each and every one of the bandits, Waxillium knew. Judging distances, preparing himself.

"As soon as I drop the bubble," Wayne said, "this place is going to erupt like an ammunition store in a volcano."

Waxillium calmly reached into his jacket and slid a hidden pistol from beneath his arm. He set it on the table. His twitch had vanished.

"Well?" Wayne asked.

"That's a terrible metaphor. How would an ammunition store get into a volcano?"

"I don't know. Look, are you going to fight or not?"

"I've tried waiting," Waxillium said. "I gave them a chance to leave. I *tried* giving this up."

"You gave it a good show, Wax." He grimaced. "Too good a show."

Waxillium rested his hand on the pistol. Then he picked it up. "So be it." With his other hand, he poured out his entire pouch of steel into his wine cup, then downed it.

Wayne grinned. "You owe me a pint for lying to me, by the way."

"Lying?"

"You said you hadn't brought a gun."

"I didn't bring *a* gun," Waxillium said, reaching to the small of his back and sliding a second pistol out. "You know me better than that, Wayne. I never go anywhere with only one. How much bendalloy do you have?"

"Not as much as I'd like. The stuff's damn expensive here in town. I've got maybe enough for five minutes' extra time. My metalminds are pretty much full, though. Spent a good two weeks sick in bed after you left.” That would give Wayne some healing power, should he get shot.

Waxillium took a deep breath; the coldness inside him melted away and became a flame as he burned steel that pinpointed each and every source of metal in the room.

If he froze again …

*I won’t,* he told himself. *I cannot.* “I’ll get the girls. You keep the bandits on the south side off me. Our priority is to keep the bystanders alive.”

“Gladly.”

“Thirty-seven armed baddies, Wayne. In a room full of innocents. This is going to be *tough*. Stay focused. I’ll try to clear some space as we start. You can catch a ride, if you want.”

“Perfect as Preserves,” Wayne said, turning and putting his back to Waxillium’s. “You wanna know why I *really* came to find you?”

“Why?”

“I thought of you happy in a comfy bed, resting and relaxing, spending the rest of your life sipping tea and reading papers while people bring you food and maids rub your toes and stuff.”

“And?”

“And I just couldn’t leave you to a fate like that.” Wayne shivered. “I’m too good a friend to let a mate of mine die in such a terrible situation.”

“Comfortable?”

“No,” Wayne said. “*Boring.*” He shivered again.

Waxillium smiled, then raised thumbs to hammers and cocked his pistols. When he’d been young and sought the Roughs, he’d ended up going where he’d been needed. Well, maybe that had happened again.

“Go!” he yelled, leveling his guns.

# 6

Wayne dropped the speed bubble.

*First step,* Waxillium thought as he took aim, *draw their attention.* He began gently Pushing away from himself in the way that created a steel bubble of force to interfere with bullets. It wouldn't protect him completely, but it would help. Unless they fired aluminum bullets.

Best to be careful. And best to shoot first.

The robbers were eagerly raising their weapons. He could see the lust for destruction in their eyes. They had been armed to the teeth, but so far, their robberies had occurred without a single shot being fired.

Rather than kill a lot of people, most of them probably just wanted to shoot the place up a little, but such situations easily grew more violent than expected. If they weren't stopped, the Vanishers would leave behind more than shattered windows and broken tables.

Waxillium quickly chose a bandit with a shotgun and dropped him with a bullet to the head. A second followed. Those shotguns were least dangerous to Waxillium, but they'd be deadly to the cowering bystanders.

His shots boomed in the cavernous chamber and the guests screamed. Some took the chance to run for the edges of the room. Most got down beside their tables. In the confusion, the bandits didn't spot Waxillium at first.

He dropped another man with a bullet to the shoulder. The smart thing to do from here would have been to crouch down beside a table and continue to fire. It would take the bandits precious moments to discover who was attacking them in a room so large and crowded.

Unfortunately, the men behind him opened fire, whooping in delight. They hadn't noticed what he was doing, though the men in front of him on the other side of the hall had seen their friends fall and were scattering for cover. In moments, the room would be a storm of lead and gunsmoke.

Taking a deep breath, Waxillium flared his steel and tapped his iron metalmind. Filling it made him lighter, but tapping it made him heavier—much heavier. He increased his weight a hundredfold. There was a proportional increase in the strength of his body, or so he'd guessed, as he didn't crush himself with his own weight.

He raised his guns high over his head to keep them out of the radius, then Pushed outward from himself in a ring. He started carefully, gradually increasing its strength. When you Pushed, it was your weight against that of the object—in this case, the metal screws and bolts in the tables and chairs. They were swept away from him.

He became the epicenter of an expanding ring of force. Tables toppled, chairs scraped against the floor, and people screamed in surprise. Some were caught up in it, shoved away from him. Not so hard that they were hurt, he hoped, but it was better to suffer a few bruises than remain in the center of the room with what was coming.

Just to the side, he saw Wayne—who had been moving carefully toward the back of the room—leap up onto an overturned table, holding to its rim and grinning as he rode it in a rush toward the bandits back there.

Waxillium eased off on the Push. He stood alone in a large empty space at the center of the dining hall, surrounded by patches of spilled wine, food, and fallen dishes.

Then the firing started in earnest, the bandits in front of him letting loose with a barrage. He met the onslaught of bullets with another strong Push. The bullets stopped in the air, rebuffed in a wave. Given their speed, he could stop bullets that way only if he was expecting them.

He let the bullets fly back at their owners, but didn't Push too hard, lest he strike an innocent partygoer. It was enough to send the bandits scrambling, however, and yelling that there was a Coinshot in the room.

He was in real danger now. Quick as an eyeblink, Waxillium switched from tapping his metalmind to filling it, making himself far lighter. He pointed his revolver down and shot a bullet into the floor just behind himself and Pushed off it, launching into the air. Wind rushed in his ears as he threw himself over the barricade of furniture he'd made, where some of the guests still huddled. Luckily, many were realizing that the perimeters of the room would be much safer, and were scrambling that way.

Waxillium dropped right in the middle of the bandits, who had started taking cover behind the pile of tables and chairs. Men cursed as he spread his arms, guns pointed in opposite directions, and started firing. He spun, dropping four men with a quick spray of bullets.

Some bandits fired on him, but the bullets were off aim, and swerved away from his steel bubble. "Aluminum bullets!" one of the bandits was yelling. "Get out your bloody aluminum!"

Wax spun and fired two shots into that man's chest. Then he leaped to the side, rolling up next to a table that had been beyond his initial

Push. A quick Push against the nails in the top overturned it, giving him cover as the bandits opened fire. He caught blue lines from some of the bullets, moving too quickly for him to Push out of the way.

Other bandits were reloading their guns. He was in luck; it seemed from the curses of the bandit leaders that the men were supposed to have aluminum bullets loaded already, at least in some of the chambers. Shooting aluminum was like shooting gold, however, and many of the bandits appeared to have kept the aluminum in their pockets rather than wanting to have it in the guns, where they might end up firing it by accident.

A bandit ducked around the side of his table, aiming a pistol. Waxillium reacted by reflex, Pushing on the gun, slapping it back into his face. Waxillium dropped him with a bullet to the chest.

*Empty,* he thought to himself, counting the bullets he'd shot. He had just two left in the other gun. He glanced over the edge of his shelter, noting the locations of two reloading bandits who had hidden behind overturned tables. He took aim quickly, increased his weight, then fired and *Pushed* with everything he had on the bullet leaving his gun.

The bullet cracked in the air, driving forward into the table shelter and drilling right through it, hitting the bandit on the other side. Waxillium repeated, taking down the other bandit, who was stupefied to see the thick oak table penetrated by a simple revolver bullet. Then Waxillium threw himself over the top of his own table, getting to the other side just as the men behind him got around the wounded and started firing at him.

Bullets snapped against his shelter, but it held. This time, none of them gave off blue lines. Aluminum. He breathed deeply, dropping his revolvers and pulling out the Terringul 27 he had strapped to the inside of his calf. Not the largest-caliber gun, but its long barrel made it precise.

He spared a glance for Wayne, and counted four Vanishers down. His friend was gleefully leaping off a table toward a man with a shotgun. The two became a blur as Wayne activated a speed bubble. In an instant he was in a different place—bullets zipping through the area he'd left—hiding behind an overturned table, the bandit with the shotgun limp on the ground.

Wayne's favorite tactic was to get close, then catch one person in the speed bubble and fight them alone. He couldn't move the speed bubble after putting it up, but he could move around inside of it. So when he released the bubble after fighting his chosen foe one-on-one, he'd be standing in a different place than expected. Foes found him incredibly difficult to track and aim at.

But in a long fight, they'd eventually catch on and hold their fire until just after Wayne dropped a bubble. It took a couple of seconds between dropping one and putting up another, the time when Wayne was most vulnerable. Of course, even when the bubble was up, Wayne wasn't completely safe. It could be nerve-racking to know that his friend was fighting alone, enclosed by a bubble of accelerated time. If Wayne got into trouble while inside, Waxillium couldn't help. Wayne would be shot and bleeding before the bubble collapsed.

Well, Waxillium had his own troubles. With those aluminum bullets, his own protective bubble was useless. He let it drop. More bullets pelted his table and the floor around him, the pops of gunfire echoing in the grand hall. Fortunately, he could still see blue lines pointing to the ordinary steel of the bandits' guns, including those of a group of men attempting to flank him.

*No time to deal with them,* he thought. The bandit boss had sent Steris out with one of his men, but had paused by the door himself. He didn't seem surprised by the resistance. Something about the way he stood there, imperious and in control … Something about the way his eyes—the only visible part of his masked face—found Wax, and locked on to him … Something about that voice …

*Miles?* The thought was a shock.

Screams. Marasi's screams. Wax turned away from the bandit leader, feeling an unfamiliar sense of panic. Steris needed him, but Marasi did too, and she was closer. The koloss-blooded man named Tarson had her; he held her with one arm around the neck, towing her toward the door and cursing. His two companions looked about anxiously, as if expecting constables to come pouring in at any moment.

Marasi had gone limp. Tarson was shouting, and he jammed his revolver in her ear, but she had her eyes squeezed shut and refused to respond. She knew she wasn't some simple hostage; they wanted her specifically, and therefore wouldn't shoot her.

*Good girl,* Waxillium thought. It couldn't be easy, hearing the Vanisher shout, feeling the barrel on her temple. A few guests hid nearby, a well-dressed woman and her husband holding their hands to their ears and whimpering. The gunfire was loud, chaotic, though he barely noticed these things any longer. He should have slipped his earplugs in, regardless. Too late now.

Waxillium ducked to the side and fired two shots into the wooden floor to cause those flanking him to duck for cover. The Terringul was loaded with hollow-point bullets specifically designed to lodge in wood, giving him a good anchor when he needed one. They also happened to lodge in flesh, reducing the chances of a through-and-through shot that could injure bystanders, which suited him just fine.

He dashed forward in a crouch and leaped onto a large serving platter. He pressed one foot against the lip of the platter, and Pushed on the bullets behind him. The maneuver threw him forward in a skid across the polished wooden floor. He broke out of the tables into open space just before the steps out of the room, then kicked the platter out from under him and increased his weight, hitting the ground and stopping.

The platter flipped out in front of him, and the startled bandits began firing. Metal pinged against metal as some of the bullets hit the platter; Waxillium responded, dropping the men on either side of Tarson with two quick shots. Then he flared his steel and Pushed toward Tarson's gun to try knocking it away from Marasi.

Only then did Waxillium realize there was no blue line pointing to the man's gun. Tarson grinned, his ashy face topped by Wayne's hat. Then he whipped around, placing himself behind Marasi, whom he gripped by the neck with one hand, holding the gun steady against her head with the other.

No blue lines. *Rust and Ruin … an entire* gun *made of aluminum?*

Waxillium and Tarson both fell still. The bandits behind hadn't noticed Waxillium's floor-level escape on the platter; they were closing on the area where he'd been hiding. The boss still stood in the doorway, looking toward Waxillium. Wax *had* to be wrong about who he was. People could look alike, sound alike. That didn't mean …

Marasi whimpered. And Waxillium found himself unable to move, unable to raise his hand to fire. The shot he'd made to save Lessie played again and again in his mind.

*I can make a shot like that,* he thought to himself, angry. *I've done it a dozen times.*

He'd only missed once.

He couldn't move, couldn't think. He kept seeing her die again and again. Blood in the air, a smiling face.

Tarson apparently realized that Waxillium wouldn't fire. So he swung his gun away from Marasi's head and toward Waxillium.

Marasi went rigid. She locked her legs and slammed her head upward into the Vanisher's chin. Tarson's shot went wild and he stumbled backward, holding his mouth.

With Marasi mostly out of the way, Waxillium's mind cleared, and he found himself able to move again. He shot Tarson, though he couldn't bring himself to aim for the chest, not with Marasi stumbling nearby. He settled on dropping Tarson with a shot to the arm. Marasi raised her hand to her mouth in horror, watching him fall.

"He's over there!" Voices from behind, the three bandits he'd been fighting among the tables. An aluminum bullet split the air just beside him.

"Hold on," Waxillium said to Marasi, leaping forward and grabbing her around the waist. He raised his gun and shot the last bullet in his gun toward the doorway, hitting the masked leader of the Vanishers in the head.

The man collapsed in a heap.

*Well, there goes that theory,* Waxillium thought. Miles wouldn't have fallen to a mere bullet. He was a Twinborn of a particularly dangerous variety.

Tarson was rolling over, holding his arm and groaning. No time. Guns empty. Waxillium dropped the gun and Pushed on it while holding tightly to Marasi. The Push hurled the two of them into the air; a hail of bullets sprayed through the space where they'd been. Unfortunately, they missed Tarson, who was rolling on the floor.

Marasi cried out, clinging to him as they flew up toward the brilliant chandeliers. Waxillium pushed off one of them, causing it to rock back and forth. That Push threw him and Marasi toward the nearby balcony, which was occupied by a group of cowering musicians.

Waxillium landed hard on the balcony; he was off-balance from carrying Marasi, and hadn't had time to judge the Push precisely. They rolled in a bundle of red and white fabric. When they came to a rest, Marasi clung to him, shaking and gasping for breath.

He sat up, and held her for a moment. "Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it," he said. "That was very brave, stopping the bandit as you did."

"Seven out of ten kidnappings can be foiled by appropriate resistance on the part of the target," she said, words tumbling out of her mouth. She squeezed her eyes closed again. "Sorry. That was just very, *very* unsettling."

"I—" He froze.

"What?" she asked, opening her eyes.

Waxillium didn't respond. He rolled to the side, pulling loose from her grip as he noticed the blue lines moving to the left. Someone was coming up the steps to the balcony.

Waxillium came up beside a large harp as the balcony door burst open to reveal two Vanishers—one with a rifle, the other with a pair of pistols. Waxillium increased his weight by tapping his metalmind, then heaved with a desperate flare of steel, Pushing against the harp's metal mountings, nails, and strings. The instrument crashed into the wooden doorway and smashed the men against the wall. They slumped down, dropping to the stairs under the broken harp.

Waxillium ran to check their vitals. Convinced they wouldn't be dangerous any time soon, he grabbed the handguns and dashed back to the edge of the balcony, scanning the room below. The furniture he'd Pushed out of the way made a strange perfectly circular open space on the ballroom floor. Partygoers were making for the kitchens in increasingly large numbers. He looked for Wayne, but saw only the broken bodies of fallen bandits where he'd been.

"Steris?" Marasi asked, crawling up beside him.

"I'll go after her right now," Waxillium said. "Some men towed her outside, but they won't have had time to…" He trailed off as he noticed a blur beside the far door. It stopped, and suddenly Wayne was lying on the ground, blood pooling around him. A bandit stood above him looking quite pleased with himself, holding a smoking pistol.

*Damn!* Waxillium thought, feeling a spike of fear. If Wayne had been hit in the head …

Steris or Wayne?

*She'll be safe,* he thought. *They took her for a reason; they need her.*

"Oh no!" Marasi said, pointing at Wayne. "Lord Ladrian, is that—"

"He'll be all right if I can get to him," Waxillium said, hastily shoving a pistol into Marasi's hands. "Can you use one of these?"

"I—"

"Just start firing it if someone threatens you. I'll come." He leaped up onto the balcony railing. His way was mostly blocked by the chandeliers; he couldn't make a direct jump to Wayne. He'd have to jump down, then up again, and bound to—

No time. Wayne was dying.

*Go!*

Waxillium threw himself off the balcony. As soon as his feet were free, he tapped his metalmind and drew forth as much weight as he could. That didn't tow him to the ground; an object fell at the same speed, no matter its weight. Only air resistance mattered.

However, weight did matter a great deal when Pushing—which Waxillium did, throwing everything he had against the chandeliers. They ripped apart in a line, the metal inside them twisting upon itself, crystal exploding outward in a shower. That gave him plenty of room along the upper portion of the room to jump in an arc toward Wayne.

In a heartbeat, Waxillium stopped tapping his metalmind and started filling it instead, decreasing his weight to almost nothing. He Pushed on the broken harp behind, and a simultaneous quick Push against the nails in the floor kept him high.

The result was that he soared across the room in a graceful arc, passing through the space the large chandeliers had occupied. The glittering smaller chandeliers continued to shine on either side of him while crystal showered beneath, each tiny piece splintering the light into a spray of colors. His suit coat flapped, and he lowered the single revolver in his hand as he fell, pointing it at the bandit standing over Wayne.

Waxillium emptied six chambers at the thief. He couldn't afford to take chances.

The pistol was slick in Waxillium's hand as he hit the ground, Pushing on the floor nails to keep from breaking his legs. The thief slumped back against the wall, dead.

Just as Waxillium reached Wayne, a speed bubble sprang up around them. Waxillium exhaled in relief as Wayne stirred; he knelt to turn his friend face upward. Wayne's shirt was soaked with blood, a bullet hole visible in his belly. As Waxillium watched, it slowly closed up, healing itself.

"Damn," Wayne said, groaning. "Gut wounds *hurt*."

Wayne couldn't have kept the bubble up while the bandit was alive—that would have told him Wayne wasn't dead. Outlaws and lawmen alike were accustomed to Metalborn; if the bubble had stayed up, the bandit would have quickly shot Wayne in the head.

So Wayne had been forced to drop the bubble and play dead. Luckily, the bandit hadn't turned him over to check his vitals and noticed that the wound was healing. Wayne was a Bloodmaker, a type of Feruchemist who could store health in the way that Waxillium stored weight. If Wayne spent some time being sickly and weak—his body healing itself much more slowly than normal—he could store up the health and healing ability in a metalmind. Then, when he tapped it, he healed at a greatly increased rate.

"How much do you have left in your metalmind?" Waxillium asked.

"That was the second bullet wound of the night," Wayne said. "I can maybe heal one more." Wayne stood as Waxillium pulled him to his feet. "Took me a good two weeks in bed to store up that much. Hope that girl of yours is worth it."

"Girl of *mine*?"

"Oh, c'mon, mate. Don't think I didn't see how you were looking at her during dinner. You always did like 'em smart." He grinned.

"Wayne," Waxillium said. "Lessie hasn't even been gone a year."

"You have to move on eventually."

"I'm done with this conversation," Waxillium said, looking over the nearby tables. Vanisher bodies lay strewn about, bones broken by Wayne's dueling canes. Waxillium spotted a few living ones hiding behind tables for cover, as if they hadn't realized yet that Wayne didn't carry guns.

"Five left?" Waxillium asked.

"Six," Wayne said, picking up and spinning his dueling canes. "There's another in the shadows over there. I brought down seven. You?"

"Sixteen, I think," Wax said distractedly. "Haven't been counting carefully."

"Sixteen? Damn, Wax. I was hoping you'd have rusted a bit, was thinkin' maybe I'd be able to catch you this time."

Waxillium smiled. "It's not a competition." He hesitated. "Even if I am winning. Some men got out the door with Steris. I shot the guy who took your hat, though he lived. He's probably gone by now."

"You didn't grab the hat for me?" Wayne asked, sounding offended.

"I was a *little* busy being shot at."

"Busy? Aw, mate. It doesn't take any effort at all to get shot at. I think you're just makin' excuses on account of being jealous of my lucky hat."

"That's it entirely," Waxillium said, fishing in his pocket. "How much time you have left?"

"Not much," Wayne said. "Bendalloy's almost gone. Maybe twenty seconds."

Waxillium took a deep breath. "I'm going for the three on the left. You go right. Get ready to jump."

"Got it."

"Go!"

Wayne ran forward and leaped onto a table in front of them. He dropped the speed bubble right as he launched himself off, and Waxillium braced himself by increasing his weight, then Pushed on Wayne's metalminds, sending the man soaring through the air in an arc toward the bandits. Once Wayne was airborne, Waxillium flipped from tapping his metalmind to filling it, then Pushed on some nails, launching himself into the air in a slightly different trajectory.

Wayne hit first, probably landing so hard he had to heal himself as he rolled between a pair of hiding bandits. He came up to his feet and slammed his dueling canes down on one bandit's arm. He then spun and smashed a cane into the second man's neck.

Waxillium tossed his gun as he fell, Pushing it hard into the face of a startled thief. He landed, then tossed the empty cartridge that Wayne had given him earlier—the one that had contained the message—at a second man. Pushing on it, he turned the casing into an improvised bullet, slamming it into the man's forehead and piercing his skull.

Waxillium shoved on the casing hard enough that it tossed him to the side. He plowed his shoulder into the chest of the man he'd thrown his gun at. The man stumbled back, and Waxillium slammed his forearm—and its metalmind bracer—into the man's head, dropping him.

*One more,* he thought. *Behind me to the right.* It was going to be close. Waxillium kicked the gun he'd dropped, intending to Push it toward the final bandit.

A gunshot sounded.

Waxillium froze, anticipating the pain of a bullet hitting him. Nothing happened. He spun to find the final bandit slumped over a table, bleeding, a gun dropping from his fingers.

*What by the Survivor's scars…?*

He looked up. Marasi knelt on the balcony where he'd left her. She'd fetched the rifle from the bandit he'd crushed, and she obviously knew how to use it. Even as he watched, she fired again, dropping the bandit in the shadows Wayne had mentioned.

Wayne stood up from finishing off his two assailants. He looked confused until Waxillium pointed toward Marasi.

"Wow," Wayne said, stepping up to him. "I'm liking her more and more. Definitely the one of the two *I'd* pick if I were you."

The one of the two.

*Steris!*

Waxillium cursed and leaped forward, throwing himself in a Steelpush across the room toward the other exit. He hit the ground running, noting with concern that the boss's body wasn't where he'd dropped it. There was blood in the entryway. Had they dragged him away?

Unless … Maybe his theory wasn't wrong after all. But *damn it,* he couldn't be facing Miles. Miles was a lawman. One of the best.

Waxillium burst out into the night—this ballroom exit led directly to the street. Some horses stood here tied to a fence, and what looked like a group of grooms lay gagged and bound on the ground.

Steris, and the bandits who had carried her out, were gone. He did find a large group of constables riding into the courtyard, however.

"Great timing, chaps," Waxillium said, sitting down on the steps, exhausted.

* * *

"I don't care *who* you are or how much money you have," Constable Brettin said. "This is a total mess you've created, sir."

Waxillium sat on his stool, listening with only half an ear as he rested with his back against the wall. He was going to ache in the morning. He hadn't pushed his body so hard in months. He was lucky he hadn't twisted anything or thrown out a muscle.

"This *isn't* the Roughs," Brettin continued. "You think you can do anything you want? You think you can just pick up a gun and take the law into your own hands?"

They sat in the kitchens of Yomen Manor, in a side area that the constables had partitioned off for interviews. It hadn't been long since the end of the fight. Just long enough for the trouble to begin.

Though his ears still rang from the noise of the gunfire, Waxillium could also hear moans and cries from the ballroom as the partygoers were seen to. Beyond that, he could hear the clopping of hooves and the racket of the occasional automobile out in the mansion courtyard as the city's elite fled in groups as they were released. The constables would be speaking to each person, making certain they were well and checking their names off the guest list.

"Well?" Brettin demanded. He was the constable-general, head of the constabulary in their octant. He was probably feeling *very* threatened by the robberies happening under his watch. Waxillium could imagine what it would be like in his position, getting thunder each day from powers above him who were not pleased.

"I'm sorry, constable," Waxillium said calmly. "Old habits make for strong steel. I should have restrained myself, but would you have done any different? Would you have watched women being kidnapped and done nothing?"

"I have a legal right and responsibility you do not."

"I have a moral right and responsibility, constable."

Brettin harrumphed, but the calm words mollified him somewhat. He glanced to the side as a brown-suited constable wearing one of their domelike hats entered and saluted.

"Well?" Brettin asked. "What's the news, Reddi?"

"Twenty-five dead, Captain," the man said.

Brettin groaned. "You see what you've caused, Ladrian? If you'd just kept your head down like everyone else, then those poor folks would still be alive. Ruination! This is a mess. I could *hang* for this—"

"Captain," Reddi interrupted. He stepped in and spoke softly. "Excuse me, sir. But those were the *bandit* casualties. Twenty-five of them dead, sir. Six captured alive."

"Oh. And how many civilians killed?"

"Just one, sir. Lord Peterus. He was shot before Lord Ladrian started fighting back. Sir." Reddi was regarding Waxillium with a mixture of awe and respect.

Brettin glanced at Waxillium, then grabbed his lieutenant by the arm and towed him a little farther off. Waxillium closed his eyes, breathed softly, and caught some of the conversation.

"You mean … two men … thirty-one *by themselves*?"

"Yes, sir."

"… else wounded…?"

"… broken bones … not too serious … bruises and scrapes … going to open fire…"

There was silence, and Waxillium opened his eyes to find the constable-general staring at him. Brettin waved Reddi away, then walked back.

"Well?" Waxillium asked.

"You appear to be a lucky man."

"My friend and I drew their attention," Waxillium said. "And most of the partygoers already had their heads down when the shooting began."

"You still broke bones with your Allomantic stunt," the constable-general said. "There will be bruised egos and angry lords. They'll come to *me* when they complain."

Waxillium said nothing.

Brettin crouched down before Waxillium, getting in close. "I know about you," he said softly. "I knew eventually I'd be having this talk with you. So let me be clear. This is my city, and I have the authority here."

"Is that so?" Waxillium asked, feeling very tired.

"It is."

"So where were you when the bandits started shooting people in the head?"

Brettin's face grew red, but Waxillium held his eyes.

"I'm not threatened by you," Brettin said.

"Good. I haven't said anything threatening yet."

Brettin hissed softly, then pointed at Waxillium, tapping a finger against his chest. "Keep your tongue civil. I've half a mind to toss you into jail for the night."

"Then do it. Maybe by morning you'll have found the *other* half of your mind, and we'll be able to have a reasonable conversation."

Brettin's face grew even redder, but he knew—as Waxillium did—that he wouldn't dare throw a house lord into jail without significant justification. Brettin finally broke away, waving a dismissive hand at Waxillium and stalking out of the kitchen.

Waxillium sighed, standing up and taking his bowler off the counter where he'd left it. *Harmony protect us from small-minded men with too much power.* He donned the hat and walked out into the ballroom.

The room had been mostly cleared of guests, the wedding party itself taken in Lord Yomen's carriage to a place where they could recover from the ordeal. The ballroom swarmed with an almost equal number of constables and physicians. The wounded were sitting on the raised wooden floor just before the exit; there looked to be about twenty or thirty people there. Waxillium noticed Lord Harms sitting at a table off to the side, staring down with a morose expression, Marasi trying to comfort him. Wayne was at the table too, looking bored.

Waxillium walked over to them, removing his hat, and sat down. He found that he didn't exactly know what to say to Lord Harms.

"Hey," Wayne whispered. "Here." He handed Waxillium something under the table. A revolver.

Waxillium looked at him, confused. It wasn't his.

"Figured you'd want one of these."

"Aluminum?"

Wayne smiled, eyes twinkling. "Snatched it out of the collection the constables made. Apparently there were *ten* of these. Figured you could sell it. I spent a lot of bendalloy fighting these gits. Need some money to replace it. But don't worry, I left a real nice drawing I did in the gun's place when I took it. Here."

He handed over something else. A handful of bullets. "Grabbed these too."

"Wayne," Waxillium said, fingering the long, narrow cartridges, "you realize these are rifle rounds?"

"So?"

"So they won't fit a revolver."

"They won't? Why not?"

"Because."

"Kind of a dumb way to make bullets, innit?" He seemed baffled. Of course, most things about guns baffled Wayne, who was generally better off throwing a gun at someone than trying to fire it at them.

Waxillium shook his head in amusement, but didn't turn the gun down. He *had* wanted one. He slipped the revolver into one of his shoulder holsters and turned to Lord Harms.

"My lord," Waxillium said. "I have failed you."

Harms dabbed his face with his handkerchief, looking pale. "Why would they take her? They'll let her go, won't they? They said they would."

Waxillium fell silent.

"They won't," Lord Harms said, looking up. "They haven't let any of the others go, have they?"

"No," Waxillium said.

"You *have* to get her back." Harms took Waxillium's hand. "I care nothing for the money or jewelry they took from me. It can be replaced, and most of it was insured anyway. But I'll pay *any* price for Steris. Please. She is to be your fiancée! You have to find her!"

Waxillium looked into the older man's eyes, and saw fear there. Whatever bravado this man had shown in earlier meetings, it was an act.

*Funny, how quickly someone can stop calling you a miscreant and a rogue when they want your help,* Waxillium thought. But if there was something he couldn't ignore, it was a sincere request for help.

"I'll find her," Waxillium said. "I promise it, Lord Harms."

Harms nodded. Then, he slowly pushed himself to his feet.

"Let me help you to the carriage, my lord," Marasi said.

"No," Harms said, waving her down. "No. Just let me … just let me go and sit by myself. I won't leave without you, but please give me some time alone.” He walked away, leaving Marasi standing with her hands clasped.

She sat back down, looking sick. “He wishes it were she you had rescued and not me,” she said softly.

“So, Wax,” Wayne butted in. “Where did you say that bloke was who had my hat?”

“I told you that he got away after I shot him.”

“I was hoping he’d dropped my hat, you know. Getting shot makes people drop stuff.”

Waxillium sighed. “He still had it on when he left, I’m afraid.”

Wayne started cursing.

“Wayne,” Marasi said. “It’s only a hat.”

“Only a hat?” he asked, aghast.

“Wayne’s a little attached to that hat,” Waxillium said. “He thinks it’s lucky.”

“It *is* lucky. I ain’t never died while wearing that hat.”

Marasi frowned. “I … I’m not sure I know how to respond.”

“That’s a common reaction to Wayne,” Waxillium said. “I did want to thank you for your timely intervention, by the way. Do you mind if I ask where you learned to shoot like that?”

Marasi blushed. “Ladies’ target club at the university. We’re quite well ranked against other clubs in the city.” She grimaced. “I don’t suppose … either of those fellows I shot pulled through?”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “You plugged them right good, you did. The one near me left brains all over the door!”

“Oh dear.” Marasi grew pale. “I never expected…”

“It’s what happens when you shoot someone,” Wayne pointed out. “At least, usually someone has the good sense to get dead when you go to all the trouble to shoot them. Unless you miss anything vital. That bloke what took my hat?”

“I hit him in the arm,” Waxillium said. “But it should have brought him down better than it did. He has koloss blood for sure. Might be a Pewterarm as well.”

That quieted Wayne. He was probably thinking the same thing as Waxillium—a band like this, with these numbers and such nice weapons, was likely to have at least a couple of Allomancers or Feruchemists among them.

“Marasi,” Waxillium said, as something occurred to him, “is Steris an Allomancer?”

“What? No. She isn’t.”

“You certain?” Waxillium asked. “She might have been hiding it.”

“She’s not an Allomancer,” Marasi said. “Nor a Feruchemist. I can promise it.”

“Well, there’s a theory rusted away,” Wayne said.

"I need to think," Waxillium said, tapping the table with his fingernail. "Too much about these Vanishers doesn't make sense." He shook his head. "But, for now, I should bid you a good evening. I'm exhausted, and if I may be bold enough to say it, you look the same."

"Yes, of course," Marasi said.

They stood, walking toward the exit. The constables didn't stop them, though some did shoot Waxillium hostile looks. Others seemed disbelieving. A few looked awed.

This night, like the four previous, lacked any mists. Waxillium and Wayne walked Marasi to her uncle's carriage. Lord Harms sat inside, staring straight ahead.

As they arrived, Marasi took Waxillium's arm. "You really should have gone for Steris first," she said softly.

"You were closer. Logic dictated I save you first."

"Well, whatever the reason," she said, voice even more soft, "thank you for what you did. I just … Thank you." She looked like she wanted to say more, staring up into his eyes, then went onto her tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek. Before he could react, she turned away and climbed into the carriage.

Wayne stepped up to him as the carriage moved off into the dark street, horses' shoes clattering on the paving stones. "So," Wayne said, "you're going to marry her cousin?"

"Such is the plan."

"Awkward."

"She is an impulsive young woman half my age," Waxillium said. *An apparently brilliant, beautiful, intriguing young woman who also happens to be an excellent shot.* Once, that combination would have left him completely smitten. Now, he barely gave it a passing thought.

He turned away from the carriage. "Where are you staying?"

"Not sure yet," Wayne said. "I found this house where the folks who lives there is away, but I think they might be back tonight. Left 'em some bread as a thanks."

Waxillium sighed. *I should have guessed.* "I'll give you a room, assuming you promise not to steal too much."

"What? I *never* steal, mate. Stealing's bad." He ran a hand through his hair and grinned. "Might need to trade you for a hat to wear till I get my other one back, though. Do you need any bread?"

Waxillium just shook his head, waving for his carriage to drive them back to Ladrian Mansion.

# 7

The morning after the assault on the wedding dinner, Marasi stood before the imposing mansion at Sixteen Ladrian Place, holding her handbag before her in both hands. She always liked to grip something before herself when she was nervous, a bad habit. As Professor Modicarm said, “Obvious visual tells must be assiduously avoided by a practitioner of the law, lest he inadvertently give criminals an insight into his emotional state.”

Thinking over quotes from her professors was another of her nervous habits. She continued to stand on the stone-paved sidewalk, indecisive. Would Lord Waxillium find it odd or invasive of her to come? Did he think her a silly girl with a silly hobby who foolishly assumed she could be of use to a seasoned lawman?

She should probably just go up and knock. But didn’t she have a right to be nervous when confronting a man such as Waxillium Ladrian? A living legend, one of her personal heroes?

A young gentleman passed on the sidewalk behind her, walking an eager dog. He tipped his hat to her, though he spared a brief distrustful glance for Ladrian Mansion.

The building didn’t seem to deserve such scrutiny; the venerable structure was built of stately, vine-bedecked stone, with large windows and an old iron gate. Three mature apple trees spread limbs over the front garden, and a member of the grounds staff was lazily sawing off a few dead branches. City law established by the Lord Mistborn himself required that even ornamental trees provide food.

*What would it be like to visit the Roughs,* she thought idly, *where the trees are scraggly and short?* The Roughs must be a fascinating place. Plants here in the Elendel Basin grew bountifully with little need for care or cultivation. A final gift of the Survivor, his munificent touch upon the land.

*Stop fidgeting,* she told herself. *Be firm. Control your surroundings.* That was something Professor Aramine had said just last week, and—

*Damn it!* She strode forward, through the open gate, up the steps, and to the door. She slammed the knocker down on the door three times.

A long-faced butler answered. He looked her up and down with dispassionate eyes. “Lady Colms.”

“I was hoping I might see Lord Ladrian?”

The butler raised an eyebrow, then swung the door open the rest of the way. He said nothing, but a lifetime growing up around servants such as him—servants trained after the ancient Terris ideal—had taught her to read his actions. He did not think she should be visiting Waxillium, and particularly not alone.

“The sitting room is currently unoccupied, my lady,” the butler said, pointing a stiff hand—palm up—toward a side chamber. He began stalking toward the staircase, moving with a sense of … inevitability. Like an ancient tree swaying in the wind.

She strolled into the room, forcing herself to hold her handbag at her side. Ladrian Mansion was decorated in a classical mode; the rugs had intricate patterns in dark shades, and the ornately carved picture frames were painted gold. Odd, that so many should favor frames that seemed to be trying to outdo the art they held.

Did it seem there was less art hanging in the mansion than there should be? Several spots on the walls were conspicuously empty. In the sitting room, she looked up at a wide painting of a field of grain, clasping her hands behind her back.

Good. She was containing her nervousness now. There was no reason for it at all. Yes, she had read report after report about Waxillium Ladrian. Yes, stories of his bravery had been part of what inspired her to study law.

However, he was far more amiable than she’d imagined. She had always pictured him as gruff and stoic. Discovering that he spoke like a gentleman had been a surprise. And, of course, there was the relaxed—if acerbic—way he interacted with Wayne. Five minutes around the two of them had destroyed years’ worth of youthful illusions about the calm, quiet lawman and his intense, devoted deputy.

Then the attack had come. The gunfire, the screaming. And Waxillium Ladrian, like a bolt of intense, bright lightning in the middle of a dark and chaotic tempest. He had saved her. How many days during her youth had she fondly dreamed of something like that happening?

“Lady Colms?” the butler said, stepping up to the doorway of the room. “I apologize, but the master says that he cannot spare the time to come down and converse with you.”

“Oh,” she said, feeling an immediate sinking in her stomach. So she’d made a fool of herself after all.

“Indeed, my lady,” the butler said, lips turning down even farther. “You are to accompany me to his study so he can converse with you there.”

Oh. Well, she hadn’t expected that.

"This way please," the butler said. He turned around and lurched up the stairs, and she followed. At the top floor, they twisted through a few hallways—passing some serving and cleaning staff, who bobbed in respect to her—until they reached a room that dominated the far western side of the mansion.

The butler gestured for her to enter. The room beyond was much more cluttered than she'd anticipated. The shutters were closed and the shades drawn, and the large desk that dominated the far wall had been set up with tubes, burners, and other scientific-looking apparatus.

Waxillium stood to the side, holding something up with a pair of tongs and studying it intently. He wore a pair of black goggles, and had on a white shirt with sleeves rolled to the elbows. His suit coat lay draped over a chair at the side of the room, bowler hat topping it, leaving him in a diagonally checkered vest of black and gray. The room smelled of smoke and, oddly, sulfur.

"My lord?" the butler said.

Waxillium turned, goggles still on. "Ah! My lady Marasi. Come in, come in. Tillaume, you may leave us."

"Yes, my lord," the butler said with a suffering tone.

Marasi stepped into the room, glancing to the side where a large sheet of paper lay on the floor, folded upon itself and covered with cramped writing. Waxillium twisted a dial, and a small metal tube on the desk shot out a thin tongue of intense flame. He briefly held his tongs in the fire, then pulled them back out and dropped their contents into a small ceramic cup. He eyed it, then grabbed a glass tube from a rack on the desk and shook it.

"Here," he said, holding it up for her to study. There was a clear liquid in it. "Does this look blue to you?"

"Er … no? Should it?"

"Apparently not," he said. He shook the tube again. "Huh." He set the tube aside.

She stood silently. It was so hard not to recall the sight of him breaking through the line of tables, gun in hand as he expertly felled two of the men trying to haul her out into the night. Or the sight of him soaring through the air—gunshots exploding up from beneath, the chandeliers shattering and crystal spraying light around him—as he shot a man from midair and dropped to rescue his friend.

She was talking to a legend. And he was wearing a pair of very silly goggles.

Waxillium raised them to his forehead. "I'm trying to figure out what alloy they used in those guns."

"The aluminum ones?" she asked, curious.

"Yes, but they're not pure aluminum. They're something stronger, and the grain is wrong. I've never *seen* this alloy before. And the bullets must be yet another new alloy; I'll need to test those next. As a side note, I'm not certain if you appreciate the advantages you possess living in the City."

"Oh, I'd say I'm aware of many of them."

He grinned. Oddly, he looked *younger* today than he had on their previous meetings. "I suppose that perhaps you do. I was referring specifically to the ease of shopping you enjoy here."

"Shopping?"

"Yes, shopping! Marvelous convenience. Out in Weathering, if I wanted a gas burner that could reach the high temperatures required for testing alloys, I had to special-order it and wait for the right railway cars to come. *Then* I had to hope the equipment arrived without being damaged or broken.

"Here, however, I merely needed to send a few lads out with a list. In hours, I could set up an entire lab." He shook his head. "I feel so spoiled. And *you* seem hesitant about something. Is it the sulfur? I needed to test the gunpowder in the bullets, you see … and, well, I suppose I should open a window."

*I will* not *be nervous around him.* "It's not that, my lord Ladrian."

"Please, feel free to call me 'Wax' or 'Waxillium,'" he said, walking over to a window. She noticed that he stood to the side as he opened it, never standing directly in the line of sight of anyone outside. The cautious behavior was natural to him, and he didn't even seem to notice what he was doing. "There's no need to be formal with me. I have a rule—saving my life entitles you to use my given name."

"You saved mine first, I believe."

"Yes. But I was already in your debt, you see."

"Because?"

"Because you gave me an excellent excuse to shoot things," he replied, sitting down at his desk and making a few notations on a pad there. "That seems to be something I'd been needing for quite some time." He looked up and smiled at her. "The hesitance?"

"Should we be alone in the room, Lord Waxillium?"

"Why not?" he said, sounding genuinely confused. "Is there a mass murderer hiding in the wardrobe that I somehow missed?"

"I was actually referring to propriety, my lord."

He sat for a moment, then smacked his forehead. "I apologize. You'll have to forgive me for being a buffoon. It's been a long time since I've had to … Never mind. If you're uncomfortable, I'll go call Tillaume back." He rose, striding past her.

"Lord Waxillium!" she said. "*I'm* not uncomfortable. I assure you. I simply didn't want to put you in an awkward position."

"Awkward?"

"Yes." Now she felt like a right fool. "Please. I didn't mean to make a fuss."

"Very well, then," he said. "To be honest, I really *had* forgotten about things like this. It's basically nonsense, you realize."

"Propriety is nonsense?"

"Too much in high society is built around the idea of making certain you don't need to trust anyone," Waxillium said. "Contracts, detailed operating reports, not being seen alone with an eligible member of the opposite gender. If you remove the foundation of trust from a relationship, then what is the point of that relationship?"

*This from someone who is marrying Steris for the express purpose of exploiting her wealth?* She felt bad for the thought. It was very difficult not to feel bitter sometimes.

She moved on quickly. "So … the alloy?"

"Yes, the alloy," he said. "Likely a tangent I shouldn't be indulging in. An excuse to dig up an old hobby. But since I know where the aluminum itself came from—the first theft—I wondered if, perhaps, they might be using an alloy that includes components I could trace." He walked back over to his desk, where he picked up the revolver Wayne had given him the night before. She could see that he'd shaved some of the metal off the outside of the grip.

"Do you know much of metallurgy, Lady Marasi?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "I probably should."

"Oh, don't feel that way. As I said, this is an indulgence of mine. There are many metallurgists in the city; I could probably have sent these shavings to one of them and gotten a report more quickly, and more accurately." He sighed, sitting back down in his chair. "I'm just accustomed to doing things myself, you see."

"Out in the Roughs, you often didn't have another choice."

"True enough." He tapped the gun against the table. "Alloys are remarkable things, Lady Marasi. Did you realize you can make an alloy with a metal that reacts to magnetism, but end up with one that doesn't? Mix it with an equal part of something else, and you don't get something that's half as magnetically reactive—you get something that's not reactive at all. When you make an alloy, you don't just mix two metals. You make a *new* one.

"That's a fundamental of Allomancy, you see. Steel is just iron with a pinch of carbon in it, but that makes all the difference. This aluminum has something else in it too—less than one percent. I think it might be ekaboron, but that's really just a hunch. A little pinch. It works for men too, oddly. A tiny change can result in creating an entirely new person. How like metals we are.…" He shook his head, then waved for her to take a seat in a chair against the wall. "But you didn't come to hear me blather. Come, tell me, what can I do for you?"

"It's actually what I can do for you," she said, sitting. "I've spoken to Lord Harms. I thought that because of your … Well, because House Ladrian is currently lacking in liquid assets, you see, I thought that you may not have the tools you need to seek Lady Steris. Lord Harms has agreed to bankroll you for whatever you need as you pursue her rescue."

Waxillium seemed surprised. "That's wonderful. Thank you." He paused, then looked at his desk. "Do you think he'd mind paying for this…?"

"Not at all," she said quickly.

"Well, that's a relief. Tillaume nearly fainted when he saw what I'd spent. I think the old man's afraid we'll run out of tea if I keep this up. It's so incredible that I can be the source of employment for some twenty thousand people, own two to three percent of the land in the city, and yet still be so poor in ready cash. What an odd world business is." Waxillium leaned forward, clasping his hands, looking thoughtful. In the light of the open window, she could now see that he had bags under his eyes.

"My lord?" she asked. "Have you slept at all since the kidnapping?"

He didn't reply.

"Lord Waxillium," she said sternly. "You mustn't neglect your own well-being. Running yourself to rust will do no good for anyone."

"Lady Steris was taken on my watch, Marasi," he said softly. "I didn't lift a finger. I had to be *goaded* into it." He shook his head, as if to drive away bad thoughts. "But you needn't worry about me. I wouldn't have been able to sleep anyway, so I might as well be productive."

"Have you come to any conclusions?" she asked, genuinely curious.

"Too many," he said. "Often, the problem is not coming up with solutions—it's deciding which of them actually happened and which are pure fancy. Those men, for instance. They weren't professionals." He paused. "I'm sorry, that probably doesn't make any sense."

"No, it does," she said. "The way they kept itching to shoot the building up, they way their boss let himself be goaded into shooting Peterus…"

"Exactly," he said. "They had experience as thieves, certainly. But they weren't *refined* at it."

"A simple way to determine the type of criminal is by whom they kill and when," Marasi said, quoting a line from one of her textbooks. "Murders end with a hanging; thievery alone can mean escaping death. Those men, if they'd really known what they were doing, would have left quickly, glad they hadn't needed to do any shooting."

"So they're street toughs," Waxillium said. "Common criminals."

"With *very* expensive weapons," Marasi said, frowning. "Which implies an outside backer, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Waxillium said, growing eager and leaning in. "At first, I was very confused. I was *convinced* this was all about the kidnappings, the thievery just a front to disguise that. Then the men last night were genuinely interested in what they were taking. It baffled me. Judging by the price of aluminum, and how much they had to spend forging those guns, they've spent a fortune to make a lesser amount from last night's robbery. It didn't make sense."

"Unless we're dealing with two groups working together," Marasi said, understanding. "Someone has given funds to the bandits, allowing them to pull off these robberies. The backing group, however, demands that they kidnap certain people, making it seem like the result of random hostage-takings."

"Yes! He—whoever the backer is—wants the kidnapped women. And the Vanishers, they get to keep whatever they steal, or perhaps a percentage of it. It *is* all meant to use the robberies as a cover-up, but it's possible the bandits themselves don't understand how they're being used."

Marasi frowned, biting her lip. "But that means…"

"What?"

"Well, I'd hoped that this was mostly over with," she explained. "Your initial count of the thieves was just under forty, and you and Wayne killed or incapacitated thirty or so of them."

"Thirty-one," he said absently.

"I had assumed those remaining might cut their losses and flee. Killing three-quarters of a group should be enough to disband them, one would think."

"It would, in my experience."

"But this is different," she said. "The bandit boss has an outside backer offering wealth and weaponry." She frowned. "The boss spoke of 'payback,' as I recall. Could he be both the boss and the backer?"

"Perhaps," Waxillium said. "But I doubt it. Part of the point of all this would be to have someone else doing the dangerous work for you."

"Agreed," she said. "But the boss *does* seem to have his own ideology. Perhaps he was chosen because of it. Criminals often use basic rationalization skills to justify what they are doing, and a man who could capitalize on that—along with promising riches and lots of fun shooting things—would be ideal as a 'middle manager,' so to speak."

Waxillium smiled broadly.

"What?" she asked.

"You realize I spent all night coming to those conclusions? You just reached them in all of … what? Ten minutes?”

She sniffed. “I had some modest help from you.”

“It might be said that I had modest help from myself, technically.”

“The voices whispering to you as a result of sleep deprivation do *not* count, my lord.”

His smile grew, and then he stood. “Come. Tell me what you make of this.”

Curious, she followed him to the front of the room, where she’d noticed the heap of paper. He pulled it straight, revealing a long—perhaps five-foot—piece of paper that was several feet wide. Waxillium knelt on the ground, but she had a harder time, being in skirts. So she just bent down, looking over his shoulder.

“Genealogies?” she asked, surprised. It appeared that he’d traced each of the kidnapped women back to the Origin, starting with their names at the left of the long sheet, then working backward. It didn’t list every relative, but it included the direct ancestors and a few notable names in each generation for each hostage.

“Well?” he asked.

“I’m beginning to suspect that you are an odd man, my lord,” she said. “You spent all night doing this?”

“It did take a great deal of my time, though Wayne’s paper gave me a good head start. Fortunately, my uncle’s library had extensive genealogical resources. It was a hobby of his. But what do you *think*?”

“That it is a good thing you’re soon to be engaged, for a good wife would have seen that you got your rest, rather than writing all night by candlelight. That’s bad for your eyes, you know.”

“We have electricity,” he said, waving upward. “Besides, I doubt Steris will care about my sleeping habits. It’s not in the contract, you see.” There was a touch of bitterness in his tone—faint, but recognizable.

She’d said most of that to stall him for a few moments so she could read more of the names. “Allomancers,” she said. “You analyzed the family lines for Allomantic powers in their heritage. They all converge on the Lord Mistborn. Didn’t Wayne speak of this?”

“Yes,” he said. “I believe that the one behind all this is looking for Allomancers. He’s building an army. He picks the people he does because he suspects that they’re secretly Allomancers. The fact that they aren’t open about it makes it harder to recognize what he’s doing.”

“But Steris *isn’t* an Allomancer. I promise it.”

“That worried me for a time,” he said. “But it’s not a large issue. See, he’s picking people he thinks are *probably* Allomancers, but he’s bound to get it wrong a few times.” Waxillium tapped the paper. “That does make me worry for her. Once the backer discovers that she's not what he thought she was, she'll be in greater danger."

*Hence why you stayed up all night,* she realized. *You think there isn't time.*

All of this, for a woman he obviously didn't love. It was difficult not to be jealous.

*What?* she thought. *You'd have had yourself be taken? Foolish girl.*

She did note that her own name was one of those listed. "You have my genealogy?" she said, surprised.

"Had to send out for it," he said. "Made some clerks quite angry in the middle of the night, I'm afraid. You're very odd."

"Excuse me?"

"Oh. Um, I mean on the list. You see here? You're second cousins with Steris."

"And?"

"And, that means you're … well, this is awkward to explain. You're, essentially, a sixth cousin to the main bloodline here. All of the others, including Steris, were much better connected—you have bloodlines on your father's side that dilute your connections. That makes you an odd target, compared to the others. I'm wondering if they picked you because they wanted to take someone random to break up their pattern and keep us guessing."

"Possible," she said carefully. "They didn't know Steris had been sitting with us, after all."

"Very true. But … here's where it gets speculative. You see? I can come up with plenty of reasons why Steris was targeted. The history of Allomancers isn't the only connection—because of the propinquity of high society, there are *many* other connections.

"In fact, as I look at it, the Allomancy factor is tenuous. If you're going to train fighters, why take only women? Why bother with Allomancers in the first place, when you have the funds and means to steal all of this aluminum? They could have stopped there and been rich. And I can't find anything to indicate, with certitude, that the other women taken were indeed Allomancers."

*They're taking just women,* Marasi thought, looking at the long lists, tying back to the Lord Mistborn. The most powerful Allomancer who ever lived. A nearly mythological figure, someone who had *all sixteen* Allomantic powers in one body. How powerful would he have been?

And suddenly, it made sense. "Rust and Ruin," she whispered.

Waxillium looked up at her. He'd probably have seen it, if he hadn't pushed himself so long through the night.

"Allomancy is genetic," she said.

"Yes. Which is why it shows up so much in these lines."

"Genetic. Taking all women. Waxillium, don't you see? They're not intending to build an army of Allomancers. They're intending to *breed* one. They’re taking the women with the most direct Allomantic lines back to the Mistborn.”

Waxillium stared at his large paper, then blinked. “By the Survivor’s spear…” he whispered. “Well, at least this means Steris isn’t in immediate danger. She’s valuable to him even without being an Allomancer.”

“Yes,” Marasi said, feeling sick. “But if I’m right, then she’ll be in a different kind of danger.”

“Indeed,” Waxillium said, subdued. “I should have seen this. Wayne will never let me live it down, once he finds out.”

“Wayne,” she said, realizing she hadn’t asked after him. “Where is he?”

Waxillium checked his pocket watch. “He should be back soon. I sent him out to cause a little mischief.”

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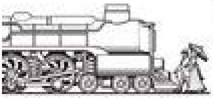

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# 8

Wayne strode up the steps into the Fourth Octant constabulary precinct offices. His ears felt way too hot. Why was it that conners wore such uncomfortable hats? Maybe that was why they were so grouchy all the time—walking about the city, picking on respectable folk. Even after just a few weeks in Elendel, Wayne knew that was basically what constables did.

Bad hats. A bad hat could make a man right disagreeable, and that was the truth.

He burst through the double doors, slamming them open. The room inside basically looked like a big cage. A wooden railing in the front to keep people separated from the conners, desks behind for eating food or lounging and talking. His entrance caused a few of the brown-uniformed conners to sit bolt upright, some reaching for revolvers at their hips.

“Who’s in charge of this place!” Wayne bellowed.

The astounded conners stared at him, then jumped to their feet, straightening uniforms and hastily sticking on their hats. He wore one of those uniforms himself. He’d traded for it at a precinct up in the Seventh Octant. He’d left a right good shirt as a replacement, as fair a trade as any man could ask. After all, that shirt had been *silk*.

“Sir!” one of the conners said. “You’ll want Captain Brettin, sir!”

“Well where the hell is he?” Wayne yelled. He’d picked up the right accent from listening to just a few conners. People, they misunderstood the word “accent.” They thought accents were those things everybody *else* had. But that wasn’t it at all. Every person had an individual accent, a blend of where he’d lived, what he did for a living, who his friends were.

People thought Wayne imitated accents. He didn’t. He outright stole them. They were the only things he was still allowed to steal, seeing as to how he’d turned to doing good with his life and stuff like that.

Several of the conners, still confused by his arrival, pointed toward a door at the side of the room. Others saluted, as if that were really the only thing they knew how to do. Wayne huffed through his thick, drooping fake mustache and stalked over to the door.

He acted as if he were just going to throw it open, but then pretended to hesitate and knocked instead.

Brettin would outrank him, barely. *Really unfortunate,* Wayne thought. *Here I am, twenty-five years as a constable, and still only a three-bar.* He should have been promoted ages ago.

As he raised his hand to knock on the door again, it flew open, revealing Brettin's lean face. He looked annoyed. "What is this racket and yelling—" He froze as he saw Wayne. "Who are you?"

"Captain Guffon Trenchant," Wayne said. "Seventh Octant."

Brettin's eyes flicked to Wayne's insignia, then back to his face. There was a moment of confusion, and Wayne could see panic in Brettin's eyes. He was trying to decide if he should remember Captain Guffon or not. The City was a big place, and—from what Wayne had overheard—Brettin was always mixing up people's names.

"I … of course, Captain," Brettin said. "Have … er, we met?"

Wayne blew out his mustaches. "We sat at the same table at the chairman's dinner last spring!" He was feeling pretty good about this accent. It was a mixture of seventh-son lord and foreman of an ironworks, with just a *hint* of canal captain. Speaking with it felt like he'd stuffed cotton in half of his mouth and had borrowed the voice from an angry dog.

But he'd spent weeks in the city now, listening in pubs in different octants, visiting the railway tracks, chatting with people in parks. He'd collected a good number of accents, adding them to the ones he'd already stolen. Even when living in Weathering, he'd taken trips to the city to gather accents. You found the best ones here.

"I … oh, of course," Brettin said. "Yes. Trenchant, I recognize you now. It has been a while."

"Never mind that," Wayne blustered. "What's this about you having *prisoners* from the Vanishers Gang? Good steel, man! We had to learn about it from the *broadsheets*!"

"We have jurisdiction here, as the event—" Brettin hesitated, looking at the room full of intrigued constables studiously pretending not to be listening. "Step inside."

Wayne eyed the watching men. Not a one of them had questioned him. Act like you were important, act like you were angry, and people just wanted to get out of your way. Basic psychology, that was. "Very well," he said.

Brettin closed the door, speaking quickly and authoritatively. "They were captured in our octant and the crime they were committing was here. We have jurisdiction flat-out. I did send you all a missive."

"A missive? Rust and Ruin, man! You know how many of those we get a day?"

"Well perhaps you should hire someone to sort through them," Brettin said testily. "That's what I eventually did."

Wayne blew out his mustache. “Well, you could have sent someone over to inform us,” he said lamely.

“Next time, perhaps,” Brettin said, sounding satisfied for having won the argument and disarmed an angry rival. “We *are* rather busy with those prisoners.”

“Well and good,” Wayne said. “When are you sending them to us?”

“*What?*” Brettin said.

“We have prior claim! You have jurisdiction for the initial inquest, but *we* have prosecution rights. First robbery happened in our octant.” Wax had written that out for him. Bloke could be right useful, on occasion.

“You have to give us a written request for that!”

“We sent a missive,” Wayne said.

Brettin hesitated.

“Earlier today,” Wayne said. “You didn’t get it?”

“Er … We get a lot of missives…”

“Thought you said you hired someone to read them.”

“Sent him out for scones earlier, you see…”

“Ah. Well then.” Wayne hesitated. “Can I have one?”

“Of the scones or the prisoners?”

Wayne leaned in. “Look, Brettin, let’s melt this down and forge it. We both know you can stall for months with those prisoners while we complete proper transfer paperwork. That is basically worthless to both of us. You get a lot of hassle, and we lose any chance we had of catching the rest of these fellows. We need to move *quick*.”

“And?” Brettin asked, suspicious.

“I want to question a few of the prisoners,” Wayne said. “Chief sent me specifically. You let me in, give me a few minutes, and we’ll stop all transfer requests. You can prosecute, but we get to keep hunting for their boss.”

The two locked gazes. According to Wax, prosecuting the Vanishers would be good for careers—very good. But the real prize, the boss of the gang, was still at large. Getting him would mean glory, promotions, and maybe an invitation to join the upper crust. The late Lord Peterus himself had done it, when he’d captured the Copper Strangler.

Letting a rival constable interview the prisoners would be risky. Potentially losing the prisoners completely—as Brettin chanced doing—was even more so.

“How long?” Brettin said.

“Fifteen minutes each,” Wayne said.

Brettin’s eyes narrowed just slightly. “Ten minutes with two of the prisoners.”

“Fine,” Wayne said. “Let’s do it.”

It took longer to set things up than it should have. Constables tended to take their time about anything unless it involved burning buildings or murders in the streets—and they ran for those two only if someone rich was involved. Eventually, they had a room set up for him and pulled one of the bandits in.

Wayne recognized him. The fellow had tried to shoot him, so Wayne had broken his arm with a dueling cane. Downright rude, trying to shoot like that. When a fellow pulls out a dueling cane, you should respond with one of your own—or at least a knife. Trying to shoot Wayne was like bringing dice to a card game. What was the world coming to?

“Has he said anything so far?” Wayne asked Brettin and several of his minions, standing outside the door and looking in at the tubby, scraggly-haired bandit. He had his arm in a dirty sling.

“Not much,” Brettin said. “Actually, none of them have given us much of anything. They seem…”

“Afraid,” one of the other constables said. “They’re afraid of something—or, at least, more afraid of talking than they are of us.”

“Bah,” Wayne said. “You just need to be *firm* with them! No coddling.”

“We haven’t been—” the constable began, but Brettin raised a hand to quiet him. “Your time is slipping away, Captain.”

Wayne sniffed, then sauntered into the room. It was small, practically a closet, with only the one door. Brettin and the others left it open. The bandit sat in a chair, manacled hands linked by chains to his feet and both locked to the floor. There was a table between them.

The bandit watched him resentfully. He didn’t seem to recognize Wayne. It was probably the hat.

“So, son,” Wayne said. “You’re in a heap of trouble.”

The bandit didn’t reply.

“I can get you off easy. No hangman’s noose for you, if you are willing to be smart.”

The bandit spat at him.

Wayne leaned in, hands on the table. “Here now,” he said very softly, changing his speech to the natural, fluid accent that the bandits had been using. A cup of canal worker for authenticity, a healthy dose of bartender for trust, and the rest Sixth Octant, north side, where most had sounded like they’d come from. “Is that the way to speak to the bloke who killed a conner and took his uniform, all to get you outta here, mate?”

The bandit’s eyes opened wide.

“Don’t do that, now,” Wayne said softly. “You’re looking too eager. That’ll make ’em suspicious. Damn it all. You’re gonna have to spit on me again.”

The man hesitated.

"Do it!"

He spat.

"Ruination!" Wayne bellowed, swapping back to the constable accent. He pounded the table. "I'll tear your ears off, boy, if you do that again."

The bandit looked at him. "Er … should I?"

*Ah, good. Got the right neighborhood.* "Like hell," Wayne hissed. "I really will rip yer ears off if you do." He leaned in, speaking in the street-tough accent, low enough so those outside couldn't hear. "The conners say you haven't talked. Good job on that. The boss'll be pleased."

"You're gonna get me out?"

"What do you think? Can't leave you to sing. It's either get you out or see you shaking hands with Ironeyes."

"I won't talk," the man said urgently. "No need to kill me. I *won't talk*."

"And the others?"

The man hesitated. "I don't think they will either. Except maybe Sindren. He's new, and all."

*Good,* Wayne thought. "Sindren. Blond fellow, with the scar?"

"No. He's the short guy. Big ears." The robber squinted at Wayne. "Why don't I recognize you?"

"Why do you think?" Wayne said, standing back and resuming his constable voice. "Now, no more griping! Where is your base of operations? Where are you men working from? I want *answers*!" He leaned in again. "You don't recognize me because I'm too valuable to be seen by the common men. They might give me away. I work with your boss. Tarson."

"Tarson? He's not boss of anything. He just hits stuff."

*Also good.* "I meant his boss."

The bandit frowned. He was growing more suspicious.

"Your attitude is going to get you hanged, mate," Wayne said softly. "Who recruited you? I want to … speak with him."

"Who … Clamps does *all* the recruitment. You should know that." His eyes grew hostile.

*Excellent,* Wayne thought. "Done!" he said, turning around. "This one won't talk. Closed-mouthed git." He walked out of the room to join Brettin and the others.

"Why were you whispering so much?" Brettin demanded. "You said we could listen."

"I said you could listen," Wayne said, "but not that I'd say anything you could hear. You've got to speak low and threateningly with these types. Have any of the men given you names, yet?"

“Aliases,” Brettin said, dissatisfied.

“Any of them give the name Sindren?”

Brettin looked at his men. They shook their heads.

*Excellent.* “I want to see the other men. I’m going to pick which one to interview next.”

“That wasn’t part of the deal,” Brettin said.

“And I can still march on home and start up paperwork for a transfer…”

Brettin stewed for a moment, then led Wayne to the cells. Sindren was easy to pick out. The large-eared man looked young; he was wide-eyed as he watched the conners look into his cell.

“Him,” Wayne said. “Let’s go.”

They grabbed him and brought him to an interrogation room. Once Sindren was chained down, Brettin and his men waited in the room.

“A little space to breathe, please,” Wayne said, glaring at them.

“Fine,” Brettin said. “But no more whispering. I want to hear what you have to ask him. He *is* still our prisoner.”

Wayne glared at them, and they shuffled out, but left the door open. Brettin stood outside with his arms folded, looking at Wayne expectantly.

*All right then,* Wayne thought. He turned to the captive and leaned in. “Hello, Sindren.”

The boy actually jumped. “How do you—”

“Clamps sent me,” Wayne said softly in a street-tough accent. “I’m working on a way to get you out. I need you to remain perfectly still.”

“But—”

“Still. Don’t move.”

“No whispering!” Brettin called in. “If you say—”

Wayne put up a speed bubble. It wasn’t going to last long; he hadn’t been able to scrounge up much bendalloy. He’d have to make it work.

“I’m an Allomancer,” Wayne said, holding perfectly still. “I’ve sped up time for us. If you move, they’ll notice the blur and know what happened. Do you understand? *Don’t* nod yes. Just say so.”

“Um … yes.”

“Good,” Wayne said. “As I said, Clamps sent me, and I’m here to get you out. Seems the boss worries you fellows will talk.”

“I won’t!” the youth said, voice nearly a squeak as he obviously worked hard to keep himself from moving.

“I’m sure you won’t,” Wayne said, moving his accent subtly to match the area this youth was from, Inner Seventh. He tossed in a sprinkle of millworker, which he caught in this lad’s dialect. Probably from his father. “If you did, Tarson would have to break some of your bones. You know how he likes that, eh?”

The boy started to nod, but caught himself. “I know.”

"But we'll get you out," Wayne said. "Don't worry. I don't recognize you. You new?"

"Yes."

"Clamps recruited you?"

"Just two weeks back."

"Which base were you working out of?"

"Which one?" the lad said, frowning.

"We have several stations of operation," Wayne said. "But of course you don't know that, do you? The boss only shows one to new kids, in case they get caught. Wouldn't want you to accidentally lead people to us, eh?"

"That would be awful," Sindren agreed. He eyed the door, but kept himself still. "He put me in the old foundry over in Longard. I thought we were the only ones!"

"That's the idea," Wayne said. "We can't let a simple mistake stop us from getting payback."

"Er, yes."

"You don't believe in all that, do you?" Wayne said. "It's okay. I think the boss gets a little crazy with that stuff too."

"Yeah," the youth said. "I mean, most of us just want the money, you know? Payback's nice. But…"

"… money's better."

"Yeah. Boss is always talking about how things will be better when he's in charge, and how the city betrayed him, and stuff. But the city betrays everyone. That's how life is." The youth glanced again at the constables outside the door.

"Don't worry," Wayne said. "They think I'm one of them."

"How'd you do it?" the boy asked softly.

"Just gotta talk their language, son. Surprising how many people never figure that out. You're sure they never told you about any of the other bases? I need to know which ones are in danger."

"No," the youth said. "I only ever went to the foundry. Stayed there pretty much all the time, except when we went out on runs."

"Can I give you some advice, son?" Wayne asked.

"Please."

"Get out of this business of robbing folks. You aren't meant for it. If you ever do get free, go back to the mills."

The boy frowned.

"Takes a special type to be a proper criminal," Wayne explained. "You ain't that type. You see, in this conversation, I tricked you into confirming the name of the guy who recruited you and giving the location of your base."

The youth grew pale. "But…"

"Don't worry," Wayne said. "I'm on your side, remember? You're just lucky that I am."

"Yeah."

"All right," Wayne said, lowering his voice, remaining still. "I don't know if I can get you out by force. Face it, kid, you're not worth it. But I *can* help you. I want you to talk to the constables."

*"What?"*

"Give me until evening," Wayne said. "I'll go back to the base and clear the place out. Once that's done, you can sing to the conners, tell them everything you know. Don't worry, you weren't told enough to get us into real trouble. Our contingency plans will protect us. I'll tell the boss I told you to do it, and so you'll be all right.

"But don't talk to them until they promise to let you go free in return. Get a solicitor into the room; ask for one by the name of Arintol. He's supposed to be honest." At least, that was what people on the streets had told Wayne. "Get the conners to promise you freedom with Arintol in the room. Then, tell them everything you know.

"Once you're out, get away from the City. Some of the gang may not believe that I told you to talk, so it could be dangerous for you. Go to the Roughs and become a millworker. Nobody will care, there. Either way, kid, stay out of crime. You'll just end up getting someone killed. Maybe you."

"I…" The youth looked relieved. "Thank you."

Wayne winked. "Now, resist everything I ask you from here out." He started coughing and dropped the speed bubble.

"—that I can't hear," Brettin said, "I'm stopping this right here."

"Fine!" Wayne yelled. "Boy, tell me who you work for."

"I ain't giving you anything, conner!"

"You'll talk, or I'll have your toes!" Wayne yelled back.

The kid got into it, and Wayne gave the constables a good five minutes of arguing before throwing up his hands and storming out.

"I told you," Brettin said.

"Yeah," Wayne said, trying to sound dejected. "Guess you'll just have to keep working on them."

"It won't work," Brettin said. "I'll be dead and buried before these men talk."

"We could only be so lucky," Wayne said.

"What was that?"

"Nothing," Wayne said, sniffing the air. "I believe that the scones have arrived. Excellent! At least this trip won't be a complete waste."

# 9

“So we aren’t sure yet what happened,” Waxillium said, sitting on the floor beside the long sheet of paper covered with his genealogical results. “The Words of Founding included a reference to two more metals and their alloys. But the ancients believed in sixteen metals, and the Law of Sixteen holds so strongly in nature that it can’t be disregarded. Either Harmony changed the way that Allomancy itself works, or we never really understood it.”

“Hmmm,” Marasi said, sitting on the floor with her knees to the side. “I would not have expected that from you, Lord Waxillium. Lawman I had anticipated. Metallurgist, perhaps. But philosopher?”

“There is a link between being a lawman and a philosopher,” Waxillium said, smiling idly. “Lawkeeping and philosophy are both about questions. I was drawn to law by a need to find the answers nobody else could, to capture the men everyone considered uncatchable. Philosophy is similar. Questions, secrets, puzzles. The human mind and the nature of the universe—the two great riddles of time.”

She nodded thoughtfully.

“What was it for you?” Waxillium asked. “One does not often meet a young woman of means studying law.”

“My means are not so … meaningful as they may seem at first,” she said. “I would be nothing without my uncle’s patronage.”

“Still.”

“Stories,” she said, smiling wistfully. “Stories of the good and the evil. Most people you meet, they aren’t quite either one.”

Waxillium frowned. “I’d disagree. Most people seem basically good.”

“Well, perhaps by one definition. But it seems that either one—good or evil—has to be pursued for it to be significant. People today … it seems they are good, or sometimes evil, mostly by *inertia*, not by choice. They act as their surroundings prepare them to act.

“It’s like … well, think of a world where everything is lit with the same modest light. All places, outside or inside, lit by a uniform light that cannot be changed. If, in this world of common light, someone suddenly produced a light that was significantly brighter, it would be remarkable. By the same token, if someone managed to create a room that was dim, it would be remarkable. In a way, it doesn't matter how strong the initial illumination was. The story works regardless."

"The fact that most people are decent does not make their decency any less valuable to society."

"Yes, yes," she said, blushing. "And I'm not saying I wish that everyone were less decent. But … those bright lights and those dim places fascinate me, Lord Waxillium—particularly when they're dramatically out of order. Why is it that in one instance, a man raised in a basically good family—surrounded by basically good friends, with good employment and satisfactory means—starts strangling women with copper wires and sinking their bodies in the canals?

"And conversely, consider that most men who go to the Roughs adapt to the general climate of lax sensibilities there. But some others—a few remarkable individuals—determine to bring civilization with them. A hundred men, convinced by society that 'everybody does it this way,' will go along with the most crude and despicable of acts. But one man says no."

"It's really not as heroic as all that," Waxillium said.

"I'm certain it doesn't look that way to you."

"Have you ever heard the story of the first man I brought in?"

She blushed. "I … yes. Yes, let's just say that I've heard it. Peret the Black. A rapist and an Allomancer—Pewterarm, I believe. You walked into the lawkeeper station, looked at the board, ripped his picture off and took it with you. Came back three days later with him over the saddle of your horse. Of all the men on the board, you picked the most difficult, most dangerous criminal of the bunch."

"He was worth the most money."

Marasi frowned.

"I looked at that board," Waxillium said, "and I thought to myself, 'Well, any of these blokes is right likely to kill me. So I might as well pick the one worth the most.' I needed the money. I hadn't had anything to eat in three days but jerky and a few beans. And then there was Taraco."

"One of the great bandits of our era."

"With him," Waxillium said, "I figured I could get some new boots. He'd robbed a cobbler just a few days earlier, and I thought if I brought the man in, I might manage to get a new pair of boots out of it."

"I thought you'd picked him because he'd shot a lawkeeper over in Faradana the week before."

Waxillium shook his head. "I didn't hear that until after I brought him in."

"Oh." Then, remarkably, she smiled in eagerness. "And Harrisel

Hard?"

"A bet with Wayne," Waxillium said. "You don't look disappointed."

"This just makes it more real, Lord Waxillium," she said. Her eager eyes glittered in an almost *predatory* way. "I need to write these down." She fished in her handbag, pulling out a pad and pencil.

"So that's what motivated you?" Waxillium asked as she scribbled notes. "You study out of a desire to be a hero, like in the stories?"

"No, no," she said. "I just wanted to learn about them."

"Are you sure?" he said. "You could become a lawkeeper, go out to the Roughs, live these same stories. Don't think that you can't because you're a woman; high society might lead you to believe that, but it doesn't matter out beyond the mountains. Out there, you don't have to wear lacy dresses or smell like flowers. You can belt on some revolvers and make your own rules. Don't forget, the Ascendant Warrior herself was a woman."

She leaned forward. "Can I admit something to you, Lord Waxillium?"

"Only if it's salacious, personal, or embarrassing."

She smiled. "I *like* the lacy dresses and smelling like flowers. I *like* living in the city, where I can demand modern conveniences. Do you realize I can send for Terris food at *any hour* of the night, and have it delivered?"

"Incredible." It actually was. He hadn't realized that was possible.

"As much as I like reading about the Roughs, and though I may like to visit, I don't think I'd take well to living there. I don't mix well with dirt, grime, and an overall lack of personal hygiene." She leaned in. "And, to be perfectly honest, I have no problem at all letting men like you be the ones to belt on revolvers and shoot people. Does that make me a terrible traitor to my sex?"

"I don't think so. You *are* pretty good at shooting things, though."

"Well, shooting *things* is okay. But people?" She shivered. "I know the Ascendant Warrior is a model for self-actualized women. We have classes on it at the university, for Preservation's sake, and her legacy is written into the law. But I don't really want to put on trousers and be her. I feel like a coward for admitting it sometimes."

"It's all right," he said. "You have to be yourself. But none of that explains why you are studying law."

"Oh, I do want to change the city," she said, growing eager. "Though I feel that tracking down every criminal and punching holes in them with pieces of metal moving at high speeds is a terribly inefficient way to do it."

"Sure can be fun, though."

"Let me show you something." She dug in her handbag a little more, and came out with some folded-up sheets of paper. "I spoke of how people generally act in response to their surroundings. Remember our discussion about the Roughs, and how there are often *more* lawkeepers per person there than here? And yet, crime is more prevalent. That's the result of environment. Look here."

She handed over some of the pages. "This is a report," she said. "I'm putting it together myself. It's about the nature of crime as related to environment. See here, this discusses the major factors that have decreased crime in some sections of the city. Hiring more constables, hanging more criminals, that sort of thing. They are of medium efficacy."

"What's this at the bottom?" Waxillium asked.

"Renovation," she said with a deep smile. "This case is where a wealthy man, Lord Joshin himself, purchased several parcels of land in one of the less reputable areas. He began renovating and cleaning up. Crime went way down. The people didn't change, just their environment. Now that area is a safe and respectable section of the city.

"We call it the 'broken windows' theory. If a man sees a broken window in a building, he's more likely to rob or commit other crimes, since he figures nobody cares. If all the windows are maintained, all the streets clean, all the buildings washed, then crime goes down. Just as a hot day can make a person irritable, it appears that a run-down area can make an ordinary man into a criminal."

"Curious," Waxillium said.

"Of course," she said, "this isn't the only answer. There will always be people who don't respond to their surroundings. They fascinate me, as I've mentioned. Anyway, I've always been good with numbers and figures. I see patterns like this and wonder. Cleaning up a few streets can be cheaper than employing more constables—but can actually decrease crime to a greater degree."

Waxillium looked over the reports, then back at Marasi. She had a flush of excitement in her cheeks. There was something captivating about her. How long had they been here? He hesitated, then pulled out his pocket watch.

"Oh," she said, glancing at the watch. "We shouldn't be chatting like this. Not with poor Steris in their hands."

"We can't do more until Wayne returns," Waxillium said. "In fact, he should have been back by now."

"He is," Wayne's voice said from the hallway outside.

Marasi jumped, letting out a faint yelp.

Waxillium sighed. "How long have you been out there?"

Wayne's head poked around the corner, wearing a constable's hat. "Oh, a little while. Seemed like you two were having some kind of 'smart people' moment. Didn't want to interfere."

“Wise of you. Your stupidity can be infectious.”

“Don’t use your fancy words ’round me, son.” Wayne strolled in. Though he wore the constable’s hat, he was otherwise normally dressed in his duster and trousers, dueling canes at his hips.

“Did you succeed?” Waxillium asked, standing up, then reaching down to help Marasi to her feet.

“Sure did—I got some scones.” Wayne grinned. “And the dirty conners even paid for them.”

“Wayne?”

“Yes?”

“*We’re* dirty conners.”

“Not no more,” he said proudly. “We’re independent citizens with a mind toward civic duty. And eating the scones of dirty conners.”

Marasi grimaced. “They don’t sound that appetizing when described that way.”

“Oh, they were good.” Wayne reached into the pocket of his duster. “Here, I brought you some. Got a little mushed up in my pocket, though.”

“No, really,” she said, paling.

Wayne, however, chuckled and brought out a paper that he waved at Waxillium. “Location of the Vanishers’ hideout in the city. Along with the name of their recruiter.”

“Really?” Marasi said eagerly, rushing over to take the paper. “How did you do this?”

“Whiskey and *magic,*” Wayne said.

“In other words,” Waxillium said, walking up and reading the paper over Marasi’s shoulder, “Wayne did a lot of fast talking. Nice work.”

“We need to get going!” Marasi said, urgent. “Go there, get Steris, and—”

“They won’t be there anymore,” Waxillium said, taking the paper. “Not after having several of their members captured. Wayne, did you manage to get this without the constables hearing?”

He looked offended. “What do you think?”

Waxillium nodded, rubbing his chin. “We *should* probably go soon. Get to the scene before it gets too cold.”

“But…” Marasi said. “The constables…”

“We’ll drop them an anonymous tip once I’ve seen the place,” Waxillium said.

“Won’t be needed,” Wayne added. “I set a fuse.”

“For when?”

“Nightfall.”

“Nice.”

“You can show your appreciation with a big fat nugget of a rare and expensive metal,” Wayne said.

"On the desk," Waxillium said, folding the paper and sliding it into his vest pocket.

Wayne walked over, glancing at the apparatus set up on the desk. "I'm not sure if I want to touch any of this, mate. I'm rather fond of all of my fingers."

"It's not going to explode, Wayne," he said dryly.

"You said that—"

"It happened *once,*" Waxillium said.

"Do you know how bloody annoying it is to regrow fingers, Wax?"

"If it's on par with your complaining, then it's likely appalling indeed."

"I'm just sayin'," Wayne said, scanning the desk until he found the bottle of bendalloy flakes. He snatched that, then backed away warily. "The most innocent-looking of things have a tendency to explode around you. A bloke has to be cautious." He shook the bottle. "This isn't much."

"Don't act spoiled," Waxillium said. "That's far more than I could have gotten you on short notice if we'd been out in the Roughs. Drop the hat. Let's go look at this foundry your notes mention."

"We can use my carriage, if you like," Marasi said. To the side, Tillaume walked in, carrying a basket in one hand and a tray with tea in the other. He set the basket beside the door, then set the tray on the table and began pouring tea.

Waxillium eyed Marasi. "You want to come? I thought you said you wanted to leave the shooting to men like me."

"You said they won't be there," she replied. "So there's really no danger."

"They still want you," Wayne noted. "They tried to grab you at the dinner. It'll be dangerous for you."

"And they'd likely shoot either one of you without blinking," she said. "So how will it be any less dangerous for you?"

"I suppose it ain't," Wayne admitted.

Tillaume walked over, bringing a cup of tea for Waxillium on a small tray. Wayne plucked it off with a grin, though Tillaume tried to pull the tray away.

"How convenient," Wayne said, holding the teacup. "Wax, why didn't you ever get me one of these chaps back in Weathering?" The butler shot him a scowl, then hurried back to the table to prepare another cup.

Waxillium considered Marasi. There was something he was missing, something important. Something about what Wayne had said …

"Why *did* they take you?" Waxillium asked Marasi. "There were better targets at that party. Women closer to the bloodlines they wanted."

“You said she might have been a decoy to throw us off,” Wayne said, dumping some bendalloy into his teacup, then downing the entire thing in one draught.

“Yes,” Waxillium said, looking into her eyes and seeing a flash of something there. She turned away. “But if that were the case, they’d have wanted to take someone that wasn’t close to the same bloodline at all, not one who was a near cousin.” He pursed his lips, and then it clicked. “Ah. You’re illegitimate, then. Steris’s half sister, by Lord Harms, I assume.”

She blushed. “Yes.”

Wayne whistled. “Wonderful show, Wax. Usually *I* wait to call someone a bastard until the second date.” He eyed Marasi. “Third if she’s pretty.”

“I…” Waxillium felt a sudden burst of shame. “Of course. I didn’t mean…”

“It’s quite all right,” she said softly.

It made sense. Marasi and Lord Harms had grown so uncomfortable when Steris had spoken of mistresses. And then there was the specific clause about them in the contract; Steris was accustomed to infidelity on the part of a lord. That also explained why Harms was paying for the education and housing of Steris’s “cousin.”

“Lady Marasi,” Waxillium said, taking her hand. “Perhaps my years in the Roughs affected me more than I’d assumed. There was a time when I gave *thought* to my words before speaking them. Forgive me.”

“I am what I am, Lord Waxillium,” she said. “And I have grown comfortable with it.”

“It was still crude of me.”

“You needn’t apologize.”

“Huh,” Wayne said thoughtfully. “Tea’s poisoned.”

With that, he toppled to the ground.

Marasi gasped, immediately going to his side. Waxillium spun, looking at Tillaume just as the butler turned from his supposed tea preparations and leveled a pistol at Waxillium.

There was no time for thought. Waxillium burned steel—he kept it in him when he thought he might be in danger—and Pushed on the third button of his vest. He always wore one made of steel there, to use either for restoring his metal reserves or as a weapon.

It burst from his vest, streaking across the room and striking Tillaume in the chest just as he pulled the trigger. The shot went wild. Neither the bullet nor the gun registered as metal to Waxillium’s Allomantic senses. Aluminum, then.

Tillaume stumbled to the side and dropped the gun, pulling himself along the bookshelf in an attempt to flee. He left a line of blood on the floor before collapsing at the door.

Waxillium dropped to his knees beside Wayne. Marasi had jumped at the gunshot, and was staring at the gasping butler.

"Wayne?" Waxillium said, lifting his friend's head.

Wayne's eyes fluttered open. "Poison. I *hate* poison. Worse than losin' a finger, I tell you."

"Lord Waxillium!" Marasi said, alarmed.

"Wayne will be fine," Waxillium said, relaxing back. "So long as he can talk and he has some Feruchemical reserves, he can pull through just about anything."

"I'm not talking about him. The butler!"

Waxillium looked up with a start, realizing that the dying Tillaume was fiddling with the basket he'd brought in—the man reached a bloodied hand into it and pulled on something.

"Wayne!" Waxillium cried. "Bubble. *Now!*"

Tillaume fell back. The basket erupted in a blossoming ball of fire.

And then froze.

"Aw, hell," Wayne said, rolling over to look at the explosion in progress. "I warned you. I *said* things are always blowing up around you."

"I refuse to take responsibility for this one."

"He's *your* butler," Wayne said, coughing and crawling to his knees. "Blarek! It wasn't even *good* tea."

"It's getting bigger!" Marasi said, alarmed as she pointed at the explosion.

The fire blast had vaporized the basket before Wayne got his bubble up. The blast wave was slowly expanding outward, burning away the carpet, destroying the doorframe and the bookshelves. The butler himself had already been engulfed.

"Damn," Wayne said. "That's a big one."

"Probably meant to look like an accident with my metallurgy equipment," Waxillium said. "Burning our bodies, covering the murder."

"Shall we go out the windows, then?"

"That blast is going to be hard to outrun," Waxillium said thoughtfully.

"You could do it. Just gotta Push hard enough."

"Against what, Wayne? I don't see any good anchors in that direction. Besides, if I launch us backward that fast, going out the window is going to shred us and rip our bodies apart."

"Gentlemen," Marasi said, voice growing frantic, "it's getting *bigger.*"

"Wayne can't stop time," Waxillium said. "Just slow it greatly. And he can't move the bubble once he's made it."

"Look," Wayne said. "Just blow the wall out. Push against the nails in the window frames and blast open the side of the building. Then you can shoot us out that direction without us running into anything."

"Do you even listen to yourself when you say these things?" Waxillium asked, hands on hips as he regarded his friend. "That's *brick* and *stone*. If I Push too hard, I'll just throw myself backward into the explosion."

"It's getting *really, really* close!" Marasi said.

"So make yourself heavier," Wayne said.

"Heavy enough so that I don't move when an entire *wall*—a well-built, extremely heavy one—is ripped off a building?"

"Sure."

"The floor would never be able to take it," Waxillium said. "It would shatter, and…"

He trailed off.

Both of them looked down.

Snapping into motion, Waxillium grabbed Marasi, pulling her over with a yelp. He rolled onto his back, holding her tightly atop him.

The explosion was taking up most of their field of vision now, having consumed a large portion of the room. It swelled closer and closer, glowing with angry yellow light, like a bubbling, bursting pastry expanding in an enormous oven.

"What are we—" Marasi said.

"Hold on!" Waxillium said.

He amplified his weight.

Feruchemy didn't work like Allomancy. The two categories of power were often lumped together, but in many ways, they were opposites. In Allomancy, the power came from the metal itself, and there was a limit to how much you could do at once. Wayne couldn't compress time beyond a certain amount; Waxillium could Push only so hard on a piece of metal.

Feruchemy was powered by a sort of cannibalism, where you consumed part of yourself for later use. Make yourself weigh half as much for ten days, and you could make yourself one and a half times as heavy for a near-equal amount of time. Or you could make yourself twice as heavy for half that time. Or four times as heavy for a quarter of that time.

Or extremely heavy for a few brief moments.

Waxillium drew into himself weight he'd stored in his metalminds across days spent going around at three-quarters weight. He became heavy as a boulder, then as heavy as a building, then *heavier*. All this weight was focused on one small section of the floor.

The wood crunched, then burst, exploding downward. Waxillium dropped out of Wayne's bubble of speed and hit real time, the shift jostling him. The next few moments were a blur. He heard the awesome sound of the explosion above—it hit with a wave of force. He released his metalmind and Pushed against the nails in the floor below them, trying to slow himself and Marasi.

He didn't have enough time to do it well. They crashed into the floor of the next story down, and something heavy landed on them, driving the breath from Waxillium's lungs. There was glaring brightness and a burst of heat.

Then it was over.

Waxillium lay dazed, ears ringing. He groaned, then realized that Marasi was clinging to him, shaking. He held her close for a moment, blinking. Were they still in danger? What had fallen on them?

*Wayne,* he thought. He forced himself to move, rolling over and setting Marasi aside. The floor beneath them had been crushed practically to splinters, the nails flattened to little disks. Part of his downward Push must have been while he still had the increased weight.

They were covered with chips of wood and plaster dust. The ceiling was a wreck, sections of wood smoldering, bits of ash and debris wafting down. There was nothing left of the hole he'd broken; the blast had consumed it and the floor around it.

Wincing, he moved Wayne. His friend had fallen on them and blocked the brunt of the explosion from above. His duster had been shredded, his back exposed, blackened and burned, blood dribbling down his sides.

Marasi raised a hand to her mouth. She was still trembling, her dark brown hair tangled, eyes wide.

*No,* Waxillium thought, uncertain if he should try to turn his friend over or not. *Please, no.* Wayne had used a portion of his health to recover from the poison. And last night, he'd said he only had enough left for one bullet wound.…

Anxious, he felt at Wayne's neck. There was a faint pulse. Waxillium closed his eyes and let out a deep breath. As he watched, the wounds on Wayne's back began to draw closed. It was a slow process. A Bloodmaker using Feruchemical healing was limited by how fast he wanted the power to work—recovering quickly required a much greater expenditure of health. If Wayne didn't have much left, he'd need to work at a slow pace.

Waxillium left him to it. Wayne would be suffering great pain, but there was nothing he could do. Instead, he took Marasi's arm. She was still trembling.

"It's all right," Waxillium said, his voice sounding odd and muffled because of the explosion's effect on his hearing. "Wayne is healing. Are you injured?"

"I…" She looked dazed. "Two in three sufferers of great trauma are unable to correctly identify their own injuries as a result of stress or the body's own natural coping mechanisms covering the pain."

"Tell me if any of this hurts," Waxillium said, feeling at her ankles, then legs, then arms for breaks. He carefully prodded her sides for broken ribs, though it was difficult through the thick cloth of her dress.

She slowly came out of her daze, then looked at him and pulled him close, tucking her head against his chest. He hesitated, then wrapped his arms around her and held her as she steadied her breath, obviously trying to get hold of her emotions.

Behind them, Wayne started coughing. He stirred, then groaned and lay still, letting the healing continue. They'd fallen into a spare bedroom. The building was burning, but not too badly. Likely the constables would soon be called.

*Nobody has come running,* Waxillium thought. *The other staff. Are they all right?*

Or were they part of it? His mind was still trying to catch up. Tillaume—a man who, as far as he knew, had served his uncle faithfully for decades—had tried to kill him. Three times.

Marasi pulled back. "I think I … I think I've composed myself. Thank you."

He nodded to her, pulling out his handkerchief and handing it over, then knelt by Wayne. The man's back was crusted with blood and burned skin, but it had been lifted and raised as scabs, new skin forming underneath.

"Is it bad?" Wayne asked, eyes still closed.

"You'll pull through."

"I meant the duster."

"Oh. Well … you're gonna need a *really* big patch this time."

Wayne snorted, then pushed himself up and moved into a sitting position. He winced several times during the process, then finally opened his eyes. Trails of tears were running down the side of his face. "I told you," Wayne said. "Innocent things are *always* exploding around you, Wax."

"You kept your fingers this time."

"Great. I can still strangle you."

Waxillium smiled, resting his hand on his friend's arm. "Thanks."

Wayne nodded. "I apologize for havin' to fall on you two."

"I'll forgive you, under the circumstances." Waxillium glanced at Marasi. She sat with her arms wrapped around herself, hunched forward, face pale. She saw his scrutiny, then lowered her arms, as if forcing herself to be strong, and began to stand up.

"It's all right," Waxillium said. "You can take more time."

"I'll be well," she said, though it was hard to make out the words, as his hearing was still dulled. "I just … I'm unaccustomed to people trying to kill me."

"You don't ever get accustomed to it," Wayne said. "Trust me." He took a deep breath, then pulled off the remnants of his duster and shirt. Then he turned his burned back to Waxillium. "You mind?"

"You may want to turn away, Marasi," Waxillium said.

She frowned, but didn't look away. So he grabbed the burned layer at Wayne's shoulder and—with a jerk—ripped the skin off his back. It came free in almost a single complete sheet. Wayne grunted.

New skin had formed underneath, pink and fresh, but it couldn't finish healing properly until the old, stiff, burned layer had been removed. Waxillium tossed it aside.

"Oh, *Lord of Harmony,*" Marasi said, raising a hand to her mouth. "I think I might be sick."

"I warned you," Waxillium said.

"I thought you were referring to his burns. I didn't realize you were going to tear off his *entire back*."

"It feels much better now." Wayne rolled his arms in his shoulders, now shirtless. He was lean and muscled, and he wore a pair of gold metalmind bracers on his upper arms. His trousers had been singed, but were mostly intact. He reached down, pulling one of his dueling canes out of the wreckage. The other was still at his waist. "Now they owe me a hat *and* a duster. Where's the rest of the house staff?"

"I've been wondering that myself," Waxillium said. "I'll do a quick search and see if anyone's hurt. You get Marasi out the back. Sneak through the grounds and out the garden gate; I'll meet you there."

"Sneak?" Marasi asked.

"Whoever hired that bloke to kill us," Wayne said, "will be expecting that explosion to mean we've gone to meet Ironeyes."

"Right," Waxillium said. "We'll have an hour or two while the house is searched and Tillaume is identified—if there's enough left to identify. During that time, we'll be thought dead."

"It'll give us a little time to think," Wayne said. "Come on. We should move quick."

He led Marasi down the back stairs toward the grounds. She still seemed dazed.

Waxillium's ears felt like they were stuffed with cotton. He suspected the three of them had been shouting their conversation. Wayne was right. You never got used to people trying to kill you.

Waxillium began a quick search of the house, and started refilling his metalminds as he did. He became much lighter, about half his normal weight. Any more than that and it became difficult to walk normally, even with clothing and guns weighing him down. He was practiced at it, though.

During his search, he found Limmi and Miss Grimes unconscious, but alive, in the pantry. A glance out the window showed the coachman, Krent, standing with his hands on his head and looking at the burning building with eyes wide. Of the other house staff—the maids, the errand boys, the cook—there was no sign.

They might have been close enough to the blast to be caught in it, but Waxillium didn't think that likely. Probably, Tillaume—who had charge over household staff—had sent away everyone that he reasonably could, then had drugged the others and stuffed them someplace safe. It indicated a desire to ensure that nobody was hurt. Well, nobody but Waxillium and his guests.

In two quick trips, Waxillium carried the unconscious women out into the back garden—being careful not to be seen. Hopefully, they would soon be discovered by Krent or the constables. After that, Waxillium fetched a pair of revolvers from the closet on the main floor and got a shirt and jacket from the laundry for Wayne. He wished he could look for his old trunk, with his Sterrions, but there wasn't time.

He slipped out the back door and crossed the garden on too-light feet. Each step of the way, he was increasingly bothered by what had happened. It was horrible for someone to try to kill you; it was worse when the attack came from someone you knew.

It seemed implausible that the bandits would have been able to contact and bribe Tillaume so quickly. How could they have even known that an aging butler would be amenable? The groom or gardener would have been a far safer choice. Something more was going on here. From Waxillium's first day in the city, Tillaume had been trying to discourage him from getting involved in local lawkeeping. On the night before the ball, he'd pointedly tried to get Waxillium to drop the subject of the robberies.

Whoever was behind this, the butler had been working with them for some time. And that meant they'd been watching Waxillium all along.

# 10

The carriage rattled on the paving stones as it rolled in a cautiously circuitous route toward the Fifth Octant. Marasi looked out at the busy street, her arms folded. Horses and carriages passed, and people flowed down sidewalks like the little blood cells through veins she'd looked at under a microscope at the university. They got clogged at corners or at sections where the paving stones were being replaced.

Lord Waxillium and Wayne sat on the other side of the carriage. Waxillium looked distracted, lost in his thoughts. Wayne was napping, head tipped back, eyes closed. He'd found a hat somewhere—a flimsy cap, of the type broadsheet boys liked to wear. After fleeing the mansion, they'd rounded the street corner and cut through Dampmere Park. On the other side, Waxillium had waved them down a carriage.

By the time they'd piled in, Wayne had been pulling on the cap, whistling softly to himself. She had no idea where he'd gotten it. Now he was snoring softly. After they'd nearly been killed, after he'd had the skin on his back seared off, he was sleeping. She could still smell the pungency of burned cloth, and her ears were ringing.

*This was what you wanted,* she reminded herself. *You're the one who insisted Lord Harms bring you along to meet Waxillium. You came to the mansion today of your own accord. You put yourself into this.*

If only she'd made a better show of herself. She was riding in a carriage with the greatest lawman that the Roughs had ever known—but at every occasion, she'd proven herself to be a helpless girl, prone to bursts of useless emotion. She started to sigh, but cut herself off. No. No sulking. That would only make things worse.

They were paralleling one of the great spoke-canals that divided the eight parts of the city. She'd seen reproductions of pages from the Words of Founding, which had included drawings and plans for Elendel, though the name of the city had been chosen by the Lord Mistborn. There was a large round park at the center where flowers bloomed year-round, the air warmed by a hot spring underneath. The canal spokes radiated from it, extending out into the bountiful hinterlands, and the river divided around it. Streets and blocks were laid out in an orderly way, with large streets—wider than anyone would once have assumed they'd need. Yet now they almost seemed insufficient.

The carriage was approaching the bridge to the Field of Rebirth; the blanket of green grass and blooming Marewill flowers rose in a gradual hillside slope. The statues of the Last Emperor and the Ascendant Warrior dominated the top, capping their tomb. There was a museum there. Marasi had been there several times as a girl to look at the relics of the World of Ash that had been saved by the Originators, those who had been nurtured in wombs of the earth and reborn to build society.

The carriage turned along the tree-shaded drive around the Field of Rebirth. Asphalt paving was used here instead of stones to quiet the clatter of steel-shod hooves, and also smoothed the way for the occasional motorcar. Those were still rare, but one of her professors claimed that they would eventually replace horses.

She tried to keep her mind on their task. There was more to the Vanishers than just the kidnappings and the robberies. What of the way the trains' cargo disappeared so abruptly, giving the Vanishers their name? And what of the extremely well-made weapons? And then there was the major effort to kill Waxillium, both with poison and that bomb.

"Lord Waxillium?" she said.

"Yes?"

"How did your uncle die?"

"Carriage accident," he said, looking thoughtful. "He, his wife, and my sister were riding in the Outer Estates. This was mere weeks after my cousin—the heir—had succumbed to disease. The trip was supposed to help ease their grief.

"Uncle Ladrian wanted to visit a particular peak to get a view of the landscape, but my aunt was too weak for the hike. They took a carriage. Along the way, the horse bolted. The hitchings snapped. The carriage went off the cliffside."

"I'm sorry."

"I am as well," he said softly. "I hadn't been to see any of them in years. I feel a strange guilt, as if I should be more crushed to lose them."

"I think that story involves enough crushed people already," Wayne murmured.

Waxillium gave him a glare, though Wayne didn't see it, as his eyes were still closed, the cap resting on his face.

Marasi kicked him in the shin, causing him to yelp. Then she blushed. "Be respectful of the dead," she said.

Wayne rubbed his leg. "Already she starts orderin' me around. Women." He put his cap back on his face and settled back.

"Lord Waxillium," she said. "Did you ever wonder if…"

"If someone might have killed my uncle?" Waxillium asked. "I am a lawkeeper. I wonder, if just briefly, about *every* death I hear of. But the reports I received indicated nothing suspicious. One of the things I learned early in my career was that sometimes, accidents simply *do* happen. My uncle was a risk taker. His gambling youth led to a middle age where he sought thrills. I eventually dismissed the tragedy as an accident."

"And now?"

"And now," Waxillium said, "I wonder if the reports sent to me were a little *too* clean. In retrospect, everything might have been carefully crafted not to arouse my suspicions. Beyond that, Tillaume was there, though he remained behind at the manor house the day of the accident."

"Why would they kill your uncle?" Marasi asked. "Shouldn't they have been worried about bringing you, an experienced lawkeeper, back to town? Removing your uncle and accidentally putting Waxillium Dawnshot onto them…"

"Waxillium *Dawnshot*?" Wayne asked, cracking an eye. He sniffled softly and wiped his nose with his handkerchief.

She blushed. "Sorry. But it's what the reports call him."

"That's what they should call me," Wayne said. "I'm the one who likes a good shot of whiskey in the morning."

"'Morning' to you is well past noon, Wayne," Waxillium said. "I doubt you've ever seen the dawn."

"That's right unfair. See it all the time, when I stay up too late.…" He grinned underneath his hat. "Wax, when are we going to go see Ranette?"

"We're *not,*" Waxillium said. "What makes you think we will?"

"Well, we're in town. She's in town too—moved here before you did, and all. Our house exploded. We could go see her, you know. Be all friendly, like."

"No," Waxillium said. "I wouldn't even know where to find her. The City is a big place."

"She lives over in the Third Octant," Wayne said absently. "Redbrick house. Two stories."

Waxillium gave Wayne a flat stare, which Marasi found curious. "Who is this person?"

"Nobody," Waxillium said. "How are you with a pistol?"

"Not good," she admitted. "The target club uses rifles."

"Well, a rifle doesn't fit in a handbag," Waxillium said, taking a pistol out of his shoulder holster. It was small, with a slim barrel. The entire weapon was only about as long as her hand.

She took the gun hesitantly.

"The trick to shooting with a pistol is to be steady," Waxillium said.

"Use both hands, find low cover if you can and set your arms on it. Don't shake, take your time, and be sure to sight. Pistols are much harder to hit with, but that's partially because people tend to be wilder with them. The very nature of a rifle encourages you to take aim, while people's first impulse with a pistol seems to be to just point vaguely and pull the trigger."

"Yes," she said, hefting the gun. It was deceptively heavy. "Eight of ten of constables firing a handgun at a criminal ten feet away miss."

"Really?"

She nodded.

"Well," Waxillium said, "I guess Wayne doesn't need to feel so bad."

"Hey!"

Waxillium eyed her. "I once saw him try to shoot someone three paces away. He ended up hitting the wall *behind* himself."

"'S not my fault," Wayne grumbled. "Bullets are devious buggers. They shouldn't be allowed to bounce. Metal don't bounce, and that's true as titanium."

She checked the small revolver to make sure the safety was on, then tucked it into her singed handbag.

The Vanishers' hideout turned out to be an innocent-looking building near a canal dock. Two stories tall, it was flat-topped and wide, with numerous chimneys. Piles of dark ashes and slag were heaped along one wall of the building, and the windows looked like they hadn't been cleaned since the Final Ascension.

"Lady Marasi," Waxillium asked, checking the sights on his revolver, "would you be terribly offended if I suggested you wait in the carriage while we reconnoiter? The place is likely abandoned, but I wouldn't be surprised to find a few traps left behind."

"No," she said, shivering. "I wouldn't mind. I think that would be just fine."

"I'll wave when we're certain the place is clear," he said, then raised his handgun and nodded to Wayne. They ducked out of the carriage, running in a low squat to the side of the building. They didn't go to the door. Instead, Wayne jumped—and Waxillium must have Pushed him, for the wiry man leaped a good twelve feet and landed on the roof. Waxillium followed, jumping more gracefully, landing without a sound. They moved over to the far corner, where Wayne swung down and kicked in a window. Waxillium swung in after him.

She waited a few tense minutes. The coachman didn't say a word about any of it, though she heard him muttering "none of my business" to himself. Waxillium had paid him enough that he'd better stay quiet.

No gunshots sounded. Eventually, Waxillium opened the door to the building and waved. She hurriedly climbed from the carriage and approached.

"Well?" she asked.

"Two tripwires," Waxillium said, "rigged with explosives. Nothing else dangerous we could find. Other than Wayne's body odor."

"That's the smell of *incredibleness,*" Wayne called from inside.

"Come on," Waxillium said, holding the door open for her.

She stepped in, then hesitated in the doorway. "It's empty."

She'd expected forges and equipment. Instead, the cavernous room was vacant, like a classroom during winter holiday. Light shone in through windows, though it was very dim. The chamber smelled of coal and fire, and there were blackened areas on the floor.

"Sleeping quarters up there," Waxillium said, pointing at the other side of the foundry. "The main chamber here is double height for half the building, but the other side has a second story. Looked like they could house some fifty men in there, men who could act like foundry workers during the days to maintain the front."

"Aha!" Wayne said from the darkness on the left side of the chamber. She heard a rattling, then light flooded the room as he pushed back the wall. It opened there, rolling to give large-scale access to the canal.

"How easily did that open?" Waxillium asked, trotting over. Marasi followed.

"I dunno," Wayne said, shrugging. "Easy enough."

Waxillium inspected the door. It slid on wheels in a small channel cut into the floor. He rubbed his fingers in the trench and brought them out, rubbing grease between them.

"They've been using it," Marasi said.

"Exactly," Waxillium said.

"So?" Wayne asked.

"If they were doing illegal things in here," Marasi said, "they wouldn't be wanting to open the entire side of the building with any frequency."

"Maybe they did it to keep up the act," Waxillium said, rising.

Marasi nodded, thoughtful. "Oh! Aluminum."

Wayne pulled out his dueling canes, spinning. "What? Where? Who's shooting?"

Marasi felt herself blush. "Sorry. I meant, we should check and see if we can find any aluminum droplets on the ground. You know, from forging or casting guns. That will tell us if this place is *really* the hideout, or if Wayne's source was trying to lead us to a bad alloy."

"He was honest," Wayne said. "I got a sense for that sort of thing." He sneezed.

"You believed that Lessie really was a dancer, the first time we met her," Waxillium said, rising.

"That's different. She was a woman. Good at lying, they are. The God Beyond made'm that way."

"I'm … not certain how I should take that," Marasi said.

"With a pinch of copper," Waxillium said. "And a healthy dose of skepticism. Just like anything Wayne says." He held out his hand.

Marasi frowned, raising her palm. He dropped something into it. Some bits of metal that looked like they'd been scraped off the floor, where they'd cooled. They were silvery, light, and dirty black around the edges.

"I found them on the floor over there," Waxillium said. "Near one of the blackened sections."

"Aluminum?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," he said. "At least, I can't Push them with Allomancy, which along with their appearance is sufficient indication." He studied her. "You've got a good mind for this sort of thing."

She blushed. *Again. Rust and Ruin!* she thought. *I'm going to have to find a way to deal with that.* "It's about deviations, Lord Waxillium."

"Deviations?"

"Numbers, patterns, movements. People seem erratic, but they actually follow patterns. Find the deviations, isolate the reason why they deviated, and you'll often learn something. Aluminum on the floor. It's a deviation."

"And are there others, here?"

"The opening door," she said, nodding to the side. "Those windows. They're smeared with too much soot. If I were to guess, it was put there by burning a candle close to the glass to blacken it so nobody could peek in."

"Maybe it was natural," Waxillium said. "From forging."

"Why would the windows be *closed* during the heat of forging? Those windows can open easily, and they open outward—so there wouldn't be any soot on them. Not so much, at least. Either they left them closed while working in order to hide what was in here, or they darkened them intentionally."

"Clever," Waxillium said.

"So the question is," she said, "what have they been moving in and out of the building through that large side door? Something important enough that they'd open it, even after going through so much trouble with the windows."

"That part, at least, is easy," Waxillium said. "They've been robbing freight cars, so they've been moving the cargo in."

"Which implies they've been shipping it after stealing it…" Marasi said.

"Which gives us a lead," Waxillium said with a nod. "They've been moving things in and out of this location via the canals. In fact, the canals might be connected to how they're getting the cargo out of the railway cars so easily." He strode away toward the door.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm going to go sniff around outside," he said. "You two go look through the sleeping quarters. Tell me if you see any … deviations, as you put it." He hesitated. "Let Wayne go in first. We might have missed a trap or two. Better for him to explode than you."

"Hey!" Wayne said.

"I mean it with all fondness," Waxillium said, slipping out through the open side of the building. Then he leaned back in. "And maybe it will blow your face off, and spare us having to look at that mug of yours." With that, he left.

Wayne smiled. "Damn. Sure is good to see him acting more like himself again."

"So he wasn't always so solemn?"

"Oh, Wax has always been solemn," Wayne said, wiping his nose with his handkerchief. "But when he's at his best, there's a smirk underneath. C'mon."

He led her to the back part of the building. There was a small box by the wall, the explosives they had discovered and disarmed, she assumed. The ceiling was lower here. Wayne climbed up a stairwell, gesturing for her to wait.

She poked around, looking for anything that had been discarded, but succeeded only in making herself jump a few times when she thought she saw something from the corner of her eye. This side of the chamber was very dim.

Was Wayne taking too long? She fidgeted, then finally decided to climb the stairwell.

It was *dark* inside. Not pitch dark, just dark enough that she thought she should be able to see what she was doing—but couldn't. She hesitated halfway up the stairs, then decided she was a fool and pushed forward.

"Wayne?" she said, nervous as she peeked out of the stairwell. The upper floor was lit by a few windows, darkened by soot, despite being in an area where there would be no forging or casting. That reinforced her theory. And her nervousness.

"He is dead, young lady," an aged, distinguished voice said from the darkness. "I am sorry for your loss."

Her heart just about stopped.

"Yes," the voice continued, "he was simply too handsome, too clever, and too immensely remarkable in all aspects of his existence to allow to live." Someone pushed open a window, letting in light and revealing Wayne's face. "I'm afraid it took a hundred men to bring him down, and he killed all but one. His last words were, 'Tell Wax …

that he's a total git … and he still owes me five notes.'"

*"Wayne,"* she hissed.

"Couldn't help myself, mate," he said, switching back to his own voice, which was completely different. "Sorry. But you shouldn't have come up here." He nodded to the corner, where a few sticks of something lay against the wall.

"More explosives?" she said, feeling faint.

"Yeah. We missed them on the first pass. Were rigged to blow when the latch was opened on a chest in the corner."

"Was there anything *in* the chest?"

"Yeah. Explosives. Weren't you listening?"

She gave him a flat stare.

"No," he said, chuckling. "I don't know what Wax expects us to find in this place. Swept it clean, they did."

By the light of the open window, she could make out a low-ceilinged room. Well, more of a loft. She and Wayne could walk in it without bending over, but him just barely. Waxillium would have to stoop.

The floorboards were warped and there were nails sticking out in places. She had images of prying one up and finding some stash of hidden clues, but as she felt across the floor, she realized she could see between the boards to the floor below. There wasn't really any space for hiding things.

Wayne poked through some cupboards built into the wall, checking for explosives, then knocking for hidden compartments. Marasi looked around, but quickly determined that there wasn't anything to find here. Other than, perhaps, the explosives.

Explosives.

"Wayne, what kind of explosives are those?"

"Hum? Oh, ordinary stuff. They call it dynamite, used for blowing holes in rock out in the Roughs. Pretty easy to get, even in the city. These are smaller sticks than I've seen, but basically the same stuff."

"Oh." She frowned. "Were they in anything?"

He hesitated, then looked back at the trunk. "Huh." He reached in and held up something. "They weren't *in* anything, but someone used this to prop up the fuse and the detonator."

"What is it?" she asked, hurrying over.

"Cigar box," he said, letting her see it. "Citizen Magistrates. Expensive brand. Very expensive."

She looked over the box. The top was painted gold and red, with the brand splayed across in large letters. There weren't any cigars left, though it *did* look like some numbers had been scribbled across the inside of the lid in pencil. The sequence didn't make any sense to her.

"We'll show it to Wax," Wayne said. "This is just the sort of thing he likes. It'll probably lead him to some grand theory about how our boss smokes cigars, and that'll somehow let him pick the guy out of a crowd. He's always doing stuff like that, ever since we started working together." Wayne smiled, taking the cigar box back, then returned to poking around the cupboards.

"Wayne," Marasi said. "How *did* you end up with Waxillium, anyway?"

"That wasn't in your reports?" he asked, knocking at the side of a cupboard.

"No. It's considered a bit of a mystery."

"We don't talk about it much," Wayne said, voice muffled, head inside the cupboard. "He saved my life."

She smiled, sitting down on the floor, resting her back against the wall. "That's probably a good story."

"It's not what you're thinking," he said, pulling his head out. "I was to be hanged over in Far Dorest, by the lawkeeper there."

"Wrongfully, I assume?"

"Depends on your definition of that particular word and all," Wayne said. "I shot a man. Innocent one."

"Was it an accident?"

"Yeah," Wayne said. "I only meant to rob him." He paused, looking at the cupboard, seeming distant. He shook his head, then crawled inside, pushing hard and breaking in the back wall.

That wasn't what she'd expected to hear. She sat back, hands around her legs. "You were a criminal?"

"Not a very capable one," Wayne said from inside the cupboard. "I've always had a problem not taking things. I just grab stuff, you know? And then it's there, in my fingers. Anyway, I was getting good at it, and I had some friends … they convinced me that I should go a little farther. Really take hold of my destiny, they said. Start going for coin, get into robbing with guns and the like. So I tried it out. Left a man dead. Father of three."

He pulled out of the broken cupboard, then held something up. It looked like cards of some sort.

"Clues?" she asked eagerly.

"Nudes," he said, flipping through them. "Old ones. Probably from before our bandits bought this place." He flipped through a few more, then tossed them back into the hole. "At least it will give the conners something fun to find." He looked back at her, seeming … haunted, his eyes lying in shadow, face lit on one side by the open window.

"So what happened?" she asked softly. "With you, I mean. Unless you don't want to tell."

He shrugged. "I didn't really know what I was doing, and I panicked. I think maybe I wanted to be caught. Never wanted to shoot that bloke. Just wanted his purse, you know? Old Deadfinger caught me easy. He didn't even have to beat a confession out of me." Wayne was quiet for a moment. "I cried the whole time. I was sixteen. Just a kid."

"Did you know you were an Allomancer?" she asked.

"Sure. That was kinda why I was in the Roughs in the first place, but that's another story. Anyway, bendalloy is hard to make. Bismuth and cadmium aren't the kinds of metals you find in your corner store. Didn't know much about Feruchemy yet, though my father was a Feruchemist, so I had an idea. But storing health, it takes gold."

He walked over, sitting down on the floor beside her. "Still don't know why Wax saved me. I shoulda hanged, you know. Killed a good man. He wasn't even rich. He was a bookkeeper. Did charity work for anyone who needed it—wills drawn up, letters read. Every week, he transcribed letters for the mine workers who couldn't write, so they could send them home to their families in the city. Found out a lot about him in the trial, you see. Got to see his kids crying. And his wife…"

Wayne reached into his pocket, then unfolded something. A sheet of paper. "Got a letter from them a few months back."

"They write you *letters*?" Marasi said.

"Sure. I send them half of what I make. Keeps the kids fed, you know. Figure it makes sense, seein' as to how I killed their daddy. One went to university." He hesitated. "They still hate me. Write me the letters to let me know they haven't forgiven me, that no money will bring back their daddy. They're right. But they do take the money, so that's something."

"Wayne…" Marasi said. "I'm so sorry."

"Yeah. Me too. Some mistakes, though, you can't fix by being sorry. Can't fix them, no matter what you do. Guns and me, we haven't gotten along ever since. My hand starts shaking when I hold one, wobbling about like a damn fish dumped on the docks. Ain't that the funniest thing? Like my hand thinks by itself."

The sound of footsteps came from the stairwell and a few moments later Waxillium walked in. He raised an eyebrow at the two of them sitting there on the floor.

"See now," Wayne said. "We're having a heart-to-heart, here. Don't go stomping in and making a mess of things."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Waxillium said. "I spoke with the local beggars. The Vanishers *have* been moving something large in and out of the building and onto a canal boat. They did it on several occasions, always at night. It seems to have been bigger than just cargo; some kind of machinery, I suspect."

"Huh," Wayne said.

“Huh indeed,” Waxillium said. “You?”

“Found a box,” Wayne said, holding out the cigar box. “Oh, and some more dynamite. In case you want to blast out a new canal or something.”

“Bring it,” Waxillium said. “Might be useful.” He took the cigar box.

“There’s some nudie pictures too,” Wayne noted, pointing at the cupboard. “They’re so faded you can barely make out the good parts, though.” He hesitated. “The ladies ain’t wearing any guns, so you probably wouldn’t be interested anyway.”

Waxillium snorted.

“The cigar box is of an expensive variety,” Marasi said, standing up. “Unlikely to be from one of the common thieves, unless they took it from someone. But look. Someone wrote some numbers on the inside.”

“Indeed,” Waxillium said. He narrowed his eyes, then looked at Wayne, who nodded.

“What?” she said. “You know something?”

Waxillium tossed the box back to Wayne, who tucked it away inside the pocket of his coat. It was large enough that it hung out. “Have you ever heard the name Miles Dagouter?”

“Sure,” she said. “Miles Hundredlives. He’s a lawkeeper, out in the Roughs.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said somberly. “Come on. I think it’s time for us to take a trip. While we go, I’ll tell you a few stories.”

# 11

Miles stood by the railing and lit his cigar. He puffed on it a few times to get it going, then slowly released a stream of pungent smoke from between his lips.

“They’ve been spotted, boss,” Tarson said as he walked up. Tarson’s arm was in a sling; most men would still be in bed after taking a shot like he had. But Tarson was a Pewterarm and koloss-blooded. He’d heal quickly.

“Where?” Miles asked, looking down and surveying the setup of the new hideout. Besides Tarson, the only one up here with him was Clamps, third-in-command.

“They’re at the old foundry,” Tarson said. He was still wearing Wayne’s hat. “Were talking to the beggars there.”

“Should have dumped the lot of them in the canal,” Clamps grumbled, scratching at the scar on his neck.

“I’m not going to start killing beggars, Clamps,” Miles said softly. He wore a pair of aluminum revolvers; they gleamed in the electric lights of the large chamber. “You’d be surprised at how quickly something like that can backfire; turn the city’s underclass against us, and all *kinds* of inconvenient information will find its way to the constables.”

“Yeah, sure,” Clamps said. “Of course. But, I mean, those beggars … they saw things, boss.”

“Wax would have figured it out regardless,” Miles said. “He is like a rat. Wherever you least wish him to be, there you will find him. In a way, that makes him predictable. I assume your explosive traps—foolproof though you promised they would be—were ineffective?”

Clamps coughed into his hand.

“Pity,” Miles said. He took his silver lighter, still in his hand from lighting the cigar, and put it back in his pocket. It bore the seal of the lawkeepers of True Madil. It made the other men uncomfortable to see that. Miles kept it anyway.

The space before them was completely windowless. Big, glaring electric lights hung from the ceiling, and men were setting up forging and casting equipment. Miles was skeptical. A foundry below the ground? But Mister Suit promised that his ducts and electric fans would pull the smoke away and circulate the air. It helped that there was a lot less smoke with the electric furnaces they'd be using down here.

This room was very curious. A large tunnel led off into darkness on the left side of the chamber, and railway tracks were set into it. The beginnings, Mister Suit said, of an *underground* railway line in the city. How would it cut through the canals? It would have to run under them, he guessed. A strange image.

As of now, that tunnel was only a test. It led a short distance to a large wooden building, where Miles could quarter the rest of his men. He had another thirty or so. At the moment, they were bringing in boxes of supplies and what was left of their aluminum. There wasn't much. In one blow, Wax had all but upended the Vanishers.

Miles puffed on his cigar, thoughtful. As always, he was drawing upon his goldmind, invigorating himself, refreshing his body. He never felt sick, never lacked energy. He still had to sleep, and he still grew old, but other than that, he was practically immortal. So long as he had enough gold.

That was the problem though, wasn't it? Smoke curled in front of him, twisting upon itself like the mists.

"Boss?" Clamps asked. "Mister Suit is waiting. Aren't you going to go meet with him?"

Miles blew out smoke. "In a moment." Suit did *not* own him. "How is recruitment, Clamps?"

"It's … I'll need more time. One day ain't enough, 'specially following half of us getting slaughtered."

"Watch your tone," Miles said.

"Sorry."

"Wax was bound to enter the game eventually," Miles said softly. "He changes the rules, and it is true that we lost far more men than I would have liked. We are fortunate at the same time, however. Now that Waxillium has entered, we can anticipate him."

"Boss," Tarson said, leaning in, "there's talk among the men. That you and Wax … that you two set us all up." He cringed back, as if expecting a violent reaction.

Miles puffed on his cigar, and managed to contain his initial burst of anger. He was getting better at that. A little. "Why would they say that?"

"You were once a lawkeeper, and all…"

"I still am," Miles said. "What we do, it is not outside the law. Not the *true* law. Oh, the rich will make their own codes, will force us to live by them. But our law is the law of humanity itself.

"Men who work for me, they are given the dispensation of reform. Their work here washes away their previous … infractions. Tell them I am proud of them, Clamps. I realize we've been through something traumatic, but we did survive. We will face tomorrow with greater strength."

"I'll tell 'em, boss," Clamps said.

Miles covered a grimace. He couldn't decide if the words were the right ones or not; he wasn't meant for preaching. But the men needed conviction from him, so conviction he would display. "Fifteen years," he said softly.

"Boss?"

"Fifteen years I spent out in the Roughs, trying to protect the weak. And you know what? It never got better. All that effort, it meant nothing. Children still died, women were still abused. One man wasn't enough to change things, not with the corruption here at the heart of civilization." He took a puff on his cigar. "If we're going to change things, we need to change them here, first."

*And Trell help me if I'm wrong.* Why had Trell made men like him, if not to see wrongs righted? The Words of Founding had even included a lengthy explanation of Trellism and its teachings, which proved men like Miles were special.

He turned and moved along the walkway. It hung like a balcony on the north side of the large chamber. Tarson and Clamps stayed behind; they knew he liked to be alone when he faced Mister Suit.

Miles pulled open the door at the end of the walk, and entered Mister Suit's office. Why he needed an office here, Miles didn't know; perhaps he'd be keeping a closer eye on operations at this new base. Mister Suit had wanted them here from the beginning. It annoyed Miles that he'd finally had to accept the offer—it put him more closely under his backer's thumb.

*Enough good robberies, and we won't need him any longer,* Miles told himself. *Then we can move somewhere else.*

Mister Suit was a round-faced man with a full gray-streaked beard. He sat at his desk sipping a cup of tea and wearing an extremely stylish and expensive suit of black silk with a turquoise vest. As Miles entered, he was studying a broadsheet.

"You know I don't like the smell of those," Mister Suit said without looking up.

Miles puffed his cigar anyway.

Mister Suit smiled. "Did I hear that your old friend has *already* located your previous base of operations?"

"Men were captured," Miles said simply. "It was only a matter of time."

"They aren't very loyal to your cause."

Miles had no response to that. They both knew that most of his men worked for the money, and not for any greater purpose.

"Do you know why I like you, Miles?" Mister Suit asked.

*I don't particularly care if you do or not,* Miles thought, but held his tongue.

"You're careful," Mister Suit continued. "You have a goal, you believe in it, but you don't let it cloud your vision. In fact, your cause is not so different from that of my associates and me. I think it is a worthy goal, and you a worthy leader." Mister Suit turned over his broadsheet. "The shootings at the last robbery threaten to undermine my confidence in that assessment."

"I…"

"You lost your temper," Mister Suit said, voice growing cold, "and you therefore lost control of your men. *That* is why this disaster occurred. There was no other reason."

"Yes there was. Waxillium Ladrian."

"You should have been ready for him."

"He wasn't supposed to be there."

Mister Suit sipped his tea. "Come now, Miles. You wore a mask on your face. You knew there was a chance he'd come."

"I wore a mask," Miles said, keeping his temper with some effort, "because I am a man of some renown. Wax wasn't the only one who could have recognized me."

"A valid point, I suppose. But then, with how dramatic you insist on being—cargo that vanishes, rather than just being stolen, it makes me wonder why you avoid being recognized."

"The drama serves a purpose," Miles snapped. "I've told you. So long as the police are baffled by how we're getting the cargo, it will keep them making mistakes."

"And the drama?" Suit said idly, turning over a newspaper on his desk. "The 'Vanishers,' Miles?"

He said nothing. He'd explained his reasons before, the ones he let Suit know of. There was more to it, of course. He needed to be dramatic, needed to capture the public's attention. Miles was out to change the world. You couldn't do that if people thought of you as common thieves. Mystery, power, a pinch of magic … that could work wonders for his cause.

"No comment," Suit said. "Well, your reasoning has proven valid in the past. Except when it comes to Waxillium. I'll admit, Miles, that part of me wonders. Is there some ancient grudge between the two of you I should be aware of? Something that, perhaps, would have caused you to act recklessly?" Mister Suit's eyes were as cold as iron. "Something that would have made you try to *goad* him into attacking during that party? So you could fight him?"

Miles held that gaze, then leaned down, hands on the table, fingers gripping his cigar. "I have no grudge against Waxillium Ladrian. He is one of the finest men this world has known. A finer man than you or I, or practically anyone else in this city."

"And this is supposed to comfort me? You all but say that you won't fight him."

"Oh, I'll fight him. Kill him, if I have to. Wax chose the wrong side. Men like him, men like me, we have a choice. Serve the people or serve the wealthy. He abandoned his right to protection the moment he returned to this city and started mingling with them."

"Curious," Suit said. "I'm also one of *them,* you know."

"I work with what I have. And besides, you have … other things recommending you. Especially since you did renounce your claim to privilege."

"Not to privilege," Suit said. "Merely to title. And I still think you intended to provoke Waxillium. That's why you shot Peterus."

"I shot Peterus because he was an impostor," Miles snapped. "He pretended to seek justice, and everyone praised him for it, but all the while he was pandering to the elite and the corrupt. In the end, they let him come play at their parties, like a favored dog. I put him down."

Mister Suit nodded slowly. "Very well."

"I *will* clean this city up, Suit. Even if I have to rip out its blackened heart with my fingernails, I'll do it. But you're going to need to get me more aluminum."

"I am setting things in motion," Suit said. He opened a drawer in his desk and took out a rolled sheet of paper. He set it in front of Miles.

Miles took off the string and unrolled the paper. Schematics. "Tekiel's new 'unrobbable' freight car?"

Suit nodded.

"It will take time to—" Miles began.

"I've had people working on this for some time now. Your job is not the planning, Miles. Your job is the execution. I will see that you have the resources you need."

Miles looked over the blueprint. Suit was connected. Powerful. Miles couldn't help feeling that he'd gotten himself entangled in something far beyond his control. "My men are still holding the latest captive," he said. "What do you want done with her?"

"That will be arranged," Suit said. He took a sip of his tea. "If I had been paying closer attention, I would have removed that one from the list. Waxillium will not stop seeking her. It would have been so much easier if the explosion had worked. Now we must contemplate more direct action."

"I'll deal with him personally," Miles said. "Today."

* * *

“Miles Dagouter is Twinborn,” Waxillium said, leaning forward in their train car. “A particularly dangerous variety of Twinborn.”

“Double gold,” Wayne said with a nod, reclining on the cushioned bench opposite Waxillium. Outside, the outer suburbs of Elendel passed in a blur.

Marasi sat on the bench near Wayne. “Gold Allomancers aren’t particularly dangerous, from what I’ve read.”

“No,” Waxillium said. “They aren’t. But it’s the Compounding that makes Miles so powerful. If your Allomancy and Feruchemy share a metal, you can access its power tenfold. It’s complicated. You store an attribute inside the metal, then *burn* it to release the power. It’s called Compounding. By the legends, it’s the way the Sliver gained immortality.”

Marasi frowned. “I’d assumed stories of Miles’s extraordinary healing abilities to be exaggerations. I assumed he was just a Bloodmaker, like Wayne.”

“Oh, he’s a Bloodmaker all right,” Wayne said, spinning a dueling cane around his wrist and catching it again. “Except *he* doesn’t ever run out of health.”

Waxillium nodded, thinking back to years ago, when he’d first met Miles. The man had always made him uncomfortable, but he’d also been an excellent lawkeeper. For the most part.

Noting Marasi’s confused look, Waxillium explained, “Normally a Feruchemist has to be sparing. It can take months to store up health or weight. I’ve been walking around at half weight since breaking us through the floor, trying to recover some of what I expended. I’ve barely filled my metalmind to a fraction of what I lost. It’s even harder for Wayne.”

Wayne wiped his nose. “I’ll have to spend a few weeks in bed after this, feeling wretched. Otherwise, I’ll be unable to heal myself. Hell, I’m already storing as much as I can and still move about normally. By the end of the day, I’ll barely have enough to heal a scratch.”

“But Miles…” Marasi said.

“Near-infinite healing ability,” Waxillium said. “The man’s virtually immortal. I heard he once took a shotgun blast to the face point-blank and walked away from it. We worked together out in the Roughs. He was the lawkeeper over in True Madil. There were three of us that had a kind of alliance going, during the good years. Miles, me, and Jon Deadfinger from Far Dorest.”

“Miles doesn’t like me much,” Wayne noted. “Well … neither of them do, actually.”

“Miles did good work,” Waxillium said. “But he was judgmental and harsh. We respected one another, though mostly from a distance. I wouldn’t call us friends. But out in the Roughs, anyone who stands up for what is right is an ally."

"It's the first law of the Roughs," Wayne said. "The more alone you are, the more you need a man you can trust at your side."

"Even if their methods go beyond what you'd choose yourself," Waxillium said.

"He doesn't sound like the type to take up a life of crime," Marasi said.

"No," Waxillium said softly. "He doesn't. But I was almost certain it was him behind the mask at the wedding, and that box of cigars, they're his favorites. I can't be sure it's him, but…"

"But you think it is."

Waxillium nodded. *Harmony helps us, but I do.* Lawkeepers were a special alloy. There was a code. Never give in, never let yourself be tempted. Working with criminals day in, day out could change a man. You began to see things the way they did. You started to think like them.

They all knew this job could twist you if you weren't careful. They didn't speak of it, and they didn't give in. Or they weren't supposed to.

"I'm not surprised," Wayne said. "Did you ever hear how he spoke of people in Elendel, Wax? He's a brutal man, Miles is."

"Yes," Waxillium said softly. "I hoped he'd stay focused on keeping order in his town and let his demons slumber."

The train passed beyond the suburbs, heading into the Outer Estates—the broad ring of orchards, fields, and pastures that fed Elendel. The landscape changed from city blocks to open expanses of tan and green, the canals shimmering blue as they cut the land.

"Does this change things?" Marasi asked.

"Yes," Waxillium said. "It means all this is far more dangerous than I'd thought."

"Delightful."

Wayne grinned. "Well, we wanted you to have the full experience. You know, for science and all."

"Actually," Waxillium said, "I've been thinking of how best to send you someplace safe."

"You want to be rid of me?" she asked. She widened her eyes to look heartbroken, her voice softening in a pitiful kind of betrayed way. He was half tempted to think she'd been learning from Wayne. "I thought I was being of help to you."

"You are," Waxillium said. "But you also have little practical experience in what we are doing."

"A woman must gain experience somehow," she said, lifting her head. "I've already survived a kidnapping and an assassination attempt."

The doors of the passenger car rattled as they rounded a bend. "Yes, but Lady Marasi, the presence of a Twinborn on the other side changes things. If it comes to a fight, I don't think I can defeat Miles. He's crafty, powerful, and determined. I'd rather you were somewhere safe."

"Where?" she asked. "Any of your estates would be obvious, as would those of my father. I can't very well hide in the underground of the city; I *highly* doubt I'd be inconspicuous there! I hasten to suggest that the safest place for me is near you."

"Odd," Wayne said, "I usually find the safest places in life are everywhere *but* near Wax. Have I mentioned the likelihood of explosions?"

"Perhaps we should just go to the constables," Marasi said. "Lord Waxillium … this kind of private investigation is technically illegal—at least insofar as we have important facts that the constables don't. We are required to bring what we know to the authorities."

"Don't get him thinking!" Wayne said. "I was just starting to get him to stop saying stuff like that!"

"It's all right, Wayne," Waxillium said softly. "I've made a promise. I told Lord Harms I'd return Steris to him. And I will. That is that."

"Then I will remain and help," Marasi said. "That is that."

"And I could really use some food," Wayne added. "Fat is fat."

"Wayne…" Waxillium said.

"I'm serious," Wayne said. "Ain't had nothing to eat since those scones."

"We'll get something at our stop," Waxillium said. "First, I would like to know something from Lady Marasi."

"Yes?"

"Well, assuming you are to remain with us, I'd like to know what kind of Allomancer you are."

Wayne sat up with a start. "Huh?"

Marasi blushed.

"You carry a pouch of metal shavings in your handbag," Waxillium said. "And you are always anxious to keep the handbag close. You know little about Feruchemy, but seem to understand Allomancy. You weren't surprised when Wayne stopped time in a bubble around us—in fact, you stepped right up to the barrier, as if familiar with them. And you come from a hereditary line that is being hunted precisely because it includes a lot of Allomancers."

"I…" she said. "Well, there really wasn't a good opportunity…" She blushed more furiously.

"I'm surprised, and a little disappointed," Wayne said.

"Well," she said quickly, "I—"

"Oh, not at you," Wayne said. "At Wax. I'd have expected that he'd put this sort of thing together on your first meeting."

"I'm growing slow in my old age," Waxillium said dryly.

"It's not really very useful," she said, looking down. "When I saw Wayne using his Slider ability, I started to get self-conscious. You see, I'm a Pulser."

As he'd suspected. "I think that could be very useful."

"Not really," she said. "Speeding up time … that is amazing. But what can one do with slowing it down, and only for myself? It's useless in a fight. Everyone else would move with great speed around me. My father was ashamed of the power. Told me to keep it quiet, much like my parentage."

"Your father," Waxillium said, "is someone that I'm increasingly certain is a fool. You have access to something useful. No, it won't fit every situation, but no tool does."

"If you say so," she said.

A merchant came down the train aisle, selling pretzels, and Wayne all but leaped out of his chair to get one. Waxillium settled back, looking out the window, thinking.

Miles. No, he couldn't be sure it was him. When Waxillium had shot the Vanisher boss in the face and dropped him, he'd assumed that he'd mistaken the voice. Miles wouldn't drop to a gunshot.

Unless he'd known that he had to feign a wound, lest Waxillium recognize him. Miles was crafty enough for something like that.

*It* is *him,* Waxillium thought. He'd known it from the first time the Vanisher boss had spoken. He just hadn't wanted to admit it.

This complicated things immensely. And, oddly, Waxillium found himself feeling overwhelmed. Twenty years as a lawkeeper, and this situation was already messier than any he'd investigated. He'd assumed that the Roughs made him strong, but there'd also been a simplicity to life out there, a simplicity he'd gotten used to.

Now he came charging in, guns raised, assuming he could handle a problem built on Elendel's scale. He assumed he could take down a team that was so well funded it could field men with guns made of something so expensive it might as well have been gold.

*Maybe we should take it to the constables,* Marasi had said. But could he?

He fingered the earring in his pocket. He'd felt that Harmony wanted him to do this, to investigate. But what was Harmony but an impression in Waxillium's mind? Confirmation bias, they called it. He felt what he expected to. That was what his logical brain said.

*I wish I could feel the mists,* he thought. *It's been weeks since I've been able to go out in them.* He always felt stronger in the mists. He felt like someone was watching, when he was out in them.

*I have to continue with this,* he told himself. He'd tried abstaining, and it had led to Lord Peterus being shot. Waxillium's usual method was to just take command and do what needed to be done. It was the way a lawman learned to work, out in the Roughs. *We aren't so different, Miles and I,* he thought. Perhaps that was what had always frightened him so much about the man.

The train slowed, pulling into their station.

# 12

Wayne stepped out of the carriage, following Waxillium and Marasi. He looked up to the carriage man, tossing him a coin. “We’ll need you to wait a spell, mate. I trust it won’t be a problem.”

The carriage man looked at the coin and raised an eyebrow. “No problem at all, mate.”

“That’s quite the hat,” Wayne said.

The carriage man wore a round cap of stiff felt, conical, but with a flat top and a feather on it. “We all wear ’em,” he said. “Mark of Gavil’s Carriages, you see.”

“Huh. Wanna trade?”

“What? Trade hats?”

“Sure,” Wayne said, tossing up his flimsy knit cap.

The man caught it. “I’m not sure…”

“I’ll throw in a pretzel,” Wayne said, fishing it out of his pocket.

“Er…” The man looked down at the coin in his hand, which was quite substantial. He pulled off his cap and tossed it down to Wayne. “No need. I guess … I’ll just buy another.”

“Mighty nice of you,” Wayne said, taking a bite from the pretzel as he sauntered after Waxillium. He put the cap on. It wasn’t a terribly good fit.

He hurried to catch up to the other two, who had stopped on a small hill. Wayne breathed in, smelling the humidity of the canal, the scents of wheat in the fields and flowers at their feet. Then he sneezed. He hated filling his metalmind when he was out doing stuff. He preferred to fill it in large chunks. That made him very sick, but he could sleep it off and drink a lot to pass the time.

This was worse. Filling his metalmind as much as he dared, storing up health as they went about, meant he got sick. Fast. He sneezed a lot more, his throat grew sore, and his eyes watered. He felt tired and groggy, too. But he’d need that health, so he did it.

He walked across the grass. The Outer Estates were an odd place. The Roughs were dry and dirty. The City was densely populated and—in places—grimy. Out here, things were just … nice.

A little too nice. Made his shoulders itch. This was the kind of place where a man would work in the field during the day, then go home and sit on his porch, drinking lemonade and petting his dog. Men died of boredom in places like that.

Odd, that in a place so open, he could feel even more anxious and confined than when locked in a cell.

“The last railway robbery happened here,” Waxillium said. He held out his hand to the tracks—which rounded a bend just to their left—then moved his hand along their path, as if seeing something Wayne wasn’t. He often did things like that.

Wayne yawned, then took another bite of his pretzel. “What whasdat, sir? What whazzat sir? What whassat, sir?”

“Wayne, what are you babbling about?” Waxillium turned, inspecting the canal to the right. It was wide and deep here, intended for carrying barges full of food into the city.

“Practicing my pretzel guy,” Wayne said. “He had a great accent. Must have been from one of the new rim towns, right by the southern mountains.”

Waxillium glanced at him. “That hat looks ridiculous.”

“Fortunately, I can change hats,” Wayne said in the pretzel-guy accent, “while you, sir, are stuck with that face.”

“You two sound a lot like siblings,” Marasi said, watching curiously. “Do you realize that?”

“So long as I’m the handsome one,” Wayne said.

“The tracks here bend toward the canal,” Waxillium said. “The other robberies all happened near canals as well.”

“As I recall,” Marasi noted, “most of the railway lines parallel the canals. The canals were here first, and when the tracks were laid, it made sense to follow the established paths.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said. “But it’s especially striking here. Look how close the tracks get to the canal.”

*His accent is changing,* Wayne thought. *Only six months back in the city, and it already shows. It’s more refined in some ways, less formal in others.* Did people see how their voices were like living things? Move a plant, and it would change and adapt to the environment around it. Move a person, and the way they talked would grow, adapt, evolve.

“So that machinery the Vanishers are using,” Marasi said, “you’re thinking they can’t move it far on land? They have to ship it up the canal, and pick a place near the tracks to set it up and carry out their robbery?”

*Her accent …* Wayne thought. *She uses more elevated diction around him than around me.* She tried so hard to impress Wax. Did he see it? Probably not. The man had always been oblivious about women. Even Lessie.

“Yes,” Waxillium said, hiking down the hillside. “The question is, how did this thing—whatever it is—empty the freight cars so quickly and efficiently?"

"Why is that so odd?" Wayne said, following him. "If I'd been a Vanisher, I'd have brought a whole heap of men. That would let me finish the work faster."

"This isn't a question of simple manpower," Waxillium said. "The train cars were locked, and some of the later ones had guards inside. When the cars arrived at their destination, they were still locked, but empty. Beyond that, from one of the cars, many heavy ingots of iron were stolen. There's a bottleneck at the car door—beyond a certain point, more men wouldn't have helped. There is no way they unloaded hundreds of ingots in under five minutes using just manpower."

"A speed bubble?" Marasi asked.

"Could have helped," Wax said, "but not much. You'd have the same bottleneck, and you can't fit many people in a speed bubble. Let's say you could have six workers inside, which would be really tight. They'd have to move the iron ingots up to the edge of the speed bubble, then drop the bubble and create another—you can't move the bubbles once they're up—and repeat."

Wax shook his head, hands on hips. "The cost in bendalloy would be incredible. With one nugget worth about five hundred notes, Wayne can compress about two minutes into fifteen external seconds. To compress time equal to five minutes on the outside—gaining you enough time on the inside to move all of those iron bars—you'd need to spend *ten thousand* notes. The bars would be worth just a fraction of that; Harmony, you could buy your own *train* for that kind of money. I don't believe it. Something else is happening here."

"Machinery of some sort," Marasi said.

Wax nodded, walking down the hillside, scanning the ground. "Let's see if we can find any traces they may have left behind. Maybe the machinery had wheels that left ruts or tracks."

Wayne shoved his hands in his pockets and walked about, making a show of looking, but the whole reason he'd come to get Waxillium involved in this investigation was because he was good at this kind of stuff. If there were people involved, Wayne was quite handy. But flowers and dirt … not so much.

After a few minutes, Wayne was bored, so he wandered over to where Marasi was looking. She glanced at him. "I do have to say, Wayne … that hat *does not* fit you very well."

"Yeah. I just want to keep reminding Wax he owes me a new one."

"Why? You were the one who let the man take your old one from you."

"He convinced me not to fight back," Wayne grumbled. Seemed obvious to him. "And then, he *shot* the guy wearing it, and the guy walked away!"

"He couldn't have known the man would survive."

"He shoulda grabbed my hat," Wayne said.

She smiled, looking bemused.

Most people, they didn't understand hats, and Wayne didn't really blame them. Until you'd had a good, lucky hat, you wouldn't understand the value of it. "It's actually all right," Wayne said softly, kicking around in the weeds. "But don't tell Wax."

"What?"

"I *needed* to lose that hat," Wayne admitted. "Otherwise, it would have been blown up in the explosion, see? It was lucky it got stolen. It could have ended up like my duster."

"You're a very unique individual, Wayne."

"Technically, we all are," he said. Then he hesitated. "Except for twins, I guess. Anyway, there's something I've been wanting to ask you. It's a little personal, though."

"How personal?" she asked.

"Well, you know, about yourself and all. The personal kind of personal. I guess."

She looked at him, frowning, then blushed. Seemed the girl did that a lot, which was just fine by Wayne. Girls were pretty with a bit of color on them. "You don't mean about me … and you … I mean…"

"Oh, Harmony!" Wayne laughed. "It's not anythin' like that, mate. Don't worry. You're pretty enough, particularly through the coppers, if you know what I mean."

"The coppers?"

"Sure. Word with a lot of curves, like you. You have a pretty accent too, and some nice bounce to you in the cloud area."

"Dare I ask what that is?"

"The white, puffy things that float high above the fruitful land where the seeds are planted."

She blushed even further. "Wayne! That might be the most crude thing anyone has ever said to me."

"I strives for excellence, mate. I strives for excellence. But don't worry—like I said, you're right nice, but you ain't got enough punch for me. I like women what could take my face *clean* off with a good roundhouse."

"You prefer women who could beat you up?"

"Sure. It's a thing. Anyway, what I was talkin' about was your Allomancy. See, you and I, we have opposite powers. I speed up time, you slow it. So what happens if we *both* use it at the same time? Eh?"

"It's been documented," Marasi said. "They cancel one another out. Nothing happens."

"Really?"

“Yes.”

“Huh,” he said, wiping his nose with his handkerchief. “Most expensive ‘nothing’ a person could find, what with us both burning rare metals.”

“I don’t know,” she said with a sigh. “My power is pretty good at doing nothing on its own. I don’t think I really understood how pathetic being a Pulser was until I saw what your power could do.”

“Oh, yours ain’t so bad.”

“Wayne, any time I use my ability—*any* time—I’ll be left frozen in place, looking stupid while everyone else is able to run about. You can use your power to gain extra time. I can only use mine to lose time.”

“Sure, but maybe sometime you want a certain day to come along sooner. You want it real badly, right? So you can burn some chromium, and poof, it’s here!”

“I’ve…” She looked embarrassed. “I’ve actually done that. Chromium burns way more slowly than bendalloy.”

“See! Advantages. How big can your bubbles get?”

“I can make one the size of a small room.”

“That’s *way* bigger than mine,” Wayne said.

“Multiply zero by a thousand, and you still get zero.”

He hesitated. “You do?”

“Er, yes,” she said. “It’s basic mathematics.”

“I thought we were talking about Allomancy. When did it become about mathematics?”

That made her blush too. You expected that out of a girl when you talked about her more attractive body parts, but not when you mentioned mathematics. She was an odd alloy, this one.

She glanced to the side, toward Waxillium. He was crouching down beside the canal.

“Now *him,*” Wayne said. “*He* likes ’em smart.”

“I have no intentions toward Lord Ladrian,” she said quickly. Too quickly.

“Pity,” Wayne said. “I think he likes you, mate.”

That might have been an exaggeration. Wayne wasn’t certain what Wax was thinking in regards to Marasi—however, the man needed to get his mind off Lessie. Lessie had been a great girl. Wonderful, and all that. But she was dead, and Wax still had that … hollow look to him. The same one he’d displayed in the weeks after Lessie’s death. It was softer now, but still there.

A new love would help a lot. Wayne was certain of it, so he found himself quite pleased with himself as Marasi started moving, eventually wandering over to where Wax was working. She touched his arm, and he pointed at something on the ground beside the canal. Together, they inspected it.

Wayne strolled over.

"… perfectly rectangular," Marasi was saying. "From something mechanical."

The ground here was pressed down as if by something heavy in a square patch. It was apparently the only kind of track in the area, and didn't seem what Wax had been intending to find. He knelt beside it, frowning, and pressed his hand into the dirt, probably to check how compact it was. He looked up at the tracks again.

"Not enough footprints," Wax said softly. "There's no way this was carried out with manpower. Even if there was a speed-bubble."

"I think you're right," Marasi said. "If the robbery happened right there, a machine could have remained in the canal and still reached the tracks."

Waxillium stood and dusted his hands off. "Let's head back. I need time to think."

* * *

Waxillium walked down the center of the passenger car, hands wet from scrubbing them in the washroom. The car thumped beneath him, fields speeding by outside.

Where would Miles be hiding? Waxillium's mind went in loops. The City offered too many places to hide, and Miles wasn't a typical criminal. He was a former lawkeeper. Waxillium's normal instincts would be off.

*He'll want to scale back,* Waxillium decided. *He's careful. Judicious. He spent months between stealing the aluminum and making his next robbery.*

Miles had lost men and resources. He'd hide for a time. But *where*? Waxillium leaned against the corridor wall. This first-class railcar was made up of private compartments. He could faintly hear people talking in the one beside him. Children. It had been a long walk through six railcars to find the one with an available washroom. Wayne and Marasi were in a compartment several cars farther along.

If Marasi was right about the intended function of the kidnapped women, then a grim fate awaited them. Miles could afford to step back, let the trail grow cold. Each hour delayed would make him that much more difficult to find.

*No,* Waxillium thought. *He'll need one more heist.* A quick one, perhaps without any hostages, to get more aluminum. Waxillium had looked over the original theft reports, and had managed to make an accurate assessment of the amount of aluminum Tekiel had been smuggling. It would have barely been enough to outfit thirty or forty men. That would leave Miles needing one more heist before going to ground; that way, he could use the downtime to make more guns and ammunition.

*That* left Waxillium with one more opportunity to catch him. If he could set it up right. He—

The scream was faint, but Waxillium had trained himself to be vigilant for such things. Always alert, especially when he was busy thinking. He immediately threw himself to the side, which saved his life as the bullet ripped through the glass window at the end of the railcar.

Waxillium twisted, pulling a revolver from its holster. A figure in black stood in the next car, looking through the broken window. He wore the mask again, eyes exposed, knit covering the rest of his features. The build was right, though—and the height, even the way he held his gun.

*Idiot!* Waxillium thought. His instincts *had* been off. An ordinary criminal would have gone to ground. But not Miles. He was a former lawman, accustomed to hunting rather than being hunted.

And if you caused a twist in his plans, he'd come looking for you.

the certainty that their valued cargo may travel unmolested along the lines of the Elendel Basin and the lands beyond.

stepped forward once again with an ingenious solution that takes an active hand in battling these villains.

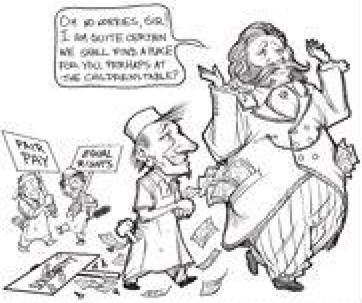
insight as to what the phantoms may desire. Exclusive reporting, only found here! Reverse side.

## Union Leader Abandons Solidarity with Trade Union Party Members

In a surprise switch from party line position, Trade Union Leader Elors Durnsed announced his intention to set aside any objection to the closure of further negotiations between representatives of the United Tradeworkers Union and the Noble Houses Collective in their ongoing agreement disputes. Rumors of a series of secret meetings taking place between the Union Leader and private citizens whose interests are aligned with the Houses remain a matter of speculation, with all questions on the matter brushed aside.

The announcement was greeted with near-violent derision from members of the Trade Union Party interviewed by this broadsheet. A Line Riveter at the site of the Ironspine Building who gave his name as Brill told this reporter that Mr. Durnsed should "bloody well keep his head clear of these parts if he knows what's what." Before he could expand upon this statement, his local union representative intervened and gave assurances that the man was speaking metaphorically. However, the mood of the assembled Line Riveters and Shovelmen was decidedly against Mr. Durnsed.

The decision by the Union Leader means that the contract as written holds now through the remainder of the financial quarter. Subsequent to this revelation, industry stocks were trading generally higher, and even recently depressed Tekiel shares began to show positive activity.


OH, NO WORRIES, SIR. I AM QUITE CERTAIN WE SHALL FIND A PLACE FOR YOU. PERHAPS AT THE CHILDREN'S TABLE?
FAIR PAY
EQUAL RIGHTS

## RELIEF FROM YOUR PAINS!

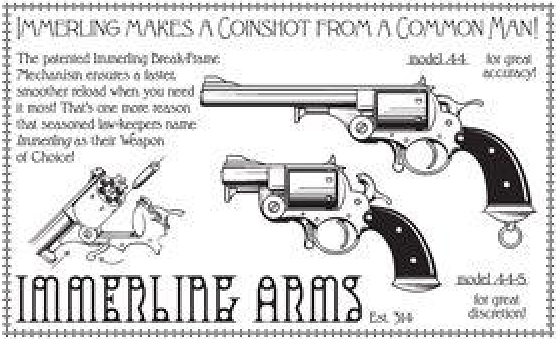
Mistress Halex, Allomancer, has opened a new Soothing Parlor. Within its relaxing confines, one can find relief from stress, anxiety, and concern—leaving with a light heart and a soaring mind. Our reporter visits the parlor to give a detailed report of what goes on. A luxurious massage, sweet scents, and a Soother on duty to give a unique "Emotional Massage" leave you feeling as good on the inside as you do on the outside. Read the report on the back, column seven.

## Feltri Proven to Be Rioter!

Alloran Feltri, long favored to win the Canalworkers 2nd Seat in this fall's elections, is rumored to have been using Allomantic abilities to create supporters. In a scandal sure to rock the city to its foundations, a former mistress has come forward to expose all. Complete story on reverse side, third column.

## Allomancers for Hire.

All varieties. Coinshots, Pewterarms for industrial work or protection. Temporal Allomancers for time manipulation. Soothers, Rioters for dinner party amusement. Some Feruchemists available with advance warning. Metalurgistics Allied, Carronberry Square, 7th Oct. Are you Metalborn and wish to earn what you deserve? Call in person; ask for Jarrington.



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The patented Immerling Break-Frame Mechanism ensures a faster, smoother reload when you need it most! That's one more reason that seasoned law-keepers name *Immerling* as their Weapon of Choice!

model 44 for great accuracy!

model 44-S for great discretion!

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## Exploring the Pits of Eltania!

My dear editor, and by way of you, my dearest readers: I trust that my missive finds you well and in the possession of a willing ear, for the incredible events that transpired in my recent experience may strike you with incredulity and shock. I vow to you in earnest assertion that each and every word I write to you is true and factual. I live these tales so that you may learn of the Roughs and the fascinating people who live out here beyond the mountains, beyond the law, and beyond cultured reason.

When I wrote my previous missive, I was certain that my end had come. Indeed, I was captured and held by the brute koloss of the Pits of Eltania, and had been told that on the morrow, I would be executed and my flesh feasted upon. I feared a gruesome end, and I will admit that I found myself in earnest prayer to the Survivor that very night! If anyone needed the protection of He Who Lived, it was I!

You may assume from my writing here that I have escaped. Well, in part that is true; but I have not left the camp of the blue-skinned koloss. Indeed, I write you this letter from the very chamber where I was held to be executed on that night. Only now, it is not a prison, but instead a grand palace! At least, so do the savages holding me consider it. To me, it remains merely a mud-floored hut. Sleeping beneath the stars would be more preferable, especially if I could have had Miss Dramali by my side. But my quest to locate where she has been taken will need to wait for later.

The koloss do try to make my accommodations fit. They have brought me dead animals to feast upon, and have built me a fire, a sign that they consider me worthy of grand attention. And they have given me several weapons of their own construction. As I have mentioned before, those weapons are of incredibly fine make. I had thought creatures such as

# 13

Waxillium didn't have time to raise his weapon. He instantly increased his weight and flared his steel as he Pushed forward on the doors between the railcars. The glass windows exploded as the doors bent and ripped free, blocking the bullets as Miles fired three times in quick succession.

The car lurched as the train began a turn. Heads popped out of compartments, wide eyes searching for the cause of the noise. Miles again took aim down the corridor at Waxillium. Children nearby were crying.

*I can't risk bystanders,* Waxillium thought. *I have to get out.*

As the gun fired, Waxillium threw himself forward. A bullet ricocheted near his head, spraying sparks. He couldn't sense it Allomantically. It was aluminum.

Waxillium burst out into the space between railcars, wind roaring and tugging on his clothing. As Miles fired his sixth shot, Waxillium Pushed on the couplers below and launched himself upward.

He soared into the air above the railcars. The wind caught him, pushing him backward as he fell. He landed with a thump on the roof several cars to the rear, going down on one knee and steadying himself with his free hand, wind blasting his hair and catching his jacket. He raised his revolver.

Miles was here. On the train.

*I could stop him now. End this.*

The next thought was immediate. How in the *world* was he going to stop Miles Hundredlives?

A masked figure rose between the train cars just ahead—maybe only ten feet away—holding a big-bore pistol. Miles always had preferred firepower to accuracy. He'd once said that he'd rather miss a few times knowing that when he *did* hit, the person he shot wouldn't be getting up again.

Waxillium cursed and filled his metalmind, dropping his weight to almost nothing, then rolled to the right, off the roof and over the side of the railcar. Gunshots followed. He grabbed the rim of a window, pressing himself against the side of the car and wedging one foot down into a slot in the metal along the car's side. His decreased weight allowed him to hold himself there easily, though his light body was buffeted by the wind.

Far ahead, the engine belched cinders and black smoke; below, the tracks were a-thunder. Waxillium raised his revolver in his right hand and waited as he clung to the side of the car with one hand and leg.

Miles's masked head soon poked out between the cars. Waxillium fired a single quick shot, Pushing the bullet forward with Allomancy for extra speed against the howling wind. He nailed Miles right in the left eye socket. The man's head snapped backward, and blood sprayed against the side of the railcar behind him. He stumbled, and Waxillium shot again, hitting him in the forehead.

The man reached up and ripped off his mask, revealing a hawk-like face with short black hair and prominent eyebrows. It *was* him. Miles. A lawkeeper, a man who should have known better. A Twinborn Compounder of awesome power. His eye grew back, and the head wound was gone in an eyeblink. Golden metal glimmered on his arms, deep within the sleeves. His metalminds; they were spikes he wore driven through the skin of his lower arm, like bolts. Metal that pierced skin was extremely difficult to touch with Steelpushing.

*Rust and Ruin!* Even getting shot in the *eye* hadn't slowed him much. Waxillium sighted on an approaching tree and fired, then let go of the train and made himself as light as he could. He blew backward in the wind, and as the tree whipped past, he Pushed on the bullet lodged in it, shoving himself to the side, between two train cars. He crouched there, gasping, heart pounding as another of Miles's bullets ricocheted off the corner near him.

How did you fight someone who was virtually immortal?

Skirting some low hills, the railway rounded another curve. Verdant farms and placid orchards rolled past in the near distance. Waxillium grabbed the car's ladder and pulled himself up, carefully peeking over the edge of the roof.

Miles was charging toward him at full speed along the top of the railcar. Waxillium cursed, raising his gun as Miles did the same. Waxillium got his shot off first, and managed to hit Miles, who was only a few steps away by that point.

Waxillium aimed for the gun hand.

The bullet ripped into the flesh and bone, causing Miles to curse, dropping his gun. The weapon bounced once on the roof, then disappeared over the side. Waxillium smiled in satisfaction. Miles growled, then leaped forward off the top of the railcar and slammed into him.

Waxillium's head cracked back against the metal behind him, pain sending a flash of white across his vision. He grunted, dazed. *Idiot!* Most men would never have jumped like that; it was too likely to toss both of them off the moving train. That wouldn't bother Miles.

They had both fallen into the space between railcars, standing on the precarious footing there. Miles grabbed Waxillium by the vest with both hands, lifting him and slamming him back against the railcar behind. Waxillium reflexively fired again and again into Miles's gut at point-blank range, but the bullets ripped out of Miles's back without even giving him pause. He pulled Waxillium forward and punched him across the face.

Pain flashed, and Waxillium's vision swam. He almost stumbled off and fell onto the speeding tracks just below. Desperate, Waxillium tried to Push himself up into the air. Miles was ready for this, and as soon as Waxillium started to rise, the other man hooked his foot under the bottom ladder rung and held on. Waxillium lurched, still feeling dazed, but didn't go into the air. He Pushed harder, but Miles hung on, eyes determined.

"You can rip the tendons in my foot, Wax," Miles yelled over the racket of wheels on the rails below and the howl of the wind, "but they'll reknit immediately. I think your body will give out before mine does. Push harder. Let's see what happens."

Waxillium let go, dropping back to the landing between cars. He tried to grab Miles in a headlock as he came down, but the other man was younger, faster, and a better brawler. Miles ducked—still holding on to Waxillium's vest—then pulled. Waxillium stumbled, off balance, as he lurched into Miles, who drove his fist into Waxillium's gut.

Waxillium gasped at the pain. Miles grabbed Waxillium on the shoulder and pulled him forward, moving to bury his fist in Waxillium's belly again.

So Waxillium increased his weight tenfold.

Miles stumbled, suddenly pulling against something incredibly heavy. His eyes went wide. He was used to dealing with Coinshots—they were one of the most common types of Allomancer, particularly among criminals. Feruchemists were far more rare. Miles knew what Waxillium was, but knowing about a power and anticipating it were different things.

Still aching and breathless from the punch, Waxillium threw his shoulder into Miles's chest, using his enormous weight to press Miles backward. The man cursed, then let go of Wax and swung away, quickly climbing up the ladder back to the railcar's roof.

Wax stopped tapping his metalmind and Pushed, throwing himself upward. He landed on the other car, facing Miles across the small gap. Wind played with their clothing and fields passed on either side. The train swayed as it crossed a switch, and the unsteady footing made Waxillium wobble. He bent down on one knee, pressing one hand against the rooftop and increasing his weight to steady himself. Miles stood tall, obviously indifferent to the shaky footing.

Indistinctly, Waxillium could hear people crying out, probably as they moved into other cars, trying to get away from the fighting. With luck the disturbance would draw Wayne.

Miles reached for the gun at his other hip. Waxillium reached for his other gun as well; he'd dropped the first—the better of the two—in the fighting. His vision was still fuzzy, his heart racing, but he still got his gun leveled at almost exactly the same instant as Miles. Each fired.

A bullet grazed Wax's side, cutting through his coat and drawing blood. His own shot took Miles in the kneecap, making him stumble, knocking his next shot wild. Wax took careful aim, then shot Miles in the hand, again blasting apart flesh and bone. Miles's body immediately began to regrow itself, bone reassembling, sinew springing back like rubber, skin appearing like ice growing over a pond. But the gun dropped.

Miles reached for it. Wax casually lowered his gun and shot the other weapon, knocking it backward and off the shaking top of the train.

"Dammit!" Miles swore. "Do you know how much those things are worth?"

Still on one knee, Wax raised his gun beside his head, the wind of the train's motion blowing the smoke away from the barrel.

Miles rose to his feet again. "You know, Wax," he yelled over the wind, "I used to wonder if I'd have to face you. A part of me always thought your softness would cause it—I thought you'd let someone go that you shouldn't have. I wondered if I'd have a chance to hunt you down for it."

Waxillium didn't respond. He maintained a level gaze, face impassive. On the inside, he was smarting, trying to catch his breath from the beating he'd taken. He raised his hand to his side, pressing it against the wound. Blessedly, it wasn't too bad, but it still wet his fingers with blood. The train swayed, and he quickly lowered his hand to the rooftop again.

"What was it that broke you, Miles?" Waxillium called. "The lure of wealth?"

"You know very well this isn't about money."

"You need gold," Waxillium yelled. "Don't deny it. You've always needed it, for your constant Compounding."

Miles didn't reply.

"What happened?" Waxillium yelled. "You were a lawkeeper, Miles. A damn good one."

"I was a dog, Wax. A hound, kept in line with false promises and stern orders." Miles backed up a few paces, then ran forward, leaping over the gap between them.

Waxillium stood warily and backed up.

"Don't tell me you never felt it," Miles yelled, snarling. "You worked *every day* to fix the world, Wax. You tried to end the pain, the violence, the robberies. It never worked. The more men you put down, the more troubles arose."

"It's the life of a lawkeeper," Waxillium said. "If you gave up, fine. But you didn't have to join the other side."

"I was already *on* the other side," Miles said. "Where do the criminals come from? Was it the shopkeeper next door who started rampaging and murdering? Was it the boys who grew up near town, working their father's dry farm?

"No. It was the mine workers, shipped out from the City to dig into the depths and exploit the latest rich find—then be abandoned once it was exhausted. It was the fortune hunters. It was the rich fools from the City who wanted adventure."

"I don't care who it was," Waxillium said, still backing up. He was on the next-to-last car. He was running out of space to retreat. "I served the law."

"I served it too," Miles called. "But now I serve something better. The essence of the law, but mixed with real justice. An alloy, Wax. The best parts of both made into one. I do something better than chase the filth sent to me from the city.

"You can't tell me you never noticed it. What of Pars the Deadman, your 'great catch' of the last five years? I remember you hunting him, I remember your nights without sleep, your anxiety. The blood on the dirt in the center of Weathering when he left old Burlow's daughter dead for you to find. Where did *he* come from?"

Waxillium didn't reply. Pars had been a murderer from the City, a butcher who had been caught killing beggars. He'd fled out into the Roughs, and there he had again worked to sate his grisly obsession.

"They didn't stop him," Miles spat, stepping forward. "They didn't send you help. They didn't care about the Roughs. Nobody cares about the Roughs—they barely seem to notice us save as a place to deposit their trash."

"So you rob them," Wax called. "Kidnap their daughters, murder any who stand in your way?"

Miles took another step forward. "I do what needs to be done, Wax. Isn't that the code of the lawkeeper? I haven't stopped being one; you never stop being a lawkeeper. It gets in you. You do what nobody else will. You stand up for the downtrodden, make things better, stop the criminals. Well, I've just decided to set my sights on a more powerful brand of criminal."

Waxillium shook his head. "You've let yourself become a monster, Miles."

"You say that," Miles said, wind whipping at his short hair, "but your eyes, Wax … they show the truth. I can see it. You *do* get what I'm saying. You've felt it too. You *know* that I'm right."

"I'm not going to join you."

"I'm not asking you to," Miles said, voice growing softer. "You've always been the good hound, Wax. If your master beats you, you just whimper and wonder how to better serve. I don't think we'd work well together. Not in this."

Miles lunged forward.

Waxillium dumped all of his weight into his metalmind and hopped backward, letting the wind grab and drag him a good twenty feet away. He increased his weight and landed on the last railcar. They were approaching the suburbs; the flora of the Outer Estates dwindled.

"Go ahead and run!" Miles called. "I'll just wander back and take little Lady Harms the bastard! And Wayne. I've long been wanting an excuse to put a bullet in that man's head." He turned and began to stroll in the other direction.

Waxillium cursed, dashing forward. Miles turned, his lips spreading in a cold smile. He reached down, pulling a long-bladed knife out of the back of his boot. It was aluminum; he didn't have a single Allomantically reactive piece of metal on his body that Waxillium could see.

*I need to throw him off the train,* Wax thought. He couldn't beat Miles here, not for good. He needed a more controlled environment. And he needed time to plan.

As he got close, Wax raised his gun and tried to blast the knife out of Miles's hand—but the other man spun the knife and rammed it through his own left forearm, jamming it right down through the flesh so it stuck out the bottom. He didn't even flinch. Stories told all around the Roughs claimed that after suffering hundreds of wounds that should have killed him, Miles had grown completely oblivious to pain.

Miles held his hands out, ready to grab Waxillium—but he'd also be able to whip out that knife in a flash. Waxillium got out his own knife and held it in his left hand. The two circled for a moment, Wax's increased weight helping to steady him atop the thumping train car. It still wasn't terribly sure footing, and sweat trickled down his brow, blown sideways by the wind.

A few fools poked their heads up between distant cars, trying to watch the action. Unfortunately, none of those fools was Wayne. Wax feinted forward with a quick step, but Miles didn't take the bait. Wax was only a fair knife fighter, and Miles was known as one of the best. But if Wax could roll them both off the train …

*At this speed, it will end me, but not him,* he thought. *Unless I can get a*

*Push underneath me. Rusts. This is going to be hard.*

He had only one chance, and that was to end the fight quickly.

Miles came in to seize him. Wax took a breath and stepped into it, which Miles seemed to find surprising, though he still managed to grab Wax's arm. With his other hand, Miles pulled the knife free from his own arm, preparing to thrust it toward Wax. In desperation, Wax increased his weight and threw his shoulder into Miles's chest.

Unfortunately, Miles anticipated that move. He dropped to the roof, rolling, and kicked Wax in the legs.

In the blink of an eye, Wax was tumbling through the air toward the gravel and rock beside the railway tracks. Some primal part of him knew what to do. He Pushed on the knife in his hand, ripping it free and plunging it into the earth directly below him. That bounced him into the air as he simultaneously shed his weight. The wind caught him. He was spinning, and he lost all sense of direction.

He hit and rolled into a heap, slamming against something hard. He stopped moving, but his vision continued to lurch. The sky spun.

All grew still. His vision slowly returned to normal. He was alone in the middle of a weedy field. The train was puffing away down the tracks.

He groaned and rolled over. *A man my age shouldn't be doing this kind of thing,* he thought, stumbling to his feet. He hadn't started feeling his age until the last few years, but he was over forty now. That was ancient by Roughs standards.

He stared after the escaping railway train, shoulder aching. The thing was, Miles had said one thing that was right.

You never stopped being a lawkeeper.

Wax gritted his teeth and dashed forward. He scooped up the gun he'd dropped when falling—it was easy to find with his Allomancy—then jumped without breaking stride and landed atop the tracks.

He Pushed, throwing himself into the air. He reached a good height, then Shoved on the rails behind him, shooting forward. A careful Push below, a continuous Push behind. The wind roared around him, his clothing a noisy flurry, blood seeping from the wound at his side.

There was a thrill to this, the flight of a Coinshot. It was a freedom no other Allomancer could know. When the air became his, he felt the same exhilaration he had years ago, when he'd first sought his fortune in the Roughs. He wished that he were wearing his mistcoat and that the mists were around him. Everything always seemed to work better in the mists. They were said to protect the just.

He caught up to the train in moments, then threw himself in a powerful arc over it. A small figure was walking along the tops of the railcars, making his way toward Wayne and Marasi.

Wax Pushed downward to keep himself from hitting too hard, but increased his weight at the same time, slamming into the train's roof and denting it into a crater around him. He stood up straight, then flipped his revolver open, as if to reload. The casings and unspent rounds flipped up into the air and he caught one.

Miles spun. Wax tossed the cartridge at him.

Looking startled, Miles snatched it out of the air.

"Goodbye," Wax said, then slammed as powerful a Push as he could into that cartridge.

Miles's eyes opened wide. His hand jerked backward into his chest, and then he was flung free of the train, the Push on the cartridge effectively transferred to him. The train rounded a bend as Miles soared through the air and crashed into the rocky ground beyond.

Wax sat down, then lay back, eyes toward the sky. He breathed in deeply, aching, and pressed his hand to the wound at his side. He rode all the way to the next stop before climbing down.

* * *

"We had orders, m'lord," the railway engineer said. "Even when I heard there was gunfire back in the passenger cars. We ain't to stop for *anything*. The Vanishers get you when you stop."

"It is just as well," Waxillium said, gladly taking a cup of water from a young man in an apprentice engineer's vest. "If you had stopped, it likely would have meant my death."

He sat in a small room at the station, which—by tradition—was owned and operated by a minor member of the house that owned the land nearby. The lord himself was out, but the steward had immediately sent for the local surgeon.

Waxillium had his coat, vest, and shirt off, and was holding a bandage to his side. He wasn't certain he had time to wait for that surgeon. It would take Miles about an hour of running to reach this station. Fortunately, he wasn't a steel Feruchemist, capable of increasing his speed.

An hour, likely, but it was best to plan for the worst. If Miles found a horse, he could arrive sooner. And Waxillium wasn't certain exactly how Miles's Compounding would affect his stamina. Perhaps he might be capable of running longer distances than he should be able to.

"We almost have your men out, m'lord," another apprentice said, entering. "Those locks aren't supposed to be this hard to open!"

Waxillium drank his water. Miles had planned his trap well. Wayne and Marasi had been confined in their car—along with all the others who happened to be there—by lengths of metal jammed into locking mechanisms on the outer doors. Miles had waited until Waxillium left his room, then had quietly trapped the others before hunting him.

There was some luck to that, at least. Miles hadn't simply killed them. It made sense that he hadn't, however. It would have been risky, going in to try to kill Wayne—who could heal himself—and risk drawing Waxillium back, then facing one on either side. Miles was too careful for that. Waxillium had been the real target. The others were better locked away until the primary goal was accomplished.

"You need to get your train going again," Waxillium said to the engineer. He was a heavyset man with a dark brown beard and a flat-topped cap. "You are in danger from the Vanishers. We need to ride the train all the way into the heart of the City. We can't delay."

"But your wound, m'lord!"

"It will be fine," Waxillium said. Out in the Roughs, he'd often had to go days or weeks with a wound before a surgeon could tend it.

"We—"

The door burst open and Marasi stumbled through. Her blue dress was still singed from the explosion at the mansion, but she wore it well, despite the folds of lace underneath the glistening outer layer. The blue vest that pulled closed around the bodice was missing a button on the bottom, probably ripped free in the fall. He hadn't noticed that before.

She raised her hands to her mouth at the sight of the bloody bandage, then immediately turned beet red at seeing him with his shirt off. He did have a moment of pride in the fact that, though he had some gray in his hair, he still had the lean muscles of a much younger man.

"Oh, *Harmony*!" she said. "Are you all right? Is that your blood? And should I be in here? I can go. I should probably go, shouldn't I? Are you sure you're all right?"

"He'll live," Wayne said, peeking in behind her. "Wha'd you do, Wax? Trip on the way out of the washroom?"

"Miles found me," Waxillium said, removing the bandage. It looked like the wound had mostly stopped bleeding. He took another bandage from one of the apprentices, then prepared to tie it in place.

"Is he dead?" Marasi asked.

"I killed him a few more times," Waxillium said, "and it was about as effective as what everyone else has tried."

"You need to get his metalminds off of 'im," Wayne said. "It's the only way."

"He keeps thirty different ones," Waxillium said, "all piercing his skin, all with enough healing to bring him back from practically any wound." A Pewterarm, or even a lesser Bloodmaker like Wayne, could be killed with a direct shot to the head. Miles could heal so quickly even that wouldn't kill him. He was said to keep the healing running constantly. From what Waxillium knew of Compounding, it could be very dangerous to stop once you'd started.

"Sounds like a challenge!" Wayne said.

Marasi lingered in the doorway for a moment longer, then apparently made a decision and rushed forward. "Let me see the wound," she said, kneeling beside Waxillium's bench.

He frowned, but stopped tying the bandage straps and let her peel back the cloth. She inspected the wound.

"You know something of surgery, m'lady?" the engineer said, shifting from foot to foot. He seemed a little anxious at her presence in the room.

"I go to university," she said.

*Ah, that's right,* Waxillium thought.

"So?" Wayne asked.

Marasi prodded at the wound. "University rules, set by Harmony himself, dictate a broad education."

"Yeah, I know they have to take girls," Wayne said.

Marasi paused. "Er … not that meaning of broad, Wayne."

"Students have to be trained in a little of everything," Waxillium said, "before they can choose a specialty."

"That includes basic healing and some small amount of surgery," Marasi said. "As well as complete anatomy courses."

Wayne frowned. "Wait. Anatomy. Meaning, *all* parts of anatomy."

Marasi blushed. "Yes."

"So—"

"So it was very popular in class to watch my reactions, apparently," she said, still blushing. "And I'd rather not dwell on that at the moment, Wayne, thank you. This needs stitches, Waxillium."

"Can you do it?"

"Er … I've never worked on anyone *alive* before…"

"Eh," Wayne said, "I spent *months* training with dueling canes on dummies before beating up my first real person. It's pretty much the same thing."

"I'll be all right, Marasi," Waxillium said.

"So many scars," she said quietly, as if not noticing what he'd said. She was staring at his chest and sides, and seemed to be counting the old bullet wounds.

"There are seven," he said softly in reply, replacing the bandage and tying it tight.

"You've been shot *seven* times?" she asked.

"A lot of gunshots aren't lethal, if you know how to care for them," Waxillium said. "They don't really—"

"Oh," she said, raising a hand to her lips. "I meant, we only have records of five. I really will need to hear about the other two sometime."

"Right," he said, grimacing and standing. He waved for his shirt.

"Oh, bother," she said. "That didn't come out very well, did it? I really am impressed that you have been shot so often. Really."

"Getting hit's not really that impressive," Wayne noted. "It don't take much skill to get shot. It's *avoiding* the bullets that's tough."

Waxillium snorted, pulling his arm through a sleeve.

Marasi stood. "I'll turn around so you can dress," she said, beginning to spin.

"Turn around," Waxillium said flatly.

"Um, yes."

"So I can dress."

"A little silly, I guess."

"A little," he said, smiling and pulling his other sleeve on. He began doing the buttons. Wayne looked so amused he was having trouble standing up.

"All right," she said, raising her hands to the sides of her face. "I *realize* that I get a little flustered sometimes. I'm just not used to things exploding, people getting shot at, and finding my friends sitting and bleeding with their shirts off when I walk in! This is all very new to me."

"It's all right," Waxillium said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "There are much worse things to be than genuine, Marasi. Besides, Wayne wasn't much better when he was new to all of this. Why, he used to get so nervous that he would start—"

"Hey," Wayne said, "no use bringin' *that* up."

"What?" Marasi asked, lowering her hands.

*"NOTHING,"* Wayne replied. "Come on. We should move, right? If Mister Miles Murderer is still alive, he'll be wanting to shoot us, right? And as good as Wax is at getting shot—he's had lots of practice, you see—I think we best be avoiding more of that sort today."

"He's right," Waxillium said, pulling on his vest, then putting on his shoulder holsters. He winced.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Marasi asked.

"He's fine," Wayne said, holding the door open for them. "*I* got quite near my entire rusted back blown off earlier, if you'll kindly recall, and I didn't hear nearly an ounce of the sympathy you're showin' him."

"That's different," Marasi said, walking past him.

"What? Why? 'Cuz I can heal?"

"No," she said, "because—even after knowing you only a short time—I'm fairly certain that on one level or another, you deserve to get blown up every now and again."

"Oi," Wayne said. "That's harsh."

"But untrue?" Waxillium said, pulling on his coat. It was looking quite ragged.

“Didn’t say that now, did I,” Wayne said, and sneezed. “Keep moving, slowboy. Rusts! A man gets shot, and he thinks he can take all afternoon. Let’s move!”

Waxillium walked past. He forced himself to smile, though he was starting to feel as ragged as his coat. There wasn’t much time. Miles had taken off his mask, but had obviously expected to kill Waxillium. He now knew that he’d been outed, and that would make him even more dangerous.

If Miles and his people were going to strike for more aluminum, they’d do it soon. Tonight, probably, assuming there was a shipment. Waxillium expected one soon; he’d read something in the broadsheets about House Tekiel boasting of their new armored freight cars.

“So what do we do when we get back?” Wayne asked softly as they walked toward the railway car. “We’re going to need someplace safe to plan, right?”

Waxillium sighed, knowing what Wayne was fishing for. “You’re probably right.”

Wayne smiled.

“You know,” Waxillium said, “I’m not sure I’d call any place near Ranette ‘safe.’ Particularly if you are there.”

“Better than being exploded,” Wayne said happily. “Mostly.”

# 14

Waxillium pounded on the door of the townhome. The area around them was a typical Elendel neighborhood. Vibrant, lush walnut trees lined either side of the cobbled street. Even after seven months back in the city, the trees still made him stare. Out in the Roughs, trees as large as these were rare. And here was an entire street full of them, mostly ignored by the inhabitants.

He, Wayne, and Marasi stood on the porch of the narrow, brick-faced home. Before Waxillium had a chance to lower his hand, the door swung open. A lean, long-legged woman stood inside. Her dark hair was pulled back into a shoulder-length tail, and she wore brown trousers and a Roughs-style long leather coat over a white, no-nonsense laced shirt. She took one look at Waxillium and Wayne, then slammed the door shut without saying a word.

Waxillium glanced at Wayne, and then they both took a step to the side. Marasi looked at them in confusion until Waxillium took her by the arm and pulled her over.

The door slammed back open, and the woman shoved a shotgun out. She glanced around the corner at the two of them, then narrowed her eyes.

"I'll count to ten," she said. "One."

"Now, Ranette," Waxillium began.

"Two three four five," she said in quick succession.

"Do we really have to—"

"Six seven eight." She raised the gun, taking aim at them.

"All right then…" Waxillium said, hustling down the steps, Wayne following, hand holding his carriage man's cap in place.

"She wouldn't really shoot us?" Marasi asked softly. "Would she?"

"Nine!"

They reached the sidewalk beneath the towering trees. The door slammed closed behind them.

Waxillium took a deep breath, turning around and looking at the house. Wayne leaned back against one of the tree trunks, smiling.

"So, that went well," Waxillium said.

"Yup," Wayne replied.

*"Well?"* Marasi demanded.

"Neither of us got shot," Waxillium said. "You can't always be sure, with Ranette. Particularly if Wayne is along."

"Now, that's right unfair," Wayne said. "She's only shot me three times."

"You're forgetting Callingfale."

"That was in the foot," Wayne said. "Barely counts."

Marasi pursed her lips, studying the building. "You two have some curious friends."

"Curious? Nah, she's just angry." Wayne smiled. "It's how she shows affection."

"By shooting people?"

"Ignore Wayne," Waxillium said. "Ranette might be brusque, but she rarely shoots people other than him."

Marasi nodded. "So … should we go?"

"Wait for a moment," Waxillium said. To his side, Wayne started whistling, then checked his pocket watch.

The door was flung open again, Ranette holding her shotgun up on her shoulder. "You're not leaving!" she called.

"I need your help," Waxillium called back.

"I need *you* to stick your head in a bucket of water and slowly count to a thousand!"

"Lives are at stake, Ranette," Waxillium yelled. "Innocent lives."

Ranette raised her gun, taking aim.

"Don't worry," Wayne said to Marasi. "At this distance, birdshot probably won't be lethal. Make sure your eyes are closed, though."

"You're not helping, Wayne," Waxillium said calmly. He was sure Ranette wouldn't shoot. Well, reasonably sure. Maybe.

"Oh, you actually want me to help?" Wayne said. "Right. You still have that aluminum gun I gave you?"

"Tucked in the small of my back," Waxillium said. "Without any bullets."

"Hey, Ranette!" Wayne called. "I've got a neat gun you can have!"

She hesitated.

"Wait," Waxillium said, "I wanted that—"

"Don't be a baby," Wayne said to him. "Ranette, it's a revolver made entirely of aluminum!"

She lowered her shotgun. "Really?"

"Get it out," Wayne whispered to Waxillium.

Waxillium sighed, reaching under his coat. He held up the revolver, drawing some looks from passersby on the street. Several of them spun about and hastened in the other direction.

Ranette stepped forward. She was a Lurcher, and could recognize most metals by simply burning iron. "Well then," she called. "You should have *mentioned* that you'd brought a bribe. This might be enough to get me to forgive you!" She strolled down her front walk, shotgun slung up over her shoulder.

"You realize," Waxillium said under his breath, "that this revolver is worth enough to buy an entire *houseful* of guns? I think *I* might shoot you, for this."

"The ways of Wayne are mysterious and incomprehensible," Wayne said. "What he giveth, he can draw back unto himself. And lo, let it be written and pondered."

"You'll ponder my fist, hitting your face." Waxillium plastered a smile on his lips as Ranette stepped up to them; then he reluctantly handed over the revolver.

She looked it over with an expert eye. "Lightweight," she said. "No maker's mark stamped on the barrel or the grip. Where'd you get this?"

"The Vanishers," Waxillium said.

"Who?"

Waxillium sighed. *That's right.*

"How could you not know who the Vanishers are?" Marasi blurted. "They've been on every broadsheet in the city for the last two months. They're all anyone is talking about."

"People are stupid," Ranette said, popping the revolver open, checking the chambers. "I find them annoying—and those are the ones I like. Did this have aluminum rounds too?"

Waxillium nodded. "We don't have any of the pistol rounds. Just a few rifle rounds."

"How did they work?" she asked. "Stronger than lead, but much lighter. Less immediate stopping power, obviously, but they'll still tear themselves apart on hitting. Could be very deadly if they hit the right spot. And that's assuming wind resistance doesn't slow the bullets too much before they reach their target. The effective range would be way down. And they'd be highly abrasive to the barrel."

"I haven't fired it," Waxillium said. He eyed Wayne, who was grinning. "We've … er, been saving it for you. And I'm sure the rounds are of a much heavier alloy than the revolver itself, though I didn't get a chance to test them yet. They're lighter than lead rounds, but not even close to as light as nearly pure aluminum would be. The percentage is still high, but the alloy must solve most of those issues somehow."

Ranette grunted. She waved the gun absently toward Marasi. "Who's the ornament?"

"A friend," Waxillium said. "Ranette, people are looking for us. Dangerous people. Can we come in?"

She tucked the revolver into her belt. "Fine. But if Wayne touches anything—*anything*—I'll blow off the offending fingers."

* * *

Marasi kept her tongue as they were led into the building. She wasn't particularly fond of being referred to as an "ornament." But she *was* fond of remaining unshot, and so silence seemed prudent.

She was good at silence. She had been trained to it over two decades of life.

Ranette closed the door behind them, then turned away. Shockingly, the locks on the door all *did themselves*, twisting in their mounts and clicking. There were nearly a dozen of them, and their sudden move caused Marasi to jump. *What in the Survivor's Deadly Name?*

Ranette set her shotgun in a basket beside the door—it appeared that she kept it there the way ordinary people kept umbrellas—then sidled past them in the narrow hallway. She waved a hand, and some kind of lever beside the interior door lurched. The door sprang open as she walked to it.

Ranette was an Allomancer. Of course. That was why she'd been able to recognize the aluminum. As they reached the door, Marasi studied the contraption that had opened it. There was a lever that could be pulled, which in turn moved a rope, pulley, and lever arrangement on the other side.

*There's one on each side,* Marasi realized as they stepped through the doorway. *She can open her doors from either direction without needing to lift a hand.* It seemed an indulgence. But, then, who was Marasi to critique another person's use of their Allomancy? This would certainly be useful if you often walked about with your hands full.

The living room beyond had been converted to a workshop. There were large worktables on all four sides, and nails had been pounded into the walls to hang an impressive variety of tools. Marasi didn't recognize any of the machinery that cluttered those tables, but there were a lot of clamps and gears. A disturbing number of electrical cords snaked across the floor.

Marasi stepped very carefully. Electricity couldn't be dangerous when it was in cords, could it? She'd heard stories of people getting burned, as if struck by lightning, from getting too close to electrical devices. And people spoke of using this power for everything—replacing horses with it, making mills that ground grain on their own, using it to power elevators. Disturbing. Well, she'd keep her distance.

The door slammed shut behind them in response to Ranette's Allomancy. She had to Pull on a lever for it, so that meant she was a Lurcher, not a Coinshot like Waxillium. Wayne was already poking through things on the desks, completely ignoring her threat to his fingers.

Waxillium surveyed the room, with its wires, windows—covered by shutters—and tools. "I assume it's living up to your expectations?"

"What?" Ranette asked. "The city? It's a pit. I don't feel half as safe here as I did out in the Roughs."

"Still can't believe you abandoned us," Wayne said, sounding hurt.

"You didn't have electricity," Ranette said, sitting at her desk in a chair with wheels on the bottom. She waved an absent hand, and a long, thin tool flipped out of a cubby on the wall. It flew toward her and she snatched it, then brought it down and began prodding at the gun Waxillium had given her. From what Marasi understood, gestures weren't needed for Pushing or Pulling, but many used them anyway.

Ranette completely ignored her visitors as she worked. She Pulled a few more tools without looking up, causing them to streak across the room to her. One nearly clipped Marasi on the shoulder.

It was unusual to see Allomancy used so casually, and Marasi wasn't certain what to make of it. On one hand, it was fascinating. On the other, it was humbling. What would it be like, to have a power that was *useful*? Lord Harms had insisted that Marasi keep her ability—such as it was—quiet, calling it unseemly. She could see through him. He wasn't so much embarrassed to have an Allomancer daughter as to have one that was illegitimate. He couldn't have Marasi looking like a better catch than Steris.

*Bitter thoughts,* she told herself, intentionally pushing them away. Bitterness could consume a woman. Best to keep it at arm's length.

"This gun is good work," Ranette said, though she sounded grudging. She'd donned some spectacles with a magnifying lens on them, and was in the process of staring down the barrel of the revolver while shining a small electric light into it. "You want me to figure out who made this, I assume?"

Waxillium turned to study a line of half-finished guns on one of the tables. "Actually," he said, "we came here because we needed someplace safe to think for a few hours."

"Your mansion isn't safe?"

"My butler failed to poison me, then tried to shoot me, then set off an explosive in my study."

"Huh." She cocked the pistol a few times. "You need to screen these people better, Wax."

"I'll take that under advisement." He picked up a pistol and sighted down its barrel. "I'm going to need a new Sterrion."

"Like hell you will," Ranette said. "What's wrong with the ones you have?"

"Gave them to the aforementioned butler," Waxillium said. "And he probably dumped them in the canals."

"What of your Ambersairs? I made you one of those, didn't I?"

"You did. I lost it fighting Miles Dagouter earlier today."

This made Ranette stop. She lowered the aluminum gun, then turned her chair. *"What?"*

Waxillium drew his lips into a line. "He's the one we're hiding from."

"Why," Ranette said pointedly, "is Miles Hundredlives trying to kill you?"

Wayne strolled forward. "He's trying to overthrow the city or something, dearie. For some reason, he thinks the best way to do that is by robbin' folks and blowing up mansions."

"Don't call me dearie."

"Sure thing, honey."

Marasi watched in silence, curious. Wayne seemed to like taunting this woman. In fact, though he tried to act nonchalant, he kept glancing at her, and had been edging through the room closer and closer to her seat.

"Whatever," Ranette said, turning back to her work. "Don't really care. But you're not getting a new Sterrion."

"Nobody else's guns shoot as straight as yours, Ranette."

She didn't reply. She did glare at Wayne, who had moved up to the point where he was leaning over her shoulder and looking at the gun.

Waxillium smiled, then turned back to the unfinished guns on the desk. Marasi joined him, uncertain what she should be doing. Hadn't they come here to plan their next move? Neither Waxillium nor Wayne seemed eager to get on with things.

"Is there something between them?" Marasi whispered, nodding her head toward Wayne and Ranette. "She acts a little like a jilted lover."

"Wayne could only wish," Waxillium whispered back. "Ranette's not interested in him like that. I'm not certain she's interested in *any* man like that. Doesn't stop him from trying, though." He shook his head. "I'm half tempted to think that all of this—coming to Elendel to investigate the Vanishers, looking me up—was about eventually persuading me to come with him to Ranette's. He knew she wouldn't let him in unless he was with me and we were doing something important."

"You're a bizarre pair, you know."

"We try."

"So what's our next move?"

"I'm trying to decide. For now, if we linger long enough, she might give me a new revolver."

"Either that, or she'll shoot you for annoying her."

"Nah. She's never shot anyone after letting them in the door that I can recall. Not even Wayne." He hesitated. "She'll probably let you stay here, if you want. It would be safe. I'll bet there's a paid

Coppercloud rotation going on in one of the nearby buildings, shrouding the area. Ranette *hates* people sensing her Allomancy. I doubt there are half a dozen people in Elendel who know she lives here. Harmony only knows how Wayne tracked her down."

"I'd rather not stay. Please, whatever you're doing, I want to help."

He picked something up off the desk; a small box of bullets. "I can't figure you out, Marasi Colms."

"You've solved some of the most troubling crimes the Roughs have ever known, Lord Waxillium. I doubt I'm nearly as mysterious."

"Your father is very well off," Waxillium said. "From what I know of him, I'm certain he would have provided you with a comfortable endowment for the rest of your life. Instead, you attend university—choosing one of the most difficult programs of study offered."

"You left a position of considerable comfort yourself," she said, "choosing to live away from convenience and modernity."

"I did."

She selected one of the bullets out of the box, holding it up, looking it over. She couldn't see anything distinctive about it. "Have you ever felt you were useless, Lord Waxillium?"

"Yes."

"It's difficult to imagine that of someone as accomplished as yourself."

"Sometimes," he said, "accomplishment and perception can work independently."

"True. Well, my lord, I have spent *most* of my life being politely told I was useless. Useless to my father because of my birth; useless as an Allomancer; useless to Steris, as I was an embarrassment. Sometimes, accomplishment can temper perception. Or so I hope."

He nodded. "I have something for you to do. It will be dangerous."

She dropped the bullet into the box. "To be of use in even a single burst of flame and sound is worth more than a lifetime of achieving nothing."

He met her eyes, judging her sincerity.

"You have a plan?" she asked.

"There isn't much time for a plan. This is more of a hunch with scaffolding." He held up the box of bullets, speaking more loudly. "Ranette, what are these?"

"Hazekiller rounds."

"Hazekiller?" Marasi asked.

"It's an ancient term," Waxillium said. "For an ordinary person trained to fight Allomancers."

"I'm working on ammunition for use against each basic type of Allomancer," Ranette said absently. She'd unscrewed the grip of the pistol and was pulling it apart. "Those are Coinshot rounds. Ceramic tips. When they Push on the bullet as it flies toward them, they'll yank off the metal portion at the back, but the ceramic should keep flying straight and hit them. Could be better than aluminum rounds—those, the Allomancer can't sense at all, so he knows to take cover rather than relying on Pushes. These they'll sense and assume they can beat—right up until they're on the floor bleeding."

Wayne whistled softly.

"Ruin, Ranette!" Waxillium said. "I've never been so glad we're on the same side." He hesitated. "Or, at least, that you're on your own special side that we don't happen to run afoul of too often."

"What are you going to do with them?" Marasi asked.

"Do?" Ranette asked.

"Are you going to sell them?" Marasi said. "Patent the idea and license them?"

"If I did that, then *everybody* would have them!" Ranette shook her head, looking sick. "Half the people in the city would be here, bothering me."

"Lurcher rounds?" Waxillium asked, holding up another box.

"Similar," Ranette said, "but with the ceramic on the sides. Not quite as effective, at least at long range. Most Lurchers protect themselves by Pulling bullets to hit an armored plate at their chest. Those bullets, they explode when Pulled on, and you get a little shrapnel blast of ceramics. Should work at ten feet or so, though it might not be lethal. I suggest aiming for the head. I'm trying to get the range up."

"Tineye rounds?"

"Make extra noise when fired," Ranette said. "And another noise when they hit. Fire a few shots around them, and their enhanced senses will have them cowering on the floor, holding their ears. Pretty good if you want to take one alive, though with a Tineye, you're going to have trouble finding them in the first place."

"And Pewterarm rounds," Waxillium said, studying the final box.

"Not really much special there," Ranette said. "Large bullets, extra powder, wide hollow tips, soft metal—meant to have a lot of stopping power. A Pewterarm can keep going long after being shot a few times, so you want to knock them down and keep them there long enough for their body to realize it should be dying rather than fighting. Of course, the best way to drop one is just hit him in the head the first time."

A Pewterarm wouldn't be like Miles, capable of healing immediately. They had great endurance, and could ignore wounds—but those wounds would still kill them, eventually.

"Huh," Waxillium said, holding up one of the long bullets. "None of these are a standard caliber. You'd need quite the gun to fire them."

Ranette didn't respond.

"This is nice work, Ranette," Waxillium said. "Even for you. I'm impressed."

Marasi expected the gruff woman to brush off the compliment, but Ranette smiled—though she obviously tried to hide her satisfaction. She buried her head in her work, and didn't even bother to glare Wayne away. "So who are the people you said are in danger?"

"Hostages," Waxillium said. "Women, including Marasi's cousin. Someone is going to try to use them to breed new Allomancers."

"And Miles is involved in *that*?"

"Yes." Waxillium's voice was solemn. Worried.

Ranette hesitated, still bent over the disassembled revolver. "Third cubby up," she finally said. "All the way at the back."

Waxillium walked over and reached a hand into the depths. He withdrew a sleek, silvery revolver with a grip that blended onyx and ivory in wavy stripes, separated by silver bands. It had a long barrel, the silvery metal so highly polished that it practically glowed in the even electric lights.

"That's not a Sterrion," Ranette said. "It's better."

"Eight chambers," Waxillium said, raising an eyebrow as he turned the revolver's cylinder.

"That's Invarian steel," Ranette said. "Stronger, lighter. It let me shave the thickness between chambers, increase the number without making it too big. See the lever on the back, below the hammer?"

He nodded.

"Hold it down and spin the wheel."

He did so. The wheel locked on a certain chamber.

"It skips that chamber and the one beside it if you fire it normally," Ranette said. "You can only fire them if you flip the lever."

"Hazekiller rounds," Waxillium said.

"Yeah. Load six ordinary shots, two special ones. Fire them when you need them. You burning steel?"

"I am now."

"Metal lines in the grip."

"See them."

"Push the one on the left."

Something clicked inside the gun. Waxillium whistled softly.

"What?" Wayne asked.

"Allomancer-only safety," Waxillium said. "You have to be a Coinshot or a Lurcher to turn it off or on."

"The switch is embedded inside the grip," Ranette said. "No exterior sign that it's there. With that, you'll never have to worry about someone firing your own gun at you."

"Ranette," Waxillium said, sounding awed. "That's *genius*."

"I call the gun Vindication," she said. "After the Ascendant Warrior." Then she hesitated. "You can borrow it. *If* you bring me a field-test report."

Waxillium smiled.

"This is Nouxil's work, by the way," Ranette said, waving to her table.

"The aluminum gun?" Waxillium asked.

Ranette nodded. "I thought it might be so from the shape of the barrel, but the mechanics inside are distinctive."

"Who is he?" Wayne asked, leaning down further.

Ranette pointedly put a hand to Wayne's forehead and pushed him back. "Gunsmith. Disappeared about a year ago. We had a correspondence going. Nobody's heard from him." She held up a piece of metal from inside the gun grip. "Anyone here speak High Imperial?"

Waxillium shook his head.

"Makes my head hurt," Wayne said.

"I can read it, kind of," Marasi said, taking the square piece of metal. There were several characters scratched into the metal. "Wasing the where of needing," she read, forming the unfamiliar words. The lofty tongue was used for old documents dating to the time of the Origin, and occasionally for government ceremony. "It's a call for help."

"Well, we know how Miles got his guns," Waxillium said, taking the plate and looking it over.

"Wax," Ranette said. "Miles always had a darkness in him, I know. But this? Are you *sure*?"

"Sure as I can be." He raised Vindication up beside his head. "I saw him face-to-face, Ranette. He spouted some rhetoric about saving the city as he tried to kill me."

"That'll be useless against him," Ranette said, nodding to Vindication. "I've been trying to figure out a gun to use against Bloodmakers. It's only half finished."

"This will be fine," Waxillium said, voice even. "I'll need every edge I can get." His eyes were hard, like polished steel.

"I'd heard rumors you'd retired," Ranette said.

"I had."

"What changed?"

He slid Vindication into his shoulder holster. "I have a duty," he said softly. "Miles was a lawkeeper. When one of your own goes bad, you put him down personally. You don't rely on hired help. Wayne, I need shipping manifests. Can you borrow me some from the railway offices?"

"Sure. I can have them in an hour."

"Good. You still have that dynamite?"

"Sure do. Here in my coat pocket."

"You're insane," Waxillium said without missing a beat. "But you brought the pressure detonators?"

"Yup."

"Try to avoid blowing anything up by accident," Waxillium said. "But hold on to that dynamite. Marasi, I need you to buy some fishing nets. Strong ones."

She nodded.

"Ranette," Waxillium began, "I—"

"I'm not part of your little troop of deputies, Wax," Ranette said. "Leave me out of this."

"All I was going to do was ask to borrow a room in your house and some paper," Waxillium said. "I need to sketch this out."

"Fine," she said. "So long as you're quiet about it. But Wax … you *really* think you can take Miles? The man is immortal. You'd need a small army to stop him."

"Good," Waxillium said. "Because I intend to bring one."

# 15

“Wax is slippery,” Miles said, walking alongside Mister Suit through the dark tunnel connecting the dorms to the forging hall of the new lair. “He has lived so long precisely by learning to avoid being killed by people who are stronger and craftier than he is.”

“You shouldn’t have revealed yourself,” Suit said sternly.

“I wasn’t about to shoot Wax without him seeing me, Suit,” Miles said. “He deserves more respect than that.” The words gnawed at him as he said them. He hadn’t mentioned the first shot he’d taken at Wax, the one while the man’s back had been turned. Nor had he mentioned the cloth of his mask, pushed back into his flesh by Wax’s bullet, making it hard to heal his eye. He’d needed to pull it free.

Suit snorted. “And it’s said that the Roughs are the place where honor goes to be murdered.”

“It’s the place honor goes to be strung up, flayed within an inch of its life, then cut down and left in a desert. If it survives something like that, it’ll be stronger than hell. Certainly stronger than anything you have at your Elendel dinner parties.”

“That from a man who so readily went to kill a friend?” Suit said. The tone was still suspicious. He thought Miles had intentionally let Wax escape.

He didn’t understand at all. This wasn’t about the robberies any longer. The paths chosen by Wax and Miles had crossed. The future could only continue down one or the other.

Either Wax would die or Miles would. That would settle the matter. Roughs justice. The Roughs weren’t a simple place, but they *were* a place of simple solutions.

“Wax is *not* a friend,” Miles said, and truthfully. “We were never friends—no more than two rival kings could ever be friends. We respect each other, we did similar jobs, and we worked together. It ends there. I’ll stop him, Suit.”

They stepped out into the forging room and climbed the stairs up to the balcony that ran along the north side of the large chamber. They walked to the end and stopped beside a doorway, beyond which was the lift. “You are quickly becoming a liability, lawkeeper,” Suit said. “The Set does *not* like you, though—as of yet—I have continued to vouch for your effectiveness. Do not make me regret that. Many of my colleagues are convinced that you will turn against us."

Miles didn't know if he would or not. He hadn't decided. He basically only wanted one thing: vengeance. All of the best motives boiled down to a single, driving emotion.

Vengeance for fifteen years in the Roughs, achieving nothing. If this city burned, maybe—for once—the Roughs would see some justice. And maybe Miles could see a government set up here in Elendel that wasn't corrupt. A part of him acknowledged, however, that seeing them—the lords who ruled, the constables who pandered, the senators who spoke so grandly but did nothing of use to real people—cast down would be the most satisfying part.

The Set was part of the establishment. But then, they wanted revolution too. Perhaps he wouldn't turn against them. Perhaps.

"I don't like being in this place, Suit," Miles said, nodding to the chamber where the Vanishers had set up. "It's too close to the center of things. My men will be seen coming and going."

"We will move you soon," Suit said. "The Set is in the process of acquiring a railway station. You are still committed to the job tonight?"

"I am. We need more resources."

"My colleagues question that," Suit said. "They wonder why we went to so much trouble to outfit your men with aluminum, if it was only to be lost in a single fight without so much as killing one of the Allomancers who faced you."

*It's important,* Miles thought, *because I intended to use that aluminum to finance my own operations.* Now he was practically destitute, right back where he'd begun. *Damn you, Wax. Damn you straight to Ironeyes' Tomb.*

"Do your colleagues question what I've done for them?" Miles said, drawing himself up. "Five of the women they wanted are in your possession, all without a speck of suspicion attached to you and the Set. If you wish that to continue, my men will be *properly* outfitted. A single Rioter could turn the entire bunch against one another."

Suit eyed him. The slender old man did not walk with a cane, and his back was straight. He was not weak, despite his age and obvious fondness for fine living. The door to the lift opened. Two young men wearing black suits and white shirts walked out of it.

"The Set has agreed to this job tonight," Suit said. "After it, you are to go to ground for six months and focus on recruitment. We will prepare another list of targets for you to acquire for us. When you return to activity, we will discuss whether or not the flamboyance of being the 'Vanishers' is required."

"The theatrics keep the constables from—"

“We will discuss it *then*. Will Wax try to interfere tonight?”

“I’m counting on it,” Miles said. “If we try to hide, he’ll dig us out eventually. But it won’t come to that—he’ll figure out where we’re going to hit, and he’ll be there trying to stop us.”

“You are to kill him tonight, then,” Suit said, pointing to the two men. “The woman you took yesterday will remain here; use her as bait, if it comes to that. We don’t want to move her while that one has her trail. As for these two, they are to aid you in making certain everything goes smoothly.”

Miles gritted his teeth. “I don’t need help to—”

“You *will* take them,” Suit said coldly. “You’ve proven unreliable with regard to Waxillium. It is not open for discussion.”

“Fine.”

Suit stepped closer, tapping Miles on the chest and speaking softly. “The Set is anxious, Miles. Our monetary resources are very limited at the moment. You may rob the train, but don’t bother with hostages. We will take half of the aluminum you steal tonight to fund several operations you need not know about. You can have the rest for weapons.”

“Have your two men there ever fought Allomancers?”

“They are among our finest,” Suit said. “I think you’ll find them more than capable.”

They both knew what this was. Yes, the two would fight Wax, but they would also keep an eye on Miles. *Great.* More interference.

“I’m leaving the city,” Suit said. “Wax is getting too close. If you survive the night, send someone to update me.” He said that last part with a hint of a smile.

*Insufferable bastard,* Miles thought as Suit walked over to the lift, where a quartet of bodyguards waited. He was leaving on his regular train; he’d probably come back on his regular one too. He probably didn’t realize Miles had been tracking those.

Suit departed, leaving Miles with the two black-coated men. Well, he’d find some use for them.

He returned to the main chamber, followed by his new babysitters. The Vanishers—the thirty or so of them that remained—were getting ready for the job tonight. The Machine had been brought into the chamber via the far platform, which moved up to ground level in a large industrial lift, a majestic electrical wonder.

*The world is changing,* Miles thought, leaning down on the railing. *First railways, now electricity. How long before men take to the skies, as the Words of Founding say is possible?* The day might come where every man knew the freedom that had once been reserved only to Coinshots.

Change didn’t scare Miles. Change was an opportunity, a chance to become something you were not. No Augur was bothered by change.

Augur. He usually ignored that side of himself. His Feruchemy was what kept him alive—and these days he hardly noticed even that, save for the faint sense of extra *energy* to every step he took. He never got headaches, never felt tired, never had sore muscles, never dealt with colds or pain.

On a whim, he took hold of the banister and swung over, dropping to the floor some twenty feet below. For a brief moment, he knew that sense of freedom. Then he hit. One of his legs tried to break—he recognized the slight pop. But the bone's fractures reknit as quickly as they broke, and so it never fully snapped, cracks opening on one side but resealing on the other.

He rose from a crouch, whole. The black-coated babysitters dropped beside him, one dropping a bit of metal and slowing a moment before he hit. A Coinshot. Well, that would be useful. The other surprised him, landing softly, but not dropping any metal. The ceiling had metal crossbeams. This man would be a Lurcher; he'd Pulled upon those beams to slow himself.

Miles strode through the room, inspecting the Vanishers as they prepared their gear. Every bit of aluminum they had left had gone for guns and bullets. They'd use those from the start this time. At the wedding-dinner fight, it had taken the men a few moments to switch weapons. Now they knew what to anticipate. Their numbers might be fewer, but they'd be much better prepared.

He nodded to Clamps, who was watching over the men. The scarred man nodded back. He was loyal enough, though he had joined up for the thrill of robbery rather than the purpose of any cause. Of them all, only Tarson—dear, brutal Tarson—had anything resembling true loyalty.

Clamps claimed to be dedicated, though Miles knew otherwise. Well, Clamps hadn't been the one to fire the first shot in the last mess. For all Miles's professions about wanting to change things, his temper—and not his mind—had eventually ruled.

He should have been better than that. He was a man created to have a steady hand and an even steadier mind. Made by Trell, inspired by the Survivor, yet still weak. Miles questioned himself often. Was that the mark of a lack of dedication? He'd never done anything in his life without questioning.

He turned, studying his domain, such as it was. Thieves, murderers, and braggarts. He took a deep breath, then burned gold.

It was considered one of the least of the Allomantic metals. Far less useful than its alloy, which was in turn far less useful than one of the prime battle metals. In most cases, being a gold Misting was little better than being an aluminum Misting—a power so useless, it had become proverbial for one who did nothing.

But gold was not completely useless. Just mostly so. Upon burning it, Miles split. The change was visible only to his own senses, but for a moment, he was two people, two versions of himself. One was the man he had been. The angry lawkeeper, growing more bitter by the day. He wore a white duster over rugged clothing, with tinted spectacles to shade his eyes against the harsh sun. Dark hair kept short and greased back. No hat. He'd always hated those.

The other man was the man he'd become. Dressed in the clothing of a city worker—buttoned shirt and suspenders over dirty trousers with fraying cuffs. He walked with a slouch. When had that begun?

He could see through both pairs of eyes, think both sets of thoughts. He was two people at once, and each one loathed the other. The lawkeeper was intolerant, angry, and frustrated. He hated anything that broke with the strict order of the law, and meted out harsh punishments with no mercy. He had a special loathing for someone who had once followed the law, but had turned his back upon it.

The robber, the Vanisher, hated that the lawkeeper let others choose his rules. There was really nothing sacred about the law. It was arbitrary, created by powerful men to help them hold power. The criminal knew that secretly, deep down, the lawkeeper understood this. He was severe toward criminals because he felt so impotent. Each day, life grew worse for the good people, the people who tried, and the laws did little to help them. He was like a man swatting mosquitoes while ignoring the gash in his leg, an artery open and throbbing gushes of blood onto the floor.

Miles gasped, and extinguished his gold. He felt weary, suddenly, and slumped back against the wall. His two minders watched him with emotionless expressions.

"Go," Miles said to them, waving a weak hand. "Check over my men. Use your Allomancy to determine if any of them accidentally left metal on their bodies. I want them clean."

The two men looked at each other. They didn't behave as if they cared to obey him.

"Go," Miles said more firmly. "So long as you're here, you should be useful."

After another moment of hesitation, the two men walked away to do as ordered. Miles slumped down farther, back to the wall, breathing in and out.

*Why do I do that to myself?*

There had been considerable speculation about what a gold Misting really saw when burning his metal. A past version of himself, certainly. Was it the person he had actually been? Or was it a person he might have become, if he'd chosen another branching path of his life? That possibility had always struck him as sounding reminiscent of the mythical lost metal, atium.

Either way, he liked to think that burning his gold on occasion helped him—that each time he did it, it let him take the best of what he had been and mix it with the best of what he could be. An alloy of himself, then.

It disturbed him how much the two people he became hated each other. He could almost feel it like an oven's heat, radiating from coal and stone.

He stood back up. Some of the men were staring at him, but he didn't care. He wasn't like the criminal bosses he'd often arrested in the Roughs. They had to worry about looking strong in front of their men, lest they be killed by someone who wanted to seize power.

Miles couldn't be killed, and his men knew it. He'd once put a shotgun to his own head in front of them to prove it.

He walked over to a pile of trunks and boxes. A few were full of things Mister Suit had ordered stolen from Wax's mansion, effects the man hoped would help them fight—or perhaps frame—the former lawkeeper. Suit had resisted killing Wax at first, for some reason.

Miles left them and walked around to the back side, where his own trunks had been deposited following the hasty evacuation of their old hideout. He picked through a few, then opened one. His white duster was inside. He took it out, shaking it, then got out a pair of sturdy Roughs trousers and a matching shirt. He slipped his tinted spectacles into the pocket, then went to change.

He'd been worried about hiding, worried that he'd be recognized and branded an outlaw. Well, an outlaw was what he had become. If this was the path he had chosen, he could at least walk it with pride.

*Let them see me for what I am.*

He would not turn from his course. It was too late to change one's aim when the hammer was already falling. But it wasn't too late to straighten his back.

* * *

Waxillium stared at the wall of Ranette's sitting room. One side was piled with furniture, where she'd put things out of the way to make a handier pathway between her workshop and her bedroom. The other half of the room was strewn with boxes of various kinds of ammunition, bits of scrap metal, and cast barrels for gun making. There was dust everywhere. Very like her. He'd asked her for a way to prop up his paper pad, expecting her to find him an easel. She'd absently handed him some nails and pointed toward a hammer. So he'd just hung it on the wall, wincing as he drove the nails into the fine wood.

He stepped up, using a pencil to scribble a note to himself in the corner. The pile of shipping manifests that Wayne had brought lay to the side. Apparently, Wayne had left a gun he'd borrowed from Ranette in place of the manifests, considering it a fair trade. It had probably never occurred to him that a group of train engineers would be completely baffled to find their manifests gone and a pistol in their place.

*Miles will strike at Carlo's Bend,* Wax thought, tapping the paper.

It had been easy to locate a shipment of aluminum. House Tekiel, tired of being robbed, was indeed making a large fuss over their new vault-style railway car. Wax could understand the reasoning; the Tekiels were best known as bankers, and their business relied on security and asset protection. The robberies been become a major embarrassment to them. They were intending to recover in a visible way.

It was almost like a dare to Miles and his Vanishers. Wax made another notation on his paper. The Tekiel shipment would follow a very direct route toward Doxonar. He'd mapped it, noting locations where the railway tracks wound close to one of the canals.

*I won't be able to watch where we're going,* Wax thought, making another notation. *I need to know exactly how far from the previous stop Carlo's Bend is….*

There wasn't much time to prepare. He fingered the earring in his left hand, running his thumb along its smooth side as he thought.

The door opened. Wax didn't look up, but the sound of the footsteps was enough to tell him it was Marasi. Soft shoes. Ranette and Wayne both wore boots.

Marasi cleared her throat.

"Nets?" Wax asked, distractedly writing the number 35.17 on the paper.

"I found some, finally," she said, walking up beside him, looking over the notations. "You can make sense of this?"

"For the most part. Except Wayne's doodles."

"They … appear to be pictures of you. Unflatteringly ugly ones."

"That's the part that doesn't make sense," Waxillium said. "Everyone knows I'm irreparably handsome." He smiled to himself. That was one of Lessie's phrases. Irreparably handsome. She'd always claimed he'd look better with a nice scar on his face, after good Roughs fashion.

Marasi smiled too, though her eyes were on his notations and scribbling. "The phantom railcar?" she asked, pointing to his drawing of a ghostly train coming down the tracks, alongside a diagram of how it had probably been made.

"Yes," he said. "Most of the attacks happened on misty nights, apparently to make it much easier to hide the fact that the phantom ‘train’ is really just a false front with a large headlamp, attached to a moving rail platform.”

“You’re certain?”

“Reasonably,” Waxillium said. “They’re using the canals to attack, and so they need some sort of diversion to keep eyes off what is sneaking up behind.”

She pursed her lips, thoughtful.

“Was Wayne out there?” Waxillium asked.

“Yes, he’s bothering Ranette. I … honestly left the room because I worried she’d shoot him.”

Waxillium smiled.

“I picked up a broadsheet when I was out,” she said. “The constables have found the old hideout.”

“Already?” Waxillium said. “Wayne said we had until dark.”

“It’s dark already.”

“It is? Hell.” Waxillium checked his watch. They had less time than he’d thought. “It still shouldn’t be in the papers yet. The police found the hideout early.”

Marasi nodded toward his sketches. “This indicates that you know where the Vanishers will strike. I don’t want to pound a brittle metal, Lord Waxillium, but we really should tell the constables that fact.”

“I *think* I know where the attack will happen. If we let the constables know, they’ll flood the area and scare off Miles.”

“Wax,” she said, stepping closer. “I understand that independent spirit; it’s part of what makes you what you are. But we’re not in the Roughs. You don’t have to do this all by yourself.”

“I don’t intend to. I’ll involve the constables, I promise. Miles, however, is not an ordinary criminal. He knows what the constables will try, and he will watch for them. This has to be done at the right time, in the right way.” Waxillium tapped his notations on the wall. “I know Miles. I know how he thinks. He’s like me.”

Almost *too* much so.

“That means he can anticipate you too.”

“He undoubtedly will. I’ll anticipate him better.”

The moment Waxillium had drawn his gun and fired back against the Vanishers, he’d started down this path. Once he got his teeth into something, he didn’t let go.

“You are right about me,” he said.

“Right? I don’t believe I said anything about you, Lord Waxillium.”

“You’re thinking it,” he said. “That I’m arrogant for wanting to do this my way, for not handing this over to the constables. That I’m foolhardy to not look for help. You’re right.”

“It’s not so bad as that,” she said.

"It's not bad at all," he said. "I *am* arrogant and foolhardy. I *am* acting like I'm still in the Roughs. But I'm also right." He reached up, drawing a small square on the paper, then an arrow from it toward the precinct building.

"I've written a letter for Ranette to send to the constables," he continued. "It details everything I've discovered, and my guesses on what Miles will do, should I fail to best him. I won't make any move tonight until we're well away from the railway and any passengers. The Vanishers won't take a hostage tonight. They'll try to be as quick and as silent as possible.

"But it will still be dangerous. People might die, innocent ones. I'll try my best to keep them from harm, and I firmly believe I have a better chance against Miles than the constables would. I realize that you are studying to be an attorney and a judge, and that your training mandates you should go to the authorities. Considering my plans, and my promises, will you refrain and help me instead?"

"Yes."

*Harmony*, he thought. *She trusts me.* Too much, probably. He reached up, squaring off a box of notes. "This is your part."

"I won't be in the train car with you?" She sounded worried.

"No," Waxillium said. "You and Wayne will watch from the hilltop."

"You'll be alone."

"I will."

She fell silent. "You knew what I was thinking of you. What are *you* thinking of *me,* Lord Waxillium?"

He smiled. "If the game is to work the same way, I can't tell you my thoughts. You need to guess them."

"You are thinking about how young I am," she said. "And you're worried about having me involved, lest I be hurt."

"Hardly a difficult guess. So far, I've given you what … three opportunities to abandon this course and seek safety?"

"You're *also* thinking," she said, "that you're glad I insist on staying, because I will be useful. Life has taught you to use the resources you have."

"Better," he said.

"You think I'm clever, as you have stated. But you also worry that I get flustered too easily, and worry it will be used against you."

"Do those records you've read talk about Paclo the Dusty?"

"Sure. He was one of your deputies before you met Wayne."

"He was a good friend," Waxillium said. "And a solid lawman. But I've *never* met a man who was as easy to startle as Paclo. A softly closed door could make him yelp."

She frowned.

"I assume the records didn't talk about that," Waxillium said.

“They depict him as very brave.”

“He *was* brave, Lady Marasi. You see, many people mistake startlement for cowardice. Yes, a gunshot would make Paclo jump. Then he’d run to see what had caused it. I once saw him stare down six men with guns trained on him, and he didn’t break a sweat.”

He turned to her. “You are inexperienced. So was I, once. So is every man. The measure of a person is not how much they have lived. It is not how easily they jump at a noise or how quick they are to show emotion. It’s in how they make use of what life has shown them.”

Her blush deepened. “I’m also thinking that you like to lecture.”

“It comes with the lawman’s badge.”

“You don’t … wear that anymore.”

“A man can take it off, Lady Marasi. But he can never stop wearing it.”

He met her gaze. She looked up with eyes that were deep, reflective, like the water of an unexpected spring in the Roughs. He steeled himself. He would be bad for her. Very bad. He’d thought the same of Lessie, and he had been right.

“There’s another thing I’m thinking about you,” she said softly. “Can you guess it?”

*All too well.*

With reluctance, he broke her gaze and looked at the pad. “Yes. You are thinking that I should talk Ranette into lending you a rifle. I agree. While I do think that it would be wise of you to train with a revolver eventually, I’d rather you spend this particular encounter with a weapon you use well. Maybe we can find a rifle that will fit those aluminum rounds Wayne grabbed.”

“Oh. Of course.”

Waxillium pretended not to notice her embarrassment.

“I think,” Marasi said, “that I’ll go check on Wayne and Ranette.”

“Good idea. Hopefully she hasn’t discovered that he took one of her guns to trade.”

Marasi withdrew, walking to the door in haste.

“Lady Marasi?” Waxillium called.

She hesitated at the door, turning, hopeful.

“You did a good job of reading me,” he said, nodding in respect. “Not many can do that. I’m not known to be free with my emotions.”

“Advanced interrogation techniques class,” she said. “And … uh, I’ve read your psychological profile.”

“I have a psychological profile?”

“Yes, I’m afraid. Doctor Murnbru wrote it after his visit to Weathering.”

“That little rat Murnbru was a *psychologist*?” Waxillium said, genuinely baffled. “I was sure he was a gambling cheat, passing through town looking for marks to swindle.”

“Er, yes. That’s in the profile. You, uh, have a tendency to think anyone who wears too much red is a chronic gambler.”

“I do?”

She nodded.

“Damn,” he said. *I’m going to need to read that thing.*

She left and pulled the door closed. He turned back to his plan once again. He raised his hand and slipped his earring into his ear. He was supposed to wear it when praying, or when doing something of great import.

He figured that tonight, he’d be doing a lot of both.

of the people of the oceans and their mystical Unknown Metals. Full story, reverse side.

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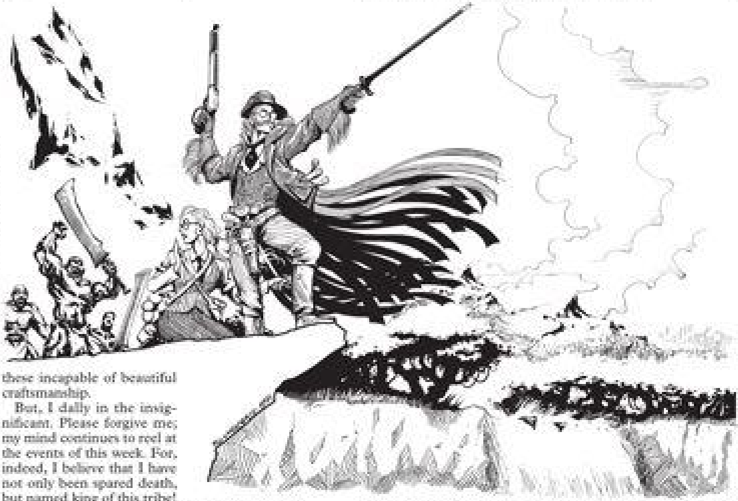
of one of the Faceless immortals? Delusion? Simple fancy? You decide. Story on the reverse, in the fifth column.

FUTURE, TODAY!
The Association of Transport Interests is a division of the Greater Basin Automotive Conglomerate, and is responsible for the content of this message.



these incapable of beautiful craftsmanship.

But, I dally in the insignificant. Please forgive me; my mind continues to reel at the events of this week. For, indeed, I believe that I have not only been spared death, but named king of this tribe!

It began on the dawn of my aforementioned execution. After being dragged awake in a not-too-kind fashion, I found myself beneath the blaring sun, trudging across the red, dusty ground. The brutes stood in silent lines, watching me with beady eyes, their skin a darkened blue, the color of a fine blue scarf if it had been singed by fire and charred. Red dust stained their bodies, and many wore the most bare of clothing.

I owe my life to Handerwym. Faithful Handerwym; I bless the day I pulled him from that lake, sodden and near drowned. The faithful Terrisman, though sworn not to harm or kill, has proved his worth a hundred times. The koloss seemed to respect him, you see, and allowed him a final approach to embrace his master, soon to be murdered in the most bleak of fashions.

Upon that embrace, I found my Glint—my trusty revolver—slipped into my hand, bound behind my back. I asked how he slipped it away from the koloss, and he explained that he had made use of one of his metalminds to create a connection to the koloss. It is an arcane art he uses, unexplored and unknown, and he wishes for me to write very little in the way of explanation, as he regards its power as sacred.

Well, I was armed, but still bound. Connection notwithstanding, the koloss pulled him away, though they didn't seem to realize what he had done. I had never had reason to bless the overly long sleeves of the jacket I received in exchange from that bandit so many weeks ago, but in this case, they may have proved my salvation.

When I tell you of this shot, I ask that you not think too highly of me. Indeed, it was more chance than skill that proved my friend that day. I had managed to wiggle my way free of the bonds slightly, so that I could move one hand down below the other. I twisted the gun in my fingers and was able to lay it flat against my palm, the barrel pointing upward along my arm. At the last moment before I was to meet the headsman, I ducked my head forward and pulled the trigger.

Preservation prevailed, and though I felt the bullet graze the back of my head, it also passed through my bindings. A quick jerk of my hands freed me at that point, and though I was exhausted, I still had some small amount of tin left inside of me. I burned it, enhancing my senses, and raised the gun to shoot the executioner between the eyes. Koloss are strong, but even they can fall to a bullet in the right place.

The next shot felled the largest of their leaders. I had hoped this alone would secure me with their awe, but while it gave them pause, it did not make them free me. Glint had been loaded with only three bullets when I left her; I looked to Handerwym, and he shook his head grimly. He had not had the ammunition to reload her.

I was left with one bullet and an entire village full of monsters. I will not lie and say I was confident in my chances! However, I should mention to you a curious aspect about the koloss. You see, ever since their first interaction with me, they had been insistent that anyone may join them. Any man they deemed worthy could be made koloss, they claimed. Indeed, several of their most brutish and powerful warriors claimed to have once been men from the City. Obviously false, but there is something in their mindset that makes them think this way.

And so, with my single bullet, I decided to prove to them that I was worthy to join them. Only a test of the greatest skill would provide this proof, I decided, and so, I raised the gun and—

*—Continued next week!!—*

Cultivated gentlemen in all octants agree;
Only electric lights will do!

DO NOT BE CAUGHT IN THE DARK!

Send runner to Brigs Wennington with # of rooms for estimate
4567 Cunning Pl, 5th Oct.

# 16

Wayne hobbled through the railway station, supporting himself on his brown cane, walking with a slow, intentionally frail step. There was quite a crowd pushing and shoving one another and gawking at the train up ahead. A group of them surged to the side, nearly toppling him.

Everyone was standing up so tall. That gave Wayne—back bent with age—no hope of seeing what the fuss was about. "No thought for a poor elderly woman," Wayne grumbled. A gravelly tone, nasal and higher-pitched than his normal voice, mixed with a nice Margothian District accent. The district no longer existed, at least not in the same way; it had been consumed by the industrial quarter of its octant, its residents moving away. A dying accent for a dying woman. "No respect at all. A travesty, I tell you. Plain and simple, that's what it is."

A few youths in the crowd in front glanced back at him, taking in his ancient coat—it went down to his ankles—his face furrowed with age, his silvery hair beneath a felt cap. "Sorry, ma'am," one of them finally said, making way for him.

*Now, there's a nice boy,* Wayne thought, patting his arm and hobbling forward. One by one, people made way for him. Sometimes it took a little fit of coughing that sounded like it might be contagious. Wayne was careful not to look like a beggar. That would draw the attention of constables, who might think he was looking for marks to pickpocket.

No, he wasn't a beggar. He was Abrigain, an old woman who had come to see what the fuss was about. Abrigain wasn't rich, nor was she poor. Frugal, with a meticulously patched coat, a favored hat that had once been fashionable. Spectacles thick as a dockworker's wits. A few very young boys let her by, and Abrigain gave them each a piece of candy, patting them on their heads. Nice boys. They reminded Abrigain of her grandchildren.

Wayne eventually reached the front. There, the Breaknaught sat in all its glory. It was a train car built like a fortress, with thick steel armor, shiny rounded corners, and a massive door on the side. That door looked like the one to an enormous vault, with a rotating wheel lock on the outside.

The door was open, and the chamber inside was mostly empty. A large steel cargo box had been *welded* to the floor at the center of the railcar. In fact, he could see through the door in the railcar that the cargo box itself looked as if it had been welded shut on all sides.

"Oh, my!" Wayne said. "That *is* impressive."

A guard stood nearby, wearing the insignia of an officer in the private security force of House Tekiel. He smiled, puffing out his chest with pride. "It marks the dawn of a new era," he said. "The end of banditry and railway robberies."

"Oh, it's impressive, young man," Wayne said. "But surely you exaggerate. I've seen railcars before—I even rode on one, curse that day. My grandson Charetel wanted me to come with him and meet his bride over in Covingtar, and it was the only way, though I thought riding in a horse cart had *always* worked well enough for me before. Progress, he'd called it. Progress is getting locked up in a box, I suppose, unable to see the sun overhead or enjoy the trip. Anyway, that train car was like this one. Only not so shiny."

"I assure you," the guard said, "this is *quite* impregnable. It will change everything. You see that door?"

"It locks," Wayne said. "I can see that. But safes can be cracked, young man."

"Not this one," he said. "Bandits won't be able to open it because it can't be opened—not by them, and not by us. Once that door is closed, it engages a mechanism tied to a ticking clock inside the doors. Those doors cannot be opened again for twelve hours, regardless of whether or not one knows the door code."

"Explosives," Wayne said. "Bandits are always blowing things up. *Everyone* knows that."

"That steel is six inches thick," the guard said. "The amount of dynamite it would take to blow it open would likely destroy the contents of the car."

"But surely an Allomancer could get in," Wayne said.

"How? They could Push on the metal all they wanted; it's so heavy, it would toss them backward. And even if they somehow *did* get in, we will have eight guards riding inside the railcar."

"My," Wayne said, letting his accent slip. "That's impressive indeed. What will the guards be armed with?"

"A full quartet of…" the man began, but then trailed off, looking more closely at Wayne. "Of…" His eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"Oh, I'm missing my tea!" Wayne exclaimed, then turned and began hobbling back through the crowd.

"Stop that woman!" the guard said.

Wayne stopped pretending and stood up straight, shoving his way through the crowd with more fervor. He glanced over his shoulder.

The guardsman was forcing his way forward in pursuit. “Stop!” the guardsman yelled. “Stop, damn you!”

Wayne raised his cane and pulled the trigger. His hand started wobbling as it always did when he tried to use a gun, but this one only had blanks in it, so it was all right. The pistol-like crack drove the crowd into a panic, people ducking down in a wave like wind blowing through a field of grain.

Wayne darted through the prostrate figures, hopping over some of them, reaching the back of the crowd. The guard raised his gun; Wayne dashed around a corner of the station building. Then he stopped time.

He threw off his coat, then pulled off the blouse underneath, revealing a gentleman’s suit: black coat, white shirt, red cravat. Wax had called it “purposefully unimaginative,” whatever that meant. He removed the items that, tied to the inside of the blouse, had formed the elderly woman’s bust: a small bag, a collapsible gentleman’s hat, and a wet rag. He unfolded the hat and stuffed the blouse into the extra space inside it before pulling off his wig and putting the hat on his head.

He ripped the outer layer off his cane, turning it black instead. He tossed the wig aside, then dropped the bag by the wall. Finally, he wiped his face clean of makeup with the rag, discarded it, then collapsed his speed bubble.

He stumbled out around the corner of the building, acting as if he’d been shoved. He cursed, straightening his hat and raising his black cane, shaking it in anger.

The guard puffed up beside him. “Are you all right, m’lord?”

“No!” Wayne snapped, filling his voice with every ounce of aristocratic condescension he could manage. Madion Ways accent, the richest area of the First Octant—where House Tekiel owned much of the land. “What kind of ruffian was that, Captain! The launch was supposed to be handled with poise and care!”

The guard froze, and Wayne could see his mind working. He’d been expecting a random nobleman, but this person sounded like a member of House Tekiel—the guard’s employers.

“Sorry, m’lord!” the guard said. “But I chased ’im off.”

“Who was he?” Wayne said, walking over to the wig. “He threw this aside as he passed me.”

“Was dressed up like an elderly woman,” the guard said, scratching his head. “Asking me questions about the Breaknaught.”

“Damn it all, man. That must have been one of the Vanishers!”

The guard paled.

“Do you know how embarrassed our house will be if something happens on this trip?” Wayne said, stepping in, shaking the cane. “Our reputation is on the line. Our *heads* are on the line, Captain. How many guards do you have?"

"Three dozen, m'lord, and—"

"Not enough! Not enough at all! Send for more."

"I—"

"No!" Wayne said. "I'll do it. I have several of my own guards here. I'll send one to fetch another division. Your men are watching the area for more *creatures* such as that one?"

"Well, I haven't told them yet, m'lord. Thought I'd try to get 'im myself, you see, and—"

"You left your post?" Wayne screamed, raising hands to the side of his head, cane dangling from his fingers. "You let him *lure you away*? Idiot! Get back, man! Go! Alert the others. Oh, Survivor above. If this goes wrong, we're dead. Dead!"

The guard captain scrambled back and ran for the train, where people were moving away in a panic. Wayne leaned back against the wall, checked his pocket watch, then waited for a good moment when he had enough space to put a speed bubble. He was reasonably sure nobody was looking.

Off came the hat. He dropped the cane and reversed his jacket, turning it into a brown and yellow military coat, matching that of the guards. He pulled off his fake nose and took a triangular cloth cap out of the bag he'd dropped by the wall.

He put this on his head instead of the gentleman's hat. Always have the right hat. That was key. He strapped a handgun on over the coat after dropping his pants, revealing the soldier's uniform beneath. Then he collapsed his bubble and jogged around the corner, making his way up to the tracks. He found the captain organizing his men, yelling orders. There were some angry noblemen arguing with one another nearby.

The cargo wasn't being unloaded. That was good. Wayne had figured they'd just give up on this run, with all the fuss, but Wax had disagreed. He said that the Tekiels had made such a big deal of the Breaknaught that a hiccup or two wouldn't stop them.

*Fools,* Wayne thought, shaking his head. Farnsward didn't agree with the decision. He'd been in House Tekiel's private guard for ten years now, though he'd mostly served on the Outer Estates with his lord, who was chronically ill. Farnsward had seen a lot in his time, and he'd learned that there *were* reasons to take risks. To save a life, to win a battle, to protect the house's name. But to take a risk just because you'd said you would? Foolishness.

He jogged up to the captain he'd talked to earlier and saluted. "Sir," he said. "I'm Farnsward Dubs—Lord Evenstrom Tekiel said I should report to you." An Outer Estates accent with a hint of aristocracy, picked up from so long associating with them.

The man was looking frazzled. “Very well. I guess we can use every man.”

“Sorry, sir,” Wayne said, leaning in. “Lord Evenstrom is excitable, sometimes. I know how it goes; this isn’t the first time he’s sent me to help someone who didn’t need it. Bren and I will stay out of your way.”

“Bren?”

“Oh, he was right behind me,” Wayne said, turning around, looking confused.

Wax ducked out of the station, wearing a uniform similar to Wayne’s. He also had a fake paunch of some size, hiding some specific materials he’d need for the night.

“There he is,” Wayne said. “He’s a dull-minded lout, sir. His father left him the position, but you could hit his steel against flint all night and not get a spark, if you know what I mean.”

“Well, stay here,” the captain said. “Guard this post. Don’t let anyone approach the train car, no matter what they look like.” He left, running over to the batch of noblemen.

“’Ello, Wax,” Wayne said, tipping his hat to the other man. “Ready to get swallowed?”

Waxillium glanced back toward the station building. Civilians were still scattering. The ground was littered with hats and handkerchiefs. “You need to make sure they still send the train, Wayne. No matter what, it *must* go forward.”

“I thought you said they’ll be too embarrassed not to launch it.”

“For the first part, yes. Not so sure about this next part. Make it happen, Wayne.”

“Sure thing, mate.” Wayne checked his watch. “She’s late—”

A sudden series of cracks split the air. Gunshots. Even though Wayne was expecting them, they still made him jump. The guards around them cried out, shouting, looking for the source of the shots. Waxillium fell, screaming, blood spraying from his shoulder. Wayne caught him as another guard spotted flashes coming from atop the building.

The guards opened fire as Wayne dragged Waxillium out of harm’s way. He looked about, then—acting frantic—shoved Waxillium into the open door of the railcar. Several of the guards looked at him, but nobody said a word. Waxillium’s eyes were staring dead into the air. The other guards had probably lost mates to bandits or house skirmishes, and they knew. In the heat of the fighting, you got the wounded to safety, and it didn’t bloody matter where.

The firing stopped from atop the building, but it started up again from a rooftop nearby. A few bullets sprayed sparks from the top of a nearby girder. *A little close there, Marasi,* Wayne thought with annoyance. Why did every woman he met try to shoot him? Just because he could heal from it. That was like drinking a man's beer just because he could order more.

Wayne plastered a worried look on his face. "They're comin' for the cargo!" he yelled. Then he grabbed the door to the large cargo car, kicked the counterbalance lever to the side, and ran forward. He slammed the door on the Breaknaught shut—Wax inside the railcar, Wayne himself standing outside—before anyone thought to stop him.

The gunfire stopped. Nearby, the guards cowering behind cover looked at Wayne with horrified expressions. The door to the train clicked into place, settling in.

"Rust and Ruin, man!" one of the nearby soldiers said. "What have you done?"

"Locked up the cargo!" Wayne said. "Look, it made them stop."

"There were supposed to be soldiers inside there!" the captain said, running up to him.

"They were trying to get in before we got it locked," Wayne said. "You saw what they were doing." He looked at the door. "They can't get to the cargo now. We've won!"

The captain looked concerned. He glanced at the noblemen who were picking themselves off the ground. Wayne held his breath as they came storming over to the captain. The captain, however, repeated Wayne's same words.

"But we stopped them," the captain explained, knowing that he—and not Wayne—would bear the blame if it was decided that mistakes had been made. "They dropped their attack. We won!"

Wayne stepped back, relaxing against a pillar as guards were sent to try to find out who had been shooting. They came back with a large number of rifle bullet casings planted on the ground in various locations, though most of the "shots" had been blanks. Several beggar boys had been paid to fire blanks into the air, then plant stories of men getting into horse carriages and riding away in a hurry.

In under an hour, the train was on its way—with everyone at House Tekiel convinced they'd fought off a major Vanishers robbery. There was even talk of giving Wayne a commendation, though he deflected the glory to the captain and slipped away before anyone could begin asking just *which* lord retained him as a bodyguard.

# 17

Waxillium rode alone in the cold cargo railcar, shoulder wet with fake blood, listening to the wheels thump over the tracks beneath him. A swinging lamp hung where he'd placed it on a hook in the ceiling, near a corner. He'd also secured the webbing of nets on the ceiling, tucked up and held in place by special hooks affixed with industrial tape. It felt good to have all of that removed from wrapping around his legs, thighs, and fake paunch. His guard's uniform, now much too large for him, lay in a heap in the corner, and he wore a utilitarian pair of suit pants and a light black jacket instead.

He sat on the floor, back to the side of the cargo container, legs stretched out. He held Vindication in his hand, absently spinning the cylinder and hitting the switch to lock it on to the special chambers. He had two of each type of hazekiller round in his pocket, and had loaded a Coinshot round and a Pewterarm round into the special chambers.

He still had his earring in.

*You wanted me to do this,* he thought toward Harmony. Did an accusation count as a prayer? *Well, here I am. I'll expect a little help, if that's acceptable to your immortal plan, and all that.*

The cargo box was beside him. He could see why House Tekiel was so proud of the job they'd done; the welded strongbox would be ridiculously difficult for thieves to steal. Getting it out of the car would require hours spent cutting it free with a gas torch or a large electric saw. That, plus the clever door and the supposed existence of guards, would make for a daunting—perhaps impossible—robbery.

Yes, the Tekiels had been clever. Problem was, they were thinking about this all wrong.

Waxillium pulled a package from beneath his coat. The dynamite and detonator that Wayne had found. He set the package beside him on the floor, then eyed his pocket watch. *Right about now …*

The train suddenly started to slow.

* * *

"Yup," Wayne said, looking through the spyglass as he crouched against the hillside. “He’s right. Wanna see?”

Marasi took the spyglass nervously. The two of them were in position following a hasty gallop out of the city. She felt naked, wearing a pair of Ranette’s trousers. *Completely* improper. Every man they passed would stare at her legs.

*Maybe that will stop the Vanishers from shooting,* she thought with a grimace. *They’ll be too distracted.* She raised the spyglass to her eye. She and Wayne were atop a hill along the railway route, outside of the City. It was nearly midnight when the train had finally come chugging along.

Now it was slowing, and the brakes caused screeches and sparks in the night. Ahead of the train, a ghostly apparition was approaching in the opposite direction, a bright light shining in front of it. She shivered. The phantom railcar.

“Wax’ll be happy,” Wayne said.

“What?” she asked. “About the phantom?”

“No. There’s mist tonight.”

She started, realizing that it was forming in the air. The mist wasn’t like a normal fog; it didn’t come rolling in over the ocean. It grew in the air, sprouting like frost on a cold piece of metal. She shivered as it began to envelop them, giving the headlamps below a ghostly cast.

She focused the spyglass on the approaching train. Because she’d been warned what to look for, and because of her angle, she could easily see the truth. It *was* a decoy. A hand-propelled rail wagon behind a wooden engine facade.

“How do they make the light work?” she said.

“I dunno. Magic?”

She snorted, trying to get a good look at what was behind the framework. “Must be some kind of chemical battery. I’ve read of the work … but Rust and Ruin, that’s a *powerful* light. I doubt they can run it for long.”

As the real train pulled to a halt, some men sprang from its sides. House Tekiel had sent guards. That gave Marasi a smile. Maybe the robbery wouldn’t happen after all.

The front portion of the phantom train dropped.

“Aw, *hell*,” Wayne said.

“What is—”

She was cut off by a loud series of shots, incredibly fast. She jumped back by reflex, ducking down, though nothing was aimed at them. Wayne grabbed the spyglass, raising it.

Marasi couldn’t make out what happened next through the darkness and the mists. And she was glad. The shots continued, and she heard men screaming.

“Rotary gun,” Wayne said softly. “Damn, these people are *serious*.”

"I have to help," Marasi said, unslinging the rifle Ranette had given her. It was of an unfamiliar make, but the woman swore it would be more accurate than anything Marasi had ever used. She raised the rifle. If she could hit the Vanishers …

Wayne took the barrel of her rifle in one hand, gently pushing it down. The rotary gun stopped firing, and the night grew silent.

"There's nothing you can do, mate, and we don't want to draw the attention of that damn rotary. Besides, you really think you can hit one of them from all the way up here?"

"I've hit red at five hundred paces."

"At night?" Wayne said. "In the mists?"

Marasi fell silent. Then she held out her hand and gestured impatiently for the spyglass. Wayne gave it to her, and she watched six men hop from the phantom train. They walked along the sides of the real train, guns at the ready and watching.

"Distraction?" Wayne asked, watching.

"Lord Waxillium thought so. He said to…" She trailed off.

He said to watch the canal.

She turned, scanning the canal with the spyglass. Something big and dark was floating down it. Shrouded in mists, it looked like some kind of massive beast—a leviathan swimming quietly through the water. It came up to the middle of the train, then halted. A dark, shadowy leg lifted from the black mass. *By the Survivor,* she thought, shivering. *It's alive.*

But no … the leg was too stiff. It moved up, rotated out, then came down. As the thing in the canal stopped, the leg clamped into place on the shore. *For stabilization,* Marasi realized. *That's what made the depression in the ground we saw earlier.*

Once the thing … the machine … was stabilized, some men moved through the darkness to the vault car. They worked for a few moments. Then a large arm rose out of the dark mass on the canal. It swung over toward the tracks, then reached down, grabbed the entire vault car, and *lifted* it.

Marasi gaped. The car was lifted only a few feet, but that was enough. The machine was a crane.

The Vanishers who had unhooked the couplers helped push the train car over across the narrow strip of land toward the canal. The black mass had to be a barge. Marasi ran some quick numbers in her head. In order to lift the train car like that, the barge must be very heavy and have considerable ballast on the other side.

She lifted her spyglass and was pleased to be able to pick out another crane arm extending in the other direction, holding some kind of heavy weight. The barge sank somewhat into the waters as the vault car was lifted, but not as far as Marasi would have assumed. It probably was designed with some means of bottoming out in the canal, perhaps an extendable section underneath the barge. That, plus the stabilizing arm, might be enough.

“My, my, my…” Wayne whispered. “Ain’t that somethin’.”

The machine dropped the entire vault car onto its barge, and then lifted something else off. Something large and rectangular. She had already guessed what to expect. A replica.

Marasi watched as the duplicate railcar was lowered onto the tracks. The couplings made it *very* tricky. This could ruin their entire plan; lower the car in the wrong way, ruin a coupler, and when the train pulled away it would leave its back half on the tracks. That would make it more obvious what had happened. The Vanishers on the ground guided the process.

Several of the other Vanishers were firing shots through the windows of a passenger car a few places ahead, probably to keep anyone from peeking out. However, the way the tracks bent around a tree-topped hill here, it would be very difficult for anyone inside to get a good view of what was happening. The phantom railcar’s light had vanished a few moments ago, and she knew it would be speeding backward along the tracks. Where did they keep it hidden? Perhaps it was loaded onto another barge after getting far enough ahead to be out of sight?

The Vanishers who had been working with the barge were running over to climb back onto their vehicle, which was slipping out into the center of the wide canal, where it was practically invisible in the misty night. It moved as a shadow.

“Wayne!” she said, scrambling up. “We’ve got to go.”

He sighed, standing. “Sure, sure.”

“Waxillium is *in that train car*!”

“Yeah. You ever notice how often he gets to be the one who rides in comfort, while I have to do things like gallop or walk all the time? Not very fair.”

She slung the rifle on her shoulder, hurrying down the hill. “You know, when I was reading the reports, I never imagined that you’d complain this much.”

“Now, that’s not fair. I’ll have you know that I pride myself on my cheery, optimistic attitude.”

She stopped, looking back at him, raising an eyebrow. “You pride yourself on it?”

He raised a hand to his chest, adopting a tone that sounded almost priestly. “Yes, but pride is bad, you know. I’ve been trying to be more humble lately. Hurry up, hurry up. We’re gonna lose them. You want Wax to be cornered and alone? Gosh, woman.”

She shook her head, turning and continuing down the hillside to where their horses were tied.

* * *

Miles stood with hands clasped behind his back, riding on the front of the Machine as it slid quietly down the canal. The part crane, part barge wasn't exactly what he'd envisioned when he'd explained his plot to Mister Suit, but it was close.

He was proud of what he'd done: not just become a thief, but become one that captured people's imaginations. Suit could say what he wanted about the theatrics, but they worked. The constables had no idea how he was performing the thefts.

"They checked on all six of the Tekiel guards, boss," Tarson said, stepping up to him. His arm was out of its sling. Pewter savants could heal quickly. Not as quickly as someone like Miles, but it was still remarkable. Of course, pewter savants were also likely to run themselves to death, never noticing that their body was exhausted. It was a dangerous art that burned men up as quickly as Allomancers burned metal.

"Engineers too," Tarson continued. "They caught a few more guards in the last passenger car, trying to sneak out to see how we were getting the cargo. We shot them. I think that means we're clean."

"Not yet," Miles said softly, staring forward into the darkness as they sailed through the mists, moving by way of a pair of slow-turning propellers underneath the barge. "Waxillium knows how we're doing this."

Tarson hesitated. "Uh … you sure?"

"Yes," Miles said absently. "He's inside the train car."

"What!" Tarson spun, looking at the large car riding in the middle of the barge. Miles could hear members of his team covering it with a tarp, to obscure it as they approached the City. They'd look like an ordinary barge, the arms and ballast hidden under other tarps and the whole thing disguised to look like a shipment of stone from one of the outer quarries. Miles even had a shipping manifest and docking authorization, along with a few tarps that actually hid piles of neatly cut stone.

"I don't know the method he used," Miles said. "But he'll be in there. Wax thinks like a lawkeeper. This is the best way to find our hideout—stay with the cargo you know will be stolen, even if you're not sure precisely how." He paused. "No. He'll have guessed how we're doing it. That's the risk of being as good as he is. As good as I was. You start to think like a criminal."

Better than a criminal, really.

In a way, it was surprising that more lawkeepers didn't end up turning to crime. If you saw something done wrong frequently enough, you'd—by nature—want to see it finally done right. Miles had started planning these robberies in the back of his mind ten years ago, when he'd realized that railway security was focused on the railcars. At first it had been just a thought experiment. That was another thing to be proud of. He had robbed, and he'd done it well. Very well. And the people … he'd gone through the city, listening. They spoke with awe of the Vanishers.

They'd never treated him like that back in the Roughs. They'd hated him while he'd protected him. Now they loved him while he stole from him. People were baffling, but it felt good not to be hated. Feared, yes. But not hated.

"So what are we going to do?" Tarson asked.

"Nothing," Miles said. "Wax likely doesn't realize I've guessed he's there. That gives us an advantage."

"But…"

"We can't open the railcar here," Miles said. "That's the entire point of the thing. We'll need the workshop." He paused. "Though I suppose we could just dump the entire car into the canal. It's deep enough here to sink entirely. I wonder if Wax has a plan to open the door if something like that happens."

"I don't think Mister Suit would much like us sinking the train car, boss," Tarson said. "Not after what he must have spent to make that replica."

"Yes. Unfortunately, the canal is only about fourteen feet deep. If we dumped the car, we'd never get it back out before another ship's hull collided with it, revealing what we've done. Pity."

Waxillium's death would almost be worth the loss of the cargo. Mister Suit didn't realize how dangerous the man was. Oh, he *acted* like he did. But if he had really appreciated how dangerous, how *effective*, Waxillium was … well, he'd never have allowed this robbery. He'd have stopped all operations and pulled out of the city. And Miles would have agreed with the move, save for one thing.

That would have meant no confrontation.

They floated into the City, carrying the train car, its cargo, and its occupant—almost as if Wax were a lord in his grand carriage. His was a nearly impregnable fortress that protected him from the dozen or so men on the barge who would happily have killed him.

Mister Suit's two minders—who called themselves Push and Pull—joined Miles at the front of the barge, but he didn't speak to them. Together, they drifted through Elendel. Streetlights were lines of fire in the mists, bright white, running along the canal. Other lights sparkled high in the sky, the windows of buildings that were shrouded in the mist.

Nearby, some of his men were muttering. The mists were considered bad luck by most, though at least two of the major religions accepted them as manifestations of the divine. Miles had never been certain how to think of them. They made Allomancy stronger, or so some claimed, but his abilities were already as strong as they could be.

The Church of the Survivor taught that the mists belonged to him, Kelsier, Lord of Mists. He appeared on nights when the mist was thick and gave his blessing to the independent. Whether they be thieves, scholars, anarchists, or a farmer who lived on his own land. Anyone who survived on his own—or who thought for himself—was someone who followed the Survivor, whether he knew it or not.

*That's another thing the current establishment makes a mockery of,* Miles thought. Many of them claimed to belong to the Church of the Survivor, but discouraged their employees from thinking for themselves. Miles shook his head. Well, he no longer followed the Survivor. He'd found something better, something that felt more true.

They sailed down past the outer ring of the Fourth and Fifth Octants. Two massive buildings rose up opposite one another across the canal. The tops disappeared into the mists. Tekiel Tower was on one side, the Ironspine on the other.

The freight dock for the Ironspine was alongside its own branch from the canal. They steered the barge into it, gliding to a stop, then used the dock's stationary crane to lift the hidden train car off the barge. It was supposed to be a big pile of rock, after all. They slowly swung it into the air, then over and gently down onto the platform.

Miles jumped off the barge and onto the ground and walked to the platform, joined by Push and Pull. The rest of his men filed in around him, looking very pleased. Some were joking with one another about the bonus they'd get for the heist.

Clamps looked very disturbed, and he scratched at the scars on his neck. He was a Survivorist, his scars a mark of devotion. Tarson just yawned a wide, gray-lipped yawn, then cracked his knuckles.

The entire platform shook, then began to move, descending one story into the foundry hall. Once they passed through, the doors closed above. The lift lurched slightly as it came to a stop. Miles looked to the side, down the long tunnel that Mister Suit claimed would someday provide train access under the city. It looked hollow, empty, lifeless.

"Hook up the chains," Miles said, hopping off the platform. "Fix the train car in place."

"Couldn't we just wait?" Tarson asked, frowning. "It'll open in twelve hours, right?"

"I plan to be gone in twelve hours," Miles said. "Wax and his people are too close. We're going to crack that car open, deal with whoever's inside, then grab the aluminum and go. Get to work; let's rip the door off."

His men hastened to obey, tying the large train car to the wall with a large number of clamps and chains. Another set of chains was hooked to the Breaknaught's door; these chains wrapped around the same powerful electric winching mechanism that raised and lowered the platform. The platform shook as it was disengaged, the motors instead engaging the chain wheels.

Miles walked to the gun rack, selecting two aluminum handguns identical to the ones in his holsters. He was disturbed to notice that there was only one other gun on the rack. They'd lost a fortune in weaponry. Well, he'd just have to see that Waxillium was duly repaid. Miles strode through the room, chains clinking on the floor and men grunting. The air smelled of coke from the inactive forges.

"Arm up!" Miles ordered. "Get ready to fire on the person inside the moment we open the thing."

The Vanishers glanced at one another, confused, but then unslung or unholstered guns. He had about a dozen of them here, with some others in reserve. Just in case. Never put all your bullets in the same gun when Waxillium was around.

"But boss," one of the Vanishers called, "the report said the train left without the guards inside!"

Miles cocked his gun. "If you find a building without rats, son, then you know that something more dangerous scared them away."

"You think he's in there?" Push said in a near monotone, stepping up beside him. Obviously, he hadn't heard Miles's conversation about Wax on the barge.

Miles nodded.

"And you brought him here."

Miles nodded again.

Push's face darkened. "You should have told us."

"You were given to me to help deal with him," Miles said. "I just wanted to see you boys get your chance." He turned. "Start the motor!"

One of the men pulled the lever, and the chains grew taut. They groaned, pulling against the door. The train car rattled, but was kept in place by the other chains behind.

"Be ready!" Miles called. "When the door opens, fire at anything that so much as *quivers* inside that car. Arm yourselves *only* with aluminum, and don't save ammunition. We can collect the bullets later and recast them."

The train's door buckled in its mountings, the metal groaning. Miles and his men moved out to the sides, away from the path of the chains. Three hastily went to set up the rotary gun, but Miles waved them down. They didn't have aluminum bullets for that, so firing it could be a disaster against a prepared Coinshot.

Miles refocused his attention on the vault car. He stilled his breath and felt his body grow warm as he increased the power he was tapping from his metalmind. He didn't need to breathe. His body renewed itself each moment. He'd stop his heartbeat if he could. A heartbeat was such an annoyance when trying to aim.

Even without breathing, he'd never been able to shoot as well as Wax. Of course, nobody could. The man seemed to have an inborn instinct for firearms. Miles had seen him make shots he'd have sworn were impossible. It almost seemed a shame to kill such a man. It would be like burning a one-of-a-kind painting, a masterpiece.

But it was what had to be done. Miles extended his arm, sighting with the revolver. The door continued to warp, and the links in several of the chains began to show strain. But there were enough of them, and the motor was strong enough, that the door's bindings began to break. Scraps of metal sprang free, bolts snapping. One took Miles on the cheek, ripping skin. The cut regrew itself immediately. No pain. He only faintly remembered what pain felt like.

Then the door gave a final screech of death, ripping free and flying across the room. It hit the ground, spraying sparks and skidding as the man at the lever hastily stopped the engine. The door came to a rest between the Vanishers, who nervously trained their weapons on the dark interior of the car.

*Come on, Wax,* Miles thought. *Play your hand. You've come to me. Into my den, into my lair. You're mine now.*

Poor fool. Wax never could stop himself if a woman was in danger.

That was when Miles noticed the string. Thin, almost invisible, it led from the fallen door to the inside of the railcar. It must have been tied to the door, then set inside in a loose pile with lots of slack. When they yanked the door off, the string didn't snap, but was strung out along behind. What …

Miles glanced again at the fallen door. Tape. Dynamite.

*Aw, hell.*

Someone inside the train car—hiding behind the box of aluminum—pulled the string tight with a sudden jerk.

# 18

Outside, the entire room shook. Inside, the train car lurched—though it appeared someone had been kind enough to secure it in place, preventing Waxillium from being thrown about too much. He held on to the rope he'd tied around the strongbox, head down, Vindication up beside his ear.

As soon as the blast wave passed, he threw himself over the top of the box and ducked out into the room. Smoke churned in the air; bits of stone and steel were scattered across the floor. Most of the lights had been knocked out by the explosion, and those that remained were swinging wildly, painting the room with bewildering shadows.

Waxillium scanned the devastation and did a quick count. At least four men down. He probably could have hit more if he'd detonated the explosion earlier, but he'd worried about hurting innocents. He'd needed a moment to glance out and make sure that Steris or others weren't near.

Waxillium Pushed up and backward off a scrap of metal, throwing himself into the air before any Vanishers could draw a bead on him. He aimed Vindication as he flew, shooting one man who was rising and shaking his head. Waxillium landed atop the train car and fired twice more with precision, killing two more Vanishers.

A ragged figure stood up on the side of the room, and Waxillium shot just before he recognized Miles. The left side of his suit coat and shirt had been shredded, but he'd already regrown his flesh, and now was lifting a gun of his own.

*Damn,* Waxillium thought, dropping down behind the wrecked train car. He'd been hoping to find himself in a more traditional hideout, with narrow hallways and hidden nooks. Not this open stone pen of a room. It was going to be hard not to get boxed in here.

He glanced around the side of the railcar, and was met with a hail of fire from four or five different places. He ducked back around, hastily reloading Vindication with ordinary rounds. He was pinned down already. This was *not* going well.

Another of the room's lights flickered, then went out. Fires started by the explosion illuminated the room with a primal red glow. Waxillium crouched down, Vindication held ready. He didn't bother with a steel bubble; they were all firing aluminum bullets.

It was either get pinned down and killed as they rounded the railcar, or risk getting shot as he broke out. So be it. He kicked up a chunk of metal, then Pushed it in front of him. It drew gunfire as he charged after it, Pushing behind himself to rise soaring through the air. He turned sideways, firing as he flew, mostly to force the enemy to keep their heads down. He managed to shoot one, however, before hitting the ground and sliding into the shadow of some fallen boxes.

He righted himself and reloaded hastily. His side was aching, bleeding through the bandage. The railcar was affixed to the north side of the room. He'd dashed out to the west, and had ended up in the northwestern corner of the room where the boxes were stacked. The western side, a little bit to the south of him, opened on some kind of tunnel. Maybe he could run that way.

He ducked around the side of the boxes and plugged one of the Vanishers in the forehead. Then he rolled into cover behind a larger stack of crates.

Someone was creeping around the boxes to his left; he could hear their steps crunching on bits of rubble from the explosion. Waxillium raised his gun, stepped to the side, and fired.

The black-suited man raised a casual hand. Tracking the bullet with the blue lines of an Allomancer, Waxillium could see it get flung back and hit the wall above him. *Great. A Coinshot.* He rolled Vindication's cylinder, locking it into place. Unfortunately, fire from the other Vanishers forced him back down before he could shoot the special round.

That Coinshot was close. Waxillium had to move quickly. He grabbed a few of the weighted kerchiefs from his pockets and threw them out with Pushes to draw fire, then worked his way around the right side of the boxes. He had to keep in motion. It—

He came face-to-face with someone moving around the boxes to flank him. The lean man had ashen skin and wore Wayne's hat. Tarson, he'd been called at the other fight.

Tarson's eyes widened in surprise and he swung a fist—never mind that it was holding a revolver. The man was koloss-blooded, maybe a Pewterarm as well, considering how easily he'd recovered from being shot. Men like that often punched first and thought about their guns second.

Waxillium barely pulled back in time; he felt the fist brush past the tip of his nose, then collide with one of the boxes, smashing it. He raised Vindication, but Tarson—moving with supernatural quickness—slapped it out of his hand. Yes, a Pewterarm for certain. Koloss-blooded men were strong, but not nearly that fast.

Reflexively, Waxillium Pushed himself backward. Going hand-to-hand with this man would be suicide. It—

The roof exploded.

Well, not the entire roof. Just the portion above Waxillium, where it looked like the train car had been lowered on some kind of mechanical platform. Waxillium ducked down as pieces of metal dropped; he Pushed some away. Gunfire erupted above, and the Pewterarm ducked back before it, as a few bullets hit the boxes nearby.

A figure dropped from above, wearing a duster and holding a pair of dueling canes. Wayne hit hard right beside Waxillium, grunting in pain, and the distinctive shimmer of a speed bubble popped up around them.

"Ouch," Wayne said, rolling over and stretching out his leg, letting it heal from fracturing.

"You didn't need to jump down so quickly," Waxillium said.

"Oh yeah? Look up, muffin-brains."

Waxillium glanced upward. While he'd been fighting the Pewterarm, the black-suited Coinshot had advanced. The man was landing in slow motion atop the crates, revolver in hand, a puff of smoke coming out as a bullet slowly left the barrel. That barrel was pointed right at Waxillium's head.

Waxillium shivered, then took a deliberate step to the side. "Thanks. And … muffin-brains?"

"Tryin' out better insults," Wayne said climbing to his feet. "You like the new duster?"

"Is *that* what took you so long? Please tell me you didn't go shopping while I was fighting for my life."

"Had to take out three gits what was guarding the entrance up above," Wayne said, spinning his dueling canes. "One of them had this fine garment upon his person." He hesitated. "I'm a little late 'cause I was trying to figure a way to beat him up without ruining the coat."

"Great."

"Had Marasi shoot 'im in the foot," Wayne said, grinning. "You ready to do this thing? I'll try to take our friend with the koloss blood there."

"Be careful," Waxillium said. "He's a Pewterarm."

"Charming. Y'always do introduce me to the most lovely of folks, Wax. Marasi's going to cover us from above, keep the gunmen pinned down. Can you handle the Coinshot?"

"If I can't, it's time to retire."

"Oh. Is that what we're calling 'getting shot' these days? I'll remember that. Ready?"

"Go."

Wayne dropped the speed bubble and rolled forward, surprising the

Pewterarm as he came around the boxes. The Coinshot's bullet hit the ground. Waxillium jumped for Vindication, which had fallen onto a nearby box after being knocked from his hand.

The Coinshot moved by reflex, jumping down and Pushing on the gun. Ranette was many things, but rich wasn't one of them—and so Vindication wasn't made of aluminum. The Coinshot's Push threw the gun right at Waxillium's head. He cursed, ducking, letting the gun pass above. He had other guns, of course, but they had only ordinary bullets.

Guessing the Coinshot was trying to slam the gun into the wall and break it, Waxillium Pushed upward with everything he had, sending the gun soaring up through the hole in the ceiling.

Waxillium followed it, dropping a round and launching himself after his weapon. The Coinshot tried to fire on him, but a well-placed shot from Marasi—she was using aluminum bullets herself—nearly took him in the head, causing him to duck away.

Waxillium passed into a wave of mist that was falling into the room like a waterfall. He burst into the dark, misty night sky and snatched Vindication from the air. He Pushed himself sideways off a lamppost as bullets zipped up after him, leaving trails in the mist.

He hit the building beside him and grabbed hold. Something dark soared out of the hole and into the air. The Coinshot. He was joined by a second man wearing black, also some kind of Allomancer, though the trajectory of his flight looked more like that of a Lurcher.

*Great.* Waxillium pointed his gun downward and drove an ordinary bullet into the ground, then Pushed down on it while decreasing his weight to drive himself into the sky. The other two followed in graceful leaps, and Waxillium rolled the cylinder of Vindication and locked it on to the special chamber.

*Goodbye,* he thought, firing right at the Coinshot's head.

By sheer chance, the man happened to Push himself to the side just at that moment. It hadn't been a deliberate dodge, just a lucky motion. The bullet streaked uselessly into the mists past the man, who raised his own gun and fired a pair of shots, one of which clipped the side of Waxillium's arm.

Waxillium cursed as his blood sprayed into the dark night, then Pushed himself off to the side to move erratically and avoid their fire. *Idiot!* he thought, angry. *Doesn't matter how good your bullets are if you don't aim carefully.*

He concentrated on staying ahead of the other two, jumping back and forth up the side of the enormous Ironspine Building. The Coinshot moved in graceful leaps after him, while the Lurcher was more direct, Pulling himself on the metal in the building's steel frame in bursts. He'd jump outward, then Pull himself upward and back toward the building, like a strange inverse rappeller.

Both saved their bullets, waiting for the right shot. Waxillium did the same, but for a different reason; he wasn't certain firing on them would do any good. He needed to load another hazekiller round. And, if possible, he needed to split up the two Allomancers so he could deal with them one at a time.

He worked his way upward, pushing off the steel beneath the stone in the ledges he landed upon. He soon ran into the same problem as the first time he'd climbed this building. It grew narrower at the top, and he could go only up and out, not in. This time, he didn't have his shotguns. He'd given those to Tillaume.

He did have that other hazekiller round, the one built to hit a Pewterarm especially hard. He hesitated—should he save it for the man below?

No. If he died now, he'd never have another chance to face the man below. Waxillium reached out, pulling the trigger and thrusting himself backward. It wasn't as powerful as the shotgun, but as light as he was, it did nudge him back toward the building.

The Coinshot blew right past him in the air, looking surprised. The man leveled his gun, but Waxillium fired first. An ordinary round—but the Coinshot was forced to Push against it to keep it away. Waxillium Pushed at the same time, and that shoved him to the building. The unfortunate Coinshot was launched out into the sky away from the tower.

*Good,* Waxillium thought. Now over a hundred feet in the air, he grabbed the facade. He fired down at the Lurcher, but the man was Pulling carefully. Waxillium's bullet arced and hit the plate on the Lurcher's chest.

Waxillium hesitated for a moment, then let go of the wall, balancing as he pulled his other revolver out of his second shoulder holster.

He emptied it, firing all six rounds in rapid succession. The Lurcher turned, angling his chest toward Waxillium, sparks flying as the bullets hit his breastplate. Luck wasn't with Waxillium—sometimes you could kill a Lurcher that way, as one of the bullets ricocheted toward his face or the plate at his chest got knocked free. Not this night.

Cursing, Waxillium threw himself out into the air and dropped past the man. The Lurcher jumped out into the air after him. They plunged through the mists.

Waxillium fired a shot downward to slow himself right before he hit the ground. He needed to get a shot at the Lurcher at just the right angle to—

A second shot cracked in the air, and the Lurcher screamed. Waxillium twisted, raising his gun, but the Lurcher hit the ground face-first, already bleeding.

Marasi popped up from a shrub next to him. “Oh! That looks like it hurt.” She winced, looking concerned for the man she’d just shot with an aluminum rifle round.

“Hurting is kind of the idea, Marasi.”

“Targets don’t scream.”

“Technically, he was a target too.” *And many thanks to Wayne for grabbing the wrong bullets back after the wedding dinner.* He hesitated. What was he forgetting?

The Coinshot.

Waxillium cursed, dropping the empty ordinary pistol and grabbing Marasi. He ducked into the opening as a spray of gunfire came from the mists, narrowly missing them. Waxillium carried her down into the room, landing softly.

The lower chamber was a scene of chaos. Men lay broken on the floor, some dead from the blast, others fallen to Waxillium’s shots. A large group of Vanishers had set up near the western tunnel, firing out at Wayne—who was in full form, burning through his bendalloy like a madman. He’d appear, draw fire, then vanish into a blur, and appear right next to where he’d been. He called insults as the bullets missed him, then moved again.

The gunmen kept trying to guess where he’d appear next, but that was a fruitless game. Wayne could slow time, see where the bullets were heading, then walk to a place where they wouldn’t hit. It took a great deal of luck and skill to hit a Slider who knew you were there.

Impressive as it was, though, it was a delaying tactic. With so many men firing on him, Wayne couldn’t risk moving any closer. He had to wait momentarily between creating speed bubbles, and if he was too close to the men, there was a good chance they’d be able to aim, shoot, and hit him in the seconds that he was exposed. The longer Wayne tried to dodge, the better the men shooting at him would get at judging the pauses. If he tried it too long, he’d get hit.

Waxillium took in the scene, then held out a hand to Marasi. “Dynamite.”

She handed him her stick.

“Find cover. Try and hit that Coinshot when he comes down for us.” Waxillium dashed into the room, firing without looking toward the group of men. They cried out, ducking for cover. Waxillium reached Wayne as a speed bubble went up.

“Thanks,” Wayne said. Streaks of sweat ran down the sides of his face, though he was grinning.

“The Pewterarm?” Waxillium asked.

“We fought to a standstill,” Wayne said. “Bastard is *fast.*”

Waxillium nodded. Pewter burners always gave Wayne trouble.

Wayne could heal far more quickly, but the Pewterarm's powers made him fast and strong. In a hand-to-hand fight, Wayne was at the disadvantage.

"He still has my lucky hat," Wayne noted, nodding to where the gray-skinned man stood behind the group of Vanishers, egging them on. "This latest group came from that tunnel. I think there are more down there. Don't know why Miles hasn't brought them in."

"Too many guns firing in a room this size gets more and more dangerous for his men," Waxillium said, looking about. "He'll want reserves, try to wear us down. Where is Miles, by the way?"

"Trying to flank me," Wayne said. "I think he's hiding to the side of the train car there."

Wayne and he stood in the center of the room, train car behind and to the left, boxes and crates behind and to the right, tunnel to the right.

Waxillium could reach the train car pretty easily. "Great," he said. "First plan to deal with Miles is still a go."

"I don't think it'll work."

"That's why we have a second plan. But let's hope this one does work. I'd rather not put Marasi in more danger." Waxillium held up the dynamite. There was no fuse—it was meant to be set off by pulling a detonator. "You go for those men. I've got Miles. Ready?"

"Yup."

Waxillium tossed the dynamite and Wayne dropped the speed bubble right before the dynamite hit the border. Any object—small ones particularly—that left a speed bubble was deflected slightly in an unpredictable way. That was why firing bullets out of one was practically useless.

The Vanishers looked up from their hiding places. The dynamite fell toward them. Waxillium leveled Vindication and fired the last bullet in the cylinder at the falling dynamite.

The explosion shook the room, loud enough to set Waxillium's ears ringing. He spun, ignoring that, to see Miles step out from beside the broken train car. Waxillium grabbed a handful of rounds and ran for the vault car, hastily ducking inside to find cover as he reloaded.

A figure darkened the doorway a moment later. "Hello, Wax," Miles said. He stepped up into the vault car.

"Hello, Miles." Taking a deep breath, Waxillium Pushed against the metal hooks above, which he'd affixed there to hold the nets in place. They sprang free, dropping the nets around Miles.

As Miles jerked about in surprise, Waxillium Pushed on the clasps at the bottom of the nets, shooting them out of the gaping hole where the door had been. That pulled the nets tight at the bottom and yanked Miles's feet out from under him.

Miles hit the floor of the railcar's interior, banging his head against the box that held the aluminum. That probably wouldn't even daze him, but the awkward fall *did* make him drop his gun. Waxillium leaped forward, grabbing it and pulling it out of the nets; then he stood, breathing quickly.

Miles thrashed at the nets. Despite his incredible healing powers, he wasn't any stronger than an ordinary man. The trick wasn't to kill him. It was just to incapacitate him. Waxillium stepped forward, only now finding a chance to bind the wound on his arm. It wasn't bad, but it was bleeding more than he'd have liked.

Miles looked up at him, growing calm. Then he reached into his pocket, got out his cigar case, and pulled a small, slender stick of dynamite from it.

Waxillium froze. He felt an awful moment of realization, followed by a jolt of terror.

*Aw, hell!* He threw himself past Miles and out of the railcar. The awkward leap left him spinning in the air. He had a brief glance of Miles yanking at the dynamite's blasting cap. The man was enveloped in a bright, powerful blast.

The explosion hurled Waxillium forward like a leaf before the wind. He smashed to the ground, and his vision flashed. He lost a few moments.

He came to, bloodied, dazed, rolling to a stop. His head swam. He was unable to move or even think, his heart thumping in his chest.

A figure stood up in the railcar. Waxillium's vision was too blurry to make out much, but he knew it was Miles. His clothing had been shredded, much of it blown off his body, but he was whole. He'd set off dynamite in his *hand* in order to free himself from the nets.

*Rust and Ruin …* Waxillium thought, coughing. How badly was he hurt? He rolled over, numb. That wasn't a good sign.

"Is there any doubt that I have been chosen for something great?" Miles bellowed. Waxillium could barely hear it; his ears were nearly useless after that blast. "Why else would I have this power, Waxillium? Why else would *we* be what we are? And yet, we let others rule. Let them make a mess of our world while we do nothing but chase petty criminals."

Miles hopped down from the train car, then strode forward, bare-chested, trousers hanging in rags. "I am tired of doing what the city tells me. I should be helping people, not fighting meaningless fights as prescribed by the corrupt and the uncaring."

He reached Waxillium, leaning down. "Can't you see? Can't you see what important work we could be doing? Can't you see that we're *meant* to be doing it, perhaps even ruling. It's almost like … like we, with the powers we have, are divine." He seemed to almost be begging for Waxillium to agree, to give him justification.

Waxillium just coughed.

“Bah,” Miles said, straightening up. He flexed a hand. “You don’t think I realize that the only way to stop me is to tie me up? A little explosion can serve a man so well, I’ve found. I keep the dynamite in the cigar cases. Few people look there. You should have questioned the criminals I caught back in the Roughs. A few of them tried capturing me with ropes.”

“I…” Waxillium coughed. His own voice sounded wrong in his ears. “I couldn’t have talked to any of the criminals you caught. You killed them all, Miles.”

“So I did,” Miles said. He grabbed Waxillium by the shoulder, hauling him to his feet. “I see you dropped my gun as you jumped out of the train. Wonderful.” He punched Waxillium in the stomach, causing him to exhale with a grunt. Then Miles let him fall to the ground, wandering over toward a gun lying nearby.

Dazed, but knowing he needed to get to cover, Waxillium somehow lurched to his feet. He Pushed against a piece of machinery and sent himself sailing across the room, where he landed beside the boxes. Those had been scattered in the blast, but they still provided some protection.

Coughing, bleeding, he crawled behind them. Then he collapsed.

* * *

Wayne spun between two Vanishers. He brought his dueling canes to the side, slamming them into the back of one of the men. He was rewarded with a satisfying *crack*. The man fell.

Wayne grinned, dropping his speed bubble. The other man who had been trapped in it with him spun about, trying to draw a bead on Wayne—but while sped up, he’d inadvertently moved into the path of several of his comrades who’d been firing.

The Vanisher fell to a spray of bullets. Wayne jumped back, erecting another bubble around just him and one confused Vanisher.

Everything outside slowed—bullets stilled in the air, shouts vanished, the waves diffusing as they hit the speed bubble. That did strange things to sound. Wayne spun about and knocked the gun out of the hands of the Vanisher behind him, then lunged forward and rammed the end of a cane into the man’s neck. The man gurgled in surprise; then Wayne smacked him on the side of the head, dropping him.

He stepped back, puffing and spinning one of his canes. His bendalloy was running low, so he ate another bit. His last. More worrisome were his metalminds, which were almost completely spent.

*Again.* He hated fighting that way. A single gunshot could end him. He was as fragile as … well, everyone else. It was most disturbing.

He stepped up to the perimeter of his speed bubble, wishing it would move with him. That Pewterarm was still wearing Wayne's lucky hat; the man had ducked behind cover when Wax had thrown the dynamite, and had only just emerged. He didn't appear to have been injured badly; a few scrapes to his face, the sort of thing a Pewterarm could ignore. Too bad. But at least the hat was doing all right.

The man had begun to charge toward Wayne, moving extremely slowly, yet noticeably faster than the other Vanishers. It was frustrating, but Wayne knew he had to stay away from the man. He'd never beaten a Pewterarm without a lot of health stored up. Better to keep jumping around, keeping the man confused until Marasi or Wax could shoot him a few times.

Wayne turned and scanned the area nearby, choosing where he should stand as he dropped the bubble. With so many bullets being fired, he didn't want to …

Was that *Wax*?

Wayne gaped, only now noticing Waxillium's bloodied form hurtling across the room, as if by a Steelpush. Wax was pointed toward a group of boxes on the northwestern side of the room, to Wayne's left. His suit had been shredded and burned along one side. Another explosion? Wayne thought he'd heard something, but jumping in and out of speed bubbles could really play havoc with sounds.

Wax needed him. Time to end this fighting, then. Wayne dropped the bubble and dashed forward. He counted to two, then put up another bubble and dodged right. He dropped it and kept running, bullets streaking through the air where he had been. To the eyes of those trying to track him, he'd have blurred and appeared immediately to the right of where he'd just been. He did it again, dodging back in another direction, then dropped the bubble.

Almost there. Another bubble up, and—

Something hit Wayne in the arm. He felt the blood before the pain, strangely enough. He cursed, stumbling, and threw up a bubble immediately.

He grabbed his arm. Warm blood squirted between his fingers, and in a panic, he tapped the last smidgen of healing in his metalmind. It wasn't enough to fix the gunshot wound; it barely slowed the bleeding. He turned, noticing another bullet about to hit his speed bubble. He jumped to the side just before it touched the perimeter, zipped through the air in a heartbeat, then hit the other side and slowed again, deflected erratically up toward the ceiling.

*Damn,* Wayne thought, tying an improvised bandage on his wounded arm. *Someone has very good aim.* He glanced about to find the black-suited Coinshot kneeling beside the wall, holding a familiar-looking rifle, sights on Wayne. The rifle was the one Ranette had given to Marasi. *Well, this is going to hell faster than bendalloy burns.*

He spent a moment of hesitation. Wax was down. But Marasi … what had happened to her? Wayne couldn't spot her anywhere, though the Coinshot had cover beside some machinery, and he had her gun. That spoke loads.

Wax would want him to go help the girl.

Gritting his teeth, Wayne turned and dashed toward the Coinshot.

* * *

Waxillium groaned, stretching against the pain and pulling the small two-shooter from his ankle holster. He'd dropped Vindication in the blast—Ranette was going to kill him for that—and he'd left his other gun up above when grabbing Marasi. He was down to this.

He unsuccessfully tried to cock the tiny pistol with a shaking hand. He didn't dare prod to feel the extent of his wounds. His leg and arm had been flayed.

Mist continued to flood down from the hole above. It had mostly enveloped this side of the room. With despair, Waxillium realized that his two-shooter had been damaged in the blast, and the hammer no longer cocked. Not that it would be of any use against Miles anyway.

He groaned again, leaning his head back against the floor. *I thought I asked for a little help.*

A voice returned to him, distinct and unexpected. *And a little is what you received, I think.*

Waxillium started. *Well … could I have some more, then? Um, please?*

*I must be careful in playing favorites,* the voice inside his mind replied. *It upsets the balance.*

*You're God. Isn't playing favorites kind of the point?*

*No,* the voice replied. *The point is Harmony, creating a way for as many as possible to make their own choices.*

Waxillium lay staring up at the swirling mists. The blast had dazed him worse than he'd thought.

*Are you divine,* the voice asked of him, *as Miles claims that Allomancers are?*

*I …* Waxillium thought. *If I were, I doubt I'd be in this much pain.*

*Then what are you?*

*This is a very bizarre conversation,* Waxillium thought back.

*Yes.*

*How can you see things like what has been done by the Vanishers,* Waxillium asked, *and not do something to help?*

*I* have *done something to help. I sent you.*

Waxillium breathed out, blowing the mists in front of him. What Miles had said bothered him: *Is there any doubt we've been given this for a reason?*

Waxillium gritted his teeth, then forced himself to stand. He felt better in the mists. The wounds didn't seem so bad. The pain didn't seem so sharp. But he was still unarmed. Still cornered. Still …

Suddenly he recognized the box right in front of him. It was his own trunk. The one he'd taken with him when first leaving for the Roughs, twenty years ago. The one—now battered and aged—he'd brought back with him to the City.

The one he'd filled with his guns on that night months ago. There was a tassel from a mistcoat hanging out of one side.

*You're welcome,* the voice whispered.

* * *

Marasi hid in the shadows behind the broken train car, anxious, her heart pounding. The Coinshot had come hunting her after what she'd done to his friend. With his Allomancy, he'd have been able to see her wherever she ran, despite the darkness and the mist, so she'd tucked the rifle behind a few boxes and hid elsewhere.

It felt cowardly, but it had worked. He'd shot a few times into the boxes, then walked around and picked up the gun, looking baffled. He'd obviously expected to find her bleeding and dead.

Instead, she was simply unarmed. She had to get to a weapon, had to do *something*. Wayne had been shot; he'd lured the Coinshot away, but he'd been dripping blood when she'd seen him.

The room was chaos, and it left her disoriented. Wayne had told her that the dynamite sticks they had were relatively small ones, but detonating them in close confines was still enormously, painfully loud. The gunshots were nearly so. The air smelled of smoke, and when gunshots weren't sounding, she could faintly hear men groaning and cursing and dying.

Before the Vanishers had appeared at the wedding dinner, she'd never been in any kind of fight. Now she didn't know what to do; she'd even lost track of which direction was which. The room was dark, lit only by flickering flames, and the mists made apparitions around her.

Some Vanishers were huddled together, guarding the mouth of the tunnel with the koloss-blooded man. She could barely make them out when she peered out of her hiding place. They held their guns leveled. She couldn't go that way.

A figure strode from the darkness nearby, and she barely held in a gasp. She recognized Miles Hundredlives from his description. Narrow face, short dark hair. He was stripped to the waist, exposing a powerful chest. His trousers were in tatters. He was counting the bullets in a revolver, and was the only one in the room who wasn't creeping or cowering. His legs kicked up mist, which now coated the floor.

He stopped by the Vanishers at the mouth of the tunnel and said something she couldn't hear. They ducked away, retreating down the passage. Miles didn't follow them, but strode through the room, getting closer to Marasi. She held her breath, hoping he'd pass closely enough to her hiding place for …

A rustle of cloth sounded, and the Coinshot dropped into place beside Miles. Miles stopped, raising an eyebrow.

"Pull is dead," the Coinshot said. Marasi could barely hear him, but she could tell that his voice was taut with anger. "I've been trying to end the short one. He keeps leading me on chases through the room."

"I believe I have said before," Miles said, voice loud and bold, "that Wayne and Waxillium are like rats. Chasing them is useless. You need to draw them to you."

Marasi leaned forward, breathing shallowly, as quietly as she could. Miles was almost close enough. A few more steps …

Miles snapped his revolver closed. "Waxillium crawled somewhere. I lost him, but he's wounded and unarmed." Then Miles turned and pointed the revolver directly at Marasi's hiding place. "Call for him if you would, Lady Marasi."

She froze, feeling a sharp stab of horror. Miles's face was calm. Icy. Emotionless. He would kill her without a second thought.

"Call for him," Miles said more firmly. "Scream."

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She could only stare at that gun. Her training in the university told her to do as he ordered, then run the moment he turned away. But she couldn't move.

The mist-shrouded shadows at the corner of the room began to shift. She ripped her gaze away from Miles. Something dark moved in the mists. A man, standing up tall.

The mists seemed to draw back. Waxillium stood there, wearing a large, dusterlike coat, cut into strips below the waist. A pair of revolvers gleamed in holsters at his hips, and he rested a shotgun on each shoulder. His face was bloodied, but he was smiling.

Without saying a word, he lowered the shotguns and blasted Miles in the side.

# 19

Shooting Miles was, of course, useless. The man could survive a dynamite explosion at close range. He could take a few shotgun blasts.

But the shots caused the Coinshot to Push himself away in alarm. They also left Miles sprayed with metal. Wax increased his weight and Pushed, though he found it hard to get a purchase on the birdshot. Any metal that pierced a person’s body or touched his blood was very difficult to affect with Allomancy.

Fortunately, Miles’s body obliged him by healing itself and spitting out the birdshot. In the instant before it could drop to the floor, Wax’s Push suddenly found anchors, and he threw Miles across the room and into the wall.

The Coinshot landed on the other side of the room. Waxillium dashed forward, mistcoat flapping. Damn, but it felt good to be wearing one of those again. He skidded to a stop beside Marasi, taking cover next to the railcar.

“I almost had him,” Marasi said.

“Waxillium!” Miles bellowed, his voice echoing in the room. “All you do is stall. Well, know *this*. My men have gone to kill the woman you came here to save. If you want her to live, give yourself to me. We —”

His voice cut off strangely. Wax frowned as something moved behind Marasi. She jumped, and Wax pointed a shotgun, but it turned out to be Wayne.

“Hey,” he said, puffing. “Nice gun.”

“Thanks,” Wax said, shouldering it, noting the speed bubble around them. That was what had stopped Miles’s voice. “Your arm?”

Wayne glanced down at the bloody bandage around his left arm. “Not so good. I’m outta healing, lost some blood. I’m slowing, Wax. Slowing too much. You look pretty beat-up yourself.”

“I’ll survive.” Wax’s leg was throbbing, his face scraped up, but he felt surprisingly good. He always felt that way, in the mists.

“The things he’s saying,” Marasi said. “You think he’s telling the truth?”

“He might be, Wax,” Wayne said urgently. “The blokes who was set up in front of the tunnel, they charged off a few shakes back. Looked like they had something important to do."

"Miles *did* tell them something," Marasi added.

"Damn," Wax said, glancing around the corner of the railcar. Miles might be bluffing … but then again, he might not be. It wasn't a chance Wax could take. "That Coinshot is going to make things difficult. We need to take him down."

"What happened to Ranette's fancy gun?" Wayne asked.

"Not sure," Wax said with a grimace.

"Wow. She's gonna rip out your insides, mate."

"I'll be sure to blame you for it," Wax said, still watching the Coinshot. "He's good. Dangerous. We'll never take out Miles unless that Allomancer is dead."

"But you've got those special bullets," Marasi noted.

"One," Wax said, slipping a shotgun into its holster inside his coat. He pulled out the other Coinshot round. "I don't think an ordinary revolver will fire this. I…"

He trailed off, then looked at Marasi. She was raising an eyebrow at him.

"Right," Wax said. "Can you two keep Miles busy?"

"No problem," Wayne said.

"Let's go, then," Wax said, taking a deep breath. "One last try."

Wayne met his eyes and nodded. Wax saw tension in his friend's face. The two of them were battered and bloodied, low on metals, metalminds drained.

But they'd been here before. And this was when they tended to shine their brightest.

As the speed bubble fell, Wax ran out from behind the train car. He tossed the bullet into the air ahead of him, then Pushed on it with a quick snap of power. The Coinshot raised his hand with casual confidence, Pushing it right back at Wax.

The casing and bullet proper broke free and flipped toward Wax, who deflected them easily, but the ceramic tip continued forward. It took the Coinshot right in the eye.

*Bless you, Ranette,* Wax thought, leaping up and Pushing off the coins in a fallen Vanisher's pocket. That launched him forward, into the tunnel. There were tracks on the ground here, as if this were built for a train.

Wax frowned in puzzlement, but Pushed on them, heedlessly hurling himself through the darkness until he reached a set of stairs leading upward. The ceiling here was wood; a structure of some sort had been built over the tunnel. He charged into the stairwell, which led up to the wooden building, perhaps a barrack or dormitory.

Wax smiled, the pain of his wounds retreating further as he grew more energetic. He heard footsteps on the wooden floor at the top of the stairwell. They were ready for him. It was a trap, of course.

He found that he didn't care. He unslung both shotguns, then Pushed on the nails in the steps and blasted up the stairwell. He passed the first floor and continued on toward the second—he'd rather check up first, then down. If Steris was being held here, she'd probably be up at the top.

*Now we're burning,* Wax thought, metal flaring, energy rising. He threw his shoulder against the door at the top of the stairs, breaking out into a second-floor hallway. Feet stomped up the steps behind him and men burst out of rooms nearby, fully armed, wearing no metal.

Wax smiled, raising his shotguns. *All right. Let's do this.*

Wax Pushed hard against the nails in the boards under the feet of the men leveling aluminum guns at him. Planks ripped free by their nails, making the floor tremble, throwing off the Vanishers' aim. He dodged right, rolling out of the hallway and into a room to its side. He came up and spun, leveling both shotguns back at the doorway.

Vanishers from the stairwell piled into the hallway after him, and his arms jerked as he fired twin shotgun blasts. He *Pushed,* slamming the men back and sending himself crashing out the window. This building was more an old warehousing shed; there was no glass in the windows, just shutters.

Wax blasted out into open air. There was a lamppost on the dark street, a little bit to his left. He Pushed on that while at the same time dropping his weight to nearly nothing. The Push sent him back against the outside of the building; he landed and half ran, half leaped parallel to the ground along the wall.

Reaching the next room over from where he'd been, he Pushed on another lamppost and crashed through the window feet-first, splinters spraying around him. He landed and came up in the building, then turned toward the wall between him and the room he'd just left.

He holstered the shotguns and grabbed his revolvers, pulling them out in a cross-armed motion. They were Ranette-made Sterrions, among the best guns he'd ever owned. He raised them and increased his weight, then Pushed hard on the nails in the wall before him.

The cheap wood exploded away, the wall disintegrating into a spray of splinters and planks, nails becoming as deadly as bullets as they ripped into the men in the next room. Wax fired, dropping any that the nails had missed in a storm of splinters, steel, and lead.

A click to his left. Wax spun as a doorknob turned. He didn't wait to see who was beyond. He Pushed on the doorknob, ripping it out of its frame and through the door, into the chest of the Vanisher trying to get in. The door slammed open, and the unfortunate man crashed through the wall of the hallway—there were no rooms on the other side, just the wall of the narrow building—propelled out into the misty night.

Wax holstered the Sterrions, barrels smoking, chambers empty. He pulled out the shotguns, rolling into the hallway and coming up in a crouch. He raised a shotgun in each direction. A few straggling Vanishers climbed up the stairs to his right; another group were leveling weapons to his left.

He Pushed on the twin metal levers on the sides of his shotguns, cocking them with Allomancy. The spent casings flipped out into the air above the guns, and Waxillium fired while Pushing, driving birdshot and spent casings into the waiting Vanishers on either side.

The floor next to Waxillium exploded.

He cursed, throwing himself to the left as gunfire from below blasted chips of wood into the air. They were getting smart, firing at him from underneath. He turned and ran, firing shotgun blasts down through the floor, mists creeping in through the broken walls.

There had to be another dozen Vanishers below. Too many to fire at without being able to see them. A bullet grazed his thigh. He turned and ducked away, leaping over the bodies of the fallen and dashing down the hallway. Bullets chased him, the floor splintering, men calling below as they fired everything they had up at him.

He hit the door at the end of the hallway. It was locked. A healthy dose of increased weight—along with some momentum and a shoulder—fixed that. He crashed through and found himself in a small windowless room with no other doors.

A short, balding man cowered in one corner. A woman with golden hair and a rumpled ball gown sat on a bench at the back of the room, her eyes red, her face haggard. Steris. She looked utterly dumbfounded as Wax spun through the broken doorway, mistcoat tassels flaring around him. He Pushed on some of the nails in the floor back in the hall, causing the boards there to ripple, drawing much of the gunfire.

“Lord *Waxillium*?” Steris said, shocked.

“Most of me,” he said, wincing. “I may have left a toe or two in that hallway.” He glanced at the man in the corner. “Who are you?”

“Nouxil.”

“The gunsmith,” Wax said, tossing him a shotgun.

“I’m not actually a very good shot,” the man said, looking terrified. A few bullets blasted up through the floor between them. The Vanishers had realized they’d been tricked. They knew what he was looking for.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re a good shot,” Wax said, raising his empty hand to the back wall and breaking it open with an increased-weight Push. “It matters if you can swim or not.”

“What? Of course I can. But why—”

"Hang on tightly," Wax said as more gunshots erupted around him. He Pushed on the shotgun in the gunsmith's hands, flinging him out the opening, throwing him some thirty feet in an arc toward the canal outside.

Wax spun, grabbing Steris as she stood up. "The other girls?" he asked.

"I haven't seen any other captives," she said. "The Vanishers implied they were sent somewhere."

*Blast,* he thought. Well, he was lucky to find even Steris. He Pushed lightly off the nails in the floor, propelling the two of them toward the ceiling. As they approached, he took advantage of the fact that it didn't matter how heavy an object was when it came to falling. All objects fell at the same rate. That meant that increasing his weight manyfold would not affect his motion.

Raising his shotgun, he shot a concentrated blast of pellets into the ceiling. Then he Pushed on them sharply, his increased weight meaning the Push didn't really move him much—just as when he was lighter, a Push affected him greatly.

The result was that he continued his momentum upward—but his Push blasted a hole in the ceiling. He made himself incredibly light and Pushed more strongly off the nails below. The two of them shot up through the hole he'd made, propelled some forty or fifty feet into the air. He spun in the night, mistcoat tassels splaying outward, smoking shotgun clutched tightly in one arm, Steris in the other. Bullets from below left streaks in the mist as it swirled around them.

Steris gasped, clinging to him. Wax drew every bit of weight he had left, draining his metalminds completely. That was hundreds upon hundreds of hours of weight, enough to make him crush paving stones if he tried to walk on them. In the strange way of Feruchemy, he didn't grow more dense—bullets would still cut through him easily if they hit. But with this incredible conflux of weight, his ability to Push grew incredible.

He used that weight to Push downward with everything he had. There were numerous lines of metal below. Nails. Doorknobs. Guns. Personal effects.

The building trembled, then undulated, then *ripped apart* as every nail in its frame was driven downward as if propelled by a rotary gun. There was an enormous crash. The building was crushed down into the railroad tunnel on top of which it had been built.

The weight was gone from him in an instant, compounded upon itself in that moment, his metalminds drained all at once. Wax let gravity take him, and he dropped through the mists, Steris clinging to him. They landed in the middle of the wreckage at the bottom of the railroad tunnel. Smashed lumber and fragments of furniture were strewn across the floor.

Three Vanishers stood in the mouth of the tunnel, openmouthed. Wax raised the shotgun and cocked it with Allomancy, then laid into them with shotgun blasts. They were the only ones that had still been standing. Everyone else had been crushed down into the tunnel.

A small fire flickered in the corner where a lantern had fallen. By its light, he checked on Steris, the mists pouring down around them and filling the tunnel.

"Oh *Survivor of Mists*!" Steris breathed, cheeks flushed, eyes wide, lips parted as she held to him. She didn't look terrified. If anything, she seemed aroused.

*You are a bizarre woman, Steris,* Wax thought.

"Do you realize that you have missed your calling, Waxillium?" a voice yelled from within the blackened tunnel. It was Miles. "You are an army unto yourself. You are *wasted* in the life you've taken upon yourself."

"Take this," Wax said softly to Steris, handing her the shotgun. He cocked it. One shell left. "Hold it tightly. I want you to run for the precinct station. It's at Fifteenth and Ruman. If one of the Vanishers comes for you, fire the shotgun."

"But—"

"I don't expect you to hit him," Wax said. "I'll listen for the sound of the shot."

She tried to comment further, but Wax ducked down to get his center of mass beneath her, then carefully Pushed the shotgun up into her middle. He used it to launch her up and out of the pit. She landed awkwardly, but safely, and hesitated only a moment before running off into the mists.

Wax scrambled to the side, making sure he wasn't backlit by the fire. He pulled a Sterrion from its holster and fished out some rounds. He reloaded as he crouched down.

"Waxillium?" Miles called from deep inside the tunnel. "If you're done playing, perhaps you'd like to come settle things."

Wax crept up to the tunnel mouth, then stepped inside. The mists had filled it, making it difficult to see—which would work equally against Miles. He made his way forward cautiously until he saw the light from the big workshop at the end, where fires still burned.

By that light, he could faintly make out the silhouette of a figure standing in the tunnel, holding a gun to the head of a slender woman. Marasi.

Waxillium froze, pulse accelerating. But no, this was part of the plan. It was perfect. Except …

"I know you're in there," Miles's voice said. Another figure moved, tossing a few improvised torches into the darkness.

With a freezing sense of horror, Waxillium realized that Miles wasn't the one holding Marasi. He stood too far back. The man holding Marasi was the one named Tarson, the koloss-blooded Pewterarm.

Her face illuminated by wavering torchlight, Marasi looked terrified. Waxillium's fingers felt slick on the revolver's grip. The Pewterarm was careful to keep Marasi between himself and Waxillium's side of the tunnel, gun to the back of her head. He was squat and tough, but not very tall. He was only in his twenties—like all koloss-blooded, he'd continue growing taller throughout his life.

Either way, at the moment, Waxillium couldn't get a bead on him. *Oh, Harmony,* he thought. *It's happening again.*

Something rustled in the darkness nearby. He jumped and nearly shot it until he caught the outline of Wayne's face.

"Sorry about this," Wayne whispered. "When she got grabbed, I thought it was Miles. And so I—"

"It's all right," Waxillium said softly.

"What do we do?" Wayne asked.

"I don't know."

"You always know."

Waxillium was silent.

"I can hear you whispering!" Miles called. He walked forward and tossed another torch.

*Just a few steps more,* Waxillium thought.

Miles stopped where he was, eyeing the creeping mists with what seemed like distrust. Marasi whimpered. Then she tried jerking, the way she had back at the wedding dinner.

"None of that," Tarson said, holding her carefully. He fired a shot right in front of her face, then brought the gun back to her head. She froze.

Waxillium raised his revolver.

*I can't do this. I can't watch another one die. Not by my hand.*

"All right," Miles called. "Fine. You want to test me, Wax? I'm counting to three. If I reach three, Tarson shoots, no other warnings. One."

*He'll do it,* Waxillium realized, feeling helpless, guilty, overwhelmed. *He really will.* Miles didn't need a hostage. If threatening her wouldn't bring Waxillium out, then he wouldn't bother with her.

"Two."

Blood on the bricks. A smiling face.

"Wax?" Wayne whispered, sounding urgent.

*Oh, Harmony, if I've ever needed you …*

Mist curled around his legs.

"Th—"

"Wayne!" Waxillium yelled, standing.

The speed bubble went up. Tarson would fire in mere moments. Miles behind him, pointing angrily. Torchfire frozen. It was like watching an explosion in slow motion again. Waxillium raised his Sterrion, and found his arm incredibly still.

It had been still on the day he'd shot Lessie, too.

He'd shot her with this very gun.

Sweating, trying to banish the images from his head, he tried to find a clear shot at Tarson. There wasn't one. Oh, he could hit Tarson, but not anywhere that would drop him immediately. And if Waxillium didn't hit just right, the man would shoot Marasi by reflex.

The head was the best way to drop a Pewterarm. Only, Waxillium couldn't *see* the head. Could he shoot the gun? Marasi's face was in the way. The knees? He might be able to hit a knee. No. A Pewterarm would ignore most hits—if the damage wasn't immediately lethal, he'd stay up, and he'd shoot.

It *had* to be the head.

Waxillium held his breath. *This is the most accurate gun I've ever fired,* he thought. *I can't sit here, frozen. I have to act.*

*I have to do something.*

Sweat dripped off his chin. He raised his hand with a quick motion in front of him, then pointed the Sterrion to the side, off center from Marasi or Tarson. Wax fired.

The bullet shot out of the bubble in an instant, then hit slower time. It deflected, as bullets always did when fired from within a speed bubble. He watched it go, judging its new trajectory. It moved forward sluggishly, spinning as it cut through the air.

Wax took careful aim, waited several excruciating moments. Then he readied his steel.

"Drop it on my mark," he whispered.

Wayne nodded.

*"Go."*

Wax fired and Pushed.

The speed bubble fell.

"—ee!" Miles called.

A small shower of sparks exploded in the air as Wax's second bullet, propelled with incredible speed by his Steelpush, clipped the other one in midair and deflected it to the side: behind Marasi, into Tarson's head.

The Pewterarm dropped immediately, gun slapping to the ground, eyes staring dully upward. Miles gaped. Marasi blinked, then turned about, raising her arms to her chest.

"Aw, biscuits," Wayne said. "Did you *have* to hit him in the head? That was my lucky hat he was wearin'."

Miles recovered his wits and raised his revolver toward Wax. Wax turned and fired first, hitting Miles's hand, dropping his gun to the ground. Wax shot it, knocking it backward into the other room.

"Stop *doing* that!" Miles screamed. "You bast—"

Wax shot him in the mouth, driving him backward a step, throwing out chips of tooth. Miles still wore only the tattered remnants of his trousers.

"Somebody shoulda done that ages ago," Wayne muttered.

"It won't last," Wax said, plugging Miles in the face again to try to keep him disoriented. "Time for you to be off, Wayne. Backup plan is still a go."

"You sure you got them all, mate?"

"Tarson was the last." *And I'd better not be wrong.…*

"Grab my hat if you get the chance," Wayne said, scrambling away as Wax shot Miles in the face again. This hit barely bothered him, and the half-naked man lurched forward. Toward Marasi. Miles was unarmed, but there was murder in his eyes.

Wax dashed forward, throwing the empty gun at Miles, then fishing out a handful of bullets. He Pushed them toward the former lawman. One sliced him in the arm, one cut through his gut and came out the other side, but none lodged in a way that Wax could push them to shove Miles back.

Wax hit Miles just before he reached Marasi. The two went down in a heap on the dirty ground, under the mists rolling across the floor.

Wax grabbed Miles by the shoulder and started punching. *Just … keep … him busy …*

Miles showed a flash of amusement through the annoyance. He took a few of the punches, Wax's fist growing sore in the process. Wax could punch until his knuckles broke and his hand was reduced to a bloody mess, and Miles would be no worse for the wear.

"I knew you'd go for the girl," Wax said, holding Miles's attention. "You talk grandly about justice, but in the end, you're just a petty criminal."

Miles snorted, then kicked Wax free. Pain flared in Wax's chest as he was thrown back into a muddy portion of the tunnel, cold water splashing around him, soaking his mistcoat.

Miles stood up, wiping some blood off his lip where it had split, then healed. "You know the *really* sad thing, Wax? I understand you. I've felt like you, I've thought like you. But there was always that distant, rumbling dissatisfaction within. Like a storm on the horizon."

Wax got to his feet and rammed a fist into Miles's kidney. It didn't even get a grunt. Miles grabbed him by the arm, twisting it, causing his shoulder to flare with pain. Wax gasped, and Miles kicked the back of his knee, sending him to the ground again.

As Wax tried to roll over, Miles grabbed him by the front of his shirt and hauled him up, then laid into him with a fist to the face. Marasi gasped, though she had been told to stay back. She did her part.

The punch slammed Wax down to the ground, and he tasted blood. Rust and Ruin … he'd be lucky if his jaw wasn't broken. He also felt like he'd ripped something in his shoulder.

His wounds suddenly seemed to crash down upon him. He didn't know if it was the mists, some action of Harmony, or simple adrenaline that had helped him ignore them for a time. But he hadn't been healed. His side screamed from where he'd been shot, and his leg and arm had been burned and scraped raw by the explosion. He'd been clipped by bullets in the thigh and the arm. And now, Miles's beating.

It overwhelmed him, and he groaned, slumping down, struggling to merely remain conscious. Miles pulled him up again, and Wax managed to get in one thrashing swing that connected. And did nothing. It was very, very difficult to brawl with a man who didn't flinch when you hit him.

Another punch sent Wax to the ground again, head ringing, eyes seeing stars and flashes of light.

Miles leaned down, speaking in his ear. "Thing is, Waxillium, I know you feel it too. A part of you knows that you're being used, that nobody cares about the downtrodden. You're just a puppet. People are murdered every day this city. At least one a day. Did you know that?"

"I…" *Keep him talking.* He rolled onto his back, aching, meeting Miles's eyes.

"People murdered every day," Miles repeated, "and what was it that brought you out of your 'retirement'? When I shot an old, would-be aristocratic wolfhound in the head. Did you ever stop to think of all the other people being killed in the streets? The beggars, the whores, the orphans? Dead because of lack of food, or because they were in the wrong place, or because they tried something stupid."

"You're trying to invoke the Survivor's mandate," Wax whispered. "But it won't work, Miles. This isn't the Final Empire of legend. A rich man can't kill a poor one just because he feels like it. We've gotten better than that."

"Bah!" Miles said. "They pretend and lie to make a good show."

"No," Waxillium said. "They have good intentions, and make laws that prevent the worst of it—but those laws still fall short. It's not the same thing."

Miles kicked him in the side to keep him down. "I don't care about the Survivor's mandate. I've found something better. That doesn't matter to you. You're just a sword, a tool that goes where it's pointed. It rips you apart that you can't stop the things that you know you should. Doesn't it?"

They met eyes. And, shockingly—despite the agony—Waxillium found himself nodding. Truthfully nodding. He did feel it. That was why what had happened to Miles terrified him.

"Well, someone has to do something about it," Miles said.

*Harmony,* Waxillium thought. *If Miles had been born back then, in the days before, he'd have been a hero.* "I'll start helping them, Miles," Waxillium said. "I promise it to you."

Miles shook his head. "You won't live that long, Wax. Sorry." He kicked again. And again. And again.

Waxillium curled around himself, hands over his face. He couldn't fight. He just had to last. But the pain was mounting. It was *terrible.*

"Stop it!" Marasi's voice. "Stop it, you monster!"

The kicks stopped falling. Waxillium felt her beside him, kneeling, hand on his shoulder.

*Fool woman. Stay back. Unnoticed. That was the plan.*

Miles cracked his knuckles audibly. "I suppose I should deliver you to Suit, girl. You're on his list, and you can replace the one Waxillium set free. I'll probably have to track her down."

"Why is it," Marasi said angrily, "that small-minded men must destroy that which they know is better, and greater, than they?"

"Better than me?" Miles said. "This? He isn't great, child."

"The greatest of men can be taken down by the simplest of things. A lowly bullet can end the life of the most powerful, most capable, most secure of men."

"Not me," Miles said. "Bullets are nothing to me."

"No," she replied. "You'll be brought down by something even more lowly."

"Which is?" he asked, amused, voice growing closer.

"Me," Marasi replied.

Miles laughed. "I'd like to see…" He trailed off.

Waxillium cracked his eyes, looking down the length of the tunnel toward the broken ceiling where the building had stood. Light flooded that pit from above, growing brighter at a remarkable rate.

"Who have you brought?" Miles asked, sounding unimpressed. "They won't arrive quickly enough." He paused. Waxillium rolled his head to the side and saw the sudden horror in Miles's face. He had seen it, finally: a shimmering border nearby, a slight difference in the air. Like the distortion caused by heat rising from a hot street.

A speed bubble.

Miles spun on Marasi. Then he ran for the bubble's border, away from the light. Trying to escape.

The light at the other end of the tunnel became bright, and a group of blurs moved down it, so quickly it was impossible to distinguish what was causing them.

Marasi dropped her bubble. The sunlight of full day streamed in from the distant pit, and filling the tunnel—right outside where the bubble had been—was a force of over a hundred constables in uniform. Wayne stood at their head, grinning, wearing a constable’s uniform and hat, a false mustache on his face.

“Get ’im, boys!” he said, pointing.

They moved in with clubs, not bothering with guns. Miles screamed in denial, trying to dodge past the first few, then punching at the group that laid hands on him. He wasn’t fast enough, and there were far too many of them. In minutes, they had him held down against the ground and were wrapping ropes around his arms.

Waxillium sat up with care, one eye swelling closed, lip bleeding, side aching. Marasi knelt beside him, anxious.

“You shouldn’t have confronted him,” Waxillium said, tasting blood. “If he’d knocked you out, that would have been the end of it.”

“Oh, hush,” she said. “You aren’t the only one who can take risks.”

The backup plan had been straightforward, if difficult. It had begun with eliminating all of Miles’s lackeys. Even one of them, left alive, could have noticed what the speed bubble meant and shot Waxillium and Marasi from the outside. There wouldn’t have been anything they could have done to prevent it.

But if the lackeys were gone, and if Miles could be distracted long enough while the bubble was up, Wayne could go to gather a large force to surround Miles while he was helpless. He’d never have let it happen if he’d suspected. But within the speed bubble …

“No!” Miles screamed. “Unhand me. I defy your oppression!”

“You are a fool,” Waxillium said to him, then spat blood to the side. “You let yourself get isolated and distracted, Miles. You forgot the first rule of the Roughs.”

Miles screamed, one of the constables pulling a gag over his mouth as he was tied tightly.

“The more alone you are,” Waxillium said softly, “the more important it is to have someone you can rely upon.”

# 20

“The constable-general has decided not to charge your associate for impersonating an officer of the law,” Reddi said.

Waxillium dabbed at his lip with the handkerchief. He sat in the precinct office nearest the Vanisher lair. He felt like slag, with broken ribs and half his body wrapped in bandages. He’d have scars from this.

“The constable-general,” Marasi said, voice hard, “should be *glad* for Lord Waxillium’s aid—in fact, he should have begged for Lord Waxillium’s help all along.” She sat beside him on the bench, hovering protectively.

“He actually *does* seem glad,” Reddi said. Now that Waxillium paid closer attention, he noticed how the constable kept glancing through the precinct room toward Brettin, the constable-general. Reddi’s eyes narrowed slightly, lips turning down. He was baffled by his superior’s calm reaction to events.

Waxillium was too exhausted at the moment to bother with the anomaly. In fact, it was nice to hear of something happening in his favor.

Reddi was called over by one of the other constables, and he left. Marasi laid a hand on Waxillium’s good arm. He could practically *feel* her concern for him physically in the way she hesitated, the way her brow wrinkled.

“You did well,” Waxillium said. “Miles was your catch, Lady Marasi.”

“I’m not the one who had to be beaten bloody.”

“Wounds heal,” Waxillium said, “even on an old horse like me. Watching him attack me and doing nothing … I’ll bet that was excruciating. I don’t think I could have stood it, if our places had been reversed.”

“You’d have done it. You’re like that. You’re every bit the man I thought you might be, yet somehow more *real* at the same time.” She looked at him, eyes wide, lips pursed. As if she wanted to say more. He could read her intent in those eyes.

“This isn’t going to work, Lady Marasi,” he said gently. “I’m thankful for your aid. Very thankful. But the thing you wish between us is not viable. I’m sorry.”

Not unexpectedly, she blushed. “Of course. I wasn’t implying such a thing.” She forced a laugh. “Why would you think—I mean, it’s silly!”

“I apologize, then,” he said. Though, of course, they both knew what the exchange had meant. He felt a deep regret. *If I were ten years younger …*

It wasn’t the age per se. It was what those years had done to him. When you watched a woman you loved die by your own gunshot, when you saw an old colleague and respected lawkeeper turn bad, it did things to you. Ripped you up inside. And *those* wounds, they didn’t heal nearly as easily as the bodily ones.

This woman was young, full of life. She didn’t deserve someone who was basically all scars wrapped up in a thick skin of sun-dried leather.

Eventually, Constable-General Brettin walked over to them. He was as stiff-backed as before, constable’s hat carried under his arm. “Lord Waxillium,” he said in a monotone.

“Constable-General.”

“For your efforts today, I have requested that the Senate give you a citywide deputized forbearance.”

Waxillium blinked in surprise.

“If you are not aware,” Brettin continued, “this would give you powers of investigation and arrest, as if you were a member of the constabulary, sufficient to authorize actions such as those of last night.”

“That is … very considerate of you,” Waxillium said.

“It is one of the only ways to excuse your actions without drawing embarrassment down upon the precinct. I have backdated the request, and if we are in luck, nobody will realize you were working alone this past night. Also, I do not wish for you to feel that you *need* to work alone. This city could use your expertise.”

“With all due respect, sir,” Waxillium said, “that’s quite a change from your previous stance.”

“I have had occasion to change my mind,” Brettin said. “You should know that I will soon be retiring. A new constable-general will be appointed in my position, but he will be required to accept the Senate’s mandate regarding you, should this motion be accepted.”

“I…” Waxillium was uncertain how to reply. “Thank you.”

“It’s for the good of the City. Of course, note that if you abuse this privilege, it will undoubtedly be revoked.” Brettin nodded awkwardly and withdrew.

Waxillium scratched at his chin, watching the man. Something decidedly odd was going on there. He was almost like a different person. Wayne passed him, tipping his lucky hat—which was bloodied on one side—and grinning as he approached Waxillium and Marasi.

“Here,” Wayne said, covertly handing something wrapped in a handkerchief to Waxillium. It was unexpectedly heavy. “Got you another of those guns.”

Waxillium sighed.

“Don’t worry,” Wayne said, “I traded a real nice scarf for it.”

“And where did you get the scarf?”

“Off one of the dead blokes you shot,” Wayne said. “So it wasn’t stealin’. He ain’t gonna need it, after all.” He seemed quite proud of himself.

Waxillium tucked the gun into his empty holster. The other holster held Vindication. Marasi had searched through the hideout after Miles was taken and had recovered it for him. That was good. It would have been sad to survive this night, only to have Ranette kill him.

“So,” Marasi said, “you traded a dead man’s scarf for another dead man’s gun. But … the gun itself belonged to someone dead, so by the same logic—”

“Don’t try,” Waxillium said. “Logic doesn’t work on Wayne.”

“I bought a ward against it off a traveling fortune-teller,” Wayne explained. “It lets me add two ’n’ two and get a pickle.”

“I … have no response to that,” Marasi said.

“Technically that *was* a response,” Wayne said.

“Looks like they fished that gunsmith outta the canal for you, Wax, and he’s alive. Not real happy, but alive.”

“Has anyone found anything regarding the other women who were kidnapped?” Waxillium asked.

Wayne glanced at Marasi, who shook her head. “Nothing. Maybe Miles will know where they are.”

*If he’ll talk,* Waxillium thought. Miles had stopped feeling pain long ago. Waxillium wasn’t certain how anyone would go about interrogating him.

Waxillium felt that by not rescuing the other women, he had failed in large measure. He’d vowed to get Steris back, and he had. But a greater evil had been done.

He sighed as the door to the captain’s office opened, and Steris stepped out. A pair of senior constables had taken her statement, after taking that of Waxillium and Wayne. The two constables waved for Marasi next, and she went, glancing over her shoulder at Waxillium. He’d told her to be frank and straightforward with them, and to not hide anything he or Wayne had done. Though, if she could, she was to obscure Ranette’s role.

Wayne wandered over to where some constables were eating morning sandwiches. They regarded him with suspicion, but—by experience—Waxillium knew that Wayne would soon have them laughing and asking him to join them. *Does he even understand what he does?* Waxillium wondered as Wayne launched into an explanation of the fight for the constables. *Or does he just do it all by instinct?*

Waxillium watched for a moment before realizing that Steris had approached him. She sat down in the chair directly across from him, maintaining good posture. She had fixed her hair, and while her dress was rumpled from her day of captivity, she looked relatively composed.

"Lord Waxillium," she said. "I find it necessary to offer you my thanks."

"I hope the necessity isn't too onerous," Waxillium said with a grunt.

"Only in that it comes … is required … after an onerous captivity. You should know that I was not touched indecently by my captors. I remain pure."

"Rust and *Ruin,* Steris! I'm glad, but I didn't need to know that."

"You did," she said, face impassive. "Assuming you still wish to proceed with our nuptials."

"It wouldn't matter either way. Besides, I thought we weren't to that point yet. We haven't even announced that we are seeing one another."

"Yes, though I believe we can now amend our previous timetable. You see, a dramatic rescue such as you have effected will be expected to create an outpouring of my emotions. What once might have been a scandal will instead be viewed as romantic. We could plausibly announce an engagement next week and have it be accepted in high society without concern or comment."

"That's good, I suppose."

"Yes. Shall I proceed with our contract, then?"

"You don't mind that I've returned to the miscreant ways of my past?"

"I rather think that I would soon be *dead* if you had not," Steris said. "I am not in a position to complain."

"I intend to continue," Waxillium warned. "Not every day, patrolling a beat or anything like that. But I've received a forbearance—and an offer—to be involved in constabulary business in the city. I plan to take on the occasional problem that needs extra attention."

"Every gentleman needs a hobby," she said evenly. "And, considering the self-indulgences of some men I've known, this wouldn't be problematic by comparison." She leaned forward. "In short, my lord, I see you for what you are. The two of us, we are beyond the points in our lives where expecting the other to change would be realistic. I will accept this about you if you will accept me. I am not without my faults, as my previous three suitors chose to explain to me—at length—in written communication."

"I hadn't realized."

“It is not an issue worthy of your attention, really,” she said. “Though I did think that you’d have realized I did not come to this potential union without—no offense—a measure of desperation.”

“I understand.”

Steris hesitated; then a bit of her coldness seemed to depart. Some of her control, her steely will, fell away. She looked tired, suddenly. Worn. Though behind that mask, he saw something that might have been affection for him. She clasped her hands before her. “I am not … good with people, Lord Waxillium. I realize it. I must stress, however, that you have my thanks for what you have done. I speak it from the depths of all that I am. Thank you.”

He met her eyes, and nodded.

“So,” she said, growing more businesslike. “We progress with our engagement?”

He hesitated. There was no reason not to, but a part of him found that he thought himself a coward. Of the two offers this day—one unspoken, the other blunt—*this* was the one he was contemplating?

He glanced toward the room where Marasi was giving the report of her involvement in this mess. She *was* entrancing. Beautiful, intelligent, motivated. By all logic and reason, he should have been completely infatuated with her.

In fact, she reminded him a lot of Lessie. Perhaps that was the problem.

“We move forward,” he said, turning back to Steris.

# EPILOGUE

Marasi attended Miles's execution.

Daius, the senior prosecutor, had counseled against it. He never attended executions.

She sat on the outer balcony, alone, watching Miles walk up the steps to the firing platform. Her position was above the execution site.

She narrowed her eyes, remembering Miles standing in that underground room of darkness and mist, pointing a gun at her hiding place. She'd had a gun to her head three times during that two-day span, but the only time she'd really believed that she would die had been when she had seen the look in Miles's eyes. The heartless lack of emotion, the superiority.

She shivered. The time between the Vanisher attack at the wedding and Miles's capture had been less than a day and a half. Yet she felt like during that time she'd aged two decades. It was like a form of temporal Allomancy, a speed bubble around her alone. The world was different now. She'd nearly been killed, she'd killed for the first time, she'd fallen in love and been rejected. Now she'd helped condemn to death a former hero of the Roughs.

Miles looked with contempt on the constables who tied him to the restraining pole. He'd shown that same expression through most of the trial—the first one she'd helped prosecute as an attorney, though Daius had been the lead on the case. The trial had gone quickly, despite its high-profile and high-stakes nature. Miles had not denied his crimes.

It seemed that he saw himself as immortal. Even standing up there—his metalminds removed, a dozen rifles cocked and pointed toward him—he didn't seem to believe he would die. The human mind was very clever at tricking itself, at keeping the despair of inevitability at bay. She'd known that look in Miles's eyes. Every man had it, when young. And every man eventually saw it as a lie.

The rifles went to shoulders. Perhaps now Miles would finally recognize that lie himself. As the guns fired, Marasi found that she was satisfied. And that disturbed her greatly.

* * *

Waxillium boarded the train at Dryport. His leg still ached, he walked with a cane, and he wore a bandage around his chest to help with the broken ribs. One week wasn't nearly enough time to heal from what he'd been through. He probably shouldn't have left his bed.

He limped down the corridor of the lavish first-class carriage, passing handsomely appointed private rooms. He counted off to the third compartment as the train labored into motion. He walked into the chamber, leaving the door open, and sat down in one of the well-stuffed chairs by the window. It was affixed to the floor, and sat before a small table with a long, single leg. It was curved and slender, like a woman's neck.

A short time later, he heard footsteps in the corridor. They hesitated at the doorway.

Waxillium watched the scenery passing outside. "Hello, Uncle," he said, turning to look at the man in the doorway.

Lord Edwarn Ladrian stepped into the room, walking with a whale-ivory cane and wearing fine clothing. "How did you find me?" he asked, sitting down in the other chair.

"A few of the Vanishers we interrogated," Waxillium said. "They described a man that Miles called 'Mister Suit.' I don't think anyone else recognized you in the description. From what I understand, you were hermitlike during the decade leading up to your 'death.' Save for your letters to the broadsheets about political matters, of course."

That didn't answer the question exactly. Waxillium had found this train, and this car, based on the numbers written in Miles's cigar box, the one Wayne had found. Railway routes. Everyone else thought they had been trains the Vanishers had been planning to hit, but Waxillium had seen a different pattern. Miles had been tracking Mister Suit's movements.

"Interesting," Lord Edwarn said. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his fingers as a servant entered, bringing a tray of food and setting it on the table in front of him. Another poured him wine. He waved for them to wait outside the door.

"Where is Telsin?" Waxillium asked.

"Your sister is safe."

Waxillium closed his eyes, and fought down the welling of emotion. He'd thought her dead in the wreck that supposedly claimed his uncle's life, but had dealt with his emotions, such as they were. It had been years since he'd seen his sister.

Why, then, was finding out that she lived so powerfully meaningful to him? He couldn't even define *which* emotions he was feeling.

He forced his eyes open. Lord Edwarn was watching him, holding a glass of crystalline white wine in his fingers. "You suspected," Edwarn said. "All along, you suspected I wasn't dead. That's why you recognized whatever description those ruffians were able to give. I've changed clothing styles, my haircut, and even shaved my beard."

"You shouldn't have had your butler try to kill me," Waxillium said. "He was too long in the family employ, and he was too ready to kill me, to have been hired by the Vanishers on such short notice. It meant he was working for someone else, and had been for some time. The simplest answer was that he was still working for the person he'd served for years."

"Ah. Of course, you weren't supposed know he caused the explosion."

"I wasn't supposed to survive it, you mean."

Lord Ladrian shrugged.

"Why?" Waxillium asked, leaning in. "Why bring me back, if only to then have me killed? Why not arrange for someone else to take the house title?"

"Hinston was going to take it," Lord Ladrian said, buttering a roll. "His disease was … unfortunate. Plans were already in motion. I didn't have time to search out other options. Besides, I hoped—obviously, without basis—that you'd have overcome your overdeveloped childhood sense of morality. I had hoped you'd be a resource to me."

*Rust and Ruin, I hate this man,* Waxillium thought, memories of his childhood returning to him. He'd gone to the Roughs, in part, to escape that condescending voice.

"I've come for the other four kidnapped women," Waxillium said.

Lord Ladrian took a sip of wine. "You think I'm going to give them up, just like that?"

"Yes. I will expose you, otherwise."

"Go right ahead!" Lord Ladrian seemed amused. "Some will believe you. Others will think you mad. Neither reaction will hinder me or my colleagues."

"Because you've already been defeated," Waxillium said.

Lord Ladrian almost choked on his roll. He laughed, lowering it to the table. "Is that honestly what you think?"

"The Vanishers are gone," Waxillium said, "Miles is being executed as we speak, and I know that you were funding him. We captured the goods you were stealing, so you have gained nothing there. You obviously didn't have much in the way of funds to begin with. Otherwise you wouldn't have needed Miles and his team to do the robberies."

"I assure you, Waxillium, that we are *quite* solvent. Thank you. And you'll find no proof that I or my associates had anything to do with the robberies. We rented Miles his space, but how could we have known what he was up to? Harmony! He was a respected lawkeeper."

"You took the women."

"There is no proof of that. Just speculation on your part. A few of the Vanishers will swear to their graves that Miles raped and killed the women. I know for a fact that one of those Vanishers survived. Though I *am* still curious how you found me here, in this particular train."

Waxillium made no reply to that specifically. "I know that you're ruined," he said instead. "Say what you will, I see it. Give me the women and my sister. I'll recommend to the judges that you be shown leniency. Yes, you funded a group of robbers as a means of high-stakes investment. But you explicitly told them not to hurt anyone, and you weren't the one to pull the trigger and kill Peterus. I suspect you'll escape execution."

"You assume so many things, Waxillium," Lord Ladrian said. He reached into the pocket of his jacket and removed a folded broadsheet and a thin, black leather appointment book. He set them down on the table, broadsheet on the top. "Funding a group of robbers as a means of high-stakes investment? Is that *really* what you think this was about?"

"That and kidnapping the women," Waxillium said. "Presumably as a means of extorting their families."

That last part was a lie. Waxillium didn't believe for a moment that it was about extortion. His uncle was planning something, and considering the family lines of those women, Waxillium suspected that Marasi was right. It was about Allomancy.

He harbored a hope that his uncle wasn't involved in the direct … breeding. The very idea made Waxillium uncomfortable. Perhaps Ladrian was merely selling the women to someone else.

*What a thing to hope for.*

Ladrian tapped the broadsheet. The headline was about news that was going around the city. House Tekiel was on the brink of collapse. They'd had too much bad publicity in the robbery last week, even though the cargo had been recovered. That, mixed with other serious financial troubles …

Other serious financial troubles.

Waxillium scanned the broadsheet. Tekiel's main house business was security. Insurance. *Rust and Ruin!* he thought, making the connection.

"A series of targeted attacks," Ladrian said, leaning in, sounding pleased with himself. "House Tekiel is doomed. They owe payments on too many high-profile losses. These attacks, and the insurance claims, have devastated them and their financial integrity. Company shareholders have been selling their stakes for pennies. You claimed my finances were weak. That is only because they have been dedicated to a specific task. Have you wondered, yet, why your house is destitute?"

"You took it all," Waxillium guessed. "You funneled it out of the house finances into … something. Somewhere."

"We have just seized one of the most powerful financial institutions in the city," Ladrian said. "The materials stolen are being returned, and so while we've assumed Tekiel's debts by purchasing them, the claims for lost goods will soon be nullified. I *always* expected Miles to be captured. This plan wouldn't work without it."

Waxillium closed his eyes, feeling a dread. *I've been chasing chickens this entire time,* he realized. *While someone stole the horses.* It wasn't about robberies, or even kidnappings.

It was insurance fraud.

"We needed only the *temporary* disappearance of goods," Edwarn said. "And everything has worked out perfectly. Thank you."

* * *

The bullets ripped through Miles's body. Marasi watched, holding her breath, forcing herself not to wince. It was time to stop being a child.

He was shot again. Her eyes open, her nerves steeled, she was able to watch with horror as his wounds started to heal. It should have been impossible. They'd searched him carefully for metalminds. Yet the bullet holes pulled closed, and his smile widened, his eyes wild.

"You are fools!" Miles yelled at the firing squad. "One day, the men of gold and red, bearers of the final metal, *will* come to you. And you *will* be ruled by them."

They fired again. More bullets ripped into Miles. The wounds again closed, but not all the way. He didn't have enough healing stored in whatever last metalmind he had hidden. Marasi found herself shivering as a fourth volley struck his body, causing him to spasm.

"Worship," Miles said, his voice failing, his mouth spouting blood. "Worship Trell and wait…"

The fifth volley of bullets hit, and this time none of the wounds healed. Miles slackened in his bonds, eyes open and lifeless, staring at the ground before him.

The constables looked extremely disturbed. One of them ran up to check for a pulse. Marasi shivered. Right up until the end, Miles hadn't seemed like he accepted death.

But he *was* dead now. A Bloodmaker like him could heal repeatedly, but if they ever actually stopped healing—let their wounds consume them—they would die like anyone else. Just to make certain, the nearest constable raised a handgun and blasted Miles three times in the side of the head. This was gruesome enough that Marasi had to look away.

It was done. Miles Hundredlives was dead.

In turning away, however, she saw a figure watching from the shadows below, ignored by the constables. He turned away, black robe rippling, and walked out through a gate leading into the alley.

* * *

"It's not only about the insurance," Waxillium said, meeting Edwarn's eyes. "You took the women."

Edwarn Ladrian said nothing.

"I'm going to stop you, Uncle," Waxillium said softly. "I don't know what you're doing with those women, but I *am* going to find a way to stop it."

"Oh please, Waxillium," Edwarn said. "Your self-righteousness was tiring enough when you were a youth. Your heritage alone should make you better than that."

"My heritage?"

"You are of a noble bloodline," Ladrian said. "Directly back to the Counselor of Gods himself. You are Twinborn, and a powerful Allomancer. It was with great regret that I ordered your death, and I only did so under pressure from my colleagues. I suspected, even hoped, you would survive. This world needs you. Us."

"You sound like Miles," Waxillium said, surprised.

"No," Ladrian said. "He sounded like *me*." He tucked his handkerchief into his collar, then began to dine. "But you are not ready. I will see that you are sent the proper information. For now, you may withdraw and consider what I've told you."

"I don't think so," Waxillium said, reaching into his jacket for a handgun.

Ladrian looked up with a pitying expression. Waxillium heard guns being cocked, and glanced to the side, to where several young men wearing black suits stood in the corridor outside. None were wearing metal on their bodies.

"I have nearly twenty Allomancers riding in this train, Waxillium," Edwarn said, voice cold. "And you are wounded, barely able to walk. You don't have a sliver of evidence against me. Are you certain this is a fight you want to start?"

Waxillium hesitated. Then he growled and reached forward with an empty hand to sweep the meal off his uncle's table. Dishes and food spilled to the floor with a crash as Waxillium bent forward, enraged. "I'll kill you someday, Uncle."

Edwarn leaned back, unthreatened. "Lead him to the back of the train. Throw him off. Good day, Waxillium."

Waxillium tried to reach for his uncle, but the men rushed in and grabbed him, pulling him away. His side and his leg both flared in pain at the treatment. Edwarn was right about one thing. This wasn't the day to fight.

But that day *would* come.

Waxillium let them tow him down the hallway. They opened the door at the end of the train and tossed him out toward the tracks that sped by beneath. He caught himself with Allomancy, as they'd no doubt expected he would, and landed to watch the train speed away.

* * *

Marasi burst out into the alleyway beside the precinct building. She felt something stirring in her, a powerful curiosity she could not describe. She *had* to find out who that figure was.

She caught a glimpse of the hem of a dark robe disappearing around a corner. She ran after it, holding her handbag in a tight grip and reaching inside for the small revolver Waxillium had given her.

*What am I doing?* a part of her mind thought. *Running into an alleyway alone?* It wasn't a particularly sensible thing to do. She just *felt* that she had to do it.

She ran a short distance. Had she lost the figure? She paused at an intersection, where an even smaller alleyway cut off from the first. Her curiosity was almost unbearable.

Standing in the mouth of the smaller alleyway, waiting for her, was a tall man in a black robe.

She gasped, stepping backward. The man was well over six feet tall, and the enveloping robe gave him an ominous appearance. He brought up pale hands and took down his hood, exposing a shaved head and a face that was tattooed around the eyes in an intricate pattern.

Driven into those eyes, point-first, were what looked like a pair of thick railroad spikes. One of the eye sockets was deformed, as if it had been crushed, long-healed scars and bony ridges under the skin marring the tattoos.

Marasi knew this creature from mythology, but seeing him left her cold, terrified. "Ironeyes," she whispered.

"I apologize for bringing you like this," Ironeyes said. He had a quiet, gravelly voice.

"Like this?" she said, her voice coming out as almost a squeak.

"With emotional Allomancy. I sometimes Pull too hard. I've never been as good at this sort of thing as Breeze was. Be calm, child. I will not hurt you."

She felt an instant calmness, though that felt terribly unnatural, and left her feeling even worse. Calm, but sick. One should not be calm when speaking with Death himself.

"Your friend," Ironeyes said, "has uncovered something very dangerous."

"And you wish him to stop?"

"Stop?" Ironeyes said. "Not at all. I wish him to be informed. Harmony has particular views about how things must be done. I do not always agree with him. Oddly, his particular beliefs require that he allow that. Here." Ironeyes reached into the folds of his cloak, bringing out a small book. "There is information in this. Guard it carefully. You may read it, if you wish, but deliver it to Lord Waxillium on my behalf."

She took the book. "Pardon," she said, trying to fight through the numbness he had put inside her. Was she really speaking to a mythological figure? Was she going mad? She could barely think. "But why didn't you take it to him yourself?"

Ironeyes responded with a tight-lipped smile, watching her with the heads of those silvery spikes. "I have a feeling he'd have tried to shoot me. That one does not like unanswered questions, but he does my brother's work, and that is something I feel inclined to encourage. Good day, Lady Marasi Colms."

Ironeyes turned, cloak rustling, and walked away down the alley. He put his hood up as he walked, then lifted into the air, propelled by Allomancy over the tops of the nearby buildings. He vanished from sight.

Marasi clutched the book, then slid it into her handbag, shaking.

* * *

Waxillium landed at the rail station, dropping as gently as he could from his Allomantic flight down the tracks. Landing still hurt his leg.

Wayne sat on the platform, feet up on a barrel, smoking his pipe. He still had his arm in a sling. He wouldn't be able to heal it quickly—he had no health stored up. Trying to store some now would just make him heal more slowly during that process, then heal more quickly as he tapped his metalmind, ending with no net gain.

Wayne was reading a small novel that he'd picked out of someone's pocket on their train ride out to the estates. He'd left an aluminum bullet in its place, worth easily a hundred times the price of the book. Ironically, the person who found it would probably throw it away, never realizing its value.

*I'll need to talk to him about that again,* Waxillium thought, walking up onto the platform. *But not today.* Today, they had other worries.

Waxillium joined his friend, but continued staring to the south. Toward the city, and his uncle.

"It's a pretty good book," Wayne said, flipping a page. "You should try it. It's about bunnies. They talk. Damnedest thing ever."

Waxillium didn't reply.

"So, was it your uncle?" Wayne asked.

"Yes."

"Crud. I owe you a fiver, then."

"The bet was for twenty."

"Yeah, but you owe me fifteen."

"I do?"

"Sure, for that bet I made that you'd end up helpin' me with the Vanishers."

Waxillium frowned, looking at his friend. "I don't remember that bet."

"You weren't there when we made it."

"I wasn't there?"

"Yeah."

"Wayne, you can't make bets with people when they aren't there."

"I can," Wayne said, tucking the book into his pocket and standing, "if they *shoulda* been there. And you shoulda, Wax."

"I…" How to respond to that? "I will be. From now on."

Wayne nodded, joining him and looking toward Elendel. It rose in the distance, the two competing skyscrapers rising on one side of the city, other smaller ones growing like crystals from the center of the expanding metropolis.

"You know," Wayne said, "I always wondered what it would be like to come here, find civilization and all that. I didn't realize."

"Realize what?" Waxillium asked.

"That *this* was really the rough part of the world," Wayne said. "That we had it easy, out past the mountains."

Waxillium found himself nodding. "You can be very wise sometimes, Wayne."

"It's onnacount of my thinkin', mate," Wayne said, tapping his head, increasing the thickness of his accent. "It's what I do wif my brain. Somma the time, at least."

"And the rest of the time?"

"The rest of the time, I don't do so much thinkin'. 'Cuz if I did, I'd go runnin' back to where things is simple. You see?"

"I see. And we do have to stay, Wayne. I have work to do here."

"Then we'll see it done," Wayne said. "Just like always."

Waxillium nodded, reaching into his sleeve and sliding out a thin black book.

"What's that?" Wayne asked, taking it, curious.

“My uncle’s pocket book,” Waxillium said. “Filled with appointments and notes.”

Wayne whistled softly. “How’d you take it? Shoulder bump?”

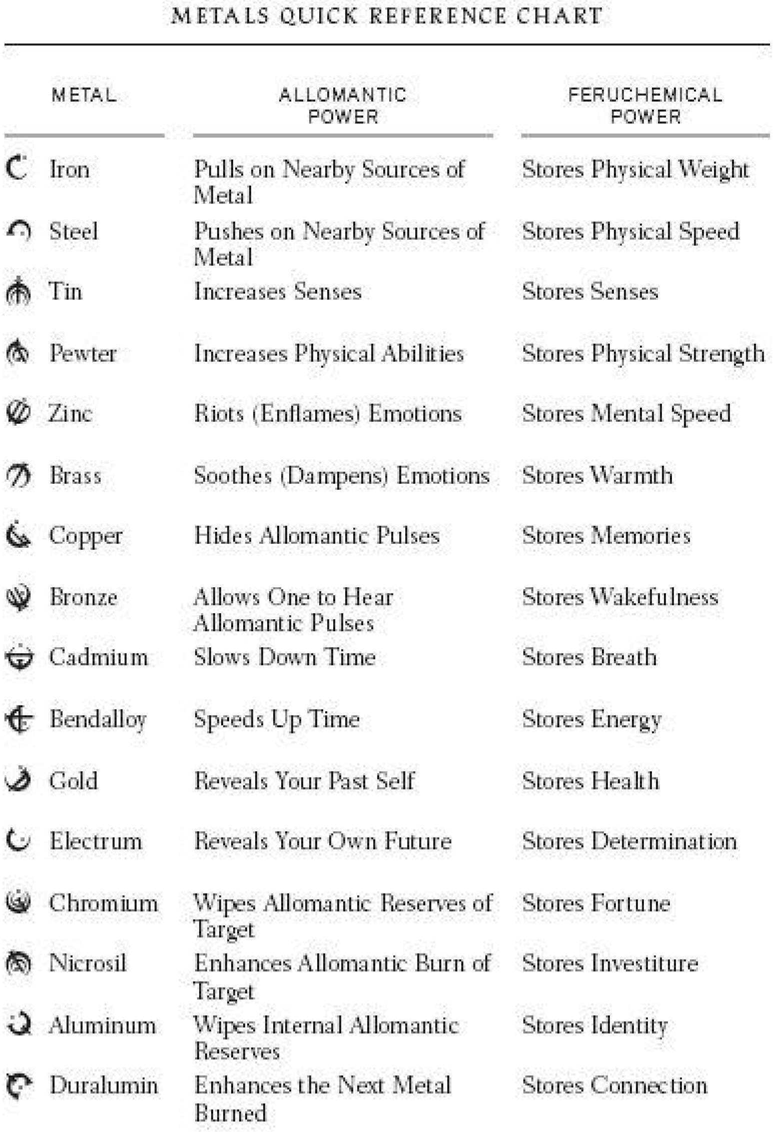
“Table sweep,” Waxillium said.

“Nice. Glad to know I’ve taught you *somethin’* useful during our years together. What did you trade for it?”

“A threat,” Waxillium said, looking back toward Elendel. “And a promise.”

He would see this to the end. Roughs honor. When one of your own went bad, it was your job to see the mess cleaned up.

# ARS ARCANUM



METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART

| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Weight |
| Steel | Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Speed |
| Tin | Increases Senses | Stores Senses |
| Pewter | Increases Physical Abilities | Stores Physical Strength |
| Zinc | Riots (Enflames) Emotions | Stores Mental Speed |
| Brass | Soothes (Dampens) Emotions | Stores Warmth |
| Copper | Hides Allomantic Pulses | Stores Memories |
| Bronze | Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses | Stores Wakefulness |
| Cadmium | Slows Down Time | Stores Breath |
| Bendalloy | Speeds Up Time | Stores Energy |
| Gold | Reveals Your Past Self | Stores Health |
| Electrum | Reveals Your Own Future | Stores Determination |
| Chromium | Wipes Allomantic Reserves of Target | Stores Fortune |
| Nicrosil | Enhances Allomantic Burn of Target | Stores Investiture |
| Aluminum | Wipes Internal Allomantic Reserves | Stores Identity |
| Duralumin | Enhances the Next Metal Burned | Stores Connection |

### LIST OF METALS

ALUMINUM: A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of his or her metals without giving any other effect, wiping all

Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their spiritual sense of identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them, it is not yet well understood. Aluminum itself and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

BENDALLOY: Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluids intake.

BRASS: Soother Mistings burn brass to soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

BRONZE: Seeker Mistings burn brass to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

CADMIUM: Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

CHROMIUM: Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer’s metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

COPPER: Coppercloud Mistings (also known as Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields nearby individuals from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

DURALUMIN: A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals' power. Mistings who can burn Duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connecter Ferrings can store spiritual connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people's awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

ELECTRUM: Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

GOLD: Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

IRON: Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

NICROSIL: Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

PEWTER: Pewterarm Mistings (also known as Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

STEEL: Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot's center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

TIN: Tineye Mistings who burn tin increase the sensitivity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the sensitivity of one of the five senses in a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their sensitivity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

ZINC: Rioter Mistings burn zinc to riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

## ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally, these are spoken of as the "Metallic Arts," though there are other names for them.

Allomancy is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology, meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their Spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn't actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn't much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the God Metals locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, however, the other metals are not in wide use.

Feruchemy is still widely known and used at this point in Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren't spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the inbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if one could make metalminds out of alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

Hemalurgy is widely unknown in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world's rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra, who (for the most part) serve Harmony.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many through history have maligned it as an "evil" art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great interest to the Cosmere, it is this one. I think there are great possibilities for its use.

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THE ALLOY OF LAW: A MISTBORN NOVEL

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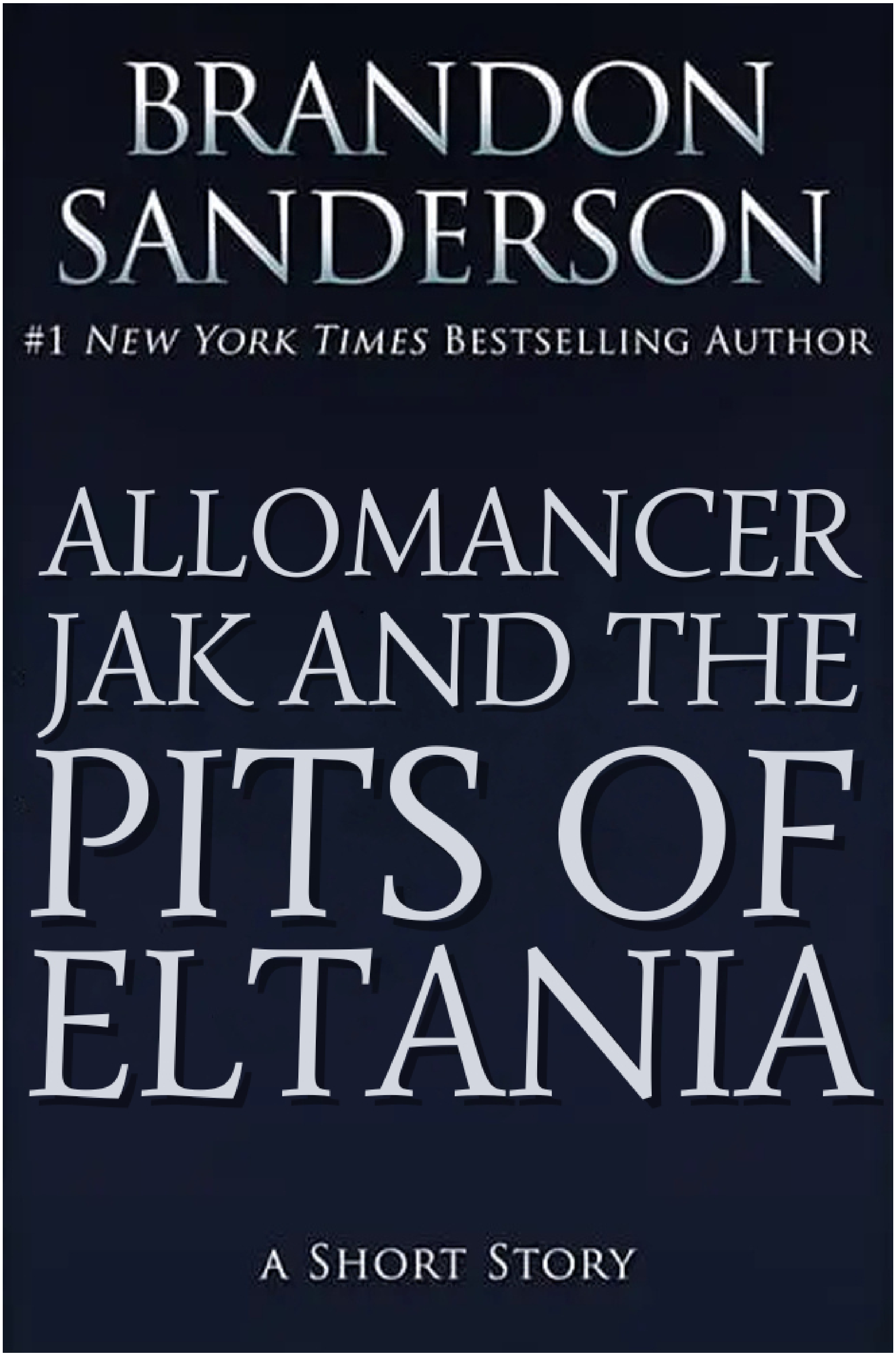
#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# ALLOMANCER JAK AND THE PITS OF ELTANIA

A SHORT STORY



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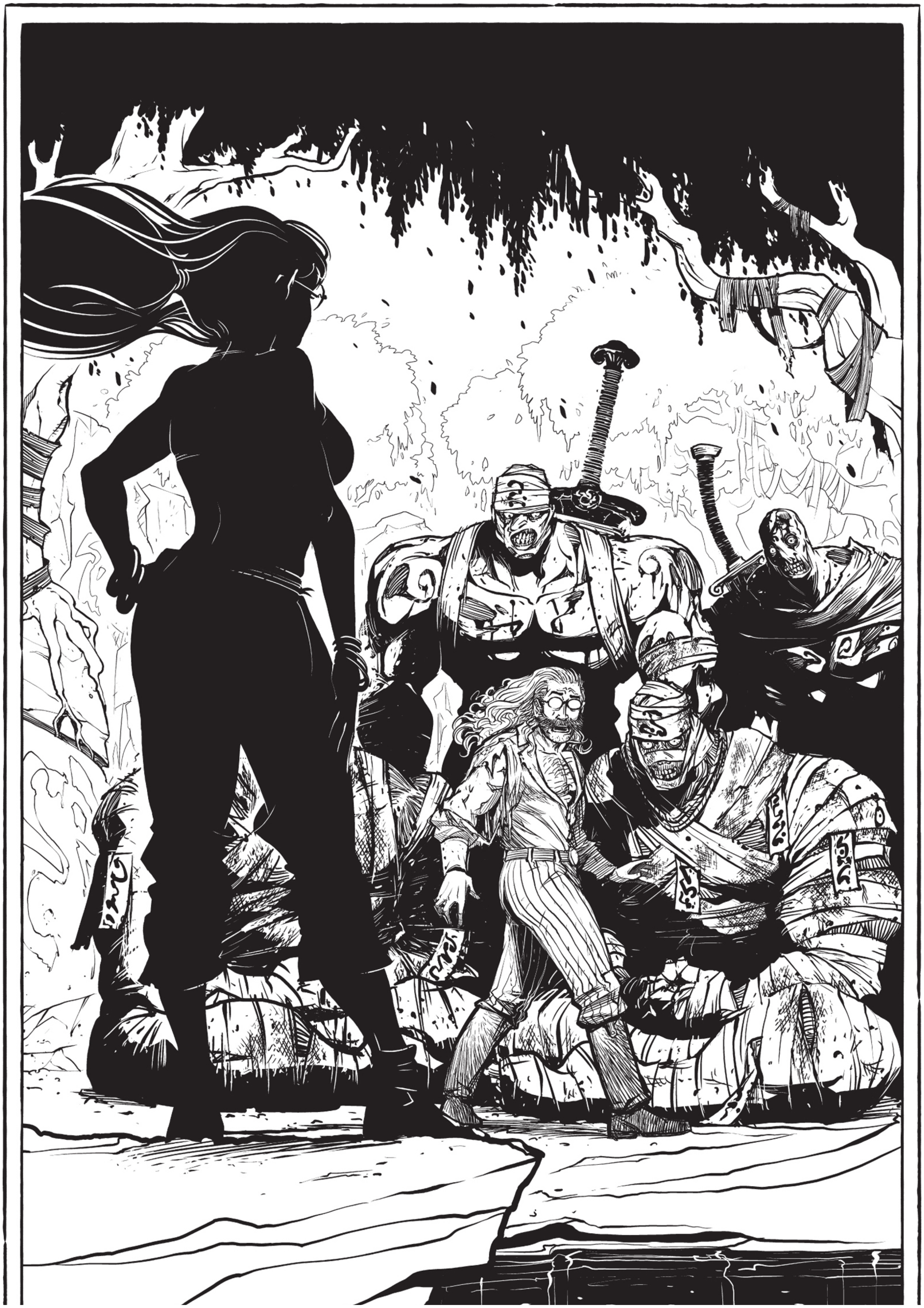

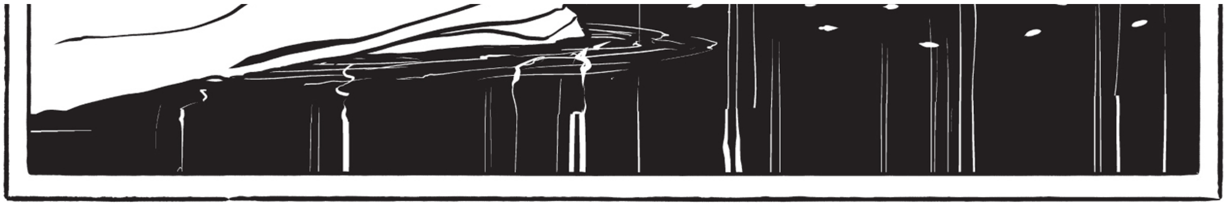

I BEGIN this week’s letter as I awake to a mighty headache.

Truly, dear readers, this pain was incredible—and the effect was a din inside my mind not unlike that of a hundred rifles firing. I groaned and rolled to my knees in the darkened chamber; my face had been resting upon cold rock. My vision shook and took time to recover.

What had happened to me? I remembered my contest with the koloss challenger—a brute sized like a steamrail engine, with strength to match. I had defeated him with a bullet through the eye, had I not? Had I not in so doing maintained the loyalty of the entire koloss clan?[*]

I climbed to my feet and felt gingerly at the back of my head. There, I found dried blood. Fear not, for the wound was not terrible. Surely I had weathered far worse. This was not nearly as bad as when I had found myself sinking in the ocean, my arms bound, my feet tied to a metal bust of the Survivor as I sank.[†]

The arid air and whistling sound of the wind through broken rock indicated I was still in the Roughs, which was good. These lands of adventure and danger are my natural habitat, and I thrive upon the challenge they provide. If I were to spend too long in the safe and mundane environment of milky Elendel, I fear I would wilt away.

My enclosure was a natural cavern of some sort, with rough stone walls and drooping stalactites on the ceiling. The cavern was shallow, however, and I found that it ended only a few feet back from my initial position. I would not be escaping in that direction, then.*

Cautious of potential gunfire, I edged to the front of the cavern and looked out. As I had guessed from the slight chill to the air, I was elevated. My cavern was on the wall of a small canyon, and the mouth opened only to a steep drop onto a group of rounded rocks far below.

Across from me, atop the ridge on the other side of the canyon, a group of blue figures watched my cavern. The hulking koloss were older ones, their skin stretched and broken, their bodies tattooed and draped with leather created from the skin of the men they had slain and eaten.†

"Why have you stranded me here, dread beasts?" I shouted at them, my voice echoing in the canyon. "And what have you done with the fair Elizandra Dramali? If you have harmed one hair upon her ever-beauteous scalp, you shall know the fury of an Allomancer enraged!"

The savages offered me no reply. They sat around their smoldering fire, and did not even turn in my direction.

Perhaps my situation was not as ideal as I had decided upon my first assessment. The canyon wall outside my cavern was as slick as glass and was as steep as the price of whiskey at Marlie's waystop. I surely could not survive an attempt to climb down, not dizzy as I was from the wound.

But neither could I simply wait. Miss Dramali, my dear Elizandra, might surely be in danger. Curse that woman and her headstrong ways; she should have remained at camp as instructed. I had no idea what might have happened to her, nor to faithful Handerwym.* The koloss would not dare harm him, because of their vow to the Terris people,† but surely he feared for my safety.

I gave little thought to how I had reached this dire location. I needed metal. My system was clean of it; I had burned the last to steady my hands and eyes as I took the perfect shot at the koloss challenger to my throne. Unfortunately, my captors had stolen Glint—brutes though they are, the koloss are wise enough to take the guns from a man, particularly after seeing my skill with my trusty sidearm. They had also taken my vials of metal. Perhaps they wanted to see if those contained whiskey. Some Roughs Allomancers do store their metals in such solutions, but I have always abstained from the process. The mind of a gentleman adventurer needs to retain clarity at all times.[‡]

Surely the hidden pouch of tin in the heel of my boot would serve me. By misfortune, however, the heel's hidden compartment seemed to have been knocked open during my initial scuffle with the koloss champion. I had lost the pouch! I made a note to myself to speak with Ranette about her heel contraption and its tendency to open unexpectedly.

Disaster! An Allomancer without metal. I was left with only my own wits as a tool. Those—though of no small measure—might not be enough. Who knew what kind of trouble the fair Elizandra might be in at this point?

Determined, I began to feel about the cavern. It was an unlikely chance, but we were in highlands prized precisely because of their keen mining opportunities. Indeed, the Survivor favored me this day, for I located a small glimmering strain of metal along the far wall. Almost invisible, I discovered it only by touch.[*] In the dim cavern I could not judge the metal's full nature, but I had no other options.

Now, I have found from my infrequent trips to Elendel that I am regarded with a somewhat heroic reputation. I must assure you, good readers, that I am but a humble adventurer, not deserving of an unduly idolized status. That said, while I have never wished for glory,[†] I do value my reputation. Therefore, if I could remove from your memories the image of this next part of my narrative, I would do so.

However, it has ever been my goal to present to you a sincere and unexpurgated account of my travels in the Roughs. Honesty is my greatest virtue.[‡] And so, I offer you the truth of what needed to happen next.

I knelt down and began to lick the wall.

I would not ever wish to look foolish before you, dear readers.[§] But in order to survive in the Roughs, a man must be willing to seize opportunity. I did so. With my tongue.

This activity gave me very little tin to burn, but it was enough for a few moments of enhanced senses.[¶] I used them to listen with care for some clue as to how I might escape this situation.

I heard two things with my tin-enhanced ears. The first was the tinkling of water. I peeked out of my cavern and saw that the rocks below hid a small stream I had not seen earlier. The other thing I heard was a strange scratching, like that of claws on a branch.

I looked up, hopeful, and there found a crow perched among a sprout of weeds growing from the rocky wall. Could it be?

“Well done!” the crow exclaimed to me in her inhuman voice. “You have found metal even in your prison, Jak. The Survivor is pleased by your ingenuity.”

It *was* her. Lyndip, my spirit guide, sent by the Survivor to me during my most difficult times of trial.[*] I have long suspected her to be one of the Faceless Immortals,[†] as the legends speak of them being able to change forms and take the bodies of animals.

“Lyndip!” I exclaimed. “Is Miss Dramali well? The koloss have not harmed her?”

“They have not, bold adventurer,” Lyndip said. “But she is captured by them and is being held. You must escape, and quickly, for a dire fate awaits her.”

“But how am I to escape!”

“I cannot give you the method,” Lyndip said. “I am a guide, but I cannot solve a hero’s problems for him. It is not the way of the Survivor, who deems that all men must make their own way.”[‡]

“Very well,” I said. “But tell me, guide: Why was I taken captive again? Had I not earned the loyalty of the koloss clan; was I not their king? I defeated the challenger!”

I am certain my frustration shone through, and I hope you do not think less of me—dear reader—to see such harsh words spoken to my spirit guide. However, I was not only concerned for the safety of my dear Elizandra, but was also devastated to lose the loyalty of this tribe of koloss. Savages though they are, they had seemed close to revealing their secrets to me—secrets I was certain would lead me to the symbol of the spearhead, the bloody footprints, and the Survivor's Treasure.

"I do not know for certain," Lyndip said, "but I suspect it was because you used a gun to kill the challenger. Previously, in winning the loyalty of the clan, you did not shoot your rival but frightened him off with the placement of your bullet. Many koloss clans see killing at a distance with guns to be a sign of weakness, not strength."

Ruthless beasts—savages indeed.[*] The gun is the most elegant of weapons, the weapon of a gentleman.

"I *must* escape and rescue the fair Elizandra," I said. "Guide, did you see how I reached this cavern prison? Do the koloss have a secret passage somewhere, and did they bring me up here by that method?"

"I saw, adventuresome one," Lyndip said. "But the truth is not what you will wish to hear. There was no secret passage—instead, you were *thrown* up here by some koloss below."[†]

"Rust and Ruin!" I exclaimed. Undoubtedly, the beasts—afraid of the powerful weapons I had used—had placed me here to die of starvation, rather than risking the anger of their gods by killing me with their own hands.

I needed a way out, and quickly. I looked out again, and noticed storm clouds in the near distance. This started me thinking. I glanced down at the trickle of water in the canyon floor below. As I had noticed, the sides of this canyon were particularly smooth. As if … weathered.

Yes! I spotted distinctive lines on the canyon walls—water lines, from when the river ran bold and deep. My avenue of escape was soon to come! Indeed, the rains dumped on the plains upstream, and water soon surged into the canyon and—propelled by the narrower confines here—the river began to swell.

I waited nervously for the right moment to enter the river, and in my waiting, found time despite my anxiety to pen this letter to you. I sealed it in the special, water-proof pocket of my rugged trousers with the hope that if I should meet my end, it would find its way to you somehow once my body was found.

As rain began to fall on the canyon itself, I could wait no longer. I hurled myself into the risen waters below.[‡]

My readers, I trust this message finds you well. As you may recall, last week's missive ended with a dangerous leap on my part toward a watery doom. I was certain that my time had come, but I am somewhat pleased to say that I have survived. Only "somewhat" because of the revelation that I must soon impart unto you. If you must read on, be warned: The contents of this letter are dreadful, and might produce discomfort—even sickness—in the more frail and youthful among you.

I did leap from my cavern prison into the rising waters of the river. I must severely advise my readers against this kind of activity unless presented with the most dire of circumstances. The waters of a Roughs-style flash flood are dangerous, full of eddies and deadly rocks. If I had been presented with any other option, I surely would have taken it.

The waters churned around me like a stampede. Fortunately, I had experience with surviving waters of this nature.[*]

The key to swimming in waters such as these is to not fight. One must travel with the current, as a ship allows the sea to pull it. Still, even keeping afloat in such a tempest requires practice, luck, and force of will.

With strength of arm, I managed to steer myself around the most deadly of rocks and survive as the waters of my small tributary merged with the greater waters of the Rancid, the greatest river of the area. Here, the larger amount of water caused slower currents, and I managed with some difficulty to swim to the shore and pull myself free.

Exhausted, still dizzy from my wound, I flopped to the bank of the river. No sooner was I free, however, than a set of strong arms hauled me into the air.

Koloss. I had been captured again.

The beasts hauled me, sopping wet, away from the roaring river. I left a trail of water in the dust.[*] I did not fight against my captors. There were six of them, medium-sized koloss, their blue skin starting to pull tight across their bodies, ripping at the sides of the mouths and around the largest of muscles.

They did not speak to me in their brutal tongue, and I knew I could not defeat six at once. Not without my guns and without metal. I deemed it better to let them drag me where they wished. Perhaps I would be placed back in my cavern prison.

Instead, the koloss carted me toward an incongruous stand of trees, hidden within a small valley of rocks. I had never come to this location before—indeed, the koloss had always steered me away from this area, claiming that it was a wasteland. From whence, then, did come the trees?[†]

The trees hid a small oasis in the dusty ground, a place where water welled up in a natural spring. I found this curious, as prime watering holes are usually marked on my maps.

They drug me past the trees and around the watering hole, and I saw that it was very deep—so deep that the depths were blue, and I could not make out a bottom. The sides were all of stone. And, with a start, I realized that the pool was shaped vaguely like a spearhead.

Could this be it? The location of the Survivor's Treasure? Had I found it at long last?[‡] I looked for the other sign, that of the bloody footprints spoken of in the legends. I did not see them until my wet form was dragged across the stones nearest to the pool.

If you travel long in the Roughs, you will find that water sometimes reveals the true color of stone. This is not so much the case in the city where many of you live, dear readers, as the stones are coated in grime and soot. But here, the land is clean and fresh. The water my body dripped on the stones revealed a pattern in the rock not unlike that of a set of footprints leading into the oasis pool.

This was it! Though not true footprints, I could see how a weary traveler—reaching this location—might mistake them for such. The invented story of the Survivor himself—bleeding from his spear wound and stopping here to drink—made sense.

The place was accoutred with koloss tattoo designs traced on the rocks and had their leatherwork wrapping some of the tree trunks. This was obviously a holy place for them, which explained both the reason I had never heard of this oasis, and the reason men had vanished in this area. Any who stumbled across this spot were murdered for having witnessed what they should not.

What did it say for my future that they had brought me here?[*]

There were more koloss here, of course. Some were so ancient that they had burst their skin completely; these sat wrapped in leather to contain the slow seeping of blood from their flesh. If you have never seen a koloss ancient, consider yourself lucky. Their immensity of size is only matched by the strangeness of their features, lacking noses or lips, their eyes bulging from faces of red flesh. Most koloss die of heart attacks before reaching this state. These would continue to grow, even after losing their skin, until that fate claimed them.

In ancient times, ones such as these would be killed. In modern days, however, elderly koloss are revered—or so I had learned, but only through stories.[†] I suspect that the locations where all tribes keep their elders are as holy as this one.

My guards deposited me before the ancients. I climbed to my knees, wary.

“You have come,” said one of the ancients.

“You are not human,” another said.

“You have bested our leader and killed all challengers,” said the third.

“What will you do with me?” I demanded, forcing myself to my feet. Sodden and dazed though I was, I would meet my fate head-on.[*]

“You will be killed,” one said.

“It will be according to the will of the daughter of the one who challenged you,” said another.

“You must join us,” said another.

“Join you?” I demanded. “How?”

“All koloss were once human,” said one of the ancients.

I had heard such statements before. And, dear readers, I realize that I disparaged them to you. I considered them silly and fanciful.

It is with a heavy heart that I must tell you that I was wrong. So very wrong. I have since learned the terrible truth. The ancients are right.

Koloss are people.

The process is terrible. To initiate a man into their ranks, they take him and pin him with small spikes of metal. This creates a mystical transformation, during which the man's mind and identity are savagely weakened. In the end, the person becomes as dull and simple as the koloss.

Koloss are not born. Koloss are made. Their barbarity exists inside of all of us. Perhaps this was what dear Handerwym was trying to tell me.[†]

They said that I had to join them. Was this to be my final end? To live my life as a brute in a distant village, my mind lost?[‡]

"You spoke of the daughter of the one who challenged me," I said. "Who is this?"

"Me," said a soft, familiar voice.

I turned and found Elizandra Dramali emerging from behind some trees nearby. She no longer wore her dress, and instead was wrapped in leathers that only *just* covered up her most intimate parts. Indeed, a full description of her figure would be too shocking for my more sensitive readers, and so I will forbear.[*]

She still wore her spectacles, and her golden hair was pulled back into its customary tail, but her skin … her skin was now a shade of blue, such as I had never before seen.

Elizandra, fair Elizandra, was *koloss-blooded.*[†]

"This can't be!" I exclaimed, staring at my beautiful Elizandra. The woman I had grown to love and cherish above all others. The woman who had somehow hidden her true nature from me all this time.

Elizandra was koloss-blooded.

I wish I did not have to write these words to you, my stalwart readers. But they are true, true as my poor heart bleeds. True as the ink on this page.

“Makeup,” Elizandra said, demure eyes downcast. “As you can see, the blue cast to my skin is light, compared to some koloss-blooded. Clever use of powders and gloves have allowed me to hide what I am.”

“But your mind!” I said, stepping toward her. “You think and have wit, unlike these beasts!”[‡]

I moved to reach toward her, but hesitated. Everything I knew about this woman was a lie. She was a monster. Not my fair, wonderful noblewoman, but a creature of the wilds, a murderer and a savage.

“Jak,” she said. “I am still me. I was born to koloss, but have not accepted the transformation. My mind is as keen as that of any human. Please, my dear one, see past this skin and look into my heart.”[§]

I could resist no longer. She might have lied, but she was still my Elizandra. I stepped into her embrace, and felt her sweet warmth in this time of confusion.

“You are in grave danger, loved one,” she whispered into my ear. “They will make you one of them.”

“Why?”

“You frightened away their chief,” Elizandra whispered. “And ruled the clan despite the challenges we provided. Finally, you killed their greatest champion. My mother.”

“The champion was a *woman*?” I asked.

“Of course. Didn’t you notice?”

I glanced at the gathered koloss, who wore loincloths, but generally no tops. If there was a way to distinguish the males from the females other than … ahem … peeking, I did not know it. In fact, I’d rather not have known that some of them were women. My crusty, wind-weathered cheeks did no longer often blush, for the things I’ve seen would rub your delicate minds raw. But if I’d been capable of a blush, I might have given one at that moment.

“I am sorry, then, for killing her,” I said, looking back to Elizandra, who still held me.

"She chose her own course in life," Elizandra said. "And it was one of brutality and murder. I do not mourn her, but I will mourn you, should you be taken into their embrace, dear one. They speak of this being my will, but it is certainly not, though they will not listen to my protests."[*]

"Why did they lock me away to die in that cavern?" I asked.

"It was a test," Elizandra said. "A final challenge. They would have freed you after three days, if you had not escaped—but as you managed to, you have proven worthy to join their ranks and become their new chief in full. But to do so, you must undergo the transformation! You will lose most of your self, instead becoming one of them, a creature of instinct."[†]

I had to escape, then. This fate would be worse than death—it would be a death of the mind. Though I have gained a great respect for the koloss savages,[*] I had no intention of ever joining them.

"You steered me here," I realized, looking toward Elizandra. "Ever since we found you in these Roughs, you have been guiding me toward this tribe. You knew of this pool."

"I suspected, from your descriptions of what you sought, this was the location of the treasure," said my fairest one. "But I did not know for certain. I had never been to the holy pool. Jak … once they transform you, they plan to do the same to me, against my will. I have resisted this all of my life. I would not let them take my mind as a youth—I will not allow it now!"

"Enough talk!" said one of the elders. "You will be transformed!"

The other koloss began to clap in unison. One of the ancients reached out a trembling, bloody hand, holding in his palm a handful of small spikes.

"No!" I exclaimed. "There is no need! For I am *already* one of you!"

Elizandra's hand tightened on my arm. "What?" she whispered.

"It is the only plan I can think of," I whispered back. Then, more loudly, I proclaimed. "I am koloss!"

"Not possible," said one of the ancients.

"You are not blue," said another.

“You have not the way,” said the third.

“I slew your champion!” I declared. “What more proof do you need! Would an ordinary human be strong enough to do this?”

“Gun,” said one of the ancients. “It takes not strength to use the gun.”

Rust and Ruin! “Well then,” I declared, “I will prove it in a final test. For I will bring you the treasure of the Survivor!”

The koloss grew silent. Their clapping stopped.

“Not possible,” said one of the ancients. “Even strongest koloss have failed.”

“Then if I succeed, you will know I have told the truth,” I said to the beasts.

I was setting myself up for certain death. I wish I could tell you that bravery steered my lips that day, but it was truly just desperation. I spoke of the only thing that occurred to me, the only thing that would let me delay.

If the legends were true, then the treasure was hidden “opposite the sky, raised only by life itself.” Opposite the sky must mean at the bottom of the pool—so far down, I could not see it. I would have to dive in and recover the treasure.

“Not possible,” said another ancient.

“I will prove it possible!” I declared.

“Jak!” Elizandra said, hand on my arm. “You’re a fool!”

“A fool I might be,” I said, “but I will not let them take me to be a koloss.”

She pulled me to her, suddenly, and kissed me. Very little in life shocks me, dear readers, but that moment achieved the impossible. She had been so cold toward me at times that I was certain my affection would go unrequited.

But this kiss … this *kiss*! As deep as the pool beside us, as true as the Survivor’s own teachings. As powerful as a bullet in flight, and as incredible as a bull’s-eye at three hundred yards. The passion in it warmed me, casting off the chill of my sodden clothing and the fear of a trembling heart.

When she finished, metal flared to life inside of me. Though not an Allomancer, she’d poured some tin dust in her mouth, passing it to me in the kiss!

I pulled back, marveling. “You’re amazing,” I whispered.

“Well damn, Jak,” she whispered back. “You’ve finally gone and said something smart, for once.”*

The koloss started to clap again. I picked the largest rock I could carry, then—taking a deep breath—leaped into the pool and allowed the rock to pull me downward.

It was deep. Unfathomably deep.*

The darkness soon swallowed me. Dear readers, you must imagine this complete darkness, for I do not believe I can do it justice. To be consumed by the blackness is itself a remarkable experience, but to be in the waters as light flees … there is something incredibly horrifying about such an experience. Even my steel nerves gave way to trembling as my descent continued.

A terrible pain struck my ears, though whether this was from my wound, I know not. I dropped for what seemed like forever, until my lungs were burning, my mind growing numb. I nearly let go of my rock.

I could not think. My wound threatened to overwhelm me, and though I could not see, I knew that my vision was growing cloudy. My body was failing me as I plummeted toward unconsciousness. I knew that I would die in these unseen depths.

At that moment, I thought of Elizandra being turned into a koloss, losing the beautiful wit that so charmed me. This thought gave me strength, and I flared my tin.

Flared tin brings clarity of mind, as I have said before. I have never welcomed it as much as I did then; those moments of lucidity forced away the shadow upon my mind.

I felt the coldness of the water, and the pain in my head seemed incredible, but I was *alive.*

I hit the bottom. Not daring to release my rock weight, I felt about me with one hand, frantic. My lungs burned like flared metals. Was it here?

Yes! It was. Something square and unnatural, a box of metal. A strongbox?

I tried to lift it, and managed to make it budge, but it was as heavy as my rock. With dismay, I realized that I could never carry this up to the surface. My body was too weak; swimming with such a weight was more than I could accomplish.

Was I to fail, then? If I reached the surface without the treasure, perhaps they would simply kill me, or perhaps they would make me like them—either way I would be finished.

I worked again to lift the box, but could swim only a few feet. I had no air, no strength. It was useless!

And then, I remembered the poem. Opposite the sky you shall find it, and it shall be raised only by life itself.[*]

Life itself. What was life down here?

Air.

I fumbled at the sides of the box and found a latch, which released some kind of object. It felt leathery, like a waterskin. I breathed into it, giving up all of the air in my lungs, air which no longer sustained me—but which might still serve me.[†] Then, I kicked off of the bottom, my metal spent, my air expended.

Eternity.

I burst from the surface of the pool as my vision clouded again. I saw only a moment of light before darkness snatched me back, but soft hands grabbed me and hauled me free of the water before I could sink to my doom. I smelled Elizandra’s perfume, and recovered to the sight of her concerned face, cradling my head in her lap. The view of her leather costume from beneath was not particularly proper, but also not unappreciated.

“You fool,” she whispered as I rolled over and coughed water from my lungs.

“He has failed!” exclaimed the koloss elders.

At that very moment, something bobbed to the surface of the pool—it appeared to be an inflated bladder of some sort, perhaps from a sheep. I reached into the water and grabbed the strongbox that floated underneath.[*]

The koloss crowded around as I knelt beside the box and worked at the lock. Elizandra produced the key we had found in Maelstrom’s mine, and it fitted[†] exactly. I turned it with a click, and opened the top.

Inside were spikes.

The koloss shouts first worried me, but they turned out to be shouts of joy. I looked to Elizandra, confused.

“New spikes,” she said. “Many of them. With these, the tribe can grow. They were losing the wars with those nearby; my tribe has always been the smallest of those in the area. This will grow them by the dozens. It is a true treasure to them.”

I sat back on my heels. I will express some regret to you, dear readers. I travel not for wealth, but for the joy of discovery and the opportunity to share the world with you—but still, this was not the treasure I had hoped to discover. A handful of small spikes? This was what I had searched for months upon months to find? This was the fabled wealth left by the Survivor himself?

“Do not look so morose, dear one,” Elizandra said, dumping the spikes for the ancients to take. She pulled back with me as they gathered around. It appeared that the two of us had been forgotten in the excitement. “It seems we have our lives restored to us.”

Indeed, the koloss did not stop us as we fled. We quickly left the small oasis valley, making toward the river and—hopefully—the rest of our caravan.[‡]

I still found myself disappointed. It was then that I noticed something. The box Elizandra carried hadn’t tarnished much from what had undoubtedly been over three centuries spent under the waters. I gestured for her to hand it to me, and I buffed at the surface of the lid. Then, I blinked in surprise.

“What?” she asked, stopping in the path.

I grinned. “Pure aluminum, my dear—worth thousands. We have found our treasure after all.”

She laughed and favored me with another kiss.

And it is here, my readers, that I must end the account of my travels in the Pits of Eltania. The treasure found, our lives lost—and then recovered—I had fulfilled the dying wish of dear, fallen Mikaff.

It was my grandest adventure yet, and I believe I will rest for a short time before striking out again. I have been hearing of strange lights in the southern skies that can only hide another mystery.

Until then, adventure on![*]

# POSTSCRIPT

This is the second of the stories I wrote for Crafty Games, this one to be published in their *Alloy of Law* supplement.

I took a different direction on this story. Since I'd done the first one as more of a showpiece to new readers, I wanted this one to be something deep and interesting for established readers. Revealing how the koloss are made and exist in the second era of Scadrial's sequence seemed the kind of secret that would be intriguing to people.

Many years ago, my brother Jordan came to me wanting to do a radio drama as a podcast. He wanted it to be scripted, written by me—but I just didn't have time. (Writing Excuses was born out of this, though I believe he eventually went to Dan Wells to do some episodes of something more scripted.) He pitched it as the story of an old-time adventurer/explorer. Though I couldn't do the piece, I did spend years thinking about what I might have done, had I had the time.

Allomancer Jak is a direct response to this. The gentleman adventurer, over the top, based off old pulp stories. Writing only that, however, seemed like it wouldn't work. In the Wax and Wayne books, I was already telling stories that were a more authentic evolution of pulp stories, with more solid characterization and less melodrama.

Jak, then, had to be about contrast—a way to highlight the old against the new. Whether he is actually the blowhard that his "faithful steward" implies he is, or whether he's more of a quixotic adventurer with boundless optimism, he is supposed to present a certain level of inauthenticity. A contrast to Wax, in the way that you might contrast the newer incarnations of Batman with the old Adam West Batman. (Note that I love both.)

As an aside, writing Handerwym’s annotations was one of the most amusing things I’ve ever done as a writer.

## BY BRANDON SANDERSON

THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE
*The Way of Kings*
*Words of Radiance*

THE MISTBORN SAGA
THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY
*Mistborn*
*The Well of Ascension*
*The Hero of Ages*
THE WAX AND WAYNE SERIES
*The Alloy of Law*
*Shadows of Self*
*The Bands of Mourning*

*Elantris*
*Warbreaker*
*The Rithmatist*
*Arcanum Unbounded: The Cosmere Collection*

ALCATRAZ VS. THE EVIL LIBRARIANS
*Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians*
*The Scrivener's Bones*
*The Knights of Crystallia*
*The Shattered Lens*
*The Dark Talent*

THE RECKONERS
*Steelheart*
*Firefight*
*Calamity*

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nazrilof

**Brandon Sanderson** grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He lives in Utah with his wife and children and teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. He is the author of such bestsellers as the Mistborn® trilogy and its sequels, *The Alloy of Law*, *Shadows of Self,* and *The Bands of Mourning;* The Stormlight Archive novels *The Way of Kings* and *Words of Radiance;* and other novels, including *The Rithmatist* and *Steelheart*. In 2013, he won a Hugo Award for Best Novella for *The Emperor's Soul,* set in the world of his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*. Additionally, he was chosen to complete Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time® sequence. For behind-the-scenes information on all of Brandon Sanderson's books, visit brandonsanderson.com, or sign up for email updates here.

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* Indeed, this was the outcome of Jak’s brave—perhaps foolhardy—plan. See episode twenty-six. At this point, Jak had been “king” of the koloss for three episodes, and had survived the latest of challenges to his authority, getting closer to the secrets they held regarding the Survivor’s Treasure.

† See “Allomancer Jak and the Mask of Ages,” episode fourteen. There, however, Jak writes that it was a bust of the Lord Mistborn. One wonders if Jak ever stops to read his accounts after their publication. Fortunately for me, he does not seem to.

* One might wonder why Jak felt he needed to escape, as he had not discovered if he was imprisoned, and had not yet tried walking out through the front of the cavern. If you have this concern, might I remind you of the last *eighteen times* Jak awoke with a headache at the beginning of an episode? Each time, he had been captured in some fashion.

† Jak is completely, blissfully unaware of modern scholarship regarding the koloss, which indicates that they rarely (if ever) use actual human skin for their trophies. Indeed, accounts of them eating humans are greatly exaggerated.

* I was actually asleep. It had been a very long day. I’m sure I’d have worried about him if it had crossed my mind to do so. The bed the koloss provided, however, was surprisingly comfortable.

† See episode twenty-five for our discovery of their vow not to harm the Terris, and their explanation for the respect they have paid me during our adventures. It is a matter which I have regarded with some interest.

‡ Didn’t he just mention the whiskey he often drinks at the waystop? Perhaps the dens of thieves do not count as a place where a clear mind is required.

* Yes, according to the way he wrote that sentence, he turned invisible for one line. No, he won’t let me change it.

† Uh …

‡ Technically, this is probably true.

§ Well, it was too late for that after volume one.…

¶ I will admit to a healthy skepticism about Jak's wall-licking episode. My research indicates that one is highly unlikely to find pure tin exposed in this way inside of a natural cave formation. Even cassiterite, a tin ore of some relevance, would be unlikely in this area—and that might be too Allomantically impure to produce an effect. But Jak *is* being truthful about having lost his pouch of tin. I found it on the ground of the camp following his second capture, full and unopened.

* See episode seven of this narrative for Lyndip’s most recent appearance. I will repeat what I said there: I did not see, nor have I ever seen, this supposed talking bird and cannot confirm her existence.

† Never mind that the Faceless Immortals are a mythological feature of the Path, not Survivorism. This theological mixup has never bothered Jak.

‡ I suspect Jak was hallucinating through this entire section, a result of the trauma to his head. Upon doing this edit, I wished several times to be similarly afflicted.

[*] I once mentioned to Jak that my people, the Terris, were at one time considered savages—at least according to the records given us by Harmony. He put a hand on my shoulder and said, “It is all right. I am proud to count a savage as my friend.” He was so sincere, I dared not explain just how insulting he was being.

† I find this strains plausibility, even for a Jak story. More likely, the koloss lowered him from above.

‡ This marks the conclusion of this episode and the beginning of the next—and no, I don’t know how he wrote the last paragraph after sealing the letter in his trousers. Regardless, I doubt you think this is Jak’s demise, considering this collected volume contains three episodes of which this is only the first. However, many of the weekly broadsheet readers of his letters did indeed worry that this was the end of Jak. Just as they worried at the end of the other three hundred episodes. It often strikes me that I wish I could find these people and discover to whom they sold the contents of their skulls, and for how much. I personally much prefer the audience of the *bound* volumes, such as this one. Their keen regard for my personal annotations proves them to be of a superior taste and intellect.

* See “Allomancer Jak and the Waters of Dread” for several equally implausible instances of Jak swimming strong currents and whitewater rapids. I am left to wonder why these extreme events never happen in my presence.

* I am not sure what happened to the rain that was so instrumental in his escape last episode. He doesn’t mention it again.

† An unnecessary “from” is the least of Jak’s problems, so I left it. I did manage to snip sixteen superfluous commas from this page. Jak is also under the impression that *koloss* looks better with an exclamation point in the center, and I have yet to ascertain the reason. For my own sanity, I have removed these, though I worry it has come too late.

‡ Yup.

* As fanciful as Jak's description of this place sounds, I have seen it myself, and must second his description. The patterns do look like footprints, and the pool appears to have the shape of a spearhead. The koloss do not speak of it to anyone. Incredible as it seems, he actually found the location of the Survivor's Treasure. I take this as proof that Harmony watches over all of us, for only deity could have such a cruel sense of humor as to repeatedly allow a man like Jak to bumble into such remarkable success.

† For this revelation, see episode twenty-five of this narrative.

* Or, in other words, “I couldn’t escape immediately, but I wanted to be ready to run screaming like a child as soon as I had the opportunity. So I stood up.”

† Well, no. But I'll accept it. Please note that what Jak is saying here is, unfortunately, true. I have seen the process with my own eyes, as have other scholars, and it is widely accepted that this description of the practice is true. I did try to explain this to Jak on several occasions.

‡ Not sure if this is possible. It would be much like dividing by a null set.

* This, of course, did not stop the newspaper editors from including a detailed sketch of this scene in their original printing of the episode.

† The original printing of this story ended the penultimate episode right here, which—I am told—nearly caused riots and prompted a special broadsheet the next day, containing the conclusion of the story. Fortunately, we had sent in all three of these episodes together, in a single pouch. It is a constant source of amazement to me that people are so interested in Jak's raw accounts, rather than waiting for my more sensible, annotated edition. This lack of taste upon the part of the general public is one of the very reasons I left Elendel to travel the Roughs in the first place. It was either that or shoot myself, and my oaths of a steward's pacifism forbid me from shedding blood.

‡ Studies have proven that koloss-blooded individuals are, on average, no less intelligent than ordinary humans—though obviously this is not true for full koloss who have accepted the transformation. Or for most adventurers.

§ I showed this scene to Elizandra, and her response was laughter. Take that as you wish. I would make note, however, that when *I* have spoken to her of this, she has not seemed nearly so ashamed of her heritage, though she did hide it from us all at first.

* More laughter here. If you know Zandra, you'd probably realize that any statement that lacks three curses—and a comment about Jak's questionable parentage—cannot truly be attributed to her. But she *does* seem to be fond of him. For some reason.

† For those confused—which includes Jak—this really is the way that one becomes a full koloss. Their children are born with skin that ranges from blue to mottled grey, but not the deep blue of true koloss. These children are generally human, though they have some generous endowments of physical capability. Each child is offered the choice to make the final transformation when they reach their twelfth year. Those who do not accept the transformation must leave and join human society. By my estimation, many do leave—but just as many ordinary humans, dissatisfied with their lives in the cities, make their way to the koloss tribes and join them, accepting the transformation. From there, no distinguishing is made between those who were originally humans or koloss-blooded.

* Not enough respect to refrain from calling them savages, of course.

* I believe that this is the only accurate quote from Elizandra in the entire story. She confided in me she threatened to shoot him in the … ahem … masculine identity if he didn’t include it in the official narrative.

* And by that he means precisely 18.3 fathoms. I went back and measured.

* Yes, I am aware that he has quoted this poem six different times through the course of this narrative, and has said it a little differently each time. No, he will not allow me to change them and make them consistent.

† Those readers with a knowledge of buoyancy and pressure should probably stop here, as opposed to working out the mathematics of what a single lungful of air could manage under these circumstances.

* If a bag of air was all that was needed to raise the treasure, one wonders why the grandest of all windbags himself needed the aforementioned sheep’s bladder.

† Sigh.

‡ Yes, they forgot about me.

* And so, we come to the end of another annotated volume. I’m certain that discerning readers of elegance and respectability will appreciate my long-suffering efforts in keeping Jak alive, if only because I suspect these edited accounts provide them with an individual blend of amusement on long winter evenings. I bid you farewell, then. Jak promises further adventure and mystery, but I make a more humble promise. I’m going to try to get him to use proper punctuation in his letters for once in his life. I believe my task to be the more difficult of the two, by far.

Handerwym of Inner Terris
The 17th of Hammondar, 341

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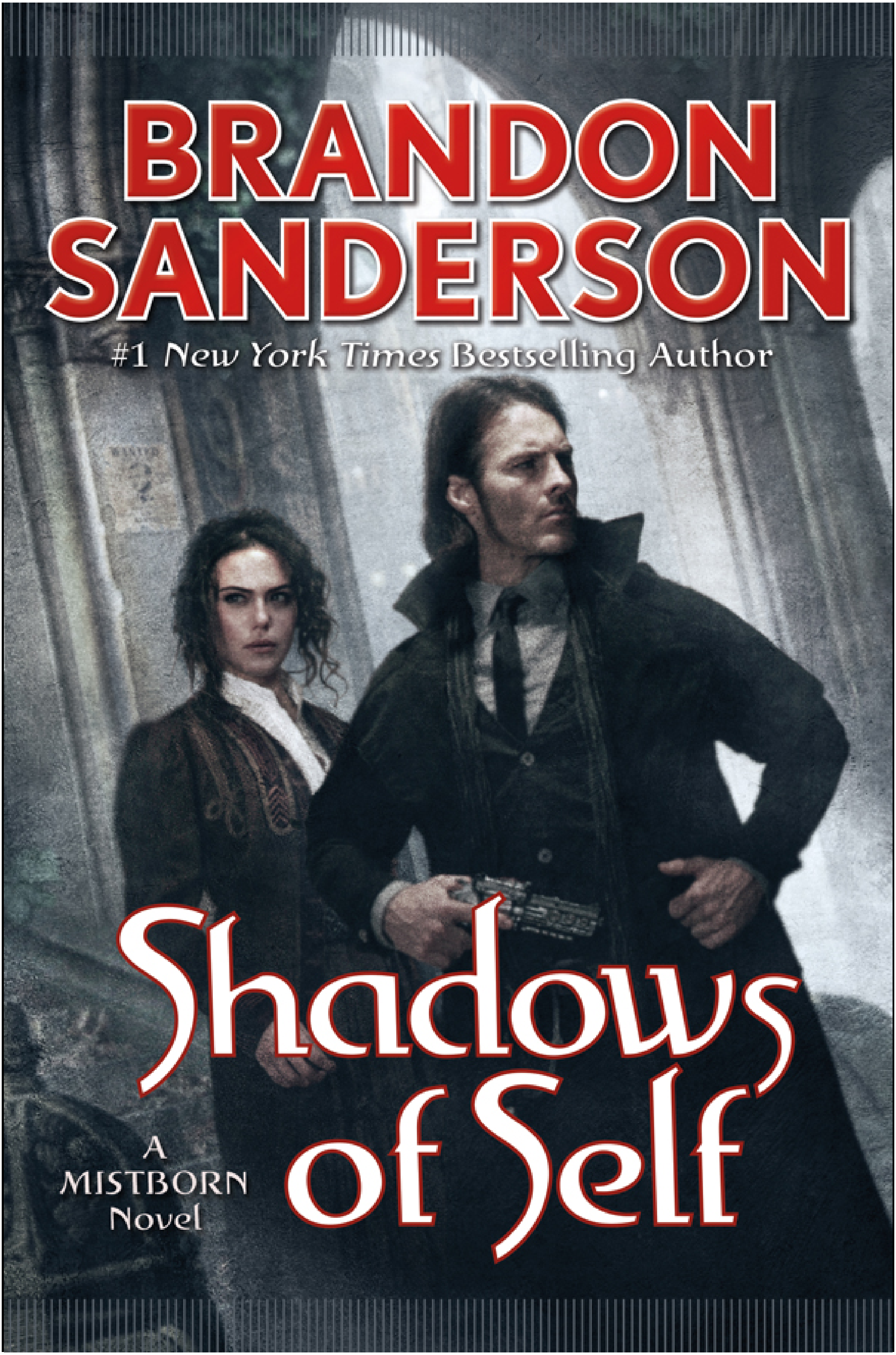
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A
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# SHADOWS OF SELF

## A MISTBORN NOVEL

BRANDON SANDERSON

A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

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About the Author

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**FOR MOSHE FEDER**

*Who took a chance on me*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has a somewhat storied past, as I wrote a third of it during the process of writing another book. (I was waiting for editorial notes to come back; I believe it was the final Wheel of Time book.) I had to drop work on this and dive into the other book.

By the time I came back, my vision for a new trilogy about Wax, Wayne, and Marasi had transformed—so the first third took some serious work to whip into shape and make match the last two thirds, as I wrote them. I relied a lot on the excellent editorial vision of my editor, Moshe Feder, my agent, Joshua Bilmes, and my editorial assistant, the Instant Peter Ahlstrom. Special thanks as well to my editor in the UK, Simon Spanton.

In addition, my writing group was—as always—invaluable. They include Emily Sanderson, Karen and Peter Ahlstrom, Darci and Eric James Stone, Alan Layton, Ben "please get my name right this time" Olsen, Danielle Olsen, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Kaylynn ZoBell, Ethan and Isaac Skarstedt, and Kara and Īsaac Stewart.

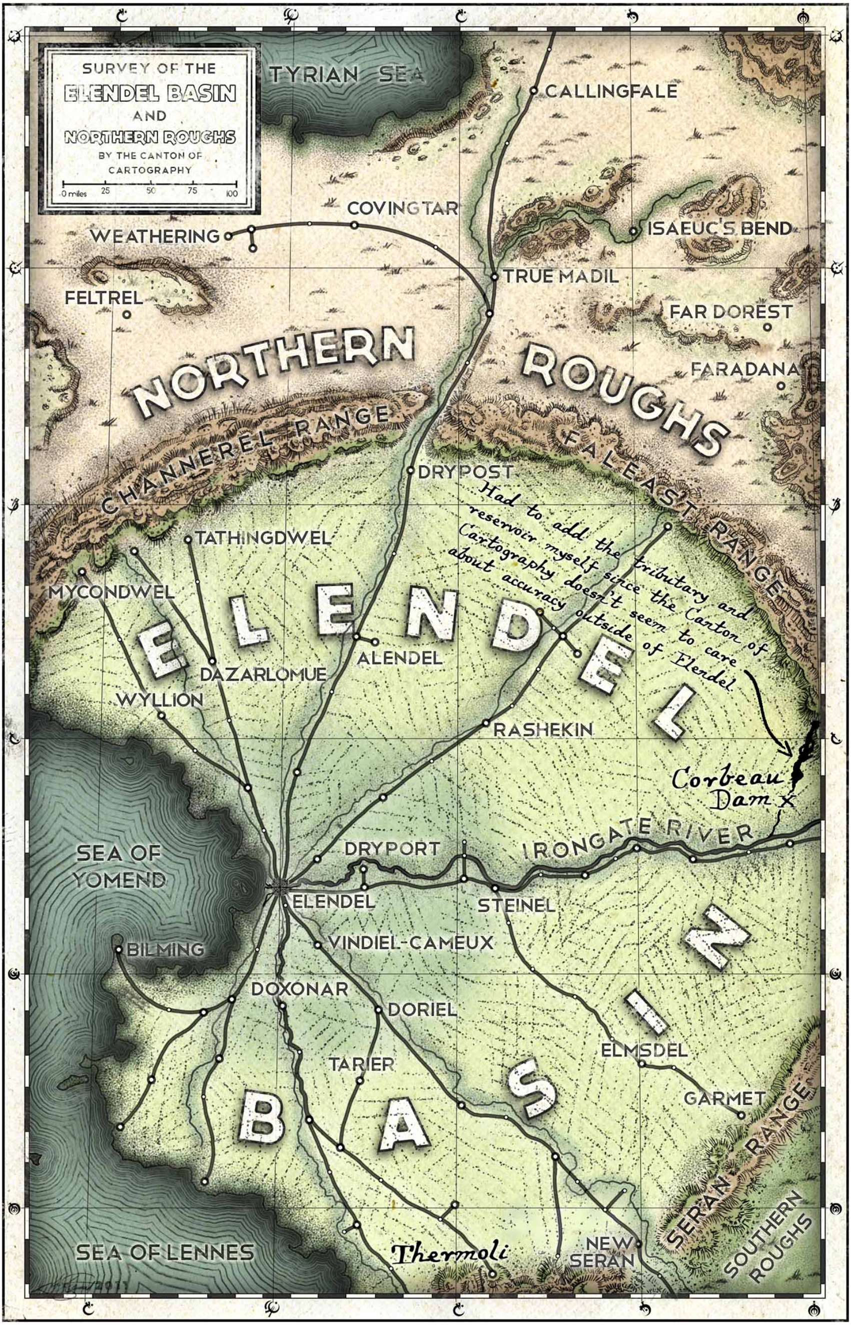
We did a blitz of a beta read, and some vigilant people jumped in with excellent commentary. They were: Jory Phillips, Joel Phillips, Bob Kluttz, Alice Arneson, Trae Cooper, Gary Singer, Lyndsey Luther, Brian T. Hill, Jakob Remick, Eric James Stone, Bao Pham, Aubree Pham, Steve Godecke, Kristina Kugler, Ben Olsen, Samuel Lund, Megan Kanne, Nate Hatfield, Layne Garrett, Kim Garrett, Eric Lake, Karen Ahlstrom, Isaac Skarstedt, Darci Stone, Īsaac Stewart, Kalyani Poluri, Josh Walker, Donald Mustard III, Cory Aitchison, and Christi Jacobsen.

Over the years, it's been incredibly satisfying to see the artwork for my novels develop. I've always had this wild vision for including way more art than usual—basically all I can get away with. Three wonderful artists made this possible on this volume. Chris McGrath did the cover, and I *love* his depictions of the characters. My good friend and now full-time art director Īsaac Stewart did the maps and symbols, as well as the heavy design lifting on the broadsheet. Art on the broadsheet was done by the ever-excellent Ben McSweeney.

At JABberwocky, my agency, thanks go to Eddie Schneider, Sam Morgan, Krystyna Lopez, and Christa Atkinson. In the UK, John Berlyne of the Zeno Agency deserves your applause.

From Tor Books, many thanks to Tom Doherty, Linda Quinton, Marco Palmieri, Karl Gold, Diana Pho, Nathan Weaver, Edward Allen, and Rafal Gibek. Ingrid Powell was the proofreader. Copyediting was done by Terry McGarry, and the audiobook is by my personal favorite reader, Michael Kramer. Other audiobook pros who deserve thanks are Robert Allen, Samantha Edelson, and Mitali Dave. Adam Horne, my new executive assistant, gets his name in a book for the first time in this one. Well done, Adam!

Finally, big thanks to my family, as always. A wonderful wife and three little boys who still get confused as to why the books Daddy writes have so few pictures.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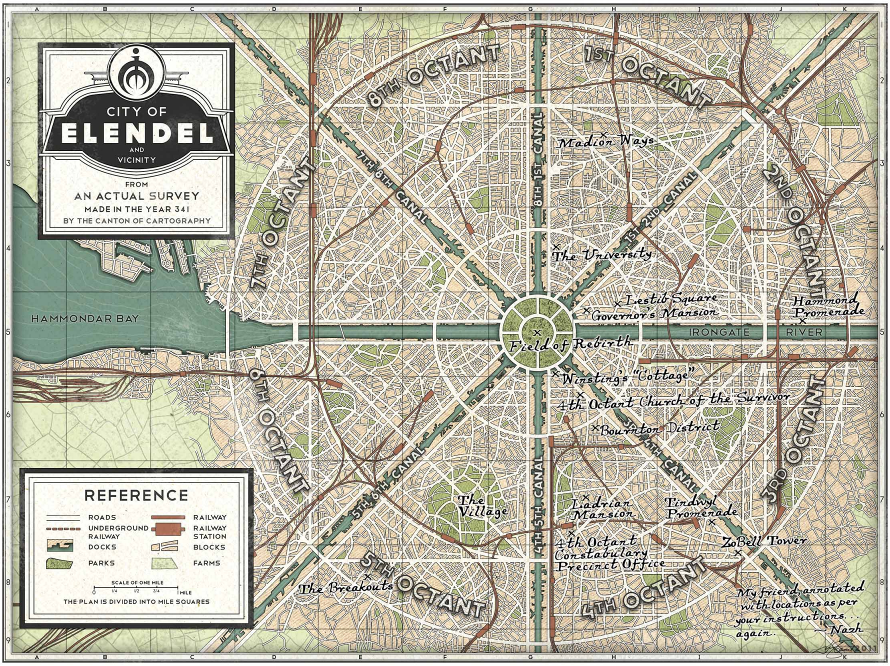
Had to add the tributary and reservoir myself since the Canton of Cartography doesn't seem to care about accuracy outside of Elendel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Bournton District
The Village
Ladrian Mansion
Tindwyl Promenade
ZoBell Tower
4th Octant Constabulary Precinct Office
The Breakouts
My friend, annotated with locations as per your instructions... again.
—Nazh
2011

# PROLOGUE

Waxillium Ladrian, lawman for hire, swung off his horse and turned to face the saloon.

"Aw," the kid said, hopping down from his own horse. "You didn't catch your spur on the stirrup and trip."

"That happened *once*," Waxillium said.

"Yeah, but it was *super* funny."

"Stay with the horses," Waxillium said, tossing the kid his reins. "Don't tie up Destroyer. I might need her."

"Sure."

"And *don't* steal anything."

The kid—round-faced and seventeen, with barely a hint of stubble on his face despite weeks of trying—nodded with a solemn expression. "I promise I won't swipe nothin' of yours, Wax."

Waxillium sighed. "That's not what I said."

"But…"

"Just stay with the horses. And try not to talk to anyone." Waxillium shook his head, pushing into the saloon, feeling a spring in his step. He was filling his metalmind a smidge, decreasing his weight by about ten percent. Common practice for him these days, ever since he'd run out of stored weight during one of his first bounty hunts a few months back.

The saloon, of course, was dirty. Practically everything out here in the Roughs was dusty, worn, or broken. Five years out here, and he still wasn't used to that. True, he'd spent most of those five years trying to make a living as a clerk, moving farther and farther from population centers in an effort to avoid getting recognized. But in the Roughs, even the larger population centers were dirtier than those back in Elendel.

And here, on the fringes of populated lands, dirty didn't even *begin* to describe life. The men he passed in the saloon sat slumped low to their tables, hardly looking up. That was another thing about the Roughs. Both plants and people were more prickly, and they grew lower to the ground. Even the fanlike acacias, which did stretch high at times, had this fortified, hardy sense about them.

He scanned the room, hands on hips, hoping he'd draw attention. He didn't, which nagged at him. Why wear a fine city suit, with a lavender cravat, if nobody was going to notice? At least they weren't snickering, like those in the last saloon.

Hand on his gun, Waxillium sauntered up to the bar. The barkeep was a tall man who looked to have some Terris blood in him, from that willowy build, though his refined cousins in the Basin would be horrified to see him chewing on a greasy chicken leg with one hand while serving a mug with the other. Waxillium tried not to be nauseated; the local notion of hygiene was another thing he wasn't yet accustomed to. Out here, the fastidious ones were those who remembered to wipe their hands on their trousers between picking their nose and shaking your hand.

Waxillium waited. Then waited some more. Then cleared his throat. Finally, the barkeep lumbered over to him.

"Yeah?"

"I'm looking for a man," Waxillium said under his breath. "Goes by the name of Granite Joe."

"Don't know him," the barkeep said.

"Don't— He's only the *single* most notorious outlaw in these parts."

"Don't know him."

"But—"

"It's safer to not know men like Joe," the barkeep said, then took a bite of his chicken leg. "But I have a friend."

"That's surprising."

The barkeep glared at him.

"Ahem," Waxillium said. "Sorry. Continue."

"My friend might be willing to know people that others won't. It will take a little time to get him. You'll pay?"

"I'm a lawman," Waxillium said. "I do what I do in the name of justice."

The barkeep blinked. Slowly, deliberately, as if it required conscious effort. "So … you'll pay?"

"Yes, I'll pay," Waxillium said with a sigh, mentally counting what he'd already spent hunting Granite Joe. He couldn't afford to go in the hole again. Destroyer needed a new saddle, and Waxillium went through suits frightfully quick out here.

“Good,” the barkeep said, gesturing for Waxillium to follow. They wove through the room, around tables and past the pianoforte, which sat beside one of the pillars, between two tables. It didn’t look like it had been played in ages, and someone had set a row of dirty mugs on it. Next to the stairs, they entered a small room. It smelled dusty.

“Wait,” the barkeep said, then shut the door and left.

Waxillium folded his arms, eyeing the room’s lone chair. The white paint was flaking and peeling; he didn’t doubt that if he sat down, he’d end up with half of it stuck to his trousers.

He was growing more comfortable with the people of the Roughs, if not their particular habits. These few months chasing bounties had shown him that there *were* good men and women out here, mixed among the rest. Yet they all had this stubborn *fatalism* about them. They didn’t trust authority, and often shunned lawmen, even if it meant letting a man like Granite Joe continue to ravage and plunder. Without the bounties set by the railroad and mining companies, nothing would ever—

The window shook. Waxillium stopped, then grabbed the gun at his side and burned steel. The metal created a sharp warmth within him, like the feeling after drinking something too hot. Blue lines sprang up pointing from his chest toward nearby sources of metal, several of which were just outside the shuttered window. Others pointed downward. This saloon had a basement, which was unusual out in the Roughs.

He could Push on those lines if he needed to, shoving on the metal they connected to. For now, he just watched as a small rod slipped between the window casements, then lifted, raising the latch that held them closed. The window rattled, then swung open.

A young woman in dark trousers hopped in, rifle in one hand. Lean, with a squarish face, she carried an unlit cigar in her teeth and looked vaguely familiar to Waxillium. She stood up, apparently satisfied, then turned to close the window. As she did, she saw him for the first time.

“Hell!” she said, scrambling backward, dropping her cigar, raising her rifle.

Waxillium raised his own gun and prepared his Allomancy, wishing he’d found a way to protect himself from bullets. He could Push on metal, yes, but he wasn’t fast enough to stop gunfire, unless he Pushed on the gun before the trigger was pulled.

“Hey,” the woman said, looking through the rifle sights. “Aren’t you that guy? The one who killed Peret the Black?”

“Waxillium Ladrian,” he said. “Lawman for hire.”

“You’re kidding. That’s how you introduce yourself?”

“Sure. Why not?”

She didn’t answer, instead looking away from her rifle, studying him for a few moments. Finally she said, “A cravat? Really?”

“It’s kind of my thing,” Waxillium said. “The gentleman bounty hunter.”

“Why would a bounty hunter need a ‘thing’ in the first place?”

“It’s important to have a reputation,” Waxillium said, raising his chin. “The outlaws all have them; people have heard of men like Granite Joe from one side of the Roughs to the other. Why shouldn’t I do the same?”

“Because it paints a target on your head.”

“Worth the danger,” Waxillium said. “But speaking of targets…” He waved his gun, then nodded toward hers.

“You’re after the bounty on Joe,” she said.

“Sure am. You too?”

She nodded.

“Split it?” Waxillium said.

She sighed, but lowered her rifle. “Fine. The one who shoots him gets a double portion though.”

“I was planning to bring him in alive.…”

“Good. Gives me a better chance of killing him first.” She grinned at him, slipping over to the door. “The name’s Lessie. Granite *is* in here somewhere, then? Have you seen him?”

“No, I haven’t,” Waxillium said, joining her at the door. “I asked the barkeep, and he sent me in here.”

She turned on him. “You asked the barkeep.”

“Sure,” Waxillium said. “I’ve read the stories. Barkeeps know everything, and … You’re shaking your head.”

“*Everyone* in this saloon belongs to Joe, Mister Cravat,” Lessie said. “Hell, half the people in this town belong to him. You *asked the barkeep*?”

“I believe we’ve established that.”

“Rust!” She cracked the door and looked out. “How in Ruin’s name did *you* take down Peret the Black?”

“Surely it’s not that bad. *Everyone* in the bar can’t…”

He trailed off as he peeked out the door. The tall barkeep hadn’t run off to fetch anyone. No, he was out in the taproom of the saloon, gesturing toward the side room’s door and urging the assembled thugs and miscreants to stand up and arm themselves. They looked hesitant, and some were gesturing angrily, but more than a few had guns out.

“Damn,” Lessie whispered.

"Back out the way you came in?" Waxillium asked.

Her response was to slip the door closed with the utmost care, then shove him aside and scramble toward the window. She grabbed the windowsill to step out, but gunfire cracked nearby and wood chips exploded off the sill.

Lessie cursed and dropped to the floor. Waxillium dove down beside her.

"Sharpshooter!" he hissed.

"Are you always this observant, Mister Cravat?"

"No, only when I'm being shot at." He peeked up over the lip of the windowsill, but there were a dozen places nearby where the shooter could be hiding. "This is a problem."

"There's that razor-sharp power of observation again." Lessie crawled across the floor toward the door.

"I meant in more ways than one," Waxillium said, crossing the floor in a crouch. "How did they have time to get a sharpshooter into position? They must have *known* that I was going to show up today. This whole place could be a trap."

Lessie cursed softly as he reached the door and cracked it open again. The thugs were arguing quietly and gesturing toward the door.

"They're taking me seriously," Waxillium said. "Ha! The reputation is working. You see that? They're frightened!"

"Congratulations," she said. "Do you think they'll give me a reward if I shoot you?"

"We need to get upstairs," Waxillium said, eyeing a stairwell just outside their door.

"What good will that do?"

"Well, for one thing, all the armed people who want to kill us are down here. I'd rather be somewhere else, and those stairs will be easier to defend than this room. Besides, we might find a window on the other side of the building and escape."

"Yeah, if you want to jump two stories."

Jumping wasn't a problem for a Coinshot; Waxillium could Push off a dropped piece of metal as they fell, slowing himself and landing safely. He was also a Feruchemist, and could use his metalminds to reduce his weight far more than he was doing now, shaving it down until he practically floated.

However, Waxillium's abilities weren't widely known, and he wanted to keep it that way. He'd heard the stories of his miraculous survivals, and liked the air of mystery around them. There was speculation that he was Metalborn, sure, but so long as people didn't know exactly what he could do, he'd have an edge.

"Look, I'm going to run for the steps," he said to the woman. "If you want to stay down here and fight your way out, great. You'll provide an ideal distraction for me."

She glanced at him, then grinned. "Fine. We'll do it your way. But if we get shot, you owe me a drink."

*There* is *something familiar about her,* Waxillium thought. He nodded, counted softly to three, then burst out of the door and leveled his gun at the nearest thug. The man jumped back as Waxillium shot three times—and missed. His bullets hit the pianoforte instead, sounding a discordant note with each impact.

Lessie scrambled out behind him and went for the stairs. The motley collection of thugs leveled weapons with cries of surprise. Waxillium swung his gun back—out of the way of his Allomancy—and shoved lightly on the blue lines pointing from him toward the men in the room. They opened fire, but his Push had nudged their guns enough to spoil their aim.

Waxillium followed Lessie up the steps, fleeing the storm of gunfire.

"Holy hell," Lessie said as they reached the first landing. "We're alive." She looked back at him, cheeks flushed.

Something clicked like a lock in Waxillium's mind. "I *have* met you before," he said.

"No you haven't," she said, looking away. "Let's keep—"

"The Weeping Bull!" Waxillium said. "The dancing girl!"

"Oh, God Beyond," she said, leading the way up the stairs. "You remember."

"I *knew* you were faking. Even Rusko wouldn't hire someone that uncoordinated, no matter how pretty her legs are."

"Can we go jump out a window now, please?" she said, checking the top floor for signs of thugs.

"Why were you there? Chasing a bounty?"

"Yeah, kind of."

"And you really didn't know they were going to make you—"

"This conversation is done."

They stepped out onto the top floor, and Waxillium waited a moment until a shadow on the wall announced someone following them upstairs. He fired once at the thug who appeared there, missing again, but driving the man back. He heard cursing and arguing below. Granite Joe might own the men in this saloon, but they weren't overly loyal. The first few up the steps would almost certainly get shot, and none would be eager to take the risk.

That would buy Waxillium some time. Lessie pushed into a room, passing an empty bed with a pair of boots beside it. She threw open the window, which was on the opposite side of the building from the sharpshooter.

The town of Weathering spread before them, a lonely collection of shops and homes, hunkered down as if waiting—in vain—for the day when the railroad would stretch its fingers this far. In the middle distance, beyond the humble buildings, a few giraffes browsed lazily, the only sign of animal life in the vast plain.

The drop out the window was straight down, no roof to climb onto. Lessie regarded the ground warily. Waxillium shoved his fingers in his mouth and whistled sharply.

Nothing happened.

He whistled again.

"What the hell are you doing?" Lessie demanded.

"Calling my horse," Waxillium said, then whistled again. "We can hop down into the saddle and ride away."

She stared at him. "You're serious."

"Sure I am. We've been practicing."

A lone figure walked out onto the street below, the kid who had been following Waxillium. "Uh, Wax?" the kid called up. "Destroyer's just standing there, drinking."

"Hell," Waxillium said.

Lessie looked at him. "You named your horse—"

"She's a little too placid, all right?" Waxillium snapped, climbing up onto the windowsill. "I thought the name might inspire her." He cupped his hand, calling to the boy below. "Wayne! Bring her out here. We're going to jump!"

"Like hell we are," Lessie said. "You think there's something magical about a saddle that will keep us from breaking the horse's back when we drop into it?"

Waxillium hesitated. "Well, I've read about people doing this…."

"Yeah, I've got an idea," Lessie said. "Next, why don't you call out Granite Joe, and go stand out in the road and have a good old-fashioned showdown at noon."

"You think that would work? I—"

"No, it won't work," she snapped. "Nobody does that. It's stupid. Ruin! How *did* you kill Peret the Black?"

They stared at each other a moment.

"Well…" Waxillium started.

"Oh hell. You caught him on the crapper, didn't you?"

Waxillium grinned at her. "Yeah."

"Did you shoot him in the back too?"

"As bravely as any man ever shot another in the back."

"Huh. There might be hope for you yet."

He nodded toward the window. "Jump?"

"Sure. Why not break both my legs before getting shot? Might as well go all in, Mister Cravat."

"I think we'll be fine, Miss Pink Garter."

She raised an eyebrow.

"If you're going to identify me by my clothing choices," he said, "then I figure I can do the same."

"It shall never be mentioned again," she said, then took a deep breath. "So?"

He nodded, flaring his metals, preparing to hold on to her and slow them as they fell—just enough to make it seem like they'd miraculously survived the jump. As he did, however, he noticed one of his blue lines moving—a faint but thick one, pointing across the street.

*The window in the mill.* Sunlight glinted off something inside.

Waxillium immediately grabbed Lessie and pulled her down. A fraction of a second later, a bullet streaked over their heads and hit the door on the other side of the room.

"Another sharpshooter," she hissed.

"Your power of observation is—"

"Shut it," she said. "Now what?"

Waxillium frowned, considering the question. He glanced at the bullet hole, gauging the trajectory. The sharpshooter had aimed too high; even if Waxillium hadn't ducked, he'd likely have been all right.

Why aim high? The moving blue line to the gun had indicated the sharpshooter running to get into position before shooting. Was it just rushed targeting? Or was there a more sinister reason? *To knock me out of the sky? When I flew out the window?*

He heard footsteps on the stairs, but saw no blue lines. He cursed, scrambling over and peeking out. A group of men were creeping up the steps, and not the normal thugs from below. These men wore tight white shirts, had pencil mustaches, and were armed with crossbows. Not a speck of metal on them.

Rusts! They knew he was a Coinshot, and Granite Joe had a kill squad ready for him.

He ducked back into the room and grabbed Lessie by the arm. "Your informant said Granite Joe was in this building?"

"Yeah," she said. "He most certainly is. He likes to be close when a gang is being gathered; he likes to keep an eye on his men."

"This building has a basement."

"… So?"

"So hang on."

He grabbed her in both hands and rolled onto the ground, causing her to yelp, then curse. Holding her over him, he increased his weight.

He had a great deal of it stored in his metalmind by now, after weeks of siphoning it off. Now he drew it all out, magnifying his weight manyfold in an instant. The wooden floor cracked, then *burst* open beneath them.

Waxillium fell through, his fine clothing getting ripped, and dropped through the air, towing Lessie after him. Eyes squeezed closed, he Pushed the hundreds of blue lines behind him, those leading to the nails in the floor below. He blasted them downward to shatter the ground level's floor and open the way into the basement.

They crashed through the ground floor in a shower of dust and splinters. Waxillium managed to slow their descent with a Steelpush, but they still came down hard, smashing into a table in a basement chamber.

Waxillium let out a puffing groan, but forced himself to twist around, shaking free of the broken wood. The basement, surprisingly, was paneled in fine hardwoods and lit by lamps shaped like curvaceous women. The table they had hit bore a rich white tablecloth, though it was now wadded in a bunch, the table legs shattered and the table itself at an angle.

A man sat at the table's head. Waxillium managed to stand up in the wreckage and level a gun at the fellow, who had a blocky face and dark blue-grey skin—the mark of a man with koloss heritage. Granite Joe. Waxillium appeared to have interrupted his dinner, judging by the napkin tucked into his collar and the spilled soup on the broken table in front of him.

Lessie groaned, rolling over and brushing splinters off her clothing. Her rifle had apparently been left upstairs. Waxillium held his gun in a firm grip as he eyed the two duster-wearing bodyguards behind Granite Joe, a man and a woman—siblings, he'd heard, and crack shots. They'd been surprised by his fall, obviously, for though they'd rested hands on their weapons, they hadn't drawn.

Waxillium had the upper hand, with the gun on Joe—but if he *did* shoot, the siblings would kill him in a heartbeat. Perhaps he hadn't thought through this line of attack quite as well as he should have.

Joe scraped at the remnants of his broken bowl, framed by splatters of red soup on the tablecloth. He managed to get some onto his spoon and lifted it to his lips. "You," he said after sipping the soup, "should be dead."

"You might want to look at hiring a new group of thugs," Waxillium said.

"The ones upstairs aren't worth much."

"I wasn't referring to them," Joe said. "How long have you been up here, in the Roughs, making trouble? Two years?"

"One," Waxillium said. He'd been up here longer, but he had only recently started "making trouble," as Joe put it.

Granite Joe clicked his tongue. "You think your type is new up here, son? Wide-eyed, with a low-slung gunbelt and bright new spurs? Come to reform us of our uncivilized ways. We see dozens like you every year. The others have the decency to either learn to be bribed, or to get dead before they ruin too much. But not you."

*He's stalling,* Waxillium thought. Waiting for the men upstairs to run down.

"Drop your weapons!" Waxillium said, holding his gun on Joe. "Drop them or I shoot!"

The two guards didn't move. *No metal lines on the guard on the right,* Waxillium thought. *Or on Joe himself.* The one on the left had a handgun, perhaps trusting the speed of his draw against a Coinshot. The other two had fancy hand-crossbows in their holsters, he bet. Single-shot, made of wood and ceramic. Built for killing Coinshots.

Even with Allomancy, Waxillium would never be able to kill all three of them without getting shot himself. Sweat trickled down his temple. He was tempted to just pull his trigger and shoot, but he'd be killed if he did that. And they knew it. It was a standoff, but *they* had reinforcements coming.

"You don't belong here," Joe said, leaning forward, elbows on his broken table. "We came here to escape folks like you. Your rules. Your assumptions. We don't want you."

"If that were true," Waxillium said, surprised at how level his voice was, "then people wouldn't come to me crying because you killed their sons. You might not need Elendel's laws up here, but that doesn't mean you don't need any laws at all. And it doesn't mean men like you should be able to do whatever you want."

Granite Joe shook his head, standing up, hand to his holster. "This isn't your habitat, son. Everyone has a price up here. If they don't, they don't fit in. You'll die, slow and painful, just like a lion would die in that city of yours. What I'm doing today, this is a mercy."

Joe drew.

Waxillium reacted quickly, Pushing himself off the wall lamps to his right. They were firmly anchored, so his Allomantic shove Pushed him to the left. He twisted his gun and fired.

Joe got his crossbow out and loosed a bolt, but the shot missed, zipping through the air where Waxillium had been. Waxillium's own bullet flew true for once, hitting the female guard, who had pulled out her crossbow. She dropped, and as Waxillium crashed into the wall, he Pushed—knocking the gun out of the other guard's hand as the man fired.

Waxillium's Push, unfortunately, also flung his own gun out of his hand—but sent it spinning toward the second bodyguard. His gun smacked the man right in the face, dropping him.

Waxillium steadied himself, looking across the room at Joe, who seemed baffled that both his guards were down. No time to think. Waxillium scrambled toward the large, koloss-blooded man. If he could reach some metal to use as a weapon, maybe—

A weapon clicked behind him. Waxillium stopped and looked over his shoulder at Lessie, who was pointing a small hand-crossbow right at him.

"Everyone up here has a price," Granite Joe said.

Waxillium stared at the crossbow bolt, tipped with obsidian. Where had she been carrying that? He swallowed slowly.

*She put herself in danger, scrambling up the stairs with me!* he thought. *How could she have been …*

But Joe had known about his Allomancy. So had she. Lessie *knew* he could spoil the thugs' aim, when she'd joined him in running up the steps.

"Finally," Joe said, "do you have an explanation of why you didn't just *shoot* him in the saloon room, where the barkeep put him?"

She didn't respond, instead studying Waxillium. "I did warn you that everyone in the saloon was in Joe's employ," she noted.

"I…" Waxillium swallowed. "I still think your legs are pretty."

She met his eyes. Then she sighed, turned the crossbow, and shot Granite Joe in the neck.

Waxillium blinked as the enormous man dropped to the floor, gurgling as he bled.

"That?" Lessie said, glaring at Waxillium. "That's all you could come up with to win me over? 'You have nice legs'? Seriously? You are *so* doomed up here, Cravat."

Waxillium breathed out in relief. "Oh, *Harmony*. I thought you were going to shoot me for sure."

"Should have," she grumbled. "I can't believe—"

She cut off as the stairs clattered, the troop of miscreants from above having finally gathered the nerve to rush down the stairwell. A good half dozen of them burst into the room with weapons drawn.

Lessie dove for the fallen bodyguard's gun.

Waxillium thought quickly, then did what came most naturally. He struck a dramatic pose in the rubble, one foot up, Granite Joe dead beside him, both bodyguards felled. Dust from the broken ceiling still sprinkled down, illuminated in sunlight pouring through a window above.

The thugs pulled to a stop. They looked down at the fallen corpse of their boss, then gaped toward Waxillium.

Finally, looking like children who had been caught in the pantry trying to get at the cookies, they lowered their weapons. The ones at the front tried to push through the ones at the back to get away, and the whole clamorous mess of them swarmed back up the steps, leaving the forlorn barkeep, who fled last of all.

Waxillium turned and offered his hand to Lessie, who let him pull her to her feet. She looked after the retreating group of bandits, whose boots thumped on wood in their haste to escape. In moments the building was silent.

"Huh," she said. "You're as surprising as a donkey who can dance, Mister Cravat."

"It helps to have a thing," Waxillium noted.

"Yeah. You think I should get a thing?"

"Getting a thing has been one of the most important choices I made in coming up to the Roughs."

Lessie nodded slowly. "I have no idea what we're talking about, but it sounds kinda dirty." She glanced past him toward Granite Joe's corpse, which stared lifelessly, lying in a pool of his own blood.

"Thanks," Waxillium said. "For not murdering me."

"Eh. I was gonna kill him eventually anyway and turn him in for the bounty."

"Yes, well, I doubt you were planning to do it in front of his entire gang, while trapped in a basement with no escape."

"True. Right stupid of me, that was."

"So why do it?"

She kept looking at the body. "I've done plenty of things in Joe's name I wish I hadn't, but as far as I know, I never shot a man who didn't deserve it. Killing you … well, seems like it would have been killing what you stood for too. Ya know?"

"I think I can grasp the concept."

She rubbed at a bleeding scratch on her neck, where she'd brushed broken wood during their fall. "Next time, though, I hope it won't involve making quite so big a mess. I *liked* this saloon."

"I'll do my best," Waxillium said. "I intend to change things out here. If not the whole Roughs, then at least this town."

“Well,” Lessie said, walking over to Granite Joe’s corpse, “I’m sure that if any evil pianos were thinking of attacking the city, they’ll have second thoughts now, considering your prowess with that pistol.”

Waxillium winced. “You … saw that, did you?”

“Rarely seen such a feat,” she said, kneeling and going through Joe’s pockets. “Three shots, three different notes, not a single bandit down. That takes skill. Maybe you should spend a little less time with your thing and more with your gun.”

“Now *that* sounded dirty.”

“Good. I hate being crass by accident.” She came out with Joe’s pocketbook and smiled, tossing it up and catching it. Above, in the hole Waxillium had made, an equine head poked out, followed by a smaller, teenage one in an oversized bowler hat. Where had he gotten that?

Destroyer blustered in greeting.

“Sure, *now* you come,” Waxillium said. “Stupid horse.”

“Actually,” Lessie said, “seems to me like staying away from you during a gunfight makes her a pretty damn *smart* horse.”

Waxillium smiled and held out his hand to Lessie. She took it, and he pulled her close. Then he lifted them out of the wreckage on a line of blue light.

# PART ONE

# 1

## SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER

Winsting smiled to himself as he watched the setting sun. It was an ideal evening to auction himself off.

“We have my saferoom ready?” Winsting asked, lightly gripping the balcony banister. “Just in case?”

“Yes, my lord.” Flog wore his silly Roughs hat along with a duster, though he’d never been outside of the Elendel Basin. The man was an excellent bodyguard, despite his terrible fashion sense, but Winsting made certain to Pull on the man’s emotions anyway, subtly enhancing Flog’s sense of loyalty. One could never be too careful.

“My lord?” Flog asked, glancing toward the chamber behind them. “They’re all here, my lord. Are you ready?”

Not turning away from the setting sun, Winsting raised a finger to hush the bodyguard. The balcony, in the Fourth Octant of Elendel, overlooked the canal and the Hub of the city—so he had a nice view of the Field of Rebirth. Long shadows stretched from the statues of the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor in the green park where, according to fanciful legend, their corpses had been discovered following the Great Catacendre and the Final Ascension.

The air was muggy, slightly tempered by a cool breeze off Hammondar Bay a couple of miles to the west. Winsting tapped his fingers on the balcony railing, patiently sending out pulses of Allomantic power to shape the emotions of those in the room behind him. Or at least any foolish enough not to be wearing their aluminum-lined hats.

*Any moment now …*

Initially appearing as pinprick spots in the air, mist grew before him, spreading like frost across a window. Tendrils stretched and spun about one another, becoming streams—then rivers of motion, currents shifting and blanketing the city. Engulfing it. Consuming it.

“A misty night,” Flog said. “That’s bad luck, it is.”

“Don’t be a fool,” Winsting said, adjusting his cravat.

“He’s watching us,” Flog said. “The mists are His eyes, my lord. Sure as Ruin, that is.”

“Superstitious nonsense.” Winsting turned and strode into the room. Behind him, Flog shut the doors before the mists could seep into the party.

The two dozen people—along with the inevitable bodyguards—who mingled and chatted there were a select group. Not just important, but also very much at odds with one another, despite their deliberate smiles and meaningless small talk. He preferred to have rivals at events like this. Let them all see each other, and let each know the cost of losing the contest for his favor.

Winsting stepped among them. Unfortunately many did wear hats, whose aluminum linings would protect them from emotional Allomancy—though he had personally assured each attendee that none of the others would have Soothers or Rioters with them. He’d said nothing of his own abilities, of course. So far as any of them knew, he wasn’t an Allomancer.

He glanced across the room to where Blome tended bar. The man shook his head. Nobody else in the room was burning any metals. Excellent.

Winsting stepped up to the bar, then turned and raised his hands to draw everyone’s attention. The gesture exposed the twinkling diamond cuff links he wore on his stiff white shirt. The settings were wooden, of course.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “welcome to our little auction. The bidding begins now, and it ends when I hear the offer I like most.”

He said nothing more; too much talk would kill the drama. Winsting took the drink one of his servers offered and stepped out to mingle, then hesitated as he looked over the crowd. “Edwarn Ladrian is not here,” he said softly. He refused to call the man by his silly moniker, Mister Suit.

“No,” Flog said.

“I thought you said everyone had arrived!”

“Everyone who said they were coming,” Flog said. He shuffled, uncomfortable.

Winsting pursed his lips, but otherwise hid his disappointment. He’d been *certain* his offer had intrigued Edwarn. Perhaps the man had bought out one of the other crime lords in the room. Something to consider.

Winsting made his way to the central table, which held the nominal centerpiece of the evening. It was a painting of a reclining woman; Winsting had painted it himself, and he was getting better.

The painting was worthless, but the men and woman in this room would still offer him huge sums for it.

The first one to approach him was Dowser, who ran most of the smuggling operations into the Fifth Octant. The three days of scrub on his cheeks was shadowed by a bowler that, conspicuously, he had not left in the cloakroom. A pretty woman on his arm and a sharp suit did little to clean up a man like Dowser. Winsting wrinkled his nose. Most everyone in the room was a despicable piece of trash, but the others had the decency not to *look* like it.

“It’s ugly as sin,” Dowser said, looking over the painting. “I can’t believe this is what you’re having us ‘bid’ on. A little cheeky, isn’t it?”

“And you’d rather I was completely forthright, Mister Dowser?” Winsting said. “You’d have me proclaim it far and wide? ‘Pay me, and in exchange you get my vote in the Senate for the next year’?”

Dowser glanced to the sides, as if expecting the constables to burst into the room at any moment.

Winsting smiled. “You’ll notice the shades of grey on her cheeks. A representation of the ashen nature of life in a pre-Catacendric world, hmmm? My finest work yet. Do you have an offer? To get the bidding started?”

Dowser said nothing. He would eventually make a bid. Each person in this room had spent weeks posturing before agreeing to this meeting. Half were crime lords like Dowser. The others were Winsting’s own counterparts, high lords and ladies from prominent noble houses, though no less corrupt than the crime lords.

“Aren’t you frightened, Winsting?” asked the woman on Dowser’s arm.

Winsting frowned. He didn’t recognize her. Slender, with short golden hair and a doe-eyed expression, she was uncommonly tall.

“Frightened, my dear?” Winsting asked. “Of the people in this room?”

“No,” she said. “That your brother will find out … what you do.”

“I assure you,” Winsting said. “Replar knows exactly what I am.”

“The governor’s own brother,” the woman said. “Asking for bribes.”

“If that truly surprises you, my dear,” Winsting said, “then you have lived too sheltered a life. Far bigger fish than I have been sold on this market. When the next catch arrives, perhaps you will see.”

That comment caught Dowser’s attention. Winsting smiled as he saw the gears clicking behind Dowser’s eyes. *Yes,* Winsting thought, *I did just imply that my brother himself might be open to your bribery.* Perhaps that would up the man's offer.

Winsting moved over to select some shrimp and quiche from a server's tray. "The woman with Dowser is a spy," Winsting said softly to Flog, who was always at his elbow. "Perhaps in constabulary employ."

Flog started. "My lord! We checked and double-checked each person attending."

"Well you missed one," Winsting whispered. "I'd bet my fortune on it. Follow her after the meeting. If she splits from Dowser for any reason, see that she meets with an accident."

"Yes, my lord."

"And Flog," Winsting said, "do be straightforward about it. I won't have you trying to find a place where the mists won't be watching. Understand?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Excellent," Winsting said, smiling broadly as he strolled over to Lord Hughes Entrone, cousin and confidant to the head of House Entrone.

Winsting spent an hour mingling, and slowly the bids started to come in. Some of the attendees were reluctant. They would rather have met him one-on-one, making their covert offers, then slipping back into Elendel's underbelly. Crime lords and nobles alike, these all preferred to dance around a topic, not discuss it openly. But they did bid, and bid well. By the end of his first circuit of the room, Winsting had to forcibly contain his excitement. No longer would he have to limit his spending. If his brother could—

The gunshot was so unexpected, he at first assumed that one of the servers had broken something. But no. That crack was so sharp, so earsplitting. He'd never heard a gun fired indoors before; he hadn't known just how stunning it could be.

He gaped, the drink tumbling from his fingers as he tried to find the source of the shot. Another followed, then another. It became a storm, various sides firing at one another in a cacophony of death.

Before he could cry for help, Flog had him by the arm, towing him toward the stairs down to the saferoom. One of his other bodyguards stumbled against the doorway, looking with wide eyes at the blood on his shirt. Winsting stared for too long at the dying man before Flog was able to tear him away and shove him into the stairwell.

"What's happening?" Winsting finally demanded as a guard slammed the door behind them and locked it. The bodyguards hurried him down the dim stairway, which was weakly lit by periodic electric lights. "Who fired? What *happened*?"

"No way of knowing," Flog said. Gunfire still sounded above. "Happened too fast."

"Someone just started firing," another guard said. "Might have been Dowser."

"No, it was Darm," another said. "I heard the first shot from his group."

Either way, it was a disaster. Winsting saw his fortune dying a bloody death on the floor above them, and he felt sick as they finally reached the bottom of the stairs and a vaultlike door, which Flog pushed him through.

"I'm going to go back up," Flog said, "see what I can salvage. Find out who caused this."

Winsting nodded and shut the door, locking it from the inside. He settled into a chair to wait, fretting. The small bunker of a room had wine and other amenities, but he couldn't be bothered. He wrung his hands. What would his brother say? Rusts! What would the papers say? He'd have to keep this quiet somehow.

Eventually a knock came at the door, and Winsting glanced through the peephole to see Flog. Behind him, a small force of bodyguards watched the stairwell. It seemed the gunfire had stopped, though from down here it had sounded only like faint popping.

Winsting opened the door. "Well?"

"They're all dead."

"*All* of them?"

"Every last one," Flog said, walking into the room.

Winsting sat heavily in his chair. "Maybe that's good," he said, searching for some glimmer of light in this dark disaster. "Nobody can implicate us. Maybe we can just slip away. Cover our tracks somehow?"

A daunting task. He owned this building. He'd be connected to these deaths. He'd need an alibi. Hell, he was going to *have* to go to his brother. This could cost him his seat, even if the general public never discovered what had happened. He slumped in his chair, frustrated. "Well?" he demanded. "What do you think?"

In response, a pair of hands grabbed Winsting by the hair, pulled his head back, and efficiently slit his exposed throat.

# 2

*I figure I should write one of these things,* the small book read. *To tell my side. Not the side the historians will tell for me. I doubt they'll get it right. I don't know that I'd like them to anyhow.*

Wax tapped the book with the end of his pencil, then scribbled down a note to himself on a loose sheet.

"I'm thinking of inviting the Boris brothers to the wedding," Steris said from the couch opposite the one Wax sat upon.

He grunted, still reading.

*I know Saze doesn't approve of what I've done,* the book continued. *But what did he expect me to do? Knowing what I know …*

"The Boris brothers," Steris continued. "They're acquaintances of yours, aren't they?"

"I shot their father," Wax said, not looking up. "Twice."

*I couldn't let it die,* the book read. *It's not right. Hemalurgy is good now, I figure. Saze is both sides now, right? Ruin isn't around anymore.*

"Are they likely to try to kill you?" Steris asked.

"Boris Junior swore to drink my blood," Wax said. "Boris the Third—and yes, he's the brother of Boris Junior; don't ask—swore to … what was it? Eat my toes? He's not a clever man."

*We can use it. We should. Shouldn't we?*

"I'll just put them on the list, then," Steris said.

Wax sighed, looking up from the book. "You're going to invite my mortal enemies," he said dryly, "to our wedding."

"We have to invite *someone*," Steris said. She sat with her blonde hair up in a bun, her stacks of papers for the wedding arrangements settled around her like subjects at court. Her blue flowered dress was fashionable without being the least bit daring, and her prim hat clung to her hair so tightly it might as well have been nailed in place.

“I’m certain there are better choices for invitations than people who want me dead,” Wax said. “I hear family members are traditional.”

“As a point of fact,” Steris said, “I believe your remaining family members actually do want you dead.”

She had him there. “Well, yours don’t. Not that I’ve heard anyway. If you need to fill out the wedding party, invite more of them.”

“I’ve invited all of my family as would be proper,” Steris said. “And all of my acquaintances that merit the regard.” She reached to the side, taking out a sheet of paper. “You, however, have given me only *two* names of people to invite. Wayne and a woman named Ranette—who, you noted, *probably* wouldn’t try to shoot you at your own wedding.”

“Very unlikely,” Wax agreed. “She hasn’t tried to kill me in years. Not seriously, at least.”

Steris sighed, setting down the sheet.

“Steris…” Wax said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be flippant. Ranette will be fine. We joke about her, but she’s a good friend. She won’t ruin the wedding. I promise.”

“Then who will?”

“Excuse me?”

“I have known you for an entire year now, Lord Waxillium,” Steris said. “I can accept you for who you are, but I am under no illusions. *Something* will happen at our wedding. A villain will burst in, guns firing. Or we’ll discover explosives in the altar. Or Father Bin will inexplicably turn out to be an old enemy and attempt to murder you instead of performing the ceremony. It *will* happen. I’m merely trying to prepare for it.”

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” Wax asked, smiling. “You’re actually thinking of inviting one of my enemies so you can *plan* for a disruption.”

“I’ve sorted them by threat level and ease of access,” Steris said, shuffling through her papers.

“Wait,” Wax said, rising and walking over. He leaned down next to her, looking over her shoulder at her papers. Each sheet contained a detailed biography. “Ape Manton … The Dashir boys … Rusts! Rick Stranger. I’d forgotten about him. Where did you get these?”

“Your exploits are a matter of public record,” Steris said. “One that is of increasing interest to society.”

“How long did you spend on this?” Wax asked, flipping through the pages in the stack.

“I wanted to be thorough. This sort of thing helps me think. Besides, I wanted to know what you had spent your life doing.”

That was actually kind of sweet. In a bizarre, Steris sort of way.

“Invite Douglas Venture,” he said. “He’s kind of a friend, but he can’t hold his liquor. You can count on him making a disturbance at the after-party.”

“Excellent,” Steris said. “And the other thirty-seven seats in your section?”

“Invite leaders among the seamstresses and forgeworkers of my house,” Wax said. “And the constables-general of the various octants. It will be a nice gesture.”

“Very well.”

“If you want me to help more with the wedding planning—”

“No, the formal request to perform the ceremony that you sent to Father Bin was the only task required of you by protocol. Otherwise I can handle it; this is the perfect sort of thing to occupy me. That said, someday I *would* like to know what is in that little book you peruse so often.”

“I—”

The front door to the mansion slammed open down below, and booted feet thumped up the steps. A moment later, the door to the study burst open and Wayne all but tumbled in. Darriance—the house butler—stood apologetically just behind him.

Wiry and of medium height, Wayne had a round clean-shaven face and—as usual—wore his old Roughs clothing, though Steris had pointedly supplied him with new clothing on at least three occasions.

“Wayne, you could try the doorbell sometime,” Wax said.

“Nah, that warns the butler,” Wayne said.

“Which *is* kind of the point.”

“Beady little buggers,” Wayne said, shutting the door on Darriance. “Can’t trust them. Look, Wax. We’ve got to go! The Marksman has made his move!”

*Finally!* Wax thought. “Let me grab my coat.”

Wayne glanced toward Steris. “’Ello, Crazy,” he said, nodding to her.

“Hello, Idiot,” she said, nodding back.

Wax buckled on his gunbelt over his fine city suit, with vest and cravat, then threw on his mistcoat duster. “Let’s go,” he said, checking his ammunition.

Wayne pushed his way out the door and barreled down the stairs. Wax paused by Steris’s couch. “I…”

“A man must have his hobbies,” she said, raising another sheet of paper and inspecting it. "I accept yours, Lord Waxillium—but *do* try to avoid being shot in the face, as we have wedding portraits to sit for this evening."

"I'll remember that."

"Keep an eye on my sister out there," Steris said.

"This is a dangerous chase," Wax said, hastening to the door. "I doubt Marasi will be involved."

"If you think that, then your professional faculties are suspect. It's a dangerous chase, so she'll *find* a way to be involved."

Wax hesitated by the door. He glanced back at her, and she looked up, meeting his eyes. It felt as if there should be something more to their parting. A send-off of some sort. Fondness.

Steris seemed to sense it too, but neither said anything.

Wax tipped his head back, taking a shot of whiskey and metal flakes, then charged through the doorway and threw himself over the balcony railing. He slowed himself with a Push on the silver inlays in the marble floor of the entrance hall, hitting with a thump of boots on stone. Darriance opened the front door ahead of him as he raced out to join Wayne at the coach, for the ride to …

He froze on the steps down to the street. "What the hell is that?"

"Motorcar!" Wayne said from the back seat of the vehicle.

Wax groaned, hastening down the steps and approaching the machine. Marasi sat behind the steering mechanism, wearing a fashionable dress of lavender and lace. She looked much younger than her half sister, Steris, though only five years separated them.

She was a constable now, technically. An aide to the constable-general of this octant. She'd never fully explained to him why she would leave behind her career as a solicitor to join the constables, but at least she'd been hired on not as a beat constable, but as an analyst and executive assistant. She shouldn't be subjected to danger in that role.

Yet here she was. A glint of eagerness shone in her eyes as she turned to him. "Are you going to get in?"

"What are you doing here?" Wax asked, opening the door with some reluctance.

"Driving. You'd rather Wayne do it?"

"I'd rather have a coach and a good team of horses." Wax settled into one of the seats.

"Stop being so old-fashioned," Marasi said, moving her foot and making the devilish contraption lurch forward. "Marksman robbed the First Union, as you guessed."

Wax held on tightly. He'd guessed that Marksman would hit the bank three days ago. When it hadn't happened, he'd thought the man had fled to the Roughs.

"Captain Reddi thinks that Marksman will run for his hideout in the Seventh Octant," Marasi noted, steering around a horse carriage.

"Reddi is wrong," Wax said. "Head for the Breakouts."

She didn't argue. The motorcar thumped and shook until they hit the new section of paving stones, where the street smoothed out and the vehicle picked up speed. This was one of the latest motorcars, the type the broadsheets had been spouting about, with rubber wheels and a gasoline engine.

The entire city was transforming to accommodate them. *A lot of trouble just so people can drive these contraptions,* Wax thought sourly. Horses didn't need ground this smooth—though he did have to admit that the motorcar turned remarkably well, as Marasi took a corner at speed.

It was still a horrible lifeless heap of destruction.

"You shouldn't be here," Wax said as Marasi took another corner.

She kept her eyes forward. Behind them, Wayne leaned halfway out one of the windows, holding his hat to his head and grinning.

"You trained as an attorney," Wax said. "You belong in a courtroom, not chasing a killer."

"I've done well caring for myself in the past. You never complained then."

"Each time, it felt like an exception. Yet here you are again."

Marasi did something with the stick to her right, changing the motor's gears. Wax never had been able to get the hang of that. She darted around several horses, causing one of the riders to shout after them. The swerving motion pushed Wax against the side of the motorcar, and he grunted.

"What's wrong with you lately?" Marasi demanded. "You complain about the motorcar, about me being here, about your tea being too hot in the morning. One would almost think you'd made some horrible life decision that you regret deep down. Wonder what it could be."

Wax kept his eyes forward. In the mirror, he saw Wayne lean back in and raise his eyebrows. "She might have a point, mate."

"You're not helping."

"Wasn't intending to," Wayne said. "Fortunately, I know which horrible life decision she's talkin' about. You really should have bought that hat we looked at last week. It was lucky. I've got a fifth sense for these things."

"Fifth?" Marasi asked.

"Yeah, can't smell worth a heap of beans. I—"

"There," Wax said, leaning forward and looking through the windscreen.

A figure bounded out of a side street soaring through the air, landed in the street, then launched himself down the thoroughfare ahead of them.

"You were right," Marasi said. "How did you know?"

"Marks likes to be seen," Wax said, slipping Vindication from her holster at his side. "Fancies himself a gentleman rogue. Keep this contraption moving steadily, if you can."

Marasi's reply was cut off as Wax threw open the door and leaped out. He fired down and Pushed on the bullet, launching himself upward. A Push on a passing carriage sent it rocking and nudged Wax to the side, so that when he came down, he landed on the wooden roof of Marasi's motorcar.

He grabbed the roof's front lip in one hand, gun up beside his head, wind blowing his mistcoat out behind him. Ahead, Marks bounded down the thoroughfare in a series of Steelpushes. Deep within, Wax felt the comforting burn of his own metal.

He propelled himself off the motorcar and out over the roadway. Marks always performed his robberies in daylight, always escaped along the busiest roadways he could find. He liked the notoriety. He probably felt invincible. Being an Allomancer could do that to a man.

Wax sent himself into a series of leaps over motorcars and carriages, passing the tenements on either side. The rushing wind, the height and perspective, cleared his mind and calmed his emotions as surely as a Soother's touch. His worries dissolved, and for the moment there was only the chase.

The Marksman wore red, an old busker's mask covering his face—black with white tusks, like a demon of the Deepness from old stories. And he was connected to the Set, according to the appointment book Wax had stolen from his uncle. After so many months the usefulness of that book was waning, but there were still a few gems to exploit.

Marks Pushed toward the industrial district. Wax followed, bounding from motorcar to motorcar. Amazing how much more secure he felt while hurtling through the afternoon air, as opposed to being trapped in one of those horrible motorized boxes.

Marks spun in midair and released a handful of something. Wax Pushed himself off a lamppost and jerked to the side, then shoved Marks's coins as they passed, sending them out of the way of a random motorcar below. The motor swerved anyway, running toward the canal, the driver losing control.

*Rust and Ruin,* Wax thought with annoyance, Pushing himself back toward the motorcar. He tapped his metalmind, increasing his weight twentyfold, and came down on the hood of the motorcar.

Hard.

The smash crushed the front of the motorcar into the ground, grinding it against the stones, slowing and then stopping its momentum before it could topple into the canal. He caught a glimpse of stunned people inside, then released his metalmind and launched himself in a Push after Marks. He almost lost the man, but fortunately the red clothing was distinctive. Wax spotted him as he bounded up off a low building, then Pushed himself high along the side of one of the city's shorter skyscrapers. Wax followed, watching as the man Pushed himself in through a window on the top floor, some twelve or fourteen stories up.

Wax shot up into the sky, windows passing him in a blur. The city of Elendel stretched out all around, smoke rising from coal plants, factories, and homes in countless spouts. He neared the top floor one window to the left of where Marks had entered, and as he landed lightly on the stonework ledge, he tossed a coin toward the window Marks had used.

The coin bounced against the glass. Gunfire sprayed out of the window. At the same time, Wax increased his weight and smashed through his own window by leaning against it, entering the building. He skidded on glass, raising Vindication toward the plaster wall separating him from Marks.

Translucent blue lines spread around him, pointing in a thousand different directions, highlighting bits of metal. The nails in a desk behind him, where a frightened man in a suit cowered. The metal wires in the walls, leading to electric lamps. Most importantly, a few lines pointed *through* the wall into the next room. These were faint; obstructions weakened his Allomantic sense.

One of those lines quivered as someone in there turned and raised a gun. Wax rolled Vindication's cylinder and locked it into place.

Hazekiller round.

He fired, then *Pushed,* flaring his metal and drilling that bullet forward with as much force as he could. It tore through the wall as if it were paper.

The metal in the next room dropped to the floor. Wax threw himself against the wall, increasing his weight, cracking the plaster. Another slam with his shoulder smashed through, and he broke into the next room, weapon raised, looking for his target.

He found only a pool of blood soaking into the carpet and a discarded submachine gun. This room was some kind of clerk's office. Several men and women pressed against the floor, trembling. One woman raised a finger, pointing out a door. Wax gave her a nod and crouched against the wall next to the doorway, then cautiously glanced out.

With a painful grating sound, a filing cabinet slid down the hallway toward him. Wax ducked back out of the way as it passed, then leaped out and aimed.

His gun immediately lurched backward. Wax grabbed it with both hands, holding tight, but a second Push launched his other pistol out of its holster. His feet started to skid, his gun hauling him backward, and he growled, but finally dropped Vindication. She tumbled all the way down the hall to fetch up beside the ruins of the filing cabinet, which had crashed into the wall there. He would have to come back for her once this was over.

Marks stood at the other end of the hallway, lit by soft electric lights. He bled from a shoulder wound, his face hidden by the black-and-white mask.

"There are a thousand criminals in this city far worse than I am," a muffled voice said from behind the mask, "and yet you hunt *me,* lawman. Why? I'm a hero of the people."

"You stopped being a hero weeks ago," Wax said, striding forward, mistcoat rustling. "When you killed a child."

"That wasn't my fault."

"You fired the gun, Marks. You might not have been aiming for the girl, but *you fired the gun*."

The thief stepped back. The sack slung on his shoulder had been torn, either by Wax's bullet or some shrapnel. It leaked banknotes.

Marks glared at him through the mask, eyes barely visible in the electric light. Then he dashed to the side, holding his shoulder as he ran into another room. Wax Pushed off the filing cabinet and threw himself in a rush down the hallway. He skidded to a stop before the door Marks had gone in, then Pushed off the light behind, bending it against the wall and entering the room.

Open window. Wax grabbed a handful of pens from a desk before throwing himself out the window, a dozen stories up. Banknotes fluttered in the air, trailing behind Marks as he plummeted. Wax increased his weight, trying to fall faster, but he had nothing to Push against and the increased weight helped only slightly against air resistance. Marks still hit the ground before him, then Pushed away the coin he'd used to slow himself.

A pair of dropped pens—with metal nibs—Pushed ahead of himself into the ground was enough, barely, to slow Wax.

Marks leaped away, bounding out over some streetlamps. He bore no metal on his body that Wax could spot, but he moved a lot more slowly than he had earlier, and he trailed blood.

Wax followed him. Marks would be making for the Breakouts, a slum where the people still covered for him. They didn't care that his robberies had turned violent; they celebrated that he stole from those who deserved it.

*Can't let him reach that safety,* Wax thought, Pushing himself up over a lamppost, then shoving on it behind him to gain speed. He closed on his prey, who checked on Wax with a frantic glance over his shoulder. Wax raised one of the pens, gauging how risky it would be to try to hit Marks in the leg. He didn't want a killing blow. This man knew something.

The slums were just ahead.

*Next bound,* Wax thought, gripping the pen. Bystanders stared up from the sidewalks, watching the Allomantic chase. He couldn't risk hitting one of them. He had to—

One of those faces was familiar.

Wax lost control of his Push. Stunned by what he'd seen, he barely kept himself from breaking bones as he hit the street, rolling across cobbles. He came to a rest, mistcoat tassels twisted around his body.

He drew himself up on hands and knees.

*No. Impossible. NO.*

He scrambled across the street, ignoring a stomping black destrier and its cursing rider. That face. That *face*.

The last time he had seen that face, he had shot it in the forehead. Bloody Tan.

The man who had killed Lessie.

"A man was here!" Wax shouted, shoving through the crowd. "Long-fingered, thinning hair. A face almost like a bare skull. Did you see him? Did anyone see him?"

People stared at him as if he were daft. Perhaps he was. Wax raised his hand to the side of his head.

"Lord Waxillium?"

He spun. Marasi had stopped her motorcar nearby, and both she and Wayne were climbing out. Had she actually been able to tail him during his chase? No … no, he'd told her where he thought Marks would go.

"Wax, mate?" Wayne asked. "You all right? What did he do, knock you from the air?"

"Something like that," Wax mumbled, glancing about one last time.

*Rusts,* he thought. *The stress is digging into my mind.*

"So he got away," Marasi said, folding her arms, looking displeased.

"Not yet he didn't," Wax said. "He's bleeding and dropping money. He'll leave a trail. Come on."

# 3

“I need you to stay behind as we go into those slums,” Wayne said, determined to impress solemnity into his voice. “It’s not that I don’t want your help. I do. It’s just going to be too dangerous for you. You need to stay where I know you’re safe. No arguments. I’m sorry.”

“Wayne,” Wax said, walking past. “Stop talking to your hat and get over here.”

Wayne sighed, patting his hat and then forcing himself to put it down and leave it in the motorcar. Wax was a right good fellow, but there were a lot of things he didn’t understand. Women for one. Hats for another.

Wayne jogged over to where Wax and Marasi peered into the Breakouts. It seemed a different world in there. The sky inside was strung with clotheslines, derelict bits of clothing dangling like hanged men. Wind blew out of the place, happy to escape, carrying with it uncertain scents. Food half cooked. Bodies half washed. Streets half cleaned.

The tall, compact tenements cast deep shadows even in the afternoon. As if this were the place dusk came for a drink and a chat before sauntering out for its evening duty.

“The Lord Mistborn didn’t want there to be slums in the city, you know,” Marasi said as the three of them entered. “He tried hard to prevent them from growing up. Built nice buildings for the poor, tried to make them last…”

Wax nodded, absently moving a coin across his knuckles as he walked. He seemed to have lost his guns somewhere. Had he bummed some coins off Marasi? It never was fair. When Wayne borrowed coins off folks, he got yelled at. He did forget to ask sometimes, but he always offered a good trade.

As they penetrated deeper into the Breakouts, Wayne lagged behind the other two. *Need a good hat …* he thought. The hat was important.

So he listened for some coughing.

*Ah …*

He found the chap nestled up beside a doorway, a ratty blanket draped over his knees. You could always find his type in a slum. Old, clinging to life like a man on a ledge, his lungs half full with various unsavory fluids. The old man hacked into a glove-wrapped hand as Wayne settled down on the steps beside him.

"What, now," the man said. "Who are you?"

"What, now," Wayne repeated. "Who are you?"

"I'm nobody," the man said, then spat to the side. "Dirty outer. I ain't done nothing."

"I'm nobody," Wayne repeated, taking his flask from the pocket of his duster. "Dirty outer. I ain't done nothing."

Good accent, that was. Real mumbly, a classic vintage, wrapped in a blanket of history. Closing his eyes and listening, Wayne thought he could imagine what people sounded like years ago. He held out the flask of whiskey.

"You trying to poison me?" the man asked. He clipped off words, left out half the sounds.

"You trying to poison me?" Wayne repeated, working his jaw as if his mouth were full of bits of rock he kept trying to chew. Some northern fields mix in this one, for sure. He opened his eyes and tipped the whiskey at the man, who smelled it, then took a sip. Then a swig. Then a gulp.

"So," the man asked, "you an idiot? I've a son that's an idiot. The real kind, that was born that way. Well, you seem all right anyway."

"Well, you seem all right anyway," Wayne said, standing up. He reached over to take the man's old cotton cap off his head, then gestured toward the whiskey flask.

"In trade?" the man asked. "Boy, you *are* an idiot."

Wayne pulled on the cap. "Could you say another word that starts with 'h' for me?"

"Huh?"

"Rusting wonderful," Wayne said. He hopped back down the steps onto the street and ditched his duster in a cranny—and along with it his dueling canes, unfortunately. He kept his wooden knucklebones though.

The clothing underneath his duster was Roughs stock, not so different from what they wore in these slums. Buttoned shirt, trousers, suspenders. He rolled up the sleeves as he walked. The clothing was worn, patched in a few places. He wouldn't trade it for the world. Took years to get clothing that looked right. Used, lived-in.

Be slow to trust a man with clothing that was too new. You didn't get to wear new, clean clothing by doing honest work.

Wax and Marasi had paused up ahead, speaking to some old women with scarves on their heads and bundles in their arms. Wayne could almost hear what they were saying.

*We don't know nothing.*

*He came running past here mere moments ago,* Wax would say. *Surely you—*

*We don't know nothing. We didn't see nothing.*

Wayne wandered over to where a group of men sat under a dirty cloth awning while eating bruised fruit. "Who're those outers?" Wayne asked as he sat down, using the accent he'd just picked up from the old man.

They didn't even question him. A slum like this had a lot of people—too many to know everyone—but you could easily tell if someone belonged or not. And Wayne belonged.

"Conners for sure," one of the men said. He had a head like an overturned bowl, hairless and too flat.

"They want someone," another man said. Rust and Ruin, the chap's face was so pointy, you could have used it to plow a field. "Conners only come here if they want to arrest someone. They've never cared about us, and never will."

"If they did care," bowl-head said, "they'd do something about all those factories and power plants, dumping ash on us. We ain't supposed to live in ash anymore. Harmony said it, he did."

Wayne nodded. Good point, that. These building walls, they *were* ashen. Did people care about that, on the outside? No. Not as long as *they* didn't have to live in here. He didn't miss the glares Wax and Marasi drew, pointed at them by people who passed behind, or who pulled windows closed up above.

*This is worse,* Wayne thought. *Worse than normal.* He'd have to talk to Wax about it. But for now there was a job to do. "They *are* looking for something."

"Stay out of it," bowl-head said.

Wayne grunted. "Maybe there's money in it."

"You'd turn in one of our own?" bowl-head said with a scowl. "I recognize you. Edip's son, aren't you?"

Wayne glanced away, noncommittal.

"You listen here, son," bowl-head said, wagging his finger. "Don't trust a conner, and *don't* be a rat."

"I ain't a rat," Wayne said, testily. He *wasn't*. But sometimes, a man just needed cash. "They're after Marks. I overheard them. There's a thousand notes on his head, there is."

"He grew up here," plow-face said. "He's one of us."

"He killed that girl," Wayne said.

"That's a lie," bowl-head said. "Don't you go talking to conners, son. I mean it."

"Fine, fine," Wayne said, moving to rise. "I'll just go—"

"You'll sit back down," bowl-head said. "Or I'll rap you something good on your head, I will."

Wayne sighed, sitting back down. "You olders always talk about us, and don't know how it is these days. Working in one of the factories."

"We know more than you think," bowl-head said, handing Wayne a bruised apple. "Eat this, stay out of trouble, and don't go where I can't see you."

Wayne grumbled, but sat back and bit into the apple. It didn't taste half bad. He ate the whole thing, then helped himself to a couple more.

It happened soon enough. The men of the fruit-eating group broke apart, leaving Wayne with a basket full of cores. They split with a few amicable gibes at one another, each of the four men claiming he had some important task to be about.

Wayne stuffed another apple in each pocket, then stood up and sauntered off after bowl-head. He tailed the fellow fairly easily, nodding occasionally at people, who nodded back as if they knew him. It was the hat. Put on a man's hat, surround your mind with his way of thinking, and it changed you. A man in dockworker's clothing passed by, shoulders slumped, whistling a sad tune. Wayne picked up the melody. Rough life that was, working the docks. You had to commute each day on the canal boats—either that or find a bed out near the waterfront of the bay, where you were about as likely to get stabbed as have breakfast.

He'd lived that life as a youth. Had the scars to prove it, he did. But as a chap grew, he wanted more to his days than a fight on every corner and women who couldn't remember his name one day to the next.

Bowl-head ducked into an alley. Well, every rusting street in here felt like an alley. Bowl-head entered an alley's alley. Wayne stepped up to the side of the tiny roadway, then burned bendalloy. Allomancy was a useful trick, that it was. Burning the metal set up a nice little bubble of sped-up time around him. He strolled around the corner, staying inside the bubble—it didn't move when he did, but he could move within it.

Yup. There he was, bowl-head himself, crouching beside a rubbish pile, waiting to see if anyone followed him. Wayne had *almost* made the bubble too big and caught the man in it.

*Sloppy, sloppy,* Wayne thought. A mistake like that on the docks could cost a man his life. He fished a ratty blanket out of the part of the rubbish pile that was inside his bubble, then wandered back around the corner and dropped the bubble.

Inside the speed bubble, he'd have been moving so quickly bowl-head wouldn't have seen more than a blur—if that. He wouldn't think anything of it, Wayne was certain. If he were wrong, he'd eat his hat. Well, one of Wax's hats at least.

Wayne found a set of steps and settled down. He pulled his cap down half over his eyes, sidled up to the wall in a comfortable position, and spread the blanket around himself. Just another homeless drunk.

Bowl-head was a careful one. He waited inside the alley a whole five minutes before creeping out, looking back and forth, then hastening to a building across the street. He knocked, whispered something, and was let in.

Wayne yawned, stretched, and tossed aside the blanket. He crossed the street to the building that bowl-head had entered, then started checking the shuttered windows. The ancient shutters were so old, a good sneeze might have knocked them off. He had to be careful to avoid getting splinters in his cheeks as he listened at each window in turn.

The men of the slums had an odd sense of morality to them. They wouldn't turn in one of their own to the constables. Not even for a reward. But then again, a chap needed to eat. Wouldn't a man like Marks want to hear just how loyal his friends were?

"… was a pair of conners for sure," Wayne heard at a window. "A thousand notes is a lot, Marks. A whole lot. Now, I'm not saying you can't trust the lads; there's not a bad alloy in the bunch. I *can* say that a little encouragement will help them feel better about their loyalty."

Ratting out a friend: completely off-limits.

Extorting a friend: well, that was just good business sense.

And if Marks didn't act grateful, then maybe he hadn't been a friend after all. Wayne grinned, slipping his sets of wooden knucklebones over his fingers. He stepped back, then charged the building.

He hit the shutters with one shoulder, crashing through, then tossed up a speed bubble the moment he hit the floor. He rolled and came up on his feet in front of Marks—who was inside the speed bubble. The man still wore his red trousers, though he'd removed his mask, and was bandaging his shoulder. He snapped his head up, displaying a surprised face with bushy eyebrows and large lips.

Rusts. No wonder the fellow normally wore a mask.

Wayne swung at his chin, laying him out with one punch. Then he spun, fists up, but the other half-dozen occupants of the room, including bowl-head, stood frozen just outside the edge of his speed bubble. Now that was right lucky.

Wayne grinned, heaving Marks up onto his shoulder. He took his knuckles off, slipping them into his pocket, and got out an apple. He took a juicy bite, waved farewell to bowl-head—who looked forward with glassy eyes, frozen—then tossed Marks out the window and followed after.

Once he passed beyond the edge of his speed bubble, it automatically collapsed.

"What the hell was that!" bowl-head yelled inside.

Wayne heaved the unconscious Marks up onto his shoulder again, then wandered back down the road, chewing on his apple.

* * *

"Let me talk to the next ones," Marasi said. "Maybe I can get them to say something."

She felt Waxillium's eyes on her. He thought she was trying to prove herself to him. Once he'd have been right. Now she was a constable—fully credentialed and in the city's employ. This was her *job*. Waxillium didn't agree with her decision, but her actions were not subject to his approval.

Together they walked up to a group of young outcasts sitting on the steps of the slums. The three boys watched them with suspicion, their skin dirty, their too-big clothing tied at the waists and ankles. That was the style, apparently, for youths of the streets. They smelled of the incense they'd been smoking in their pipes.

Marasi stepped up to them. "We're looking for a man."

"If you need a man," one of the boys said, looking her up and down, "I'm right here."

"Oh please," Marasi said. "You're … what, nine?"

"Hey, she knows how long it is!" the boy said, laughing and grabbing his crotch. "Have you been peeking at me, lady?"

*Well, that's a blush,* Marasi thought. *Not terribly professional.*

Fortunately, she'd spent time around Wayne and his occasional colorful metaphors. Blushes would happen. She pressed onward. "He came shooting through here less than an hour ago. Wounded, trailing blood, wearing red. I'm sure you know who I'm speaking of."

"Yeah, the man of hours!" one of the boys said, laughing and referencing a figure from old nursemaid tales. “I know him!”

*Treat them like a belligerent witness,* she thought. *At a trial. Keep them talking.* She needed to learn how to deal with people like these boys in the real world, not just in sterile practice rooms.

“Yes, the man of hours,” Marasi said. “Where did he go?”

“To the edge of dusk,” the boy said. “Haven’t you heard the stories?”

“I’m fond of stories,” Marasi said, slipping a few coins from her pocketbook. She held them up. Bribery felt like cheating, but … well, she *wasn’t* in court.

The three boys eyed the coins, a sudden hunger flashing in their eyes. They covered it quickly, but perhaps showing off money in this place wasn’t terribly wise.

“Let’s hear a story,” Marasi said. “About where this … man of hours might be staying. The location of dusk, if you will. Here in these tenements.”

“We might know that,” one of the boys said. “Though, you know, stories cost a lot. More than that.”

Behind her, something clinked. Waxillium had gotten out a few coins too. The boys glanced at those, eager, until Waxillium flipped one up into the air and Pushed until it was lost.

The boys grew quiet immediately.

“Talk to the lady,” Waxillium said softly, with an edge to his voice. “Stop wasting our time.”

Marasi turned to him, and behind her the boys made their decision. They scattered, obviously not wanting to deal with an Allomancer.

“That was very helpful,” Marasi said, folding her arms. “Thank you so much.”

“They were going to lie to you,” Waxillium said, glancing over his shoulder. “And we were drawing the wrong kind of attention.”

“I realize they were going to lie,” Marasi said. “I was going to catch them in it. Attacking someone’s false story is often one of the best methods of interrogation.”

“Actually,” Waxillium said, “the best method of interrogation involves a drawer and someone’s fingers.”

“Actually,” Marasi said, “it does *not.* Studies show that forced interrogation results in bad information almost all the time. Anyway, what is wrong with you today, Waxillium? I realize you’ve been flaunting your ‘tough Roughs lawman’ persona lately—”

“I have not.”

“You *have,*” she said. “And I can see why. Out in the Roughs, you acted the gentleman lawman. You yourself told me you clung to civilization, to bring it with you. Well, here you're around lords all the time. You're practically *drowning* in civilization. So instead, you lean on being the Roughs lawman—to bring a little old-fashioned justice to the city."

"You've thought about this a lot," he said, turned away from her, scanning the street.

*Rust and Ruin.* He thought she was infatuated with him. *Arrogant, brutish … idiot!* She puffed out and stalked away.

She was *not* infatuated. He had made it clear there would be nothing between them, and he was engaged to her sister. That was that. Couldn't the two of them have a professional relationship now?

Wayne lounged on the steps leading up to a nearby building, watching them and sloppily taking bites out of an apple.

"And where have you been?" Marasi asked, walking up to him.

"Apple?" Wayne said, handing another one toward her. "'s not too bruised."

"No thank you. Some of us have been trying to find a killer, not a meal."

"Oh, that." Wayne kicked at something beside him on the ground, hidden in the shadow of the steps. "Yeah, took care of that for you."

"You took … Wayne, that's a person at your feet! Rusts! He's bleeding!"

"Sure is," Wayne said. "Not my fault at all, that. I did knock 'im upside the head though."

Marasi raised a hand to her mouth. It was *him*. "Wayne, where … How…"

Waxillium gently pushed her aside; she hadn't seen him approach. He knelt down, checking Marks's wound. Waxillium then looked up at Wayne and nodded, the two sharing an expression they often exchanged. The closest Marasi had been able to figure, it meant something between "Nice work" and "You're a total git; *I* wanted to do that."

"Let's get him to the constabulary offices," Waxillium said, lifting the unconscious Marks.

"Yes, fine," Marasi said. "But aren't you going to ask *how* he did this? Where he's been?"

"Wayne has his methods," Waxillium said. "In a place like this, they're far better than my own."

"You knew," she said, leveling a finger at Waxillium. "You knew we weren't going to get anywhere asking questions!"

"I suspected," Waxillium said. "But Wayne needs space to try his methods—"

"—onnacount of my being so incredible," Wayne added.

"—so I did my best to find Marks on my own—"

"—onnacount of *him* being unable to accept that I'm better at this sorta thing than he is—"

"—in case Wayne failed."

"Which never happens." Wayne grinned and took a bite of his apple, hopping off his steps to walk beside Waxillium. "Except that one time. And that other one time. But those don't matter, onnacount of my getting hit to the head enough times that I can't remember them."

Marasi sighed inwardly, falling into step with the two. They had so much history that they moved in concert subconsciously, like two dancers who had performed together countless times. That made life particularly difficult for the newcomer who tried to perform with them.

"Well," Marasi said to Wayne, "you could at least tell *me* what you did. Perhaps I could learn from your methods."

"Nah," Wayne said. "Won't work for you. You're too pretty. In an unpretty sort of way to me, mind you. Let's not go around that tree again."

"Wayne, sometimes you completely baffle me."

"Only sometimes?" Waxillium asked.

"I can't give her all I got, mate," Wayne said, thumbs behind his suspenders. "Gotta save some for everyone else. I dole it out with no respect for privilege, class, sex, or mental capacity. I'm a rusting saint, I am."

"But *how*," Marasi said. "How did you find him? Did you make some of these people talk?"

"Nah," Wayne said. "I made them not talk. They're better at that. Comes from practice, I suspect."

"You should take lessons," Waxillium added.

Marasi sighed as they approached the entrance to the Breakouts. The human flotsam who earlier had cluttered the stairwells and alleyways in here had melted away, perhaps finding the attention of several lawmen too discomforting. It—

Waxillium stiffened. Wayne did as well.

"What—?" Marasi began, right as Waxillium dropped Marks and reached for his mistcoat pocket. Wayne shoved his shoulder into Marasi, pushing her away as something zipped down out of the air and clacked against the paving stones where they'd been standing. More projectiles followed, though she wasn't really looking. She instead let Wayne tow her to relative cover beside a building, then both of them began craning to search the skyline for the sniper. Waxillium took to the air with a dropped coin, a dark rush of twisting mistcoat tassels. At times like this he looked more primal, like one of the ancient Mistborn from the legends. Not a creature of law, but a sliver of the night itself come to collect its due.

"Aw, hell," Wayne said, nodding toward Marks. The body slumped in the middle of the road, and now had a prominent wooden shaft sticking out of it.

"Arrow?" Marasi asked.

"Crossbow bolt," Wayne said. "Haven't seen one of those in years. You really only want them for fighting Allomancers." He looked up. Above, Waxillium gave chase, soaring toward the top of one of the buildings.

"Stay here," Wayne said, then dashed off down an alleyway.

"Wait—" Marasi said, raising a hand.

But he was gone.

*Those two,* she thought in annoyance. Well, obviously someone didn't want Marks to be captured and spill what he knew. Perhaps she could learn something from the crossbow bolt or the corpse itself.

She knelt down beside the body, checking first to make certain he was dead—hoping perhaps that the crossbow bolt had not finished the job. He *was* dead, unfortunately. The bolt was firmly lodged in the head. Who knew that a crossbow could penetrate a skull like that? Marasi shook her head, reaching into her handbag to get her notepad and do a write-up of the position the body had fallen in.

*You know,* she thought. *The assassin is lucky. They were gone so fast, they couldn't have known that they dealt a killing blow. If I were looking to make sure Marks was finished off, I'd certainly …*

She heard something click behind her.

*… double back and check.*

Marasi turned slowly to find a ragged-looking man leaving an alleyway, holding a crossbow. He inspected her with dark eyes.

The next part happened quickly. Before Marasi had time to take a step, the man rushed her. He fired the crossbow over his shoulder—causing a Wayne-like yelp to come out of the alleyway—then grabbed Marasi by the shoulder as she tried to run.

He whipped her about, raising something cold to her neck. A glass dagger. Waxillium dropped to the ground in front of them, mistcoat unfurling around him.

The two stared at one another, a coin in Waxillium's right hand. He rubbed it with his thumb.

*Remember your hostage training, woman!* Marasi thought. *Most men take a hostage out of desperation.* Could she use her Allomancy? She could slow time around her, speeding it up for everyone outside her speed bubble. The opposite of what Wayne could do.

But she hadn't swallowed any cadmium. Stupid! A mistake the other two would never make. She needed to stop being embarrassed with her powers, weak though they were. She'd used them effectively on more than one occasion.

The man breathed in and out raggedly, his head right next to hers. She could feel the stubble of his chin and cheek against her skin.

*Men who take hostages don't want to kill,* she thought. *This isn't part of the plan. You can talk him down, speak comforting words, seek common ground and build upon it.*

She didn't do any of that. Instead, she whipped her hand out of her handbag, gripping the small, single-shot pistol she kept inside. Before even considering what she was doing, she pressed the barrel against the man's chin, pulled the trigger …

And blew the bottom of his head up out of the top.

# 4

Wax lowered his hand, looking at the new corpse beside Marasi. Her shot had taken off a big chunk of the face. Identifying the man would be near impossible.

It would have been anyway. Suit's minions were notoriously difficult to trace.

*Don't worry about that right now,* he thought, taking out a handkerchief. He walked over and held it up to Marasi, who stood with wide eyes, blood and bits of flesh sprayed across her face. She stared straight ahead and did not look down. She'd dropped the pistol.

"That was…" she said, eyes ahead. "That was…" She took a deep breath. "That was unexpected of me, wasn't it?"

"You did well," Wax said. "People assume a captive to be in their power. Often the best way to escape is by fighting back."

"What?" Marasi said, finally taking the handkerchief.

"You discharged a pistol right beside your head," Wax said. "You are going to have trouble hearing. Rusts … you've probably done some permanent damage to your ear. Hopefully it won't be too bad."

"What?"

Wax gestured toward her face, and she looked at the handkerchief, as if seeing it for the first time. She blinked, then glanced down. She looked away from the corpse immediately and began wiping at her face.

Wayne, grumbling, staggered out of the alleyway, a new hole in his clothing at the shoulder and a crossbow bolt in his hand.

"So much for interrogating him," Marasi said with a grimace.

"It's all right," Wax said. "Living was more important."

"… What?"

He smiled at her reassuringly as Wayne waved to some other constables, who had finally arrived on the scene and were making their way into the slums.

"Why does this keep happening to me?" Marasi asked. "Yes, I know I won't be able to hear your reply. But this is … what, the third time someone has tried to use me as a hostage? Do I *exude* indefensibility or something?"

*Yes, you do,* Wax thought, though he didn't say it. *That's a good thing. It makes them underestimate you.* Marasi was a strong person. She thought clearly in times of stress; she did what needed to be done, even if it was unpleasant. However, she was also very keen on dressing nicely and making herself up.

Lessie would have had none of that. The only times Wax had seen her in a dress were when they'd made the occasional trip to Covingtar to visit the Pathian gardens there. He smiled, remembering a time she'd actually worn trousers *under* the dress.

"Lord Ladrian!" Constable Reddi trotted over, wearing the uniform of a captain in the constabulary. The lean man had a neatly clipped, drooping mustache.

"Reddi," Wax said, nodding to him. "Is Aradel here?"

"The constable-general is engaged in another investigation, my lord," Reddi said with a crisp tone. Why did Wax always want to smack this man after talking to him? He was never insulting, always impeccably proper. Maybe that was reason enough.

Wax pointed toward the buildings. "Well, if you'd kindly have your men secure the area; we should probably question those nearby and see if, by some miracle, we can discover the identity of the man Lady Colms just killed."

Reddi saluted, though it wasn't technically necessary. Wax had a special deputized forbearance in the constabulary, allowing him to do things like … well, jump through the city armed and firing. But he wasn't in their command structure.

The other constables moved to do as he requested anyway. As he glanced at the Marksman, Wax forcibly kept his anger in check. At this rate, he would *never* track down his uncle Edwarn. Wax had only the slightest hint of what the man was trying to accomplish.

*It can make anyone into an Allomancer, you see.… If we don't use it, someone else will.*

Words from the book Ironeyes had given him.

"Excellent work, my lord," Reddi said in a calm voice, nodding to the fallen Marksman. The clothing was distinctive. "Another miscreant dealt with, and with your customary efficiency."

Wax said nothing. Today's "excellent work" was just another dead end.

"Hey, look!" Wayne said nearby. "I think I found one of that fellow's teeth! That's good luck, ain't it?"

Marasi looked woozy, settling down on a nearby set of steps. Wax was tempted to go comfort her, but would she interpret it the wrong way? He didn't want to lead her on.

"My lord, could we talk?" Reddi said as more constables flooded the area. "I mentioned the constable-general and another case. I was actually already on my way to find you when we heard of your chase here."

Wax turned to him, immediately alert. "What has happened?"

Reddi grimaced, showing uncharacteristic emotion. "It's bad, my lord," he said more softly. "*Politics* is involved."

Then Suit might be involved as well. "Tell me more."

"It, well, it's connected to the governor, my lord. His brother, you see, was hosting an auction last night. And, well, you should see for yourself…."

* * *

Marasi didn't miss Waxillium grabbing Wayne by the shoulder and pointing toward a waiting constabulary carriage. He didn't come for her. How long would it be before that damnable man was willing to accept her as, if not an equal, a colleague?

Frustrated, she made toward the carriage. Unfortunately, she ran into Captain Reddi on the way. He spoke, and she had to strain her ringing ears —and guess a little—to figure out what he was saying.

"Constable Colms. You are out of uniform."

"Yes, sir," she said. "It is my day off, sir."

"Yet here you are," he said, hands clasped behind his back. "How is it that you find your way, consistently, into situations like this, despite *explicitly* being told that it is not your assignment, as you are not a field constable?"

"Pure happenstance I'm sure, sir," Marasi said.

He gave her a sneer at that. Funny. He usually saved those for Waxillium, when the man wasn't looking. He said something she couldn't make out, then nodded toward the motorcar she'd brought—which was technically constabulary property; she'd been told to become proficient in driving motorcars and report on their effectiveness to the constable-general. He wanted to test them as replacements for horse-drawn carriages.

"Sir?" she said.

"You've obviously been through a great deal this day, constable," Reddi said, more loudly. "Don't argue with me on this. Head home, clean up, and report for duty tomorrow."

"Sir," Marasi said. "I'd like to brief Captain Aradel on my pursuit of the Marksman, and his subsequent demise, before the details become fuzzy. He will be interested, as he's followed this case personally."

She stared Reddi in the eyes. He outranked her, yes, but he wasn't her boss. Aradel was that to both of them.

"The constable-general," Reddi said with some obvious reluctance, "is away from the offices at the moment."

"Well then, I'll report to him and let him dismiss me, sir," Marasi said. "If that is his wish."

Reddi ground his teeth and started to say something, but a call from one of the other constables diverted him. He waved toward the motorcar, and Marasi took it as dismissal to do as she'd said. So, when the carriage with Waxillium pulled away, she followed in the motor.

By the time the trip had ended, at a fashionable mansion overlooking the city's Hub, she had started to recover. She was still feeling shaken, though she hoped she didn't show it, and she could hear with her left ear, if not on the other side, where she'd fired the gun.

As she climbed out of the motorcar, she found herself wiping her cheek again with her handkerchief, though she had long since cleaned off the blood. Her dress had been thoroughly ruined. She grabbed her constable's coat from the back of the motorcar and threw it over the top to hide the stains, then rushed over to join Waxillium and the others as they descended from the carriage.

*Only one other constabulary carriage,* she noted, inspecting the drive. Whatever had happened here, Aradel didn't want to make a big show of it. As Waxillium walked up toward the front, he glanced about and found her, then waved her over to him.

"Do you know what this might be about?" he asked her quietly as Reddi and several other constables conferred near the carriage.

"No," Marasi said. "They didn't brief you?"

Waxillium shook his head. He glanced down at her bloodied dress, which peeked out underneath the sturdy brown jacket. He made no comment however, instead striding up the steps, tailed by Wayne.

Two constables, a man and a woman, guarded the door into the mansion. They saluted as Reddi caught up to Waxillium—pointedly ignoring Marasi—and led the way in through the doors. "We've tried to keep this very tightly controlled," Reddi said. "But word will get out, with Lord Winsting involved. Rusts, this is going to be a nightmare."

"The *governor's brother*?" Marasi asked. "What happened here?"

Reddi pointed up a set of steps. "We should find Constable-General Aradel in the grand ballroom. I warn you, this is not a sight for delicate stomachs." He glanced at Marasi.

She raised an eyebrow. "Not an hour ago, I had a man's head *literally* explode all over me, Captain. I believe I will be fine."

Reddi said nothing further, leading the way up the steps. She noticed Wayne pocketing a small, decorative cigar box they passed—Citizen Magistrates brand—replacing it with a bruised apple. She'd have to see that he swapped the cigar box back at some point.

The ballroom upstairs was littered with bodies. Marasi and Waxillium stopped in the doorway, looking in at the chaos. The dead men and women wore fine clothes, sleek ball gowns or tight black suits. Hats lay tumbled from heads, the fine tan carpet stained red in wide patches around the fallen. It was as if someone had tossed a basket of eggs into the air and let them fall, their insides seeping out all over the floor.

Claude Aradel, constable-general of the Fourth Octant, picked through the scene. In many ways, he didn't look like a constable should. His rectangular face had a few days' worth of red stubble on it; he shaved when the mood struck him. His leathery skin, furrowed with wrinkles, attested to days spent in the field, not behind a desk. He was probably pushing sixty at this point, though he wouldn't divulge his true age, and even the octant records had a question mark next to his birth date. What was certain was that Aradel didn't have a drop of noble blood in him.

He'd left the constabulary about ten years ago, giving no official reason for his departure. Rumor was he'd hit the silent ceiling on promotions a man could get without being noble. A lot could change in ten years though, and when Brettin had retired—soon after the execution of Miles Hundredlives almost a year ago—the hunt for a new constable-general had landed on Aradel. He'd come out of retirement to accept the position.

"Ladrian," he said, looking up from a corpse. "Good. You're here." He crossed the room and gave a glance to Marasi, who saluted. He didn't dismiss her.

"Aw," Wayne said, peeking in, "the fun is already over."

Waxillium stepped into the room, taking Aradel's proffered hand. "That's Chip Erikell, isn't it?" Waxillium asked, nodding to the nearest corpse. "Thought to run smuggling in the Third Octant?"

"Yes," Aradel said.

"And Isabaline Frellia," Marasi said. "Rusts! We have a file on her as tall as Wayne, but the prosecutors have never been able to charge her."

"Seven of these bodies belong to people of equivalent notoriety," Aradel said, pointing to several corpses among the fallen. "Most from crime syndicates, though a few were members of noble houses with … dubious reputations. The rest were high-ranking representatives from other important factions. We have near thirty notable stiffs, along with a handful of guards each."

"That's half of the city's criminal elite," Waxillium said softly, crouching down beside a body. "At least."

"All people we've never been able to touch," Aradel said. "Not for lack of trying, mind you."

"So why is everyone so grim?" Wayne asked. "We should be throwing a bloomin' party, shouldn't we? Someone went and did our work for us! We can take the month off."

Marasi shook her head. "A violent change in power in the underworld can be dangerous, Wayne. This was a hit of huge ambition, someone eliminating rivals wholesale."

Aradel glanced at her, then nodded in agreement. She felt a surge of satisfaction. The constable-general was the one who had hired her, picking her application out of a dozen others. Every other person in the pile had had years of constable experience. Instead, he'd chosen a recently graduated law student. He saw something promising in her, obviously, and she intended to prove him right.

"I can't fathom someone doing this," Waxillium said. "Toppling so many of the city's underworld powers at once won't favor the perpetrators; that's a myth from penny novels. Murders on this scale will just draw attention and unify opposition from every other surviving gang and faction as soon as word gets out."

"Unless it was done by an outsider," Marasi said. "An uncertain element from the start, someone who stands to gain if the entire system crumbles."

Aradel grunted, and Waxillium nodded in agreement.

"But how," Waxillium whispered. "How did someone achieve this? Surely their security must have rivaled any in the city." He began moving about, pacing off distances, looking at certain bodies, then at others, whispering to himself as he periodically knelt down.

"Reddi said that the governor's brother was involved, sir?" Marasi asked Aradel.

"Lord Winsting Innate."

Lord Winsting, head of House Innate. He had a vote in the Elendel Senate, a position he gained once his brother was elevated to governor. He had been corrupt. Marasi and the rest of the constables knew it. In retrospect, she wasn't surprised to find him in the middle of something like this. The thing was, Winsting had always seemed a small catch to Marasi.

The governor, however … well, perhaps that hidden file on her desk—full of hints, guesses, and clues—would finally be relevant.

"Winsting," she asked Aradel. "Is he…?"

"Dead?" Aradel asked. "Yes, Constable Colms. From the invitations we found, he initiated this meeting, under the guise of an auction. We located his corpse in a saferoom in the basement."

This drew Waxillium's attention. He stood up, looking directly at them, then muttered something to himself and paced off another body. What was he searching for?

Wayne wandered over to Marasi and Aradel. He took a swig from a silver flask engraved with someone else's initials. Marasi pointedly did not ask him which of the dead he'd taken it from. "So," he said, "our little house leader was friendly with criminals, was he?"

"We've long suspected he was crooked," Aradel said. "The people love his family though, and his brother went to great lengths to keep Winsting's previous lapses out of the limelight."

"You're right, Aradel," Waxillium said from across the room. "This will be bad."

"I dunno," Wayne said. "Maybe he didn't know these folks were all trouble."

"Doubtful," Marasi said. "And even if it were true, it wouldn't matter. Once the broadsheets get ahold of this … The governor's sibling, dead in a house full of known criminals under very suspicious circumstances?"

"What I'm hearing," Wayne said, taking another swig, "is that I was wrong. The fun *isn't* over."

"Many of these people shot one another," Waxillium said.

They all turned to him. He knelt beside another body, inspecting the way it had fallen, then looked up toward some bullet holes in the wall.

Being a lawman, particularly out in the Roughs, had required Waxillium to teach himself a wide variety of skills. He was part detective, part enforcer, part leader, part scientist. Marasi had read a dozen different profiles of him by various scholars, all investigating the mindset of a man who was becoming a living legend.

"What do you mean, Lord Ladrian?" Aradel asked.

"The fight here involved multiple parties," Waxillium said, pointing. "If this was an unexpected hit by someone external—and Lady Colms is right, that would have made the most sense—one would expect the victims to have died from a barrage fired by the enemy who burst in. The corpses don't tell that story. This was a melee. Chaos. Random people firing one at another. I think it began when someone started shooting from the *middle* of the group outward."

"So it *was* one of the attendees who began it," Aradel said.

"Maybe," Waxillium said. "One can only tell so much from the fall of the bodies, the sprays of blood. But something is odd here, very odd.… Were they all shot?"

"No, strangely. A few of the attendees were killed by a knife in the back."

"Have you identified everyone in the room?" Waxillium asked.

"Most of them," Aradel said. "We wanted to avoid moving them too much."

"Let me see Lord Winsting," Waxillium said, standing, his mistcoat rustling.

Aradel nodded to a young constable, and she led them out of the ballroom, through a doorway. Some kind of secret passage? The musty stairwell beyond was narrow enough to force them to walk single file, the constable at the front carrying a lamp.

"Miss Colms," Waxillium said softly, "what do your statistics tell you about this kind of violence?"

*Oh, so we're using last names now, are we?* "Very little. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times something like this has happened. The first place I'd look is for connections between the people killed. Were they all in smuggling, Captain Aradel?"

"No," he said from behind. "Some smugglers, some extortionists, some gambling tycoons."

"So it's not a specific attempt to consolidate power in a certain type of criminal activity," Marasi said, her voice echoing in the damp stone stairwell. "We need to find the connection, what made these specific people targets. The one most likely behind it is dead."

"Lord Winsting," Waxillium said. "You're saying he lured them here, planned an execution, and it went wrong?"

"It's one theory."

"He ain't that kind of slime," Wayne said from near the end of the line.

"You know of Winsting?" Marasi asked, looking over her shoulder.

"Not specifically, no," Wayne said. "But he was a politician. Politician slime is different from regular slime."

"I find myself agreeing," Captain Aradel said. "Though I wouldn't put it so colorfully. We knew that Winsting was crooked, but in the past he kept mostly to small-time schemes. Selling cargo space to smugglers when it suited him, some shady real-estate deals here and there. Cash in exchange for political favors, mostly.

"Recently, rumors started that he was going to put his Senate vote up for sale. We were investigating, with no evidence so far. Either way, killing those willing to pay him would be like blasting your silver mine with dynamite to try finding gold."

They reached the bottom of the stairwell, where they found four more corpses. The guards, apparently, all killed with bullets to the head.

Waxillium knelt. "Shot from behind, from the direction of the saferoom," he whispered. "All four, in rapid succession."

"Executed?" Marasi asked. "How did the killer get them to stand there and take it?"

"He didn't," Waxillium said. "He moved too quickly for them to respond."

"Feruchemist," Wayne said softly. "Damn."

They were called Steelrunners, Feruchemists who could store up speed. They'd have to move slowly for a time, then could draw upon that reserve later. Waxillium looked up. Marasi saw something in his eyes, a hunger. He thought his uncle was involved. That was what he thought *every* time a Metalborn committed crimes. Waxillium saw Suit's shadow over his shoulder each way he turned, the specter of a man whom Waxillium hadn't been able to stop.

Suit still had Waxillium's sister, best as they could tell. Marasi didn't know much of it. Waxillium wouldn't talk about the details.

He stood up, expression grim, and strode to the door behind the fallen men. He threw it open and entered, Marasi and Wayne close behind, to find a single corpse slumped in an easy chair at the center of the room. His throat had been slit; the blood on the front of his clothing was thick, dried like paint.

"Killed with some sort of long knife or small sword," Aradel said. "Even more strange, his *tongue* was cut out. We've sent for a surgeon to try to tell us more of the wound. Don't know why the killer didn't use a gun."

"Because the guards were still alive then," Waxillium said softly.

"What?"

"They let the killer pass," Waxillium said, looking at the door. "It was someone they trusted, perhaps one of their number. They let the murderer into the saferoom."

"Maybe he was just moving very quickly to get past them," Marasi said.

"Maybe," Waxillium agreed. "But that door has to be unlocked from the inside, and it hasn't been forced. There's a peephole. Winsting let the murderer in, and he wouldn't have done that if the guards had been killed. He's sitting calmly in that chair—no struggle, just a quick slice from behind. Either he didn't know someone else was in here, or he trusted them. Judging by the way the guards fell outside, they were still focused on the steps, waiting for danger to come. They were still guarding this place. My gut says it was one of their own, someone they let pass, who killed Winsting."

"Rusts," Aradel said softly. "But … a Feruchemist? Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Wayne said, from the doorway. "This wasn't a speed bubble. Can't shoot out of one of those, mate. These fellows were killed before *one* could turn about. Wax is right. Either this is a Feruchemist, or somebody figured out how to fire out of speed bubbles—which is somethin' we'd *really* like to know how to do."

"Someone moving with Feruchemical speed explains the knife deaths up above," Waxillium said, standing. "A few swift executions in the chaos, while everyone else was shooting. Quick and surgical, but the killer would be safe despite the firefight. Captain Aradel, I suggest you gather the names of Winsting's companions and staff. See if any corpses that should be here, aren't. I'll look into the Metalborn side—Steelrunners aren't common, even as Feruchemists go."

"And the press?" Marasi asked.

Waxillium looked to Aradel, who shrugged. "I can't keep a lid on this, Lord Ladrian," Aradel said. "Not with so many people involved. It's going to get out."

"Let it," Waxillium said with a sigh. "But I can't help feeling that's the point of all this."

"Excuse me?" Wayne said. "I thought the point was killing folks."

"Lots of folks, Wayne," Waxillium said. "A shift in power in the city. Were those upstairs the main target? Or was this an attack on the governor himself, a sideways strike upon his house, a message of some sort? Sent to tell Governor Innate that even he is not beyond their reach.…" He tipped Winsting's head back, looking at the gouged-out mouth. Marasi looked away.

"They removed the tongue," Waxillium whispered. "Why? What are you up to, Uncle?"

"Excuse me?" Aradel asked.

"Nothing," Waxillium said, dropping the head back to its slumped position. "I have to go sit for a portrait. I assume you'll be willing to send me a report once you've detailed all of this?"

"I can do that," Aradel said.

"Good," Waxillium said, walking toward the door. "Oh, and Captain?"

"Yes, Lord Ladrian?"

"Prepare for a storm. This wasn't done quietly; it was done to be noticed. This was a challenge. Whoever did this isn't likely to stop here."

# PART TWO

# 5

Wayne tugged on his lucky hat. It was a coachman's hat—something like a wide-brimmed bowler, only one that didn't have three ounces of fancy shoved up its backside. He nodded to himself in his mirror, then wiped his nose. Sniffles. He'd started storing up health the day before, just after finding all those corpses.

He already had a nice cushion of healing he could draw upon, tucked away in his metalmind bracers. He hadn't needed much lately, and always spent days when he had a hangover as sickly as he could manage, since he was going to have an awful time of it anyway. But the way things smelled, with all those important folk dead, warned him. He'd soon need some healing. Best to expand that cushion as he could.

He went light at it today, though. Because it was today, a day when he was going to need some luck. He was tempted to call it the worst day of his life, but that would certainly be an exaggeration. The worst day of his life would be the one when he died.

*Might die today though,* he thought, looping on his belt and slipping his dueling canes into their straps, then wiping his nose again. *Can't be certain yet.* Every man had to die. He'd always found it odd that so many died when they were old, as logic said that was the point in their lives when they'd had the most practice not dying.

He wandered out of his room in Wax's mansion, idly noticing the scent of morning bread coming from the kitchens. He appreciated the room, though he really only stayed because of the free food. Well, that and because of Wax. The man needed company to keep him from going more strange.

Wayne wandered down a carpeted corridor that smelled of polished wood and servants who had too much time. The mansion was nice, but really, a man shouldn't live in a place that was so big; it just reminded him how small he was. Give Wayne nice, cramped quarters, and he'd be happier. That way he'd feel like a king, with so much *stuff* it crowded him.

He hesitated outside the door to Wax's study. What was that sitting on the stand beside the doorway? A new candelabra, pure gold, with a white lace doily underneath. *Exactly* what Wayne needed.

He fished in his pocket. Rich people didn't make sense at all. That candelabra was probably worth a fortune, and Wax just left it lying around. Wayne fished in his other pocket, looking for something good to trade, and came out with a pocket watch.

*Ah, that,* he thought, shaking it and hearing the pieces rattle inside. *How long since this thing actually told time?* He picked up the candelabra, pocketed the doily underneath, then put the candelabra back in place with the pocket watch hanging from it. Seemed like a fair trade.

*Been needing a new handkerchief,* he thought, blowing his nose into it, then pushed open the door and wandered in.

Wax stood before an easel, looking at the large artist's sketch pad he had filled with intricate plans. "Up all night, were you?" Wayne asked with a yawn. "Rusts, man, you make it hard to loaf about properly."

"I don't see what my insomnia has to do with your laziness, Wayne."

"Makes me look bad, 'sall," Wayne said, looking over Wax's shoulder. "Proper loafing requires company. One man lying about is being idle; two men lying about is a *lunch break*."

Wax shook his head, walking over to look at some broadsheets. Wayne leaned in, inspecting Wax's paper. It held long lists of ideas, some connected by arrows, with a sketch of the way the bodies had fallen in both the ballroom and the saferoom.

"What's all this, then?" Wayne asked, picking up a pencil and drawing a little stick figure with a gun shooting at all the dead bodies. His hand trembled as he drew the stick gun, but otherwise it was a right good stick figure.

"Proof to me that a Steelrunner is involved," Wax said. "Look at the pattern of deaths in the ballroom. Four of the most powerful people in the room were killed with the same gun, and they were the only ones up there killed by that weapon—but it's the same one that killed the guards outside the saferoom. I'd bet those four above were shot first, dead in an eyeblink, so fast that it sounded like a single long shot. Thing is, judging by the wounds, each shot came from a different location."

Wayne didn't know a lot about guns, seeing as how he couldn't try to use one without his arm doing an impersonation of a carriage on a bumpy road, but Wax was probably right. Wayne moved down to start sketching some stick figures of topless women in the center of the picture, but Wax stepped over and plucked the pencil from his fingers.

"What's that?" Wayne asked, tapping the center of the sketch pad, where Wax had drawn a bunch of straight lines.

"The pattern the killer used baffles me," Wax said. "The four people in the party he shot, they all fell while in random conversations—look how they were lying. Everyone else who died was part of the larger shoot-out, but these four, they died while the party was still going on. But why did he shoot them from different directions? See, best I can guess, he fired first here, killing Lady Lentin. Her dropped drink was stomped on many times over the next few minutes. But then the killer used his speed to move quickly over here and fire in another direction. Then he moved again, and again. Why four shots from different places?"

"Who was standing where he shot?"

"The people he killed, obviously."

"No, I mean, who was standing near him when he fired his gun. Not who did he shoot, but who was he near when he shot?"

"Ahh…" Wax said.

"Yep. Looks to me like he was trying to set them all off," Wayne said, sniffling. "Get everyone in the room shootin' at each other. See? It's like how, to start a bar fight, you throw a bottle at some fellow and then turn to the person next to you and cry out, 'Hey, why'd you throw that bottle at that nice fellow? Rusts, he looks big. And now he's comin' for you, and—'"

"I understand the concept," Wax said dryly. He tapped the drawing pad. "You might have something."

"It's not catching."

Wax smiled, writing some notes on the side of the pad. "So the killer wanted to sow chaos.… He started a firefight by bouncing around the room, making it look like various parties were attacking one another. They would already have been tense, suspicious of one another.…"

"Yup. I'm a genius."

"You just recognized this because the killer was making others do his work for him, which is an expertise of yours."

"As I said. Genius. So how are you going to find him?"

"Well, I was thinking of sending you to the Village to—"

"Not today," Wayne said.

Wax turned to him, raising his eyebrows.

"It's the first of the month," Wayne said.

"Ah. I had forgotten. You don't need to go *every* month."

"I do."

Wax studied him, as if waiting for a further comment or wisecrack. Wayne said nothing. This was actually serious. Slowly, Wax nodded. "I see. Then why haven't you left yet?"

"Well, you know," Wayne said. "It's like I often say…"

"Greet every morning with a smile. That way it won't know what you're planning to do to it?"

"No, not that one."

"Until you know it ain't true, treat every woman like she has an older brother what is stronger than you are?"

"No, not … Wait, I said that?"

"Yes," Wax said, turning back to his notes. "It was a very chivalrous moment for you."

"Rusts. I should really write these things down."

"I believe that is another thing you often say." Wax made a notation. "Unfortunately, you'd first have to learn how to write."

"Now, that's unfair," Wayne said, walking over to Wax's desk and poking around in its drawers. "I can write—I know four whole letters, and one's not even in my name!"

Wax smiled. "Are you going to tell me what you always say?"

Wayne found a bottle in the bottom drawer and lifted it up, dropping in the lace he'd taken from outside as a replacement. "If you're going to have to do something awful, stop by Wax's room and trade for some of his rum first."

"I don't believe you've ever said that."

"I just did." Wayne took a gulp of the rum.

"I…" Wax frowned. "I have no response to that." He sighed, setting down his pencil. "However, since you're going to be indisposed, then I suppose *I* will have to go visit the Village."

"Sorry. I know you hate that place."

"I will survive," Wax said, grimacing.

"Wanna piece of advice?"

"From you? Probably not. But please feel free."

"You should stop by Wax's room before you go," Wayne said, trailing out toward the door, "and pinch some of his rum."

"The rum you just pocketed?"

Wayne hesitated, then took the rum out of his pocket. "Ah, mate. Sorry. Tough for you." He shook his head. Poor fellow. He pulled the door closed behind him, took a pull on the rum, and continued on his way down the stairs and out of the mansion.

* * *

Marasi tugged at the collar of her jacket, glad for the seaborne wind that blew across her. It could get warm in her uniform—a proper one today, with a buttoned white blouse and brown skirt to match the brown coat.

Next to her, the newsman wasn't so thankful for the wind. He cursed, throwing a heavy chunk of iron—it looked like a piece of an old axle—onto his stack of broadsheets. On the street, the traffic slowed in a moment of congestion. Motorcar drivers and coachmen yelled at one another.

"Ruin break that Tim Vashin," the newsman grumbled, looking at the traffic. "And his machines."

"It's hardly his fault," Marasi said, digging in her pocketbook.

"It is," the newsman said. "Motors were fine, nothing wrong with them for driving in the country or on a summer afternoon. But they're cheap enough now, everyone has to have one of the rusting things! A man can't take his horse two blocks without being run down half a dozen times."

Marasi exchanged coins for a broadsheet. The yelling subsided as the traffic clot loosened, horses and machines once again flowing across the cobbles. She raised the broadsheet, scanning above the fold for stories.

"Say," the newsman said. "Weren't you just here?"

"I needed the afternoon edition," Marasi said absently, walking away.

"Cry of Outrage in the Streets!" the headline read.

> A cry like that of twisting metal sounds through Elendel as people take to the streets, outraged by government corruption. One week after the governor's veto of bill 775, the so-called workers'-rights manifesto, his brother Winsting Innate has been found dead after an apparent dealing with known criminals.
>
> Winsting was killed in his mansion, perhaps a casualty of constable action against these criminal elements. Among the fallen is the notorious Dowser Maline, long suspected of running ore-smuggling operations into the city, undercutting the work of honest men. The constables admit no culpability for the deaths, but suspicions about the mysterious circumstances have led to a general outcry.

Marasi reached into her handbag and took out the morning edition of the same paper. "Mystery at Lord Winsting's Mansion!" the headline read.

> Constables have disclosed that Lord Winsting, brother of the governor, was

> found dead in his mansion home last night. Little is known of the mysterious circumstances of the death, though several members of high society are rumored to have been present.

Every other story in the paper was the same in both editions, save for one report on the floods in the east, which had an extra line updating casualty estimates. The Winsting story had nudged two others off the page, in part because of the size of its headline. The *Elendel Daily* was hardly the most reputable news source in the Basin, but it did know its market. News stories that people agreed with, or were scared by, sold the most copies.

Marasi hesitated on the steps of the Fourth Octant Precinct of the Constabulary. People flowed on the sidewalks, bustling, anxious, heads down. Others loitered nearby, men in the dark jackets of teamsters, hands shoved in pockets, eyes shaded by peaked hats.

*Out of work,* Marasi thought. *Too many idle men out of work.* Motorcars and electric lights were changing life in Elendel so quickly it seemed that the common man had no hope of keeping up. Men whose families had worked for three generations in the same job suddenly found themselves unemployed. And with the labor disputes at the steel mills …

The governor had recently given political speeches to these men, making promises. More coach lines to compete with rail lines, going places the railroad could not. Higher tariffs on imports from Bilming. Empty promises, mostly, but men losing hope clung to such promises. Winsting's death could dash those promises. How would people react if they began to wonder if the governor, Replar Innate, was as corrupt as his brother?

*A fire is kindling in the city,* Marasi thought. She could almost feel the heat coming off the page of the broadsheet in her hands.

She turned and entered the constabulary offices, worrying that Lord Winsting might actually do more harm to Elendel dead than he had alive—which was saying something.

* * *

Wax climbed out of the carriage, nodding to his coachman and indicating that the man should continue on home rather than wait for his master.

Wax pulled on his aluminum-lined hat—broad-brimmed, Roughs style, matching his duster, though he wore a fine shirt and cravat underneath. The hat and mistcoat made him stand out like a man who had brought a shotgun to a knife fight. Workers passed in suspenders and caps, bankers in vests and monocles, constables in helms or bowlers and militaristic coats.

No Roughs hats. Maybe Wayne was right about that; he never would shut up about the importance of a hat. Wax took a deep breath, then stepped into the Village.

It had probably once been just an ordinary city street. A wide one, but still just a street. That was before the trees. They sprouted here, pushing cobblestones aside, creating a dense canopy that ran the length of the thoroughfare.

It was a place that felt like it shouldn't be. No mere park—this was a forest, uncultivated and unmanicured, fresh and primal. You couldn't bring a carriage or motor into the Village; even without the trees, the ground would be too rough now, rolling and uneven. The buildings along the street had been engulfed and become the property of the Village. He couldn't help wondering if this was what all of Elendel would be like without the hand of men. Harmony had made the Basin ferociously fecund; men didn't farm here so much as fight to harvest quickly enough.

Wax strode forward, arrayed as if for battle. Vindication and his Sterrion at his hips, short-barreled shotgun in its holster on his thigh, metal burning inside of him. He pulled the brim of his hat low, and entered another world.

Children wearing simple white smocks played among the trees. Older youths wore the tinningdar, the Terris robe marked with a V pattern running down the front. These looked up from the steps of buildings to watch him pass. The air smelled *soft* here. Soft air. A stupid metaphor, and yet there it was. That smell reminded him of his mother.

Whispers rose around Wax like spring shoots. He kept his eyes forward, trudging across the too-springy ground. There were no gates into or out of the Village, yet you couldn't enter or leave without being identified. Indeed, moments after his entry, a young woman with streaming golden hair was sent running ahead of him to bear news of his arrival.

*They've found peace for themselves here,* Wax thought. *They've* made *peace for themselves. You shouldn't resent them so.*

After a short walk, he emerged from a stand of trees to find three Terrismen waiting for him, arms folded, all wearing the robes of Brutes, Feruchemists who could increase their strength. Their features were varied enough that one wouldn't have pegged them as relatives. Two had the height that was often the Terris heritage, and one had skin that was darker—some of the Originators from ancient Terris had been dark of skin; Wax's own tan probably came from that lineage. None of the men here had the elongated features seen in the ancient paintings. That was a thing of mythology.

"What is it you need, outsider?" one of the men said.

"I want to speak with the Synod," Wax said.

"Are you a constable?" the man said, looking Wax up and down. Children peeked out from behind nearby trees, watching him.

"Of a sort," Wax said.

"The Terris police themselves," another of the men said. "We have an arrangement."

"I'm aware of the compact," Wax said. "I just need to speak to the Synod, or at least Elder Vwafendal."

"You shouldn't be here, lawman," the lead Terrisman said. "I—"

"It's all right, Razal," a tired voice said from the shadows of a nearby tree.

The three Terrismen turned, then quickly bowed as an old Terriswoman approached. Stately and white-haired, she had darker skin than Wax, and walked with a cane she didn't need. The woman, Vwafendal, studied Wax. He found himself sweating.

Razal, still bowing, spoke with a stubborn tone. "We tried to send him away, Elder."

"He has a right to be here," Vwafendal said. "He has as much Terris blood as you do; more than most."

The Terrisman Brute started, then rose from his bow, peering again at Wax. "You don't mean…"

"Yes," Vwafendal said, looking very tired. "This is he. My grandson."

* * *

Wayne tipped the rum bottle up and teased the last few drops out into his mouth. Then he tucked the bottle into his coat pocket. It was a good bottle. He should be able to trade it for something.

He hopped off the canal boat, giving a wave to Red, the boatman. Nice chap. He would let Wayne bum rides in exchange for a story. Wayne spat a coin out of his mouth—he'd been keeping it in his cheek—and flipped it to Red.

Red caught the coin. "Why is this wet? Were you sucking on it?"

"Allomancers can't Push on my coin if it's in my mouth!" Wayne called.

"You're drunk, Wayne!" Red said with a laugh, shoving off from the dock with his pole.

"Not nearly drunk enough," Wayne called back. "That cheapskate Wax didn't even have the decency to stock a full bottle!"

Red turned the canal boat, poling it out into the waters, wind rippling his cloak. Wayne walked away from the post marking the canal-side mooring, and was faced with the most intimidating sight a fellow could see. The Elendel University.

It was time for Wayne's three tests.

He reached for the rum, then remembered—a little foggily—that he'd finished it all. "Rust and Ruin," he muttered. Perhaps he shouldn't have downed the whole thing. Then again, it made his sniffles easy to ignore. When he was properly smashed, he could take a punch or two to the face and not even feel it. There was a kind of invincibility to that. A stupid kind, but Wayne wasn't a picky man.

He made his way up to the university gates, hands stuffed in his coat pockets. The etched letters over the top proclaimed, in High Imperial, WASING THE ALWAYS OF WANTING OF KNOWING. Deep words. He'd heard them interpreted as, "The eternal desire of a hungry soul is knowledge." When Wayne's soul was hungry he settled for scones, but this place was full of smart kids, and they were a strange sort.

Two men in black coats leaned casually against the gates. Wayne hesitated. So they were watching for him out front this time, were they? The first of his three trials was upon him. Rusting wonderful.

Well, after the nature of any great hero from the stories, he was going to do his best to avoid this particular trial. Wayne ducked to the side before the two men could spot him, then followed the wall. The university was surrounded by the thing, like it was some kind of bunker. Were they afraid all their knowledge would leak out, like water from a swimmer's ears?

Wayne craned his neck, looking for a way in. They'd bricked up the broken part he'd used last time. And the tree he'd climbed that other time had been cut down. Drat on them for that. He decided to follow another great tradition of heroes facing trials. He went looking for a way to cheat.

He found Dims on a nearby corner. The young man wore a bowler hat and a bow tie, but a shirt that had the sleeves ripped off. He was head of one of the more important street gangs in the area, but never stabbed people too badly when he mugged them and was polite with the people he extorted. He was practically a model citizen.

"Hello, Dims," Wayne said.

Dims eyed him. "You a conner today, Wayne?"

"Nope."

"Ah, good," Dims said, settling down on the steps. He took something out of his pocket—a little metal container.

"Here now," Wayne said, wiping his nose. "What's that?"

"Gum."

"Gum?"

"Yeah, you chew it." Dims offered him a piece of the stuff. It was rolled into a ball, soft to the touch and powdered on the outside.

Wayne eyed the lad, but decided to try it. He chewed for a moment.

"Good flavor," he said, then swallowed.

Dims laughed. "You don't *swallow* it, Wayne. You just chew!"

"What's the funna that?"

"It just feels good." He tossed Wayne another ball.

Wayne popped it into his mouth. "How are things," Wayne said, "with you and the Cobblers?"

The Cobblers were the rival gang in the area. Dims and his fellows went about with their sleeves torn. The Cobblers wore no shoes. It apparently made perfect sense to youths of the street, many of whom were the children of the houseless. Wayne liked to keep an eye on them. They were good lads. He'd been like them once.

Then life had steered him wrong. Boys like this, they could use someone to point them in the right direction.

"Oh, you know," Dims said. "Some back, some forth."

"There won't be trouble now, will there?" Wayne asked.

"I thought you said you wasn't no conner today!"

"I ain't," Wayne said, slipping—by instinct—into a dialect more like that of Dims. "I'm askin' as a friend, Dims."

Dims scowled, looking away, but his muttered response was genuine. "We ain't stupid, Wayne. We'll keep our heads. You know we will."

"Good."

Dims glanced back at him as Wayne settled down. "You bring that money you owe me?"

"I owe you money?" Wayne asked.

"From cards?" Dims said. "Two weeks back? Rusts, Wayne, are you drunk? It ain't even noon yet!"

"I ain't drunk," Wayne said, sniffling. "I'm investigatin' alternative states of sobriety. How much do I owe you?"

Dims paused. "Twenty."

"Now see," Wayne said, digging in his pocket, "I distinctly remember borrowin' five off you." He held up a note. It was a fifty.

Dims raised an eyebrow. "You want something from me, I'm guessing?"

"I need into the university."

"The gates are open," Dims said.

"Can't go through the front. They know me."

Dims nodded. That sort of thing was a common complaint in his world. "What do you need from me?"

A short time later, a man wearing Wayne's hat, coat, and dueling canes tried to pass through the front of the university. He saw the two men in black, then bolted as they chased after him.

Wayne adjusted his spectacles, watching them go. He shook his head. Ruffians, trying to get into the university! Scandalous. He walked in through the gates, wearing a bow tie and carrying a load of books. Another of those men—who stood in a more hidden spot, watching his companions chase Dims—barely gave Wayne a glance.

Spectacles. They were kind of like a hat for smart people. Wayne ditched the books inside the square, then walked past a fountain with a statue of a lady who wasn't properly clothed—he idled only a short time—and made his way toward Pashadon Hall, the girls' dormitory. The building looked an awful lot like a prison: three stories of small windows, stonework architecture, and iron grates that seemed to say "Stay away, boys, if you value your nether parts."

He pushed his way in the front doors, where he prepared himself for the second of his three tests: the Tyrant of Pashadon. She sat at her desk, a woman built like an ox with a face to match. Her hair even curled like horns. She was a fixture of the university, or so Wayne had been told. Perhaps she had come with the chandeliers and sofas.

She looked up from her desk in the entryway, then threw herself to her feet in challenge. "You!"

"Hello," Wayne said.

"How did you get past campus security!"

"I tossed them a ball," Wayne said, tucking the spectacles into his pocket. "Most hounds love having somethin' to chase."

The tyrant rumbled around the side of her desk. It was like watching an ocean liner try to navigate city canals. She wore a tiny hat, in an attempt at fashion. She liked to consider herself a part of Elendel upper society, and she kind of was. In the same way that the blocks of granite that made up the steps to the governor's mansion were a part of civic government.

"You," she said, spearing Wayne in the chest with a finger. "I thought I told you not to come back."

"I thought I ignored you."

"Are you drunk?" She sniffed at his breath.

"No," Wayne said. "If I were drunk, you wouldn't look nearly so ugly."

She huffed, turning away. "I can't believe your audacity."

"Really? Because I'm sure I've been this audacious before. Every month, in fact. So this seems a right believable thing for me to do."

"I'm not letting you in. Not this time. You are a scoundrel."

Wayne sighed. Heroes in stories never had to fight the same beast twice. Seemed unfair he had to face this one each month. "Look, I just want to check in on her."

"She is fine."

"I have money," Wayne said. "To give her."

"You can leave it here. You distress the girl, miscreant."

Wayne stepped forward, taking the tyrant by the shoulder. "I didn't want to have to do this."

She looked at him. And, to his surprise, she cracked her knuckles. *Wow.* He reached into his pocket quickly and pulled out a piece of pasteboard.

"One ticket," Wayne said quickly, "admitting two people to the governor's spring dinner and policy speech, occurring during a party at Lady ZoBell's penthouse tonight. This here ticket lists no specific names. Anyone who has it can get in."

Her eyes widened. "Who'd you steal that from?"

"Please," Wayne said. "It came delivered to my house."

Which was perfectly true. It was for Wax and Steris. But they were important enough folk that invitations sent to them had no names, so they could send an emissary if they wished. When it came to someone fancy like Wax, even getting their relative or friend to attend your party could be advantageous.

The tyrant didn't count as either. But Wayne figured that Wax would be happy to not have to go to the blasted party anyway. Besides, Wayne had left a real nice-looking leaf he'd found in exchange. Rusting beautiful, that leaf was.

The tyrant hesitated, so Wayne waved the ticket in front of her.

"I guess…" she said. "I could let you in one last time. I'm not supposed to allow unrelated men into the visiting room, however."

"I'm practically family," he said. They made a big fuss about keeping the young women and young men separated around here, which Wayne found odd. With all of these smart people around, wouldn't one of them have realized what boys and girls was supposed to do together?

The tyrant let him pass into the visiting room, then sent one of the girls at the desk to run for Allriandre. Wayne sat down, but couldn't keep his feet from tapping. He'd been stripped of weapons, bribes, and even his own hat. He was practically naked, but he'd made it to the final test.

Allriandre entered a few moments later. She'd brought backup with her in the form of two other young ladies about her age—just shy of twenty. *Smart girl,* Wayne thought, proud. He rose.

"Madam Penfor says you're drunk," Allriandre said, remaining in the doorway.

Wayne tapped his metalmind, drawing forth healing. In a moment, his body burned away its impurities and healed its wounds. It thought alcohol was a poison, which showed that a fellow couldn't always trust his own body, but today he didn't complain. It also washed away his sniffles for the moment, though those would return. It was hard to heal from diseases with a metalmind for some reason.

Either way, sobriety hit him like a brick to the chin. He inhaled deeply, feeling even more naked than before. "I just like to play with her," Wayne said, all hint of slur gone from his voice, eyes focused.

Allriandre studied him intently, then nodded. She did not enter the room.

"I brought this month's money," Wayne said, taking an envelope out and setting it on the low, glass-topped table beside him. He stood up straight, then shuffled from one foot to the other.

"Is that really him?" one of the girls asked Allriandre. "They say he rides with Dawnshot. Of the Roughs."

"It's him," Allriandre said, eyes still on Wayne. "I don't want your money."

"Your mama told me to bring it to you," Wayne said.

"You don't need to bring it in person."

"I do," Wayne said quietly.

They stood in silence, neither party moving. Wayne finally cleared his throat. "How're your studies? Are you treated well here? Is there anythin' you need?"

Allriandre reached into her handbag and took out a large locket. She spread it open, displaying a strikingly distinct evanotype of a man with a wide mustache and a twinkle in his eyes. He had a long, friendly face, and his hair was thinning on top. Her father.

She made Wayne look at it every time.

"Tell me what you did," she said. That voice. It could have been the voice of winter itself.

"I don't—"

*"Tell me."*

The third trial.

"I killed your daddy," Wayne said softly, looking at the picture. "I mugged him in an alley for his pocketbook. I shot a better man than me, and because of that, I don't deserve to be alive."

"You know you aren't forgiven."

"I know."

"You will never be forgiven."

"I know."

"Then I'll take your blood money," Allriandre said. "If you care to know, my studies go well. I am thinking of taking up the law."

Someday, he hoped he might be able to look into the girl's eyes and see emotion. Hatred, maybe. Something other than that emptiness.

"Get out."

Wayne ducked his head and left.

* * *

There should not have been a thatched log hut in the middle of Elendel, and yet here it was. Wax stooped to enter, seeming to step backward in time hundreds of years. The air inside smelled of old leather and furs.

The enormous firepit in the middle would never be needed in Elendel's mild weather. Today, a smaller fire had been constructed at its very center, and over it simmered a small kettle of hot water for tea. However, charred stones indicated that the entire firepit was sometimes used. It, the furs, the ancient-style paintings on the wall—of winds, and frozen rain, and tiny figures painted with simple strokes on slopes—were all fragments of a myth.

Old Terris. A legendary land of snow and ice, with white-furred beasts and spirits that haunted frozen storms. During the early days following the Catacendre, refugees from Terris had written down memories of their homeland, as no Keepers had remained.

Wax settled down beside his grandmother's firepit. Some said that Old Terris waited for this people, hidden somewhere in this new world of Harmony's design. To the faithful, it might as well have been paradise; a frozen, hostile paradise. Living in a land naturally lush with bounteous fruit, where little cultivation was required, could warp one's vision.

Grandmother V settled down opposite him, but did not start the fire. "Did you remove your guns before entering the Village this time?"

"I did not."

She snorted. "So insolent. During your long absence, I often wondered if the Roughs might temper you."

"They made me more stubborn, is all."

"A land of heat and death," Grandmother V said. She crinkled a handful of herbs, flakes dropping into a tea strainer above her cup. She poured steaming water over them, then placed the lid with a gnarled hand. "Everything about you stinks of death, Asinthew."

"That isn't what my father named me."

"Your father didn't have the right. I would demand you remove the weapons, but it would be meaningless. You could kill with a coin, or with a button, or with this pot."

"Allomancy is not so evil as you make it out to be, Grandmother."

"Neither power is evil," she said. "It is mixing those powers that is dangerous. Your nature is not your fault, but I cannot help but see it as a sign. Another tyrant in our future, too powerful. It leads to death."

Sitting in this hut … the scent of Grandmother's tea … Memories grabbed Wax by his collar and shoved him face-first up against his past. A young man who had never been able to decide what he was. Allomancer or Feruchemist, city lord or humble Terrisman? His father and uncle pushing him one way, his grandmother another.

"A Feruchemist slaughtered people in the Fourth Octant last night, Grandmother," Wax said. "He was a Steelrunner. I know you track everyone in the city with Feruchemical blood. I need a list of names."

Grandmother V swished around her tea. "You've visited the Village on … what, a mere three occasions since your return to the city? Nearly two years, and you've made time for your grandmother only twice before today."

"Can you blame me, considering how these meetings usually go? To be blunt, Grandmother, I know how you feel about me. So why torture either of us?"

"You cling to your images of me from two decades ago, child. People change. Even one such as I." She sipped her tea, then added more herbs to the strainer and lowered it back into the water. She would not drink until it was right. "Not one such as you, it appears."

"Trying to bait me, Grandmother?"

"No. I am better at insults than that. You haven't changed. You still don't know who you are."

An old argument. She'd said it to him both times they'd met during the last two years. "I am *not* going to start wearing Terris robes, speaking softly, quoting proverbs at people."

"You will shoot them instead."

Wax took a deep breath. A mixture of scents lingered in the air. From the tea? Scents like that of freshly cut grass. His father's estates, sitting on the lawn, listening to his father and grandmother argue.

Wax had lived here in the Village for only a single year. It had been all his father had agreed to give. Even that had been surprising; Uncle Edwarn had wanted Wax and his sister to both stay away from the place. Before his official heir, the late Hinston Ladrian, had been born when Wax was eighteen, Edwarn had basically appropriated his brother's children and tried to raise them. Even still, it was hard to separate Wax's parents' will in his head from that of Edwarn.

One year among these trees. Wax had been forbidden Allomancy during his days in the Village, but had learned something far greater. That criminals existed, even among the idyllic Terris.

"The only times I've truly known who I am," Wax said, looking up at his grandmother, meeting her eyes, "are when I've put on the mistcoat, strapped guns to my waist, and hunted down men gone rabid."

"You should not be defined by what you do, but by what you are."

"A man is what he does."

"You came looking for a Feruchemist killer? You need only look in the mirror, child. If a man is what he does … think of what you've done."

"I've never killed a man who didn't deserve it."

"Can you be *absolutely* certain of that?"

"Reasonably. If I've made mistakes, I'll pay for them someday. You won't distract me, Grandmother. To fight is not against the Terris way. Harmony killed."

"He slew beasts and monsters only. Never our own."

Wax breathed out. This again? *Rusts. I should have* forced *Wayne to come here instead of me. He says she actually likes him.*

A new scent struck him. Crushed blossoms. In the darkness of that chamber, he imagined himself again, standing among the trees of the Terris Village. Looking up at a broken window, and feeling the bullet in his hand.

And he smiled. Once that memory had brought him pain—the pain of isolation. Now he saw only a budding lawman, remembered the sense of *purpose* he'd felt.

Wax stood up, grabbing his hat, mistcoat rustling. He almost wanted to believe that the scents to the room, the memories, were his grandmother's doing. Who knew what she put into that tea?

"I'm going to hunt down a murderer," Wax said. "If I do it without your help, and he kills again before I can stop him, you will be partially to blame. See how well you sleep at night then, Grandmother."

"Will you kill him?" she asked. "Will you shoot for the chest when you could aim for the leg? People die around you. Do not deny it."

"I don't," he said. "A man should never pull a trigger unless he's willing to kill. And if the other fellow is armed, I'm going to aim for the chest. That way, when people do die around me, it's the right ones."

Grandmother V stared at her teapot. "The one you're looking for is named Idashwy. And she is not a man."

"Steelrunner?"

"Yes. She is not a killer."

"But—"

"She is the only Steelrunner I know of who could possibly be involved in something like this. She vanished about a month ago after acting … very erratically. Claimed that she was being visited by the spirit of her dead brother.”

“Idashwy,” he said. It was pronounced in the Terris manner, eye-dash-wee. The syllables felt thick in his mouth, another reminder of his days in the Village. The Terris language had been dead once, but Harmony’s records included it, and many Terris now learned to speak it in their youths. “I swear I know that name.”

“You did know her, long ago,” Grandmother V said. “You were with her that night, actually, before…”

Ah yes. Slender, golden hair, shy and didn’t speak much. *I didn’t know she was a Feruchemist.*

“You don’t even have the decency to look ashamed,” Grandmother V said.

“I’m not,” Wax said. “Hate me if you must, Grandmother, but coming to live with you changed my life, just as you always promised it would. I’m not going to be ashamed that the transformation wasn’t the one you expected.”

“Just … try to bring her back, Asinthew. She’s not a killer. She’s confused.”

“They all are,” Wax said, stepping out of the hut. The three men from before stood outside, glaring at him with displeasure. Wax tipped his hat to them, dropped a coin, then launched himself into the air between two trees, passing their canopies and seeking the sky.

* * *

Each time Marasi entered the precinct offices, she got a little thrill.

It was the thrill of bucked expectations, of a future denied. Even though this room didn’t look like she’d imagined—as the clerical and organizational center for the octant’s constables, it felt more like a business office than anything else—the mere fact that she was here excited her.

This wasn’t supposed to have been her life. She’d grown up reading stories of the Roughs, of lawmen and villains. She’d dreamed of six-guns and stagecoaches. She’d even taken up horseback riding and rifle shooting. And then, real life had intervened.

She’d been born into privilege. Yes, she was illegitimate, but the generous stipend from her father had set her and her mother up in a fine home. Money for an education had been guaranteed for her. With that kind of promise—and with her mother’s determination that Marasi should enter society and prove herself to her father—one did not choose a profession so lowly as that of a constable.

Yet here she was. It was wonderful.

She passed through the room full of people at desks. Though a jail was attached to the building, it had its own entrance, and she rarely visited it. Many of the constables she passed on her way through the main chamber were the type who spent most of their days at a desk. Her own spot was a comfortable nook near Captain Aradel's office. His room felt like a closet inside, and Aradel rarely spent time there. Instead, he stalked through the main chamber like a prowling lion, always in motion.

Marasi set her handbag on her desk next to a stack of last year's crime reports—in her spare time, she was trying to judge to what extent petty crimes in a region foretold greater ones. Better that than reading the politely angry letters from her mother, which lay underneath. She peeked into the captain's office and found his waistcoat thrown across his desk, right beside the pile of expense reports he was supposed to be initialing. She smiled and shook her head, dug his pocket watch out of his waistcoat, then went hunting.

The offices were busy, but they didn't have the bustle of the prosecutor's offices. During her internship there beneath Daius, everyone had always seemed so *frantic*. People worked all hours, and when a new case was posted, every junior solicitor in the room rushed over in a flurry of papers, coats, and skirts, craning to see who had posted the case and how many assistants they would be taking.

The opportunities for prestige, and even wealth, had been bountiful. And yet she hadn't been able to shake the feeling that nobody was actually *doing* anything. Cases that could make a difference languished because they weren't high-profile enough, while anything under the patronage of a prominent lord or lady was seen to immediately. The rush had been less about fixing the city's problems, and more about making certain the senior solicitors saw how much more eager you were than your colleagues.

She'd probably still be there, if she hadn't met Waxillium. She'd have done as her mother wanted, seeking validation through her child. Proof, perhaps, that she *could* have married Lord Harms, if it had been in the cards, despite her low birth. Marasi shook her head. She loved her mother, but the woman simply had too much time on her hands.

The constables' offices were so different from the solicitors'. Here, there was a true sense of purpose, but it was measured, even thoughtful. Constables leaned back in chairs and described evidence to other officers, looking for help on a case. Junior corporals moved through the room, delivering cups of tea, fetching files, or running some other errand. The competition she'd felt among the solicitors barely existed here. Perhaps that was because there was little prestige, and even less wealth, to go around.

She found Aradel with sleeves rolled up, one foot on a chair, bothering Lieutenant Caberel. “No, no,” Aradel said. “I’m telling you, we need more men on the streets. Near the pubs, at nights, where the foundry workers congregate after the strike line breaks up. Don’t bother guarding them during the day.”

Caberel nodded placidly, though she gave Marasi a roll of the eyes as she walked up. Aradel *did* tend to micromanage, but at least he was earnest. In Marasi’s experience, they were almost all fond of him, eyerolls notwithstanding.

She plucked a cup of tea off the plate of a passing corporal, who was delivering them to the desks. He quickly moved on, eyes forward, but she could almost feel him glaring at her. Well, it wasn’t *her* fault she’d landed this position, and the rank of lieutenant, without ever having to deliver tea.

*All right,* she admitted to herself, sipping the tea and stepping up beside Aradel. *Maybe there is a* bit *of competition around here.*

“You’ll see this done, then?” Aradel asked.

“Of course, sir,” Caberel said. She was one of the few in the place who treated Marasi with any measure of respect. Perhaps it was because they were both women.

There were fewer women in the constabulary than among the solicitors. One might have guessed that the reason for this was that ladies weren’t interested in the violence—but having done both jobs, Marasi felt she knew which profession was bloodier. And it wasn’t the one where people carried guns.

“Good, good,” Aradel said. “I have a debriefing with Captain Reddi in…” He patted at his pocket.

Marasi held out his watch, which he grabbed and checked for the time.

“… fifteen minutes. Huh. More time than I expected. Where’d you get that tea, Colms?”

“Want me to have someone fetch you some?” she asked.

“No, no. I can do it.” He bustled off, and Marasi nodded to Caberel, then hurried after him.

“Sir,” she said, “have you seen the afternoon broadsheets?”

He held out his hand, which she filled with paper. He held up the stack of broadsheets, and almost ran over three different constables on his way to the stove and the tea. “Bad,” he muttered. “I’d hoped they’d spin this against us.”

“Us, sir?” Marasi asked, surprised.

“Sure,” he said. “Nobleman dead, constables not giving the press details. This reads like they started to pin the death on the constables, but then changed their minds. By the end, the tone is far more outraged against Winsting than us."

"And that's worse than outrage at *us* for a cover-up?"

"Far worse, Lieutenant," he said with a grimace, reaching for a cup. "People are used to hating conners. We're a magnet for it, a lightning rod. Better us than the governor."

"Unless the governor deserves it, sir."

"Dangerous words, Lieutenant," Aradel said, filling his cup with steaming tea from the large urn kept warm atop the coal stove. "And likely inappropriate."

"You know there are rumors that he's corrupt," Marasi said softly.

"What I *know* is that we are civil servants," Aradel said. "There are enough people out there with the mindset and the moral position to monitor the government. *Our* job is to keep the peace."

Marasi frowned, but said nothing. Governor Innate *was* corrupt, she was almost sure of it. There were too many coincidences, too many small oddities in his policy decisions. It wasn't by any means obvious, but trends were Marasi's specialty, and her passion.

It wasn't as if she'd wanted to discover that the leader of Elendel was trading favors with the city's elite, but once she'd spotted the signs, she'd felt compelled to dig in. On her desk, carefully hidden under a stack of ordinary reports, was a ledger in which she'd assembled all the information. Nothing concrete, but the picture it drew was clear to her—even though she understood that it would look innocent to anyone else.

Aradel studied her. "You disagree with my opinion, Lieutenant?"

"One doesn't change the world by avoiding the hard questions, sir."

"Feel free to ask them, then. In your head, Lieutenant, and not out loud—particularly not to people outside the precinct. We can't have the men we work for thinking we are trying to undermine them."

"Funny, sir," Marasi said. "I thought we worked for the people of the city, not their leaders."

Aradel stopped, cup of steaming tea halfway to his lips. "Suppose I deserved that," he said, then took a gulp, shaking his head. He didn't flinch at the heat. People in the office figured he'd seared his taste buds off years ago. "Let's go."

They wove through the room toward Aradel's office, passing Captain Reddi at his desk. The lanky man rose, but Aradel waved him down, pulling out his watch. "I still have … five minutes until I have to deal with you, Reddi."

Marasi shot the captain an apologetic smile. She got a scowl in return.

“Someday,” she noted, “I’m going to figure out why that man hates me.”

“Hmmm?” Aradel said. “Oh, you stole his job.”

Marasi missed a step, stumbling into Lieutenant Ahlstrom’s desk. “What?” she demanded, hurrying after Aradel. “Sir?”

“Reddi was going to be my assistant,” Aradel said as they reached his office. “Had a damn fine bid for the job; I was all but priced into hiring him, until I got your application.”

Marasi blushed deeply. “Why would *Reddi* want to be your assistant, sir? He’s a field constable, a senior detective.”

“Everyone has this idea that in order to move up, you need to spend more time in the office and less on the street,” Aradel said. “Stupid tradition, even if the other octants follow it. I don’t want my best men and women turning into desk slugs. I want the assistant position to be for nurturing someone fresh who shows promise, rather than letting some practiced constable gather moss.”

The realization made a lot of things lock into place for Marasi. The hostility she felt from many of the others wasn’t just because she’d skipped the lower ranks—many with noble titles did that. It was because they’d solidified behind Reddi, their friend who’d been slighted.

“So…” Marasi said, taking a deep breath and grasping for something to keep her from a panic. “You think I show promise then?”

“Of course I do. Why would I have hired you otherwise?” Corporal Maindew walked by, saluting, and Aradel threw the wadded broadsheets into his face. “No saluting indoors, Maindew. You’ll knock yourself unconscious slapping your forehead every time I walk past.” He glanced back at Marasi as Maindew mumbled an apology and rushed off.

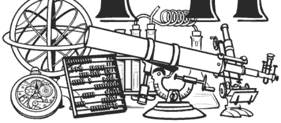
“There’s something in *you,* Colms,” Aradel told her. “Not the gloss and glint of the application. I don’t care about your grades, or what those zinctongues in the solicitors’ office thought of you. The words you wrote about changing the city, those made sense. They impressed me.”

“I … Thank you for the praise, sir.”

“I’m not flattering you, Colms. It’s just a fact.” He pointed toward the door. “That broadsheet said the governor was going to address the city later this afternoon. I’ll bet the Second Octant constables ask us for help managing the crowds; they always do. So I’m going to send a street detail. Go with them and listen, then report back to me what Governor Innate says, and pay attention to how the crowd reacts.”

“Yes, sir,” Marasi said, stopping herself from saluting as she snatched her handbag and ran to follow the orders.

# THE HOUS



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THE JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATIO

# “GENTLEMAN JAK IN THE CITY OF FOUNTAINS”

### *Part Six*

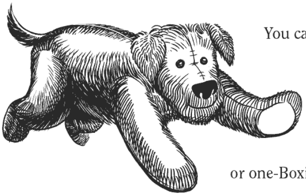
## “The Sinister Soiree!”

I need not remind my astute readers of the precarious situation in which I was left at the end of last week's column, but for those of you whose heightened tastes have just now led them from the gutters of disgraceful journalism to the noble pages of The House Record, let me present a short recapitulation.

Through the efforts alone of my silver tongue and tin-quick mind, I gained access to Lady Lavont's private party in New Seran wherein she planned to auction the only remaining buttons from the Lord Mistborn's favorite smoking jacket. Handerwym, my faithful Terrisman steward, had prised the information that the leader of the Cobblesguilders planned to steal the buttons by swapping them with impeccable forgeries at some point during the night.

As Handerwym watched the tin buttons from the hors d'oeuvres table, I rubbed elbows with Lady Lavont, and her inner circle, who found me completely enchanting. That was when the man in the striped white suit pointed a gun at me. *(Continued Below!)*

## ALL Children Love SOONIE PUPS



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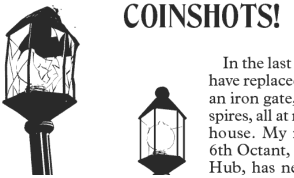
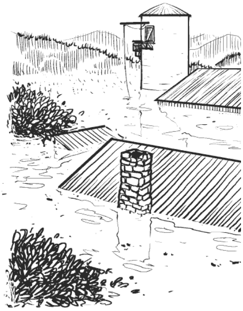


In the last sixteen months I have replaced three lamposts, an iron gate, and two steeple spires, all at my Madion Ways house. My residence in the 6th Octant, much nearer the Hub, has needed twice that

# ELENDEL FEELS EI OF CORBEAU FLO

## Higher commodities prices to impact marl



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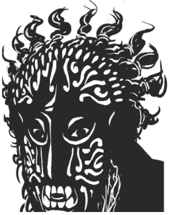
“There are enough supplies in reserve to meet most demands over the next four months,” says Lord Chapmot Heviers, a Circle member with strong ties to Corbeau. “But after that, most grain will start going to the highest bidder. If you own bakeries, you will think twice about selling loaves at five clips each when you could be selling whiskey at forty clips a bottle.”

## VISITORS from other WORLDS



## Vif Sparkle Tonic!

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Every Day!

## PECTIN·ADE

**THE BASIN'S FAVORITE SNACK**

Try all eight flavors! Only 10 clips a box. You'll be glad you stayed for PECTIN-ADE!

## The Sinister Soiree!

I described my assailant as wearing a striped white suit, but that is not as specific as it may seem. In Elendel, someone dressed as described would stick out like afternoon tea among koloss,

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# “GENTLEMAN JAK IN THE CITY OF

# FOUNTAINS”

## *Part Six*

## “The Sinister Soiree!”

I need not remind my astute readers of the precarious situation in which I was left at the end of last week’s column, but for those of you whose heightened tastes have just now led them from the gutters of disgraceful journalism to the noble pages of The House Record, let me present a short recapitulation.

Through the efforts alone of my silver tongue and tin-quick mind, I gained access to Lady Lavont’s private party in New Seran wherein she planned to auction the only remaining buttons from the Lord Mistborn’s favorite smoking jacket. Handerwym, my faithful Terrisman steward, had prised the information that the leader of the Cobblesguilders planned to steal the buttons by swapping them with impeccable forgeries at some point during the night.

As Handerwym watched the tin buttons from the hors d’oeuvres table, I rubbed elbows with Lady Lavont, and her inner circle, who found me completely enchanting. That was when the man in the striped white suit pointed a gun at me. *(Continued Below!)*

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# 6

Wax soared through the air above Elendel, hat held by its strings to his neck, mistcoat waving behind him like a banner. Below, the city bustled and moved, people swarming through its roadway arteries. Some glanced at him, but most ignored him. Allomancers were not the rarity here they had been in the Roughs.

*All these people,* Wax thought, Pushing off a fountain shaped like mists condensing into Harmony with arms upraised, bracers glittering golden on the otherwise green copper statue. Women sat on its stone edge; children played in its waters. Motorcars and horse carriages broke around it, sweeping to the sides and charging down other roads, going about the ever-important business of city life.

So many people—and here, in the Fourth Octant, a frightening percentage of them were his responsibility. To begin with he paid their wages, or oversaw those who did; on the solvency of his house rested the financial stability of thousands upon thousands. But that was only part of it; because through his seat in the Senate, he represented any who worked for him, or who lived on properties he owned.

Two divisions within the Senate. One side, the representatives of the professions, was elected and came and went as people's needs changed. The other side, the seats of the noble houses, was stable and immutable—not subject to the whims of voters. The governor, elected by the seats, presided over them all.

A good enough system, except it meant that Wax was supposed to look after tens of thousands of individuals he could never know. His eye twitched, and he turned, Pushing off some rebar sloppily left sticking from a tenement wall.

Towns were better in the Roughs, where you could know everyone. That way you could care for them, and really *feel* you were doing something. Marasi would argue that statistically, leading his house here was more effective in creating general human happiness, but he wasn't a man of numbers; he was a man who trusted his gut. His gut missed knowing the people he served.

Wax landed on a large water tower near a glass dome covering his octant's largest Church of the Survivor. People were worshipping inside, though a greater number would come at dusk to await the mists. The Church revered the mists, and yet with that glass dome they still separated themselves from it. Wax shook his head, then Pushed off along the nearby canal.

*He's probably finished by now,* Wax thought. *He'll be on one of the nearby docks, listening to the lapping water….*

He continued along the canal, which was cluttered with boats. Tindwyl Promenade, which ran along this canal, was crowded—even more so than usual. Dense with life. It was difficult not to feel subsumed by the great city, engulfed, overwhelmed, insignificant. Out in the Roughs Wax hadn't just enforced the law; he had interpreted it, revised it when needed. He had *been* the law.

Here he had to dance around egos and secrets.

As Wax searched for the right dock, he was surprised to eventually find the reason for the traffic on the promenade. It was all bunched up, trying to get through a large clot of men with signs. Wax passed overhead, and was shocked to see a small cluster of constables from the local octant amid the picketers—they were being pressed on all sides by the shouting men, waving signs in an uncomfortably violent manner.

Wax dropped through the air and Pushed lightly on the nails in the promenade boards here, slowing his descent. He landed in a crouch in an opening nearby, mistcoat flaring, guns clinking.

The picketers regarded him for a long moment, then broke apart, taking off in different directions. He didn't even have to say a word. In moments the beleaguered constables emerged, like stones on the plain as the soil washed away in a sudden rain.

"Thanks, sir," said their captain, an older woman whose blonde hair poked down straight about an inch on all sides around her constable's hat.

"They're getting violent?" Wax asked, watching the last of the picketers vanish.

"Didn't like us trying to move them off the promenade, Dawnshot," the woman said. She shivered. "Didn't expect it to go so bad, so fast…."

"Can't say I blame them much," one of the other constables said, a fellow with a neck like a long-barreled pistol. His fellows turned to him, and he hunched down. "Look, you can't say you don't have mates among them. You can't say you haven't heard them grumble. Something needs to change in this city. That's all I'm saying."

"They don't have the right to block a main thoroughfare," Wax said, "no matter their grievances. Report back to your precinct, and make sure you bring more men next time."

They nodded, hiking off. The promenade's knot of pedestrians slowly unwound itself, and Wax shook his head, worried. The men running the strikes *did* have a grievance. He'd found some of the same problematic conditions among the few factories he owned—long hours, dangerous environments—and had been forced to fire a few overseers because of it. He'd replaced them with overseers who instead would hire more men, for shorter shifts, as there was no shortage of laborers in the city who were out of work these days. But then he'd needed to up wages, so that the men could live on the shorter-shift income—making his goods more costly. Difficult times. And he didn't have the answers, not to those problems.

He hiked along the promenade a short distance, drawing more than a few stares from people he passed. But he soon found what he'd been looking for. Wayne sat on a narrow dock nearby. He had his shoes and socks off, feet in the water, and was staring off down the canal. "Hello, Wax," he said without looking as Wax stepped up.

"It went poorly?" Wax asked.

"Same as always. It's strange. Most days I don't mind being me. Today I do."

Wax crouched down, resting a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Do you ever wonder if you shoulda just shot me?" Wayne asked. "Back when you and Jon first found me?"

"I'm not in the habit of shooting people who can't shoot back," Wax said.

"I coulda been faking."

"No. You couldn't have been."

Wayne had been a youth of sixteen when Wax and Jon Deadfinger—a lawman who had been mentoring Wax—had found him curled up in the crawl space under a house, hands over his ears, cloaked in dirt and whimpers. Wayne had thrown his guns and ammunition down a well. Even as Deadfinger had dragged him out, Wayne had been complaining of the gunfire. Shots only he could hear, echoing from that well….

"Any number of the boys we run across and take down," Wayne said.

"Any of them could be like me. Why did I get a second chance, but none of them do?"

"Luck."

Wayne turned to meet his eyes.

"I'd give those lads second chances if I could," Wax said. "Maybe they've had their moments of doubt, regret. But the ones we shoot, we don't find them unarmed, hiding, willing to be brought in. We find them killing. And if I'd found you in the process of armed robbery all those years ago, I'd have shot you too."

"You're not lying, are you?"

"Of course not. I'd have shot you right in the head, Wayne."

"You're a good friend," Wayne said. "Thanks, Wax."

"You're the only person I know that I can cheer up by promising to kill him."

"You didn't promise to kill me," Wayne said, pulling on his socks. "You promised to have killed me. That there be the present perfect tense."

"Your grasp of the language is startling," Wax said, "considering how you so frequently brutalize it."

"Ain't nobody what knows the cow better than the butcher, Wax."

"I suppose…" Wax said, standing up. "Have you ever met a woman named Idashwy? A Feruchemist."

"Steelrunner?"

Wax nodded.

"Never met her," Wayne said. "They keep kicking me out of the Village when I visit. Right unneighborly."

So far as Wax knew, that wasn't true. Wayne would occasionally toss on some Terris robes, mimic their accents, then sneak in to live among them for a few days. He'd eventually get into trouble for saying something crude to one of the young women, but he wouldn't get thrown out. He'd baffle them, as he did most people, until he got bored and wandered away.

"Let's see what we can find," Wax said, waving down a canal gondola.

* * *

"Five notes, for *one basket* of apples! That's robbery!"

Marasi hesitated on the street. She'd driven the motorcar up to the Hub for the governor's speech, then parked it with the coachmen who took pay to watch and refuel motors, intending to walk the rest of the way on foot. The Hub could be a busy place.

That led her here, near this small street market with people selling fruit. With disbelief, she saw that one vendor was—indeed—selling apples at *five* *notes* a basket. Those shouldn't cost more than half a boxing per basket, at most. She'd seen them for a handful of clips.

"I could get these at Elend's stand for a fraction of the price!" the customer said.

"Well, why don't you go see if he has any left?" the cart owner said, nonplussed. The customer stormed off, leaving the cart owner with her sign proudly proclaiming the ridiculous price. Marasi frowned, then glanced down the row of stands, barrels, and carts.

*Suspiciously low quantities, all 'round.* She walked up to the cart owner with the high prices; the woman stood up stiffly, braids shaking, and shoved her hands into the pockets of her apron. "Officer," she said.

"Five is on the high side, wouldn't you say?" Marasi asked, picking up an apple. "Unless these are infused with atium."

"Am I doing anything wrong?" the woman asked.

"You have the right to set your prices," Marasi said. "One simply wonders what you seem to know that nobody else does."

The woman didn't respond.

"Shipment coming late?" Marasi asked. "Apple harvest gone bad?"

The woman sighed. "Not apples, officer. Grain shipments out of the east. Simply not coming. Floods did them in."

"A little early to be speculating on food prices, don't you think?"

"Pardon, officer, but do you know how much food this city eats? We're one shipment away from starvation, we are."

Marasi glanced down the row again. Food was moving quickly, most of it—from what she could see—being sold to the same group of people. Speculators grabbing up the fruits and sacks of grain. The city wasn't as close to starvation as the cart owner claimed—there were storages that could be released—but bad news moved faster than calm winds. And there was a good chance this woman was right, that she'd be able to sell her apples at a premium until things calmed down in a few days.

Marasi shook her head, setting down the apple and continuing toward the Hub. There was always a press here, people on the promenade, vehicles on the streets trying to force their way into the ring around the Hub. More people today, crowds drawn by the speech causing traffic clots in the regular bustle. Marasi could barely make out the giant statues of the Ascendant Warrior and her husband in the Field of Rebirth peeking out over the throng.

Marasi walked up to join another group of constables who had just arrived, on Aradel's orders, their carriages lagging behind her motorcar. Together they wended their way through the streets on foot toward the executive mansion. The governor preferred to address people from its steps, a few streets up into the Second Octant from the Hub.

They soon reached the large square before the mansion. Moving here was more difficult, but fortunately the constables from this octant were already in attendance—and they had roped off various areas near the front and sides of the square. In one, dignitaries and noblemen sat on bleachers to hear the address. In another, the Second Octant constables clustered and watched the crowd for pickpockets from the steps up into the National Archives. Other constables moved through the crowd, officers readily identifiable by the blue plumes on their hats.

Marasi and Lieutenant Javies, who had command of the field team, made their way toward the National Archives, where their colleagues from the Second Octant let them pass. A mustachioed older constable was directing things here, his helm—under his arm—bearing the double plume of a captain. When he saw Marasi, Javies, and the team, the man lit up.

“Ah, so Aradel sent me reinforcements after all,” he exclaimed. “Rusting wonderful. You chaps go watch the east side of the square, down Longard Street. Foundry workers are gathering there, and they don’t look too pleasant. This isn’t the place for their picket lines, I dare say. Maybe an eyeful of constable uniforms will keep them in check.”

“Sir,” Javies said, saluting. “Those masses are pushing up against the steps to the mansion! With respect, sir, don’t you want us up there?”

“Governor’s guards have jurisdiction, Lieutenant,” the old captain said. “They brush us back if we try to do anything on the actual mansion grounds. Damn pewternecked bulls. They barely give us warning anytime the governor wants to have a say to the people, then expect us to do the hard work of policing this mess.”

Javies saluted, and his team ran off.

“Sir,” Marasi said, remaining behind. “Constable-General Aradel wanted me to bring him a direct report on the speech. Do you think I could get a spot on those bleachers to watch?”

“No luck there,” the captain said. “Every niece and nanny of a house lord has demanded a spot; they’ll gut me if I send someone else over.”

“Thank you anyway, sir. I’ll see if I can work my way to the front of the crowd.” Marasi moved off.

“Wait, constable,” the old man said. “Don’t I know you?”

She looked back, blushing. “I’m—”

“Lord Harms’s girl!” the old captain said. “The bastard. That’s it! Now, don’t get red-faced. That’s not meant as an insult, child. Just what you are, and that’s it, simple as day. I like your father. He was bad enough at cards to be fun to play against, but he was careful not to bet so much that I felt bad winning."

"Sir." News of her nature, once kept discreet, had moved through all of high society. Hanging around Waxillium, who created such stirs, did have its drawbacks. And her mother *did* have something of a reason for her angry letters.

Marasi was quite accepting of what she was. That didn't mean she liked having it thrown at her. Old nobleman officers like this, though … well, they came from a time when they felt they could say whatever they wanted, particularly about their subordinates.

"There's space with the reporters, Little Harms," he said, pointing. "Up near the north side. Not great for watching, as you'll have steps in your way, but a great place for listening. Tell Constable Wells at the rope I said you could pass, and give my best to your father."

She saluted, still wrestling with a mixture of shame and indignation. He didn't mean anything by his comments. But Rust and Ruin, she had worked most of her life swept under the rug with a few coins in hand, her father refusing to openly acknowledge her. Among the constables at least, couldn't she be known for her professional accomplishments, not the nature of her birth?

Still, she wouldn't turn down the opportunity for a better spot, so she began to work her way around the square toward the section he'd specified.

* * *

*What was that?* Wax thought. He spun to look away from the group of beggars he'd been questioning.

"Wax?" Wayne called, turning away from another group of people. "What—"

Wax ignored him, shoving through a crowd on the street toward the thing he'd seen. A face.

*It can't be.*

His frantic actions drew annoyed shouts from some people, but only dark glares from others. The days when a nobleman, even an Allomancer, could quell with a look were passing. Wax eventually stumbled into a pocket of open ground and spun about. *Where?* Wild, every sense straining, he dropped a bullet casing and Pushed, instantly popping up about ten feet. Scanning, he whirled, the motion flaring his mistcoat tassels.

The heavy flow of people on Tindwyl Promenade continued toward the Hub, near which the governor would apparently be making a speech. *That's a dangerous crowd,* a piece of him noticed. There were too many men wearing battered coats and bearing battered expressions. The labor issue was becoming a bigger and bigger problem. Half the city was underpaid and overworked. The other half was simply out of work. A strange dichotomy.

He kept seeing men loitering on corners. Now they flowed together in streams. That would create dangerous rapids, as when a real river met rocks. Wax landed, heart thrumming like the drum of a march. He'd been sure of it, this time. He *had* seen Bloody Tan in that crowd of men. A brief glimpse of a familiar face, the mortician killer, the last man Wax had hunted in the Roughs before coming to Elendel.

The man who had caused Lessie's death.

"Wax?" Wayne hurried up. "Wax, you all right? You look like you ate an egg you found in the gutter."

"It's nothing," Wax said.

"Ah," Wayne said. "Then that look I saw … you were just contemplatin' your impendin' marriage to Steris, I guess?"

Wax sighed, turning away from the crowds. *I imagined it. I must have imagined it.* "I wish you'd leave Steris alone. She's not nearly so bad as you make her sound."

"That's the same thing you said about that horse you bought—you remember, the one who only bit *me*?"

"Roseweather had good taste. Did you find anything?"

Wayne nodded, leading them out of the press of traffic. "Miss Steelrunner settled down nearby, all right," he said. "She got a job doing bookkeeping for a jeweler down the road. She hasn't come in to work in over a week though. The jeweler sent someone to her flat, but nobody answered the door."

"You got the address?" Wax asked.

"Of course I did." Wayne looked offended, shoving his hands in the pockets of his duster. "Got me a new pocket watch too." He held up one made of pure gold, with opaline workings on the face.

Wax sighed. After a short trip back to the jeweler to return the watch—Wayne claimed he figured it had been for trade, since it had been sitting out on the counter with naught but a little box of glass around it—they made their way up the road to the Bournton District.

This was a high-quality neighborhood, which also meant it had less character. No laundry airing in front of buildings, no people sitting on the steps. Instead the street was lined by white townhouses and rows of apartment buildings with spiky iron decorations around their upper windows. They checked the address with one of the local newsboys, and eventually found themselves in front of the apartment building in question.

"Someday I'd like to live in a fancy place like this," Wayne said wistfully.

"Wayne, you live in a mansion."

"It ain't fancy. It's *opulent*. Big difference."

"Which is?"

"Mostly it involves which kinds of glasses you drink out of and what kind of art you hang." Wayne looked offended. "You need to know these things now, Wax, being filthy rich and all."

"Wayne, you're practically rich yourself, after the reward from the Vanishers case."

Wayne shrugged. He hadn't touched his share of that, which had been paid out mostly in aluminum recovered from Miles and his gang. Wax led the way up the steps running along the outside of the building. Idashwy's place was at the top, a small apartment on the rear, with a view only of the back of other buildings. Wax slipped Vindication out of her holster, then knocked, standing to the side of the door in case someone shot through it.

No response.

"Nice door," Wayne said softly. "Good wood." He kicked it open.

Wax leveled his gun and Wayne ducked inside, sliding up against the wall to avoid being backlit. He found a switch a moment later, turning on the room's electric lights.

Wax raised the gun beside his head, pointing at the ceiling, and swept in. The apartment wasn't much to look at. The pile of folded blankets in the corner probably served as a bed. With steelsight, Wax saw no moving bits of metal. Everything was still and calm.

Wax peeked into the bathroom while Wayne moved over to the only other room in the apartment, a kitchen. Indoor plumbing for the bathroom, electric lights. This *was* a fancy place. Most Terris claimed to prefer simple lives. What had led her to pay for something like this?

"Aw, hell," Wayne said from the kitchen. "That ain't no fun."

Wax moved over, gun out, and glanced around the corner into the kitchen. It was just large enough for one person to lie down in. He knew this because of the bloody corpse stretched out on the floor, her chest bearing a large hole in the center, eyes staring sightlessly into the air.

"Looks like we're going to need a new prime suspect, Wax," Wayne said. "This one downright refuses to not be dead already."

* * *

Marasi's position at the speech turned out to be exactly as advertised: nestled into a narrow gap in the crowd formed by the side steps of the mansion's forecourt. Around her, the members of the press clutched pencils and pads, ready to jot down bite-sized quotes from the governor's speech that might make good headlines. Marasi was the only constable among them, and her lieutenant's bars didn't earn her much consideration from the reporters.

Their view was obstructed not only by the position of the wide stone steps, but also by the governor's guard—a row of men and women in dark suits and hats, standing with hands clasped behind their backs along the steps. Only a pair of sketch artists, who stood at one corner of the knot of reporters, had anything resembling a good view of the governor's platform, which had been erected on the steps.

That was fine with Marasi. She didn't need to see much of Innate to digest and relate his words. Besides, this position gave her an excellent view of the gathering crowd, which she found more interesting. Dirty men stained with soot from work in the factories. Tired women who—because of the advent of electricity—could now be forced to work much longer hours, well into the night, with the threat of dismissal to keep them at the loom. Yet there was hope in those eyes. Hope that the governor would have encouragement to offer, a promised end to the city's growing strain.

*Mirabell's Rules,* Marasi thought, nodding to herself. Mirabell had been a statistician and psychologist in the third century who had studied why some people worked harder than others. Turned out a man or woman was much more likely to do good work if they were invested—if they felt ownership of what they did and could see that it mattered. Her personal studies proved that crime went down when people had a sense of identity with and ownership of their community.

That was the problem, because modern society was eroding those concepts. Life seemed more transient now, with people commonly relocating and changing jobs during their lifetime—things that had almost never happened a century ago. Progress had forced it upon them. These days, Elendel just didn't need as many carriage drivers as it did automobile repairmen.

You had to adapt. Move. Change. That was good, but it could also threaten identity, connection, and sense of purpose. The governor's guards studied the crowd with hostility, muttering about miscreants, as if seeing the crowd as barely contained malefactors who were looking for any excuse to riot and loot.

To the contrary, these people wanted something stable, something that would let them sustain their communities or forge new ones. Rioting was rarely caused by greed, but frequently by frustration and hopelessness.

The governor finally made his appearance, stepping from the mansion.

Marasi caught a few fragmentary glimpses of him between the legs of the guards. Innate was a tall, handsome man, unlike his brother, who had always seemed dumpy to Marasi. Clean-shaven, with a wave in his salt-and-pepper hair and a trendy set of spectacles, Innate was the first governor to pose for his official portrait wearing spectacles.

Would he know? Would he understand how to calm these people? He was corrupt, but it was a quiet kind of corruption—little favors done to enrich himself or his friends. It was quite possible he did care for the people of his city, even while enriching himself. He stepped up to his platform, where a diminutive woman in a green dress skittered around, adjusting devices that looked like big cones with their wide openings facing the crowd. Marasi felt she should recognize the young woman—who was barely more than a girl, with long blonde hair and a lean face. Where *had* Marasi seen her before?

She thought for a moment, then sidled up to one of the reporters to read over her shoulder. *"Breezy day" … blah blah … "air of violent suspense," whatever that means … There! "Attended by the curious ministrations of Miss Sophi Tarcsel, the inventor's daughter."*

Sophi Tarcsel. She'd been making an uproar, writing opinion pieces in the broadsheets about her father, who had supposedly been a great inventor —though Marasi had never heard or read his name before those articles.

"People of Elendel," Governor Innate said, and Marasi was surprised by how his voice echoed across the square, loud and clear. Something to do with those devices, apparently. "The papers would have you believe that this evening we stand on the brink of a crisis, but I assure you, no such problem exists. My brother was not the criminal they are condemning him to have been."

*Oh, Innate,* Marasi thought, sighing to herself as she wrote. *That's not why they're here.* Nobody had come to hear more about Winsting. What about the city's real problems?

"I will not suffer this defamation of my dear brother's character," Innate continued. "He was a good man, a statesman and philanthropist. You might have forgotten the Hub beautification project that he spearheaded just three years ago, but I have not.…"

He continued in that vein. Marasi dutifully took notes for Captain Aradel, but she shook her head. Innate's goal was understandable. He hoped to preserve his family's reputation in the eyes of important investors and noblemen, and perhaps deflate some of the public anger. It wouldn't work. The people didn't *actually* care about Winsting. It was the deeper corruption, the feeling of powerlessness, that was destroying this city.

As the speech progressed, laboring with explanations of how good a man Winsting had been, Marasi edged to the side in an attempt to get a better view. How was Innate responding to the crowd? He was charismatic; she could hear that even from the way he spoke. Maybe he *was* doing some good with his oratory alone, even if the speech lacked substance.

"A full investigation of the constables will be ordered," Innate continued. "I am not convinced my brother was killed as they say. My sources posit this might all be the result of a bungled raid, using my brother as willing bait to catch criminals. If that is true, and they put my brother in harm's way and are now covering it up, the responsible parties will answer for it."

Marasi moved to the side, but her view was obstructed by one of the guards, who stepped in front of her. Annoyed, Marasi moved again, and again the guardsman moved. She'd have considered it deliberate if his back hadn't been to her.

"As for the floods in the east, we are sending relief. Your friends and relatives there shall be succored. We stand with them in the face of this disaster."

*Not good,* she noted. *The people don't want to hear about aid going outside the city, no matter how necessary, not while things are growing worse and worse here….* Marasi moved again. Aradel wanted her to judge the public's reaction, but she needed a better view.

Her shuffling earned a curse of annoyance from one of the reporters, and she finally got a sight of Innate on his podium. He moved into a longer rant against the press. Perhaps that was why the reporter had been so testy. She certainly would be….

Marasi frowned. That guardsman who had been moving and shuffling and blocking her view had turned, and she could see a *very* odd expression on his face, like a grimace of pain. And he was whispering—at least his mouth was moving. Nobody else seemed to notice him, as they were focused on the speech.

So Marasi was the first one to scream as the guardsman pulled a revolver from underneath his coat and leveled it at the governor.

* * *

Wayne prowled around the dead woman's room. It was too clean. A room where people lived should have a healthy amount of clutter. Miss Steelrunner hadn't spent much time here.

In the other room, Wax inspected the body. Wayne left him to that; he had no interest in poking at a corpse's insides, even if Wax claimed it was important. Wayne, instead, went looking for more interesting bits of life. His first discovery was a small cache of bottles in the cabinet under the bathroom washbasin. Various forms of alcohol, the harder stuff, each a little gone. All save one, which was empty. Wayne gave it a sniff. Port.

*Not surprising,* he thought. He took the whiskey and gave it a good swig. Bleh. Too much bite, and far too warm. He took another swig as he spun about in the main room. These fancy neighborhoods were too quiet. People should be shouting outside. That was *right* for the city. He checked the trunk beside her sleeping pallet and found it contained three outfits, each clean and carefully folded. The Terris robes were on the bottom. Creases had set; these weren't worn often. The other two were modern designs, the one on top more daring than the one below.

He took another swig of whiskey and wandered back into the room with the corpse. Wax had removed his hat and coat, and knelt beside the body in his vest and slacks.

"You found the alcohol, I see," Wax said. "How uncharacteristic."

Wayne grinned, offering the bottle to Wax, who took a small swig. "Ugh," he noted, handing it back. "This murder is troubling, Wayne."

"I'm sure she felt so."

"Too many questions. Why did she leave the Village, and why choose to live here? It doesn't feel very Terris."

"Oh, I can tell you why she was here," Wayne said.

"Well?"

"Think of yourself as a sheltered Terriswoman in her forties," Wayne said. "Old enough to have missed the chance to be a wild youth, and starting to wish you'd done something more daring."

"The Terris don't long for wildness," Wax said, taking notes in a little book as he inspected the woman's wound. "They aren't daring. They're a reserved people."

"Ain't we Terris?"

"We're exceptions."

"Everyone's an exception to something, Wax. This girl, she left the Village and found a whole world out here. She must have had an adventurous side."

Whiskey.

"She did," Wax admitted. "I didn't know her well, but she'd sneak out of the Village as a youth. That was long ago."

"And she left again," Wayne said, "on account of the Village being so dull as to bore the sense out of a scribe. Hell, even *Steris* would hate that place."

"Wayne…"

"Our miss," Wayne said, waving the bottle toward the dead woman, "she tried to remain conservative at first, so she got a job as a clerk, a good Terris occupation. She convinced herself that a nice apartment—where she was safe from the supposed horrors of lesser neighborhoods—was worth the expense. Simple stuff.

"But then some workers at the jeweler took her out, and she let herself drink. She liked that. Awakened memories of sneaked drinks as a youth. She wanted more, so she bought a whole *mess* of different kinds of spirits to try them all out. She liked port best, by the way."

"Makes sense," Wax said.

"Now we find her with increasingly liberal dresses, showing more skin, spending most evenings out. Give her a few more months, and she'd have turned into a right proper girl to have a good time with."

Whiskey.

"She didn't get a few more months," Wax said softly. He took something from his own pocket and handed it out to Wayne. A book, bound in leather, pocket-sized. "Have a look through this."

Wayne took it, flipping through some pages. "What is it?"

"The book that Death gave me."

* * *

Marasi's shout was lost in the roar as the governor ended his speech. Polite applause from the nobility, shouts and curses from most of the workers. The noise swallowed her shout like a single splash in a breaking tide.

She fumbled for her handbag as the guard in the dark coat sighted with his gun at the governor. No. There wasn't time for her gun. She had to do something else.

She jumped for the man and slowed time.

She had metal in her this time—she'd made sure, after being embarrassed this morning. Her Allomancy created a bubble of greatly slowed-down time, enveloping herself, the would-be assassin, and a few bystanders.

She grabbed the man around the legs, but her speed bubble did the real work, trapping him inside—as everyone *outside* became a blur. The man squeezed his gun's trigger, and the crack of a gunshot rang amid the strange warping of sounds that she heard inside a bubble from those outside. One of his fellow guards, also caught in her bubble, shouted in alarm.

The fired bullet hit the perimeter of the speed bubble and was deflected. It shot out over the blur of the crowd, the governor's figure vanishing as—she assumed—he was rushed away. Marasi's lunge wasn't enough to topple the would-be assassin, and so she lay there half on the steps, holding on to his legs and feeling foolish, until one of his companions hit him harder, knocking him down.

She dropped the speed bubble and jumped back, the sudden roar of the crowd washing over her. The captured man struggled, shouting, as other guards piled onto him.

* * *

"So basically, with this … Hemalurgy," Wax said, "you can *make* someone Metalborn."

Wayne sniffled as he flipped through the book, and his cheeks were breaking out in some kind of rash. *Storing health,* Wax thought. Wayne often ended up with odd rashes when he did that. They sat in the main room of Idashwy's apartment, away from the corpse, which they'd draped with a sheet. They'd paused briefly in their inspection to send the newsboy for the local constables.

Wax ground his teeth. Idashwy's wound … it was just like those described in the book. Somebody had killed this woman with a spike through the chest, stealing her Feruchemical talent. The book described the process as "tearing off a chunk of someone's soul." Using the spike, one could effectively *attach* that piece of soul to one's own, granting the powers of the deceased.

In the old days, Inquisitors had driven the spike right through the body of the one to be killed into the body of the person to gain the powers. That prevented any power from being lost. Apparently, coating the newly made spike in blood could achieve a similar effect.

*He knew,* Wax thought. *Ironeyes knew something like this was going to come.* The book had been written by the Lord Mistborn long ago to leave some record of the art known as Hemalurgy. Lestibournes's book said he considered it a crime that the Words of Founding—Harmony's own record—omitted references to the dark art.

"So our killer knows this Hemalurgy stuff?" Wayne said.

"Yes," Wax said. "The killer used a spike to steal Idashwy's Feruchemical talent, then employed that ability to kill Lord Winsting and his guests. We have to assume that our killer could also have numerous other powers at their disposal: any combination of Allomantic or Feruchemical abilities. Or all of them."

Wayne whistled softly.

"Did you discover anything else in your search of the room?" Wax asked.

"Not much."

"I understand the motive here," Wax said, glancing back toward the kitchen with the body. "But I don't yet have one for Winsting's murder. Or … well, I know of too *many* possibilities. I don't have the right motive."

"What did you find in the stiff's pockets?"

Wax hesitated.

"You didn't rifle through the pockets?" Wayne asked, aghast. "Wax, you're a *terrible* grave robber!"

"I was distracted by the manner of death," Wax said, rising. "I'd have gotten to it."

The word "distracted" didn't really do justice to his emotions—to the profound shock, the numbness. For months that book had been only an object of study, but now its contents had abruptly ceased being mere words on a page and had become a motive for murder.

*We're out of our depth,* Wax thought, returning to the kitchen. *We've crept into the realm of the gods. Harmony, Ironeyes, the Lord Mistborn …*

Wayne pulled back the sheet, exposing that gaping hole in the woman's chest—right at the sternum. Who would know how to do something like this? Who would Harmony *let* know how to do something like this?

"Here," Wayne said, fishing in the woman's skirt pockets. He came out with a folded-up piece of paper. He unfolded it, then grunted. "Huh. It's for you."

Wax's stomach plummeted. Wayne slowly turned the paper around. It was a sheet ripped from a ledger, filled with numbers and sums. Scrawled across it in a different hand was a single sentence—a familiar sentence. The very words Bloody Tan had said before jerking Lessie right into the path of Wax's bullet, making him kill the woman he loved.

*Someone else moves us, lawman.*

# 7

“Look, Wax,” Wayne said as the two of them entered Ladrian Mansion, “I saw Tan’s body. You shot him square in the head. That bloke was deader than a stuffed lion in a hunting lodge. It ain’t him.”

“What if he was secretly Metalborn?” Wax asked. “Miles could have survived a shot to the head.”

“Doesn’t work that way, mate,” Wayne said, shutting the door and tossing his coat at Darriance. It hit the butler in the face. “If you’re a Bloodmaker, you’ve got to heal a head wound *right as* it’s happening. Once a bloke is actually dead, no power—Allomantic or Feruchemical—is bringin’ ’im back.”

“I *saw* him, Wayne. Twice.” *Once while chasing the Marksman, and then just earlier today.*

“Master,” Darriance said, folding Wayne’s coat. “New equipment has arrived for you from Miss Ranette. She asked if you’d be willing to test it.”

“Aw, Ruin!” Wayne said. “I missed her? What did she leave for me?”

“She … said I was to slap you,” Darriance admitted.

“Aw. She does care. See that, Wax, she cares!”

Wax nodded absently as Wayne tried to force Darriance to slap him across the rear—which he doubted was what Ranette had intended.

“Sir,” Darriance said, turning away from Wayne’s proffered posterior. “In addition to the package, Lady Harms awaits you in the sitting room.”

Wax hesitated, impatient to go upstairs. He needed time to think—preferably with his earring in—and to go through Ranette’s package. They were always very interesting.

But he couldn’t simply ignore Steris. “Thank you, Darriance,” Wax said.

"Send a note to my grandmother at the Village that says we found the missing Terriswoman, but someone had gotten to her—and regretfully killed her—before we arrived. Say the constables will explain the rest, and may have questions for her."

"Very well, my lord."

Wax pushed his way into the sitting room. Steris rose to greet him, and Wax kissed her hand. "I don't have a lot of time, Steris."

"You've sunk your teeth in, then," she said, eyeing him up and down. "I suppose this could be useful. If you catch the murderer of the governor's brother, it will be politically favorable."

"Unless I drag some corpses out into the light."

"Well, perhaps we can prepare for that," she said. "Lady ZoBell's party. You are still planning to attend with me?"

Rusts. He'd forgotten all about it.

"Our invitation has gone missing—I suspect Wayne is to blame—but it doesn't matter. You're lord of a Great House. They won't turn us away."

"Steris. I don't know if I have the time…"

"The governor is attending," Steris said. "You could speak with him about his brother."

*More meaningless conversation,* Wax thought. *More dances and political games.* He needed to be working, hunting.

Bloody Tan. His eye twitched.

"There was some talk of the governor not attending," Steris said, "considering what happened today. However, I have it on the best authority that he *will* come. He doesn't want to appear to have anything to hide in these parlous times."

Wax frowned. "Wait. What happened today?"

"Assassination attempt on the governor," Steris said. "You really don't know?"

"I've been busy. Rusts! Someone tried to kill him? Who?"

"Some deranged man," Steris said. "Not in his right mind. They caught him, I'm told."

"I'll need to talk to the suspect," Wax said, walking for the door. "It might be connected."

"He wasn't a credible threat," Steris said. "By all reports, the man's aim was terrible. He didn't come close to hitting his intended victim. Waxillium?"

"Wayne!" Wax said, shoving open the door. "We've got—"

"On it already," Wayne said, holding up a broadsheet from the table. Evening edition; Wax had a subscription. The top line read, "Bold Attack on the Governor in Daylight!" Wayne tossed Wax his hat off the rack, then snapped his fingers toward the butler—who was in the process of hanging Wayne's duster in the coat closet. Darriance sighed, getting it back out and carrying it over.

"I'll try to make the party," Wax said to Steris, pulling his hat on. "If I'm not back, feel free to go without me."

Steris folded her arms. "Oh? I suppose I should take the butler instead, then?"

"If you like."

"Be careful about that, Steris," Wayne added. "Wax's butlers have a tendency to explode."

Wax gave him a glare, and the two of them charged out the door toward the coach.

"You still need private time for that thinkin' of yours?" Wayne asked.

"Yes."

"Never touch the stuff myself," Wayne said. "Causes headaches. Hey, Hoid. Can I catch a ride up there with you?"

The new coachman shrugged, making room for Wayne on top of the carriage. Wayne climbed up, and Wax stepped inside. This wouldn't be ideal, but it would have to do. He pulled down the window shades, then settled back as the coach began rolling.

He took his earring out of his pocket—the earring of the Pathian religion. His was special. He'd been hand-delivered it under mysterious circumstances. Lately, though, he had avoided wearing it, as the book made clear what it must be. Long ago, a small spike of metal like this had allowed people to communicate with Ruin and Preservation, gods of the ancient world. It was Hemalurgy.

Had this earring, then, been made by killing someone?

Hesitantly, he slipped it in.

*Unfortunately,* a voice said in his mind, *your fears about the earring are correct. It is a Hemalurgic spike.*

Wax jumped, throwing open the carriage door with Allomancy—preparing his escape—while pulling out Vindication. Rusts! He'd heard that voice as if someone were sitting beside him.

*Firing that gun would not have the effect you want, I think,* the voice said. *Even if you could see me, shooting at me would merely ruin the furnishings of your coach, costing precisely eighty-four boxings to repair when Miss Grimes takes it to the shop next week. You'd be left with a new wood panel on the coach body just behind me which would never quite match those around it.*

Wax breathed in and out. "Harmony."

*Yes?* the voice said.

“You’re here, in my coach.”

*Technically, I am everywhere.*

Wax trembled, mouth going dry. He forced himself to close the door and sit back down.

*Tell me,* the voice said in his head, *what were you expecting to happen when you put in the earring, if not this?*

“I…” Wax slid Vindication back into her holster. “I wasn’t expecting an answer so … promptly. And my reflexes tend to be on the jumpy side lately. Um, Your Deificness.”

*You may call me Harmony, or “Lord” if you must.* The voice sounded amused. *Now. About what do you wish to speak?*

“You know.”

*Better to hear you say it.*

“Better for You to hear me say it,” Wax said, “or for me to hear myself say it?”

*Both.*

“Am I insane?” Wax asked.

*If you were, speaking to a figment of your delusion would certainly not diagnose that fact.*

“You’re not helping much.”

*Then ask better questions, Waxillium.*

Wax leaned forward. “I…” He clasped his hands before him. “You’re real.”

*You’ve heard my voice; you’ve followed my Path.*

“A few whispered words when I was in a moment of great stress, when I was gravely wounded,” Wax said. “Words I’ve doubted ever since. This is different. This is … more real.”

*You need to hear it then, do you?* the voice said. It sounded as clear and ordinary as if someone normal, someone *visible,* sat there talking to him. *Very well. I am Harmony, the Hero of Ages, once called Sazed. At the end of one world, I took upon myself the powers of protection and destruction, and in so doing became the caretaker of the world to come. I am here, Waxillium, to tell you that you are* not *insane.*

“Bloody Tan lives.”

*Not exactly.*

Wax frowned.

*There are … beings in this world who are neither human nor koloss. Something related to both. You call them the Faceless Immortals.*

“Kandra,” Wax said. “Like TenSoon, the Guardian. Or the person who gave me this earring."

*They can take the corpses of the dead and use their bones to mimic a person who has died—they wear bodies like you wear clothing, changing back and forth as they wish. They were created by the Lord Ruler using Hemalurgy.*

"Your Holy Books give few details about their organization," Wax said. "But everyone knows that the Faceless Immortals are *your* servants. Not murderers."

*Any being has choice,* Harmony said. *Even koloss have the power to choose. This one … the being who wears Bloody Tan's body … has not made very good choices.*

"Who is he?"

*She is a member of the Third Generation, and you should know better than to assume everyone dangerous to be a male. Paalm was what we called her, but she has chosen the name Bleeder for herself. Waxillium, Bleeder is ancient, older than the destruction of the world—almost as old as the Final Empire. Indeed, she is even older than I am, though not older than my powers. She is crafty, careful, and brilliant. And I'm afraid that she might have gone mad.*

The carriage turned a corner.

"One of Your ancient servants," Wax said, "has gone mad and is killing people."

*Yes.*

"So stop her!"

*It is not so simple.*

"Free will?" Wax said, annoyed.

*No, not in this case. I can directly control a being who has pierced herself with too much Hemalurgy. In this case I would act, for Bleeder has disobeyed her Contract with me and opened herself up for my intervention. Something is wrong, unfortunately.*

"What?" Wax asked.

God was silent for a time. *I don't know yet.*

Wax felt cold. "Is that possible?"

*It appears so. Somehow, Bleeder has figured out how to hide from me. At times I can spot her, but only when she takes direct and obvious action.*

*Unfortunately, she has removed one of her Blessings—one of the two spikes that kandra must keep inside themselves to retain their cognition. I would forcibly control her if I could, but one spike does not pierce the soul sufficiently for me to get in.*

"Cognition," Wax said. "Two spikes are required for the kandra to be able to think. But she is going around with only one. Which means…?"

*Insanity,* Harmony said, His voice softer in Wax's ear. *But something is* *wrong beyond that. She can hide from me, and while I can speak to her, she doesn't have to listen—and I can't keep track of where she is.*

"Didn't you say you were everywhere?"

*My essence is,* Harmony said. *But this thing that I am … it is more complex than you might expect.*

"Being God is more complex than a mortal can comprehend?" Wax said. "What a surprise."

Harmony chuckled softly.

*Wait,* Wax thought. *Did I just get sarcastic with God Himself?*

*Yes, you did,* Harmony said. *It is well. Few act that way toward me, even among the kandra. It feels good to me. Like older times. Since Kelsier … well, I haven't had much of that.*

"You can hear my thoughts?" Wax asked.

*When you have the earring in, yes. I gain the ability to hear you from Preservation, and the ability to speak to you from Ruin. Each had only one half. I always found it puzzling.*

*Regardless, I know you have been reading young Lestibournes's book. I am not pleased that he made it, but I could not forbid him. I will trust that Marsh was wise in giving it to you. Bleeder can use Hemalurgy, but in a way she should not be able to. Kandra do not have Allomantic or Feruchemical powers. She has learned to take these, and to use them to maintain her kandra form.*

*Fortunately, she is limited. She can only use one spike at a time, otherwise she will open herself to my control. If she trades spikes, she must do it by ripping out her single one and then falling onto another, digesting it and returning her to sapience.*

*I do not know her game with this city, but I'm alarmed by it. She has spent centuries studying human behavior. She is planning something.*

"I'll have to stop her, then."

*I will send you help.*

"I assume, considering the source, it will be spectacular."

Harmony sighed softly. In Wax's mind's eye, he had a sudden image of a being standing with hands clasped behind Him, eternity extending into darkness before Him. Tall, robed, back to Wax, almost visible and distinct yet somehow completely unknowable at the same time.

*Waxillium,* Harmony said, *I have tried to explain this to you, but I did not do a good job, I think. My hands are tied, and I am bounded.*

"Who ties God's hands?"

*I tied them myself.*

Wax frowned.

*I hold both Ruin and Preservation,* Harmony said. *The danger in carrying* *these opposed powers is that I can see both sides—the need for life, the need for death. I am balance. And, to an extent, I am neutrality.*

“But Bleeder used to be one of Your own, and now she’s acting against You.”

*She used to be of Preservation. She has moved to being of Ruin. Both are needed.*

“Murderers are needed,” Wax said flatly.

*Yes. No. The potential for murderers is needed. Waxillium, I—the personality you speak to—agree with your indignation. But the powers that I* am, *the essence of my self, cannot allow me to take sides.*

*Already I fear that I have made things too easy for men. This city, the perfect climate, the ground that renews … You were to have had the radio a century ago, but you didn’t need it, so you didn’t strive for it. You ignore aviation, and cannot tame the wilds because you don’t care to study proper irrigation or fertilization.*

“The … radio? What is that?”

*You don’t explore,* Harmony continued, ignoring Wax’s confusion. *Why would you? You have everything you want here. You’ve barely progressed technologically from what I gave you in the books. Yet others, who were nearly destroyed …*

*I made a mistake with you, I now see. I still make many. Does that ruin your faith, Waxillium? Does it worry you that your God is fallible?*

“You never claimed to be infallible, so far as I remember.”

*No. I did not.*

Wax felt a warmth, a fire, as if the inside of the carriage were heating to incredible temperatures.

*I loathe suffering, Waxillium. I hate that people like Bleeder must be allowed to do what they do. I cannot stop them. You can. I beg you to do so.*

“I will try.”

*Good. Oh, and Waxillium?*

“Yes, Lord?”

*Do be less harsh with Marasi Colms. You aren’t my only agent in the affairs of men; I worked quite hard to maneuver Marasi into a position where she could do good in this city. It is taxing to have you continue to dismiss her because her admiration makes you uncomfortable.*

Wax swallowed. “Yes, Lord.”

*I will send you help.*

The voice vanished. The temperature returned to normal. Wax leaned back, sweating, feeling drained.

A rapping came at his window. Hesitant, Wax pulled aside the shade. Wayne’s face hung there, upside down, his hand holding his hat onto his head. “You done talking to yourself, Wax?” he asked.

“I … Yes, I am.”

“I heard voices in my head once too, you know.”

“You did?”

“Sure. Gave me a fright. I banged my head against the wall until I went unconscious. Never heard *them* again! Ha. Showed ’em good, I did. If rats move in, best thing to do is to burn the nest and send ’em packing.”

“And the nest … was your head.”

“Yup.”

The sad thing was, Wayne probably wasn’t lying. Being unkillable, so long as one had some healing power stored up, could do strange things to a person’s sense of self-preservation. Of course, Wayne had probably been drunk at the time. That *also* tended to do strange things to a person’s sense of self-preservation.

“Well, anyway,” Wayne said. “We’re almost to the precinct headquarters. Time to go back to being dirty conners. At least they’ll probably have scones inside.”

* * *

Marasi stood in the precinct station with arms folded, partially to hide the fact that her hands were still trembling. That was unfair. She’d been in firefights numerous times now. She should be accustomed to this … but still, after the jolt of it all wore off—the moment of thrill and action—she occasionally found herself feeling drained. Surely she’d get past it eventually.

“He was wearing these, sir,” Reddi said, placing a pair of bracers onto the table with a thump. “No other metal on his body save for the gun and a pocketful of rounds. We’ve called in the First Octant precinct’s Leecher to make sure he doesn’t have any metal swallowed, but we can’t be certain until she arrives.”

Aradel picked up one of the bracers, turning it over in his hands. The dim room was a kind of balcony, overlooking the interrogation chamber below, where the assassin Marasi had stopped sat slumped in a chair. His name was Rian; no house, though they’d located his family. He was tied with ropes to a large stone behind his chair. No metal in the room, to make it safe to stow Coinshots or Lurchers. Stone floor, walls made of thick wood joined with wooden pegs. Almost primitive in feel. The balcony had glass walls, letting them look down upon him without being heard.

“So he’s Metalborn,” said Lieutenant Caberel, the only other person in the room. The stout woman picked up the other bracer. “Why didn’t he use his abilities in the assassination? If he killed Winsting with Feruchemical speed, like old Waxillium Dawnshot says, he should have done the same today."

"Maybe he didn't kill Winsting," Aradel said. "The attacks could be unrelated."

"He fits the profile though, sir," Reddi said. "Winsting's bodyguards probably would have trusted a member of the governor's personal guard. He could have talked his way past them and done the deed."

"Hard to imagine Winsting's guards letting even someone like that in alone with their charge, Captain," Aradel said. "After a firefight where others were being killed? They'd be tense. Suspicious."

Down below, the suspect began rocking back and forth on his seat. The vents that would allow them to listen in on him were closed, but she had a sense that he was muttering to himself again.

"So, we just ask him," Caberel said.

"Again?" Reddi said. "You heard before. All he does is mumble."

"Then encourage him," Caberel said. "You're pretty good at that, Reddi."

"I suppose his face could use a few new bruises," Reddi said.

"You know you can't do that," Marasi said from beside the window.

Reddi looked at her. "Don't quote statistics at me, Colms. I've found I can make a man speak the truth, no matter what you claim."

"It isn't statistics this time," Marasi said. "If you actively torture that man, you'll ruin him for prosecution. His attorneys will get him off for sure."

Reddi gave her a scowl.

"So send for his daughter," Caberel said, glancing over the fact sheet they had on the man. "We threaten her in front of him, but don't do anything to harm her. He'll talk."

Marasi rubbed her forehead. "That's *specifically* illegal, Caberel. Do you people know nothing about Article Eighty-Nine? He has rights."

"He's a criminal," Reddi said.

"He's a suspected criminal." Marasi sighed. "You can't continue to act as you have in the past, Reddi. New laws are in place. They're only going to get stricter, and the defense attorneys are increasingly clever."

"The solicitors have sold out to the other side," Caberel said with a nod. "She's right."

Marasi remained silent on that score. Of course it wasn't really a matter of selling out at all—but she'd settle for the constables learning to follow the rules, regardless of the reasoning.

"I think," Reddi said, "that it's unfortunate we've got someone among us who seems to be more on the solicitors' side than on the side of justice. She knows more about their ways than ours."

"Perhaps she does," Aradel said in a soft, stern voice. "And one might consider that to be exactly why I brought her in among us, Captain Reddi. Colms knows contemporary legal codes. If you paid more attention to the very laws you are sworn to uphold, perhaps Daughnin wouldn't have gotten back on the street last month."

Reddi blushed, bowing his head. Aradel stepped up beside Marasi, looking down at the captive. "How are you at interrogating hostile witnesses, Lieutenant?"

"Less practiced than I'd like to be," she replied with a grimace. "I'm willing to give it a try, but we might as well wait for a few more minutes."

"Why?"

Distantly, a door slammed. "That's why," Marasi said.

A moment later, the door into their observation chamber was flung open, Pushed by Waxillium as he approached. Couldn't the man be bothered to lift a hand from time to time? He strode in, tailed by Wayne, who was for some reason wearing Constable Terri's hat.

Waxillium looked down at the captive. He narrowed his eyes, then glanced at the bracers on the table nearby. One jumped, then fell off the table, Pushed by his unseen Allomantic ability.

He grunted. "Those aren't metalminds," he said. "This man is a decoy. You've been duped." He turned as if to leave. Wayne slouched down in one of the chairs and put his feet up beside the bracers, then promptly started snoring.

"Wait, that's *it*?" Reddi said, glancing at Waxillium. "You aren't even going to interrogate him?"

"I'll talk to him," Waxillium said. "He might give us clues that will help find Winsting's killer. But it wasn't that man."

"How can you be so sure, Waxillium?" Marasi said.

"It takes more effort to Push on real metalminds," Waxillium said, pointing. "And that man is too obvious. Whoever did this has predicted our conjecture that one of Innate's guards was behind the murder, and wants us to jump on this man as a suspect. They want us to assume we have the killer in custody. Why, though? Are they planning something tonight…?" Distracted, he walked toward the door. "I'm going to go talk to the prisoner. Marasi, I wouldn't mind another set of ears."

She started. He was *asking* her for help? That was a change from making her feel guilty every time she showed up at a crime scene. She glanced at Aradel, who gave her leave, and she hurried after Waxillium.

In the stairwell down, Waxillium stopped and turned toward her. He was wearing his Roughs hat. He only did that when he was in full-on "tough lawman" mode. "I hear you brought this guy in."

"I did."

"Nice work."

That should *not* have given her the thrill that it did. She didn't need his approval.

It was nice nonetheless.

He continued to study her, as if on the verge of saying something more.

"What?" Marasi asked.

"I spoke to God on the way over here."

"All right…" Marasi said. "I'm glad you're devout enough to say a prayer now and then."

"Yes. Thing is, He spoke back."

She cocked her head, trying to judge the meaning of that. But Waxillium Ladrian was nothing if not earnest. Rusts, often he was too blunt.

"All right," she said. "What did he tell you?"

"Our killer is a Faceless Immortal," Waxillium said, starting down the steps again. "A creature who calls herself Bleeder. She can change shapes by taking the bones of the dead, and she's been driven mad. Even Harmony doesn't know her purposes."

Marasi followed him down, trying to swallow that. Mistwraiths and kandra … those were things out of the Historica, not real life. Then again, once she would have said that men like Miles Hundredlives and Waxillium Dawnshot were men out of stories. They'd lived up to the legends to a surprising degree.

"So that *could* be her," Marasi said, gesturing toward the wall separating them from the prisoner. "She could have any shape, any face! Why are you so sure this isn't the killer?"

"Because the governor is still alive," Waxillium said softly. "The creature who's behind this casually murdered Winsting in a saferoom, behind a wall of guards, after intentionally starting a firefight in the room above. She wouldn't be caught like this. It's a taunt." He looked to Marasi. "But I can't be certain, not a hundred percent. So I need you to know what we're up against."

She nodded to him and he nodded back, then he led the way out of the stairwell and around the corner toward the interrogation room. Marasi took a bit of satisfaction in the fact that the corporal there looked to her for authorization before opening the door for Waxillium.

The poor captive inside sat with his arms tied tight, staring at the table in front of him. He muttered softly. Waxillium walked straight up to the table and took the other seat, settling down and putting his hat on the table. Marasi lingered back, where—in case they were wrong about the prisoner—she'd be out of reach but able to offer aid.

Waxillium tapped the table with his index finger, as if trying to decide what to say. The prisoner, Rian, finally looked up.

"She said you'd come talk to me," Rian said softly.

"She?" Waxillium said.

"God."

"Harmony?"

"No. She said I had to kill the governor. Had to attack him. I tried not to listen.…"

Waxillium narrowed his eyes. "You met her? What did she look like? What face was she wearing?"

"You can't save him," Rian whispered. "She's going to kill him. She promised me freedom, but here I am, bound. Oh, Ruin." He took a deep breath. "There is something for you. In my arm."

"In your…" Waxillium actually seemed disturbed. Marasi took an unconscious step forward, noticing for the first time a small bulge in the prisoner's forearm.

Before she could quote the legal problems with doing so, Waxillium stood up and took that arm, making a quick slice in the skin. He pulled something out, bloody. A coin? Marasi stepped forward again as the prisoner reached to his head with his bleeding arm and started humming to himself.

Waxillium wiped off the coin with his handkerchief. He inspected it, then turned it over. Then he grew very still, paling. He stood up suddenly. "Where did you get this?" he demanded.

Rian only continued humming.

"Where?" Waxillium demanded, grabbing the man by the front of the shirt.

"Waxillium," Marasi said, running up, hand on his arm. "Stop."

He looked to her, then dropped Rian.

"What is that coin?" Marasi asked.

"A message," Waxillium said, shoving the coin in his pocket. "This man won't know anything of use. Bleeder knew we might capture him. Do you have plans for tonight?"

She frowned. "What … why are you asking?"

"Governor's attending a party. Steris says he won't cancel despite what has happened, and this is the sort of thing she's always right about. He'll want to put up a strong front, and won't want his political enemies to think he has anything to either hide or fear. We need to be at that party. Because I guarantee Bleeder will be.”

# 8

Young Waxillium, age twelve, looked from one coin to the other. Both bore a picture of the Lord Mistborn on the front, standing with his left arm outspread toward the Elendel Basin. On the back, each displayed a picture of the First Central Bank, in which his family owned a large stake.

“Well?” Edwarn asked. He had a stern face and perfect hair. He wore his suit like he’d been born in it—and to him it was a uniform of war.

“I…” The youthful Waxillium looked from one to the other.

“It is understandable you can’t spot the difference,” Edwarn said. “It takes an expert, which is why so few of these have been discovered. More may actually be in circulation; we can’t know how many. One of those is an ordinary coin; the other has a very special defect.”

The carriage continued rattling through the streets as Waxillium studied the coins. Then he unfocused his eyes. It was a trick he’d been taught by a friend at a party recently, used for making two drawings spring to life by overlapping them.

Eyes unfocused, coins before him, he crossed his eyes intentionally and let the images of the two coins overlap one another. When they locked into place, the element of the picture that wasn’t the same—one of the pillars on the bank building—fuzzed as his eyes were unable to focus on that point.

“The mistake happened,” Uncle Edwarn continued, “because a defective coin striker was used. One worker at the mint brought home a pocketful of these curiosities, which were never supposed to enter circulation. You won’t be able to see it, but the error—”

“It’s the pillars,” Waxillium said. “On the right side of the bank picture. They are spaced too closely.”

"Yes. How did you know that? Who told you?"

"I saw it," Waxillium said, handing the coins back.

"Nonsense," Uncle Edwarn said. "Your lie is not a believable one, but I can respect your attempt at hiding your source." He held up one of the coins. "This is the most valuable defective coin in Elendel history. It's worth as much as a small house. Studying it taught me something important."

"That rich people are foolish? They'll pay more money for a coin than it's worth?"

"All people are foolish, just in different ways," Uncle Edwarn said offhandedly. "That lesson I learned elsewhere. No, this coin showed me a harsh but invaluable truth. Money is meaningless."

Waxillium perked up. "What?"

"Only expectation has value as currency, Waxillium," Uncle Edwarn said. "This coin is worth more than the others because people *think* it is. They *expect* it to be. The most important things in the world are worth only what people will pay for them. If you can raise someone's expectation … if you can make them *need* something … that is the source of wealth. Owning things of value is secondary to creating things of value where none once existed."

The carriage stopped. Outside, an intimidating flight of stone steps led up to the very bank pictured on the coin. Uncle Edwarn waited for the coachman to open his door, but Waxillium hopped down on his own.

Uncle Edwarn met him on the steps. "Your father," Uncle said, "is hopeless with economics. I have worked on him for years, but he cannot—or will not—learn. I have great expectations of you, Waxillium. Banking is not your only option for serving your house. However, after today I suspect you will recognize it as the best one."

"I'm not going to be a banker," Waxillium said, climbing the steps.

"Oh? You have your eye on administering the teamsters after all?"

"No," Waxillium said. "I'm going to be a hero."

His uncle chose not to reply immediately as they approached the top of the steps. Finally, he said softly, "You are twelve years old, and you still speak of this? I expect such foolishness from your sister, but your father should have beaten it out of you by now."

Waxillium turned defiant eyes up at his uncle.

"The day of heroes has passed," Uncle Edwarn said. "The stories of people breaking out of history belong to another world. We have reached an era of modernism, both louder and more silent at the same time. You watch. Where once kings and warriors shaped the world, now quiet men in offices will do the same—and do it far, far more effectively."

They entered the bank lobby, which had a low ceiling and a wall of cagelike bars with hunched-over people inside who received or disbursed cash from or to those who waited in lines. Waxillium's uncle led him around to the back. The dark wood furnishings and mold-colored rug made it feel like dusk in the room, even with windows open and gas lamps burning.

"There are two appointments today I wanted you to observe," Uncle Edwarn said as they entered a long, unadorned room. The chairs faced the wall; this was a viewing room, a place to spy upon meetings in the bank. His uncle gestured for him to sit, then pulled aside a panel in the wall, revealing a glass slit that let them see the two people in the next room. One was a male banker in a vest and slacks. He sat at an imposing desk, speaking with a middle-aged man in dusty clothing, holding a felt cap in his fingers.

"The loan will help us move up," the dirty man said. "Get a place out of the slums. I have three sons. We'll work hard, I promise you we will."

The banker looked down his nose at the man, then riffled through papers. Uncle Edwarn closed the slit, surprising Waxillium with the abrupt motion. His uncle rose and Waxillium followed, moving to another set of chairs along the same wall. A second spy slit let them look in on another room similar to the first. A female banker in vest and skirt sat behind a similarly intimidating desk. The patron, however, was tall, clean, and relaxed.

"Are you certain you need *another* boat, Lord Nikolin?" the banker asked.

"Of course I'm certain. Would I bother coming here if I weren't serious? Honestly. You people should allow my steward to make these arrangements. That's what stewards are *for,* after all."

Uncle Edwarn closed the slit with a quiet snap, then turned to Waxillium. "You are watching a revolution."

"A revolution?" Waxillium asked. He'd studied banking—well, he'd been forced to study it by his tutors. "This sounds like what happens every day at a bank."

"Ah," Uncle Edwarn said. "You know all this already. And to which of these men will we give a loan?"

"The rich one," Waxillium said. "Assuming he's not lying or acting somehow."

"No, Nikolin is legitimately wealthy," Uncle Edwarn said. "He has banked with us numerous times in the past, and he never misses his payments."

"So you'll loan money to him and not the other."

"Wrong," Uncle Edwarn said. "We'll lend to both."

"You'll use the good credit of the rich man to underwrite the risk of helping the poor man?"

Uncle Edwarn seemed surprised. "Your tutors have been diligent."

Waxillium shrugged, but inwardly he found himself growing interested. Perhaps this was a way to become a hero. Maybe Uncle Edwarn was right and the frontier was shrinking, the need for men of action vanishing. Maybe this new world wasn't at all like the one that the Ascendant Warrior and the Survivor had lived in.

Waxillium could carefully balance risks, and give money to those who needed it. If men in suits would someday run the world, couldn't they also make it a better place?

"Your assessment is correct on one hand," Uncle Edwarn said, oblivious to the direction Waxillium had been thinking, "but flawed on the other. Yes, we will lend to the poor man—but we will not accept risk to do so."

"But—"

"The papers our banker is now presenting will tie the laborer in debt that is impossible to escape. If he fails to meet payments, his signature on that paper will allow us to go directly to his employer and take a percentage of his wages. If that isn't enough, we can do the same for his sons. The rich man has banked with us many times, and his house negotiated favorable terms. We will earn barely three percent on what we lend him. But the laborer is desperate, and no other bank will consider him. He'll pay us *twelve* percent."

Uncle Edwarn leaned in. "The other banks don't see it yet. They lend safely, and safely only. They have not changed as the world has. Workers earn more now than they ever did, and they're hungry to pay for things once outside their reach. In the last six months we have pushed aggressively to lend to the common people of the city. They flock to us, and will soon make us very, very wealthy."

"You'll make slaves of them," Waxillium said, horrified.

His uncle took out the error coin and set it on the counter beside Waxillium. "This coin is a mistake. An embarrassment. Now it is worth more than thousands of its companions combined. Value created where none once existed. I will take the poor of this city and make of them the same thing. As I said, a revolution."

Waxillium felt sick.

"The coin is for you," Uncle Edwarn said, standing. "I wish it to be a reminder. The gift that will—"

Waxillium snatched the coin off the counter, then bolted out the door.

"Waxillium!" his uncle called.

The bank was a labyrinth, but Waxillium found his way. He burst into the small room where the poor man sat in consultation with the loan officer. The laborer looked up from the stack of papers; he'd be barely literate. He wouldn't even know what he was signing.

Waxillium set the coin down on the desk before him. "This is a misprinted coin, something that collectors covet. Take it, sell it at a curiosities shop—don't take less than two thousand for it—and use the money to move your family out of the slum. Don't sign those documents. They'll be like a chain around your neck."

* * *

Wax paused in his story. He held the coin in front of him, studying it as he and Steris rode toward the party.

"Well?" Steris asked, sitting across from him in the carriage. "What did your uncle do?"

"He was livid, of course," Wax said. "The laborer signed the papers; he couldn't believe that I'd actually give him something so valuable. My uncle came in, wove lies in the air like pretty puffs of colored smoke, and got his documents."

Wax turned the coin over, looking at the image of the Lord Mistborn pressed into the front. "The laborer—his name was Jendel—killed himself by jumping off a bridge eight years later. His sons are still in debt to the bank, though House Ladrian no longer owns an interest in the First Central Bank; my uncle sold it off for capital before gutting the house and faking his death."

"I'm sorry," Steris said softly.

"It's part of what drove me away," Wax said. "Events like that—and what happened in the Village, of course. I told myself I was setting out to find adventure; I never intended to be a lawman. I think I knew, deep down, that I couldn't change anything in Elendel. It was too big, the men in suits too crafty. Out in the Roughs, one man with a gun meant something. Here, it's hard to see him as anything other than a relic."

Steris pursed her lips, and obviously didn't know what to say. Wax didn't blame her. He'd thought often of the events in that bank, and he still didn't know what—if anything—he could have done differently.

He flipped the coin over in his fingers. Scratched onto the back, in tiny letters, were the words *Why did you leave, Wax?*

"How did Bleeder get the coin?" Steris asked.

"I can't fathom," Wax said. "I sold it before going to the Roughs. My father had cut me off by then, and I needed money to outfit myself for the trip."

"And those words?"

"I don't know," Wax said, pocketing the coin. "Thing is, remembering that story bothers me. I told myself at the time that I was trying to help the man, but I don't think that was true. Looking back, I was just trying to anger my uncle.

"I'm still like that, Steris. Why did I leave for the Roughs? I wanted to be a hero—I wanted to be seen and known. I could have done a great deal of good by taking a position in my house here in Elendel, but I'd have had to do it quietly. Leaving, then eventually trying to make a name for myself as a lawman, was ultimately selfish. Even joining the constables here sometimes seems like an act of insufferable hubris to me."

"I doubt that you care," Steris said, leaning in, "but I consider your motives to be irrelevant. You save lives. You … saved *my* life. My gratitude is not influenced by what was running through your head as you did so."

Wax met her eyes. Steris was prone to this—startling moments of pure honesty, where she stripped everything away and laid herself bare.

The carriage slowed, and Steris's eyes flicked toward the window. "We have arrived, but it will take us time to get in. There are many carriages in front of us."

Wax frowned, opening his window and leaning his head out. Indeed, a line of carriages and even a few motors clogged the way into the coach portico of ZoBell Tower. The skyscraper towered some twenty stories up into the night sky, its top disappearing in the dark mists.

Wax pulled back into the carriage, mist tumbling in through the now-open window beside him. Steris glanced at it, but did not ask him to close the shade.

"I guess we'll be late," Wax said.

Unless, of course, he improvised.

"This is the first party in the space atop the tower," Steris said, taking a small planning notebook out of her handbag, "and the coach attendants aren't accustomed to this heavy traffic."

Wax smiled. "You accounted for this delay, did you?"

Steris stopped on a page in her notebook, then turned it around. There, in her neat handwriting, was a detailed agenda for their evening at the party. The third entry read, *8:17. Way into the building likely blocked by traffic. Lord Waxillium carries us up to the top floor by Allomancy, which is completely inappropriate and at the same time breathtaking.*

He raised an eyebrow, checking his pocket watch, which he carried in his gunbelt—not his vest—to be easily dropped with his other metals. "It's 8:13. You're slipping."

“Traffic on the promenade was lighter than I expected.”

“You really want to do this the hard way?”

“I believe this will actually be the easy way,” Steris said. “Completely inappropriate though.”

“Completely.”

“Fortunately, you have a reputation for that sort of thing, and I can’t be expected to keep you reined in. I did wear dark undergarments, though, so they won’t be as visible from below while we are flying.”

Wax smiled, then reached under his seat, getting out the package that Ranette had sent him. He tucked that under his arm, then pushed open the door. “People underestimate you, Steris.”

“No,” she said, stepping out onto the misty sidewalk. He saw she wore shoes that fastened securely. Good. “They simply presume to know me when they do not. Understanding social conventions is not the same as condoning them. Now, how is it that we are to—*Oh!*”

She said the last part as Wax gathered her to him in a close embrace, then unholstered Vindication and shot a bullet into the ground—between three cobblestones—at their feet. He grinned as heads popped out of carriages all down the line. He’d have to leave Wayne and Marasi to fend for themselves this way, but that was likely better. Might keep eyes off those two.

Wax decreased his weight, oriented himself and Steris at the correct angle to the bullet, and *Pushed*. They shot into the air at a slant, soaring over the coaches in a line. He landed them on one of the skyscraper’s decorative outcroppings a few stories up. Steris clung to him with the grip of a cat hanging above an ocean, her eyes wide. Then, cautiously, she released him and stepped up to the edge of the stonework, leaned out, and peered through the misty depths. Lights bobbed below: coaches, streetlamps, lanterns held high by footmen. In the mist, most were just bubbles and shadows.

“I feel like I’m afloat in a sea of smoke and fog,” she said. The mists twisted and churned as if alive. Eddies and swirls seemed to move against the currents of air, always in motion.

Wax opened Ranette’s package, getting out the length of tightly twined rope inside. He looked upward. Ranette’s note said she wanted him to experiment with using a tether as he jumped with Allomancy, then provide her with feedback.

“You were eager to come tonight,” Steris said. “It’s more than wanting to meet the governor. You’re working. I can see it in you.”

Wax hefted the rope—which was weighted at one end with a hooked steel spike—getting a feel for what throwing it would be like.

"I can tell, you see," she said, "because you are fully awake. You are a predator, Waxillium Ladrian."

"I *hunt* predators."

"You are one too." She looked at him through the translucent mists dancing between them. Her eyes were alight, reflecting the glow from the sea of fog below. "You are like a lion. Most days you're only partially present, with me. Lounging, half asleep. You do what you must, you fulfill the needs of the house, but you don't thrive. Then the prey appears. You wake. The burst of speed, the fury and power; the pounding, pulsing, rush of the hunt. This is the real you, Waxillium Ladrian."

"If what you say is true, then all lawmen are predators."

"True lawmen, perhaps. I don't know that I've met another." She followed his gaze as he looked upward. "So, my question. What do you hunt tonight?"

"Bleeder will be here."

"The murderer? How do you know?"

"She is going to try to kill the governor again," Wax said. "She'll want to test me, to see if she can get close, judge how I'll react."

"You act as if it's personal, between the two of you."

"I wish it were." *Someone else moves us.* "I wish I knew Bleeder well enough for it to be personal, as that would give me an edge. But she certainly is interested in me, and that means I can't skip this party. Otherwise she might take it as a sign that she should strike."

Wax finished coiling the rope in one hand, then held it with the spiked end dangling free. He held out his hand, and Steris readily stepped up to him.

He searched out a metal line that pointed toward one of the steel girders in the stone under his feet. With so much rock separating them, it wouldn't be as strong an anchor as otherwise—but it was large and solid, so it would work for his purposes. Holding Steris, he Pushed off it into the night air. Skyscrapers like this one presented a problem for him, since they tapered as they grew taller. In addition, many of the footholds he used were narrow ledges, which made it hard to get a Push directly upward—those Pushes often sent him slightly outward, away from the building at an angle. Either way, the higher he went, the farther from the wall he got. Usually, he could counter this with his shotgun and his ability to make himself lighter. That wouldn't work while carrying Steris.

Ranette's rope and spike might. He reached a height where he started to slow, his anchor getting too far to give him further lift. As usual, he'd drifted out some ten feet from the building. So, as he slowed, he flipped the spiked end toward a balcony and Pushed on it, shooting the tether toward the balcony frame. The hooked spike shot between the metal bars of the balcony, but then pulled free. He drifted to a stop, precarious, in danger of falling sideways away from the building. He cursed and tried again, and this time got the hook to lock in place.

He pulled them inward, like a fish reeling itself in. That got them to the balcony. He set Steris down and coiled the rope again, looking upward.

"That was well performed."

"Too slow," Wax said absently.

"Oh dear."

He smiled, gathered her again, and Pushed them upward off the balcony. This time, as he drew near the halfway point to the party, he launched his hook toward a passing balcony at speed, hooking in place. He continued Pushing himself, moving up past the balcony on his right. Then a sharp pull on the rope made him pivot in the air as he flew, and he swung toward the building.

Wax hit the side of the building boots first, rope in one hand, the other arm wrapped around Steris. He then dropped them the few feet to the balcony. Better, better. The great liability of a Coinshot like himself was that he could only Push away from things, never Pull toward them. A tether could be useful indeed.

He wiggled the hook free. This was awkward. What if he needed to unhook it while flying, or fighting? Could Ranette make that hook able to unhitch on command somehow? He Pushed on the balcony, sending them upward again. Steris dug her fingers into his shoulders. Mists streamed lazily about them. A Coinshot grew very comfortable with heights—no matter how far he fell, dropping a single piece of metal and Pushing carefully let him land unharmed.

"I forget how disorienting this can be," Wax said, slowing their ascent. "Close your eyes."

"No," Steris said. She seemed breathless. "This is … this is wonderful."

*I don't think I'm ever going to understand that woman,* he thought. He could have sworn she was terrified. The next few leaps went well as he got used to the tether. *The rope is way too bulky,* he thought. *Lugging this around would be a serious pain.* And the hook could easily get tangled. If he were using this in a fight, he'd probably have to leave the rope tether behind after the first leap.

Tonight it worked well enough though, and a moment later he swung them onto the top-floor balcony in a flurry of skirts and mistcoat tassels. A small group of partygoers stood here, and Wax's arrival caused surprised exclamations and one dropped glass. Wax straightened, letting Steris down. Despite what she'd been through, she quickly composed herself, settling her skirts and pulling back her hair to smooth straggling locks.

"I believe," she said softly, "that was an entrance befitting your station."

"Alerted the guards, at least," Wax said, nodding to the men who stood at the sides of the balcony, watching them. The men were doing their job, which was good to see. A Coinshot couldn't enter this party unnoticed. They didn't stop him, however. He was too important to bother.

Wax wound up the rope and spike, tying it at his waist within his coat, which made Steris roll her eyes. Then she rested her hand on his arm. Before leaving Ladrian Mansion, she'd coached him with precision on how to walk and stand—her sixth such coaching during their time together. Perhaps that was because he never did it as he was supposed to. Indeed, tonight he took her by the arm in a more familiar way than she'd explained. They were betrothed. Rusts, he could hold her by the arm.

Steris eyed him, but said nothing as Wax Pushed open the balcony doors with an Allomantic shove and they entered the party.

# 9

Standing at the foot of ZoBell Tower, Wayne watched Wax and Steris disappear into the mists. He shook his head, then took a ball of gum from the tin in his pocket. He'd gotten himself some of the stuff. It was actually fun to chew.

He popped it into his mouth and thought about what a rusted fool his friend was. Obviously, Wax persisted with this whole engagement-to-Steris mess because he missed Lessie so much. So Wax had chosen a marriage that demanded no emotional investment. That was easy to see as the bottom of your own glass at a pub with watered-down ale, that was.

Wayne held out his hand to help Marasi down from their coach. "You look nice," she told him. "I'm surprised you agreed to wear that."

Wayne glanced down at his sharply tailored suit, chewing absently. Marasi acted amazed that he had a suit, matched by a fancy bowler on his head and a dark green cravat. Why wouldn't he have a costume like this? He had beggar costumes, constable costumes, and old lady costumes. A fellow needed to be able to blend with his surroundings. In the Roughs, that meant having some pale brown cowhand's costume. In the city, that meant having a fancy twit costume.

The stupid line was so long that aluminum could have rusted in the time it took them to reach the halfway point. *Rusting Wax and his cheating ways,* Wayne thought. The man could have at least taken Wayne instead of Steris.

Up ahead, oddly, a couple was turned away, forced to trudge back toward their carriage despite all the waiting. *What's going on up there?* Fancy people like this didn't get turned away from parties, did they? Everyone had an invitation, even if his was forged. It was just like the one he'd given to the old tyrant at the school though.

Well, no telling until they arrived. And this line was still moving *slooooooowwwww*.

“That fellow you caught ever say anything useful?” he asked Marasi.

“No,” Marasi said. “He isn’t all there, mentally. We did find what seems to be a Hemalurgic spike in him though.”

“Rusts. You know ’bout that too?”

“I got to read the book,” Marasi said absently. “Death *did* give it to me first, and Waxillium let me make a copy. Our captive had a piercing on some skin in his chest. After we removed that, he calmed. But he still won’t talk.”

Eventually, after seven crop rotations or so, they reached the front of the line. Marasi presented their invitation. The bouncer here looked it over, his face grim. “I’m afraid that we’ve been ordered to deny any nameless invitations not in the possession of the people they were sent to. With the attempt on the governor’s life, only guests named on our list can be allowed in.”

“But—” Marasi said.

“Here now,” Wayne cut in. “We’re important people. Don’t you see how fancy my cravat is?”

Near the door, men in black coats stepped forward, threatening. Rusting government security. Constables, they were real people—oh, they might bust a man’s neck now and then, but they came from the streets same as anyone. These spooks though … they barely had any soul to them.

“I saved the governor’s life today,” Marasi said. “Surely you won’t turn *me* away.”

“There’s nothing I can do, I’m afraid,” the bouncer said, his stern face completely expressionless.

Yeah, something was going on here. Wayne grabbed Marasi’s arm, towing her aside. “Let’s go. Rusting fools.”

“But—”

Wayne glanced over his shoulder and, just at the right moment, tossed up a speed bubble. “Alrighty, then,” he said. “New plan!”

“You sound excited,” she said, glancing at the borders of the speed bubble. It was more distinct than usual, as the mist inside the bubble continued to shift and move while that outside hung frozen in the air like gauze.

“I’m an excitable type,” Wayne said, hurrying back to the lectern where the bouncer stood. Wayne had managed to catch the lectern in his speed bubble, but not the bouncer. Right fine precision on his part. That little pedestal had a name manifest on it.

"I think you gave up too easily on getting in the ordinary way," Marasi said, folding her arms.

"Our names are on here," Wayne said, careful to keep moving as he read it over. "In a column of people specifically to be kept out. Wouldn't have mattered how well you argued."

"What?" she demanded, shoving up beside him. "Damn. I saved his *life,* the bastard."

"Marasi!" Wayne said, grinning. "You're startin' to talk normal-like."

"Because of you," she said, then paused. "Bastard."

He grinned, chewing his gum loudly. "You saved the governor's life, yeah, but it's probably his security who want to keep you out, not him. They've got mud on their faces because one of their own went rotten, and you embarrassed them by noticing first."

"But that's petty! They're playing with the governor's life!"

"Men are petty." He danced to the side.

"Why are you moving like that?"

"If I stay too long in one place, they have a chance of seeing me, even with how fast we're moving inside this bubble. If we keep moving we'll be a blur, and out in the mists that should be unnoticeable."

She reluctantly started moving.

Wayne glanced over the lists again, recognizing a name. "Here now. That one will work."

"Wayne, you're going to get us into trouble, aren't you?"

"Only if we get caught!" He pointed. "They have two lists—people they're to turn away no matter what, and people they're to allow. See the notes? Fourth name down? Says he sent word he might not come, and they're to make certain nobody else uses his invitation."

"Wayne," Marasi said, "that's Professor Hanlanaze. He's a brilliant mathematician."

"Hm," Wayne said, rubbing his chin. "From the university."

"No, from New Seran. He's been behind some of the discoveries in combustion technology."

Wayne perked up. "From outside the city. So people might not know him."

"They will by reputation."

"But personally?"

"He's somewhat reclusive," Marasi said. "He often gets invited to things like this, but rarely comes. Wayne, I see that look in your eye. You *can't* imitate him."

"What's the worst that could come of it?"

“We get caught,” she said, still walking with him around the speed bubble. “We get thrown in prison, prosecuted for conspiracy, embarrass Waxillium.”

“Now that,” Wayne said, striding back to where he’d been standing when he’d sped up time, “is the best damn argument for trying this that anyone could make. Come back so I can drop this speed bubble. After that we’re gonna need to find us some weapons.”

Marasi paled, joining him. “If you are thinking of sneaking guns in—”

“Not guns,” Wayne said with a grin. “A different kind of weapon. *Math.*”

* * *

“So that kandra is in here,” Steris said softly from her place on Wax’s arm as she scanned the party room. “Somewhere.”

The penthouse of ZoBell Tower encompassed its entire top floor, with windows ringing the outside. Light from a dozen dim chandeliers played off wineglasses, diamond jewelry, sequins on sleek dresses. The dress style was new. Was he so oblivious to fashion that he had missed such a dramatic shift?

Steris wore more traditional attire—a kind of gauzy, draping white dress with a very small bustle and a distinct waist. However, it had sequins lining the collar and cuffs, and was more filmy—lighter than what she normally wore, and actually quite pretty on her. With the sequins, it shared something with these modern gowns.

The party attendees moved around several bars and numerous small displays set up on the red-carpeted floor. Wax and Steris passed one, a stand with a glass box enclosing a raw copper nugget as big as a man’s head. Light glimmered on its surface.

*Allomantic metals,* Wax thought as they passed another display. Dozens of specimens, with plaques talking about where the nugget or vein had been mined. They provoked conversations around the room, clusters of people chatting as light played off the colorful drinks in their fingers.

“You’re drawing attention,” Steris noted. “I’m not certain wearing the coat was a wise move.”

“The mistcoat is a symbol,” Wax said. “It is a reminder.” She’d talked him out of the hat, but not this.

“It makes you look like a ruffian.”

“It’s supposed to. Maybe they’ll think twice about lying to me; I don’t want to be part of their games.”

“You are *already* part of their games, Lord Waxillium.”

“Which is why I don’t like coming to the parties.” He held up his hand, cutting her off. “I know. It’s important that we be here. Let’s go chat with the partygoers you’ve planned for us to approach.”

She always had a list, carefully prepared. Steris was the only person he’d ever heard of who brought an agenda to a cocktail party.

“No,” she said.

“No?”

“That is what we commonly do,” Steris said, giving a specific smile—she practiced different ones—to Lady Mulgrave as they passed. “Tonight’s purpose is yours. Let us be about it and find that killer.”

“Are you certain?”

“Yes,” she said, waving to another couple. “It behooves a wife to be interested in, if not involved in, the passions of her spouse.”

“You don’t need to do that, Steris. I—”

“Please,” she said softly. “I do.”

Wax let the argument drop. Truth was, he was pleased. With the possibility that Bleeder was here somewhere, Wax wouldn’t be able to relax anyway.

So how to find the creature? More importantly, how would he beat someone who could move in a blur? Unlike Allomancy—which burned at a few standard rates—Feruchemical powers could be used up all at once. Bleeder could drain her metalminds in a single burst of speed—and could probably take down dozens of people in an eyeblink. Maybe even hundreds. And Wax wouldn’t be able to do a thing.

But perhaps she wouldn’t have enough left for that. She couldn’t just pop more metal in, like an Allomancer, and refill her reserves. She’d have to rely on what speed she had been able to store up, and she’d only stolen her spike recently. Killing the people at Winsting’s party would have expended a large amount of what she’d theoretically been able to save up over the last few weeks.

So he had two options. Kill her before she moved, or somehow get her to waste her Feruchemical reserve without hurting anyone.

He stepped up to the bar, ordering drinks, then turned to scan the crowd. It had been two decades since he’d been a part of high society, and his two years back in Elendel hadn’t yet polished off all the rust. Everyone here had the same counterfeit way about them—they chatted with a studied air of merriment while secretly pursuing their own agendas. There was no better place for a murderer to blend in than this.

Drinks in hand, Wax stepped down from the bar and turned on his steel bubble.

It wasn’t something he’d always been able to do, and he wasn’t entirely certain how he did it. Oh, the basic mechanics were obvious: he burned steel, then Pushed lightly outward from himself in all directions at once. But how had he learned to exempt metal he himself carried? He still didn't know. It was just something that had happened, over time.

With the bubble on, his Allomantic instincts searched out any bits of metal moving quickly toward him, and would Push on those with increasing force as they drew closer. He was getting better and better at that. Standing and letting Darriance shoot at his chest while wearing about twelve inches of padding and armor had helped. He couldn't dodge bullets, but the bubble helped.

"What did you just do?" Steris asked as he reached her. "My bracelet wants to leap off my arm."

"Remove it," Wax said. "If there's an Allomantic fight, I don't want you wearing any metals."

Steris raised an eyebrow, but took off the bracelet and dropped it in her handbag. Wax mentally added an exception for it.

"I don't know that it will matter," Steris said. "This place is positively teeming with metal. What are you doing with your drink?"

Wax looked up. He'd just finished covertly dumping a bit of brown powder into his cup. "I got water," he said. "The powder will make it look like I'm drinking brandy. If I can feign drunkenness later, it might give me an edge."

"Fascinating," Steris said. She seemed genuinely impressed.

They moved through the room, passing under a chandelier. The separate bits of crystal—which had wires suspending them—moved subtly away from Wax, like the needle of a compass confronted by a magnet's matching pole. He accidentally knocked a nugget off a pedestal as they passed. Rusts. Against his better judgment, he dampened his steel bubble.

"Let's find the governor," Steris said.

Wax nodded. He couldn't shake the feeling that no matter which way he turned, someone had a gun pointed at his back.

*Someone else moves us, lawman.*

Red on the bricks. Lessie in his arms, already dead. His hands stained with her blood.…

No. He'd moved past that. He'd *grieved*. He wouldn't be sucked down into that spiral again. As they continued through the party, a pair of lesser nobles wearing dark colors moved to intercept them, but Wax gave them a glare, which was enough to get them to back off.

"Lord Waxillium…" Steris said.

"What?" Wax asked. "You said we were going to the governor."

"That doesn't mean you can growl at everyone else."

"I didn't growl." Did he?

"Let me handle it next time," Steris said, guiding them around a pedestal displaying—oddly—nothing at all. The plaque read: ATIUM, THE LOST METAL.

As they neared the governor—who stood holding court near the windows on the north side—a man in a bright yellow bow tie noticed Wax. Great. Lord Stenet. He would want to talk about textile tariffs again. But of course he wouldn't *say* that, not at first. People never said what they meant around here.

"Lord Waxillium!" Stenet said. "I was just thinking about you! How are your wedding arrangements proceeding? Should I look forward to an invitation soon?"

"Not too soon," Steris said. "We've only just settled on a priest. What of you? Your engagement is the talk of the city!"

His face fell. "Oh. Now, about that…" He cleared his throat. Steris prodded, but in a moment Stenet had found an excuse, changed the topic, then politely retreated.

"What was that about?" Wax said.

"He's been cheating on her," Steris said absently. "Naturally, the topic makes him uncomfortable."

"Nice work," Wax said. "You're very good at this."

"I'm proficient at it."

"I believe that's what I said."

"There is a distinction," Steris said with a shake of her head. "In this room there are true masters of social interaction. I am not one of them. I studied social norms, researched them, and now I execute them. Another woman might have sailed through that conversation and left him happy, but distracted. I had to use blunt force, so to speak."

"You are a bizarre woman, Steris."

"Says the only man in the room with guns on his hips," she replied, "a man who is unconsciously trying to Push the earrings out of the ears of every woman we pass. You didn't notice Lady Remin losing her ring into her drink, did you?"

"Missed that."

"Pity. It was entertaining. Here, step this way; we don't want to get into a conversation with Lord Bookers. He is dreadfully boring."

Wax followed her down three steps, passing a display shining with nuggets of tin that rattled at his passing, alongside pictures of famous Tineyes, including several sketches of the Lord Mistborn—who had been a Tineye before the Catacendre. *Funny, that Steris would remark on someone* *being boring….*

“You’re thinking,” Steris said, “that it is ironic that I would note that someone is a bore—as I myself have a reputation for the same personality flaw.”

“I would not have phrased it like that.”

“It’s all right,” Steris said. “As I have said many times before, I am aware of my reputation. I must embrace my nature. I recognize another bore as you might recognize a master Allomancer—as a colleague whose arts I don’t particularly wish to sample.”

Wax found himself smiling.

“As a side note,” Steris said softly as she steered them toward where the governor was speaking with the lord of House Erikell, “if you do find the murderer, steer me in her direction. I shall endeavor to fascinate her with details of our house finances. With luck, she’ll fall asleep in her drink and drown, and I shall have my first kill.”

“Steris! That was actually amusing.”

She blushed. Then she got a conspiratorial look on her face. “I cheated, if you must know.”

“… Cheated?”

“I know you enjoy witty conversation,” she said, “so I prepared earlier, writing myself a list of things I could say that you would find engaging.”

Wax laughed. “You have plans for everything, don’t you?”

“I like to be thorough,” she said. “Though admittedly, sometimes I can be *so* thorough that I end up needing to plan how to best make my plans. My life ends up feeling like a beautiful ship in dry dock, built with eighteen rudders pointing in different directions to be *extra* certain that a steering mechanism is in place.” She hesitated, then blushed again. “Yes. That quip was on my list.”

Wax laughed anyway. “Steris, I think this is the most genuine I’ve ever seen you.”

“But I’m being fake. I prepared the lines ahead of time. I’m not *actually* being diverting.”

“You’d be surprised at how many people do the same thing,” Wax said. “Besides, this *is* you. So it’s genuine.”

“Then I’m always genuine.”

“I guess so. I just didn’t realize it before.”

They stepped toward Innate, putting them close enough that the governor would notice them waiting. Nearby, other couples and groups shot them covert looks. As the lord of a major house, Wax outranked almost everyone in the room. Old noble titles were coming to matter less and less, but with Steris's money backing him, he'd been able to dig himself out of many of his debts. That in turn had allowed him to avoid foreclosures, and he'd been able to hold out until other investments came through. House Ladrian was again one of the wealthiest in the city. Increasingly, that was more important than a noble pedigree.

He found it unfortunate, though not surprising, how often noble birth aligned with economic and political power. The Lord Mistborn's laws, based upon the Last Emperor's ideal, were supposed to put power into the hands of common men. And yet the same groups just kept on ruling. Wax was one of them. How guilty should he feel?

*Already I fear that I have made things too easy for men….*

Drim, the governor's chief bodyguard and head of security, stepped up to Wax. "I suppose you'll be next," the thick-necked man growled. "My men at the doors let you keep your guns, I hear."

"Let me tell you, Drim," Wax said, "if the governor is in the slightest bit of danger, you *want* a gun in my hands."

"I suppose. A gun doesn't mean much to you anyway, does it? You could kill with the spare change in your pocket."

"Or a pair of cuff links. Or the tacks holding the carpet to the floor."

Drim grunted. "Too bad about your deputy."

Wax snapped his attention on Drim. "Wayne. What about him?"

"He's a security threat," Drim said. "Had to turn him away down below."

Wax relaxed. "Oh. All right, then."

Drim smiled, obviously feeling he'd won something from the conversation. He backed up to take his place by the wall, watching those who came to speak with the governor.

"You're not concerned about Wayne?" Steris asked softly.

"Not anymore. I worried he'd find the party so boring, he would wander off. Instead, the good man there kindly gave Wayne a challenge."

"So … you're saying he'll sneak in?"

"If Wayne isn't in here somewhere already," Wax said, "I'll eat your handbag and try to burn it for Allomantic power."

They continued to wait. The governor's current interlocutor, Lady Shayna, was a long-winded blowhard, but after the political and financial support she'd given him, even the governor couldn't turn her away. Wax looked around, wondering where Wayne would be.

"Lord Waxillium Ladrian," a feminine voice said. "I've heard about you. You're more handsome than the stories say."

He raised his eyebrows toward the speaker, a tall woman waiting to see the governor. Very tall—she had a few inches on him at least. With luscious lips and a large chest, she had creamy skin and hair the color of gunpowder, and she was wearing a red dress missing most of its top half.

"I don't believe we've met," Steris said, her voice cool.

"I'm called Milan," the woman said. She didn't bother to look at Steris, but inspected Wax up and down, then smiled in a mysterious way. "Lord Waxillium, you wear sidearms and a Roughs-style mistcoat to a cocktail party. Bold."

"There is nothing bold about doing what one has always done," Wax said. *Flirting with a man while his fiancée stands beside him, however …*

"You have an interesting reputation," Milan continued. "Are the things they say about you true?"

"Yes."

She pursed her lips, smiling, expecting more. Instead, he met her eyes and waited. She shuffled, moving her cup from one hand to another, then excused herself, walking off.

"Wow," Steris said. "And they say *I* can make people uncomfortable."

"You learn the stare early," Wax said, returning his attention to the governor. In the back of his mind, he assessed the woman Milan and decided to keep an eye on her. Had that been Bleeder in disguise, trying to feel him out? Or had it been just another foolish partygoer with a bit too much wine in her and an inflated opinion of how men would respond to her?

*Rusts, this is going to be tough.*

* * *

Wayne sauntered about the party, his tiny dining plate stacked with food as high as he could get it. Why did they always use such tiny plates at fancy parties? To keep people from eating too much? Rusts. Rich folk didn't make sense. They gave away the most expensive booze in the city, then worried about people eating all of the little sausages?

Wayne was a rebel. He refused to play by their rules, yes he did. He quickly laid out a battle plan. The ladies with the little sausages came out from behind the east bar, while the west bar was preparing the salmon crackers. Tiny sandwiches to the north, and desserts of various sorts to the south. If he made a round of the penthouse room in exactly thirteen minutes, he could hit each station just as the servants were entering with fresh platters.

They were starting to give him glares. A fellow knew he was doing his job right when he got those kinds of glares.

Marasi stayed nearby, playing the part of Professor Hanlanaze's assistant.

Wayne scratched at his beard. He didn't like beards, but Marasi said the few evanotype pictures of Professor Hanlanaze showed him wearing one. Hanlanaze was far thicker at the waist than Wayne was too. That was great. You could hide all kinds of stuff in padding like that.

"I still can't believe you had all of this in the carriage," Marasi whispered, then she stole one of his sausages. Right off his plate. Outrageous!

"My dear woman," Wayne said, scratching his head, where he wore a colorful Terris cap, a proud emblem of Hanlanaze's lineage. "Being a qualified academic depends, before anything else, upon suitable preparation. I would no sooner leave my home without appropriate equipment for every eventuality than I would work in my lab without proper safety precautions!"

"It's the voice that truly *makes* the disguise, you know," Marasi said. "How do you do it?"

"Our accents are clothing for our thoughts, my dear," Wayne said. "Without them, everything we say would be stripped bare, and we might as well be screaming at one another. Oh look. The dessert lady has chocolate pastries again! I *do* find those irresistible."

He stepped toward them, but a comment cut him off. "Professor Hanlanaze?"

Wayne froze.

"Why, it *is* you!" the voice said. "I didn't believe you'd actually come." A tall man approached, wearing so much plaid that you could have strung him up on a pole and made a war banner out of him.

On one hand Wayne was pleased. He'd only had Marasi's description of Hanlanaze to go on in creating his disguise, so the fact that he fooled someone who had obviously seen the professor's picture was impressive.

On the other hand … damn.

Wayne handed Marasi his plate, giving her a stern glare that said "Don't eat these." Then he took the newcomer's hand. That suit's fabric really was something. The mill that made it must have used up an entire year's quota of stripes.

"And you are?" Wayne asked, pinching his voice. He'd found that big men like Professor Hanlanaze often had voices that sounded smaller than the person was. He was glad he'd been studying southern accents. Of course he also injected some of a university accent into it, and set both on a base of Thermolian "v" sounds, from the outer village where the professor had grown up.

Getting a good accent was like mixing a paint to match one already on a wall. If you didn't blend just right, the flaws could look much worse than if you'd chosen a different color entirely.

"I'm Rame Maldor," the man said, shaking Wayne's hand. "You know … the paper on the Higgens effect?"

"Ah yes," Wayne said, releasing the hand and stepping back. He gave a good impression of being nervous around so many people, and it sold better than two-penny drinks the day after Truefast. Indeed, Maldor was perfectly willing to give the supposed recluse plenty of space.

That let Wayne speed up time around him and Marasi only.

"What in Harmony's wrists is he talking about?" Wayne hissed.

From her bag, Marasi retrieved the book that she'd purchased at a nearby shop while Wayne was getting into his costume. She soon found the page she wanted. "The Higgens effect. Has to do with the way a spectral field is influenced by magnets." She flipped a few pages. "Here, try this.…" She rattled off some gibberish to Wayne, who nodded and dropped the speed bubble.

"The Higgens effect is old news!" Wayne said. "I'm much more interested in the way that a static *electric* field produces similar results. Why, you should *see* the work we are near to completing!"

Rame got pale in the face. "But … But … I was going to study that effect myself!"

"Then you're behind by at least three years!"

"Why didn't you mention this in our letters?"

"And reveal my next discovery?" Wayne said.

Rame stumbled away, then dashed for the lift. Wayne had never seen a scientist move so quickly. You'd have thought someone was handing out free lab coats in the lobby.

"Oh dear," Marasi said. "You realize the chaos this might cause in their field?"

"Yup," Wayne said, taking his plate of food back. "It will be good for them. It'll stop them from sittin' around and thinkin' so much."

"Wayne, they're scientists. Isn't that their *job*?"

"Hell if I know," Wayne said, stuffing a little sausage in his mouth. "But rusts, if it is, that would explain *so much*."

* * *

Governor Innate finished his conversation and turned toward Wax. Drim, the bodyguard, waved them forward. He didn't like Wax, but from what Wax knew of the man, Drim was solid, loyal and dependable. He understood that Wax wasn't a threat.

Unfortunately, Drim didn't know the threat they *were* facing. A kandra …

it could be anyone. Wax wouldn't have been so trusting.

*Wouldn't I?* he thought, shaking the governor's hand. *What if the kandra is Drim? Have I considered that?*

That was how Bleeder had gotten in to kill Lord Winsting, after all. She had been wearing the face of someone Winsting's men trusted. *Rusting iron on a hillside,* Wax thought. *This is going to be very, very hard.*

"Lord Waxillium?" Innate asked. "Are you well?"

"I'm sorry, my lord," Wax said. "My thoughts were called away for a moment. How is Lady Innate?"

"She had a moment of passing nausea," the governor said, kissing Steris's hand. "And went home to lie down. I will tell her you asked after her. Lady Harms, you look lovely this evening."

"And you are ever a gentleman," Steris replied, giving him a genuine smile. Steris liked the governor, though politically they were opposites—Steris calculatedly progressive, as she figured would be expected of new money looking to advance, while Innate was conservative. But that sort of thing didn't bother Steris. She liked people whose motives made sense, and she felt Innate's political record was orderly. "I hope Lady Allri will recover soon."

"It is an ailment of nerves more than anything else," Innate said. "She did not react well to what happened today."

"You seem to be doing remarkably," Wax said. "All things considered."

"The would-be assassin was one of our newer guards, and was mentally unhinged. He had terrible aim, and likely didn't even *actually* intend to kill me." The governor chuckled. "Would that the Survivor would always send such enemies to me, and often around election season."

Wax cracked a forced smile, then glanced to the side. That woman from before, the pretty one with the large eyes, stood nearby. Who else was suspiciously near?

*Bleeder won't be someone I can spot easily,* Wax thought. *The Faceless Immortals have centuries of practice blending into human society.*

"What is your take on it, Lord Waxillium?" Innate asked. "What were the man's motives?"

"He was provoked to the attack," Wax said. "It was a distraction. Someone else killed your brother; they will try again for you."

Nearby, Drim stood up straight, glancing at him.

"Curious," Innate said. "But you're known for jumping at shadows, are you not?"

"Every lawman follows a bum lead on occasion."

"I believe you'll find Lord Waxillium to be right far more often than he is wrong, my lord," Steris said. "If he warns of danger, I would listen."

"I will," Innate said.

"I want to meet with you," Wax said, "so we can discuss important matters. Tomorrow at the latest. You need to hear what we're dealing with."

"I will schedule it." From Innate, that was a promise. Wax would have his meeting. "Lady Harms, might I ask after your cousin? I've yet to thank her for what she did today, even if the man's aim was off, and I would have been safe anyway."

"Marasi is well," Steris said. "She should be coming up here tonight to—"

*Look at them.*

The thought forced its way into Wax's head. Steris and the governor continued to speak, but he froze.

*They dress in painted sequins. They drink wine. They laugh, and smile, and play, and dance, and eat, and quietly kill. All part of Harmony's plan. All actors on a stage. That's what you are too, Waxillium Ladrian. It's what all men are.*

A chill moved over Wax, like ants running across his skin. The thoughts in his head were a voice, like Harmony's, but rasping and crude. Brutal. A terrible whisper.

Wax was still wearing his earring. Bleeder had found out how to communicate with someone wearing a Hemalurgic spike.

The murderer was in his head.

# 10

Wayne turned as the sausage lady passed. He intended to reach for another handful. Instead he got slapped.

He blinked, at first assuming that the servers had finally gotten tired of him outthinking them. But the slapper hadn't been one of them. It was a child. He fixed his stare on the young girl as Marasi hurried back to his side. Why, this child couldn't be more than fifteen. And she'd *slapped* him!

"You," the girl said, "are a *monster*."

"I—"

"Remmingtel Tarcsel!" the girl said. "Do you think anyone in this party has heard that name before?"

"Well—"

"No, they haven't. I've asked. They all stand here using my father's incandescent lights—which he toiled for *years* to create—and nobody knows his name. Do you know why, Mister Hanlanaze?"

"I suspect I don't—"

"Because you stole his designs, and with them his life. My father died clipless, destitute and depressed, because of men like you. You aren't a scientist, Mister Hanlanaze, whatever you claim. You're not an inventor. You're a thief."

"That part's right. I—"

"I'll have the better of you," the girl hissed, stepping up to him and poking him right in the gut, almost where he'd hidden his dueling canes. "I have *plans*. And unlike my father, I know that this world isn't just about who has the best ideas. It's about the people who can market those ideas. I'm going to find investors and change this city. And when you're crying, destitute and discredited, you remember my father's name and what you did."

She spun on her heel—long, straight blonde hair slapping him in the face—and stalked away.

"What the hell was that?" Wayne whispered.

"The price of wearing someone else's likeness, I guess," Marasi said. Rusting woman sounded *amused*!

"Her daddy," Wayne said. "She said … I killed her daddy…"

"Yeah. Sounds like Hanlanaze has some dirt in his past."

Hanlanaze. Right. Hanlanaze. The professor.

"I've read broadsheet columns by that girl," Marasi said. "It's a real shame, if it's true those inventions were stolen."

"Yeah," Wayne said, rubbing his cheek. "Shame." He eyed the plate of little sausages as it passed, but couldn't find the will to chase it down. The fun was gone, for some reason.

Instead he went looking for Wax.

* * *

"Excuse me," Wax said to the governor and Steris.

Both turned astonished eyes on him as he walked away. A rude move. He didn't let himself care. He stepped into the center of the room, instincts screaming at him.

Guns out!

Firefight coming!

Find cover!

*Run.*

He did none of those things, but he couldn't keep his eye from twitching. With his steel burning, a spray of small, translucent blue lines connected him to nearby sources of metal. He was in the habit of ignoring those.

Now he watched them. Quivering, shifting, the rhythm and pulse of a hundred people in a room. Trays for food, jewelry, spectacles. Metal parts in the tables and chairs. So much metal that made the framework for the lives of men and women. They were the flesh of civilization, and steel was now its skeleton.

*So, you realize what I am,* the voice said in his mind. Feminine, but rasping.

*No, what are you?* Wax sent back. A test.

*Harmony spoke to you. I know that he did.*

*You're a koloss,* Wax said, using the wrong word on purpose.

*You dance for Harmony,* the voice replied. *You bend and move at his* *direction. You don't care how poor an excuse for a god he is.*

Wax wasn't certain—there was no way to be certain—but it seemed that Bleeder couldn't read his mind. The kandra could only send out thoughts. What was it Harmony had said? That hearing thoughts had come from Preservation, but inserting them from Ruin?

Wax turned slowly about the room, watching those lines. Bleeder wouldn't have any metal on her. People who were metallically aware were more careful about things like that. The governor's guards, for example. Half of them carried guns, but the other half only dueling canes.

*How do you stand it, Wax?* Bleeder asked. *Dwelling among them. Like living up to your knees in sewage.*

"Why did you kill Winsting?" Wax asked out loud.

*I killed him because he had to die. I killed him because nobody else would.*

"So you're a hero," Wax said, turning about. *She's close by,* he thought. *Watching me. Who? Which one?*

And if he thought he'd figured it out … did he dare fire first?

*The strike of lightning is not a hero,* Bleeder said. *The earthquake is not a hero. These things simply exist.*

Wax started walking through the room. Perhaps Bleeder would try to move along with him. He kept his hands to the sides, a coin in each fist. No guns yet. That would provoke a panic. "Why the governor?" Wax asked. "He is a good man."

*There are no good men,* Bleeder said. *Choice is an illusion, lawman. There are those created to be selfish and there are those created to be selfless. This does not make them good or evil, any more than the ravaging lion is evil when compared to the placid rabbit.*

"You called them sewage."

*Sewage is not evil. That does not make it desirable.*

Bleeder's voice in his mind seemed to take on more personality as she spoke. Soft, haunting, morose. Like Bloody Tan had been.

Someone else moves us.…

"And you?" Wax asked. "Which are you? Wolf or rabbit?"

*I am the surgeon.*

The woman, the beauty in red, followed him. She tried to be surreptitious about it, walking over to a group to meet them and chat—but she moved parallel to Wax. There was another person following too. A short man in a server's outfit carrying a tray of food. He made his rounds, but the other servers moved clockwise. Wax was going counterclockwise.

Were they close enough to hear him speaking? Not with natural ears. Perhaps Bleeder could burn tin. If that was the power she'd chosen for the evening.

*You are a surgeon too,* Bleeder said. *They call you lord, they smile at you, but you aren't one of them. If only you could be truly free. If only …*

"I follow the law," Wax whispered. "What do you follow?"

Bleeder gave no reply to that. The whisper, perhaps, had kept her from hearing.

*The governor is corrupt,* Bleeder said. *He spent years covering for his brother, but in truth he would have done better covering for himself.*

Wax looked to the side. He'd circled the room at this point, almost back to where he'd started. That server had followed all the way.

*I have much work to do,* Bleeder said. *I need to free everyone in this city. Harmony crushes his palm against society, smothering it. He claims to not interfere, but then moves us like pieces on a board.*

"So you'll kill the governor?" Wax said. "That will somehow free the city?"

*Yes, it will,* Bleeder said. *But of course I can't kill him yet, Wax. I haven't even murdered your father yet.*

Wax felt suddenly cold. But his father was already dead. He spun, hand on his gun, and met the eyes of the server. The man froze, his eyes wide.

Then he ran.

Wax cursed, dashing after and flipping a coin out in front of himself. It spun in the air, but the waiter ducked behind a group of people. Wax gritted his teeth and let the coin drop without Pushing on it, instead unslinging Vindication. This prompted cries of worry from those in the party. The waiter ducked behind groups of people, ready to dodge Wax.

Fortunately, he—or she, or whatever—wasn't ready for Wayne, who surged out between two plump women with cups of wine and flung himself at the waiter. Both went down in a heap. Wax slowed, raising his gun, taking aim. He couldn't give Bleeder a chance to use Allomancy or Feruchemy, particularly if he was wrong about her using tin right now. A shot to the head wouldn't kill a kandra, he guessed, but it should slow her down. Wax just had to be certain not to hit Wayne in the wrong—

The governor's guards piled on top of Wayne and Bleeder. Wax cursed, dashing forward, Vindication up beside his head and mistcoat flapping behind him. He leaped over cowering partygoers—Pushing off tacks in the floor to get some height—and came down near the group of struggling guards.

Wayne, wearing a false beard and swearing like a canal worker with a headache, flailed about as five security guards held him.

"Let him go!" Wax said. "That's my deputy. Where's the other one?"

The guards stumbled about, all but one, who lay on the floor. Bleeding from the gut.

Wax snapped his head up, spotting a man in a waiter's outfit pushing his way toward the room's outer wall nearby. Wax leveled Vindication and took aim.

*You should know,* Bleeder said, *that I was sad about your lover's death. I hated that it was necessary.*

Wax's hand froze. Lessie. Dead.

*Damn it, I'm past that!* Wax squeezed the trigger anyway, but Bleeder ducked, skidding to the ground. The bullet punched a hole in the window above the man's head.

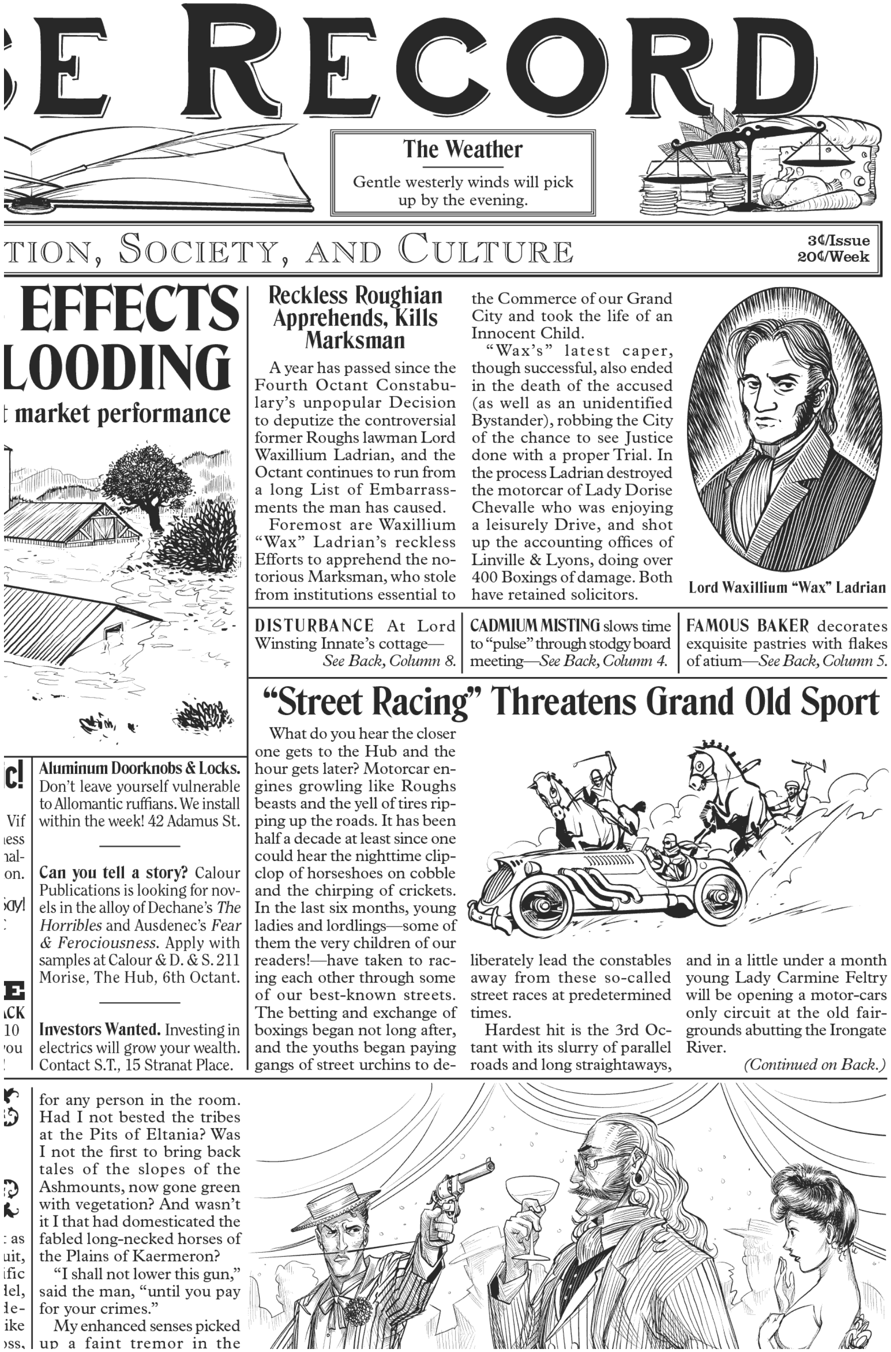
Bleeder threw a chair at the weakened window, shattering it. Then, as Wax fired again, he leaped through.

Twenty-plus stories in the air.

Wax bellowed, charging toward the window. Wayne joined him, grabbing Wax by the arm. "I'll hold on tightly, mate. Let's go."

"Stay," Wax said, forcing himself to think through his turmoil of emotions. "Watch the governor. This might be a distraction, like the attempt earlier."

Wax didn't give Wayne a chance to complain. He shook out of the man's grip, then threw himself into the mists.



# E RECORD

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for any person in the room. Had I not bested the tribes at the Pits of Eltania? Was I not the first to bring back tales of the slopes of the Ashmounts, now gone green with vegetation? And wasn't it I that had domesticated the fabled long-necked horses of the Plains of Kaermeron?

"I shall not lower this gun," said the man, "until you pay for your crimes."

My enhanced senses picked up a faint tremor in the

## Reckless Roughian Apprehends, Kills Marksman

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Foremost are Waxillium "Wax" Ladrian's reckless Efforts to apprehend the notorious Marksman, who stole from institutions essential to the Commerce of our Grand City and took the life of an Innocent Child.

"Wax's" latest caper, though successful, also ended in the death of the accused (as well as an unidentified Bystander), robbing the City of the chance to see Justice done with a proper Trial. In the process Ladrian destroyed the motorcar of Lady Dorise Chevalle who was enjoying a leisurely Drive, and shot up the accounting offices of Linville & Lyons, doing over 400 Boxings of damage. Both have retained solicitors.

Lord Waxillium "Wax" Ladrian

**DISTURBANCE** At Lord Winsting Innate's cottage—*See Back, Column 8.*

**CADMIUM MISTING** slows time to "pulse" through stodgy board meeting—*See Back, Column 4.*

**FAMOUS BAKER** decorates exquisite pastries with flakes of atium—*See Back, Column 5.*

## "Street Racing" Threatens Grand Old Sport

What do you hear the closer one gets to the Hub and the hour gets later? Motorcar engines growling like Roughs beasts and the yell of tires ripping up the roads. It has been half a decade at least since one could hear the nighttime clip-clop of horseshoes on cobble and the chirping of crickets. In the last six months, young ladies and lordlings—some of them the very children of our readers!—have taken to racing each other through some of our best-known streets. The betting and exchange of boxings began not long after, and the youths began paying gangs of street urchins to deliberately lead the constables away from these so-called street races at predetermined times.

Hardest hit is the 3rd Octant with its slurry of parallel roads and long straightaways, and in a little under a month young Lady Carmine Feltry will be opening a motor-cars only circuit at the old fairgrounds abutting the Irongate River.

(Continued on Back.)

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*(Continued on Back.)*

# 11

Falling felt natural to a Coinshot. That sudden moment of acceleration, gut lurching but spirit leaping. The rush of wind. The chill of mist on the skin.

He opened his eyes to spinning white upon black, mist dancing about him, inviting, eager. All Allomancers shared a bond with the mists, but the other types never knew the thrill of jumping through them. Of nearly becoming one with them. During moments like this, Wax understood the Ascendant Warrior. Vin—they rarely called her by name. Her title, like those of the other Preservers, was used to show reverence.

The Historica, a section of the Words of Founding, said she had melded with the mists. She had taken them upon herself, becoming their guardian as they became her essence. As the Survivor watched over all who struggled, Vin watched over those in the night. Sometimes he felt he could see her form in their patterns: slight of frame, short hair splayed out as she moved, mistcloak fluttering behind her.

It was a fancy, wasn't it?

Wax fired Vindication, slamming a bullet into the ground and Pushing on it to stop his descent. He hit the street in front of the building lobby, going down on one knee. Nearby, some hopefuls still waited to be allowed into the party.

"Where?" Wax demanded, looking at them. "Someone fell before me. Where did he go?"

*I haven't even murdered your father yet….*

Rusts. Could she mean Steris's father, his soon to be father-in-law?

"There … there was nobody," said a man in a black suit. "Just that." He pointed to a smashed chair.

In the distance, a motorcar roared to life. It tore away with a frantic sound.

*Bleeder might be a Coinshot now,* Wax thought, running toward the sound, hoping it was her. *But she wouldn't need a motorcar if that were the case.* Maybe she'd chosen the Feruchemical power to change her weight, so she could drift down on the wind.

Wax launched himself upward, watching the steel lines for movement. In the mists ordinary vision was of limited use, but steelsight's blue lines pierced the mists like arrows. He could easily make out the motorcar speeding away, but he didn't know for certain Bleeder was in it. He took a moment to watch the movements of other vehicles nearby. A carriage pulled to a stop one street away. He could tell from the way the lines quivered—those would be the metal fittings on the horse's harness. People on foot walked slowly along Tindwyl Promenade. Nothing suspicious.

Decision made, he Pushed against some streetlamps, sending himself after the speeding motorcar. He bounded from lamp to lamp, then launched himself over the top of a building as the motor turned a corner. Wax crested the building in a rush of swirling mists, passing only a few feet over the top. A group of young boys playing on the roof watched him pass with dropped jaws. Wax landed on the far edge of the rooftop, mistcoat tassels spraying forward around him, then leaped down as the motor passed below.

*This,* he thought, *will not work out as well as you hoped, Bleeder.*

Wax increased his weight, then Pushed on the motor from above.

He didn't crush the person inside—he couldn't be absolutely sure he had the right quarry. His carefully pressed weight did pop the wheels like tomatoes, then squashed the roof down just enough to bend the metal doors in their housings. Even if Bleeder had access to enhanced speed, she wouldn't be getting out through those doors.

Wax landed beside the motorcar, Vindication out and pointed through the window at a confused man wearing a cabbie's hat. Motorcar cabbies? When had that started happening?

"He got out!" the cabbie said. "Two streets back. Told me to keep driving; didn't even let me stop as he jumped!"

Wax kept perfectly still, gun right at the cabbie's forehead. It could be Bleeder. She could change faces.

"P-please…" the cabbie said, crying. "I…"

*Damn it!* Wax didn't know enough. *Harmony. Is it him?*

He was returned a vague sense of uncertainty. Harmony didn't know.

Wax growled, but lifted his gun away from the frightened driver, trusting his gut. "Where did you let him off?"

"Tage Street."

"Go to the Fourth Octant precinct station," Wax said. "Wait for me, or constables I send. We'll likely have questions for you. Once I'm satisfied, we'll buy you a new motor."

Wax Pushed himself into the air to the corner of Tage and Guillem, which put him at the edge of a maze of industrial alleyways linking warehouses with the docks where canal boats unloaded. Steelsight on and Pushing bubble up, he crept through the mists, but didn't have much hope. He'd have a devil of a time finding one man alone here, in the dark.

All Bleeder had to do was pick one place and hide there. Many criminals didn't make the wise choice in this situation, however. It was hard to remain perfectly still, not moving any metal, while an Allomancer prowled about looking for you.

Wax persisted, walking down a dark alleyway, checking the rope at his waist, making sure he could unwind it quickly in case Bleeder was a Coinshot or a Lurcher and he needed to dump his metals. Soon the mists filling in behind him made him feel as if he were in an endless corridor, vanishing into nothingness in both directions. Above as well, only dark, swirling mists. Wax stopped in an empty intersection, silent warehouses like leviathans slumbering in the deep on all four corners, only one of which held a streetlight. He looked about with steelsight, waiting, counting heartbeats.

Nothing.

Either the cabbie had been Bleeder in disguise, or Wax's prey had slipped away. Wax sighed, lowering his gun.

One of the large warehouse doors fell outward with a crash, revealing a dozen men. Wax felt a sweeping wave of relief. He hadn't lost his quarry—he'd simply been led into a trap!

Wait.

*Damn,* Wax thought, leveling Vindication and pulling his Sterrion from his hip. He Pushed on the men in the same movement, which flung him backward toward the cover of a half-finished building.

Unfortunately, the men opened fire before he arrived. Wax's steel bubble deflected a number of the shots, bending them away to cut empty air. The bullets trailed streaks in the mist. One, however, clipped him on the arm.

Wax gasped as his Push slammed him against an incomplete wall. He fired a shot into the ground, then Pushed on it, backflipping himself over the brick wall and behind cover.

Bullets continued to pelt the bricks as Wax dropped a gun and pressed his left hand to the underside of his right upper arm with a flare of pain and blood. The men on the other side of the wall kept firing, and some of the bullets didn't have blue lines. Aluminum bullets. Bleeder was far better funded than Wax had expected.

Why keep firing so rabidly? Were they trying to bring the wall down with the force of their shots? *No. They're trying to hold my attention so I can be flanked.*

Wax grabbed Vindication, holding his bleeding arm as he raised it—it *hurt*—just as several shadows wearing no metal ducked into the other side of the building site. Wax plugged the first one in the head, then dropped the second with a shot to the neck. Three others knelt, raising crossbows.

Something pulled one of them into the shadows. Wax faintly heard an *urk* of pain just before he fired at the second. He turned his gun toward the third to find it slumping down, something stuck into its head. A knife?

"Wayne?" Wax asked, hurriedly reloading Vindication with bloody fingers.

"Not exactly," a feminine voice said. A tall figure crawled through the mists, moving over a pile of bricks to reach him. As she drew closer, he could make out large eyes, jet hair, and a sleekly elegant gown—that was now missing the bottom half, below the knees. The woman from the party, the one who had tried flirting with him.

Wax flipped Vindication, reloaded, up in a smooth motion, pointing it at the woman's head. The bullets outside stopped pounding the wall. The silence was far more ominous.

"Oh please," the woman said, pulling up beside the wall with him. "Why would I save you if I were an enemy?"

*Because you could be Bleeder,* Wax thought. Anyone could.

"Um … you're hurt," the woman said. "How bad is that? Because we should *really* start running right now. They're going to come charging in here shortly."

*Damn. Not much choice.* Trust her and potentially die, or not trust her and almost certainly die.

"Come here," Wax said, grabbing the woman and pulling her close. He pointed Vindication at the ground.

"They have snipers," she said. "On five roofs, watching for you to Push into the mists. Aluminum bullets."

"How do you know?"

"Overheard those fellows with the bows whispering as they moved around to come get you."

Wax growled. "Who are you?" he said through gritted teeth.

"Does it matter right now?"

"No."

"Can you run?"

"Yes. It's not as bad as it looks." Wax took off, the woman running at his side. The wound hurt like hell, but there was something about the mists.… He felt stronger in them. It shouldn't be so—he was no Pewterarm—but there it was.

In truth, getting shot was bad, but not as bad as people often made it out to be. This shot had gone through the skin and muscle under his arm, making it difficult to raise, but he wouldn't bleed out. Most bullets wouldn't actually stop a man; psychologically, the panic of being shot did the most harm.

The two of them charged out the back side of the building, past the man with a knife in his head. Behind them shouts rose in the mist, and a few of the ambushers trying to get into the building took wild shots.

The woman ran well despite being in a gown. Yes, she'd ripped off the bottom half, but she still seemed to run too easily, without seeming to break a sweat or breathe deeply.

Blue lines. Ahead.

Wax grabbed Milan by the arm, yanking her to the side into an alleyway as a group of four men burst out of a cross street, leveling guns.

"Rusts!" Wax said, peeking around the corner. This short alleyway ended at a wall. The thugs had him surrounded.

"How many men does Bleeder have?" Wax muttered with another curse, under his breath.

"These can't be Bleeder's men," Milan said. "How would she have recruited such an army? In the past she's always worked on her own."

Wax looked at her sharply. How much did she know about all this?

"We're going to have to fight," Milan said as shouts sounded from behind them. She reached to her chest, where her gown exposed considerable cleavage.

Waxillium had seen some odd things in his life. He'd visited koloss camps in the Roughs, even been invited to join their numbers. He'd met and spoken with God himself and had received a personal gift from Death. That did not prepare him for the sight of a pretty young woman's chest turning nearly transparent, one of the breasts splitting and offering up the hilt of a small handgun.

She grabbed it and pulled it out. "So convenient," she noted. "You can store all sorts of things in those."

"Who *are* you?"

"MeLaan," she said, rising and holding her gun in two hands. The pronunciation was slightly different this time when she said her name. "The Father promised you help. I'm it."

A Faceless Immortal. As soon as she stopped speaking, he heard a rustling in his mind. *You can trust this one.* Harmony's voice, accompanied by a sense of endlessness, a vision like he'd seen before. It was as good a confirmation as he could get that this wasn't Bleeder.

Wax narrowed his eyes at the woman anyway. "Wait. I think I know you."

She grinned. "We've met once before tonight. I'm charmed you remember. You want the ones in the back or the front?"

At least a dozen chasing them. Four ahead. He had to trust someone, sometime. "I'll take the ones behind."

"Such a gentleman," she said. "By the way, technically I'm not supposed to kill people. I … uh … think I already broke that rule tonight. If we happen to survive, please don't tell TenSoon that I murdered a bunch of people again. It upsets him."

"Sure. I can do that."

She grinned—whoever she was, this side of her was completely different from what she'd displayed previously. "Say when to go."

Wax peeked around the corner. Dark figures moved in the mist behind them, coming up on their position. If she was right, and this wasn't Bleeder, then who …

Aluminum bullets. Snipers to watch for his escape.

It was his uncle. Somehow Wax had been played. Oh, Harmony … If Bleeder and the Set were working together …

He tossed a bullet casing to the side, against the wall to his right, and held it in place with a light Allomantic push. He flexed his wounded arm, then raised both guns. "Go."

Wax didn't wait to see what MeLaan did. He Pushed against the casing, throwing himself out into the street, churning the mist. Men fired, and Wax increased his weight, then *Pushed* with a sweeping blast of Allomantic power. Some weapons were thrown backward, and some bullets stopped in the air. Men grunted as his Push sent them away.

Two men's weapons weren't affected by the Push. Wax shot them first. They fell, and he didn't give the other men time to go for the aluminum guns. He decreased his weight greatly and Pushed against the men behind him, hoping that the shove helped MeLaan.

His Push sent him into the middle of the men he was fighting. He landed, kicking one of the aluminum guns away into the mists, then lowered Vindication and drilled a thug in the head, just at the ear. The cracks of his gunfire rang in the night.

Wax kept firing, dropping the men around him as he spun through the mists. Some came at him with dueling canes while others fell back with bows. No Allomancers that he'd spotted. In the night, he could finally prove the worth of the mistcoat. As he dodged between the thugs—kicking the other aluminum gun away—the tassels on his coat spun in the air, seeming to meld with the mists. Men attacked where he had been, the tassels confusing them as they churned the fog.

He twisted between two of the thugs and raised a gun to either side and fired, sending them to the ground. Then he turned and leveled both weapons at the man who had been sneaking up on him.

*Both out, I believe.* He pulled the triggers anyway. The weapons clicked.

The terrified man stumbled back, then paused. "He's out! Move! He's defenseless!" The man charged forward.

Wax dropped the guns.

*Why, exactly, would they assume that I need guns to be dangerous?*

He reached into his coat and undid the rope at his waist. He pulled it free, draping the rope from his fingers. Ranette's hook clinked as it hit the ground.

The man in front of him hesitated at the sound, dueling cane held nervously.

"This," Wax said, "is how it used to be done."

He yanked the rope, whipping the metal end into the air, then Pushed the spike at the man's chest, letting the rope move through his fingers to give it more slack. It hit, cracking ribs, and Wax yanked the rope back, holding it on a tight leash and spinning the hook through the air as he turned. He Pushed again, slamming the metal into the man raising a bow.

Wax twisted and knelt, whipping the rope around. It spun before him in a grand arc, stirring the mist as he gave the rope more slack, then Pushed it, slamming the spike-hook past one man and into another's chest. Wax yanked the spike-hook back, catching the other man on the thigh, tripping him as he came forward with a dueling cane.

Wax caught the hook in one hand and turned, Pushing the hook forward into the shoulder of an ambusher. Wax ripped it free with a yank, then Pushed it directly back into the man's face.

*One more,* he thought. Wax whirled, pulling the hook back into his hand, searching.

The last man scrambled for something on the ground. He looked up, raising one of the fallen aluminum guns. "The Set sends its regards, law—"

He cut off as a shadow behind him rammed a knife into his back.

"Here's a tip, kid," MeLaan said. "Save the wisecracks until your foe is dead. Like this. See how easy it is?" She kicked the corpse in the face.

Wax looked around at the fallen and groaning men. He held the rope tightly. Those sharpshooters on the roofs might reposition soon and start firing. "We need to move fast. I think Bleeder is going after Lord Harms, my betrothed's father."

"Damn," MeLaan said. "You want to try to climb up and go after those sharpshooters?"

"No time," Wax whispered. He pointed down the street. "You go that way; I'll go the other way. If you get out, head back to the Counselor's Cup, a tavern over on Edden Way. I'll meet you there after I go for Lord Harms. If I or someone I send talks to you, first say the words 'all yellow pants.'"

"Sure thing."

"Good luck."

"I'm not the one who needs help, lawman," MeLaan said. "*I'm* basically bulletproof." She gave him a kind of mock salute, then took off down the street, charging through the mists.

Wax recovered Vindication, but didn't holster her. Instead, he grabbed one of the corpses nearby and lugged it up onto his shoulder, stuffing bullets into its pocket. Then he pulled off his gunbelt. He didn't know if those sharpshooters might be Metalborn, set to watch for lines of metal in the mists.

Just in case, he heaved the corpse overhead and Pushed, lobbing it upward through the mists. Then he Pushed on his gunbelt, sending it flying ahead of him down the street.

Finally he ran, chasing after the gunbelt and using Allomancy to knock it up and forward again as it started to fall. A gunshot broke the night, but he couldn't pinpoint its origin. He didn't know if the sharpshooter was trying to hit the corpse, his gunbelt, or him. Another shot followed.

He burst out of the alley, snatched his gunbelt off the ground, then leaped, soaring over the walkway and coming down in the frigid blackness of the canal. Dark water surrounded him, the guns towing him down as his mistcoat billowed outward.

He kicked downward, seeking the floor of the canal. And then, still submerged, he Pushed on the mooring rings on either side of the canal behind him. Most people, even seasoned gunmen, underestimated the stopping power of a good foot of water. Wax surged through the canal like a fish swimming downstream, continuing to Push on new mooring rings as they passed, staying centered in the canal and remaining submerged. He scraped the bottom of a boat overhead, but kept Pushing, praying he wouldn’t ram himself into anything in the depths.

By the time his breath ran out, he must have traveled a number of blocks. He burst out of the water and, coughing, crawled to the side of the canal and heaved himself out onto the walkway. He stumbled to his feet. Nobody shot him, which was a good sign.

He paused just long enough to catch his breath and roughly bind his arm, then took to the skies, heading for the Harms mansion.

# 12

"That's good," Wayne said, notepad out. "You're sure that fellow wasn't acting strange, then? Nothing odd?"

The serving woman shook her head, sitting with her arms wrapped around herself. They'd finally managed to get down from the top floor, following the panicked exodus by the rich types. The governor was surrounded by a bubble of guards over to Wayne's left, and a set of strong electric lanterns illuminated the misty night.

The green in front of the skyscraper felt right empty, now that so many people had left. He figured that would soon change, when Marasi returned with some more constables. She'd run off to fetch them, and give a report. That meant Wayne was the sole officer of lawkeepin' in the vicinity. A frightening thought.

"I've got one more question for you," Wayne said to the woman.

"Yes, officer?" she asked.

"Where'd you get those shoes?"

The woman blinked, then looked down. "Um … My shoes?"

"Yeah, your shoes," Wayne said. "Look plenty comfortable, they do. Can never have too many pairs of black pumps. They go with *rusting* everything."

She looked back at him. "You're a man."

"Sure am," Wayne said. "Checked last time I pissed. The shoes?"

"Rousseau's," she said. "Third Octant, on Yomen Street." She paused. "They were on sale last week."

"Damn!" Wayne said. "That's beautiful. Thanks. You're free to go."

She gave him that look that people seemed to give only to Wayne, the one he hadn't quite figured. Ah well. He wrote down the name of the shop.

If he had to wear those awful pumps from his disguise box *one* more time, he'd probably go insane.

He popped a ball of gum into his mouth and wandered over toward the pile of guards, going over his notes. *That server up above,* he thought, tapping his pad with his pencil, *was not the kandra.* Wayne had talked to a dozen of the staff. All knew the fellow and said he hadn't been acting strange at all. But none of them liked him. He was a screwup, and none were surprised that he'd turned out to be rotten.

An amateur might think that picking the new guy made for a good disguise, but this Bleeder, she could be *anyone*. Why would she pick the low man on the list, someone who had only joined the staff a few weeks back? Sure, being new would give you an excuse to not know people's names, but by reports, this fellow hadn't forgotten anyone's name tonight. And picking a habitual klutz with a bad reputation would just lead to everyone watching over your shoulder. A terrible choice for an imitator.

That guy had been some other kind of mole. He shook his head.

"Where's Drim?" he asked the guards. "I wanna show him what I've got."

The guard leaned over, looking at Wayne's notepad. "All that's on there is a bunch of scribbles."

"It's for show," Wayne said. "Makes people talk more if they think you're writin' stuff down. Dunno why. I sure wouldn't want anyone rememberin' the slag I say…." He hesitated, then shoved aside the guard, looking into the middle of the pile. Drim wasn't there, and neither was the governor.

"What'd you do with him!" Wayne said, turning on the others. A smug group of bastards, they were.

"It was best everyone thought he was still here," the guard said. "In truth, he and Drim headed to a secure location ages ago. If we fooled you, then hopefully we fooled the assassin."

"Fooled … I'm supposed to be protectin' the guy!"

"Well, you're doing a rusting good job of that, mate, ain'tcha," the guard said, then smirked.

So Wayne did the only reasonable thing. He spat out his gum, then decked the fellow.

* * *

Wax rarely appreciated the city as much as he did when he needed to get somewhere quickly.

To the eyes of a man burning steel, Elendel was alight and full of motion, even while shadowed by darkness and mist. Metal. In some ways, that was the true mark of mankind. Man tamed the stones, the bones of the earth below. Man tamed the fire, that ephemeral, consuming soul of life. And combining the two, he drew forth the marrow of the rocks themselves, then made molten tools.

Wax passed among the skyscrapers like a whisper, the motion drying his clothing. He became just another current in the mists, and moving with him in radial spokes was a majestic network of blue lines—like a million outstretched fingers pointing the way to anchors he could use along his path. When even a galloping horse was too slow, Wax had steel. It burned in him, returning to the fire that gave it shape.

From it he drew power. Sometimes that wasn't enough.

But this night, he exploded through the lit upper windows of the Harms dwelling, rolling and coming up with guns leveled. Lord Harms swiveled in the chair of his writing desk, knocking over his pot of ink. The red-faced older man had a comfortable paunch, an easy manner, and a pair of mustaches that were in competition with his jowls to see which could droop farthest toward the floor. Upon seeing Wax, he started, then scrambled to reach into his desk drawer.

Wax scanned the room. Nobody else there. No enemies in the corners, no moving bits of metal in closets or the bedroom. He'd arrived in time. Wax let out a sigh of relief, standing up as Lord Harms finally got his desk drawer open. The man whipped out a pistol, one of the modern semiautos that were popular with the constables. Harms leaped to his feet and rushed over to Wax, holding his gun in two hands.

"Where are they!" Harms exclaimed. "We can take them, eh, old boy?"

"You have a gun," Wax said.

"Yes indeed, yes indeed. After what happened last year, I realized that a man has to be armed. What's the emergency? I'll have your back!"

Wax carefully tipped the point of Lord Harms's gun downward, just in case a bullet was chambered—because, fortunately, the man hadn't locked a magazine into the pistol. Wax glanced behind at the windows. He'd flung them open with a Push as he approached, but they were meant to open outward, *not* inward. He'd ripped both right off their hinges, toppling one while the other hung by its corner. It finally gave way, crashing to the floor, cracking the glass inside the wooden frame.

Mist poured in through the opening, flooding the floor. Where was Bleeder? In the house somewhere? Impersonating a maid? A neighbor? A constable passing on the street?

Standing in the room with him?

"Jackstom," Wax said, looking to Lord Harms, "do you remember when you first met me, and Wayne was pretending to be my butler?"

Harms frowned. “You mean your uncle?”

*Good,* Wax thought. An impostor wouldn’t know that, would she? Rusts … He’d have to suspect everyone.

“You’re in danger,” Wax said, sliding his guns into their hip holsters. His suit was basically ruined from the swim in the canal, and he’d tossed aside his cravat, but the sturdy mistcoat had seen far worse than this. “I’m getting you out of here.”

“But…” Lord Harms trailed off, face blanching. “My daughter?”

As if he had only one.

“Steris is fine,” Wax said. “Wayne is watching her. Let’s go.”

The problem was, go where? Wax had a hundred places he could take Harms, but Bleeder could be lurking at any of them. The odds were certainly in Wax’s favor, and yet …

*Bleeder is ancient,* Harmony had said. *Older than the destruction of the world. She is crafty, careful, and brilliant.… She spent centuries studying human behavior.*

Any option Wax chose could be the very one Bleeder had predicted he would choose. How did you outthink something so old, so knowledgeable?

The solution seemed easy. You didn’t try.

* * *

Steris left ZoBell Tower to find Wayne sitting across the street from a huddle of bruised and obviously angry men. Wayne was eating a sandwich.

“Oh, Wayne,” she said, looking from the hostile, wounded men and back to him. “Those are the governor’s guards. He’s going to need them tonight.”

“’s not my fault,” Wayne said. “They was bein’ unaccommodating.” He took a bite of his sandwich.

She sighed, settling down beside him and looking up through the mists toward the tower. She could make out the lights on various floors glowing like phantoms above, leading all the way up to the very top.

“This is how it’s going to be, with him, isn’t it?” she asked. “Always being left behind in the middle of something? Always *half* feeling as if I’m part of his life?”

Wayne shrugged. “You could do the noble thing, Steris. Give up on the whole marriage. Let him loose to find someone he actually likes.”

“And my family’s investment in him and his house?”

“Well, I know this here is revolutionary words, Steris, but you can loan a chap money *without* him havin’ to jump you in appreciation, if you know my meanin’.”

Good *Harmony* he could be shockingly unmannered. He wasn’t like this to others. Oh, he was crass and whimsical, but rarely blatantly rude. He saved that for her. Was he expecting her to fight back, prove herself somehow? She'd never been able to figure this man out. Preparing what to say to him only seemed to make him more vulgar.

"Did he say where he was going?" she said, trying to remain polite.

"Nah," Wayne said, taking a bite of his sandwich. "He's chasin' Bleeder down. Means he could have gone anywhere, and so tryin' to find him is useless. He'll come back for me when he can. If I leave, I'll just end up missing him."

"I see." She settled back, crossing her feet on the curb and staring up at those lights. "Do you hate me because of what I represent, Wayne? The responsibilities that called him back?"

"I don't hate you," Wayne said. "I find you repulsive. That there is an important distinction, it is."

"But—"

Wayne stood up. He shoved the rest of the sandwich into his mouth.

Then he walked over to the guards that were glaring at him and sat down. The implication was obvious.

*I'd rather be here.*

Steris closed her eyes, squeezing them shut, and tried to pretend she was someone other than herself for a time. Eventually, sounding bells announced the arrival of constable carriages. She stood up and composed herself, relieved when Marasi exited one of them and hurried over.

"Waxillium?" she asked.

Steris shook her head.

"Get in," Marasi said, pointing to one of the carriages. "I'm sending you someplace safe."

"I think the danger has passed here," Steris said. "Unless Wayne is picking fights again."

"No," Marasi said. "The danger has only just started."

Something in the younger woman's tone gave Steris pause. Other constables weren't piling out of the carriages. In fact, they seemed to be waiting for Marasi. They weren't coming here to investigate the man Waxillium had chased off.

"Something's happened, hasn't it?" Steris asked.

"Yeah," Marasi said. "Wayne, get over here! We've got work to do."

* * *

Wax stashed Lord Harms at the very top of Feder Tower. He'd chosen its location on the city map by picking random numbers; hopefully Bleeder wouldn't be able to outthink a plan with no thought involved. Harms had instructions to lie low, hide in the darkness and stay quiet. Even if Bleeder could Steelpush and search in the night, the chance of her happening upon Harms was ridiculously low verging on impossible. That didn't stop Wax from worrying. Steris's father was a silly man, but good-natured and amiable.

It was the best Wax could do, as he needed to locate the governor. That hunt took Wax longer than he'd have assumed, which was actually a good thing. It meant that Drim, despite his dislike of Wax, was doing his job properly. Best Wax could determine, they had sent at least three unmarked carriages away from ZoBell Tower: two decoys, and one with the governor inside. He spotted one on Stanton Way, and dismissed it. Too obvious, with the guards riding on top. Guessing that another had gone east, he found it driving around in a circle in the Third Octant, also trying to draw attention. It was moving too slowly.

Besides, the governor wouldn't go that way. Innate was a fighter. He wouldn't want to be seen hiding. So it was that Wax found himself perched on the top of a building near Hammond Promenade, a few streets from Innate's own mansion. He'd return here, eschewing safehouses in the city. He'd want to be in his center of power and authority.

The mists seemed to glow here in the city, lit by a thousand lights—an increasing number of them electric. It took long enough for the carriage to arrive that Wax was starting to second-guess himself. But arrive it did: a tall-topped enclosed coach with red curtains. Yes, it was quite nondescript. The horses, however, were from the governor's prized breeding stock. Just like the two decoys.

Wax shook his head as he jumped and Pushed his way to the top of the stone archway outside the First Insurance Bank. The coach moved at a fair clip and held no obvious guards. They must have taken a very roundabout way to take so long to reach here. Wax leaped off the bank's facade and Pushed on a streetlight, hurling himself after the governor's coach. He landed on its top and nodded to the surprised coachman, then swung down alongside the vehicle and knocked on the coach's door, hanging by one arm above the blur of cobblestones beneath. They were certainly running the animals hard.

After a few moments the window shade opened, revealing Drim's surprised face. "Ladrian?" he said. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Being polite," Wax said. "May I come in?"

"What if I refuse?"

"Then I *stop* being polite."

Drim sneered, but glanced to the side, where the governor rode with his hat in his lap. The man nodded, and Drim sighed and turned back to the door.

They didn't stop the carriage. So Wax had to let go, drop a bullet casing, and Push back to the carriage as Drim opened the door. He grabbed it by the handle, Pushing off a passing light, and ducked into the vehicle, ending up seated opposite Drim and the governor.

Drim would be a perfect person to imitate. As would the carriage driver, as would basically anyone with access to the governor, including his wife and family.

"Lord Ladrian," Innate said with a sigh. "Breaking up the party wasn't enough for you? You have to harass me on the way home from it as well?"

Wax shrugged, then moved to climb back *out* of the carriage. He had the door half open before Innate, sputtering, snapped, "What are you doing now, you fool?"

"Leaving," Wax said. "There are thousands of places I could be right now, most of them more pleasant." He hesitated, then pulled out one of his Sterrions and flipped it in his hand, holding it grip-first to the governor. "Here."

The governor's eyes bulged. "Why would I need a gun? I have bodyguards."

"So did your brother," Wax said. "Take it. I'll feel guilty when you get shot, if I haven't done *something*."

"… Shot?" Innate blanched. "My brother was killed because of his flirtations with the underbelly of Elendel. They wouldn't dare touch me."

"I'm sure they wouldn't," Wax said, leaning out the door, then hesitated again and looked back in. "You know how to spot a kandra, right, Drim?"

"A what?" the thick-necked bodyguard said.

"Those are myths," Lord Innate said.

"Are they?" Wax said. "Then the one I met tonight must have been lying. Not sure how she made her skin transparent though. Oh well. Guess you have it in hand."

"You mean to tell me," Innate said, stopping Wax with a touch before he could move out the door again, "that one of the *Faceless Immortals* was at my party tonight?"

"Two, actually," Wax said. "One came to help. I would introduce you, have her prove her nature to you, but it does seem that your mind is made up. The other one at the party was the person who killed your brother. You sure you don't want a gun? No? All right, I'll just be—"

"You've made your point, Lord Waxillium," Innate said, sour-faced. He settled back beside the carriage's lantern, which burned gas with a proper light.

"My lord," Drim said, looking to Innate. "This is stupid. The Faceless Immortals? Every second person claims to have met one, just to get their stories in the broadsheets! You're not really considering these claims, are you?"

Innate studied Wax.

"He is," Wax said. "Because he knows *something* strange happened to his brother. Killed in his saferoom, guards murdered from behind by someone they trusted—and Winsting Innate took his security *very* seriously. More seriously than you do, I'd suspect, Mister Governor."

"You can introduce me to one of the creatures?" Innate asked. "Offer me proof of their existence?"

"Yes."

"But why," Drim said, "would one of Harmony's own servants kill Lord Winsting?"

"The kandra has gone insane," Wax said softly. "We don't know her motives yet, but she does seem to want you dead, Mister Governor. So my job is to keep you alive."

"What do we do?" Innate asked. "How do we prepare?"

"Well," Wax said, "first I take over your security."

"Like hell you do!" Drim said.

"You taking over is impossible," Innate agreed. "Drim has served me well for years. He … Where are you going?"

Wax turned back from the door. "There's a play I wanted to see tonight," he said, gesturing. "Figured I'd go catch the tail end while you two discuss this."

"And if this creature comes for me while you're gone?" Innate demanded.

"I'm sure your head of security can deal with it," Wax said. "He knew the kandra were at the party tonight, didn't he? And he most certainly didn't miss Wayne slipping in wearing a disguise. And—"

"You may review my security protocols," Innate said with a sigh. "And offer advice."

"Fine," Wax said, pulling the door closed as the carriage turned a corner and approached the governor's mansion. "But you have to agree to one thing right now. I'm going to give you both a passphrase, and I want you both to vow not to share it with *anyone*. Not even each other or Lady Innate. You'll also give me a passphrase. When we meet, we'll exchange them in a whisper, which will prove that none of us have been replaced."

"You honestly think I wouldn't know my own wife?" Innate asked tiredly.

“I’m sure you would,” Wax said, softening his tone. “But this is a requirement of my aid, and you must humor me. It will put my mind at ease.”

The family was most dangerous. Bleeder had sounded so confident, as if she had the governor in hand, which made Wax think the creature had already gotten to one of the family. Lady Innate hadn’t been at the party, but Harmony had said Bleeder could swap bodies whenever she wished. Rust and Ruin, what an awful spot to be in. Bleeder could have killed a niece or nephew, a toddler even, and be planning to imitate one of them to get to the governor. In the Historica, kandra imitated animals. The house pets could secretly be assassins.

Wax glanced at the governor, who looked profoundly disturbed, his hands clasped, eyes staring as if to see a thousand miles. The implications of it were sinking in. Innate wasn’t an idiot. Just an egotist and possibly a crook.

The carriage pulled up to the mansion and Drim climbed out. As Wax followed, the governor took him by the arm. “I will want to see this proof of yours, Roughian.”

“I’ll arrange a meeting tomorrow.”

“Tonight.”

Wax nodded.

“If this is true,” the governor said, still holding his arm, “what do we do? I’ve read the Words of Founding. I know what the Immortals were capable of. Ruin … this creature could be anyone. Passphrases won’t be enough. Not nearly.”

“They won’t,” Wax admitted. “Sir, the thing has access to the Metallic Arts too. At any time, she could be anything from a Pulser to an Archivist. Though she can only carry one at a time without risking loss of control, she can swap the powers out at will.”

“Great *Harmony*,” the governor whispered. “How do you stop something like that?”

“Frankly, I don’t know. You should probably already be dead.”

“Why am I not?” the governor asked, waving back Drim, who had peeked in to check on them. “This creature could have killed me as easily as she did my brother.”

“She seems to have some kind of agenda. Bigger than you. She might not want to bring you down until doing so topples the city government entirely.” Wax hesitated, then leaned closer. “Sir, you might want to leave Elendel.”

"Leave?" Innate said. "Have you *seen* what is going on in the city?"

Wax nodded. "I—"

"Labor strikes," Innate continued as if he hadn't heard Wax. "Food prices skyrocketing. Too many men from one job out of work, too many from another demanding to be treated better. Rusts, there are practically riots in the streets, man! And the *scandal*. I can't leave. My career would be over."

"Better than your life being over."

The governor glanced at him. He didn't seem to see it that way. "Leaving is impossible," Innate reiterated. "It would look like I'm abandoning the people—they'd think the scandal drove me into hiding. I'd be perceived as a coward. No. Impossible. I will send Lady Innate to safety, as well as the children. I must stay and *you* must deal with this thing, whatever it is. Stop it before it can go any further."

"I'll try," Wax said, leaning in. "Give me a passphrase to authenticate myself. Something memorable, but nonsensical."

"'Leavening on sand.'"

"Good. Mine for you is 'bones without soup.' You have a saferoom?"

"Yes," Innate said. "In the bottom of the mansion, beneath the sitting room."

"Set up in there," Wax said, climbing out of the carriage, "and if you lock the door, *don't* let anyone in until I arrive, and can give you the passphrase."

Soon after stepping down, Wax found himself pulling out Vindication.

He'd leveled the gun before he registered what had set him off. Cries of alarm, but not pain. A servant hastened out of the governor's mansion, passing pillars on the front lit stark white, like a line of femurs.

"My lord governor!" the woman cried. "We've had a telenote through the wire; something has happened. You're going to need to prepare a response!"

"What is it?" Wax demanded as the governor climbed from the carriage.

The servant hesitated, eyes widening at Wax's gun. She wore a sharp black suit, skirt to the ankles, red scarf at the neck. A steward, or perhaps one of the governor's advisors.

"I'm a constable," Wax said. "What is the emergency?"

"A murder," she said.

*Harmony, no* … "Not Lord Harms. Please tell me!" Had he left the man to be killed, in his haste to get to the governor?

"Lord who?" the woman asked. "It wasn't a nobleman at all, constable." She glanced at Drim, who nodded—Wax could be trusted. She looked back to Wax. "It was Father Bin. The priest."

* * *

Marasi stared up at the corpse, which had been nailed to the wall like an old drapery. One spike through each eye. Blood painted the man's cheeks and had soaked into the white ceremonial robes, forming a crimson vest. Almost like a Terris V. Blood stained the wall on either side of the corpse as well, smeared there by thrashing arms and fingers. Marasi shivered. The priest had been alive as this happened.

Though constables poked and prodded at the large nave of the church, Marasi felt alone, standing before that corpse and its steel eyes. Just her and the body, a disturbingly reverent scene. It reminded her of something out of the Historica, though she couldn't remember what.

Captain Aradel stepped up beside her. "I've had word of your sister," he said. "We've got her in one of our most secure safehouses."

"Thank you, sir."

"What do you make of it?" he asked, nodding toward the body.

"It's ghastly, sir. What exactly happened?"

"The conventicalists aren't being very helpful," he said. "I'm not sure if they're in shock, or if they see our intrusion here as offensive."

He gestured for her to go before him and they passed Wayne, who sat in one of the pews chewing gum and looking up at the body. Marasi and Aradel exited the domed nave and entered a small foyer where a row of ashen-faced people sat on some benches. They were conventicalists—those who worked in a Survivorist church aside from the priest.

A grey-haired woman sat at their head, wearing the formal dress of a church matron. She wiped her eyes, and several youths huddled against her, eyes down. Constable Reddi stood nearby; the lean man tucked his clipboard under his arm and saluted Aradel. Normally, this wasn't the sort of thing a constable-general would be involved in, but Aradel had been a detective for many years.

"Will you be handling the interrogation yourself, sir?" Reddi asked. The conventicalists stiffened visibly at the word "interrogation." Marasi could have smacked him for his tone.

"No," Aradel.

"Very good, sir," Reddi said, pulling his bow tie tight and taking out his clipboard. He stepped up to the conventicalists.

"Actually," Aradel said, "I was thinking we'd let Lieutenant Colms try."

Marasi felt a sharp spike of panic, which she smothered immediately. She wasn't afraid of a simple interrogation, particularly with amiable witnesses. But the way Aradel said it, so seriously, made her suddenly feel as if it were some type of test. Wonderful.

She took a deep breath and pushed past Reddi, who had lowered his clipboard and was eyeing her. The assembled group of eight people sat with slumped shoulders. How to best approach them? They'd described to a sketch artist what had happened, but details could separate Ruin from Preservation.

Marasi settled down on the bench between two of them. "My condolences on your loss," she said softly. "My apologies too. The constabulary has failed you this day."

"It's not your fault," the matron said, pulling one of the children tight. "Who could have anticipated … Holy Survivor, I knew those Pathians were a miscreant bunch. I always *knew* it. No rules? No precepts to guide their lives?"

"Chaos," a shaven-headed man said from the bench behind. "They want nothing but chaos."

"What happened?" Marasi said. "I've read the report, of course, but … rusts … I can't imagine…"

"We were waiting for evening celebration," the matron said. "The mists had put in quite the appearance! Must have been almost a thousand people in the dome for worship. And then he just sauntered up to the dais, that Pathian *mongrel*."

"Did you recognize him?"

"Course I did," the matron said. "It was that Larskpur; we see him at community functions all the time. People feel they have to invite a Pathian priest, as if to not show favoritism, though nobody wants them around."

Behind her, the underpriest nodded. "Little wretch of a man, barely fit his robes," he said. "Nothing ornate. Really just a smock. They don't even dress up to worship."

"He started talking to the crowd," the matron continued. "Like *he* was going to give the mistdawn sermon! Only it was vile stuff he spouted."

"Such as what?" Marasi asked.

"Blasphemy," the matron said. "But it shouldn't matter. Look here, constable. Why are you even talking to us? A *thousand* people saw him. Why are you treating *us* like we did something wrong? You should be off arresting that monster."

"We have people hunting for him," Marasi said, and rested her hand on the shoulder of one of the children; the little girl whimpered and clamped on to her arm. "And I promise you, we'll catch and punish the one who did this. But every detail you can remember will help us put him away."

The matron and the underpriest glanced at each other. But it was one of the others—a lanky altarman in his twenties—who spoke. "Larskpur said," the man whispered, "that the Survivor was a false god. That Kelsier had tried, and failed, to help humankind. That his death hadn't been about protecting us or Ascending, but about stupidity and bravado."

"It's what they've always thought," the matron said, "but don't say. Those Pathians … they claim to accept everyone, but if you push you can see the truth. They mock the Survivor."

"They want chaos," the underpriest repeated. "They hate that so many people look to the Survivor. They hate that we have standards. They have no meetings, no churches, no commandments.… The Path isn't a religion, it's a *platitude*."

"It stunned us, I'll tell you that," the matron said. "I thought at first that Father Bin *must* have invited Larskpur to speak. Why else would he be so bold as to step up to the pulpit? I was so horrified by what he said that I didn't notice the blood at first."

"I did," the underpriest said. "I thought he was wearing gloves. I stared at those fingers, waving, bright red. And then I noticed the drops that he was flicking across the floor and the pulpit as he gestured."

They all were quiet for a moment. "There isn't anything more to say," the matron finally said. "Larskpur gestured one last time, and the back draping fell down. There he was, our blessed father, nailed there in a terrible parody of the Survivor's Statemark. Poor Father Bin had been … hanging the whole time. Might have been still alive, bleeding and dying while we all listened to that blasphemy."

Marasi doubted that. Though the priest had obviously struggled at first, the spikes would have ended that quickly. "Thank you," she said to the distraught group. "You've been very helpful." She carefully pried the little girl's hands from her arm and passed her to the matron.

Marasi stood, walking to Aradel and Reddi, who stood on the other side of the room.

"What do you think?" Marasi asked softly.

"About the information," Reddi said, "or your interrogation techniques?"

"Either."

"That wasn't how I'd have done it," the short constable said. "But I suppose that you did put them at ease."

"They didn't offer much," Aradel said, rubbing at his chin.

"What did you expect?" Marasi asked. "Captain, this had to be the same person who killed Winsting."

"Don't jump to conclusions," Aradel said. "What would be the motive?"

"Can you explain this any other way?" Marasi said, gesturing toward the room with the dead priest. "A Pathian? Murdering? Sir, their priests are some of least aggressive people on the planet. I've seen toddlers more dangerous."

Aradel continued rubbing his chin. "Reddi," he said, "go get those conventicalists something to drink. They could use a warm mug right now, I'd suspect."

"Sir?" Reddi said, taken aback.

"You been spending so much time at the gun range you've gone deaf?" Aradel said. "Be about it, Captain. I need to talk to Constable Colms."

Reddi's glare at Marasi could have boiled water, but he moved off to do as ordered.

"Sir," Marasi said, watching him go, "I can't help noticing that you're determined to see the rest of the constables hate me."

"Nonsense," he said. "Just giving the boy a nudge. He's useless when he isn't trying to show off for me—those weeks when he thought he had the assistant's position sewn up were miserable. He's a better officer when he has somebody to compete with." He took Marasi by the shoulder and steered her away from the seated conventicalists. A junior corporal had just shown up with blankets and mugs of warm tea. Hopefully Reddi wouldn't be too put out at having that job stolen from him too.

"I," Aradel said, drawing her attention back to him, "can't fight mistwraiths and spirits in the night. I'm a watchman, not an exorcist."

"I understand that, sir," Marasi said. On their ride over here, she'd told him what Waxillium had said about Bleeder. She wasn't about to keep information like that from her superior. "But if the criminal is supernatural, what option do we have?"

"I don't know," Aradel said, "and that frustrates me to no end. I've got a city dry as a pile of autumn leaves, Lieutenant, and it's about to go up in flames. I don't have the manpower to hunt down a fallen immortal; I need to have constables on the streets trying to keep this city from consuming itself."

"Sir, what if the two are related?"

"The two murders?"

"The murders and the unrest, sir." She closed her eyes, remembering the chapel with its dome and pews, and tried to imagine it as it had been earlier. Larskpur standing in front and waving his hands, horrified parishioners fleeing and bearing the story that the Pathian leader had murdered a Survivorist priest …

"Bleeder, or whoever is behind this, has distracted the government with a scandal," Marasi said opening her eyes. "Now she strikes at one church leader in the guise of another? Sir, whatever her real motives are, she's obviously trying to strain Elendel. She *wants* this city to break."

"You might be ascribing too much to one person, Lieutenant."

"Not just a person," Marasi said. "A demigod. Sir, what started the worker strikes?"

"Hell if I know," Aradel said, patting at his pocket and taking out his cigar case. He opened it and found only a little folded note. He grimaced and showed it to her. *There's a banana in your drawer.* "Damn woman will be the death of me. Anyway, I suspect the strikes have been building for a while. Harmony knows I sympathize with the poor fools. Get paid like dirt while the house lords live in mansions and penthouses."

"But why now?" Marasi asked. "It's the food, right? Suddenly spiked prices, worry that even when the strikes end, there won't be food to be bought?"

"That certainly hasn't helped," Aradel agreed. "Those floods are going to be a strain."

"A broken dam. Did we investigate that properly?"

Aradel paused, little paper half folded to return to his pocket. "You think that could have been sabotage?"

"Could be worth checking," Marasi said.

"Could be indeed," Aradel said. "I'll see if I can spare some men. But if you're right, what's this creature's endgame?"

"General mayhem?" Marasi asked.

Aradel shook his head. "Maybe it's different for mistwraiths, but men who do things like this, they do it to *prove* something. They want to show how clever they are, or they want to stop an injustice. Maybe she wants to bring someone down. Isn't the governor a Pathian?"

"I think so."

"So this murder tonight could be an attempt to discredit his religion." Aradel nodded. "Kill his brother, expose a scandal, undermine his faith, cause riots during his tenure … Rusts, this could be about making sure that Innate doesn't just die, he gets *stomped* to the *ground*."

Marasi nodded slowly. "Sir. I … might have proof that the governor is corrupt."

"What? What kind of proof?"

"Nothing definitive," she said, blushing. "It has to do with his policies, and when he's changed his mind on bills, when he's voted irregularly following visits with certain key individuals. Sir, you said you hired me in part because of my ability to read statistics. I'll show you what I have once it's all arranged, but the story the governor's record tells is of a man who is offering himself up for sale."

Aradel ran a hand through his hair, red flecked with grey. "Harmony.

Keep this quiet, Lieutenant. We'll worry about it another time. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. And I agree."

"But good work," he noted, then jogged over to take crime scene reports. Marasi couldn't help feeling a thrill that he'd listened to what she said, even when all she could offer was half explanations. At the same time, however, a disturbing thought struck her. What if *Aradel* was secretly the kandra, somehow? How much damage could Bleeder do if she had an entire octant's constables under her thumb?

No. Aradel had been around people when the priest was murdered. Rusts … the creature would have Marasi jumping at shadows, wondering if everyone she met was a kandra. She went to get herself a cup of that tea, hoping it would help her banish the image in her head of poor Father Bin hung from the wall. She wasn't halfway to the table with the flasks before the doors to the foyer slammed open and Waxillium strode in.

He trailed tassels like the curling mists, his powerful stride prompting lesser constables to scuttle out of his way. How was it that he could so fully encapsulate everything the constables *should* be, but weren't? Noble without being pandering, thoughtful yet proactive, unyielding yet inquisitive.

Marasi smiled, then hurried after him. It wasn't until they reached the chapel, with its large glass dome and the dead priest hanging on the far side, that she realized she'd forgotten entirely about getting tea. A headache still thumped inside her skull.

Aradel stood inside the nave, accompanied by two young constables. "Lord Ladrian," he said, turning toward Waxillium. "We'll have a report on the body ready for you in—"

"I'll see for myself, constable," Waxillium said. "Thank you." He dropped a bullet casing and rose into the air, soaring over rows of pews beneath the dome to land on the dais.

Aradel sighed and muttered a curse under his breath, then turned to one of the corporals. "See that His Lordship gets whatever he needs. Maybe he can make something of this damn mess—assuming he doesn't just shoot the place up instead."

The young constable nodded, then ran to join Waxillium, who was saying something to Wayne, who had stepped up to join him. Whatever Waxillium said sent the shorter man scuttling out the doors on some errand.

The constable-general shook his head, a sour grimace on his lips.

"Sir?" Marasi said. "You're upset with Lord Waxillium?"

Aradel started, as if he hadn't seen—or hadn't registered—her standing there. "Pay no heed, Lieutenant. His Lordship is a great resource to this department."

“Sir, that has the sound of a practiced answer to it.”

“Good,” Aradel said, “because it took me a long time to learn to say it without cursing.”

“Could I have the non-practiced version?”

Aradel looked her over. “Let’s just say that it must be damn nice, Lieutenant, to have other people to clean up your messes for you.” He nodded to her, then stalked from the room.

Rusts. Was that how Aradel saw Waxillium? A rogue nobleman accustomed to getting what he wanted, blunt in ways that Aradel could never be? The constable-general wasn’t a nobleman, and had to worry about funding, politics, the future of his men. Waxillium could just butt in and do what he liked, shooting and letting his status—both as an Allomancer and a house lord—get him out of it.

That perspective was eye-opening. Waxillium was a *trouble*. A worthwhile trouble, as he did get things done, but almost as bad as the problems he solved. But for that brief moment he seemed less an ally and more a storm that you had to prepare for and clean up after.

Disturbed, she walked up through the room to join him beside the body.

“Those spikes give off strong lines,” Waxillium noted to her, pointing at Father Bin’s ruined face. “To my Allomantic senses, I mean. From what I’ve read, I think that means they’re not Hemalurgic spikes. Those are supposed to be tough to see and Push on, like metalminds.”

“What would spiking him accomplish?” Marasi asked.

“No idea,” Waxillium said. “Still, when you get that body down, send me a sample of metal from each spike. I want to run some tests on their composition.”

“All right,” Marasi said.

“We should have seen it. She’s trying to drive a wedge between the Pathians and the Survivorists.”

“The governor is Pathian,” Marasi said. “We think Bleeder is trying to get at him.”

“You’re right,” Waxillium said, narrowing his eyes. “But that’s not her true goal. She wants to overthrow the city. Perhaps the governor’s murder will be the capstone. But what does this have to do with me?”

“Everything doesn’t *have* to be about you, you know.”

“Not everything,” Waxillium agreed. “Just this.”

Annoyingly, he was probably right. Why else would Bleeder be parading around the city wearing the body of the man who had killed Waxillium’s wife? Waxillium left the corpse, pushing out of the building though the rear exit. There a narrow alleyway led out to the street. Marasi followed, joining

Waxillium in the darkness and mists.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“You don’t plan a dramatic murder like this one without preparing an escape route,” Waxillium said. “From the discarded handkerchiefs and handbags left behind, I’d guess the room was full when she revealed the body. The worshippers ran out the main doors, and the murderer would have expected this. She would have come out the back, getting away while everyone was either fleeing or stunned.”

“Okay…”

“Narrow alley,” Waxillium said, kneeling to inspect the wall. “Look at this.”

Marasi squinted. The bricks along the wall here had been scraped, leaving behind something that had rubbed off on them. “Looks metallic. Silvery.”

“Paint, I’d guess,” Waxillium said. “Where it came from is a small question, unfortunately, compared to the larger ones. Why would she kill this priest in the first place? She warned me she was going to. I thought she meant your father. Not Father Bin.”

“Waxillium,” Marasi said. “We need more information. About what this creature can do, and what its motives might be.”

“Agreed,” Waxillium said. He rose and stared down the alleyway. “I’d like to ask God a few hard questions. I doubt He’s going to make Himself available, however, so we’ll have to settle for someone else.”

“Who?” Marasi asked.

“I had some help tonight,” Waxillium said. “From an unexpected source. I have a feeling that an interview with her will be illuminating. Want to come?”

“Of course I do,” Marasi said. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“Well,” Waxillium said, “I’m worried that interacting with her might prove … theologically difficult.”

# 13

Wayne didn't consider himself to be a particularly religious man. He figured that Harmony didn't pay much attention to fellows like him, for the same reason a master painter didn't often wonder what his mom had done with the pictures he'd given her as a toddler.

That said, Wayne *did* like to visit the temple of the common man now and then. It made him feel better and forget his problems for a spell. So he knew the place when Wax sent him on ahead to check it over.

The temple huddled on the corner of an intersection, a stately old building, squat and stubborn. Newer tenements perched on either side, some six stories tall, but the temple had the air of an old gaffer in his chair who hadn't the inclination to look higher than a fellow's knees. As Wayne had expected, the door was open and friendly, still spilling out light, though it was starting to get late. He strolled down the lane and nodded to the temple guard, who wore a cap and overalls for his uniform and bore a ceremonial stick what seemed to have bits of hair sticking out of the end, likely from clubbing men upside the head for being too rowdy.

Wayne tipped his hat to the man and chanted the proper invocation to gain admittance. "Hello, Blue. How watery's the beer today?"

"Don't make trouble at the pub tonight, Wayne," the man intoned in response. "My temper is really short."

"Temper?" Wayne said, passing him. "That's a funny name for it, mate, but if the ladies like you givin' silly names to your body parts, I ain't gonna say nothin'."

Ritual introductions finished, Wayne stepped into the temple proper. Inside, men and women bowed at their places, heads drooping as they considered the deep complexities of the cosmere. Their prayers were made in mumbled exchanges to friends, and their incense in the burning of pipes. A picture of Old Ladrian himself hung over the altar, a man with a ripe paunch and a cup thrust forward, as if to demand attention.

Wayne stood in the doorway, head bowed in respect, and dabbed his fingers into a trail of beer dripping from a nearby table, then anointed himself on the forehead and navel, the mark of the spear.

The scent marked him as a pilgrim upon this holy ground, and he passed among the penitent seeking forgiveness on his way to the altar. The air of the place was odd tonight. Solemn. Yes, the temple was a place of contemplation, but it should also be a place of joy. Where were the hymns, sung in a holy slur? Where was the laughter, the joyful noise of celebration?

*Not good,* he thought as he settled onto one of the pews—in this case a rough, circular table with scriptures carved into it, like *Mic is a total git* and *The sausages is rubbish*. He'd always liked that one. It brought up real theological implications, it did. If the food they ate was trash, were they ultimately trash? Were they all nothing in the end? Or should one instead see even trash as something to be elevated, as it had been created by the God Beyond like everything else?

Wayne settled back in his seat and drew a few looks from nearby tables. As a lovely young conventicalist in a plunging top passed by carrying mugs, he took her arm. "I'll haaave…" he blinked. "Ahll have some whiskey." He had the accent and tone of a man who had been very, *very* pious already this night.

The maid shook her head and continued on her way. Those nearby ignored him. Wayne closed his eyes and listened to their prayers.

"They're just gonna let us starve. You heard the governor, Ren. All he cares about is his rusting reputation."

"We're supposed to have the good life. Harmony made this land for us all. But do we get to enjoy it? No. Its riches only mean that the fine folk get more outfits and big houses."

"Something needs to change in this city. I ain't out of work like those fellows at the steel mill, but Harmony…"

"Sixteen-hour shifts. I leave before my little girl gets up, and she's in bed before I get back. See her once a week, I do."

"We work and die so we can give it all up to the same people. They own the building we live in. Ain't that the scam? Work for them all day, then give it all back at night for the privilege of bein' able to survive another day to keep workin'."

Weighty prayers, those were.

Wayne kicked back away from his table and walked to the altar at the front of the room, with its bottles on the rack behind shining in the light. Gas lights. Real traditional, this temple was. He settled down at the altar between a fellow with suspenders and another with arms so hairy he had to have some bear in him. Grandfather, at least.

"Whhiskey," Wayne said to the priest behind the altar.

The man gave him a cup of water with a lemon in it instead. Rusts. Might have laid the accent on a little too thick. Wayne settled back, sipping his water.

The men here at the altar, they didn't complain. They just stared, holding their cups. Wayne nodded. Those were silent prayers, the kind that you could read in their eyes. He reached out and plucked the cup from the next man's hands and gave it a sniff. Plain rum. What fun was that?

He reached over to bear-fur and plucked his drink from his fingers as well, and gave it a sniff. Both men turned toward him as he downed the rest of his water, then mixed their drinks together in his cup. He gave it a squeeze of his lemon and a pinch of sugar from behind the altar, then added some ice, placed a coaster on top, and shook like his life depended on it. Which it might, since the fellow with rugs on his arms had just stood up and cracked his knuckles.

Before he could start pounding, Wayne spun a cup toward each man and settled back in thought. The cups settled into place, and the altar fell silent. Hesitant, the men reached out and tried their drinks. Suspenders tried his first.

"*Wow*," the man said. "What did you do?"

Wayne didn't reply, tapping the table with one finger as hairy-arms tried his drink and nodded appreciatively. Living among the fancy folk had taught Wayne a few things. Fancy folk couldn't ever do anything the ordinary way. Sometimes he thought they acted strange just so they wouldn't be like regular folk.

But they *did* know how to get drunk. He'd give them that.

The priest came over to investigate the disturbance, but both men just wanted more of what Wayne had made. The priest listened to them try to explain it, and then nodded—looked like he'd worked some fancy parties, or had some rich folk come in.

Wayne slipped something onto the altar. A couple of bullet casings.

"What's this?" the priest asked, setting down the cup he'd been wiping. "Is this … is this *aluminum*?"

Wayne stood up and gathered a few things from behind the altar, then piled them in the priest's arms. He had ice, fortunately, from a delivery earlier. That was getting cheaper and cheaper these days, with shipments down from the mountains. The fellow also had a nice collection of spirits and some fixings. Enough for Wayne to make do.

Wayne pointed for the man to follow him, then began working his way through the room. He stopped at each table, taking their drinks and reworking them. Those with beer got juice or soda water, mixed carefully and transformed. He always left them with something like what they'd started with, but new. Fresh. He added ginger to some—worked real nice with lemon—and bitters to others. He tried to use something from every table, and only got cussed at a couple of times. Before too long, he had the temple feeling far more companionable. In fact, he'd drawn something of a crowd.

The group cheered as he settled down at a table in front of a tall, pretty woman with large eyes and long fingers. The drink he made for her wasn't actually anything special—gin and lime, with some soda water and a hint of sugar—but the secret ingredient … well, that *was* something special. A pouch of blue powder he'd found at the party earlier that night. He'd traded some sand for it.

He mixed the powder into the drink with a hidden twist of the fingers, shaking, before finally adding the lime. As he slid the cup in front of the woman, the drink's blue liquid swirled and moved, then blushed to a deep violet, the color moving through it like growing mists.

Those around him hushed in awe, and the woman smiled at him. He gave her a grin back. He was taken, yes, but he needed to keep practicing his flirtin' or Ranette was likely to start ignoring him.

And then the skin of the woman's cheeks shifted to *blue,* then *violet,* just like the drink had. Wayne jumped back from the table as her skin returned to normal. She took the drink with a sly smile and sipped at it. "Nice," she said, "but I usually like something with more kick to it."

The others in the temple were retreating to their pews. They'd enjoyed the show, but were looking forward to enjoying their liquor even more. They didn't seem to have noticed what the woman's skin had done. Perhaps Wayne had been mistaken. He hesitantly took the seat back and looked at the woman, whose eyes—clear as daylight—shifted from blue to violet, then once again to blue.

"Well hang me," Wayne said. "You're that immortal, ain't you?"

"Sure am," she said, sipping her drink and holding out her hand for him to shake. "Name's MeLaan. Waxillium told me to say 'all yellow pants' to prove it. You did well here tonight. When I first arrived, I felt like the place was going to burst from all the anger. You might have stopped a riot."

"It's just one pub," Wayne said, shaking her hand, then settling back in his chair. "One outta hundreds. If a riot is brewin', I can't stop it with some girly drinks."

"True, I suppose."

"What I need to do," Wayne said, "is get the whole *city* drunk."

"Or, you know, advocate workers' rights to bring down working hours, improve conditions, and meet a base minimum of pay."

"Yeah, yeah," Wayne said. "That too. But if I could get *everybody* drunk, think how much happier this city would be."

"So long as you get *me* drunk first, I'd be fine with it." She held out her cup to him. "Top a lady off, will you?"

Wayne frowned. "Now, this ain't right. You're some kinda demigod or something. Shouldn't you be moralizin' at me?"

"Lo, behold," MeLaan said, wiggling her cup, "bring an offering to your deity in the form of one blue sunset, extra gin. And ye shall be blessed."

"I think I can do that," Wayne said. "Bloody hell, maybe I *am* religious after all."

* * *

The immortal demigod took a throaty slurp of her beer, then slammed the mug down onto the table, grinning like a four-year-old who had been paid in cookies to rat out her sister. Wax studied her as she looked Wayne in the eyes and let out a belch that could have woken the dead. Beside Wax, Wayne nodded in appreciation, looking quite impressed. He then downed his own beer and belched back at MeLaan, easily twice as long and loud.

"How do you *do* that?" MeLaan asked.

"Years of trainin' and practice," Wayne said.

"I've been alive for well over half a millennium," MeLaan said. "I am *certain* I have more practice than you."

"You don't have the *will*, though," Wayne said, wagging his finger. "You gotta *want* it." He downed the rest of his mug and let out a protracted belch.

Marasi, who sat next to Wax in their booth at the pub, looked horrified by the exchange. Wax had allowed her to drive them here, if only so he could rebind his wound and check it over. The painkillers were doing their job, though. He could barely feel the hit.

After the short ride, he and Marasi had walked in on these two in the middle of their belching … contest? Wax wasn't certain if it was a contest, or more a matter of mutual appreciation, like two virtuosos playing their favorite songs.

MeLaan finished her beer, then dramatically held up her hand. The palm split, forming lips, which then let out a soft belch.

“Cheating,” Wayne said.

“Just using what Father gave me,” MeLaan said. “Don’t tell me you wouldn’t belch out of other body parts if you could.”

“Well,” Wayne said, “now that you mention it, I *can* make a real interestin’ sound wif—”

Wax cleared his throat. “Not to defer a conversation about which parts of Wayne’s body can and can’t make noise, but I have to admit that you aren’t what I expected, Your Grace.”

“Bloody hell,” MeLaan said. “Please don’t call me that.”

“You’re a servant of Harmony,” Wax said.

“I’m from one of the later generations,” MeLaan said. “In kandra terms, I’m basically still a kid.”

“You lived through the Catacendre,” Wax said. “You knew the Originators.”

“I spent the Catacendre underground,” MeLaan said. “I was an adolescent, and didn’t know the land when it was covered in ash. You really don’t need to be intimidated by me.”

“You’re over *six hundred* years old,” Marasi said.

“So is dirt,” MeLaan said. She leaned forward. “Look, I’m just here to help. If you want someone to fawn over, I’ll send VenDell or one of the really ancient ones to you. They like it. I just want to see Paalm stopped, then helped.”

Wax leaned forward on the table. He could sense in the way MeLaan smiled at people passing by—the way she tapped her finger to the tavern song a group of drunk men sang in the corner—that she liked people. She liked being here, among them. She wasn’t aloof, as he’d expected, or withdrawn. Not even that alien, despite the fact that she’d just made a mouth in her hand. “You’re the one who brought me my earring,” he said, fingering his ear with its tiny spike. “All those years ago.”

MeLaan’s smile widened. “I was wearing the same body, but I’m still surprised you remember.”

“And whose body is it?” Marasi asked. “Where did you get those bones?”

“I made them,” MeLaan said, raising her chin. Her face went transparent, suddenly, revealing the skull underneath—one made of carved crystal of a vivid emerald color. “I prefer True Bodies, though if I need to I can take another form. I’ll warn you, as far as kandra go, I’m only so-so at impersonation.”

“And this one we’re huntin’?” Wayne asked. He’d started building a houselike tower using the thin wooden coasters strewn around the tavern table, balancing them on their ends.

"Paalm?" MeLaan said, turning her face back to normal. "She was one of our best. Of all the kandra I know, only TenSoon is better at it than she is."

"But she'll be erratic," Wax said. "She's gone mad. That should help us spot her, even in disguise, right?"

"Maybe," MeLaan said, grimacing. She took a few of the coasters and started her own tower. "Paalm is good, and imitation … well, it's kind of *ingrained* in us, particularly the older kandra who worked back in the days of the Final Empire. Some of them don't feel like they have personalities of their own; they don't know how to live unless they're being someone else."

"You seem to find the idea disturbing," Wax said, curious.

"I'm a youngster," she said with a shrug. "Never really had to serve the Lord Ruler. I've always served Harmony, who seems like a generally nice fellow."

An odd way to refer to God. Wax glanced at Marasi, who cocked an eyebrow at him and shrugged. Around them, the pubgoers chattered with a low hum of energy and enthusiasm. Wax and the others had settled into a secluded booth at the side. The warm gas lighting was somehow friendlier, more alive than the electric lights back at his mansion.

"All right," Wax said to MeLaan. "Let's talk about what Bleeder can do. And about how to kill her."

"You don't need to kill her," MeLaan said quickly, getting her tower to a second story. She glanced at Wayne, who already had his up to three levels. "Just remove her remaining spike, which will basically immobilize her. She's confused; we can deal with her once we have her in custody."

"Confused?" Wax said. "She killed a priest by *nailing him through the eyes*."

MeLaan's smile faded. "She only has one spike. She's not thinking straight."

"Yes," Wax said, "but she pulled the other spike out herself, right?"

"We think so," MeLaan admitted. "We're weaker than other Hemalurgic creatures. Only two spikes, and we can be taken. So she removed one."

"She wanted freedom to kill," Wax said. "She's not 'confused,' MeLaan. She's destructive and possibly psychotic. Tell me how to kill her."

MeLaan sighed. "Acid works, but that's horribly inefficient. If you crush her skeleton, she'll have a hard time moving, so maybe use that. Gunshots will be useless, as will most forms of physical damage. The spike—it's the key. Pull it out, and she'll revert to her primal state. It *is* the best way."

"Her primal state," Marasi said. "A mistwraith."

MeLaan nodded.

Wax tapped the table in thought. “If I can get the spike out, chances are that I’ve already immobilized her. If she’s tied up, what good will it do to remove the spike?”

“Waxillium,” MeLaan said, leaning forward, “you *do* realize what you’re dealing with? Paalm was trained by the ancients, and served the Lord Ruler *himself*. She quashed rebellions and overthrew kingdoms in his service, and she is intimately familiar with the intricacies of Hemalurgy. By your own accounts, she’s learned to use spikes to grant herself Allomancy and Feruchemy—something we thought impossible. If you have her captured, that is a state she’s not likely to remain in for long. *Remove that spike.*”

Wax felt a chill. “Right,” he said. “Will do.”

“Rusts,” Marasi whispered. “I thought you didn’t want us to be intimidated by you.”

“Me?” the kandra said. “I’m harmless.” She waved at the barmaid, then pointed at her mug. “I’m far less crazy than Paalm.”

“Great,” Wax said. He glanced at Wayne. “You look concerned.”

“Me?” Wayne said, placing a fourth level onto his tower. “Sorry. Tryin’ to think of how to get everyone in the city drunk.”

“I … I’m not going to ask.” Wax grabbed a few of the coasters as a barmaid dropped more on the table, noticing that they were playing with them. He started building a tower of his own. “So we get the spike out. How?”

“Easiest way is to call me,” MeLaan said. “I can get it out. But if I’m not there, don’t wait on me. Break her bones, start pulling them out, and eventually you’ll find the spike. It will take a strong stomach.”

*Great.* “Is there a way to spot a kandra? Wound patterns? Blood samples?”

MeLaan dug into her pocket. “Once we’ve shifted shapes, we lock into that body and *are* that person. We’ll bleed, and if you take off a finger, our prints will remain that of the person we’re imitating. Even another kandra will have trouble spotting a duplicate. Haven’t you read the Historica?”

“Several times,” Wax said, “but the kandra sections are kind of dull.”

“I feel like I should be offended by that.”

“Then you aren’t drunk enough,” Wayne responded. Five levels. Wax shook his head and concentrated on getting his second level built.

“Anyway,” MeLaan said, “locating other kandra was a problem in the past. So we did something about it, just in case. The more scientifically minded among us developed this.”

She slid something onto the table. A pair of needles, about as long as a man’s palm is wide, attached to metal syringes. Wax held one up.

"Inject that into a kandra," MeLaan said, "and the liquid inside will make her shape droop for a bit. The skin briefly goes clear, reveals who she really is."

"Nifty," Wayne said.

"One problem though," MeLaan said. "If you stick it into someone who *isn't* a kandra, it will kill them."

"Inconvenient," Marasi said, examining the other one.

"Yeah," MeLaan said. "We're working on that part. This is a last resort, obviously, but it *will* immobilize her briefly. If you want to find Paalm before using it, you can try to catch her in a lie. She won't have the actual memories of the person she's imitating. Conversely, if you see someone who isn't Metalborn use a power, that outs her too."

"I've got a feeling that if she's using her powers right in front of me, I'm dead anyway," Wax said.

The group fell silent. Wax took both syringes and tucked them into the pouch on his gunbelt. Marasi scribbled on a note pad, transcribing the conversation—he'd have to ask her for a copy. Drink refills arrived, and no payment was requested. What had Wayne done here before Wax arrived? He was afraid to ask.

*What help is this?* Wax thought, frustrated, his tower falling to pieces. A weapon he could use only when he was already a hundred percent certain who the impostor was? It felt like so little. Bleeder could be anyone. Bleeder could manifest any of the powers. Bleeder was ancient, brilliant, and crafty. …

"She has a plan," Wax said. "She's *not* simply crazy, MeLaan. There is more to this."

"You're still determined to kill her," MeLaan said, sighing.

"If I have to. Why are you so hesitant? I'd think that the kandra would be determined, more than anyone, to see this problem dealt with."

"She's not a 'problem,'" MeLaan said. "She's a person. Yes, I want to see her stopped. She *needs* to be stopped. But…" She settled back, then knocked over her small tower of coasters with a flick of the finger. "There's so few of us left. Hell, there weren't ever more than five or six hundred of us, and we lost a lot in the days before the Final Ascension. Imagine if your entire race consisted of three hundred people, lawman. Maybe you'd be a little more hesitant to see one of them slagged."

"A person's species shouldn't matter," Wax snapped. "I don't care if there are three hundred of you left or just three; when one of you starts nailing people to walls in my city, I'm going to—"

"Wax," Wayne interrupted, balancing his *sixth* story of beer-mat coasters.

"Check your pulse, mate."

Wax took a deep breath. "Sorry," he said.

"What was that," Marasi said, wagging her pencil from Wayne to Wax. "Pulse?"

"Sometimes," Wayne said, "Wax forgets he's a person and starts thinkin' he's a rock instead."

"It's Wayne speak," Wax said, grabbing some coasters and starting another tower. "For times when he thinks I should be a little more empathetic."

"You can be single-minded, mate."

"Says the man who once collected eighty different kinds of beer bottles."

"Yeah," Wayne said, smiling fondly. "Did that mostly to annoy you, I did."

"You're kidding."

He shook his head. "Started to hate all those rusting bottles, but each morning you'd curse when you tripped over a new box o' them, and it was just so melodious…"

"You know," MeLaan said, taking a pull on her drink, "you two aren't *anything* like I was led to believe."

"Tell me about it," Marasi said.

"For one thing," MeLaan added, "I had no idea that Kid Wayne was so talented with beer-mat sculptures."

"He cheated," Wax said. "He stuck some of the coasters on his lower level together with that gum stuff he's been chewing."

Marasi and MeLaan turned to Wayne, who grinned. He picked up his sculpture, knocking down the top levels, but revealing that the bottom three had—indeed—been stuck together.

"Wayne," Marasi said, aghast. "Are you that concerned with impressing us?"

"It wasn't about impressing anyone," Wax said. "The contest wasn't about how high the towers got—it was about if I'd spot what he did. He always cheats somehow. Back to the matter at hand, MeLaan. Your rogue kandra friend is planning something. If her plot gains momentum, it will roll over us and crush this city."

"I agree," MeLaan said. "So what do we do?"

"We outthink her," Wax said. "I need to know her motive. *Why* is she doing this? What drove her to pull out her spike in the first place?"

"I wish I knew," MeLaan said. "We've been trying to figure out the same thing."

"Tell me about her, then," Wax said, tapping at his empty shot glass.

"What is she like? What are her passions?"

"Paalm was the ultimate blank slate," MeLaan said. "Old-style kandra. Like I said, she spent so much time out on missions that she barely had a personality of her own. She had real trouble with that at the dawn of a new world. Some of the older generations, they liked to spend time in the Homeland, only left for a mission when forced to. Not Paalm. She was the Father's own, the kandra reserved specifically to do missions for the Lord Ruler." She hesitated. "She might know things from him. Things the rest of us weren't told. I think he may even have had her imitate Inquisitors at times, act as a mole among them.

"Anyway, she wouldn't have been able to impersonate an Inquisitor without a good grasp of Allomancy and Feruchemy. So maybe that's where she got the knowledge. She was loyal to the Lord Ruler, and then when he was gone, she became loyal to Harmony. Fanatical about it. Insisted on being given mission after mission, and never spent time with the rest of us. Kept to herself. She was almost always in character. Until…"

"Murderous rampage," Wayne said softly. "It's always the quiet ones. Well, and the psychopathic ones. That too."

*So what does that tell me?* Wax thought, leaving his little tower at three stories. *How would I approach this if it were any other criminal?*

MeLaan leaned back for a moment, as if lost in thought, then flipped a coaster at Wax's tower to knock it down. She grunted.

"What?" Wax said.

"I was just curious to see if you were cheating too."

"Wax never cheats," Wayne said, face halfway in his mug. Wax had never figured out how he could talk and drink at the same time without choking.

"That's incorrect," Wax said. "I cheat *infrequently*. That way nobody's expecting it." He stood up. "Can you think of a reason Bleeder would target the governor in particular?"

MeLaan shook her head.

"Do any of the other kandra know her better than you do?"

"Maybe one of the older ones," MeLaan said. "I'll see if I can get one of them to come talk to you."

"Good," Wax said. "But first I want you three watching the governor."

"I've got to report in to the precinct offices first," Marasi said. "I want to follow up on something there."

"Fine," Wax said. "Wayne, you head to the governor's mansion first."

"He ditched me last time."

"He won't again," Wax said. "I've persuaded him to listen, though we'll need him to meet MeLaan soon."

"Sure, all right," Wayne said. "It wasn't like I was planning to, you know, *sleep* tonight or anythin'."

"Sleep might be in short supply going forward," Wax said.

"You want me to go with him, Dawnshot?" MeLaan asked.

"Depends. Marasi, would you like some backup?"

"Yes please," she said.

"Watch her," Wax said, nodding toward Marasi. "And maybe give Aradel a glimpse of your nature. It's probably time to inform him what we're up against."

"Already done," Marasi said. "Though I'm sure he'd like proof."

Wax grunted. He hadn't ordered her to do that. "Be quick about your errand," Wax told her. "And get to the governor. I want more than one set of eyes on him. And before we split, I want each pair of us to exchange codes, individual and unknown to the others, so we each have a way to authenticate ourselves to one another. I've done the same with the governor and his top staff." Harmony, this was going to be a nightmare.

"Watching the governor isn't going to be enough, Wax," Marasi said, standing up from the table. "You yourself said it. Too reactive. So what else are we going to do?"

"I'll come up with something."

The others stood, and Wax towed Wayne by the arm to check to see that they were square with the pub manager. Surprisingly, Wayne had indeed paid for everything he should have. On their way toward the door, Wax explained to his friend a little idea he had for protecting the governor.

They stepped into the entryway of the pub, where MeLaan was waiting while Marasi fired up her beast of a motorcar. Wayne hiked off to catch a carriage to take him to the governor's mansion, and Wax took MeLaan by the arm.

"I hate this," he noted, soft enough to keep the bouncer outside from hearing. "Not being able to trust people I should always be able to. Second-guessing myself."

"Yeah," she replied. "But you'll handle it. There's a reason He came to you for this." She stepped in closer. Rusts, she was attractive—but then, it would be odd if she weren't, all things considered. "You and I aren't the only ones hunting Paalm, lawman—every kandra in the city is searching for her. Thing is, I don't think many of my brothers and sisters will be of use. They're timid about hurting others, particularly after what TenSoon was forced to do during the Remarked Duplicity. And beyond that, they can be an … inconsistent group."

“They’re God’s servants,” Wax said.

“Yes,” MeLaan replied, “and they’ve had centuries upon centuries to refine their eccentricities. Getting older does *not* tend to make you more normal, let me tell you. We don’t think like killers. We’ve been too closely in contact with Harmony. What Paalm is doing, it baffles us. It goes against everything we’ve believed and lived for centuries. I don’t think we’ll be able to find her, not in time. But you … you can.”

“Because I think like a killer.”

“I didn’t—”

“It’s all right,” Wax said, releasing her arm. “I am what I am.” He took his mistcoat from the peg by the door and shrugged it on before stepping out into the night. “Thanks, by the way,” he said.

“For?”

He tapped his ear, and the earring he wore in it. “This.”

“I was just the delivery girl.”

“Doesn’t matter. It was what I needed. When I needed it.” He dropped a bullet casing, then stilled it with his foot. “I’ll meet you all at the governor’s mansion.”

# 14

If you want to know a man, dig in his firepit.

The phrase was from the Roughs, maybe koloss in origin. Basically, it meant that you could judge a lot about a man's life by what he threw away—or by what he was willing to burn in order to stay warm.

A loud church clock rang eleven as Wax moved through the mists on Allomantic jumps. The sound echoed in the night, the bell tower hidden in the darkness. Eleven was not late these days, particularly not in the heart of the city, but it *should* have marked a time when most men and women had begun to seek their beds. Labor started early in the morning.

Only, a sizable portion of the laborers in the city didn't have a job to get up for right now. That was reflected in the busy streets and busier pubs, not to mention the Soothing parlors he passed, still open well into the night. Those were places where the downhearted could seek a different kind of relief, in the form of an Allomancer who—for a small fee—would wipe away their emotions for a time and leave them numb.

Rioting parlors were a different beast. There, you could choose the emotion you wanted and have it stoked within you. Those might be even more popular, judging by the line he saw outside one.

Wax delayed on a rooftop, listening, then headed for the sound of men shouting. He ran along the peaked roof and Pushed off the nails in the shingles, launching himself over a set of apartments in a quiet flutter, coming down and landing on a street beyond.

Here, he found a small Pathian sanctuary. Not the church with the bell he'd heard earlier; Pathian structures were too small for that. Built to resemble old Terris huts, they were often empty save for two chairs. One for you. One, ostensibly, for Harmony. The religion forbade worship, in a formal way. But talking to God was encouraged.

Tonight, the little sanctuary was under siege.

They shouted and threw rocks: a group of shadows in the mist, probably drunk. He could make them out well enough; a misty night was never too dark in the city, not with all the ambient light reflecting off the vapors.

Wax yanked Vindication from her holster and stalked forward, mistcoat flaring behind him. His profile was enough. The first man who spotted him emerging from the mists yelled a warning and the men scattered, leaving the detritus of their tiny riot. Fallen stones. A few bottles. Wax watched their metal lines to make sure none of them rounded back on him. One stopped nearby, but kept his distance.

He shook his head, stepping up to the sanctuary. He found the missionary cowering inside, a Terriswoman in intricate braids. Pathian clergy was a strange thing. On one hand, the religion emphasized man's personal connection to Harmony—doing good, without formality. On the other hand, people needed direction. Someone to explain all of this. Pathian missionaries—called priests by outsiders, though they rarely used the term for themselves—set up in places like this, explaining the Path to all who came. A clergy, yes, but not in the formal way of the Survivorists.

He'd always found it curious that the small Pathian sanctuaries—with large doorways on eight sides—let in the mists, while Survivorist churches observed the mists from behind domes of glass, comfortable in their ornate rooms full of golden statues and fine wood pews. The woman looked up at him as he knelt, smelling oil. Her lantern lay broken nearby.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I … Yes," she said. "Thank you."

Her eyes flicked toward the gun. On principle, Wax didn't holster the thing. "It would be best if you retired for the night," Wax said.

"But I live in the loft upstairs."

"Go to the Village then," Wax said. "In fact, gather any of your colleagues you can in a short time and take them as well. A Survivorist priest has been brutally murdered by someone posing as a Pathian missionary."

"Sweet Harmonies," the woman whispered.

Wax left her to gather her things and, hopefully, do as he told her. He struck out into the night, following a few lines of metal toward where the man he'd scared off earlier had hidden. Wax studied the darkened alleyway in the mists, then dropped a shell casing and launched himself into the air. A careful Push let him drop straight into the alleyway, where he landed and leveled a gun at the head of the person hiding there.

Who immediately soiled himself, judging from the stench and the liquid pooling at the young man's feet. Wax sighed and lifted Vindication. The young man scrambled backward, stumbling over a box of trash, adding to his humiliation.

"You're going to leave that missionary alone," Wax said. "She had nothing to do with the murder."

The youth nodded. Wax dropped a shell casing and prepared to launch himself back into the night.

"M-murder?" the youth asked.

"Of the…" Wax hesitated. "Wait. Why were you here, attacking that sanctuary?"

The boy whimpered. "They came into the pub, two of them in those Pathian robes, and cursed out the Survivor an' us."

"*Two?*" Wax said, advancing on the boy, making him cringe. "There was more than one?"

He nodded, then—crying—scrambled away and ran into the night. Wax let him go.

*I should have guessed,* he thought, launching himself into the air. *The news of the murder couldn't have traveled this quickly.* There was more to the plot than the one killing. Rusts. Were other priests in danger?

Two people. Bleeder and someone else? Or two helpers? MeLaan had seemed confident that Bleeder would be working alone, but this offered evidence to the contrary. And the attempt to kill Wax earlier, the ploy involving the server at ZoBell Tower, matched too well with his fears of an assassin to be coincidence. Bleeder had help, likely from Wax's uncle. He'd look into that later. For now, however, there was a different lead he wanted to chase.

He eventually reached the location he'd set out to find: Ashweather Carriage and Coach, a large open yard at the northern edge of the octant where a fleet of carriages of various styles was stored. Rich-looking landaus with retractable tops. Conventional buggies, with less lavish upholstery and wood, to attract a modest clientele. A few surrey-style, with frilled tops.

By far the most common in the carriage park was the standard road coach: the four-wheeled vehicle with a completely enclosed passenger compartment, and room at the top front for a driver. They called them Barringtons in the city, after Lord Barrington, and though the paint jobs could vary wildly, the style was pretty much standardized. Wax's own coaches were Barringtons.

He counted seven in a line here, all lit by electric lamps atop towering stanchions high enough to light the whole yard and adjacent large, low buildings. Those were stables, of course, as his nose confirmed. All of the Ashweather Company's carriages were painted a shiny black, common for vehicles used as cabs in the city, and they had a round shield on the side proclaiming the Cett family heritage.

A shield painted silver. The color that had scraped onto the bricks in the alleyway outside the church. Bleeder had likely fled in a coach just like one of these, one that had been told to wait while Bleeder killed the priest.

Wax inspected each vehicle in turn, running his fingers over the silver-painted shields on the sides. No scrapes.

"Can I help you?" a curt voice demanded. Steelsight indicated a person walking up the row of vehicles. No weapon held, but metal buttons on his coat, a ring on each hand, some change in the pocket, and a watch in his waistcoat. A few pins in the collar of his shirt—very small lines—gave Wax an idea of how tall the man was.

Wax turned toward the voice. The man turned out to be a pudgy fellow in a distinctive formal suit with long tails, identifying him as the establishment's proprietor. Wax had known more than a few Cetts in his time. He'd never gotten along with any of them. Lean or fat, rich or scrawny, they all got the same calculating look on their faces as they tried to estimate how much money Wax would be willing to part with.

This Cett's eyes flicked toward Wax's suit, which was rumpled, swum-in, and missing the cravat. With the duster on, he likely didn't look very distinguished—and the man's expression hardened. Then he saw the tassels on the duster.

His entire demeanor changed immediately. His posture went from "Stay away from my coaches" to "You look like the type who will pay extra for velvet pillows." "My lord," he added, nodding his head. "Would you like to hire a coach for the evening?"

"You know me?" Wax said.

"Waxillium Ladrian, I believe."

"Good," Wax said, digging into his pocket and removing a small steel sheet, engraved on one side. His credentials, proof that he was a constable. "I'm on constabulary business. How many of these coaches do you have?" Wax nodded toward the line.

Cett's expression fell as he realized Wax wasn't likely to be paying him for anything tonight. "Twenty-three," the man finally said.

"Lots of coaches still in service for the night," Wax said. "Considering the hour."

"We work as long as people are out, constable," Cett said. "And tonight, people are out."

Wax nodded. "I need a list of the drivers who are still working, their routes, and any prearranged clients they picked up today."

"Of course." Cett seemed more relaxed as he led Wax toward a small building in the center of the carriage yard. As they walked, a coach arrived—no scraped sides—drawn by a pair of sweaty horses with drooping heads and a bit of froth at the mouths. Long hours for the beasts too, it seemed.

Inside the building, Cett fetched some records from a desk. *Too eager,* Wax thought as the man hurried over and offered them. Whenever someone worked with the authorities too easily, it made Wax's eye twitch. So he took his time browsing through the lists Cett proffered and kept an eye on the man as he did so. "What percentage of your pickups are impromptu, and what percentage are arranged ahead of time?"

"Half and half, for the black coaches," Cett said. "The open carriages are more spur-of-the-moment." He had a good game face, but something *was* bothering him. What was he hiding?

*You think everyone is hiding something,* Wax told himself, flipping through the pages. *Stay on the task at hand.*

Wax dug into the list, hoping Bleeder had decided to hire a coach for a pickup to be certain she had her escape planned, rather than just grabbing a cab on the street. Finding the one who had driven her would be useful either way. He looked over the records for the drivers still out for the night. Each had a few prearranged pickups over the course of the day, but only three had been scheduled around the time of the murder. And two of those were repeat customers with a long list of pickups in the past.

That left one. A person to be picked up in the Fourth Octant, and to be driven "at liberty," meaning they were to be driven as long as the client wished. Shanwan was the name listed. A Terris name. The word meant "secret."

"I need to find this driver," Wax said, holding up the list and pointing. *If they're still alive.*

"Coach sixteen," Cett said, rubbing his chin. "That's Chapaou's. No telling when he'll be back; you probably don't want to wait. I can send you a message when he returns."

"Maybe," Wax said, but dallied.

The door slammed open and a young woman in trousers and suspenders burst in. "Boss," she said, "late-night play getting out on Bonnweather. They're going to want rides."

"We sent coaches there already."

"Not enough," the young woman said. "Boss, there are *lots* of men on the streets. Common men, the type that will make the rich folk nervous. Playgoers will want carriages."

Cett nodded. "Wake Jone and Forgeron. Send them and anyone else you can rouse. Anything more?"

"We could have more wheels out for certain, particularly near the pubs."

"Coinshot," Wax guessed, noticing the bag of metal bits—probably pieces of scrap—the young woman carried. "You've been using Allomancer runners to scout for busy areas to send drivers."

"Is that surprising?" Cett asked.

"It's expensive."

"You have to spend money to make money, constable," Cett said. "And as you can see, I'm having a very busy night. Perhaps you could leave me to it, if I promise to—"

"Coinshot," Wax said to the girl. "You see coach number sixteen out there? I assume your boss has you checking in on the drivers, make sure they're doing their jobs?"

"How—" she began.

"You don't hire an Allomancer just for traffic reports," Wax said. "Coach sixteen?"

She glanced at Cett, who nodded. So whatever Cett was hiding, it probably didn't have to do with this driver. In fact, it probably didn't have anything to do with Bleeder. Just your average, run-of-the-mill lawbreaking.

*At least one Allomancer on staff,* Wax thought.

"I didn't see sixteen on the streets," the young Allomancer said, turning to Wax. "But that's because Chapaou is at a Soothing parlor over on Decan Street. His coach is around the corner."

"At a *Soothing parlor*?" Cett demanded. "He's on the clock!"

"I know," the Allomancer said. "I thought you'd want to hear."

"Hm, yes," Wax said. "And what of the Rioter you have on staff. Are they there too?"

"Nah," the Allomancer said. "He's on—" She cut off, and grew pale. The entire room fell still.

"Using emotional Allomancy," Wax said, "to drum up customers. Riot passing people, make them feel tired or urgent, and more willing to take the coach conveniently parked right across the street."

Cett looked sick. Yes, that was it. Flagrant use of a Rioter to drum up business, a violation of the Allomantic Agreement of '94. There were entire departments in the government that watched for this sort of thing. Fortunately, while it was a dangerous crime, it wasn't one that worried Wax at the moment.

"You don't have any proof…" Cett said, then thought better of it. "I'll be speaking with my attorney. I'll have you know that my people are off-limits for interrogation without a judicial order to—"

"Take it up with the constable-general," Wax said. "I'm sure you'll be hearing from him soon. For now, I need a description of this carriage driver of yours, along with the names of any pets he owns."

* * *

Marasi walked along a counter topped with a row of rifles, each accompanied by a domed steel helmet, a folded heavy jacket, and a box of ammunition. Rusts! She hadn't realized the constabulary had access to these kinds of weapons.

"Well," she said, looking back at MeLaan, "we're ready if a koloss warlord decides to invade again."

A pair of corporals, both men, were looking over each weapon to confirm it was in good repair. Though she spotted more than one pair of bleary eyes, the place was alive with activity. More and more constables were arriving, called in for extra duty. As they entered through the main doors they tended to stop as Marasi had, looking at the row of weapons. Perhaps that was why Aradel had ordered them set out like this. A quick visual reminder of how dangerous things were growing in the city.

Marasi rounded the front counter and entered the offices behind. A young woman corporal passed by, handing Marasi a warm cup of dark tea. It smelled strong, cooked down to increase the concentration of caffeine. She tried a sip.

Yup. Awful. She drank another sip anyway. She wasn't going to embarrass herself by asking for honey when everyone else was chugging the stuff like it was some kind of contest. MeLaan trailed after her, looking around the room with interest. The voluptuous kandra drew glances. And, well, stares. It wasn't often that a gorgeous, six-and-a-half-foot-tall woman strode into the constabulary offices clad in trousers and a tight shirt. She seemed to like the attention, judging by the way she smiled at the men they passed.

*Of course she likes the attention,* Marasi thought. *Otherwise she wouldn't have chosen a body so exquisitely proportioned.* It seemed blatant to Marasi. After all, technically MeLaan wasn't even *human*.

"I didn't expect to find women in uniform here," MeLaan noted. "I'd assumed you to be an oddity."

"The constabulary is very egalitarian," Marasi said. "The Ascendant Warrior serves as a model for all women. You won't find as many of us here as in, say, the solicitors' offices, but it's hardly considered an unfeminine profession."

"Sure, sure," MeLaan said, smiling at a young lieutenant as the two of them made their way to the back rooms, where the records office was. "But I've always found humans to be rather sexist. A natural result of your sexual dimorphism, VenDell says."

"And kandra aren't sexist?" Marasi said, blushing.

"Hmm? Well, considering that a male kandra you're talking to today might decide to be a woman tomorrow, I'd say we have a different perspective on all that."

Marasi blushed further. "Surely you're exaggerating."

"Not really. Wow, you blush easily, don't you? I'd have thought you'd find this natural, considering that your God is basically a hermaphrodite at this point. Both good and evil, Ruin and Preservation, light and dark, male and female. Et cetera et cetera."

They reached the doors to the records office and Marasi turned away to hide her blush. She really wished she'd just find a way to get over her embarrassment. "Harmony's not my god. I'm a Survivorist."

"Oh, yeah," MeLaan said, "because *that* makes sense. Worship the guy who died, rather than the one who saved the world."

"The Survivor transcended death," Marasi said, looking back, hand on the door, but not entering. "He survived even being killed, adopting the mantle of the Ascendant during the time between Preservation's death and Vin's Ascension."

Rust … was she arguing theology with a demigod?

MeLaan, however, just cocked her head. "What, really?"

"Um … yes. Harmony wrote of it *himself* in the Words of Founding, MeLaan."

"Huh. I really ought to read that thing one of these days."

"You haven't…" Marasi blinked, trying to fathom a world where one of the Faceless Immortals didn't know doctrine.

"I keep meaning to," MeLaan said, shrugging. "Never can find the time."

"You're over six hundred years old."

"That's the thing about having an eternity, kid," MeLaan said. "It gets *really* easy to procrastinate. Are we going in that room or not?"

Marasi sighed, pushing into a room filled with filing cabinets and tables piled high with ledgers and broadsheets. This was Aradel's doing; he liked to keep his thumb on what people were saying and writing in the city. So far, he didn't do much with the collection besides watch for reports of crimes his men had missed, but Marasi had plans.

Unfortunately, Constable Miklin—who ran the records office—was one of Reddi's closest friends. As Marasi entered, Miklin and the other two people working there looked up, then immediately turned back to their files.

"Who's the civilian?" Miklin asked from his desk in the corner. How *did* he get his hair to stand up straight like that? Almost like a patch of grass growing from a pot.

"Special investigator from another jurisdiction," Marasi said. "Lord Ladrian sent her."

Miklin sniffed. "I'm led to believe this wisp hunt is your doing? I barely got to the offices tonight before I was sent back here to dig up information on that dam breaking."

"What did you find?" Marasi said eagerly, slipping between two large filing cabinets—he had them arranged like sentries—and stepping up to his desk.

"Nothing," Miklin said. "Dead end. Waste of my time."

"I'd like to see what you found anyway," Marasi said. "If it's not too much trouble."

Miklin rested his hands on the table. He spoke softly. "Why are you here, Colms?"

"I thought Aradel told you," Marasi said. "The dam breakage might—"

"Not that. Here. In the constabulary. You had an offer to join the octant's senior prosecutor on a permanent basis, with a letter of commendation on your internship with him. I looked into it. And now … what? You suddenly want to chase criminals? Strap on some six-guns like you're from the rusting Roughs? That's not what police work is like."

"I'm well aware," Marasi said dryly. "But thank you for the information. What did you find?"

He sighed, then tapped a folder with the back of his hand. "Rusting waste of my time," he muttered.

Marasi took the folder and retreated between the filing cabinets. She wished it were only Miklin she had to deal with, but the two other constables made their opinions known with quiet sniffs of disdain. Marasi felt them glaring at her as she led MeLaan out of the room, clutching her folder.

"Why do they treat you like that?" MeLaan asked as they slipped out.

"It's complicated."

"People tend to be. Why do you *let* them treat you like that?"

"I'm working on it."

"You want me to do something?" MeLaan said. "I could scare the cynicism right out of those people, show them you've got friends that—"

"No!" Marasi said. "No, please. It's nothing I haven't dealt with before."

MeLaan followed her as she scurried to her desk outside of Aradel's office. A lanky female constable stood there, one foot on Marasi's chair, chatting with the man one desk over and sipping her tea. Marasi cleared her throat twice before the woman—Taudr was her name, wasn't it?—finally looked at her, rolled her eyes, and moved out of the way.

Marasi settled down. MeLaan pulled over a chair. "You sure you don't want me—"

"No," Marasi said immediately, digging into the folder. She took a deep breath. "No, please."

"I'm sure your friend Waxillium could come on over, fire off a few slugs, force them to stop being such sourlips."

*Oh, Survivor, no,* Marasi thought, the image of it making her sick. But MeLaan obviously wasn't going to let this go without an explanation.

"I'm beginning to realize that Waxillium is part of the reason why they treat me as they do," Marasi said, opening the folder Miklin had prepared. "Life in the precinct follows a hierarchy. The sergeants start as corporals, work the streets, put in ten or fifteen years doing a hard beat and finally earn a promotion. The captains start out as lieutenants, and mostly come from noble stock. Once in a while, a sergeant works his or her way up. But everyone's expected to put in their time at the bottom."

"And you…"

"I skipped all that," Marasi said. "I applied for—and got—an important position as Aradel's chief aide. Waxillium makes that worse, as I'm associated with him. He's like a whirlwind, blowing through and messing everything up. But he's also good at what he does and a high-ranking nobleman, so nobody complains too loudly. I, however…"

"Not noble."

"Not noble enough," Marasi said. "My father is low-ranked, and I'm illegitimate. That makes me the available target, when Waxillium is off-limits."

MeLaan leaned back in her chair and scanned the room. "Spook was always droning on about things like this—that bloodline shouldn't matter as much as capability. You doing what you did should be impressive to everyone, not threatening. Hell, you said the place was egalitarian."

"It is," Marasi said. "That's why I could get the job in the first place. But it doesn't stop people from resenting me. I'm the way the world is changing, MeLaan, and change is frightening."

"Huh," the kandra said. "And the lower ranks just go along with this? You think they'd like you showing that someone can jump in line."

"You don't know a lot about human nature, do you?"

"Of course I do. I've studied, and imitated, dozens of people."

"I suspect you understand individuals, then," Marasi said. "The interesting thing about people is that while they might seem unique, they actually play into broad patterns. Historically, the working class has often been *more* resistant to change than the class oppressing them."

"Really?" MeLaan asked.

Marasi nodded. She started to reach for some books on the small shelf beside her desk, but stopped. This wasn't the time. In fact, they might be witnessing one of the exceptions to this rule, outside on the streets. And, like many upendings of the status quo, when it *did* happen, it could be violent. Like a steam engine's boiler that had been plugged up, given no release until suddenly … everything exploded.

Nobody liked to realize they'd been had. People in Elendel believed they were living the good life—they'd been told all their lives that Harmony had blessed them with a rich and lavish land of bounty. You could listen to that sort of talk only so long before starting to wonder why all the incredible orchards were owned by someone else, while you had to work long hours just to feed your children.

Marasi dug into the contents of the folder, which listed the events surrounding the flooding to the east. MeLaan settled back in her seat. What a curious creature she was, sitting with head held high, meeting the glances of people who passed without the least concern about what anyone thought of her.

Miklin was annoying, but he hadn't let his displeasure undermine his work, which was meticulous and thorough. He'd included constable reports on the dam breakage, a piece written by the engineer who had investigated the problem, and broadsheet clippings from Elendel regarding the disaster.

Most importantly, there was a transcript of the recent trial and execution of the farmer who had caused the flood. He claimed he'd wanted to ruin his neighbor's harvest in an "accident." But the saboteur had packed too much dynamite, and had blown a hole in the dam large enough to cause the entire thing to fail. Dozens dead, and crops destroyed throughout the region, causing grain shortages.

The defense had called witnesses who claimed that the saboteur, a man named Johnst, had been acting erratically. They claimed he was obviously mad. And the more she read, the more Marasi was convinced he *was* mad—if only because Bleeder was.

"Look at this," Marasi said, handing a sheet to MeLaan.

The kandra took it and read, then grunted. "He couldn't remember the names of his children at the trial?"

"Seems like good evidence that Johnst had been replaced, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes and no," MeLaan said. "The old guard, they are *really* good at interrogating people and doing research before taking a new form. We don't have to do that so much anymore—most of the forms we take are personas we've made up ourselves. If this *was* Bleeder, she must have been pressed for time." MeLaan pointed at a section farther down the page. "This is much better proof, if you ask me."

Marasi scooted over, looking at the paragraphs indicated.

> Report of the execution. Prisoner was hanged until dead. Rejected a final meal, and demanded it be "over with quickly." Grave desecrated two nights later; suspected to be the work of those who lost family in the flood.

"Wow," Marasi said, taking the paper back. She hadn't reached that section yet. "Yeah. Escaping the grave, eh? She actually let them *bury* her?"

"Undoubtedly," MeLaan said. "Paalm is nothing if not dedicated to her craft."

"Then why forget the names of the children?"

MeLaan shook her head. "No idea."

Either way, this seemed to be enough to take to Aradel. "Come on," she said.

# 15

One thing that Wax's life in the Roughs had taught him was that men would monetize anything. The first time he'd seen someone selling water, he'd been surprised. Who sold something that literally fell from the sky?

Now, more than twenty years later, he was surprised nobody in Elendel had found a way to charge a tax on collecting rainwater. If someone wanted it, you could charge for it. That went double for Allomancy, though there were some conservatives who decried the increasing commercialization of the Metallic Arts. Feruchemists for hire were much scarcer than Allomancers, perhaps because Terris traditions viewed their powers with such reverence.

Wax walked up the steps toward the building, which stood alone on the street in a fairly nice neighborhood of town, even if this was the darker end of the lane, so to speak. The place was two stories tall, and had the window shades drawn, though light inside gave them a warm glow. A black coach—with a silver crest, scraped across its face—was parked in the drive to the right.

The Soothing washed over him right as he reached the door. A calm, gentle feeling—like emotional anesthetic. Like someone had pressed a pillow against his emotions in an attempt to lovingly smother them.

*Sloppy,* he thought. *Should have brought my hat.* It had an aluminum lining, and Bleeder could have access to a spike letting her Soothe or Riot. Well, he'd have to fetch it later. He pushed into the building, entering a room dimly lit with lamps in red shades. A scattering of men and women lounged on cushions inside, smoking cigars or incense pipes, staring at the ceiling, which was painted like a stained-glass window in a pretty, abstract pattern.

Most businesses would be closed by this hour, but not the Soothing parlors. Visiting one was more expensive than a night at the pub, but had none of the side effects. Or to be more precise, it had different side effects. A woman in a matronly gown—and a hat, likely aluminum-lined—approached Wax, probably to take payment, but Wax flashed his credentials.

"If you think credentials will get you in free," the proprietor said, "then you must be new to the force."

Wax gave her a dry smile, tucking away the metal plate. She ran a low-grade Soothing parlor. While what she did wasn't illegal—amusingly, it was fine to manipulate people's emotions so long as they were paying for it—she'd be used to the constables checking up on her. Not only did these sorts of places tend to attract people who were hiding from something, it was very possible for a disreputable Soothing parlor to take advantage of its clients.

None of the people here matched Chapaou's description, but Soothing parlors often had more than one room. "Short man," Wax said, "balding. Known as Chapaou, but may not have given that name."

The proprietor nodded and gestured for Wax to follow as she crossed the room, weaving between the people lounging on the floor. The dim, smoky building should have left Wax jumpy—this was just the sort of place where accidents or ambushes happened—but the Soothing was difficult to pierce. It tore away the top layers of his concern, exposing those beneath—his worry for Wayne and Marasi. Beneath that, a surprising frustration—even anger—at God. Then those emotions too became as fluttering wings, leaving him hollow. Not calm, just empty.

He wanted to settle into one of the chairs, close his eyes, and let out a sigh of relaxation. Bleeder would wait. Surely she wouldn't try to kill again tonight. Why worry if she did? He probably couldn't stop her anyway.

He found he hated that sensation. These emotions were his; they were a core of his self. Taking them away didn't make him happy or help him forget. It just made him feel sick.

He picked up his pace, trying to urge the proprietor faster as they left the room with the cushions and stepped into a long hallway. Here, they passed several other rooms: A completely white chamber with people sitting cross-legged on the floor. Another that was completely black, no lights at all, the people inside barely visible. There was even a room with painted trees on the walls, the ground covered in thatch, like a Terris meeting hut. A lone man sat in this one, on a solitary chair, eyes closed.

The proprietor led Wax up a set of steps. Perhaps the man in the Terris room had been one of the Soothers—the parlor would have at least one in here somewhere, extending out a small bubble of Soothing. Parlors were supposed to have aluminum sheets in the walls to keep the emotional Allomancy contained from the neighborhood, but the rule wasn't uniformly enforced.

The proprietor led Wax to a small room on the second floor, unadorned save for a couch at the center for massages. Chapaou didn't lie on that. Instead, he paced by a latched window in the far wall, frustrating the masseuse who stood nearby with her arms folded. An old man sat in a chair by the wall. The metal vials in his pocket—visible to Wax as small, diffuse lines pointing at the suspended flakes—marked him as an Allomancer.

Wax raised his eyebrow. Chapaou had paid for a private session. Where had he found that kind of money? The coach driver stopped in place, looking toward Wax. His eyes flicked toward the guns at Wax's hips, then he fell to his knees, weeping.

The aged Soother rose with audible cracks from his joints. "I've done what I can, Mistress Halex," he said to the proprietor. "But this man doesn't need Allomancy. He needs a physician."

"He's yours," Mistress Halex said to Wax. "Get him out of here. He's disturbing my people."

Wax crossed the room to kneel beside Chapaou. The short man shivered, holding his legs. "Chapaou," Wax said. "Look at me."

Chapaou turned toward him.

"What's the name of your dog?" Wax asked.

"My … I don't have a dog. He died a few years back."

Good enough. This wasn't Bleeder in disguise, unless she'd thought to interrogate a random cabdriver about his pets before killing him and taking his shape.

"What's wrong?" Wax said. "Why are you here?"

"To forget what I saw."

"Soothing doesn't work like that," Wax said. "It doesn't take your memories."

"But it should make me feel better, right?"

"Depends on the emotions you're feeling," Wax said, "and the skill of the Soother." He held the man by the shoulder. "What did you see, Chapaou?"

The man blinked reddened eyes. "I saw … myself."

* * *

Aradel wasn't in his office, of course. That place was there, as he put it, "for giving house lords somewhere to sit when they come to complain at me."

Marasi found him on the roof of the constabulary offices listening to reports from the two precinct Coinshots who had been scouting the city. Marasi politely waited with MeLaan and several constable lieutenants standing nearby, and was able to hear most of the latest report. *Thousands still on the streets, my lord. They're congregating at pubs. Not going home …*

Aradel stood with one booted foot up on the short wall around the rooftop as he took the reports. Mist curled around each Coinshot in a distinct vortex; it responded to the use of Allomancy. Finally, Aradel dismissed the two. They weren't true constables—more contractors. Their loyalties would be to their houses. Or in some cases to their pocketbooks.

As they left—jumping off the building—the constable-general turned to the waiting lieutenants. "Get the men ready to clear out the pubs," he said softly.

"Sir?" one of the women asked.

"We're going to close them down," Aradel said, pointing. "First on the promenades, then work down the smaller streets. We can't start until I get authority from the governor to institute martial law in the octant, but I want the constables ready to move as soon as we have word."

The lieutenants ran to obey. Aradel glanced toward Marasi, and she thought she saw something of his ancestor in him, a soldier who had died a martyr during the days of the Ascendant Warrior. In another era, would this man have been a field general rather than a policeman?

"What do you have for me, Lieutenant Colms?" he said, waving her forward. MeLaan lingered by the stairwell down, hands in her trouser pockets.

"Our assassin, sir," Marasi said, proffering the folder. "She dug her way out of her own grave after being executed for causing the floods in the east. They found the bones nearby a few days later, and called it desecration of the grave. After all, why would they guess that one of the holy Faceless Immortals had been inhabiting the body of a murderer and criminal?"

Aradel breathed out quietly in a hiss. Shadows moved beneath the streetlights, despite the hour, on the promenade behind him. "So this is all her doing?"

"Pardon, sir," Marasi said, "but I'd say this is rather the fault of the city's unpleasant working conditions. That said, Bleeder is most certainly shoving it along. She wanted this city to be on the brink of cracking when she made her move."

"Ruin…" Aradel whispered. "In the face of that, it seems almost trivial whether the governor is corrupt or not, doesn't it?"

"I suppose that depends on whom you ask." Shouts rose from the street down below; a group of men passing along the canal, speaking riotously to one another. She couldn't make out their words, just their tone.

"I still want proof," Aradel said. "Not to diminish your efforts, Lieutenant. But I'm not going to jump at wraiths in the mist unless I can see for myself. That goes for the governor too. Keep your eyes open. If you can find me something concrete, we'll use it once this all blows over. And I still want some kind of proof regarding your supernatural assassin."

"I understand, sir," Marasi said, nodding toward MeLaan, lit by the lanterns hanging on poles near the door to the stairs. "And I have some proof for you there. But it would be best if we could do this in private."

Aradel slowly shifted his weight backward, lowering his foot from the top of the parapet he'd been leaning on. He glanced at Marasi, who nodded.

"Below," he said to the two remaining constables attending him. Junior corporals, for message running. They obeyed, and once they were gone, Aradel crossed the distance to MeLaan. "I hope," he said, after clearing his throat, "that my questions aren't offensive, er, Your Grace."

"Sincere inquiries never offend, human," MeLaan said, "for it is thy duty to seek truth. True questions return only truth." Her skin shimmered, growing transparent as it had before, but somehow also giving off a kaleidoscopic sheen. She spread her hands to the sides, and her blouse somehow split and slid down her shoulders, exposing a transparent torso with an emerald skeleton that glittered in the lamplight.

Marasi blinked. Well, *that* hadn't been what she'd been expecting. Beside her, Aradel inhaled sharply, then didn't seem to be breathing at all as he took in the sight. MeLaan's head—completely transparent—cocked, and she looked down at them with a maternal cast.

"Speak," she whispered.

"What…" Aradel cleared his throat. "Is what Constable Colms has told me true? Could one of your kind really be behind this?"

"Paalm is a lost soul," MeLaan said, "tortured by a broken mind and a twisted spirit. Yes, she is of us, human. Thy task is not easy, but we shall aid thee in thy desperation."

"Great," Aradel said. "I guess … I guess that's the confirmation I needed." He hesitated. "Could you, by any chance, put in a good word for me with Harmony?"

"Thy deeds are thine own good words, human," MeLaan said. "And thy God knows of them. Go and protect this city. Worry not for thyself, but instead for thy fellows."

"Right, right," Aradel said. "I'll just be about it, then. Unless there's anything more you can tell me…"

“Thy snoring,” MeLaan said, “is rather loud.”

“I … What?”

“It doth be like unto an hundred angry koloss,” MeLaan said, “in the middle of a rockslide. Lo, and it doth come near to waking the dead.”

“Right…” Aradel said.

“Be on thy way, human,” MeLaan said.

“As commanded. Lieutenant Colms, a moment?” He bowed his head to MeLaan, walking around her to the side, and had trouble tearing his eyes off her. Granted, Marasi had trouble doing the same. MeLaan was overwhelming even when she wasn’t transparent and half naked. MeLaan nodded Marasi onward. No need to come back up for her.

When they were halfway down the stairs, Aradel let out a deep breath. “Well, that was strange.”

“I did warn you,” Marasi noted.

“That you did. The bit about snoring … a metaphor, I assume. But for what? The constables, we’re too loud, perhaps?” He nodded to himself. “We’re supposed to serve the people, but the complaints of brutality, and of officers ordering people around as if they were lords … Yes, I can see. I’ll need to make some changes. Do you think that’s what she meant?”

“I don’t know,” Marasi said carefully. “Meeting her does tend to affect one in profound ways.”

“Very true.” Aradel hesitated on the steps, turning as if he longed to return up above. He held himself back. “The question I had earlier remains. We’ve got an immortal killer out there, potentially trying to overthrow the government. How in Preservation do we fight something like that?”

“You don’t,” Marasi said. “Lord Waxillium will handle the kandra. We should focus on keeping the city from exploding.”

Aradel nodded. “I want you to do something for me.”

“Sir?” They still stood in the stairwell, lit by a solitary electric light above them.

“You mention Lord Ladrian,” Aradel said. “He seems to trust you, Lieutenant.”

“We have become good friends over the last year.”

“He’s a wildcard, Lieutenant,” Aradel said. “I appreciate the work he does, but his methods … let’s just say I wouldn’t mind having a little more information on what he’s doing and when.”

“You’re asking me to spy on him.”

Aradel shrugged. Another man might have been embarrassed to be confronted with it so bluntly, but he didn’t seem so. “I won’t lie to you, Colms. I think you can be a resource for this department in more ways than one. It's my job to see that the law in this octant is served, and I'll feel a hell of a lot better if I know what Lord Ladrian is doing. If only so I can get the proper warrants—and if necessary, apologies—ready."

"I see," Marasi said.

Aradel waited for something more. She could practically hear the implication. *You're a constable, Lieutenant. This is your job. Do as you are assigned.*

"You could just ask him," she said. "He's been deputized. He is technically under your jurisdiction."

"And you don't think I've tried? He always promises a report. If I'm lucky, that consists of a letter telling me where he left a suspect hanging by his ankles—do you remember that one?—or a quick rundown at a party of something he's hunting, if only so he can ask me for the loan of some resources. I don't mean to turn you into his chaperone, but honestly, a little more information would be *wonderful*."

Marasi sighed. "I'll write you a weekly report. More frequently if an investigation is ongoing, as it is now. But I will inform him that I'm doing so."

"Great. Fantastic." Aradel started down the stairs again, stepping quickly and speaking almost as fast. "Get to the governor's place and tell him I need an executive order for martial law tonight so I can clear the pubs. Suggest he send one to each of the octants. Then check in on your friend Ladrian and tell me anything he's learned about this immortal who thinks she can bring down our city."

He reached the floor below and strode out into the main chamber, shouting for a report on the number of constables they'd been able to call up for duty this night. Marasi followed more slowly, legs feeling like they bore hundred-pound bracers.

*You can be a resource for this department in more ways than one….*

She reached the ground floor and walked out the precinct's back door. She'd always known that her involvement with Waxillium had helped her obtain this job. If she hadn't joined his hunt for Miles Hundredlives, she'd never have gained enough notability. That said, she'd assumed her understanding of historical crime rates, her letters of recommendation, and her interview had been more important.

Was that even the case? Had Aradel given her the job instead of someone like Reddi because she knew Waxillium? Did her studies even matter?

She settled with her back against the wall, waiting for MeLaan. Rusts … did everything always *have* to be about Waxillium? Of course, thinking that made her feel like a child, jealous that someone else had more blocks than she did.

MeLaan strolled into the alleyway a short time later, disturbing the mists. “Well?” MeLaan asked. “How did I do?”

“We shall aid thee in thy desperation?” Marasi asked.

“Hey, it’s what he expected.”

“Not what *I* expected.”

MeLaan sniffed. “I can be divine when I need to be. I’ve had a *long* time to practice.”

“Then why don’t you use the act around me and the others?”

“Who says this isn’t the act?” MeLaan said. She met Marasi’s eyes. “Perhaps my duty as one of Harmony’s servants is to show people what they need to see, whatever will bring them the most peace.”

Marasi felt cold, suddenly, a shiver running through her. Not at the words, but at the look in MeLaan’s eyes, which had faded to a faint translucence. As if … in reminder?

Then MeLaan threw her head back and started laughing. “Nah, I’m just rusting you, kid. I don’t show you that side because it’s too hard to keep a straight face while talking with all those ‘thee’s and ‘whatfore’s.”

“Hence the snoring wisecrack?” Marasi said.

“Yeah. I had to check on the guy when Harmony was first looking for Paalm. He snores like a *steam engine,* that one. Anyway, where to now?”

“The governor’s mansion,” Marasi said.

“Along we go, then,” MeLaan said, striding toward the exit of the alleyway.

* * *

“We pulled to a stop,” Chapaou said, hunched up next to his carriage in the mists outside the Soother’s place. “And I’d been hearing things inside the coach. I didn’t like how he’d come out of that church, with hands all red.”

Wax knelt in the back of the coach, listening while he carefully unwrapped a bundle of black cloth. A lantern hung on the side of the coach, giving him light, but also turning the mists into a bloom of illumination. He could still feel the Soother’s touch from the nearby building, but it was far less pronounced now. He felt almost like himself. That was both good and bad, for there was nothing to hold back his sense of revulsion as he unwrapped the bloody mallet that had been used to pound the spikes into Father Bin.

“I shouldn’t have looked into the coach,” Chapaou said. “He told me not to look, you know? But I couldn’t help it. So I turned softly and peeked in the coachman’s slot, the one they have so you can see if the person inside is ripping the upholstery or whatnot.

“I found I hadn’t been carrying a man, but a monster. A mistwraith, with bones and sinew exposed, and a face of stretched muscle and grinning teeth. It looked at me, all smiles, and scrambled up toward the hole. It pressed that exposed eye against the slot, and then it *changed*. It *changed*. Skin growing over its face, like mine. A twisted, broken version of me.”

He started weeping again. Wax unrolled bones from the bundle, the corpse of the Pathian whom Bleeder had imitated in order to kill Father Bin. Bleached, picked clean, and under them a pile of cloth. Pathian robes? Yes, the colors were right.

“Hands all red…” Chapaou whispered.

“You ran, after that?” Wax asked, lining up the bones carefully.

“No, I drove,” Chapaou said. “I whipped the horses forward, bearing that demonspawn in my coach. A driver for Ironeyes himself. What good would it do to run? It had my soul. Harmony … it *has my soul*.”

“No,” Wax said. “It is a trickster, a false face, Chapaou. It was a twisted version of yourself, you say?” MeLaan had said that older kandra could often approximate a face without having the right bones, but it was always noticeable.

“Yeah.” The man huddled down lower in the alleyway. “I know what you think, lawman. I killed that priest tonight, didn’t I? I went mad, and I killed him, and those bloody hands are mine. Shoulda killed myself, jumped off that bridge…”

“No,” Wax said. “You’ve been taken in by a charlatan, Chapaou. It wasn’t you.”

The man just whimpered.

Wax continued, methodically laying out the evidence, though a part of him wondered what good it would do. Did traditional detective work have any place in a fight against a creature like this? How did you fight mythology with a microscope? Harmony … what if he *did* find a clue? If he chased her down? Could he even defeat something like this?

He stared at the bones, then shook his head. He would send for a crime-scene team to look this over. He needed to get to the governor’s mansion and check in.

*Wait,* he thought, then leaned forward. There, on the hem of the robe. What was that? He shielded the lantern, causing Chapaou to groan and huddle down farther.

With the lantern dimmed, Wax spotted it better. The corner of the robe’s hem *glowed* with a soft blue light, easy to miss. Wax reached down, taking a substance off the robe and rubbing it between his fingers. A powder of some sort? What kind of powder gave off its own light, faint though it was?

"Did you see anything glowing back here, Chapaou?" he asked, turning toward the man. Wax had to unshield the lantern to get him to respond. Even then, the only reply he got was a confused shake of the head.

"Where did you drive the coach?" Wax asked.

"Lestib Square," Chapaou whispered. "Where I'd been told to drop the creature off. Then I squeezed my eyes shut and waited. It … it climbed up to me, as it left. Hands on my shoulders, head beside mine, cheeks touching. I could feel the blood, though it left none staining my shirt. It … it *whispered* to me, lawman. 'I will make you free.' When I opened my eyes it had gone, leaving those bones in the passenger compartment along with a small pile of coins. I thought for sure I'd gone mad."

Wax downed an extra vial of metals to refill his stores, then dried the vial out and took a sample of the dust. Lestib Square, named after the Lord Mistborn. It was worryingly close to the governor's mansion. "Don't worry. I'm on the thing's trail. I intend to stop it."

"It said it would make me free," Chapaou said. "If I'm not mad, then that means … that means that thing was *real.*"

"It is," Wax said.

"Honestly, sir, I'd rather be crazy."

"Eh," Wax said, rising and pushing Chapaou toward his coach. "The thing probably doesn't want you dead anyway."

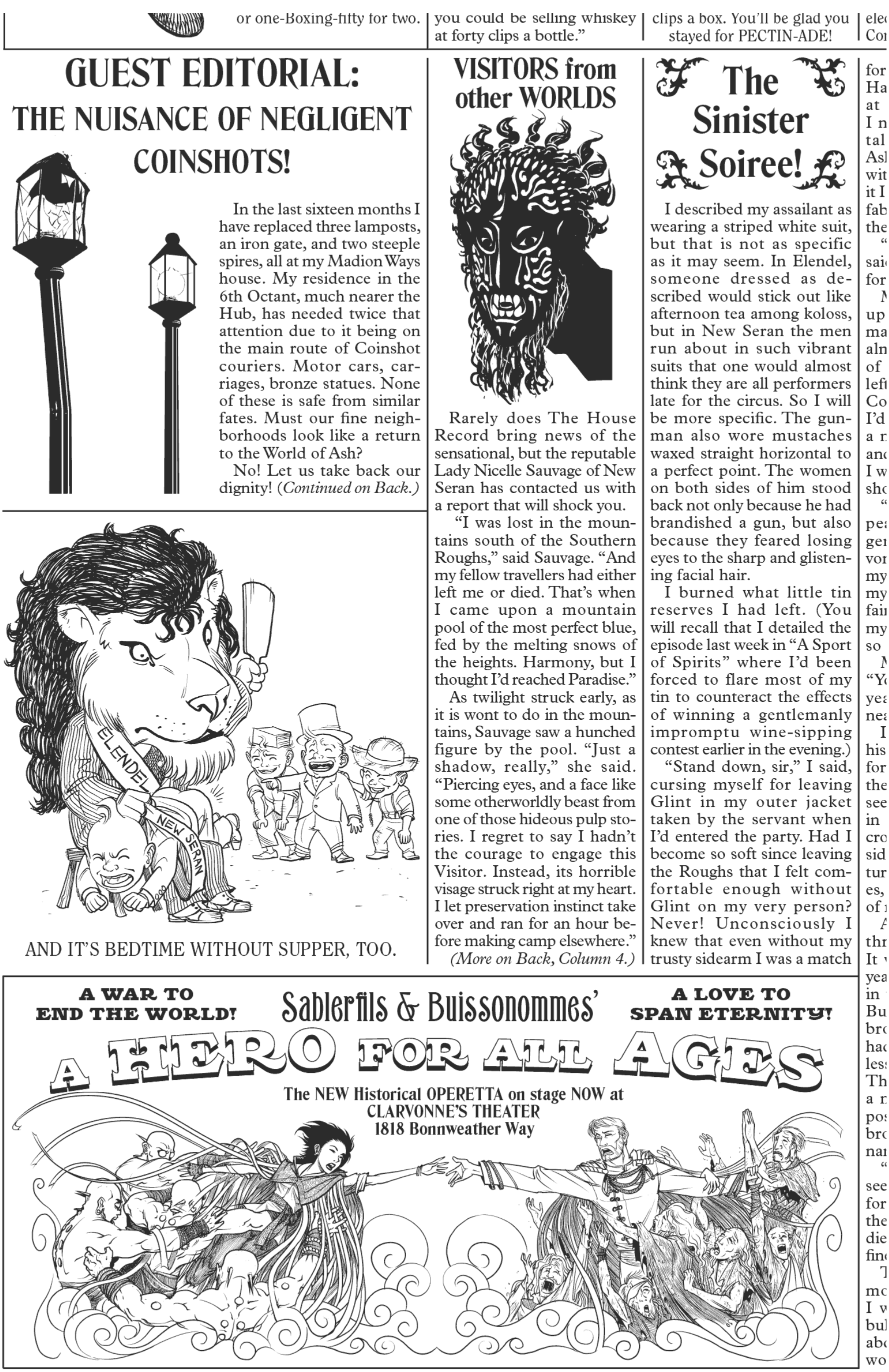
"Probably?"

"No way to tell for certain," Wax said, checking his ammunition. "But I'd bet money against it—at least, it no more wants you dead than it wants everyone in the city dead. Maybe. Not sure yet what its endgame is."

Chapaou looked sick. Damn. He was sure that last part had been comforting.

"Go home," Wax said, then tossed the man a few banknotes. "Or go find a hotel. Get some sleep. She isn't going to come for you."

She had much bigger game to hunt.



or one-Boxing-fifty for two.

you could be selling whiskey at forty clips a bottle.”

clips a box. You'll be glad you stayed for PECTIN-ADE!

### GUEST EDITORIAL:
### THE NUISANCE OF NEGLIGENT COINSHOTS!

In the last sixteen months I have replaced three lamposts, an iron gate, and two steeple spires, all at my Madion Ways house. My residence in the 6th Octant, much nearer the Hub, has needed twice that attention due to it being on the main route of Coinshot couriers. Motor cars, carriages, bronze statues. None of these is safe from similar fates. Must our fine neighborhoods look like a return to the World of Ash?

No! Let us take back our dignity! (*Continued on Back.*)

AND IT'S BEDTIME WITHOUT SUPPER, TOO.

### VISITORS from other WORLDS

Rarely does The House Record bring news of the sensational, but the reputable Lady Nicelle Sauvage of New Seran has contacted us with a report that will shock you.

“I was lost in the mountains south of the Southern Roughs,” said Sauvage. “And my fellow travellers had either left me or died. That's when I came upon a mountain pool of the most perfect blue, fed by the melting snows of the heights. Harmony, but I thought I'd reached Paradise.”

As twilight struck early, as it is wont to do in the mountains, Sauvage saw a hunched figure by the pool. “Just a shadow, really,” she said. “Piercing eyes, and a face like some otherworldly beast from one of those hideous pulp stories. I regret to say I hadn't the courage to engage this Visitor. Instead, its horrible visage struck right at my heart. I let preservation instinct take over and ran for an hour before making camp elsewhere.”

*(More on Back, Column 4.)*

### The Sinister Soiree!

I described my assailant as wearing a striped white suit, but that is not as specific as it may seem. In Elendel, someone dressed as described would stick out like afternoon tea among koloss, but in New Seran the men run about in such vibrant suits that one would almost think they are all performers late for the circus. So I will be more specific. The gunman also wore mustaches waxed straight horizontal to a perfect point. The women on both sides of him stood back not only because he had brandished a gun, but also because they feared losing eyes to the sharp and glistening facial hair.

I burned what little tin reserves I had left. (You will recall that I detailed the episode last week in “A Sport of Spirits” where I'd been forced to flare most of my tin to counteract the effects of winning a gentlemanly impromptu wine-sipping contest earlier in the evening.)

“Stand down, sir,” I said, cursing myself for leaving Glint in my outer jacket taken by the servant when I'd entered the party. Had I become so soft since leaving the Roughs that I felt comfortable enough without Glint on my very person? Never! Unconsciously I knew that even without my trusty sidearm I was a match

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I described my assailant as wearing a striped white suit, but that is not as specific as it may seem. In Elendel, someone dressed as described would stick out like afternoon tea among koloss, but in New Seran the men run about in such vibrant suits that one would almost think they are all performers late for the circus. So I will be more specific. The gunman also wore mustaches waxed straight horizontal to a perfect point. The women on both sides of him stood back not only because he had brandished a gun, but also because they feared losing eyes to the sharp and glistening facial hair.

I burned what little tin reserves I had left. (You will recall that I detailed the episode last week in "A Sport of Spirits" where I'd been forced to flare most of my tin to counteract the effects of winning a gentlemanly impromptu wine-sipping contest earlier in the evening.)

"Stand down, sir," I said, cursing myself for leaving Glint in my outer jacket taken by the servant when I'd entered the party. Had I become so soft since leaving the Roughs that I felt comfortable enough without Glint on my very person? Never! Unconsciously I knew that even without my trusty sidearm I was a match

# 16

Wax perched on an electricity pylon, overlooking the governor's mansion—a clean white building, brightly lit in the mists by floodlights. Those didn't shine so strongly every night, and their brightness tonight seemed to indicate that Innate was worried. The crowds were not dispersing. Men roamed the streets; there seemed to be *more* of them than there had been earlier, though the clock had struck midnight soon after Wax had left the Soothing parlor.

He'd stopped by his house to rebind his arm wound, chew down some painkillers, and pick up some supplies: his hat, his short-barreled shotgun, and his thigh holster. He'd considered sending someone for Lord Harms, but honestly, Wax wanted him safe where Bleeder couldn't use the man against him. Better that he stay hidden on his rooftop. In fact, he'd been half tempted to go fetch Steris and drop her somewhere similar. Time was short, unfortunately. He had to trust that the constables watching her would keep her hidden.

From there, he'd walked the streets a short time, listening. He'd overheard anger at the government. Vitriol for the Pathians. Those complaints were bad enough, but mixed with them was a more disturbing trend. Anger, but with no focus. General discontent. The grumbling of men over their beers, of youths out on the street throwing rocks at cats. Hiding amid it all was a murderer, like a lion in the grass.

At least the governor's mansion looked calm. He'd come fearing the worst, a strike on Innate while he was away. *She's got me pinned,* Wax thought with dissatisfaction, as the breeze rustled his mistcoat. *I can't stay and protect the governor because I have to follow leads and try to figure out her* *plan. But I can't be as effective in that hunt because I keep worrying that I'm leaving Innate exposed.*

Could he convince the governor to hide? Beneath his feet, electricity ran like an invisible river through the suspended cables. Spirits that moved like Allomancers in the sky, hopping from building to building …

*Ah, lawman,* a voice intruded upon his thoughts like a nail into a board. *There you are.*

Wax reached to his waist for Vindication. Where? This had to mean Bleeder was close, right? Watching somewhere?

*Do you know,* the voice said, *about the body's remarkable defenses? Inside, there are tiny bits of you that men never see. Even surgeons don't know of them, for they're too small. It takes a refined taste to distinguish them, know them. What is it that your friend likes to say? Ain't nobody what knows the cow better than the butcher?*

Wax dropped down from his perch, slowing himself by Pushing on a discarded bottle cap. Mists churned around him, drawn by his Allomancy.

*If a tiny invader enters your blood,* Bleeder said, *the entire* body *begins to spin around it, to fight it, to find it and eliminate it. Like a thousand fingers of mist, like a legion of soldiers all too small to see. But what is very interesting is when the body turns upon itself, and these soldiers run wild. Free …*

"Where are you?" Wax asked loudly.

*Close,* Bleeder said. *Watching. You, and the governor. I will need to kill him, you know.*

"Can we talk?" Wax asked a little softer.

*Isn't that what we're doing?*

Wax turned, walking in the night. Either Bleeder would have to follow—which might let him catch motions in the mists—or he'd get far enough away that she couldn't hear to reply to him, which would tell him which direction to search in.

"Are you going to try to kill me?" Wax asked.

*What good would it do to kill you?*

"So you want games."

*No.* Bleeder sounded resigned. *No games.*

"What, then?" Wax asked. "Why bother with all of this showmanship?"

*I'll free them. Every one of them. I'll take this people, and I'll open their eyes.*

"How?"

*What are you, Waxillium?* Bleeder asked.

"A lawman," Wax said immediately.

*That's the coat you're wearing right now, but it's not who you are. I know. God knows I've seen the truth in you.*

“Tell me, then,” Wax said, still walking through the mists.

*I don’t think I can. I might be able to show you.*

Bleeder didn’t seem to have trouble hearing, though Wax had softened his voice. Allomancy? Or did she just have the ability to make ears that worked better than human ones? He kept searching. Perhaps one of those dark windows in the government building nearby? Wax headed that way. “Is that why you’re targeting the governor, then?” he asked. “You want to bring him down, free the people from the government’s oppression?”

*You know he’s just another pawn.*

“I don’t know that.”

*I wasn’t talking to you that time, Waxillium.*

He hesitated in the mists. The office building loomed before him, the windows a hundred hollow eyes. Most of those windows were closed—a common practice at night. No need to invite the mists in. Religion could say what it wished, and people believed, mostly. But the mists still made them uncomfortable.

*There,* Wax thought, picking out an open window on the second floor.

*Very good,* Bleeder said, and Wax saw something shift just inside the window, ambient light barely sufficient to let him discern it. *Ever the detective.*

“I’m not much of one, actually,” Wax said. “In the Roughs, you solve fewer cases with investigation than with a good pair of guns.”

*That’s a fun lie,* Bleeder said. *Do you tell that one at parties to youths who’ve read too many stories about the Roughs? They don’t like hearing about interrogating family members of a man gone bad? Tracking down gunsmiths to see who fixed an outlaw’s rifle? Digging through an old campfire after days spent on the road?*

“How do you know about things like that?” Wax asked.

*I do my homework. It’s a kandra thing, which I assume MeLaan explained. Whatever you claim, you’re a good investigator. Maybe an excellent one. Even if you are, by definition, a dog chasing its own tail.*

Wax walked right up to the base of the building, the mist thinning between him and Bleeder, who skulked just inside the window about ten feet up. Her face, though enveloped by the shadows, seemed wrong to Wax. Shaped oddly.

“Have you asked him?” Bleeder whispered from above, barely audible in the night. She had a rasping, dry voice, like the one in his head.

“Who?”

“Harmony. Have you asked why he didn’t save Lessie? A whisper at the right time, telling you not to split up. A warning in the back of your mind, telling you not to prowl down that tunnel, but instead circle around behind? You could have saved Lessie so easily with his help."

"Don't speak her name," Wax hissed.

"He's supposed to be God. He could have snapped his fingers and made Tan drop dead on the spot. He didn't. Have you asked why?"

Vindication was in Wax's hand a moment later, pointing up toward that window. His other hand felt at his gunbelt for the pouch that held the syringes.

Bleeder chuckled. "Ever quick with the gun. If you speak to Harmony again, ask him. Did he know the effect Lessie had on you, that she was what kept you out in the Roughs? Did he know, perhaps, that you'd never return here—where he needed you—as long as she was alive? Did he, perhaps, *want* her to die?"

Wax fired.

Not to hit Bleeder. He just needed to hear a *crack* in the night. That sound, so familiar, of breaking air. The bullet left a trail in the mist, and the wall beside Bleeder popped, scattering flakes of brick.

Rusts … he was shaking.

"I'm sorry," Bleeder whispered. "For what I have to do. Cleaning the wound is often more painful than the cut itself. You will see, and understand, once you are free."

"No, we—"

The mists churned. Wax stumbled back, swinging his gun toward something that had passed in a blur, leaving a corridor of swirling mist.

Bleeder. Moving with Feruchemical speed.

Toward the governor.

Wax cursed, swinging Vindication behind himself and planting a bullet in the ground, then Pushing in a powerful burst. He launched through the mists toward the blazing light of the governor's grounds, sweeping over the gates, startling a small flock of ravens, which scattered into the air around him.

Two shots rang out in the night. As Wax crossed the grounds, he spotted Bleeder on the mansion's front steps, wearing a body-length scarlet coat. The guards at the front doors lay dead at her feet. In the glow of the electric lights, he could see what was wrong with Bleeder's face now—she wore a black-and-white mask. The Marksman's mask, but twisted, broken up one side.

She ducked into the building, not using her speed any longer. Wax landed beside the bodies—he didn't have time to check them for life—and growled as he shoved into the building, gun out, and checked right, then left. The house steward screamed, dropping a tray of tea in the entryway as Bleeder skidded across the floor and into the next room.

Wax followed, the main door ripping from its frame and flying out behind him into the night as he Pushed against it and its hinges to cross the room in a half run, half skim. He burst into the next chamber—a sitting room—with Vindication out, spinning the cylinder to one of the gun's special hazekiller rounds. A Thug shot, extra-heavy slug, built to deliver as much force as possible.

The room he entered was decorated with the kind of perfect furniture you found only in a house that had too many rooms. According to the blueprint he'd been given, under it would be the saferoom.

*Still the gun,* Bleeder said in his mind as she leaped over a sofa, heading toward the wall, which hid the steps down to the saferoom. *Useless. I cannot be killed with that.*

Wax raised Vindication and sighted, then fired, Pushing the bullet forward in a burst of extra speed. It hit Bleeder as she landed.

Right in the ankle.

The bone shattered and Bleeder collapsed as she tried to put weight on her ankle. She turned toward Wax, lips raised in a snarl visible through the broken side of the mask.

Wax put a bullet through the eyehole in the mask.

*This is meaningless—*

He strode forward, shooting her in the hand as she tried to raise her gun. Wax pulled out the syringe, ready to Push it toward her skin, but she growled and became a blur. Wax tried to follow that blur—but at that moment, the side of the room burst open, revealing the hidden stairwell. A group of men in black suits and shotguns piled out, frantic. The governor's special security.

Wax dove for cover as they started firing. He didn't catch much of what happened next, as he put his back to the side of a thick chair. Bleeder moved among the men, firing. They tried to fire back, doing more damage to their friends than they did to her.

It was over by the time the report from the first gunshot had faded in Wax's ears. Men lay groaning and bleeding on the floor, and Bleeder was through the hole and heading down the steps. Wax set his jaw and Pushed himself across the room. He landed, skidding on blood, and leaped into the stairwell. Another Push sent him soaring down the steps.

Gunshots resounded in the narrow confines of the stairwell, coming from just ahead. Wax slowed himself with a shot forward into the ground, landing beside a final handful of guards who lay bleeding on the floor.

The kandra stood alone before the door to the saferoom. She looked at Wax, smiled, and became a blur.

But her speed only lasted a fraction of a second. Soon after she'd begun tapping her metalmind, she slowed back down.

Wax caught sight of her just as she unlocked the door to the governor's saferoom, using a key she shouldn't have. She pulled the door open with a flourish, then glanced back at Wax, shaking her head. She obviously thought she was still a blur moving with incredible speed. And she was.

Wax had simply joined her.

One of the fallen bodies stirred, and Wayne pushed back his hat, showing a grin. Wax raised his hands, a gun in each, and was rewarded by an expression of utter shock on Bleeder's face. She'd regrown her eye, though blood still streamed down the front of her mask. As he had chased her, talked to her, she'd always seemed fully in control.

Until this moment.

Wax blasted away with both guns. That wasn't usually a good idea, at least if you wanted to hit anything, but they were barely ten feet apart—and besides, he was inside a speed bubble. His bullets would refract when leaving sped-up time, and so aiming was of questionable value anyway.

At a time like this, you didn't want to be precise. You wanted to be thorough. Steris would be proud.

He fired in a cacophony, empting both weapons. He took advantage of Bleeder's shock, dropping his guns and pulling his other Sterrion out of its under-arm holster and unloading it. His short-barreled shotgun, from the holster on his thigh, followed, belching slugs and thunder as Wax strode to the edge of the speed bubble.

After reaching the rim, the bullets deflected out into normal time, moving painfully slowly. But less than a foot separated Bleeder and the edge of Wayne's bubble. Wax dropped the shotgun and pulled out one of the syringes again, and shoved it toward her, Pushing on the metal, hoping against hope that—stunned from the gunfire—she wouldn't notice it coming.

As the kandra turned to run, the first bullet hit. Others followed in a storm. Half missed, but Wax had fired almost two dozen shots. Many punched into Bleeder, who dropped her Feruchemical speed as they caught her. She moved lethargically, trying to escape the hail of bullets, sprays of blood bursting silently into the air, like the seeds blown from a dandelion.

She stumbled against the doorframe, and one of the shotgun slugs hit the back of her head, ripping a hole through her face and breaking off the mask. She sagged, gripping the doorframe, draped in her red cloak.

The needle flew from Wax's Push, spinning in the air, but it—like the bullets—had been deflected by the edge of the speed bubble. It impaled itself into the wood of the doorframe just inches from Bleeder.

She righted herself a second later, and sped up again, wounds vanishing. She didn't look at him as her back straightened and she strode through the door. She did flip the needle off the frame, sending it toppling in slow motion toward the ground.

Wax dug a handful of rounds from the pouch on his belt, then leaped out of the speed bubble. He felt an immediate *lurch*—as if the world had been upended—and heard a faint popping sound. The nausea hit him like a punch to the face, but he was ready for it. He'd ducked out of speed bubbles before.

A single gunshot sounded from the saferoom.

He crossed the distance to the door in a rush, throwing the cartridges in front of himself, ready to Push on the ones that he might need to hit Bleeder. Once inside, however, he let the rounds drop to the ground. Bleeder wasn't in the room; an open door at the back led out, presumably through a tunnel to the grounds above.

The plush saferoom—round and rimmed with bookshelves—had a wet bar on one end and was lit by comfortable reading lamps. The governor knelt on the floor, holding a bleeding Drim, frantically trying to stanch the blood coming from the bodyguard's neck.

Wax dashed across the room, stopping at the door into the escape tunnel.

"Lawman!" Innate cried. "Help. Please … oh, Harmony. Help!"

Wax hesitated, peering into that empty, dark tunnel. He was reminded of another one like it, dusty and shored up by beams at the sides. Both a tomb and a stage …

Behind, Wayne stumbled into the room, then scrambled to help Innate. Wax remained by the door into the tunnel, rolling a few rounds between his fingers.

"He saved me," Innate said, weeping. By this point, he was drenched in Drim's blood. He'd pulled off his shirt, trying to use it to stanch the blood. "He leaped into the way right as the assassin shot," Innate said. "Tell me you can … Please…"

"He's gone, mate," Wayne said, settling back.

"Other casualties upstairs, Wayne," Wax said, pointing. With reluctance, he shut the door to the escape tunnel. He couldn't give chase, not and leave the governor alone here.

Wayne rushed out of the room to check on the men who had been shot upstairs. Wax walked over to the governor, who knelt before his bodyguard's corpse. He'd never seen Innate look so human as he did at that moment, shoulders slumped, head bowed. Exhausted, wrung-out. Could anyone fake that?

He checked anyway. "Leavening on sand," Wax said.

Innate looked up at him, eyes unfocused. Wax's heart skipped a beat, but then the governor sighed. "Bones without soup."

He knew the passphrase. This was really Innate.

Wax knelt beside the governor, looking over Drim's corpse. Annoying though the man had been at times, he had not deserved this. "I'm sorry."

"She stopped moving at a blur," Innate said, his voice strained. "She appeared inside, gun out, but seemed angry about something. Drim leaped for me right before she shot. She was gone a second later. Surely she could have paused to finish me off, rather than running."

"She obtained Feruchemical powers only two weeks ago," Wax said. "That time frame greatly limits how much speed she can have stored up, and moving as fast as she has been must have drained her metalmind quickly. She needed to escape before it ran out."

Of course, there could be another reason. She might have just wanted to frighten them, and the governor. To prod him to do something. But what? She said she intended to kill him, but not until the time was right.

Why? What was the plan?

"So she's flawed," Innate said. "She can be beaten."

"Of course she can," Wax said. He looked down at the corpse, and the floor stained red. *But at what cost?* He took a deep breath. "I want you to leave the city."

"No."

"That's stupidity," Wax snapped. "She *will* be back."

"Have you looked out there, lawman?" Innate said, waving a bloody hand in a vaguely upward direction. "Have you seen what's happening in this city?"

"You can't do anything about that tonight."

"I most certainly can." Innate stood. "I'm the leader of this city; I'm not going to run away. If anything, I need to be seen—need to meet with the chief instigators of this movement, if any can be found. I need to address the crowds, prepare a speech—I need to gather my cabinet, and with them make sure that there's still a city here in the morning." He pointed at Wax. "You *stop* this creature, Ladrian. I don't have a bodyguard any longer. I'm in your hands."

He strode out then. Whatever else he thought of the man, Wax had to respect Innate's grit.

*You stop this creature.…*

Wax glanced at the syringe, still lying on the floor near the doorframe. So close. If it had hit, he might have been able to depress the metal plunger and send the liquid into her veins. Feeling powerless, he fetched that syringe and brought it back to Drim's corpse, dead with a bullet right in the neck. Wax plunged the syringe into the corpse's arm and emptied it into the flesh.

Nothing happened. He hadn't expected it to—it seemed very implausible that Bleeder would have managed to get Drim's face on and fool the governor this way. But it still made Wax feel more comfortable.

He stumbled to his feet. Rusts, he was tired. Why *hadn't* she killed the governor? There was more to this.

Wayne peeked in. "Two guards might make it. We have a surgeon helpin' them now."

"Good," Wax said. "Wait for me upstairs."

Wayne nodded, ducking back out. Wax instead walked to the escape route and pulled open the door. He lit a candle and stepped up the slope, cautious, hand on his gun. What did undermining the governor, inciting a riot against the Pathians, and Wax's own "freedom" have to do with one another? What was he missing?

He didn't find Bleeder in the tunnel, though halfway up it he found her red cloak. She'd tossed it, bloodied, to the side. There, scrawled on the wall, was a crude picture shaped like a man, drawn with a fingernail into the wood.

Dabs of dried blood marked the figure's eyes, and another marked its mouth. The words scrawled beneath in blood gave Wax a chill.

*I rip out his tongue to stop the lies.*

*I stab out his eyes to hide from his gaze.*

*You will be free.*

# 17

About a half hour after Bleeder's attack, Wayne walked into the governor's fancy washroom. Only in his head it wasn't the washroom. He just knew to call it that here.

You see, Wayne had figured out the code.

Rich folks, they had this *code*. All of them knew it, and they used it like a new language to weed out everyone who didn't belong.

Regular folk, they called something after what it was.

You'd say, "What's that, Kell?"

And they'd say, "That? That there's the crapper."

And you'd reply, "What do you do with it?"

And they'd say, "Well, Wayne, that's where you put your crap."

It made sense. But rich folk, they had a different word for the crapper. They'd call it a "commode" or a "washroom." That way, when someone asked for the crapper, they knew it was a person they needed to oppress.

Wayne did his business and spat his gum into the bowl before flushing. It felt good to be wearing his own hat again, dueling canes at his waist. He'd spent a good hour or two wearing the clothing and false face of a guard for Innate. Horribly uncomfortable, that.

He wiped his sniffly nose and washed his hands, drying them on towels embroidered with Innate's name. He was *that* worried people would run off with his towels? Well, the joke was on him. Wayne was perfectly happy to wipe up dirt with the governor's name. He tucked the towel into his pocket, and left in trade a few mints he'd taken from the bar.

He wandered out from there, peeking into the room where the governor was holding a meeting with all kinds of important folks, the type who called the crapper "the facilities."

*You know,* he thought, *maybe I have it wrong. Maybe it's not code. Maybe they're just so familiar with what comes out of their arses, normal words aren't specific enough.* Like how the Terris language had seven different words for iron.

He nodded to himself. A new theory. Wax was gonna love this one. Wayne passed into the room with the couches, where the guards had been gunned down. Wax stood inside with an envelope, into which he dropped something small and metallic. He sealed it, then handed it to a young messenger from the governor's staff.

"Deliver it quickly," Wax said. "Pound on the door. Wake her up if you have to—and don't get scared off if she cusses at you or threatens to shoot you. She won't actually hurt you."

The young man nodded, though he'd gone pale.

"Tell her it's urgent," Wax said, holding up his finger. "Don't let her toss it aside and read it in the morning. You stay there until she's read what I wrote, you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good lad. Off with you."

The youth ran out. Wayne strolled over to Wax, passing the open door down to the saferoom. The bodies around it had been removed, though the blood remained.

"Ranette?" Wayne asked hopefully.

Wax nodded. "I thought of something that might help."

"I coulda delivered that, you know…."

"You, she *would* shoot," Wax said.

"Only 'cuz she likes me," Wayne said, smiling. He'd have welcomed an excuse to go see Ranette. This night was getting darker and darker, it seemed.

"Wayne…" Wax said. "You know she doesn't actually like you."

"You always say that, but you're just not seein' the truth, Wax."

"She tries to kill you."

"To keep me alive," Wayne said. "She knows I live a dangerous life. So, keepin' me on my toes is the best way to make sure I stick around. Anyway, was that Marasi I saw in there with the governor and his important folk?"

Wax nodded. "She and MeLaan arrived a short time back. Aradel wants to declare martial law."

"And you don't?" Wayne asked, taking a seat on one of the nice couches that didn't have much blood splattered on it. Important people were meeting nearby. He suspected he knew what would come next, and he intended to wait around for it.

Wax stood for a moment, then shook his head. “Bleeder set this all up, Wayne. She’s been pushing us toward this. ‘I rip out his tongue … I stab out his eyes…’”

“Now, I’m as for dismemberment as the next fellow,” Wayne said, “but that’s a mite violent for this time of day.”

“Bleeder wrote it on the wall down below. A poem of some sort. It doesn’t feel finished to me.”

“She nailed that priest through the eyes,” Wayne noted.

“And ripped out Winsting’s tongue,” Wax said. He fished in his pocket and brought something out, tossing it to Wayne.

“What’s this?” Wayne asked, turning it over in his fingers. It was a piece of painted wood.

“Remains of the Marksman’s mask. Bleeder was wearing it.”

“You think she was him all along?” Wayne asked.

“Maybe,” Wax said. “It would have served her purpose, riling up the people of the slums, reminding them how rich the houses are. By bringing him down, I put myself at odds with the common people.”

“I hate to say it, mate,” Wayne said, “but you ain’t exactly beloved of them anyway.”

“I’m a hero from the Roughs,” Wax said.

“You’re a conner,” Wayne said. “*And* a house lord, mate. Not to mention the fact that you can, yunno, *fly*. You can’t treat this like Weathering. You can’t convince a fellow you’re on his side by slapping him in jail overnight, then playing cards with him until he sees you as a regular chap.”

Wax sighed. “You’re right, of course.”

“Usually am.”

“Except that time on Lessie’s birthday.”

“You always have to bring that up, don’t you?” Wayne leaned back, tipping his hat down over his eyes. “Honest mistake.”

“You put dynamite in the *oven,* Wayne.”

“Gotta hide a gift where nobody’ll look for it.”

“I need to piece this together,” Wax said, starting to pace. “Sketch it out. Write it down. We’re missing something very important.”

Wayne nodded, but was hardly listening. Wax would figure it out. Wayne just needed to get some shuteye, while the getting was still good enough for …

He heard a door click open. He threw back his hat and was on his feet a second later, scrambling for the door. Wax cursed, pulling out one of his guns, following as Wayne dashed into the hallway and intercepted the servant with a plate full of little party foods.

“Aha!” Wayne said. “Thought you could slip by me, didja!”

The kitchen maid looked horrified as Wayne gathered up three of each of the treats. Wax stopped in the doorway, then lowered his gun. “Oh, for Harmony’s sake.”

“Harmony can get his own,” Wayne said, popping a little cake in his mouth. As he turned back to Wax, the maid scuttled away, heading for the meeting.

It was exactly what Wayne had been waiting for. Important folk meeting together always meant snacks. Or canapés, if you knew the code. Wayne popped one in his mouth—candied bacon wrapped around a walnut.

“How is it?” Wax asked.

“Tastes like cotton candy,” Wayne said, relishing the flavor, “made of baby.”

“I did not need to hear that,” Wax said, slipping his gun back into its holster. “I’m going to need to go back out there, see if I can figure out Bleeder’s plan. That leaves you here to protect the governor again.”

Wayne nodded. “I’ll do what I can, but that’s a tall order, mate.”

“I’ve arranged for some help,” Wax said, leading the way over to the ladies’ crapper. He knocked on the door.

“Still changing!” MeLaan’s voice came from inside.

“How long?” Wax said.

The door cracked, and a woman’s face peeked out that looked completely unlike MeLaan’s. “Not long,” she said in MeLaan’s voice. “This lady’s hair was a real pain.” She shut the door.

“I recognize that face,” Wayne said, folding his arms and leaning against the wall.

“One of the guards,” Wax said. “That got shot a little earlier.”

“Oh right.” Wayne had a sinking feeling. “Wasn’t she one of the ones I tried to save?”

“Died shortly thereafter,” Wax said. “MeLaan will keep the arm in a sling—that was where the shot hit first, before penetrating into the woman’s lung. We’ll keep her on the governor’s guard staff, and hopefully Bleeder will be so busy looking for you and me that she’ll miss MeLaan.”

“I hope you appreciate this,” the kandra’s voice came from inside the crapper. “I *hate* being short. As a side note, this lady tasted awful. Far too lean and tough.” The door cracked, revealing the face again. “Next time, choose a body that’s been sitting around awhile, would you? Nice and aged is the best flavor for…”

She trailed off, looking from Wayne to Wax, noticing their expressions.

"Oh right," she said. "Mortals. I'd forgotten how squeamish you can be."

"Please," Wax said, sounding pained, "show some respect for the dead woman. It's already difficult to let you use her corpse like this."

MeLaan rolled her eyes—rusts, it was strange to see her behave just like before, but in an entirely different body. "It's either me or the worms, kids. Don't you think she'd be happy to go out all at once, munched down in half an hour, rather than sitting there and melting into the ground over the course of—"

"Too much description, MeLaan," Wax said, his voice strained.

"Fine, fine. I'm almost ready; just have to get the clothing on. How is the hair?"

"Good," Wayne said. "I think you forgot an eyebrow though."

MeLaan felt at her face. "Hell," she said. "This is what you get by forcing me to work so quickly." She ducked back into the room.

"Speaking of quickly," Wax said through the door, "is this about what I can expect with Bleeder? A half hour to change bodies?"

Wayne nodded. That would be useful to know.

"No, unfortunately," MeLaan's voice said from inside, muffled. It was still the same voice as she'd had in her other body. Was she going to change that? "Paalm is old-generation, *very* practiced. I don't think anybody is as good as TenSoon, mind you, but Paalm will be fast—particularly swapping into a body she's used before. I've known early-generationers who can change bodies in under ten minutes, and that's going in blind."

"Isn't that tough?" Wayne called. "Like … I once hadda eat twenty sausages for a bet. Won five notes, but spent an hour on the ground moaning like a fellow on the pot tryin' to force a mango through his delicate doughnut, if you catch my meaning."

Wax groaned softly, but a short time later MeLaan opened the door again, and was this time clothed in a black suit like the other guards. She was also smiling. "You're cute," she noted to Wayne. "How's my eyebrow?"

"Uh, good." Cute? "But I'm taken."

"In answer to your question," MeLaan said, "it *is* hard, but not for the reason you're implying. We can force-feed and expel excess, which makes doing the transformation near a drain like in here convenient. The tough part is memorizing the muscle patterns as you digest them. That and getting the hair right. You people are practically drowning in the stuff. Fortunately, for a quick change like this, I can ignore the hair under the clothing."

"So … wait," Wayne said, rubbing his chin. "You're saying we might be able to check if a person is a kandra by…"

"… Seeing if they put leg and arm hair on?" MeLaan asked. "That might actually work, but only if the kandra had to change fast."

"*Arm hair*," Wayne said. "Right. I was thinkin' of arm hair."

"That is the most difficult part to get right on short notice," MeLaan said. "We can't make hair, so we've got to use your own, and place each strand in a pore. Arms and legs have thousands of the things. What a pain. Far worse than a mass on the head or whatnot."

"MeLaan," Wax said, digging in his coat pocket and bringing something out. "Do you recognize this?"

"I don't have a lot to go on, chief, but I'd say it's an empty glass vial."

"Take it inside and turn off the lights," Wax said, tossing her the vial as Wayne stepped forward, trying to get a look. That stuff seemed interesting.

MeLaan withdrew, then shoved open the door a second later. She grabbed Wax by the mistcoat, somehow still imposing despite the fact that she was now shorter than either of them. "Where did you get this?"

"Bottom of Bleeder's robes," Wax said. "The ones she was wearing to imitate a priest."

"This is perchwither," MeLaan said. "It's a bioluminescent fungus. It grows in only one place."

"Where?" Wax asked.

"The kandra Homeland."

Wax looked deflated. "Oh. So that's where we'd expect her to be going, right?"

"No," MeLaan said. "The kandra are no longer trapped there. We move in society—we have homes, lives. If we want to meet up with others of our kind, we catch them at the pub. The Homeland is a monument. A holy site. A place of relics. The fact that she's been there recently, wearing the body of someone she killed…" MeLaan shivered visibly, letting go of Wax. "It's nauseating."

"I should check it out," Wax said. "She might be staying down there."

MeLaan folded her arms, looking him over. "Harmony says it's okay," she said. "You can get in through the tombs; look for the sign of atium and use your other eyes. We don't use that entrance very often, but it's probably easiest for you. Just don't break anything, lawman."

"I'll do my best," Wax said, turning as a footman peeked in from the hallway, then approached with a small silver tray bearing a card.

"Lord Ladrian?" said the footman, holding out the tray. "Your coach has arrived."

"Coach?" Wayne asked. On a hunt, Wax was usually in full-on "fly through the city like a rusting vulture" mode. Why would he need a coach?

Wax picked up the card on the tray, then nodded and took a deep breath.

"Thank you." He turned to Wayne and MeLaan. "Keep the governor alive. I'll send word if I discover anything."

"So what's in the coach?" Wayne asked.

"I sent a note soon after I got here to the mansion," Wax said. "There's one person in this city who might have an inkling of what Bleeder is up to." Wax's face took on a grim cast.

*Ah, of course,* Wayne thought. He patted Wax on the shoulder. This wouldn't be a pleasant meeting.

"Who?" MeLaan asked, looking from Wayne back to Wax. "What are you talking about?"

"Have you ever heard," Wax said, "of a group called the Set?"

* * *

Wax found his uncle waiting comfortably inside the coach. No bodyguards. The coachman didn't even ask for Wax's weapons as he stopped at the door. Contacting his uncle had been easy; the appointment book had listed a few of Edwarn's safe-deposit boxes, kept under false names. After posting watch on one for a few weeks, Wax had found a letter inside, suggesting he try something else.

He'd left his own letter. After that, one had appeared for him. They never said anything useful, and Wax had driven himself crazy trying to find out how they were being placed. But Edwarn seemed to know the moment a new one from Wax arrived.

Wax took a deep breath, then climbed into the coach. Edwarn was a stocky man distinguished by a short, precisely trimmed beard, a beautifully tailored suit, and a cravat so narrow and thin, it lay flat like a bowtie loosened at the end of a long night. Edwarn's hands rested easily on the ornate head of a cane, and his face bore a wide smile.

"Nephew!" he said as Wax settled into his seat. "You can't imagine my joy upon receiving your note, and with a promise that you wouldn't try to arrest me. So quaint! I came immediately; I feel like we've been too distant lately."

"Distant? You tried to have me killed."

"And you've tried to return the favor!" Edwarn said, knocking with his cane on the roof to get the coach moving. "Yet here we sit, both alive and well. I see no reason why we can't be amiable. We are rivals, yes, but also still family."

"You're a criminal, Uncle," Wax said. "Considering the things you've done, I don't feel much familial empathy."

Edwarn sighed, slipping his pipe from his pocket. "Can't you at least try to be pleasant?"

"I'll try." Truth was, Wax wanted information from this man. Antagonizing him would not be smart.

They rolled on silently for a while as Edwarn lit the pipe, and Wax tried to organize his thoughts. How to approach this?

"Dangerous night," Edwarn noted, nodding out the window as they passed a group of men and women holding aloft lanterns and torches while listening to a woman standing on a stack of boxes. She shouted into the mists angry words that Wax couldn't quite make out. Rusts, that group was close to the governor's mansion. He hoped that Innate and the constables could get this under control.

"I wonder," Edwarn said, puffing on his pipe, "if that night long ago felt the same as this one—the night when the Survivor's Gambit played out. The fall of a regime. The start of a new world."

"You can't possibly think this is equivalent," Wax said. "The Lord Ruler's reign was one of terror and oppression. These people are upset, yes, but it's a far different world now."

"Different?" Edwarn said, letting smoke roll from his mouth as he spoke. "Perhaps. But human emotions are the same. It seems that no matter how nice the box is, put a man inside it and he will buck. Fight. *Rail.*"

"And you claim to be on the side of the common man," Wax said dryly.

"Hardly. I want power. Wealth. Influence. Just like the people in the Survivor's crew, actually."

"They were heroes."

"And thieves."

"They were what they had to be."

"And Kelsier himself?" Edwarn said. "In the years before his grand gambit? What of the Ascendant Warrior, living on the street, scamming noblemen and priests for a living? Have you read the Words of Founding, Nephew? The Historica speaks frankly about their ambitions. The Survivor didn't just want to overthrow the Lord Ruler; he wanted to steal the empire's riches. He wanted to rule the world that came about upon the Lord Ruler's fall. He wanted power. Influence. Wealth."

"I'm not going down this road, Uncle," Wax said.

"Have you ever wondered," Edwarn mused, ignoring Wax's objection, "if you'd get along with them? If you'd lived back then, what would you have seen? A bunch of miscreants? Lawbreakers? Would you have trussed up the Ascendant Warrior and tossed her in a cell? The law is not something holy, son. It's just a reflection of the ideals of those lucky enough to be in charge."

"I don't know any constables," Wax said, "who think the law is perfect or the courts infallible. But they're the best damn things we have right now, and I'm not going to entertain for a *second* the idea that you're some kind of secret seeker of justice. You're as rotten as they come, Uncle."

"So pleasant," Edwarn said. "And this is what I get for responding to your invitation? Insults and vitriol. And one wonders why our house is considered a laughingstock these days. I'm told they invite you to parties just to see you strut."

"I sent to you," Wax said through clenched teeth, "because I think we might have a common enemy. I know you want to rule this city. Well, I need you to see reason. I've spoken with the creature. If we don't stop her, there might not be a city *to* rule."

Edwarn didn't respond, holding his pipe and looking through the coach's glass window at the curling mists in the darkness just outside.

"What do you know?" Wax asked, almost a plea. "I'm certain the Set has been watching events with interest. Your attempt to kill me earlier—tell me that was just a strike of opportunity. Tell me you aren't working with her. She'll see it all burn, Uncle. Help me bring her down."

Edwarn mused silently awhile, enjoying his pipe. "Do you realize what your overzealous campaign against us has accomplished, Nephew?" he finally asked. "Half the city's elements are too frightened to work with the Set, for fear that you'll show up on their doorstep and shoot their mothers. The money you've seized hasn't ruined us, but it has made some of our members very, very upset."

"Good," Wax said.

"You say that because you're ignorant," Edwarn spat. "Among the members of the Set, I am conservative. I speak against brashness, against violence. The more you shove, however, the weaker my influence becomes, and stronger grow the voices clamoring for change. At any cost."

"Oh, Harmony," Wax whispered. "You *are* working with her."

"It's more like we're riding the storm," Edwarn said. "Personally, I'd love to see you bring this creature down. It might topple some of my rivals, give me a chance to propose something audacious of my own to the Set. But I'm not going to help you, Nephew. Perhaps this is what needs to be."

"How can you do this?" Wax asked. "You're going to watch it all burn?"

"Ashes are excellent fertilizer," Edwarn said.

"Unless they pile so high they smother everything."

Edwarn drew his lips to a tight line. "You are shortsighted and self-righteous. You were ever so, even during your youth. But still I love you, Nephew. I consider it a sign of that love that I haven't actually had you killed. I keep hoping you'll see we are not your enemy. We are the thieves and miscreants of this day who will someday be hailed as heroes. The men and women who will change the world because … what was it you said?… this is what we need to be in order to survive.”

“And my sister?” Wax said. “Is holding her captive part of what you need to do to survive?”

“Yes, actually,” Edwarn said, meeting his eyes. “Because I don’t doubt that someday I’m going to need to use her against you. Kill me, and your sister is as good as dead, Waxillium.” He knocked again on the ceiling beneath the driver. The carriage slowed to a stop.

“Run along now,” Edwarn said. “Go be the toy soldier and pretend you wouldn’t have murdered the Survivor’s entire crew, if you’d lived under the Lord Ruler. Try to pretend you went out into the Roughs to find justice, and not because you realized life in this city was just too damn *hard* for you.”

They sat in the quiet, immobile coach. Wax held himself steady, though Edwarn’s eyes flicked toward Wax’s shoulder holster, as if he was expecting Wax to draw. He could. He could shoot this man right here and now—he’d broken promises before, and to far better men than his uncle.

*Kill me, and your sister is as good as dead.…*

Wax kicked the door open. “I’m going to go deal with this kandra, but know that I won’t forget you, Uncle. One day you’re going to find me standing behind you with a gun to your head, and you’ll have the sudden, horrible realization that there’s nothing left that can protect you.”

“I look forward to it!” Edwarn said. “If that day doesn’t come before next summer, you should join me for Mareweather dinner. We’ll have stuffed pig in your honor.”

Wax growled softly, but stepped from the coach and slammed the door.

# 18

Marasi had spent a great portion of her adult life preparing to be an attorney, and her mother had wished her to someday find her way to politics. Marasi had abandoned aspirations toward politics in her youth, and had recently abandoned the solicitors as well. The thing was, those professions had one important flaw: They were populated entirely with attorneys and politicians.

Despite her best efforts she now found herself in a room full of them. Governor Innate stood by the hearth here, in his private study, one arm resting on the mantel. Arrayed before him were the men and women of his executive staff, a hearty bunch who didn't seem nearly as groggy as the constables and guards who had been called up in the middle of the night.

In fact, the group displayed a distinct energy as they discussed the crisis. Their words tumbled over one another in their eagerness to express their opinions, like children vying for parental approval. Marasi stood beside the window—where the governor had put her, saying he'd get to her later. So she waited, listened, and circumspectly took notes on her pad. If the kandra happened to be hiding among them, she doubted a verbal slip would enable her to recognize Bleeder, but it seemed the best use of her time as long as she was required to stay put.

"It will all blow over," repeated the city sanitation director. He was an attorney who had been through the same program she'd completed, albeit many years ago. Marasi wasn't sure why he needed a law degree to run city sanitation. "Rep, you're taking this too seriously."

"I am taking an attempt on my *life* too seriously?" Innate asked. "An attack that left one of my lifelong friends dead?"

That brought a stillness to the room, and the sanitation director settled back down, red-faced. Innate had changed his shirt from the one stained red with blood, but Marasi knew they all had seen him before he'd done so. She rather thought he'd delayed changing until they had.

"I wasn't talking about the assassination attempt," the sanitation director said. "I meant the ruckus outside. It will blow over."

"They're already looting," the minister of trade noted, a bespectacled woman who had brought two aides to take notes for her. She hadn't offered them seats.

"There will *always* be looting," the sanitation director said. "It happens. We hunker down, let burn what needs to burn. Contain, rather than try to stamp out."

"Foolishness," said the secretary of education, a corpulent woman who sat with her feet up by the crackling fire. "This is a time for decisiveness, my lord governor. You need to show your rivals that you are not easily cowed. You know the Lekals have been getting traction lately, and your brother's scandal will only fuel their ambition. Mark my words, they will present a strong candidate to rival you at the next election, and he will lean on this night's events to discredit you."

"Yes," said the minister of public affairs. "Could they be behind the assassination attempt, perhaps?"

The governor glanced toward Marasi—the first time he'd acknowledged her since the meeting had begun. He knew about MeLaan now; she'd shown her true nature to him just before the meeting started. He believed, and had begun by explaining to the executive staff about the rogue kandra. The others obviously considered it foolishness and, after the way of their kind, were simply ignoring what he'd told them.

Marasi met his gaze calmly. Once upon a time she had dreamed of being a participant in meetings like this one. Gatherings where important decisions were made, where laws were drafted and political strategies adopted. Now, she found herself frustrated by all the talk. Waxillium was rubbing off on her, and perhaps not in ways she should appreciate.

"No, no," the sanitation director said. "The Lekals aren't behind this. An assassin? Are you mad, Donton? They would never be caught engaging in something so potentially damaging."

"Agreed," said the secretary of education. "This was someone far more desperate. I repeat, my lord governor. Decisiveness. Leadership. You asked about martial law? Well, that is the *minimum* you must do, I say. Send the constables out in force. Crush the looters, scatter the rioters, be seen protecting the city."

Others voiced their opinions on this, and the governor quieted them. “I’ll consider. I’ll *consider*.” His tone was sharp, sharper than Marasi had heard from him before. “Out with you all. I need to think.”

In that moment he looked haggard. The counselors quieted, then made their way out. Marasi moved to join them, reluctantly.

“Miss Colms,” the governor said, walking to his desk, “a moment.”

Marasi obeyed, stepping up before the desk as he settled down. He reached to the floor, pushing back the rug and exposing the top of a small safe, which he absently unlocked with a key from his desk. He reached inside, taking out his seal of office, then settled down to begin writing.

“Tell Constable-General Aradel that he has his writ of martial law,” the governor said tiredly. “He’s the only constable-general to contact me so far, which I find disturbing. I am appointing him with executive authority as lord high constable, director of all law-enforcement offices in the city until this crisis is over. The other octants’ constables-general will need to report to him.”

Marasi didn’t reply. The others weren’t going to like that. The rivalry among the octant precincts was officially characterized as friendly, but in reality had far too much bite to it for her taste. “And your instructions regarding the people of the city?” Marasi asked softly as he wrote. “Should the constables do as your education secretary suggests?”

Innate finished writing. He looked up at her, and seemed to weigh her with his eyes. “You’re new to the constabulary, I believe? The … cousin of Lord Ladrian’s betrothed?”

“I wasn’t aware I’d attracted your attention,” Marasi said.

“You haven’t. *He* has. Damnable man.”

Marasi remained silent, feeling awkward before his judgmental gaze.

“Those mobs will end up here sooner or later, you know,” the governor said, tapping his pen on the table. “They’ll come demanding answers. I must speak to them, turn this tide.”

*Speak to them?* Marasi thought. *As you did earlier?* That speech hadn’t shown any particular sense of empathy.

Rusts, had that only been this afternoon? Checking the governor’s ornate desk clock, she found it was almost two—so the governor’s speech had technically been yesterday. She probably shouldn’t have looked at the time; seeing exactly how late it was merely reminded her of her own exhaustion. It was like an angry creditor pounding on her door; she’d be able to ignore it for only so long.

“Tell Aradel,” the governor mused, “not to stop the people from converging here at the mansion, but he is to beat down any looters in other parts of the city. Put the fear of the sword into them. I'll need a force of constables here, of course, to keep the masses who come to me in check, but I do want to speak to them. This will be a night for *history* to be made."

"Sir," Marasi said. "I know a thing or two about the mentality of crowds, if you wish—"

Someone outside called for Innate, and he stood in the middle of Marasi's sentence. He shoved the writ toward her, sealed with his stamp, then marched out to deal with the questions.

Marasi watched him go with a sigh. Hopefully Wayne and that kandra woman would be able to assure his safety. She'd happily see Innate incarcerated someday, but she didn't wish him dead. His assassination would be, among other things, terrible for city morale.

She stored the writ beside her pistol in her purse, then walked from the room and slipped through the hallway, where many of the cabinet members were giving orders to aides and accepting cups of steaming black tea from household staff. Wayne lounged in a corner, feet up on an end table and spinning an expensive gold-and-mahogany pen between his fingers. Harmony knew where he'd stolen *that*.

Unfortunately, her motor needed a refueling, so she'd have to use more mundane methods to run the writ to Aradel. She found the footman and ordered a carriage.

The haggard footman, however, shook his head. "It will be a few minutes, miss, before I can dredge up a coach. The executive staff have half the cabs in the city running notes for them, and on a night like this one no less…" He glanced meaningfully toward the open door. Outside, the porch lights barely penetrated the mists. They curled and danced, almost timid. Tiny wisps would creep into the entry hall, then vanish almost immediately like steam over a stove.

"I will wait," Marasi said. "Thank you."

He seemed pleased by her response; perhaps others had been less understanding. As he was called away, Marasi idled in the doorway, staring into the mists. That orange haze over the city wasn't normal. Fires were burning out there. If they were lucky, those flames would only be massed lanterns and torches, not buildings.

Standing there strongly reminded her of something that she couldn't put her finger on. She shook her head and walked back into the mansion with half a mind to find Wayne and see what he thought of recent events. In the large sitting room beyond the entryway, she passed a weary serving man scrubbing the wooden floor. The bloodstains were stubborn, it appeared. The man had already discreetly rolled the rug up against the wall for disposal.

Marasi passed him and, changing her mind about finding Wayne, instead walked down the stairs toward the hidden chamber. *A city close to breaking,* she thought as she reached the bottom. *This has happened before.*

In the confined space, the air still smelled of the soap that had been used to clean up the blood. The empty saferoom had a quiet, scholastic feel about it, with all those books on the walls. There was no overhead lighting, just the lamps, shaded a soft red-orange. She walked around the room, noting the many volumes of the full Words of Founding when she passed it on the wall. The leather-bound books seemed pristine, and on a whim, she pulled the first one out and checked it. The pages were uncut, as sometimes happened in new books. This volume had obviously never been read.

Long ago the Survivor had pushed a city to the brink of destruction, then channeled that fury into a rebellion that had overthrown a millennium-long dictatorship. Every student learned of those days, but Marasi had read the detailed accounts, including of the night when it had all come to a head. She could imagine it had been a night very much like this one.

Only instead of the Survivor, this time it had been induced by a psychotic murderer.

*She has to be doing it on purpose,* Marasi thought, walking through the room. *Trying to echo that night when the Lord Ruler fell. A people on the brink of insurrection. Noble houses at each other's throats. And now …*

Now a speech. The governor would have his moment before the crowd, and they would sense the resonance even if they couldn't put their finger on it. They'd been taught about that night since childhood. They would listen to him, and expect him to be like the Last Emperor, who had spoken long ago on the night of the Lord Ruler's death. The Last Emperor had come to power because of his heartfelt words that night.

But Governor Innate was *not* Elend Venture. Far from it.

Marasi suddenly stopped and backed up a few steps. She'd been walking beside the built-in bookcases, paying little conscious attention to them, but just enough to have noticed something off. Here, on this long shelf of pristine books, were three in a row with spines scuffed at the bottom. What distinguished these books? They were part of a seven-volume collection of dry political treatises written long ago by the Counselor of Gods.

She took one and flipped through it, finding nothing of interest. Perhaps Innate had been studying lately. But … why were only the third, fourth, and fifth volumes scuffed? She picked up another and opened it—and here she found the reason. Cut into the center of the pages was a hole containing a key. Innate hadn't been reading Breeze's old essays. He had simply forgotten which volume had the key in it.

Marasi held up the key, then glanced at the room's solitary desk. Dared she?

*Of course I dare,* she thought, crossing the room with a swish of skirts. Her constable credentials, plus Aradel's concern about the governor, would give her legal grounds for doing a quick search. She knew the law as well as anyone.

She also knew that the law was subject to interpretation by the city's judges, most of whom had noble blood and would not take kindly to someone spying on the governor. That was why her fingers were trembling as she quickly tried the key in the desk drawer. It didn't fit. She paused, then tried a spot on the floor like the one up above, where the governor had gotten out his seal.

Sure enough, there was a hidden safe under the rug. She turned the key in it, and earned a satisfying *click*. She pulled the safe open and quickly scanned the contents.

A pistol.

Cigars. She didn't recognize the brand.

A bundle of banknotes tied with string. Enough to buy a house. Marasi's eyes bulged a little, but she kept searching.

A stack of letters. These she took over to the desk, expecting to find details of an illicit romantic relationship or the like. She skimmed them, then read more deeply, then sank down into the desk's chair, raising her fingers to her lips.

The letters did detail a relationship—or, rather, many of them. These were private communications with house leaders throughout the city. Although couched in euphemism and circumlocution, to her they clearly spoke of corruption.

Marasi grew cold as she flipped through them, letter by letter. The actual writing was opaque. *We agree that certain courtesies will be extended* or *These are acceptable terms as per our previous arrangement*. But they were dated, and her mind quickly related each of them to her notes back at the precinct. This was proof. She flipped through more. Yes, they aligned with her own statistical analysis. These were Innate's promises of political favors in exchange for bribes.

With the obfuscatory language, it might not be a smoking gun—but it was at least a very warm one. Better, Innate had added notations to most of the letters to remind himself of important points. Here was one probably trading a promise by Innate to push for higher tariffs on refined steel from outside the city in exchange for a favorable deal on a land purchase by one of his family. Another more recent one was about a judge's seat, when Innate had appointed a Hammondess scion to a recent opening.

She'd suspected corruption, but this was jarring—seeing it discussed like this in black and white. She sifted through the stack. No letters to the Lekals, his primary rivals. None to Waxillium either, Marasi saw with relief—nor any older ones to Edwarn Ladrian, Waxillium's uncle.

Under the letters was a ledger, which she expected would show what Innate thought he was still owed, and would also record the state of his private accounts. Flipping through quickly didn't tell her enough to be certain, but it did seem reasonable.

Marasi sat holding it all, feeling overwhelmed. *Rusts. The people are right to be in revolt.* Was this the crux of Bleeder's plan? Shove Innate into the limelight, then undermine him by exposing his corruption—indeed, the corrupt nature of virtually every noble family in the city? In revealing these letters, Marasi could be playing into the creature's hands. That made her sick. If he *was* this corrupt, didn't he need to be exposed and removed?

She hurriedly tucked the letters into her purse. Captain Aradel needed to see this. Marasi quickly shut and locked the safe, put back the key, and then started up the steps. She didn't want to be in the basement when the footman came looking for her to announce her carriage.

*Innate will claim they were planted by Bleeder,* Marasi thought as she reached ground level. *He'll have an easy out.* Beyond that, if he noticed they were gone, he'd have a pretty good idea of who took them. That same servant was still cleaning up, and he'd seen Marasi go down and return.

But Rust and Ruin, she wasn't going to just ignore something like this.

* * *

Flying through the air at night let Wax see the distinct presence of humankind, as marked by strict boundaries. Where they dwelled, there was illumination. Pinpricks in the darkness, men and women staking a claim on the night. The lights spread like the roots of a tree.

His uncle had left him far from where he wanted to be. Fortunately, for a Coinshot even the vastness of Elendel was manageable. He didn't immediately turn inward, however, to visit the kandra Homeland. His uncle's words haunted him, and before those Bleeder's gibes. They attacked from two different directions, like pins pushed into either temple.

He needed to think, to be alone. Perhaps then he could sort through what this mess meant. He landed on a rooftop overlooking the vast glowing carpet of lights before him. A cat watched him from a nearby flower box, its eyes alight. Below was another row of pubs. Loud, raucous. Surely it was past two in the morning, yet they showed no signs of quieting down.

Rusts, how he hated that one could never feel truly alone in the city. Even in the privacy of his mansion, the quiet was marred by the incessant passage of carriages outside.

He leaped away into the night, frightening the cat. He soared high in a long arc, trying to get far enough away that he couldn't hear the men shouting drunkenly in the row of pubs. His search took him eastward, toward the edge of the city. As he approached, something emerged from the mists like the bleached spine of some ancient monster. Eastbridge, a massive construction that spanned the Irongate River here.

On one hand, he marveled that humankind could create something like this—an enormous riveted marvel, big enough to let motors pass and also hold railroad tracks. On the other hand, the mists completely engulfed the bridge, giving it an even more skeletal cast. Humankind would create, and take pride in those creations, but Harmony's presence could make it all seem trivial.

*Did He know?* Wax landed atop one of the bridge's towers, boots clanging. *Could He have saved Lessie?*

The answer was simple. Of course Harmony had known. To believe in a God was to accept that He or She wasn't going to deliver you from every problem. It wasn't something Wax had ever dwelled on. Living in the Roughs, he'd accepted that sometimes you just had to weather things on your own. Help didn't always come. That was life. You dealt with it.

But now, something felt different. He'd spoken to Harmony. Hell, Wax was out here right now because of a request from God Himself. That made it all the more personal. God hadn't saved Lessie, hadn't given Wax warning. And now He expected Wax to just hop to it and do as He demanded?

*And what would you do?* Wax addressed himself, walking along the bridge's lofty pinnacle. *Let the city burn? Let Bleeder keep killing?*

Of course he couldn't. Harmony knew that too. He had Wax by the throat.

*Are you there?* Wax asked, sending the thought out. *Harmony?*

He felt at his ear before remembering that he'd taken out his earring. By necessity, yes, but in that moment he was glad not to have it. Not to let God get a purchase on his mind, for the thoughts he had weren't particularly pious.

Wax strode through the mists, while down below a lone motorcar puttered across the bridge. Bleeder was toying with him. He could feel her fingers sneaking in, piercing his skull, wrapping around his mind. He could see exactly what she was doing, yet couldn't banish the questions she raised.

Wax paused at one end of the tower's top. From here he could see the edge of the city, where the lights gave way to the darkness of the countryside. Behind him, the city was a brilliant blaze, thousands upon thousands of lights, but the electric lines hadn't yet come out past the bridge. On the outskirts of Elendel, the lights stopped. The last few hung on the bridge, like lighthouses looking out at the vast blackness of the sea.

He yearned for that darkness. To leap out into it, escape all this responsibility—stop needing to worry about hundreds of thousands of people he couldn't know, and get back to helping the few he could.

Freedom. Freedom, to Wax, wasn't the absence of responsibility. He didn't doubt that if he left again, he'd find himself as a lawman once more. No, freedom was not lack of responsibilities—it was being able to do what was right, without having to worry if it was also wrong.

He didn't contemplate leaving, not seriously. But he did sit for a time, looking out at that darkness. Trying to look past the people, the shadowed suburbs, and see simplicity again. Rusts. What he wouldn't give to trade all the politicians, games, and secrets for an honest murderer calling him out on the street.

*Coward.*

His own thought. Not from Harmony, or Bleeder. That made it all the more like a punch to the gut, for he knew it to be the truth. Wax took a deep breath and stood up again, shouldering his burdens. He turned away from the darkness and leaped off the bridge, Pushing himself into the night again. He'd come here for a moment's solace, to think.

Turned out, he didn't like where those thoughts were taking him.

# 19

As much as Wayne appreciated all the fancy treats the governor was providing, he had to admit he wasn't entirely sympathetic to the man's plight. After all, the whole point of having someone in charge—like the governor—was about makin' sure people knew which fellow to kill.

That was why they had elections, wasn't it? Innate got to be in charge and order everybody about, but when the assassins got bored, they didn't go whack the guy what sold fish on the street corner. They went for the guy in charge. You had to take the good with the bad, you did. On one hand, you got fancy sweets any time of day. On the other hand, you might find murderers in your loo. That was the breaks.

And this Innate guy, he seemed to really *want* to meet Ironeyes. Not running away to the country when you *knew* a psychopathic, shapeshifting super-Allomancer was after you? Yeah, he understood he was a target. As Wayne sauntered after him—taking the tray from the serving girl as she tried to retreat with the uneaten cakes—the governor stopped in the doorway to his study.

"I need a few minutes to think, to prepare my remarks," he said to Wayne and the other guards. "Thank you."

"But sir!" MeLaan said. "You can't go in alone. We need to protect you!"

"And what are any of you going to do," Innate said, "about someone who can move at the speed of a thunderclap? We will just have to take our chances that the constables can deal with this … creature."

"I don't think—" MeLaan began, but cut off as he shut the door, leaving her, Wayne, and a couple of other guards in the hallway.

Wayne rolled his eyes, then leaned against the wall. "You two," he said to the other guards, “go watch the window from outside that room, whydontcha? We’ll set up here.”

The two fellows shuffled, looked like they’d object, but then slunk out of the hallway. *I wonder,* Wayne thought, settling down on the floor beside the door, *if they’re rethinkin’ their career choices. What with most everyone else guarding the governor dead already …*

“You mortals,” MeLaan said, waving toward the door, “can be surprisingly cavalier with your limited life spans.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said. “He probably just wants to get me in trouble.”

“What?” MeLaan sounded amused. “By getting himself killed?”

“Sure,” Wayne said. “The idiot forbade me from goin’ to his fancy party earlier, then ditched me afterwise. He’s got it in for me. He’s gonna get himself killed, and leave me to explain it to Wax. ‘Sorry, mate. I let your pet politician get ripped in half.’ And Wax’ll scowl at me real good, even though ’s not my fault.”

MeLaan sat down across from him and grinned. “Is that what happened to his horse?”

“Why you gotta bring that up again?” Wayne asked, wriggling down to get comfortable and tipping his hat over his eyes. “That *really* wasn’t my fault. I had myself a dehabilitating injury when that happened.”

“De…”

“Yeah,” Wayne said, “made me cuss and drink like a bugger.” He settled back, listening, eyes closed. Servants moved through the building. Messengers went over their routes. Important types discussed their opinions just a room over.

They all talked. Everyone had to talk. People couldn’t just think something, they had to *explain* it. Wayne was the same. He was people, after all.

This murderer, this kandra, she was people too. She had talked to Wax. She *had* to talk.

Wax would probably catch her. He did things like that, impossible things that nobody thought he could. But just in case he didn’t, Wayne listened. You could tell a lot about people from the way they talked. You saw their past, their upbringing, their aspirations—all in the words they used. And this kandra … sooner or later she’d slip up and use the wrong word. A word that would be obvious, like a fellow drinking milk in the middle of a rowdy tavern.

He didn’t hear anything right off, though oddly he *did* notice MeLaan whispering to herself. As he listened, she modulated her voice, making it deeper—though still feminine. She repeated a few words to herself.

"She woulda been a twofie," Wayne noted, eyes still closed.

"Hm?" MeLaan said.

"Your bones," Wayne said. "Woman you're wearin' right now. Twofie. Second Octant. Raised on the outskirts."

"And how do you know that?" MeLaan asked.

"Heard her curse as I was helpin' her," Wayne said, feeling a stab of regret. The woman had just been doing her job, trying to keep someone from being killed.

*She's still doing her job though,* he thought, cracking an eye and looking at MeLaan. *Her bones are, at least.* Given the choice, if he died while trying to do something important, he'd rather that his bones get up and see it done right. Hell, with some kandra friends, he could be annoying Steris well into the afterlife.

"Like this?" MeLaan said. "Second Octant, touch of agave farmer?"

"Nice," Wayne said. "Draw out the end of your sentences, pitch them lower. Get some real twofie into that voice."

"Is this better?"

"Yeah, actually," Wayne said, sitting up. "That's damn good."

"TenSoon would be proud," MeLaan said. "I can still get a difficult accent right, when I need to."

"Difficult?" Wayne said. "The twofie accent?"

"With agave farmer."

"Common mix," Wayne said. "Once, I hadda do a guy who grew up on the northwestern coast, raised by deaf parents, only talking once in a while—who had then moved in with the Terris fundamentalists up in the mountains there."

MeLaan frowned as a servant bustled past carrying linen. Some of the executive staff were going to be staying through the night, what was left of it, and guest rooms needed to be prepared. "I don't know if I can do that," MeLaan said, talking in a slow, deliberate way, with a hint of Terris and a lot of slurred words. "But it does sound like fun."

"Ha!" Wayne said, turning on the accent, which was actually more clipped than MeLaan had made it. "Good, but you're trying too hard. Being raised by parents who can't hear doesn't make a chap stupid. He just looks at the world differently, see?"

"Not bad," MeLaan said. The next servant who passed gave them a glare as she had to pick her way over their outstretched legs in the hallway.

"It's better if I have a hat," Wayne said.

"A … hat."

"Sure," Wayne said. "Hats is a disguise for your *brain*. Helps you think like the person what wore it last. You wanna know a guy? Put on his hat."

"Has anyone ever told you that you're surprisingly wise?" MeLaan asked.

"All the bloody time."

"They're idiots. You're not wise, you're playing them. You're doing this on purpose." She grinned. "I love it."

Wayne tipped his hat forward, smiling and leaning back again. "I'm not lying 'bout the hats though. They do help."

"Sure," MeLaan said. "Like bones."

He cracked an eye at her. "Does it ever … bother you? Knowin' you might live forever?"

"Bother me? Why would it? Immortality is damn convenient."

"Don't know about that," Wayne said. "Seems to me that it would be nice to finally be *done,* you know? It's like … like you're running a race, and you don't know quite where the end is, but you got an idea. An' you only need to make it that far. I can do that, I figure. But you, you don't have no end."

"You actually sound like you *want* to die."

"Someday," Wayne said. "Huh. Maybe I should get into politics."

MeLaan shook her head at him, seeming bemused. "It can be daunting," she admitted a short time later, "to consider eternity, as Harmony must see it. But anytime I get bored, I can just live a new life."

"Put on a new hat," Wayne said. "Become someone else."

"Switch it up. Be bold where once I was timid. Be crass where I was respectful. Makes life interesting, dynamic." She paused. "And there's something else. We *can* die, if we want."

"What, just like that?"

"Kinda," MeLaan said. "Don't know if you've read the accounts. They're blurry about this topic anyway, but near the end of the World of Ash, Ruin tried to take over the kandra. Control them directly. Well, TenSoon and those in charge, they were *really* terrified by that. So they planned, and we all talked. And about a century after the Catacendre, we figured out a way to stop our own lives. Takes a little concentration, but sets the body into a spiral where we just … end."

"Nice," Wayne said, nodding. "That makes a lot of sense. Always have an escape route planned. Oh, and your 'a's are still off; you carried them over from your own accent. They aren't nasal enough. Draw them out, if you wanna sound like a real twofie."

She cocked her head at him. "You're wasted as a human."

"Nah," Wayne said. "I've barely had a few mouthfuls today." He reached in his pocket and checked his flask. "Well, maybe a wee more than that."

"No, I meant—"

He grinned at her, and she cut off, then grinned back. He tipped his hat to her, then closed his eyes and continued listening. A short time later, she stood up and started pacing the hall, and he could hear her saying her "a" sounds to herself as she walked.

He listened for a good long while, catching nothing abnormal, though he was pretty sure the sanitation-minister guy was lying about his education. That fellow had never been to the university—or if he had, he hadn't hung around long enough to pick up the proper words. Wayne was mulling this over when he heard something out front. A voice, faint but unmistakable.

He scrambled to his feet, causing MeLaan to jump.

"Gottago," he said. "Watchdaidiot."

"But—"

"Berideback," Wayne said, clutching his hat and running down the hallway, his long Roughs-style duster flaring to the sides. He raced around the corner and dashed toward the front of the mansion.

"He said to deliver it here," the woman was saying to the butler. "So I've brought it. It was a simple task—he just needed something made. Hardly worth waking me…"

She turned to him. A radiant, glorious woman, built like a good Roughs fence—just tall enough, lean, but strong too. She had dark hair, which he'd compared to a pony's on several occasions—and it was right unfair that she should get mad, considering she kept it in a tail and everything. She wore trousers, because skirts were stupid, and boots, 'cuz stuff needed to be kicked.

The whole world could be going wrong, but seeing her made him forget. He grinned.

In return she gave him her special scowl, the one just for him. It was how he knew she cared. That, and when she shot him she tended to aim for places that didn't hurt too much.

"She's with me," Wayne said, running up.

"Like *hell* I am," Ranette said, but she let him steer her away from the butler.

"And one wonders," the butler said from behind, "how His Grace's life can be threatened, when we're letting every dust rat in the city saunter up and—"

He cut off as Ranette spun, her pistol out. Wayne caught her arm in time to stop her from firing.

"Dust rat?" she muttered.

"When's the last time you bathed?" Wayne said. Then winced. "Just … you know, curious."

“Guns don’t care if I stink, Wayne. I have things to do. And I *don’t* like being ordered around.” She shook a little cloth pouch in her left hand. Behind, the butler had grown very pale.

Wayne got her into the sitting room. She didn’t stink, despite what she said—she smelled of grease and gunpowder. Good scents. Ranette scents.

“What is it?” Wayne asked, snatching the pouch once they were out of sight.

“Something Wax asked me to make,” Ranette said. “Who got killed over there?” She pointed toward the still-open secret door down to the saferoom. Murder always caught her attention, if only because she’d want to see the bodies and judge how well the bullets tore up the flesh.

Wayne rolled a small metal object from the pouch onto his palm.

A bullet.

His hand started to shake.

“Oh, for Harmony’s sake,” Ranette said, plucking the bullet from his hand before he could drop it. “It’s not a gun, you idiot.”

“It’s a part of one,” Wayne said, shoving his hand in his pocket and breathing deeply. He could hold a bullet. He did that all the time, for Wax. The shaking subsided. Something seemed odd about that bullet though.

“So if I gave you a splinter of wood, and told you it had once been in a rifle stock, you’d go to pieces then too?”

“Dunno,” Wayne said. “You think I understand how my brain works?”

“I’d say there’s a logical fallacy in that statement,” Ranette said. “Maybe two.” She tucked the bullet back into the pouch. “Wax here?”

“No. He’s off detectiving.”

“Then you’ll have to take this,” she said, handing him the pouch. “His note insisted it was important. Half powder as he asked, piercing bullet, forged not to shatter.”

He *could* hold a bullet. He took it, then tucked it away immediately in his duster. See?

“So, uh, want to go get a drink?” he said. “You know, when the city is safe. Or maybe before it’s safe? I don’t mind none if the pub’s a little on fire while we drink.”

“You know I’d sooner shoot myself, Wayne,” she said with a sigh. “And Misra would shoot me if—by chance—I did go, come to think of it.”

Wayne frowned. That was nowhere *near* the vitriol he normally got from her. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

She shook her head, glancing back toward the entryway. “It’s bad out there, Wayne. People still on the streets, thronging together, shouting. I’ve seen crowds like this before, in the Roughs. Usually right before a man got strung up, law or no law. Those were towns of five hundred. What happens when it's *five million* who start acting like that…"

"Probably the return of the Ashen World," Wayne said. "What better time to finally profess your long-requited love for a certain handsome fellow what don't mind none if you smell like the inside of a barrel of sulfur?"

She gave him the glare again. He grinned. But then she didn't shoot him. Or even punch him. Damn. This was *bad.*

"They're starting to gather outside," Ranette said, distracted. "Chanting slogans about the governor."

"I need to check that," Wayne decided. If the governor wasn't going to let him in and watch him close up, maybe he could learn something about Bleeder's plans out in that crowd. "Get back to your house, lock the doors, and keep your guns handy."

It was telling that she didn't offer the slightest objection to his order as he strode toward the door out into the mists.

* * *

Captain Aradel regarded the governor's writ as he would the last will and testament of a beloved family member: with both reverence and obvious discomfort.

"He names me lord high constable," Aradel said. "But … rusts, I'm no lord." He looked up at Reddi and his other lieutenants.

"Perhaps," Reddi said, "the appointment conveys a title, sir."

"The governor can't just appoint someone to the peerage," Marasi said. "A new title has to be ratified by a council with a quorum of the major house seats in the city." She bit her lip as soon as she said it. She didn't mean to be contrary.

Aradel didn't appear to mind. He carefully folded the writ and slid it into his jacket pocket. She'd found him gathering a sizable force outside of headquarters, preparing to still malcontents and ring constabulary bells to let the people living nearby know that at least someone was patrolling this night. Phantom sounds floated through the mists. Distant shouts. Clangs. Screams. It felt like hell itself surrounded them, shrouded in a veil of darkness and fog.

"Sir," Marasi said. "The governor said that he wanted you to do two things. First, send a detachment to forcefully quell rioting in the city. Second, bring up a smaller force to guard him as he prepares to address the people near the mansion. You're not to turn protesters away there, but elsewhere in the city … sir, he counseled you to be firm of hand. Very firm."

"Rusting idiots deserve it," said Lieutenant Mereline, a woman with short blonde hair.

"No need for bloodthirst, Lieutenant," Aradel said. "I seem to remember you cussing out the Hasting family with some regularity yourself."

"Doesn't mean I'm setting fire to the city," Mereline said. "The high houses being bastards doesn't excuse being bastards ourselves. Sir."

"Well, the mansion seems a good enough center from which to operate," Aradel said. "Chip, you and the messengers run to the other constables-general and ask them to meet me at the governor's mansion with their officers. We'll coordinate the city lockdown from there. Everyone else, let's double-time it that way. If His Grace wants to talk to the people, I want a nice *thick* barrier of police bodies between him and his constituents, understand?"

The group bustled into motion, the bell ringers setting out in front, the messengers scattering—one even taking to the skies; Chip was one of the Coinshots. The rest of the constables fell into a march. An uneven one—they weren't soldiers—but no less resolute.

"Sir," Marasi said, walking quickly up to Aradel, "there's something else I need to tell you, if you can spare a moment."

"How important is it?" Aradel asked, pausing at the side of the group.

"Very."

Reddi cleared his throat behind them. "Perhaps you should discuss it while traveling to the mansion, sir. If the governor really is planning to address the crowds…"

"Yes," Aradel said. "Innate suddenly appointed me lord high constable; that immediately worries me about what other kinds of impulsive things he's capable of doing tonight. Let's do this on the move, Colms. Reddi, bring along the rest of the constables as smartly as you can. I'm going to the mansion ahead of you."

Marasi nodded. The things she wanted to discuss would be best said in the privacy of a carriage anyway.

Except …

*Idiot,* she thought as Aradel jogged over to a group of horses in constable livery, reins held by a corporal. The carriage she'd been contemplating pulled away, loaded with equipment most likely. Reddi grinned at her smugly.

Marasi sighed. She'd been looking forward to maintaining her decorum tonight. Ah well. She walked over and took a set of reins.

Aradel was already in his saddle. He glanced at her, then raised a hand to his head. "Oh, of course. I didn't think—"

Marasi swung up into the saddle, awkwardly bunching her skirt up between her legs and sitting on part of it, revealing a generous expanse of leg. "It occurs to me, sir," Marasi noted, "that lady constable uniforms could be distinctly more utilitarian."

"We'll … make a note of it, Lieutenant Colms." He glanced toward the retreating carriage. "If you wish—"

"Sir," Marasi said, "I believe the city is on *fire*. Perhaps we can discuss feminine modesty on another occasion?"

"Of course." He nodded and they set off in a clatter of hooves, trailed by two corporals with rifles in the scabbards on their saddles. The four horses quickly outpaced the larger group of constables, and even the carriage, as they rode through the mists.

Marasi was glad of the darkness, as it hid her furious blush. In compensation, she had gained the memory of Reddi's stunned expression, utterly shocked by what she'd done.

Well, why *shouldn't* she show her legs? Historical precedent, and simple practicality, demanded that women be allowed into all professions. What lord would turn away a Thug or a Bloodmaker from his guards just because she had breasts? What constable office would pass up the chance to have every Tineye or Coinshot they could get? What bank wouldn't jump at the chance to employ a Terriswoman with copperminds?

The thing was, woman constables were *also* expected to be models of ladylike behavior. A holdover from the old days, reinforced by the speeches of Lady Allrianne Ladrian soon after the Catacendre. There was just this blunt expectation that you would strive to remain feminine at the same time as you did your job. A heavy double standard to bear. At times Marasi didn't mind. She *liked* dresses, and nice hair, and solving problems with a careful word instead of a fist to the face. To her it was perfectly reasonable to be feminine and a constable. But did the men ever have to worry about being properly masculine while doing their jobs?

*One social problem at a time, Marasi,* she admonished herself, riding alongside Aradel. Though she *was* going to buy some rusting trousers. Riding this way was *cold*.

"You ride well," Aradel called to her as they slowed slightly from their initial burst away from the others. He led the way across a canal bridge, cutting across the middle of the Third Octant to get to the Second.

"I've had plenty of practice," Marasi said.

"That's uncommon in the city these days," Aradel noted. "A hobby?"

"You could say that," Marasi said, blushing as she remembered her girlish fascination with the Roughs, lawmen, and Allomancer Jak stories. When her friends—well, acquaintances—had been given new coats for their birthdays, she'd begged for a Roughs duster and hat.

Pure foolishness, of course. She'd completely grown out of that.

"What is it you wanted to tell me?" Aradel called.

"Could we slow further for a moment?"

He nodded and obliged, to the point where the horses were maintaining a brisk walk. Marasi opened the purse she'd slung over her shoulder and thrust the letters at Aradel. She hadn't consciously realized how eager she'd been to pass them on to someone else, so that the responsibility they represented wouldn't rest solely on her.

Aradel took them. "What's this?" he asked quietly.

"You remember telling me to snoop around the governor's place, if I got the chance?"

"I remember telling you—with great circumspection—to keep your eyes open, Lieutenant."

"I did, sir. I kept my hands open too. In case something damning *happened* to fall into them."

"Harmony. What did you find?"

"Letters," Marasi said, "from Innate to various ladies and lords in the city, arranging for the purchase of political favors and the suppression of legislation they didn't want. Sir, they're annotated in his own hand, and they match my records of suspicious events during his tenure as governor. During the ride to bring you the writ I read through them, and I'm convinced he's just as corrupt as his brother was."

Aradel gave no outward reaction of either surprise or outrage. He rode in silence, gripping the letters, eyes forward.

"Sir?" Marasi finally asked.

"You put me in a difficult position, Lieutenant."

"Sir. I'd say that the governor has put you in that position, not me."

"How legally did you obtain these?"

"That depends," Marasi said, "on how the courts would interpret your authority to investigate when there is reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing, and whether or not you were justified in authorizing me to act."

"In other words, you stole them."

"Yes, sir."

Aradel tucked them away.

"It doesn't mean we shouldn't protect him, sir," Marasi offered. "Until proven guilty in court, he's still the rightful leader of the city. This isn't the Roughs, where we can just stride up and shoot someone, then publish our reasons later."

"The mere fact that you feel you need to point that out," Aradel said, “means you’ve been spending too much time with your Coinshot friend, Colms. I’m not considering avoiding my duty. I’m just thinking of all those people, and their rioting. And they’re *right*. They *are* being robbed by the system. Ruin … we were supposed to be better than this. What if the Lord Mistborn saw us now?”

“I suspect,” Marasi said, “he’d tell us to do something about the situation.”

Aradel nodded curtly. When he offered no further commentary, Marasi kicked her horse back into a trot, and the lord high constable followed suit.

* * *

Tradition held that today’s Field of Rebirth looked exactly the same as on that day long ago when humankind had crept from the wombs of stone that Harmony had created. Though the city had claimed all of the surrounding area, this central ring of pleasant grass and gentle hills had been left as a monument to another time.

Marewill flowers brushed Wax’s mistcoat as he strode across the springy ground. The tradition that this place hadn’t changed was pure stupidity. Surely when Breeze and Hammond had climbed out into the sunlight, they hadn’t found grass that was perfectly manicured or flowers that grew in careful lines. Did people who spoke of that tradition just ignore the benches and the pathways? The buildings? Surely Harmony hadn’t left *lavatories* on the grassland for the convenience of visitors.

At the center the highest hill was topped by the half museum, half mausoleum sheltering the tombs of the Last Emperor and the Ascendant Warrior. Their giant statues rose above, dominating the area. As Wax approached, he was surprised to find lamps on the low structure spilling light across the grass and flowers. A pair of constables guarded the door.

“Now, just turn on back and don’t make trouble,” one of them called as Wax approached.

Wax ignored the order, striding out of the mists and up to the men. “The caretakers called for your help, I assume?”

The two constables studied him, then reluctantly saluted. His reputation preceded him, though these men wore the patches of constables from the First Octant. It was a precinct he hadn’t often visited, but who else strode through the night in a mistcoat with a shotgun strapped to his leg?

“They’re worried about looters,” one of the constables said, a squat fellow with a half beard around his mouth. “Um, sir.”

“Wise,” Wax said, striding past them and pushing into the mausoleum.

“Uh, sir?” one of the constables said. “They said not to let … Sir?”

Wax pushed the door shut as the two constables started arguing outside about whether they should stop him or not. He scanned the open foyer, with its murals of the Originators. Hammond, the Lord Mistborn, Lady Truth, Wax's own ancestor Edgard Ladrian. Portly and self-satisfied, in his portrait he held a cup of wine. He'd always looked like the sort of person Wax would want to punch on sight. The type who was certainly guilty of *something*.

Wax ignored the displays of various relics from the World of Ash, and didn't enter the chamber that held the resting places of the Ascendant Warrior and her husband, though he did raise his gun and spin the cylinder toward them in acknowledgment. A Roughs tradition to respect the fallen.

"What's this?" A bleary-eyed woman stepped out of a nearby room, apparently a small apartment for the caretaker. "Nobody was to be let in!"

"Routine inspection," Wax said, striding past without looking.

"Routine? In the middle of the night?"

"You asked for constable involvement," Wax said. "Codes require that when you ask for guards from the precinct, we have to do an inspection to make sure you don't have contraband."

"Contraband?" the woman asked. "This is the *Originator Tomb*!"

"Just doing my job," Wax said. "You can take it up with my superiors outside, if you wish."

She stormed out toward the front doors in a huff as Wax reached a small room unadorned with relics or plaques. The only thing in here was a hole in the ground.

It was a gaping pit fenced by a railing to keep inquisitive children from tumbling in. There was a ladder, but Wax dropped a bullet casing and jumped, falling freely a short distance before slowing himself and hitting the dark, glassy stone floor at the bottom.

A few lights dangled from the ceiling, like drips of molasses. He Pushed on a nearby light switch, causing the lights to flicker on throughout this enormous cavern. He'd visited here as a youth; every tutor brought their charges to visit, and he understood it was common in the public schools as well. It felt different now, standing alone in the large, low-ceilinged chamber. No jabbering tourists to break the mood or chase away visions of the past. He could hear much better the water rushing in the distance, where the river flowed. Parts of the caverns were supposed to have flooded over time. He could only vaguely remember explanations during his tour here of why others remained dry.

He walked into the cavern, trying to imagine what it had been like to huddle in one of these caves, the world dying outside, wondering if you were going to spend the rest of your short life trapped in darkness. He trailed his fingers on the stone walls as he wound around corners. The place was large and open, but also contained a series of smaller, bulbous chambers at the side. Most were part of the museum, and contained plaques with quotes from the Originators, written in metal. Others contained depictions of the rebuilding of the world, or other relics such as a replica of both Harmony's Bands and the Bands of Mourning.

One entire chamber was dedicated to the Words of Founding, Harmony's books, lore, knowledge, and own holy account of what had happened to the World of Ash. Another chamber contained volumes by other Originators, some of which were considered holy canon by one sect or another—while some, like the Docksithium, were decidedly apocryphal. Wax had tried to read the thing once. Copyright pages were more interesting.

He lingered at a chamber dedicated to the Survivor containing a hundred different depictions of him by various artists, some contemporary, others ancient. There was fervent fascination with his posthumous "apparitions" to people during the final days, though Harmony himself attributed those to the Faceless Immortals.

Echoing voices chased Wax onward. Wayne would probably give him hell for confusing the poor people, rather than just telling them what he was doing. Of course, Wayne would probably have convinced them he was the Lord Ruler, then made them fix him dinner. So he tried not to let Wayne's moral compass influence him too much.

Wax counted down the chambers dedicated to each of the metals until he reached the sign of atium. This little chamber contained documentation and rumors about the mythological metal; Wax didn't have the time to read them. Instead, he followed the blue lines his steelsight showed him. They pointed toward a side wall, where he was able to pry back a decorative piece of wood paneling and push on a lever, popping open a doorway and revealing a cavern beyond.

He slipped in, unhooked an old oil lantern from the wall, and pulled the door shut before kneeling down in the pitch blackness, fishing in his gunbelt for some matches. As he pulled them out, a growling voice sounded in the dimness.

"I've been waiting for you."

# 20

Wax held very still in the darkness. He flared his steel, seeking guidance from that comfortable fire inside of him. The blue lines pointed exclusively behind him; those pointed toward the hidden doorway and the nails in the wall. There was nothing else.

Except … Could he just barely make something out? Two faint lines, tiny as the threads of a spiderweb. He flared his metal, straining, Pushing. The lines quivered in the darkness. Then they were gone.

Wax whipped out his Sterrion and pointed it down the corridor away from the lines, and fired three times in quick succession. The flash of gunpowder lit the room like lightning as he leveled his other gun toward the blue lines and the source of the sound.

In those flashes, he made out something in the darkness crouching nearby. It was inhuman, with bestial eyes and stark white teeth. *Rust and Ruin.* Fingers sweaty on his gun, Wax backed away from the thing, ready to fire.

He didn't pull the trigger. You didn't shoot something for talking to you.

"You're certainly a jumpy one," the voice growled.

"Who are you?" *What are you?*

"Light your lantern, human," the voice said. "And lock that door. Let's be away from here before someone comes to investigate the gunfire."

Wax paused to catch his breath and steady his nerves, but eventually slipped his guns back into their holsters. Whatever it was, it could have attacked him instead of speaking to him. It didn't want him dead.

He lit the small lantern, but when he raised it, the creature had retreated into the corridor until it was just a shadow. Still unnerved, Wax flipped the latches he found on the wall, locking the hidden doorway closed from the inside.

“Come,” the voice said.

“You’re one of them,” Wax whispered, raising the lantern and following the shadowy figure, which walked on all fours. “You’re a kandra.”

“Yes.”

Wax jogged to catch up, his lanternlight finally giving him a good look at his companion. A wolfhound, easily the largest he had ever seen, of a mottled grey coloring. The pelt reminded him of the mists.

“I’ve read about you,” Wax said.

“Thrilling,” the kandra growled. “I’m so happy Sazed included me in his little book so that drunk people can curse by my name.”

“They … do that?”

“Yes.” The wolfhound growled quietly in the back of his throat. “There are … stuffed toys too.”

“Oh yeah,” Wax said. “Soonie cubs. I’ve seen those around.”

The growling grew louder, and Wax’s nervousness returned. Best not to taunt the immortal hound. He didn’t know how many of the legends of this creature were true, but if even a percentage were based in fact …

“So,” Wax said. “Guardian. You were waiting for me?”

“It was decided,” the kandra said, “that allowing a human to wander these caverns alone was unwise. I came myself. The others are busy.”

“Hunting Bleeder?”

“Counteracting her,” the kandra said, leading him to an intersection, then taking the right fork.

They walked in silence for a short time before Wax cleared his throat. “Um … do you mind explaining what you mean by that?”

The dog sighed, a discomforting sound. A talking dog was strange, but the sigh was just so *human*.

“I don’t talk much these days,” the kandra said. “I’ve … fallen out of practice, it seems. Paalm is trying to spark a revolution, using skills she learned from the Lord Ruler himself. But she is only one kandra. She has disdain for the rest of us, and therefore underestimates us in equal measure. We can do what she does, imitating people, appearing on the streets. For every ‘priest’ she has commit an atrocity, we will have dozens out tonight, preaching temperance and peace, pleading with the people not to listen to rumors.”

“Wise,” Wax said. He hadn’t considered what the other kandra might be doing, other than vaguely assuming they were tracking Bleeder. This made good sense. Could he use it, somehow, in his investigation?

As they moved deeper into the caverns, Wax noted a crusty white substance growing on the rocks, the source of the powdery residue he'd found on Bleeder's clothing. Presumably, if he extinguished his lantern he'd be able to see the glow. He might not even need the lantern, but thinking of all this stone surrounding him—separating him from the mists above—he felt no urge to extinguish it.

The network of tunnels was far more extensive than he'd expected. He'd thought of this place only as that one cavern underneath the tomb—but that wasn't it at all. Harmony had assembled many different refuges of people as he remade the world, placing them all in the same area that was now Elendel. How much of the city did these tunnels stretch beneath? He passed a number of them that had flooded; what was the difference between those and the ones that remained dry?

As they wound through the tunnels, they passed an opening into a different large cavern. He raised his lantern to give it a glance, then froze in place. Instead of more rough, natural rock, his light illuminated dusty tiles and pillars, with parts of the floor torn up. Past them, there was what appeared to be a small *hut* of all things.

"TenSoon?" he asked as the kandra continued forward.

"Come along, human."

"Is that…"

"Yes. Many people hid in the basements of Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's palace. Sazed moved that here, as he did with all other caverns of refuge."

Wax couldn't pull himself away, gaping at history—no, *mythology*—come alive. The Lord Ruler's palace. Places where the Survivor and his followers had walked.

Rusts … the *Well of Ascension itself* would be in there.

"Human," the kandra said, insistent. "There is something I wish for you to see. Come."

*Another time,* Wax thought, turning from the entrance to lost Kredik Shaw and following TenSoon. "MeLaan said that the kandra don't come down here often. Why not? Isn't this your home?"

"It is a sacred place," the wolfhound said. "Yes, it is home, but also a prison—and so much more. Under the Lord Ruler, we needed this place for freedom, to be ourselves. Outside, we were controlled, enslaved by men."

*Bitter,* Wax thought. Even after hundreds of years, this creature was pained by the life it had led. Did he blame humankind? Did Bleeder?

"We come here," TenSoon said, "when the mood strikes us. Usually we come alone, and infrequently. There are clubs up above where we can socialize now, being ourselves. Homes. Lives. The younger generations almost never visit this place. They prefer their lives as they are now, and don't wish to remember the past. I suppose I'm the same, though for different reasons."

Wax nodded, walking alongside the kandra as they penetrated ever deeper into the twisting tunnels of the Homeland. They passed many empty chambers, but some that held oddities, like two with old baskets and some discarded bones on the floor.

Wax had been in his fair share of tunnels out in the Roughs, but most of those had been some kind of man-made mine. These caverns were different. Those had smelled of dust and dirt, while this place somehow felt *alive*. Of water and fungus. Of patience.

The tunnels were knobby, yet smooth, like wax pooled beneath a long-burning candle. Holy ground. Everything else in the world, so far as he knew, had been completely remade during the Catacendre. But these caverns stretched back to eternity, as old as human memory. Older.

Eventually they reached a small chamber that didn't seem quite as organic as the others. Had it been shaped, somehow, by kandra hands? TenSoon settled down on his haunches in the entrance to the room. Wax's light glittered off the smooth, bulbous rock of the floor, which fell away into a series of pits. Perhaps three feet across, they looked like holes dug by prospectors foolishly hunting metals out in the Roughs.

Wax glanced at TenSoon.

"I passed by here on my way to meet with you," the kandra said in his growling, half-human voice. "I smelled something wrong."

Smelled something? Wax couldn't catch any odd scents—but this whole place smelled strange to him. He stepped into the room, then noted something. One of the small pits was full. Were those sheets of paper?

Yes, they were. As Wax knelt at the rim of the pit, he was surprised to find hundreds of sheets of paper inside, jagged on one edge, as if they'd been ripped from a book. They contained cramped writing, with numbered verses. The Words of Founding.

Besides the normal writing, someone had scrawled all over these in brownish-red ink.

*Blood,* Wax thought. *It's blood.*

He set down his lantern, then reached down and picked up a page. Book eighty, verses twenty-seven through fifty. Verses about Harmony's quest for Truth.

Someone, likely Bleeder, had written all over them the words *Lies, lies, lies*.

Wax dug up other sheets. Most had something written on them, a word or phrase, though many were just smeared with blood. Something bothered Wax about it all, something that made his eye twitch. He couldn't say what it was.

*I was there,* one sheet read. *Nobody,* said another. *It was,* said another. He started laying them out. TenSoon—whom he'd almost forgotten—sniffed in the doorway.

Wax glanced back. "Did you see these?"

"Yes," TenSoon said.

"What do you make of them?"

"I … did not stay long," the kandra said, then looked to the side. "I do not spend time in this room, human. I am not fond of it."

*This room …* Wax felt cold. Was this the prison that TenSoon had been trapped in, locked away without bones, awaiting execution?

Rusts. He was kneeling in a place that had decided the fate of the world.

Wax stretched down, grabbing more of the sheets. It seemed like Bleeder had ripped apart an entire set of the Words of Founding—the unabridged version. Old edition too, judging by the fact that it had been handwritten instead of printed.

"You really knew her, didn't you?" Wax asked. "The Ascendant Warrior?"

"I knew her," TenSoon said softly. "Near the end, I spent over an hour without my spikes, and so my memories degraded. However, most of what I lost was from the time right before my fall. Most of my memories of her are crisp."

Wax hesitated with stacks of pages in his hands. "What was she like? As a person, I mean."

"She was strong and vulnerable all at once," TenSoon whispered. "She was my last master, and my greatest. She had a way of pouring everything of herself into what she did. When she fought, she was the blade. When she loved, she was the kiss. In that regard, she was far more … human than any I have known."

Wax found himself nodding as he settled the pages about him, in stacks based on whether they had words or not. The ones with fingerprints he set in their own stack. Perhaps they would be useful. Probably not. Bleeder *was* a shapeshifter, after all.

TenSoon eventually padded up to him. "They look," TenSoon said, inspecting the sheets, "like they might say something if you string them together."

"Yeah," Wax said, dissatisfied.

"What is wrong?"

"It's too much," Wax said, waving his hand at it. "Too convoluted, too sensational. Why would she write on a bunch of pages, then rip them out and leave them here?"

"Because she's mad."

"No," Wax said. "She's not that kind of mad. The way she's been working is too deliberate, too focused. Her *motives* might be insane, but her *methods* have been careful." How could he explain it? This case had his instincts fighting with one another.

He tried again. "When someone leaves something like this behind, it means one of two things. They're sloppy, or they're trying too hard. She's not sloppy, but I don't think she's trying to be cute either, dangling clues and playing games. When I talked to her…"

"You *spoke* with Paalm?" TenSoon demanded, his ears perking up. "When?"

"Earlier tonight," Wax said. "There was something regretful about her. She claimed to not be playing games, but this seems like a game. A thousand discarded pages, left to be put back together and form a clue?" He shook his head. "I don't buy it. Madness or not, she had to know that other kandra would eventually find this."

"Very well," TenSoon said, settling back down. "But she spoke to you as *herself,* not an imitation?"

"Yes. Is that odd? You're doing it right now, and MeLaan seems to be acting no specific role either."

"We are not Paalm," TenSoon said. "As long as I've known her, she's been subject to the performance. I was like that too, years ago. I didn't know who I was if I was not imitating someone."

Wax looked across the sheets. *Freedom,* one of them said in a scrawl across the page. *Will give you freedom whether you,* said another, only half of a thought.

"What was she like?" Wax asked. "Who *is* she, Guardian?"

"Hard to say," TenSoon replied. "Paalm was the Lord Ruler's pet kandra, a slave to his will and the contract we made with him. She ignored events surrounding the end of the World of Ash; she vanished, didn't return to the Homeland. I assumed her dead, until she appeared among the survivors. Even then she separated herself from us, though she served Harmony as we all did. Until … nothing. Absence."

"Freedom," Wax said, tapping the page. "She talked about that with me. What does it mean?"

"I don't know," TenSoon said, voice even more a growl than before. "She has betrayed everything we are. But then, so did I. So perhaps we are a pair, she and I. Two of the oldest monsters remaining on this planet, now that many of the Seconds have taken the escape of ending their own lives."

"Freedom…" Wax whispered. "Someone else moves us.… She left a note for me in the governor's mansion. She removed a politician's tongue, to stop his lies. Killed a priest through the eyes, to stop him from looking. Seeing. For who? For what?"

She had been the Lord Ruler's kandra, moved about and danced at his whims. And then … Harmony's servant? She lived with his voice inside her head, knowing all along that he could take control of her. How would that feel?

Would it make you remove one of your spikes? Would you be trying to bring that freedom to everyone? Misguided, in your insanity, certain that the world needed saving?

Wax stood up slowly. "It's about Harmony."

"Lawman?"

"She's trying to bring down God Himself."

"That's insane."

"Yes," Wax said, turning to the kandra. "It is." He started to pace in the small room. "Speak to Harmony and find out something for me. Did Bleeder first leave because Harmony tried to take control of her at some point? Did that set her off?"

A moment of silence. "Yes," TenSoon replied. "Harmony says He didn't try to control her directly, but He did push her very hard to do something she didn't want to do."

"She's been persistent about this idea that all people are controlled." *Harmony … was she Bloody Tan? Was she wearing his body, even back then? Was she there when I shot Lessie?* "She sees everyone as Harmony's puppets—in her eyes, the politicians are His mouth. She's bringing down the government for that reason. Religion? Harmony's eyes, to watch over the people. She works to undermine that by creating strife between the religious sects."

"Yes…" TenSoon said. "In a way, it could be seen as a continuation of the First Contract. Serve the Lord Ruler. Bring down the force that he worked to defeat. Harmony is half of that."

"But what am I in this?" Wax continued, only half listening to TenSoon. "Why me? Why focus on—"

No, wrong question.

What was she going to do next? Eyes, tongue … ears, maybe? *Pretend she's a step ahead of you,* Wax told himself. *Prepare for the worst.*

He looked again at the sheets on the floor. She wanted Wax out of the way. An elaborate puzzle? It was a time waster, a distraction. She'd ripped out these sheets not to tease him, but to remove him from the investigation long enough to accomplish the next phase of her plan. She'd *led* him here with that dust on her robe. She'd planted it there for that purpose.

"She knows," Wax said softly. "She knows what you're going to do, TenSoon. What you've *done*." He felt cold, and met the kandra's inhuman eyes. "She's *planned* that you would send your kandra to try to win back the hearts and minds of the people. That exposes you. Her next step is to bring them down."

* * *

Wayne wandered between two bonfires. Inside one, table and chair legs made sharp lines, like the shadowy limbs of corpses being burned. The mists didn't get too close to the fires, though the smoke made a good imitator in the night. Like a beggar dressed up so nice, you only knew him for what he was when you got close enough to catch a proper whiff.

Wayne leaned in to one of the bonfires to light his cigar, though that required him to heal the skin of his arm as it burned. He smelled both of his own singed hair and of the scent of the fire. Polished furniture didn't burn clean. He liked feeling the heat though. Made him feel alive.

He had stopped filling his metalminds, hoping he had enough health for what was coming. He couldn't afford to be weak or sickly right now. Not with what was happening.

He leaned back away from the flames and settled the cigar between his teeth. It was a fancy type, from the governor's own hidden stash. Wayne took a long puff before remembering that he hated the rusting things. Ah well. He hadn't traded anything good for it. Just one of Wax's forks.

The crowd gathering here in the square was the biggest he'd seen this night. They clumped in the bonfire light like a flock of ravens drawn to a kill. Wayne moved up to the back of the crowd and handed his cigar to someone there. He left her standing, baffled, as he dove into the crowd.

With a crowd this big, you couldn't move *through* them, but *with* them. You hadda pull the crowd on like a good coat, snug and tight, then let the cloth give you some direction. Wayne shuffled when the people shuffled, and shouted at the proper points, giving just the right drunken slur to his speech. He gave back a friendly elbow when one nudged him, and before too long he neared the front. Here, above everyone else, a shirtless fellow in trousers and suspenders stood atop a fountain statue, holding on to the Survivor's spear for balance, his other fist raised toward the crowd.

"They rob us blind!" the man shouted.

*Aye, that's true,* Wayne thought, shouting along with the crowd's roar of agreement.

"They expect us to work long hours every day, but then when it ain't convenient for them, they just cut us loose and don't care none if we starve."

*Yeah, they do,* Wayne thought, joining in the cursing and shouting.

"They do each other favors," the man bellowed. "They suck us dry, then gather to throw lavish parties!"

*I've been to those parties,* Wayne thought. *Good sandwiches.*

"Would the Survivor have stood for this?"

*Probably not,* Wayne admitted. As the crowd surged around him, Wayne folded his arms and thought. Sure, bringing down a homicidal shapeshifter was important and all, but *rusts,* this seemed a bad time to be hanging around with conners and noblemen. Listening to this speech, he was half inclined to string *himself* up, which was really disturbing, since he was generally suicidal only in the mornings.

He was about to turn away and flow back toward the mansion to talk with MeLaan about this when something changed. A new figure climbed up onto the statue: an older, balding man who was a little thick around the waist, but in a friendly-type way. He wore ornate robes that frayed like a mistcoat at the bottom. A Survivorist priest?

The older man held up a pleading hand, and the fellow who had been shouting bowed his head in acknowledgment and stepped back. Beneath the giant image of the Survivor, his priest would be heard. Wayne felt a disturbance stir within him, like his stomach discovering he'd just fed it a bunch of rotten apples. Religion worried him. It could ask men to do things they'd otherwise never do.

"I come to you," the priest said into the night, "understanding and sympathetic. But I implore you, do not invoke the Survivor's name for looting and destruction. There is a way to fight back, and I will join you in it, but these are not the days of the Lord Ruler's tyranny. You have the ability to make your voice heard. You can send advocates to the government for you."

The crowd hushed. A few men shouted out expletives, explaining exactly what they wanted to do to the governor, but most grew quiet.

"The Survivor said that we should smile," the priest pled. "He taught that we should not let our sorrows drag us down no matter how bad life became."

The mood of the crowd was shifting. They shuffled instead of shouted. Wayne relaxed. Well, maybe religion *was* good for something other than fancy clothes and weird hats. If that priest defused this group, Wayne would buy him a drink, he would. And buying drinks for priests was great, because they usually wouldn't drink theirs, so you got two for yourself to …

Wait. Why was that fellow in the suspenders—the one who had talked before—sneaking up behind the priest? Raising his hand, as if to—

"No!" Wayne shouted, shoving through the crowd toward the fountain. He froze time, which caused quite a mess of confusion in the people around him, but it didn't do much. All that let him do was stand there feeling helpless, knowing the priest was too far away to save. The fellow in the suspenders stood just behind the gentle old man, hand raised, knife glittering in the firelight.

Except that wasn't no knife. It was a *needle*.

Wayne dropped his speed bubble. The needle plunged down, striking the priest in the back. The round-faced man jerked upright, and then his flesh started to *melt*. It turned translucent, his eyes drooping out of their sockets, crystal bones beneath glittering in the light of the bonfires.

"Look!" the bare-chested man said. "See what they send to try to placate you? The Faceless Immortals serve the nobility! This was no priest, but one of their minions. They want you to believe you're free, that their democracy works for you, but all that surrounds you is lies!"

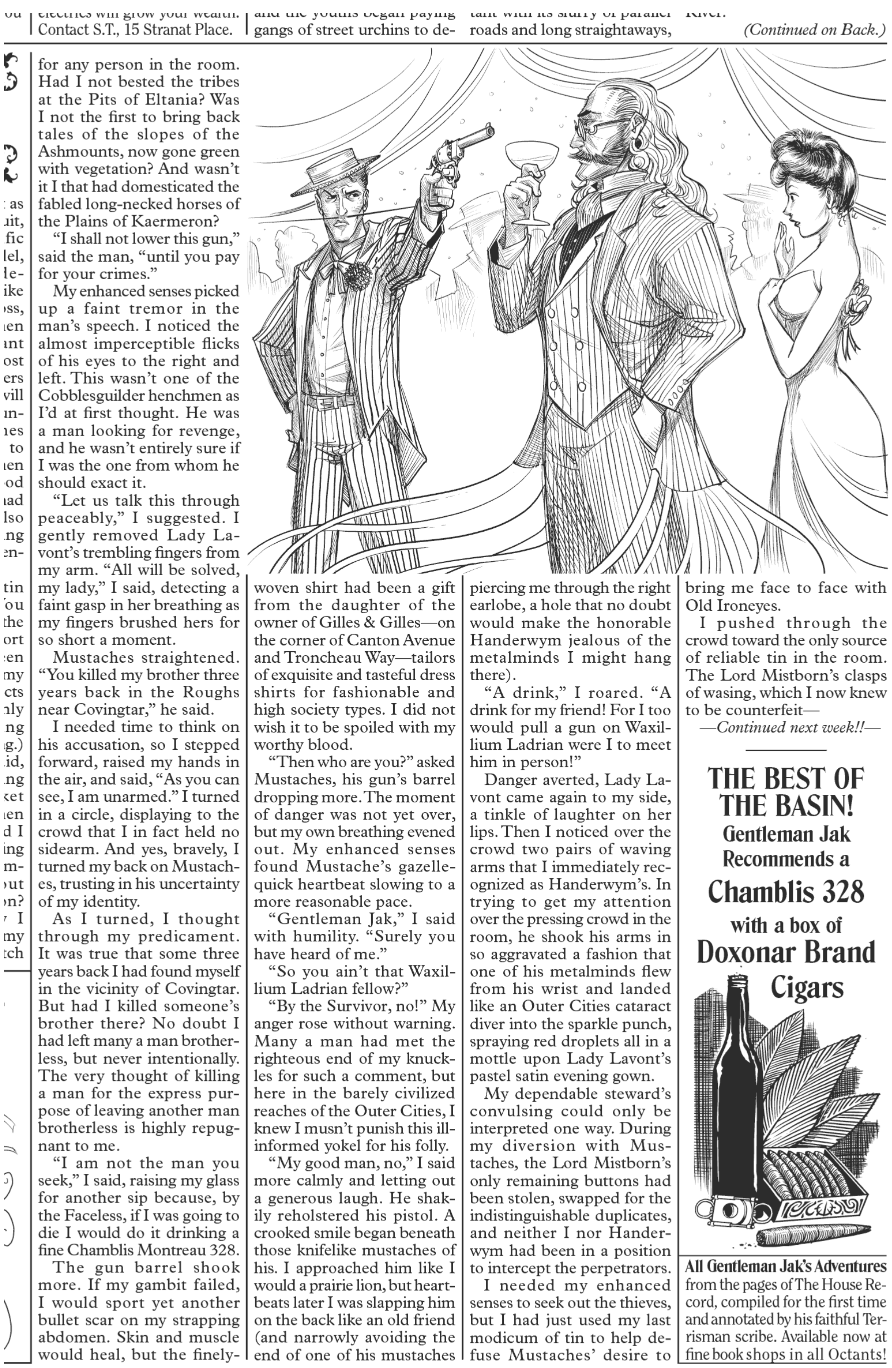
Wayne gaped as the priest—no, the kandra—struggled to stand upright and speak, but that made it worse. The protesters shouted, their rowdiness back with renewed strength, save for near Wayne, where the people were still confused as to why time had stopped for them.

A woman in a dirty skirt eyed him. "Hey, aren't you that guy from the Roughs?"

Wayne grimaced, backing away. On the fountain, the leader spotted him and interrupted his diatribe. He pointed right at Wayne. "One of them is here!" he shouted. "They send constables into our midst! They're all around, controlling you!"

Basically the entire crowd turned to look at Wayne.

*Well, hell.*



Contact S.T., 15 Stranat Place.

gangs of street urchins to de-

roads and long straightaways,

(Continued on Back.)

for any person in the room. Had I not bested the tribes at the Pits of Eltania? Was I not the first to bring back tales of the slopes of the Ashmounts, now gone green with vegetation? And wasn't it I that had domesticated the fabled long-necked horses of the Plains of Kaermeron?

"I shall not lower this gun," said the man, "until you pay for your crimes."

My enhanced senses picked up a faint tremor in the man's speech. I noticed the almost imperceptible flicks of his eyes to the right and left. This wasn't one of the Cobblesguilder henchmen as I'd at first thought. He was a man looking for revenge, and he wasn't entirely sure if I was the one from whom he should exact it.

"Let us talk this through peaceably," I suggested. I gently removed Lady Lavont's trembling fingers from my arm. "All will be solved, my lady," I said, detecting a faint gasp in her breathing as my fingers brushed hers for so short a moment.

Mustaches straightened. "You killed my brother three years back in the Roughs near Covingtar," he said.

I needed time to think on his accusation, so I stepped forward, raised my hands in the air, and said, "As you can see, I am unarmed." I turned in a circle, displaying to the crowd that I in fact held no sidearm. And yes, bravely, I turned my back on Mustaches, trusting in his uncertainty of my identity.

As I turned, I thought through my predicament. It was true that some three years back I had found myself in the vicinity of Covingtar. But had I killed someone's brother there? No doubt I had left many a man brotherless, but never intentionally. The very thought of killing a man for the express purpose of leaving another man brotherless is highly repugnant to me.

"I am not the man you seek," I said, raising my glass for another sip because, by the Faceless, if I was going to die I would do it drinking a fine Chamblis Montreau 328.

The gun barrel shook more. If my gambit failed, I would sport yet another bullet scar on my strapping abdomen. Skin and muscle would heal, but the finely-woven shirt had been a gift from the daughter of the owner of Gilles & Gilles—on the corner of Canton Avenue and Troncheau Way—tailors of exquisite and tasteful dress shirts for fashionable and high society types. I did not wish it to be spoiled with my worthy blood.

"Then who are you?" asked Mustaches, his gun's barrel dropping more. The moment of danger was not yet over, but my own breathing evened out. My enhanced senses found Mustache's gazelle-quick heartbeat slowing to a more reasonable pace.

"Gentleman Jak," I said with humility. "Surely you have heard of me."

"So you ain't that Waxillium Ladrian fellow?"

"By the Survivor, no!" My anger rose without warning. Many a man had met the righteous end of my knuckles for such a comment, but here in the barely civilized reaches of the Outer Cities, I knew I musn't punish this ill-informed yokel for his folly.

"My good man, no," I said more calmly and letting out a generous laugh. He shakily reholstered his pistol. A crooked smile began beneath those knifelike mustaches of his. I approached him like I would a prairie lion, but heartbeats later I was slapping him on the back like an old friend (and narrowly avoiding the end of one of his mustaches piercing me through the right earlobe, a hole that no doubt would make the honorable Handerwym jealous of the metalminds I might hang there).

"A drink," I roared. "A drink for my friend! For I too would pull a gun on Waxillium Ladrian were I to meet him in person!"

Danger averted, Lady Lavont came again to my side, a tinkle of laughter on her lips. Then I noticed over the crowd two pairs of waving arms that I immediately recognized as Handerwym's. In trying to get my attention over the pressing crowd in the room, he shook his arms in so aggravated a fashion that one of his metalminds flew from his wrist and landed like an Outer Cities cataract diver into the sparkle punch, spraying red droplets all in a mottle upon Lady Lavont's pastel satin evening gown.

My dependable steward's convulsing could only be interpreted one way. During my diversion with Mustaches, the Lord Mistborn's only remaining buttons had been stolen, swapped for the indistinguishable duplicates, and neither I nor Handerwym had been in a position to intercept the perpetrators.

I needed my enhanced senses to seek out the thieves, but I had just used my last modicum of tin to help defuse Mustaches' desire to bring me face to face with Old Ironeyes.

I pushed through the crowd toward the only source of reliable tin in the room. The Lord Mistborn's clasps of wasing, which I now knew to be counterfeit—

*—Continued next week!!—*

THE BEST OF THE BASIN!
Gentleman Jak Recommends a
Chamblis 328
with a box of
Doxonar Brand Cigars

**All Gentleman Jak's Adventures** from the pages of The House Record, compiled for the first time and annotated by his faithful Terrisman scribe. Available now at fine book shops in all Octants!

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**Recommends a**
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**All Gentleman Jak’s Adventures** from the pages of The House Record, compiled for the first time and annotated by his faithful Terrisman scribe. Available now at fine book shops in all Octants!

# 21

"Ashfalls!" TenSoon said as he ran alongside Wax through the tunnels of the kandra Homeland. "I have told Harmony to pass the word to my fellows. We will stop our efforts immediately, but He says it might be too late."

Wax nodded, holding his lantern and puffing from exertion.

"We're Harmony's ears," TenSoon growled. "That fits with her theme, doesn't it? We listen, move among you, report back to God. She's going to try to deafen Him."

Wax nodded again.

"That's pointless!" TenSoon said. "She can't stop Harmony. Even with all of this, she's just a child throwing rocks at a *mountain* to try to move it."

"Yeah," Wax said, scrambling over some rubble. Pieces of the kandra Homeland had obviously suffered from being shoved about in the earth during the Catacendre. Walls had collapsed, then had lain here, broken, for hundreds of years. "But she's not really trying to *kill* God. She just wants to free people from Him, in her twisted way."

"Free them?" TenSoon said. He was silent for a time. "Emotion. That's it, isn't it? Vin liberated koloss by making them feel powerful emotions. It gave an opening into their souls, let her break through another's control and seize the creatures."

"That's what the old stories say," Wax replied. "Good to have confirmation."

"Humans aren't Hemalurgic creations like koloss. Powerful emotion won't 'free' them from Harmony."

"Sure it will," Wax said. "At least in Bleeder's eyes. If you're in a rage, you're not following Harmony's careful plans. You're out of control. She's going to drive this city to madness in an insane attempt to liberate it."

"Ruin!" TenSoon growled. "I may have to leave you behind, lawman. I must reach my people quickly and speak with them about what is happening."

"Fine," Wax said. "But I might keep up better than you assume, so long as I—"

A shrill howl echoed through the corridor, so chilling that Wax pulled to a stop. He drew Vindication, lantern held high in his off hand. The howl was joined by others, a terrible cacophony, each sound jarring against the others.

TenSoon leaned low, growling as the howls faded.

"What the hell was that?" Wax said.

"I have never heard its like before, human."

"Aren't you over a thousand years old?"

"Something like that," TenSoon said.

"Holy *hell*," Wax repeated. "Another way out?"

The kandra took off, leading him back the way they had come. The howls started up again, louder. The tight tunnels and uneven stones suddenly seemed far more confining.

Wax ran and, despite his earlier bravado, found he had real trouble keeping up with TenSoon. The stone around them didn't contain any metals, at least not in a pure enough form for him to Push on. Besides, the tunnels twisted and turned too much for long Pushes.

So he ran, holding on to his lantern with sweating fingers, listening as the things behind seemed to grow more excited. Distracted as he was, he almost crashed into TenSoon when he caught up to him standing still in the tunnel.

"What?" Wax asked, panting from his run.

"It smells wrong ahead," TenSoon said. "They're waiting for us."

"Great," Wax said. "What are they?"

"They smell like men," TenSoon said.

More howls came from behind.

"Those," Wax said, "are *men*?"

"Come," TenSoon said, turning and scrambling away, his claws scratching on stone.

Wax followed. "Another way out?" he asked again.

TenSoon didn't answer, instead leading them in a sprint through small caverns, around corners, through tunnels. They stopped at an intersection, TenSoon considering their options while Wax fingered his gun nervously. He swore he could see something moving down the tunnel they'd left behind, the one where TenSoon claimed to have spotted an ambush.

“TenSoon…” he said, nervous.

“This way,” the kandra said, dashing off.

Wax followed, entering a longer tunnel. Perfect. He let himself lag behind, holding up the lantern, trying to get a glimpse of whatever was following.

His light reflected from eyes in the shadows. Figures that were bent low, scrambling on all fours, moving in a distinctly inhuman way. Sweating, Wax dropped a shell casing and shoved it with his foot into a cleft in the rock. He Pushed, throwing himself down the corridor to catch up with TenSoon, landing just before they took a corner at speed.

“They’re *not* human,” Wax said. “Not completely.”

“Hemalurgy,” TenSoon said. “This is terrible. Paalm … She has gone further than I had assumed. She doesn’t just kill. She Ruins.”

“They’re almost upon us,” Wax said, clutching gun and lantern. “How do we get out?”

“We don’t,” TenSoon said, ducking to the side and into a small chamber. “We fight.”

Wax followed, but stopped in the doorway, gun at the ready. They’d passed this room before, or one like it. It was filled with small baskets—glancing at them now, he could see they were full of bones.

The things chasing them had started yipping, but he could hear them scrambling on the stone—could hear them breathing in excited gasps—as they drew close.

Inside the room, TenSoon transformed.

It happened in a burst, the kandra’s skin sloughing off his canine bones and splashing to the ground like a bucket of slop tossed out the back of a kitchen. The muscles and melting skin slapped against one of the baskets, tipping it, dumping bones.

MeLaan had said he was fast, but that word didn’t begin to describe the sudden motion as TenSoon absorbed the bones. Arms sprouted from the side of his mass, then lifted it into the air even as legs formed beneath, thick like those of a wrestler. A skull emerged like a bubble rising through molasses, filling in with muscles stretched against bone, a jaw shifting into place.

In seconds, a short but robust figure stood in the chamber. The face of stretched skin and muscle reminded Wax of a koloss, but those forearms were like hammers, and the chest superhumanly powerful. It was nude, though the crotch lacked genitals of either variety.

Wax looked back down the corridor outside and raised his pistol, sweating. The things prowled closer. Heads emerged from the darkness, faces that twisted human features into something more canine. He counted five total. These creatures were no longer bipedal, but traces of humanity laced them—fingers that were too long, hands with opposable thumbs. The joints bent the wrong way at the elbows and knees, and the eyes … the eyes were dead. Pure black.

"What has she done to you?" Wax whispered at them.

The creatures didn't respond. Either they could not think, could not speak, or didn't care to do either. Wax fired upward, half hoping that the sound would scare the things away, send them scuttling back into the night.

The greater part of him hoped they would remain, so he could finish off every last one of the poor bastards.

The single shot rang loud in the tunnel, but the beasts didn't flee. Instead they surged forward, their reluctance giving way to frenzy. Wax leveled Vindication and unloaded at the first creatures, aiming for skulls. Flashes of gunfire lit the tunnel. Though his bullets tore off skin and left streaks of bleeding muscle, not one of the creatures dropped.

Wax ducked back into the room, holstering Vindication and setting his lantern on an outcropping. "Their skulls have been thickened," he shouted to TenSoon while reaching for his Sterrion.

The kandra stepped past him, both lithe and powerful. Wax could almost hear the muscles constricting, pulling taught beneath that skin. As the first creature entered, TenSoon smashed it on the side of the head, pinning it to the wall with one hand. Then he stepped back and raised his foot to *crush* the skull against the rocks.

The others leaped over TenSoon, dragging him down, biting his flesh. He grabbed at one, ripping it free by the hind legs and hurling it away. Wax fired, aiming for the eyes.

"They have been created to fight you," TenSoon growled from the ground, where he wrestled with one of the creatures while others tore at him. "Flee. Your modern weapons are useless here, lawman!"

*Like hell they are,* Wax thought, dropping his Sterrion and reaching to the large holster on his thigh, bringing out his short-barreled shotgun. He pulled out a handful of shells and tossed them to the floor with a sound like rain. Then he waded in, slapping the first monster that came at him across the face with the shotgun. It flinched, then howled—baring rows of uneven teeth.

Wax shoved the shotgun into its mouth and fired.

Bits of it colored the wall, and as it fell—thrashing—it knocked over baskets, spilling bones to the rock floor. The one creature's death caught the attention of others, who turned from the bleeding TenSoon and charged Wax.

Wax naturally preferred the pistol. A handgun was an extension of one's focus, a weapon of precision—like a thrown coin in anteverdant days. The soul of the Coinshot, his will made manifest.

The shotgun was something different; it wasn't an extension of focus or will, but it *did* do a good job of representing his rage.

Wax shouted, slamming his shotgun across the face of one beast and Pushing on the barrel, giving the swing incredible momentum. The blow flung the creature to the side as Wax spun and pumped his gun, then blasted at the leg of the next one, ripping its arm free at the shoulder and sending it face-first into the stone.

He leaped over the next one that came for him, Pushing on a fallen bullet for lift. He fired a shotgun slug down into the beast's back, stunning it, then multiplied his weight and landed with a crunch.

The thing thrashed and writhed beneath him as another leaped at his throat. He pumped and shot it in the head, then Pushed on the slug. His weight still increased—draining his metalmind at a furious rate—that bullet didn't stop at the skull as the others had. It split bone and made a mess of the brain.

Wax sidestepped that corpse as it flopped beside him, then swung his shotgun upward into the head of the last beast coming for him. It flipped backward, exposing the belly.

Wax fired three times, emptying the shotgun. The underbelly was soft, as he'd hoped. The thing went down.

He stood, breathing deeply, the rhythm of the fight having consumed him. Nearby, TenSoon rolled over, the wounds to his arms and sides resealing. He had killed another of the things by ripping it in half. His eyes were wide as he regarded Wax. His bloodied face looked as inhuman as those of the creatures they'd just fought.

TenSoon climbed to his feet, surveying the wreckage. The lantern still burned calmly, illuminating bones scattered across the floor and masses that had once—horribly—been human, but now just twitched. Wax felt sick. He'd called them "things" in his head, but these had been people. TenSoon was right. What Bleeder had done here was worse, somehow, than even her murders.

"I will need to ask Harmony," TenSoon said, "if I have failed Him in killing this day." His voice was the same gravelly growl as before, when he'd inhabited the wolfhound's body.

"Why would he care?" Wax said, still sick. "He uses me to kill all the time."

"You are His Ruin," TenSoon said. "I am His Preservation."

Wax stood in silence amid the dead and dying and lowered his shotgun, trying to suppress the immediate feeling of *indignation* he felt. Was that all he was to Harmony? A killer? A destroyer?

"Still," TenSoon said, picking his way through the room and speaking as if he didn't realize the insult he'd just offered, "I do not think Harmony will mind what I have done. These poor souls…" He knelt and prodded at one of the bodies Wax had killed.

TenSoon came up with a thin piece of metal, silvery and perhaps as long as a finger. Did it have a red cast to it, or was that just the blood? He used steelsight and found that while he could see the spike, the line was duller than it should have been. Hemalurgy.

"One spike," TenSoon said, turning it over. "Any more, and Harmony might have been able to control these beasts. How could such a change be effected by a single spike? This is a level of Hemalurgy beyond my understanding, lawman."

Wax shook his head, checking on the creatures. Not to see if they were still a threat, but to make sure he didn't leave one of them here to die a protracted death. He found one woman still alive, paralyzed by his shot into her back. She watched him with those eyes, shaped like a person's, yet alien and dark. Whatever else had happened to these people, they should have been able to keep their eyes.

Wax put his gun to the woman's eye and fired, up into the brain. Then he closed his eyes and offered … what? A prayer to Harmony? Harmony hadn't helped these people.

*I have done something to help.…* The words whispered to him from the past. A memory of the last time Harmony had spoken to him. *I sent you.*

Wax wasn't certain if that was enough this time.

"Tell me you'll see these people buried," Wax said.

"I will," TenSoon said as a howl sounded in the distance. "More come. Do we fight here, or run?"

"Can you get us out?" Wax asked, reloading the shotgun.

"Perhaps. Not by a conventional method, but there could be a way."

"Then let's go," Wax said. "This is another distraction, TenSoon. Those creatures only came for us when we left the other chamber."

TenSoon nodded, dropping his body to the floor and absorbing the wolfhound's bones again. Only seconds passed before he'd restored himself, save for the hair. That started to sprout from the skin as TenSoon moved to the door, coming in waves as the kandra's body arranged it and pushed it out.

Wax grabbed his lantern and they fled, TenSoon again leading the way.

* * *

"There he goes, boys!" Wayne yelled, pointing into the darkness. "I saw that dirty conner right ahead. You go that way, I'll head around the other way, and we'll trap 'im between us, we will!"

The small force of men with him—armed with wrenches and brooms—split off in a cheering, clangorous mass of spit and vengeance. Wayne egged them on while backward-jogging in the other direction. Eventually he slowed, finally alone, and shook his head. Not bad fellows, for all the fact that they had the combined wits of a brick.

Wayne spun a dueling cane in his fingers, rounding back through an alleyway and popping out near the governor's mansion. He didn't go toward the front—more and more angry people were gathering there, and some might recognize him from before. On his head he wore a newsboy's cap, his other hat carefully stowed in a bush along the way. That was fine; he liked this new cap well enough, but he felt naked in another way—he was out of bendalloy. Completely dry.

That was bad. No more stopping time unless Wax had an extra vial for him. The fellow often carried one.

Wayne slipped around the mansion, intending to head toward the back doors, where he hoped the guards would let him in. He'd wasted time, far too much, getting away from that crowd. The sight of that poor kandra melting in front of everyone else haunted him.

Rusts. He wasn't sure which side of the argument he came down on, but at least he wasn't going around melting people for an audience. Besides, for the moment he figured he'd choose the side that *wasn't* actively trying to kill him.

He strolled and stuck a new ball of gum into his mouth. Then he hesitated, mists swirling around him, the mansion looming before him like a mesa in the Roughs, lit up all white. He heard a voice drifting toward him.

The accent was wrong. Just *slightly* wrong, but in a profound way.

And suddenly he knew who Bleeder was impersonating.

* * *

The howls were distant from Wax, but they haunted him more than they had during the first chase, for now he knew what made them. If he survived this, he would have to see something done for these creatures.

TenSoon conducted them through the intestines of the Homeland, eventually reaching a wall full of cracks. Wax raised his lantern, inspecting it. The wolfhound beside him had a pelt that was missing hair in patches.

"Well?" Wax said, inspecting the dead end.

“We have been watching this spot,” TenSoon said. “It cracked long ago, and the cracks seem to have widened over the years. If it opens, it will provide another path into the Homeland, and we wish to be aware of each of those.”

Wax ran his fingers along the cracks in the stone wall. Air moved through them, he thought, catching a whiff of something more … rotten. More like the city he knew. Familiar and disgusting all at once.

He tapped his metalmind, increasing his weight, then threw his shoulder against the wall. This was tricky, as his strength hadn’t increased except in its ability to lift his own limbs and manipulate his heavier muscles. That lent him some ability, but mostly he had to try to force things just right so that he was *falling* into the wall as much as pushing on it.

He finally got the correct leverage, shoving through the cracked rock and causing a clatter. He was able to pick his way through into a narrow rift, like a very thin slot canyon out in the Roughs. The walls were slick with water, and knobby as in so much of this underground realm.

“What now?” Wax asked.

“Now we climb, human,” TenSoon said. He melted again, dumping his bones and fur to the ground, becoming a group of muscles. Here, in these narrow confines, that was an advantage. TenSoon was able to push on both walls and start sliding up the crack, filling holes and clefts with his mass, then using his muscles to propel himself upward. A bag, like a stomach, had formed around the wolfhound bones, and he carted these up behind him.

It was grotesque yet fascinating. This was the natural state of the kandra, the sludgelike collection of muscles that at times acted human.

*Of course,* Wax thought, starting to climb, *what am I but a pile of blood and meat that gets up and walks around?*

This climb was difficult, particularly with the lantern, though decreasing his weight substantially helped. After only a short time, he heard the creatures come in below, howling and scrambling. His heart beat more quickly, but they didn’t seem to have much luck climbing. He continued to inch upward, until—in his haste for a handhold—he fumbled with the lantern and dropped it.

It bumped and clanged against the stones before smashing down below. The light went out.

In that moment, Wax realized he was buried in the earth, clinging to rocks in the darkness. The walls seemed to press against him, and twisted monsters howled below and sought his blood. He gasped in sudden panic.

Then his eyes adjusted and a soft blue light revealed the world to him. He wasn’t trapped. There was a way out above. He could see it by the patina of blue fungus growing on the walls, giving a gentle light to everything.

"Harmony made sure it spread here," TenSoon's voice said from above. "He wanted to make certain that no person was ever trapped in darkness in this place again."

Wax forced himself to continue upward. He recognized where he was now, from the stories. The holes in the walls that he used as handholds had once been overgrown with crystals, and within, geodes containing a bead of the lost metal. Legendary atium.

He was climbing the Pits of Hathsin themselves.

"Peace, lawman," TenSoon said from above. "Keep climbing."

Had he heard Wax's breathing quicken? He steadied himself and continued. This place was no longer a prison. No more did it cut and lacerate, as it had done to the Survivor's arms. The climb was actually easy, with all those holes. The sounds from below grew softer.

Finally, he crawled from the crevice into a section of man-made tunnel. One of the city sewers; the crack behind him was just a thin cleft in the rock that gave no hint of its ancient origin. Wax shivered, breathing in the awful stench of the sewers, but still glad to be free. TenSoon convulsed as a mass nearby, then formed into a wolfhound again. "I can see why Paalm might want me distracted and unable to stop my people from being caught in her trap," he said. "But what happened below, that was not for me, but you, human. What was she trying to distract you from?"

Wax didn't reply, but could think of only one reason. Once she dealt with the kandra, her plan would be ready for the final steps. She'd need to drive the people of the city further into a frenzy, freeing them, as she saw it, sending them forth as a mob to rage and hate, destroying Elendel.

The governor was planning to speak to the people of the city. Bleeder hadn't succeeded in killing him yet, and Wax suspected he knew why.

Because when she murdered him, she wanted an audience.

# PART THREE

# 22

Mist seemed to burn in the night, like clouds before the sun. Wax dropped through it, slamming to the steps of the governor's mansion, surprising the guards there. Constables, by the uniforms, rather than the normal guards. Good. They'd been running low on the latter.

Wax stood up straight, turning and regarding the crowd gathering in front of the mansion. Constables with rifles made an uneasy barrier between them and the building. Nearby, workers erected a small stage on the steps. Aradel supervised, though judging from his sour expression, he was rather displeased with the governor's plan.

Wax agreed. Addressing the crowd would be playing right into Bleeder's hands. He grabbed one of the constables. "I assume there hasn't been another attempt on the governor's life?"

"No, sir," the constable said. "He's in his study, sir."

Wax nodded and barged into the mansion, trailing wisps of mist behind him. He stalked toward the back, and in the hallway Marasi intercepted him, taking him by the arm. "Kolossblood," she said, giving him the password he'd given her, proving she wasn't a kandra.

"Nighttime Summer," Wax said back, authenticating himself. "You need to do something about that crowd, Marasi. They're going to rip this city down."

"We're working on it. Have you seen Wayne?"

"No. Why?"

"MeLaan says he went out to inspect the protesters. That was over half an hour ago. Nobody has seen him since."

"He'll turn up," Wax said. "I need to talk to the governor."

Marasi nodded, but held on to his arm as he tried to walk toward the study. “Wax,” she said softly, “he’s corrupt. *Really* corrupt. I’ve found proof.”

Wax drew in a deep breath. “Let’s survive this night. Then we’ll do something about that.”

“My thoughts are similar,” Marasi said, “but I think Bleeder wants to put us in a difficult position—perhaps she wants to force us to let the governor die.”

“Not going to happen,” Wax said. “We’ll hand him over to the courts, but not a mob. Have you checked on your sister?”

“No,” Marasi said. “But I’ve been intending to.”

“Do so,” Wax said. “I’ll look in on your father after talking to the governor. I don’t want either showing up as an unexpected hostage.”

“As long as it isn’t me, for a change,” Marasi said with a grimace. “MeLaan is wearing the body of the guard with the sling. She’s furious the governor won’t let her or the others in. I’m going to go see if I can track down Wayne; wouldn’t be surprised to find him on the front row of the mob.”

She let go of his arm and headed toward the exit.

“Marasi,” Wax said after her.

“Hm?”

“The uniform,” he said. “It suits you. Don’t know if I’ve had a chance to mention that.”

She blushed—she *was* Marasi after all—before continuing. Wax turned and strode down the hallway toward the door to the governor’s study. MeLaan lounged there with a group of three other guards.

“Nobody is to enter, lawman,” one of them said with an annoyed tone. “He’s been in there composing a speech for the last hour. He won’t—”

Wax walked past them and tried the door, which was locked. He could hear Innate’s voice inside, going over a speech. Wax increased his weight and flung the door open with Allomancy, splintering the doorframe. Innate stood inside, holding a pad of paper and pacing as he talked. He froze midstride and spun on Wax, then relaxed visibly.

“You could have knocked,” the governor said.

“And you could have ignored a knock,” Wax said, walking in and swinging the door shut behind him. It didn’t latch, of course, after what Wax had done. “What do you think you’re doing, Innate? You could have been killed in here, quietly, alone without anyone to help.”

“And what would they have done?” Innate demanded, tossing his pad onto his desk. He walked up, then spoke more softly: “Wind’s whisper.”

“Drunken steam,” Wax said back, latest passphrases exchanged. Innate was authentic. “Locking your guards out was foolhardy. They would have fought for you, protected you. We chased her off one time before.”

“*You* chased her off,” Innate said, walking back to his desk and picking up his pad. “The rest were useless. Even poor Drim.” He went back to his pacing, speaking the lines of his speech to himself and practicing emphasis.

Wax fumed, feeling dismissed. This was the man they struggled to protect? Wax made his way to the window. It was open, surprisingly, letting in wisps of mist. They didn’t travel far. He’d heard legends of the mists filling rooms, but that rarely happened.

He leaned against the window, looking out at the darkness, listening with half an ear to Innate’s speech. It was inflammatory and dismissive. He claimed to feel the problems the people had, but called them peasants.

This would just make things worse. *She wants that,* Wax thought. *She wants to free the city from Harmony by making it angry.*

She knew what Innate was going to say. Of *course* she knew. She’d been leading them around this entire time. Every clue Wax had found so far had been carefully planted for him. So what did he do? Stop Innate’s speech? What if *that* was what she wanted?

He tapped his finger on the windowsill. Tap. Tap.

Squish.

He looked down, then blinked. A wad of chewed gum had been stuck here. Wax lifted his finger, and—as he contemplated it—something started to fall into place. Something he’d been missing. Bleeder had set this all up from the start.

Wax’s suspicions had begun because she’d deliberately alerted him by wearing Bloody Tan’s face. That had been a conscious ploy on her part, a way to start the festivities. Everything was moving on her timetable.

Bleeder had had everything already in place when this night arrived. She’d been planning this for a long time. Far longer than he’d assumed.

So where was the best place to hide?

Rusts.

Wax reached for his gun and spun.

He found himself facing down Governor Innate, who had taken out a sidearm and leveled it. “Damn it, Wax,” the governor said. “Just a few minutes more and I’d have had this. You see too far. You can always see a *little* too far.”

Wax froze there, hand on his gun. He met the governor’s eyes, and hissed out slowly. “You knew the passphrase,” Wax whispered, “but of course you did. I gave it to you. When did you kill him? How long has the city been ruled by an impostor?”

"Long enough."

"The governor wasn't your target. You think bigger than that—I should have seen. But Drim … He was in the saferoom when you entered below. Is that why you killed him? No. He'd have known you were gone."

"He knew all along," Bleeder said. "He was mine. But tonight, I killed him because of you, Wax. You'd shot me up…"

"You had on the governor's clothing underneath the cloak," Wax said. "Rusts! I'd bloodied you. So you needed an excuse for why the governor was covered in blood, an excuse to pull off your shirt and stanch a wound."

She held the gun on him, immobile. The weapon didn't register to his Allomancy. Aluminum. She was prepared, of course. But she seemed torn. She didn't want to kill him. She'd never wanted to kill him, for some reason.

So Wax yelled for help.

It was risky, but nothing ever ended well when you obeyed the person with the gun on you. As he'd suspected, Bleeder didn't shoot at him as the door burst open. Wax pulled out his gun and fired at Bleeder, to distract her as he dug in his gunbelt for the last needle that MeLaan had given him.

The guards turned their guns toward Wax and started firing.

*Idiot,* he thought, throwing himself toward the governor's desk for cover. Of course they'd do that. "Wait!" he said. "The governor has been taken. Don't—"

Bleeder gunned down the guards. Wax rolled behind the desk, but still heard it as they cried out in shock, their own governor—so far as they knew—shooting them down. Wax winced, cursing. Those deaths were upon him.

"I guess the rest of the constables will be upon us soon," Bleeder said. "They're not free yet. Neither are you, despite how I've tried.…"

Wax peeked up over the desk, then ducked down again as she swung the gun toward him. The governor's face was twisted in a mask of anger and frustration.

"Why couldn't you have given me a little longer?" she demanded. "So close. Now I have to kill you, claim you were the kandra, and blame you for shooting my guards. That way I can still talk to the crowd, free them.…"

Yet she didn't come for him. She still seemed upset. Best to take advantage of that.

"MeLaan, go!" Wax shouted, then Pushed on the nails in the floor, flinging himself up into the air.

One of the corpses at Bleeder's feet grabbed her around the legs.

Wax Pushed off the wall, leaping toward Bleeder. She growled, then slapped his hand as he landed, knocking the needle free. Rusts, she was *strong.* She kicked MeLaan off as Wax dove for the fallen needle.

She became a blur. As he tried to grab the needle, Bleeder snatched it and spun around, slamming it down into MeLaan's shoulder. It was done in an eyeblink.

Then she lurched to a stop. She seemed jarred by the motion. Her metalmind storage, at long last, had run dry.

Wax pulled out his gun and fired, lying with his back on the floor. The bullets ripped her skin, but did nothing else. Nearby, MeLaan's shape distorted—face drooping and the skin going transparent.

Wax lay on the ground, his emptied gun pointed at Bleeder, whose skin re-formed from the wounds. They stared at one another for an extended moment before boots in the hallway outside made Bleeder curse, then dash for the window. Wax grabbed his other gun, following, then threw himself down as shots sounded outside.

He waited a moment, then glanced up, but didn't spot her in the swirling mists. Wax cursed, rolling his arm in its socket. Rusts. That bullet hole he'd taken earlier in the night was bleeding again, and the pain was returning. He thought he'd chewed enough painkiller to keep it away.

"You all right?" he asked MeLaan, who had managed to sit up.

"Yeah," she said, though the word was mangled by her melted face. "I made them do this to me once to test it out. I'll be fine in a few minutes."

"Thanks for the save," Wax said, anxiously scanning the room for hidden compartments with his steelsight. Quivering lines in the closet. Could he be so lucky? He rushed over and yanked it open.

Wayne—tied securely and gagged—tumbled out and hit the floor with a thump. He was alive, thank Harmony. Wax knelt down, sighed in relief, and loosened the gag. Wayne looked like he'd been stabbed in the leg, and his metalminds had been stripped away so he couldn't heal, but he was alive.

"Wax!" Wayne said. "It's the governor. Bugger's got the same 'a' as MeLaan!"

"I know," Wax said. "You're lucky. She probably wanted to harvest your Metalborn abilities with spikes, otherwise she'd have killed you right off. Why didn't you warn anyone?"

"Was going to, but I needed to check first. Got too close to the window, and she rusting came right out for me. Had knocked me upside the head, stripped off my metalminds, and had me over her shoulder all in an eyeblink. Drug me up here after, real quiet-like. You get her?"

"No," Wax said, working on Wayne's bonds. "She ran off."

Gunshots sounded outside.

"And you ain't chasin' her down?"

"Had to check on you first."

"I'm fine," Wayne said. "Stop untying me and look in my pocket."

Wax felt at Wayne's pocket, pulling out a small pouch.

"From Ranette," Wayne said.

Wax removed a single bullet cartridge. He held it up as a tense set of constables, led by Marasi, piled into the room.

The newcomers called for an explanation. Wax left them to interrogate Wayne, instead seeking the mists once more.

# 23

Wax was a bullet in the night, rushing through the mists and disturbing them with his passing. He had become the hunter rather than the game, though the transition might have taken too long. He soared upward first to get a view of the area. An ever-growing crowd surrounded the governor's mansion. Roaring. Calling for change, or perhaps just blood.

Would he bring down Bleeder only to find her victorious in a city destroyed?

He couldn't worry about that at the moment. Instead he sought signs, clues, a story. Nobody passed, even at night, without leaving a trail. Perhaps it would be too faint for him to locate, but it would exist.

There. A group of people pulling *away* from the mansion, instead of crowding toward it. Wax landed in a storm, mistcoat flaring. This was the mansion's garden, near a large workers' shed. Wax studied the pattern of people moving away.

*The gunfire just a moment ago,* he thought. *It wasn't to shoot someone, but to clear the crowd.* She was out of Feruchemical speed and fleeing frantically, and had opened fire into the air to clear this pocket of people. As he listened he picked out cries of confusion, some people claiming the constables had opened fire on the crowd. Others claimed they'd seen the governor himself running, trying to escape the mansion.

Wax loaded Vindication with the single bullet Ranette had sent, placing it in one of the special chambers he could quickly spin to at will. Then he inched open the door to the shed, crouching beside the doorway so as to not present a profile. The mists were bright with torchlight this night, but that light didn't penetrate to the dark shed. Wax searched through the shadows, until he saw something.

A bone? Yes, and draped over it cloth. He picked out a fallen cravat, a white buttoning shirt … the governor's clothing. Bleeder had stashed another body in here, and had fled to swap into it. How fast was she? MeLaan had said that Bleeder could change faster than she could, but that nobody was as quick as TenSoon.

That didn't tell him much. MeLaan had taken minutes, TenSoon seconds. Wax held Vindication beside his head and slipped through the doorway. If he could find Bleeder in midtransformation …

"I can still free you," a voice whispered from the darkness inside. "Perhaps I have lost the city, but I didn't come here for them. Not at first. I came for you."

"Why me?" Wax asked, searching furiously through the darkness, palm sweating as he held Vindication. "Damn it, creature, *why me*?"

"I have deafened him," Bleeder whispered. "I have cut out his tongue, pierced his eyes, but still he can act. You are his hands, Waxillium Ladrian. He may be deaf, blind, and mute … but still, with you, he can move his pawns."

"I'm my own man, Bleeder," Wax said, finally spotting what he thought was her silhouette, crouched at the back of the dusty chamber, beside a rack of shovels. "Perhaps I serve Harmony, but I do so because I wish it."

"Ah," she whispered. "Do you know, Wax, how long he cultivated you? How long he teased you, led you by the nose? How he sent you to be hardened by the Roughs, so he could draw you back in once you had aged properly, like leather being cured.…"

Wax raised Vindication, but the side of the building burst outward, showering pieces of wood across the lawn. Wax tried to draw a bead on her, but didn't fire, and Bleeder ducked out. He had to be very careful with this shot. Ranette had sent but one bullet, and only it would matter in this fight.

Bleeder fled into the night and launched into the air. The breaking wall had been an indication, but this was confirmation. Her metalmind, drained of the speed she'd stored up, was now useless. She'd left it on the ground beside the governor's bones, and had become a Coinshot instead.

Wax followed, Pushing on the same nails, sending himself into the sky. He could see why she'd chosen to become a Coinshot; Steelpushing lent great maneuverability and speed, and logically gave her the best chance of escaping.

There was a problem with that, of course.

Steel was *his* domain.

* * *

The pile of bones on the floor of the little shack proved that at least one person was having a worse night than Wayne was. He nudged the pile with his toe, then grimaced at his wounded leg. Rusting inconvenient, that was. He had to grab the wall for support.

He looked toward Marasi. "I can't decide," he said, "if the governor already bein' dead means we did a really terrible job, or a really good one."

"How," Marasi replied, kneeling beside the corpse, "could you see this as anything *other* than terrible?"

"Well, see, we weren't the ones what was in charge of keepin' him alive when he died." Wayne shrugged. "Guess anytime I find a corpse and it ain't *my* fault they're dead, I feel a little relieved."

MeLaan strolled into the cottage, still wearing the body of the guardswoman—though she had moved back to speaking with her own voice now. "It's getting rough out there. We'll want to get back into the mansion soon."

Marasi continued to kneel by the bones, which were lit by Wayne's lantern. His wrists still chafed from his confinement, and his leg smarted something fierce. Rusting kandra. She'd known just how to take him out: a quick burst of speed, tie his legs together, gag him, steal his metalminds—even though it didn't matter none how quickly he could heal if he was tied up.

Course, she should have checked his hands for gum as she towed him into the room.

"The governor is dead," Marasi whispered.

"Yeah," Wayne said, "havin' your skeleton removed tends to do that to a guy."

"What does it mean?" Marasi said, looking out the side of the shack, in the direction they'd seen Wax escape.

"Well, it means he won't be makin' it to his tap-dancing lessons this—"

"Wayne?"

"Yeah?"

"Shut it."

"Yes, ma'am."

Marasi closed her eyes, and Wayne leaned back against the wall, looking out at that crowd. Angry, waiting for the governor to give them his speech. The speech that was supposed to stop all this.

"Bleeder was planning to outrage them," MeLaan said. "I heard some of his speech. Maybe we can make them disperse?"

"No," Marasi said, standing. "We can do better than that." She turned to

MeLaan, then nudged the governor's skull with her foot. "How long will it take you to imitate him?"

"I didn't digest his corpse—and don't wince like that, it's not my fault you people happen to be edible. If it helps, you taste terrible, even if you're properly aged. Anyway, it will be tough. TenSoon's pretty good at re-creating a face from a skull, but I'm way less practiced."

Wayne didn't say anything. He could shut it. Damn right he could shut it, when he needed to. Even if there was jokes that practically *begged* to be said.

"You have us to help you get it right," Marasi said to MeLaan. "Plus, it will be dark. You won't need to fool Innate's mother, just a crowd of angry citizens, most of whom haven't seen him up close."

MeLaan folded her arms, inspecting the remains. "Fine. If you think you can come up with something for me to say that will placate that crowd, I'll do it."

Wayne stood still, jaw clenched. *No jokes about … well, the obvious things.* Besides, he'd just learned something far worse. Something that was *no* cause for laughter.

Marasi looked at him, then frowned. "Wayne, what's wrong?"

He sat down, shaking his head.

"Wayne?" Marasi said, rising, sounding genuinely concerned. "I didn't mean to snap at you. It's just that—"

"I don't mind what you said," Wayne said.

"Then what?"

"Well," he said, looking at MeLaan, "I'd just always assumed … you know … that humans tasted *wonderful.*"

"Nope," MeLaan said.

"You're really woundin' my self-esteem," Wayne said. "Maybe I'm different. Wanna gnaw on my arm a bit? It'll grow right back, least once we find out what that monster did with my metalminds…."

Marasi sighed loudly. "MeLaan, work on those bones. I need to rewrite your speech…."

# 24

Bleeder had obviously practiced with steel. She knew how to Push on passing latches or lampposts to adjust her course. She knew how to drop low before shoving on a parked motorcar to give herself lateral speed, rather than just Pushing herself higher. She was capable.

Wax was more than capable. He followed as a shadow, never more than a half leap behind her. He sensed an increasingly frantic quality to her motions, flared steel trying to Push herself out of his reach.

He let her, at first, trying to run her out of steel. They bounced through the city, two currents in the mist, leaping over roadways clogged with angry rioters, past middle-class neighborhoods full of closed shutters and extinguished lights, over the grounds of the rich—whose security forces stood tensely by gates, waiting for this hellish night to end.

Wax confirmed to himself as they flew that Bleeder had not been the Marksman. She'd worn one of his masks earlier—and seemed to be doing so again, from the quick glance he got as she passed a burning building in the night—but she did so to consternate and confuse him. Marks had sought the insides of rooms as he ran, trying to set up an ambush. She kept to the open spaces, as if frightened of the indoors. No running toward skyscrapers, no seeking the cramped confines of the slums. Instead, she headed directly east from the governor's mansion, toward the freedom of the outer city.

There wouldn't be nearly so much metal out there, making it difficult for her to flee—but also removing some of his advantage. He couldn't let that happen.

As they chased past a late train, Wax redoubled his efforts. He anticipated her turn as she cut away from the train toward an industrial quarter, and he cut sideways, earning a few seconds. As she leaped over a squat, burning building—passing protesters who threw rocks at her from below—Wax skimmed between it and the building beside it, coming around the other side in a precise turn. He passed through boiling smoke and emerged, gun out, as she came down from a more graceful arc.

That earned a curse from her as she saw him. She flung herself down a street, using each passing light as another source to Push off, increasing her speed. It was done with deftness, but Wax had an advantage. He decreased his weight, filling his metalmind. As always, though the change was sometimes subtle, this increased his velocity. If he decreased his weight while in motion, he got a little burst of speed. He didn't know why.

In a chase such as this, shoving off each light that passed, little advantages like that added up. Each cut corner, each careful judge of an arc, each use of the speed boost in flight after landing for a moment, sent him closer to her. To the point that as they neared the edge of the city, she glanced backward and found him about to grab her heels.

She cried out, a feminine exclamation of surprise. She shoved herself to the side, passing out over the river, and managed to land on the roadway portion of the Eastbridge, holding on to one of the support wires.

Wax landed gracefully before her, gun out. "You can't run from me, Bleeder. Let me remove your spike and take you prisoner. Perhaps the others can find a way, someday, to heal your madness."

"And become a slave again," she whispered behind the red and white mask. "Would you clasp the manacles willingly on your own hands?"

"If I had done the horrible things that you have, then yes. I would demand to be taken in."

"And what of the god you serve? When will Harmony accept *his* punishments? The people he lets die. The people he *makes* die."

Wax raised his gun, but Bleeder launched herself upward.

Wax trailed her with his weapon, but she bounced back and forth between massive bridge support beams, and he did not fire. Instead he lifted himself with a Push, soaring up—coat flapping—until he reached the top of one of the bridge's suspension towers. Bleeder waited here, atop the pinnacle, dressed in her red shirt and trousers, a loose cape blowing around her.

Wax landed and leveled the gun.

Bleeder dropped the mask.

She wore Lessie's face.

* * *

Marasi didn't tell the other constables, even Aradel, the truth about Innate. What would she have said? "Sorry, but the man we've been protecting was actually the killer"? "Oh, and the city has been *run* by an insane kandra for who knows how long"? She'd make a report soon, once she knew how to explain it, but for now she didn't have time. She needed to save the city.

She still felt a stab of guilt as she stood near the flimsy stage at the front of the steps, where she watched Captain Aradel pass her. The lord high constable looked visibly sick as he paced. The predicament she'd placed him in, with regards to thinking the governor was a crook, troubled him deeply.

Nearby, MeLaan stepped up onto the stage to address the crowd. Though she critiqued her own shortcomings, in Marasi's estimation her imitation of the governor was excellent.

The crowd grew quiet. Marasi frowned. Had Aradel's men prompted that somehow? No … the constables stood in a tight line between the crowd and the mansion, but weren't doing anything to quell the crowd.

How odd. Though there were a few jeers, for the most part everyone fell silent—watching through the mists, which seemed thinner than they had before, now that lights had been set up all around the square in front of the mansion. The former rioters genuinely wanted to hear what the governor had to say. Well, why *shouldn't* they?

Marasi felt their mood, one of hostile curiosity. She felt a calmness too. MeLaan's speech would work. Everything was fine. Why had she been so worried earlier? It …

Rusts. She was being Soothed.

She snapped alert, suddenly tense. She knew crowds. She'd studied mob dynamics. It was her specialty—and she could tell, easily, that something was wrong here. But who was Soothing? Why? How?

*Suit,* she thought. Waxillium had said the Set was involved. His uncle had access to Allomancers, and an inclination to see that Bleeder's plans came to fruition. It didn't matter what Marasi had written for MeLaan to say; when Suit's men discovered that "the governor" was deviating from the script, they'd drive the crowd to a frenzy.

Suddenly frantic, Marasi didn't listen to the beginning of MeLaan's speech. Could she get to Aradel? No, he was standing on the rusting stage, near MeLaan. Wayne, putting on a brave face despite his wound, hovered near the two of them, ready to help if something went wrong.

Marasi had to move quickly, and quietly, not alerting the Set. She spotted Reddi standing near the base of the steps, watching the crowd with arms folded. Marasi scrambled over to him and seized his arm.

"Reddi," she said. "There's a Soother in this crowd somewhere."

"What?" he asked absently, glancing at her. "Hmm?"

"A Soother," Marasi said. "Dampening our emotions. Probably a Rioter waiting too, to drive the crowd into a frenzy once they hear the speech."

"Don't be silly," Reddi said with a yawn. "Everything is fine, Lieutenant."

"Reddi," she said, tightening her grip. "How do you feel?"

"Fine."

"Not annoyed at me?" she said. "Not angry that I hold the position you should? Not jealous at all?"

He glared at her, then cocked his head. Then he hissed out softly. "Damn it, you're right. I usually *hate* you, but all I feel is a mild dislike. Someone's playing with my emotions." He hesitated. "No offense."

"Can't feel offense," Marasi said. "I'm having trouble feeling any strong emotion or urgency. But Reddi, we *have* to stop them."

"I'll get a squad," he said. "How will we find them though? They could be anywhere."

"No," Marasi said, scanning the crowd. Her eyes found a carriage parked discreetly in a small alleyway across from the governor's square. "Not anywhere. They won't want to mix with the masses that they're planning to turn into a murderous mob. Too dangerous. Come on."

# 25

Upon seeing Lessie's face, Wax growled in a guttural, primal sound. The sound of a man getting hit straight in the stomach with a well-driven punch. He held the gun on Bleeder, but his hand wavered, and his vision shook.

*It's not her. It's not her.*

"Again with the guns," Bleeder said softly. Rusts! It was Lessie's voice. "You lean on them too much, Wax. You're a Coinshot. How often do I have to point that out?"

"You dug up her corpse?" Wax asked in a pleading voice. He was having trouble seeing straight. "You monster. You *dug up her corpse*?"

"I wish I hadn't been forced to do this," Les—*Bleeder* said. "But strong emotion frees us from him, Wax. It's the only way."

She stared down that gun. Of course she would. She was a kandra. He had to remind himself of that forcibly. The gun meant nothing to her.

Lessie … How often had he dreamed of hearing that voice again? He'd wept for the wish to tell her one last time of his love. To explain the hole, gaping like the wound from a shotgun blast, left in him by her death.

To apologize.

*Harmony. I can't shoot her again.*

Bleeder had outthought him after all.

"I worried about using Tan's body," Lessie said, stepping toward him. "Worried it would make you figure out who I really was."

"You're *not* Lessie."

She grimaced. "Yeah, I guess that's true. I was never Lessie. Always Paalm the kandra. But I *wanted* to be Lessie. Does that count for anything?"

Rusts … she had Lessie's mannerisms down exactly. MeLaan had said she was good, but this was so real, so *believable*. He found himself lowering his gun, wishing. Wishing …

*Harmony?* he begged.

But he didn't have his earring in.

* * *

Marasi and Reddi wrapped around, moving over a block before coming back in behind the suspicious carriage. They hadn't been able to gather as large a force as she'd wanted—not only did they worry about the Soother noticing the motion, Reddi was concerned about leaving too few people watching the crowd.

MeLaan's voice carried through the voice projectors, audible even as Marasi and her team of eleven men set up near the far end of the alleyway containing the carriage. How long before the Set noticed they'd been had? Probably not long. Marasi had left in some of the beginning part of the speech, in order to not sound *too* different from Innate, but the speech would take a turn very soon.

Reddi pulled off his constable's helmet—Marasi's own pressed against her hair, an uncomfortable weight—then nodded to the rest of them in the darkness. With his aluminum-lined helmet off, he could feel the Soother's touch more powerfully here than he had out in the crowd. That carriage really was the source of it.

He put the helmet back on. The precinct owned only a dozen of these, all donated by Waxillium. Reddi had just enough clout to requisition the task force that had them. He secured his helmet, then reached to his side, taking out a thick dueling cane like a long baton with a knob on the end. The others did the same. There would be no gunplay this close to a crowd of civilians.

"We go in quickly and quietly," Reddi whispered to the team. "Hope to Harmony they don't have a Coinshot with them. Keep your helmets on. I don't want that Soother taking control of any of you."

Marasi cocked an eyebrow. Soothers couldn't control people, though many mistook that. It didn't help that the Words of Founding spoke vaguely of kandra and koloss being controlled by Allomancy, but Marasi now knew that was only possible for someone who bore Hemalurgic spikes.

"Colms," Reddi said, still speaking in a low voice, "stay at the back. You're not a field agent. I don't want you getting hurt or, worse, messing this up."

"As you wish," she said.

Reddi counted softly. On ten, the group of them surged into the misted alleyway. Marasi hung near the back, walking with hands clasped behind her. Almost immediately after entering the alleyway, the constables pulled to a stop. A force of men in dark clothing piled out of a doorway inside the alley, blocking off access to the little carriage.

Marasi's heart pounded as the two groups regarded one another. At least this proved she'd been right about the carriage. A few of the newcomers carried guns, but a barked word from one of the dark-clothed men made them tuck those away.

*They don't want to draw the crowd's attention from the speech,* Marasi thought. *They still think what the governor is saying plays into their plans.*

Keeping this fight quiet would serve both sides. The two groups stood waiting, tense, before Reddi waved his dueling cane.

The two forces crashed into one another.

* * *

Bleeder stepped closer to Wax in the mists. Atop this high platform, this tower on the bridge, nothing else seemed to exist. It was as if they stood on a tiny steel island rising from the sea. Grey all around, darkness extending into vastness above.

"Maybe I should have come to you," Lessie's voice said. "And had you help me with my plan. But he was watching. He's *always* watching. I'm glad you took the earring out. At least my words meant something to you."

"Stop," Wax whispered. "Please."

"Stop what?" Lessie asked, mere inches from him. "Stop walking? Stop talking? Stop loving you? My life would have been a lot easier if I'd been able to do *that*."

Wax seized her with his open hand, grabbing her by the neck, thumb along her jaw. She met his eyes, and he saw pity in them.

"Perhaps," she said, "the reason I didn't come to you had no connection to Harmony at all. I knew this would hurt you. I'm sorry."

*No,* Wax thought.

"I'm going to have to do something about you," she said. "Keep you safe, somehow, but out of the way. Might have to hurt you, Wax. For your own good."

*No, this isn't real.*

"Still don't know what to do about Wayne," she said. "Couldn't bring myself to kill him, poor fool. He followed you here, to help you in the city. For that I love him. But he's still Harmony's, and so he's probably better dead than the way he is now."

*NO!*

Wax shoved her back, lifting Vindication again. The gun, however, leaped from his fingers—Pushed by Bleeder. It tumbled into the mists.

Wax growled, ramming his shoulder into Bleeder, trying to toss her off the tower. She seized him as he hit, throwing them both off balance.

As they fell together, she raised her aluminum gun and shot him in the leg.

He cried out as they fell from the tower, dropping through the mists. A frantic Push on the bridge below slowed Wax, but when he hit, his leg gave out and he screamed, dropping to one knee.

*Gun. Find the gun.*

It had fallen this way. Rusts. Would it even work after dropping so far? He hadn't heard it hit. Did that mean it had plunged into the waters?

Bleeder landed hard nearby. She spun on him, lit now by the garish electric lights that lined the roadway of the bridge. It was empty of carriages and motorcars, and behind her, a greater light hovered over the city. Red, violent light, seeming to burn the mists.

Looking out of the city, he saw darkness and peace. But inward, Elendel burned.

* * *

Marasi edged along the outside of a battlefield.

It was a very *small* battlefield, true, but the ferocity of the conflict stunned her. She felt she could—for the first time—imagine what it had been like to live during the War of Ash, so long ago.

But surely wars back then had been more thought-out, more deliberate. Not this mixed jumble of figures beating on one another, breaking bones, cursing, stepping on the fallen. Watching it made her sick, anxious. Those men were her colleagues, struggling frantically to push through the Set's thugs. All night they'd been forced to stand and watch the city decompose around them, the situation growing worse and worse as they felt helpless.

This was something they could fight, so fight they did, cracking heads, shoving down enemies, grunting in the dirty, dark alleyway in an effort to reach the carriage. Thankfully, the Set troops here didn't appear to include any Coinshots or Pewterarms.

Her men were still outnumbered, and for all their determination they weren't making much headway. Outside the alleyway, the crowd was growing restless. The kandra's speech turned toward the words Marasi had written for her, words promising social reform, legislation to cut down work hours and improve conditions in the factories. What Marasi was able to hear of the echoing voice, unfortunately, had a sense of desperation to it. It sounded fake, inauthentic.

That wasn't MeLaan's fault. She had said she didn't have time to prepare this imitation properly, and it wasn't her specialty in the first place. Rusts. The crowd started to shout, cursing the governor's lies. MeLaan's voice faltered. Was this the Rioter, whipping the crowd into a frenzy? Or were the people so angry, they were overcoming the Allomancy?

Either way, Marasi couldn't help feeling desperate as her men struggled and fell, the crowd building toward a full-on riot. She made her way along the side of the alley, hoping that if she got to that carriage she could make a difference. Unfortunately, the alley's confines were too narrow, and combatants filled the entire thing. Already half her men were down. Those who fought looked like wraiths, shifting and undulating in the mists. Shadows trying to consume shadows.

Nobody on either side seemed to pay her much attention. That was common. For most of her life, her father had wished that she would vanish. Those in high society were very good at pretending she didn't exist. Even Waxillium seemed to forget she was along sometimes.

Well, so be it. She took a deep breath, and strode directly into the fight. As she neared two struggling men, she dodged in, as if trying to do something to help—then flung herself to the side as if she'd been hit. It was a fair impression, in her opinion.

She heard Reddi curse her name from somewhere in the alleyway, but nobody came to her rescue. They kept trying very assiduously to kill one another, and so Marasi crept along the ground, crawling in the shadows until she neared the carriage.

Two guards stood here. Drat. She needed to get past them. How?

She glanced back toward the fight. It had moved farther up the alley, the constables being forced to retreat before superior numbers. They were probably far enough away that Marasi could try something truly desperate.

She used her Allomancy.

For a brief moment, she engaged a speed bubble that caught herself and just the two guards. She extinguished her metal immediately. Only seconds had passed outside.

It was still jarring. The mists seemed to zip with sudden speed around them, and the combatants lurched in their motions. The two guards jumped in surprise, looking around. Marasi did her best impression of a corpse.

Then she flicked on the Allomancy again.

"Ruin!" one of the guards said. "You see that?"

"There's Metalborn among them," the other said. They both sounded very nervous.

Marasi gave them another jolt of distorted time. The two guards held a hushed, frantic argument; then they knocked on the door of the carriage and spoke through the window. Marasi waited, sweating, her nerves taut. Her men didn't have much time.…

The two guards ran down the alleyway, leaving the carriage and carrying orders to the other combatants to be wary of Metalborn. Marasi got to her feet and slipped around to the other side of the carriage, which had no driver, then pulled open the door and slipped inside, seating herself.

A pudgy woman sat on the bench within, wearing a lavish gown of three silken layers. A man beside her sat with a hand on her wrist, his eyes closed, his suit very stylish and modern. The handgun Marasi leveled at them was, on the other hand, quite traditional. And quite functional.

The woman blinked, breaking her concentration to regard Marasi with a look of horror. She nudged the man, who opened his eyes, startled. One Soother and one Rioter, Marasi would guess.

"I have a theory," Marasi said to them, "that a gentlewoman should never need to resort to something so barbarous as violence to achieve her goals. Wouldn't you agree?"

The two quickly nodded.

"Yes indeed," Marasi said. "A true gentlewoman uses the *threat* of violence instead. So much more civilized." She cocked the gun. "Stop those pewterheads in the alley from beating up my friends. Then we'll talk about what to do with this crowd.…"

* * *

"Stop it, Wax!" Bleeder screamed. "Stop obeying him!"

*There.* Vindication! He spotted the gun near Bleeder, peeking out of a gutter alongside the roadway.

Wax leaped for it, rolling painfully on his wounded arm, using a Push to skid forward. Bleeder leveled her gun at him, but didn't fire. Perhaps, deep down, a part of the creature had adopted the feelings of the body it wore. Perhaps it no longer could tell the difference between its mind and its face.

Wax snatched up Vindication.

"Please," Bleeder whispered. "Listen."

"You're wrong about me," Wax said, spinning the chamber, feeling the trigger, hoping the gun still worked. He looked up at Bleeder and leveled the weapon.

Looking down those sights, he saw Lessie. His stomach turned again.

"How am I wrong?" Bleeder asked.

Rusts, she was crying.

"I'm not Harmony's hands," Wax whispered. "I'm His sword."

Then he fired.

Bleeder didn't dodge. Why would she? Guns barely inconvenienced her. This shot took her right in the forehead. Though her head flinched at the impact, she didn't fall, barely even moved.

She stared at him, a little dribble of blood running down beside the bridge of her nose, onto her lips. Then her eyes widened.

Her gun dropped from trembling fingers.

*We're weaker than other Hemalurgic creatures,* MeLaan had said. Wax struggled to his feet, holding on to the bridge's side wall for support. *Only two spikes, and we can be taken.*

"No!" Bleeder screeched, falling to her knees. "*No!*"

One spike allowed her to be sapient. And a second—delivered into her skull in the form of a bullet forged from Wax's earring—let Harmony seize control of her again.

# 26

Marasi towed the female Soother after her, holding the woman's collar with one hand, her gun in the other. They were accompanied by a battered Reddi, who regarded the surging crowd with displeasure. They'd left the other captives with the rest of the constables, and she prayed to Harmony that wasn't tempting fate.

"Stop them," Marasi hissed at the woman as they reached the edge of the crowd, which was throwing things at the stage. Poor MeLaan soldiered onward with the speech, growing more and more testy that they weren't listening.

"I'm trying!" the Soother complained. "It might be easier if you weren't *choking* me!"

"Just Soothe!" Reddi said, raising his dueling cane.

"I can't control their minds, silly man!" the Soother said. "And beating on me won't accomplish anything. When do I get to speak to my solicitor? I've broken no laws. I was simply watching the proceedings with interest."

Marasi ignored Reddi's angry response, instead focusing on the crowd. MeLaan stood before them, lit by electric lights from behind, but by bonfires from the front. The rage of the crowd, an ancient fire, against the cold sterility of the new world.

"You should be grateful!" MeLaan shouted at the crowd. "I've come to talk to you myself!"

*Wrong words,* Marasi thought. Her annoyance was leading her to deviate from the script.

"I'm listening!" MeLaan yelled over the crowd. "But you have to listen back, you miscreants!"

*She sounds just like him.* Too much, perhaps? MeLaan was playing a *part.* She was the governor, the role Marasi had given her. It seemed that the kandra had let the form dictate her reactions. Rusts … it wasn't that she was doing a bad job. She was doing a good job—of being Innate. Unfortunately, Innate had always had trouble connecting with the crowds.

"Fine," MeLaan said, waving a hand. "Burn the city! See how you feel in the morning without homes to live in."

Marasi closed her eyes and groaned. Rusts, she was tired. How late was it, now?

The crowd was growing violent. Time to grab MeLaan and Wayne and leave. Their gambit had failed. It had been a long shot in the first place, perhaps impossible. This crowd had come for blood. And …

The crowd shouted a new set of jeers. Marasi frowned, opening her eyes. She stood at the south edge of the crowd, near one of the bonfires, and was close enough to the front to make out Constable-General Aradel, who had stepped up beside MeLaan. Likely, he was going to get "the governor" to safety.

Instead Aradel took out his pistol and *pointed it at the governor*.

Marasi gaped for a moment. Then she spun on the Soother. "Soothe them!" she said. "Now. With everything you have. Do it, and I give you immunity for what you did tonight."

The woman eyed Marasi, displaying a craftiness that belied her earlier whining. She seemed to be weighing the offer.

"I promise it," Marasi said, "by the Survivor's spear."

The woman nodded, and a wave went through the crowd—a sudden hush. It didn't quiet them completely, but when Aradel spoke, his voice carried.

"Replar Innate," Aradel said. "In the name of the people of this city, and by the authority of my station as lord high constable, I arrest you for gross corruption, personal exploitation of this city's resources, and perjury of your oaths as a civil servant."

The crowd finally stilled completely.

"What idiocy—" MeLaan began.

"Men, turn around," Aradel said. He looked down at his constables. "Turn *around*."

The feeble line of soldiers reluctantly turned to face him, putting their backs to the crowd.

"What is he *doing*?" Reddi demanded.

"Something brilliant," Marasi said.

Aradel looked over the crowd, still holding a gun to the governor.

"Tonight, the governor himself declared this city to be in a state of martial law. That puts the constables in charge, with him at the head. Unfortunately, it turns out the governor is a lying bastard."

Some of the people began hesitant shouts of agreement.

"He's no longer in control," Aradel said. "Best I can figure, *you're* in control. So if you're willing, tonight, the constables stand with you.

"Now, you all came here to start a riot. Listen! Stop your shouts. I won't stand for rioting or looting. You start burning this city, and I'll fight you up to my last breath. You hear me? We *aren't a mob*."

"Then what are we?" a call went up, along with a handful of others.

"We're the people of Elendel, and we're tired of being led by a pack of rats," Aradel yelled. "I have proof of at least seven house lords who are corrupt. I mean to see them arrested. Tonight." Aradel hesitated, then spoke louder, voice carrying and amplified by the cones set up before the stage. "I could use an army to help me, if you're willing."

As the crowd roared its agreement, Aradel shoved MeLaan into the hands of a pair of corporals waiting nearby. They seemed utterly stunned. In truth, Aradel himself seemed a little overwhelmed by what he'd just done.

"Pure Preservation," Reddi cursed softly, looking over the excited crowd. "They're going to turn into a lynch mob."

"No," Marasi said. "They won't."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because a river is easier to channel than to stop, Reddi," Marasi said.

This could work. She didn't have much hope for holding the house lords and ladies Aradel wanted to arrest, but the governor himself … With those letters and MeLaan playing the role … Yes, this could *really work*.

She released the Soother. "You're free; get out of here. And tell Suit he might want to take an extended vacation during what is coming."

* * *

Wax crossed the bridge limping. Life had taught him never to underestimate an enemy you thought you'd downed. One hand on his bleeding leg, he kept his gun trained on the writhing figure until he could sweep her gun away. Then he went down on his good knee and rolled her over, making certain she wasn't covering up another weapon.

He found tears streaming from her eyes, mixing with the trickling blood from the bullet wound. "He's in my head again, Wax," she whispered, trembling. "Oh, *Ruin,* he's in my head. He's taking me. I won't go back to him."

"Hush," Wax said, pulling a second gun from her side and tossing it away. "It's all right."

"No," she cried, grabbing his arm. "No, it's not. I won't be his again! I *will be me,* at the end!"

Bleeder's trembling increased, her body bucking, as she held to his arm. He frowned as she kept her head thrust forward, meeting his eyes, weeping and shuddering. Thrashing.

"What are you doing?" Wax demanded.

"Dying. We decided it! We won't fall again. We found a way out." She could no longer meet his eyes, and she fell backward, spasming. Eyes dilating quickly, skin trembling against the bone.

Wax watched, horrified. He seized her arm. No pulse. She *was* dying. Killing herself.

Could he stop it?

Why would he care to? She was a murderer many times over. This was a fitting end. In truth, he empathized with her. Let her take this route, rather than suffering under Harmony's control. Hesitant, but feeling there was little else he could do for this poor creature, he picked her up and held her close. Let her die in someone's arms. It revolted him to do so, after what she had done. But damn it, it was *right.*

Bleeder turned her head toward him, and her expression softened as she shook, smiling through bloodied lips. "You're … you're as surprising as a … dancing donkey, Mister Cravat."

Wax grew cold. "Where did you hear that? How did you know those words?"

"I think I loved you even on that day," she said. "Lawman for hire. So ridiculous, but so … earnest. You didn't try to shelter me, but seemed so eager to impress.… A lord with a purpose."

"Who told you of that day, Bleeder?" Wax demanded. "Who…"

"Ask Harmony," she said, the trembling growing more violent. "Ask him, Wax! Ask why he sent a kandra to watch over you, all those years ago. *Ask him* if he knew I would come to love you!"

"No…"

"He moved us, even then!" she whispered. "I refused. I wouldn't manipulate you into returning to Elendel! You loved it out there. I wouldn't bring you back, to become his pawn.…"

"Lessie?" Harmony, it *was* her.

It was *her.*

"Ask him … Wax," she said. "Ask him … why … if he knows everything … he'd let you kill me.…" She grew still.

"Lessie?" Wax said. "Lessie!"

She was gone. There in his lap, he stared at her body. It kept its shape. Her shape. He clutched her, and let out a low-pitched howl, from deep within, a raw shout that echoed into the night.

It seemed to drive the mists back.

He still knelt there, holding the body, an hour later when a figure loped out of the mists and approached on four legs. TenSoon the kandra, Guardian of the Ascendant Warrior, approached with a reverent step, wolfhound's head bowed.

Wax stared out into those shifting mists, holding a corpse, hoping irrationally that his heat would keep it warm.

"Tell me," Wax said, voice cracking and rough from his shouting. "*Tell me,* kandra."

"She was sent to you long ago," TenSoon said, sitting back on his haunches. "The woman you knew as Lessie was always one of us."

*No* …

"Harmony worried about you in the Roughs, lawman," TenSoon said. "He wanted you to have a bodyguard. Paalm had exhibited a willingness to break prohibitions the rest of us held sacred. He hoped that you two would be good for one another."

"You didn't tell me?" Wax spat, his grip tight. Hatred. He didn't think he had ever felt *hatred* so intense as he did at that moment.

"I was forbidden," TenSoon said. "MeLaan didn't know; I was only informed a few days ago. Harmony foresaw a disaster if you were told whom you hunted."

"And this *isn't* a disaster, kandra?"

TenSoon turned away. They sat there on that empty bridge, electric lights making pockets in the mist, a dead woman in Wax's lap.

"I killed her," Wax whispered, squeezing his eyes closed. "I killed her *again.*"

# EPILOGUE

Wax sat alone in a room full of people. They'd done everything to make him comfortable. A warm fire on the hearth, a small lamp on the table beside it, for Steris knew he preferred flame to electricity. Broadsheets lay untouched in a roll beside a cup of tea that had long since grown cold.

They talked and celebrated, led by Lord Harms, who laughed and exclaimed about his minor part in it all. A disaster averted. A new governor—the first ever who was not of noble blood. Even the Lord Mistborn, long ago, had been part nobleman. The Last Emperor had been full-blooded, and the Survivor half nobleman. All great people, everyone agreed, to be lauded.

But Claude Aradel had none of the same lineage. Not a drop of noble blood in him. Those at the party congratulated one another for being so progressive as to speak favorably of one who was common-born.

Wax stared into the fire, fingering at the stubble on his chin. He spoke when it was required of him, but mostly they allowed him his peace. He was wrung out, Steris told them. Fatigued by the terrible things he'd seen. She diverted them from him when she could, telling them—when they inevitably asked—that she and he had decided to delay the wedding so Wax could take a short vacation to recuperate.

Partway through the event, Wayne sauntered over on crutches. He couldn't heal without storing up more health—and he couldn't do that while healing from his wound, or it would defeat the purpose. For now, he had to deal with the fragility of the body, just like a normal person.

*We're all so fragile, when you consider it,* Wax thought. *One little thing goes wrong, and we break.*

"Hey, mate," Wayne said, settling down on the footstool by Wax's feet. "Wanna hear how I'm a rusting genius?"

"Shoot," Wax whispered.

Wayne leaned forward, spread his hands before himself dramatically. "I'm gonna get *everybody* drunk."

The crowd continued its chatter. Mostly constables. Some political allies of Wax's. He'd chosen to do business with the more reputable people in the city, so Aradel's culling of the lords hadn't hit his house. It was considered an enormous political victory.

"See, I got this plan," Wayne said, tapping his head. "People in this town, they got issues. The folks what work in the factories think havin' more time to themselves is gonna fix their woes, but they gotta do something *with* that time. I've got an idea. It'll fix it all."

"Harmony, Wayne," Wax said. "You're not going to poison the city, are you?"

"Nah," Wayne said. "Not their bodies, at least." He grinned. "You watch. This will work. It's gonna be *amazing*." He rose, and stumbled, almost falling. He looked at his leg in surprise, as if he'd forgotten about the wound. Then he shook his head, grabbing his crutch and getting to his feet.

Once standing he hesitated, then leaned down. "It'll pass, mate," he said. "My pa once said to me, 'Son, keep a stiff upper lip.' So if things get bad, you bash your face against a wall till your lip bleeds, and you'll feel better. Works for me. Least I think it does. Can't right remember, on account of too many head wounds."

He grinned. Wax kept staring into the flames. Wayne's face fell.

"She'd have wanted you to stop her, you know," Wayne said softly. "If she'd been able to talk to you, been able to think straight, she'd have demanded you kill her. Just like I'd have wanted it. Just like you'd want the same, if you'd lost your copper. You did what you hadda do, mate. And you did it well."

He made a fist at Wax and nodded, then hobbled off, approaching a short young woman with long golden hair. A teenage girl? Wax didn't recognize her.

"I know you, don't I?" Wayne said. "Daughter of Remmingtel Tarcsel? The guy what invented the incandescent lightbulb?"

The girl's jaw dropped. "You know him?" She seized Wayne by the arms. "You know about my father?"

"Sure do!" Wayne said. "He was robbed, I gotta say. Genius. Word is, you're just as smart. That device you whipped up for making speeches sure is nice."

She regarded Wayne, then leaned in. “That’s only the start. They’ve brought it into their houses. Don’t you see? It’s all around.”

“What?” Wayne said.

“Electricity,” the girl said. “And I’m going to be the first to use it.”

“Huh,” Wayne said. “Need some money?”

“Do I…” She towed Wayne away through the party, aglow, speaking so quickly Wax couldn’t pick out the words.

He didn’t care to. He just stared at the fire.

The guests were polite enough not to imply that he was ruining the party by his indifference. Clotide passed by, swapping his cold cup of tea out for a warm one. For all Wax cared, this comfortable chair could have been a hard bench. He didn’t feel it, or the warmth of the fire, or the joy of the victory.

How could you hear a bee buzzing in the middle of a thunderstorm?

The guests eventually found excuses to leave, their sedate revels accomplished. Some bade farewell to him. Others did not. About halfway through the protracted death of the party, Marasi settled down on his footstool. She wore her constable’s uniform. Odd thing to do at a party, though as he thought about it, the men in the constabulary did it all the time.

Marasi took his tea and sipped it, then placed something else onto the table where the cup had been. Wax’s eyes flicked toward it. A small spike, long as a finger, made of some silvery metal with dark red spots, like rusted bits.

“That’s one of the spikes she was using, Waxillium,” Marasi said softly. “MeLaan wanted me to show it to you.”

Wax closed his eyes. They thought he wanted to *see* something like that?

“Waxillium,” Marasi said. “We can’t identify the metal. It’s nothing we’ve ever seen before. It certainly wasn’t one of the spikes she started with. That means she removed both, and stuck one like this in instead. Where did she get them? Who gave them to her?”

“I don’t care,” he whispered, opening his eyes.

Marasi grew quiet. “Wax…”

“He sent her to me, Marasi. He sent a *kandra* to *seduce* me.”

“No,” Marasi said, firm. “He sent a bodyguard to watch over you in the Roughs. I spoke to TenSoon. The seduction was her idea. And yours, presumably.”

“Harmony knew,” Wax said hoarsely. “He saw what would happen.”

“Maybe He didn’t.”

“Then what kind of God is He? What *good* is a God like Him, Marasi? Tell me that.”

Marasi fidgeted, then she sighed and took the strange spike back. She dropped something else onto the table as she rose. A small earring, just a stud with the back bent over. “They sent this for you.”

Wax didn’t look at it. He left that earring right where it was, as Marasi made her farewells and stepped out of the party. Others came to him, offered bland encouragement, of the type you might write on a card.

He nodded, but didn’t listen.

* * *

Marasi stopped by the precinct offices on her way home from the party at Ladrian Mansion, intent on retrieving her copy of the Lord Mistborn’s Hemalurgy book, which she’d locked in her drawer. The offices were dark and quiet—a direct contrast to the chaos of a few nights back. Though some constables were out on patrol, most had been given time off. Only those with jail watch would be on duty.

So it surprised her when she found lights on at the back of the main chamber. She walked up and leaned against the doorframe, looking in at Aradel, who had a stack of papers out and was working on them by candlelight.

“I find it hard to believe,” Marasi noted, “that there’s nothing better for the governor to do on his first day in office than equipment-depreciation reports. Not that I mind. You’ve been ignoring those for … how long?”

Aradel’s expression soured. “I’m not governor,” he said. “Not really.”

“The title ‘Interim Governor’ has the word ‘Governor’ in it, sir.”

“They’ll vote someone else into office next month at the proper hearing.”

“Frankly, sir, I doubt that.”

He slapped one page down on the stack, signed and sealed, then sat there staring at it. Finally he ran a hand through his hair. “Oh, Preservation. What have I done? And why the hell didn’t any of you stop me?”

Marasi smiled. “You didn’t exactly give us a chance, sir.”

“I’ll run away,” he said. “I’ll refuse the appointment. I’ll…” He looked up at her, and then sighed. “I can’t be happy in this position, Colms.”

“The ones who are happy in the role, sir, seem to have had their chance. I’m excited to see where it goes from here. You just changed the world.”

“Didn’t mean to.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Marasi said, glancing to the side as someone else moved through the darkened chamber, approaching. Another constable coming in to catch up on work? “Oh no.”

Governor Innate stepped up to the door, holding a belt. “Either of you know how to tie one of these?” the former governor said in MeLaan’s voice.

"You don't tie a belt, kandra," Aradel said. "You buckle it."

"No, no," MeLaan said, pulling it tight. "I mean, in making a noose. People always talk about guys hanging themselves in their cells, but I'll be damned if I can figure it out. Hung there for a good ten minutes, and I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have killed even the most frail mortal. I've got it wrong somehow."

She looked up at the two of them, then frowned at their appalled expressions. "What?"

"*Hang* yourself?" Marasi sputtered, finally finding her voice. "You're our linchpin witness!"

"You really think," MeLaan said dryly, "that Harmony would let me sit at trial and testify falsely against people I don't even know? It would make a mockery of justice, kids."

"No," Marasi said. "We have the letters. We know the truth."

"Do you?" MeLaan asked, pulling the belt tight again. "You know for certain Paalm didn't forge those letters, or that Innate himself didn't do it before she took him? You know that those lords and ladies went through with the plans, rather than backing out? You know they weren't just talking about possibilities?"

"We've got good cases, holy immortal," Aradel said. "Lieutenant Colms has done her research. We're pretty sure this is all correct."

"Then convince the judge and jury," MeLaan said with a shrug. "We don't do things like this. People have to be able to trust the law; I'm a lot of things, but I'm *not* going to be the one who sets the precedent that the kandra can lie in order to get someone convicted, even if you're 'pretty sure' you've got the right evidence."

Marasi folded her arms, grinding her teeth. Aradel glanced at her, questioning.

"Without her, they'll wiggle out of it," Marasi said. "We won't be able to keep them in jail. They'll be loose upon the city again." She sighed. "But … Blast. She's probably right, sir. I'd have hit on it if I'd thought about it long enough. We can't falsify evidence, however right our cause."

He nodded. "We weren't going to keep them in prison anyway, Colms. They have too much power, even now. They'd find a way to escape conviction, pinning the charges on subordinates." He sat back in his chair. "They'll have the governor's seat again, unless someone does something about it. Damn it. I really have to do this, don't I?"

"Sorry, sir," Marasi said.

"Well, at least I can get my desk clear of paperwork first," he said, leaning forward in determination. "Suggestions for my replacement as constable-general?”

“Reddi,” Marasi said.

“He hates you.”

“Doesn’t make him a bad conner, sir,” Marasi said. “So long as someone keeps an eye on him, as you put it. I can do that. I think he’ll rise to the challenge.”

Aradel nodded, then held up a hand to MeLaan. She tossed him the belt, and he tied it in a loop.

“This part around your neck, holy one,” he said. “Make your skin bruise so it looks right, a V shape. You know how to make someone look like they died of strangling?”

“Yeah,” MeLaan said. “Unfortunately.”

“I’ll come cut you down in fifteen minutes,” Aradel said. “You’ll need to fool the coroner.”

“No problem,” MeLaan said. “I can breathe through a tracheal system instead of lungs. Arrange to have the body cremated, give me a window, and I’ll slip out and leave the bones, which you can burn. Nice and neat.”

“Fine,” Aradel said, looking sick.

MeLaan bade him farewell, wandering back toward the cells. Marasi joined her after giving Aradel a salute he didn’t see.

“How did you get out, anyway?” Marasi asked, catching up to MeLaan.

“Stuck my finger in the lock,” MeLaan said, “and melted my skin, shoving a bit in. It’s amazing what you can do when you aren’t constrained to normal body shapes.”

They walked together to the entrance of the jail part of the building. Marasi wasn’t going to ask how MeLaan had avoided the guards. Hopefully the two hadn’t been hurt.

“Harmony knows, right?” Marasi asked as MeLaan lingered at the door. “If these people are guilty or not?”

“He does.”

“So you could simply ask Him if it’s just to imprison them. If He says yes, we could go through with it. I’d accept God’s word on the matter to satisfy my conscience.”

“Still breaks our rules,” MeLaan said. “And Harmony probably wouldn’t talk.”

“Why not?” Marasi said. “You realize what all this has done to Waxillium, right?”

“He’ll weather it.”

“He shouldn’t have to.”

“And what would you have Harmony do, *woman*? Give us all the answers? Lead us by the noses, like Paalm swore that He did? Turn us all into pieces on a board for His amusement?"

Marasi stepped back. She'd never heard such a tone from MeLaan.

"Or maybe you want it the other way?" MeLaan snapped. "Leave us alone completely? Not intervene at all?"

"No, I—"

"Can you imagine what it must be like? Knowing that any action you take is going to help some, but hurt others? Save a man's life now, let him spread a disease that kills a child later in his life. Harmony does the best He can—the best *possible,* by the very definition. Yes, He hurt Wax. He hurt him badly. But He put the pain where He knew it could be borne."

Marasi blushed, then—annoyed at herself—dug in her purse and brought out the strange spike. "And this?"

"It's not a metal we know."

"That's what TenSoon said. But Harmony—"

"It's not a metal *Harmony* knows," MeLaan said.

Marasi felt a chill. "Then … it's not His? Not from His form, like the old stories of atium and lerasium?"

"No," MeLaan said. "It's from somewhere else. She used these strange spikes to steal attributes, instead of the ones we're familiar with. Maybe that's why she could use stolen Allomancy and Feruchemy, when other kandra can't. Either way, didn't you wonder why Harmony couldn't see Bleeder? Couldn't track her, couldn't predict her? What could stop a god, Marasi Colms? Any guesses?"

"Another god," Marasi whispered.

"Congratulations," MeLaan said, pulling open the door. "You've found proof of something that terrifies us. Think on that for a while, before you go around accusing Harmony—or the kandra—of anything. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go try to hang myself properly."

She slipped away, closing the door behind her.

*Another god,* Marasi thought, standing in the darkness. Not Harmony, not Ruin, not Preservation.

She looked down at the small spike in her hands, and heard a name from a year ago, spoken by Miles Hundredlives as he died. The name of a god from the old days. Marasi had researched the name halfheartedly, far more distracted by her interaction with Ironeyes.

Now, however, she determined to dig back into the records and find the answers.

Who, or what, was *Trell?*

* * *

The room had probably grown silent long before Wax noticed he was alone. The fire was dying. He should do something about that.

He didn't.

Steris stepped over and set a new log on, then stirred the embers. So he hadn't been alone. She set the poker beside the fireplace, then regarded him. He awaited her words.

None came. Instead, she scooted the footstool around until it was beside his chair. She sat down, legs crossed neatly, hands in her lap.

The two of them remained there, not saying a word, though she did eventually rest her hand on top of his. The fire had felt cold to him, the air frozen, but that hand was warm.

Finally, he turned to the side, rested his head on her shoulder, and wept.

# ARS ARCANUM

## METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART

| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Weight |
| Steel | Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Speed |
| Tin | Increases Senses | Stores Senses |
| Pewter | Increases Physical Abilities | Stores Physical Strength |
| Zinc | Riots (Enflames) Emotions | Stores Mental Speed |
| Brass | Soothes (Dampens) Emotions | Stores Warmth |
| Copper | Hides Allomantic Pulses | Stores Memories |
| Bronze | Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses | Stores Wakefulness |
| Cadmium | Slows Down Time | Stores Breath |
| Bendalloy | Speeds Up Time | Stores Energy |
| Gold | Reveals Your Past Self | Stores Health |
| Electrum | Reveals Your Own Future | Stores Determination |
| Chromium | Wipes Allomantic Reserves of Target | Stores Fortune |
| Nicrosil | Enhances Allomantic Burn of Target | Stores Investiture |
| Aluminum | Wipes Internal Allomantic Reserves | Stores Identity |
| Duralumin | Enhances the Next Metal Burned | Stores Connection |

LIST OF METALS

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**ALUMINUM:** A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of his or her metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn Aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their spiritual sense of identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them, it is not yet well understood. Aluminum itself and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

**BENDALLOY:** Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluids intake.

**BRASS:** Soother Mistings burn brass to Soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

**BRONZE:** Seeker Mistings burn bronze to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

**CADMIUM:** Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

**CHROMIUM:** Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer’s metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

**COPPER:** Coppercloud Mistings (a.k.a. Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields the Smoker from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

**DURALUMIN:** A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals' power. Mistings who can burn Duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connecter Ferrings can store spiritual connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people's awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

**ELECTRUM:** Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

**GOLD:** Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

**IRON:** Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

**NICROSIL:** Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

**PEWTER:** Pewterarm Mistings (a.k.a. Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

**STEEL:** Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot's center of gravity.

Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

**TIN:** Tineye Mistings who burn tin increases the sensitivity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the sensitivity of one of the five senses into a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their sensitivity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

**ZINC:** Rioter Mistings burn zinc to Riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

## ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally, these are spoken of as the "Metallic Arts," though there are other names for them.

**Allomancy** is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology—meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their Spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn't actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn't much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the "God Metals" locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, however, the other metals are not in wide use.

**Feruchemy** is still widely known and used at this point on Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren't spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the inbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if one could make metalminds out of alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

**Hemalurgy** is widely unknown in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world's rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra, who (for the most part) serve Harmony.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many through history have maligned it as an "evil" art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual Realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great interest to the cosmere, it is this one. I think there are great possibilities for its use.

### COMBINATIONS

It is possible on Scadrial to be born with ability to access both Allomancy and Feruchemy. This has been of specific interest to me lately, as the mixing of different types of Investiture has curious effects. One needs look only at what has happened on Roshar to find this manifested—two powers, combined, often have an almost chemical reaction. Instead of getting out exactly what you put in, you get something new.

On Scadrial, someone with one Allomantic power and one Feruchemical power is called "Twinborn." The effects here are more subtle than they are when mixing Surges on Roshar, but I am convinced that each unique combination also creates something distinctive. Not just two powers, you could say, but two powers … and an effect. This demands further study.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nazrilof

**Brandon Sanderson** grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He lives in Utah with his wife and children and teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. In addition to completing Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time®, he is the author of such bestsellers as the Mistborn trilogy, *Warbreaker, The Alloy of Law, The Way of Kings, Words of Radiance, The Rithmatist,* and *Steelheart*. He won the 2013 Hugo Award for *The Emperor's Soul,* a novella set in the world of his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*. For the behind-the-scenes information on all his books visit www.brandonsanderson.com. Or sign up for email updates here.

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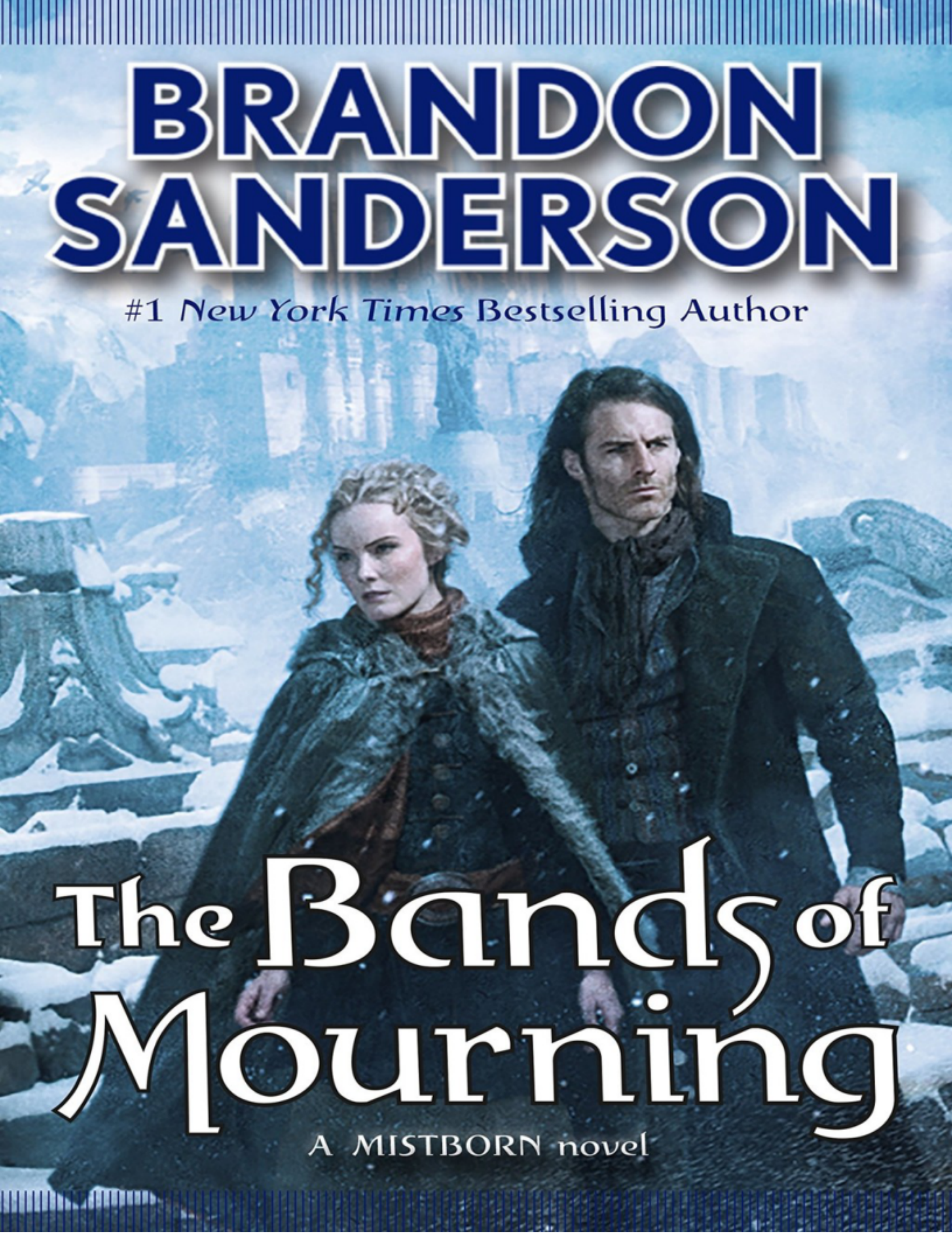

# BRANDON SANDERSON

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

# The Bands of Mourning

A MISTBORN novel

# THE BANDS OF MOURNING

A MISTBORN NOVEL

BRANDON SANDERSON

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**FOR BEN OLSEN**

*Who keeps putting up with a bunch of crazy writers as friends,*

*And finds time to make our books better all the while.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book comes out in the year that will mark the tenth anniversary of the Mistborn series. Considering all the other things I’ve been doing, it seems like six books in ten years is a grand accomplishment! I can still remember the early months, writing the trilogy furiously, trying to craft something that would really show off what I can do as a writer. Mistborn has become one of my hallmark series, and I hope that you find this volume a worthy entry in the canon.

As always, this book involved the efforts of a great number of people. There’s the excellent art by Ben McSweeney and Isaac Stewar†—maps and icons by Isaac, with all the broadsheet art done by Ben. Both also helped a great deal on the text of the broadsheet, and Isaac himself wrote the Nicki Savage piece for it—since the idea was to have Jak hiring out his work now, we wanted to give that a different voice. I think it turned out great!

The cover art was done by Chris McGrath in the US, and by Sam Green for the UK edition. Both are longtime artists on this series, and their art keeps getting better. Editorial was done by Moshe Feder at Tor, with Simon Spanton shepherding the project over at Gollancz in the UK. Agents on the project included Eddie Schneider, Sam Morgan, Krystyna Lopez, Christa Atkinson, and Tae Keller at Jabberwocky in the US, all overseen by the amazing Joshua Bilmes. In the UK you can thank John Berlyne of the Zeno Agency, an all-around awesome guy who worked hard for many years to finally break my books into the UK.

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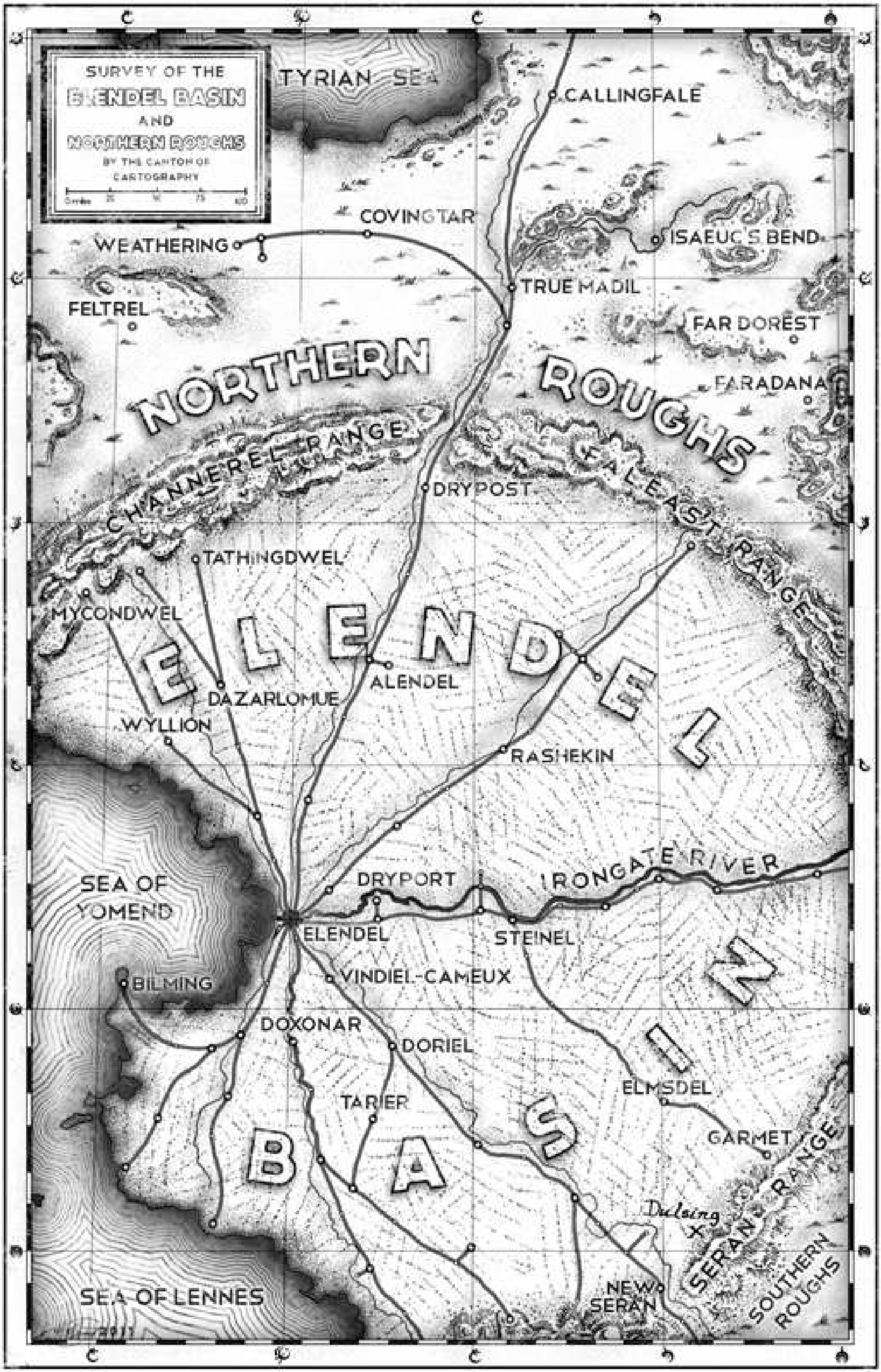
Continuity, all-around editing feedback, and countless other jobs were done by the Immaculate Peter Ahlstrom. Also working here on my team are Kara

Stewart, Karen Ahlstrom, and Adam Horne. And, of course, my lovely wife, Emily.

We leaned extra hard on my beta readers for this one, as the book didn’t have the chance to go through writing group. That team is: Peter Ahlstrom, Alice Arneson, Gary Singer, Eric James Stone, Brian T. Hill, Kristina Kugler, Kim Garrett, Bob Kluttz, Jakob Remick, Karen Ahlstrom, Kalyani Poluri, Ben “wooo this book is dedicated to me, look how important I am” Olsen, Lyndsey Luther, Samuel Lund, Bao Pham, Aubree Pham, Megan Kanne, Jory Phillips, Trae Cooper, Christi Jacobsen, Eric Lake, and Isaac Stewar†. (For those wondering, Ben was a founding member of my original writing group with Dan Wells and Peter Ahlstrom. A computer person by trade, and the only one of us in that original group who had no aspirations toward working in publishing, he’s been a valued reader and friend for many years. He also introduced me to the Fallout series, so there’s that as well.) Community proofreaders included most of the above plus: Kerry Wilcox, David Behrens, Ian McNatt, Sarah Fletcher, Matt Wiens, and Joe Dowswell.

Well, that was a mouthful! These folks are wonderful, and if you compare my early books to my later ones, I think you’ll find that the assistance of these people has been invaluable in not only slaying typos but also helping me tighten narratives. Finally, though, I’d like to thank you readers for sticking with me these ten years, and being willing to accept the strange ideas I throw at you. Mistborn is not quite halfway through the evolution I have planned for it. I can’t wait for you to see what is coming your way, and this book is where some of that finally starts to be revealed.

Enjoy!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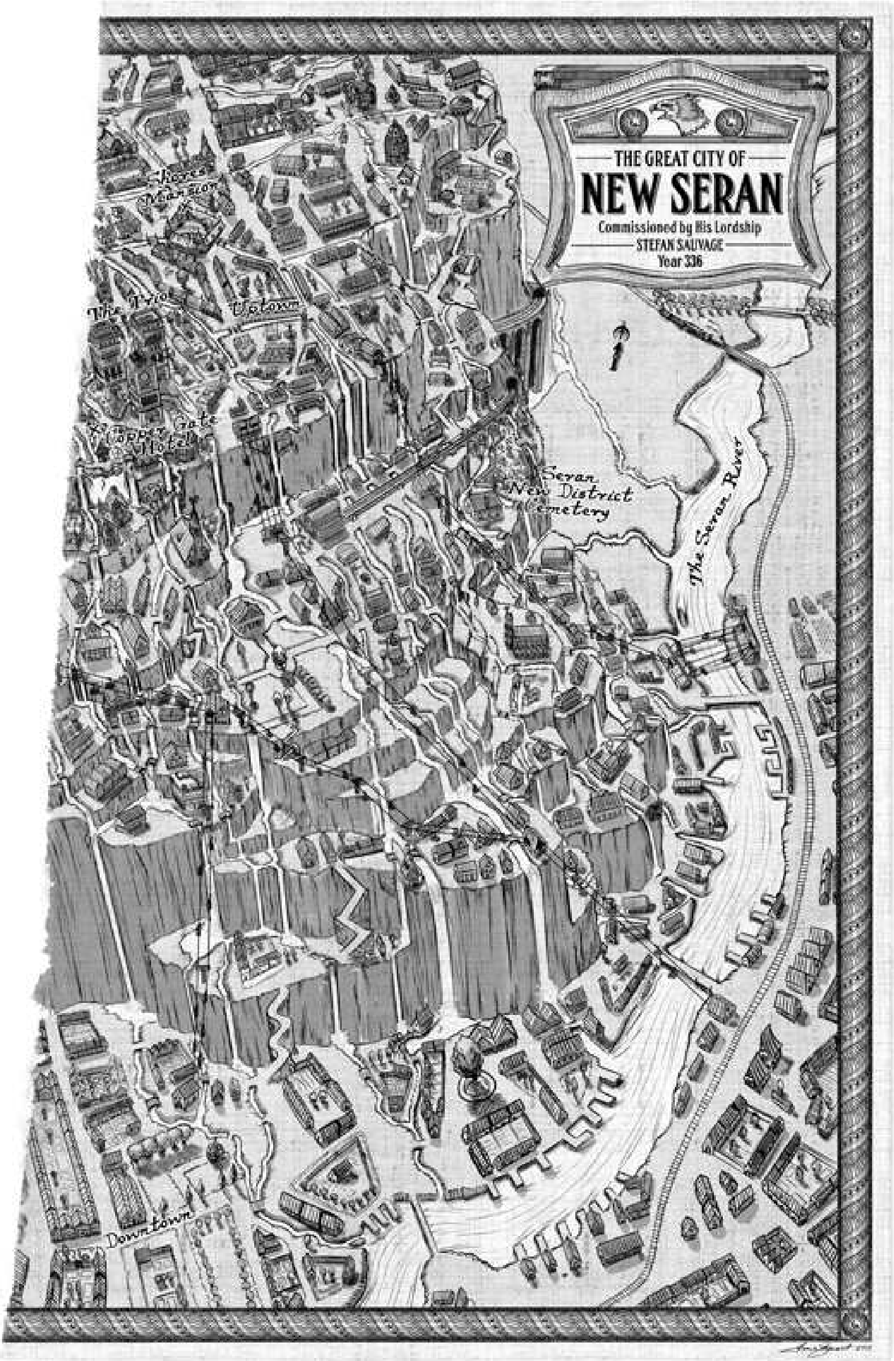
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Downtown

# PROLOGUE

“Telsin!” Waxillium hissed as he crept out of the training hut.

Glancing back, Telsin winced and crouched lower. At sixteen, Waxillium’s sister was one year older than he was. Her long dark hair framed a button nose and prim lips, and colorful V shapes ran up the front of her traditional Terris robes. Those always seemed to fit her in a way his never did. On Telsin, they were elegant. Waxillium felt like he was wearing a sack.

“Go away, Asinthew,” she said, inching around the side of the hut.

“You’re going to miss evening recitation.”

“They won’t notice I’m gone. They never check.”

Inside the hut, Master Tellingdwar droned on about proper Terris attitudes. Submission, meekness, and what they called “respectful dignity.” He was speaking to the younger students; the older ones, like Waxillium and his sister, were supposed to be meditating.

Telsin scrambled away, moving through the forested area of Elendel referred to simply as the Village. Waxillium fretted, then hurried after his sister.

“You’re going to get into trouble,” he said once he caught up. He followed her around the trunk of an enormous oak tree. “You’re going to get *me* into trouble.”

“So?” she said. “What is it with you and rules anyway?”

“Nothing,” he said. “I just—”

She stalked off into the forest. He sighed and trailed after her, and eventually they met up with three other Terris youths: two girls and a tall boy. Kwashim, one of the girls, looked Waxillium up and down. She was dark-skinned and slender. “You brought *him*?”

“He followed me,” Telsin said.

Waxillium smiled at Kwashim hopefully, then at Idashwy, the other girl.

She had wide-set eyes and was his own age. And Harmony … she was gorgeous. She noticed his attention on her and blinked a few times, then glanced away, a demure smile on her lips.

“He’ll tell on us,” Kwashim said, drawing his attention away from the other girl. “You know he will.”

“I won’t,” Waxillium snapped.

Kwashim gave Waxillium a glare. “You might miss evening class. Who’ll answer all the questions? It will be rusting quiet in the classroom with nobody to fawn over the teacher.”

Forch, the tall boy, stood just inside the shadows. Waxillium didn’t look at Forch, didn’t meet his eyes. *He doesn’t know, right? He can’t know.* Forch was the oldest of them, but rarely said much.

He was Twinborn, like Waxillium. Not that either of them used their Allomancy much these days. In the Village, it was their Terris side—their Feruchemy—that was lauded. The fact that both he and Forch were Coinshots didn’t matter to the Terris.

“Let’s go,” Telsin said. “No more arguing. We probably don’t have much time. If my brother wants to tag along, then fine.”

They followed her beneath the canopy, feet crackling on leaves. With this much foliage, you could easily forget you were in the middle of an enormous city. The sounds of shouting men and iron-shod hooves on cobbles were distant, and you couldn’t see or smell the smoke in here. The Terris worked hard to keep their section of the city tranquil, quiet, peaceful.

Waxillium should have loved it here.

The group of five youths soon approached the Synod’s Lodge, where the ranking Terris elders had their offices. Telsin waved for the group of them to wait while she hurried up to a particular window to listen. Waxillium found himself looking about, anxious. Evening was approaching, the forest growing dim, but *anyone* could walk along and find them.

*Don’t worry so much,* he told himself. He needed to join in their antics like his sister did. Then they’d see him as one of them. Right?

Sweat trickled down the sides of his face. Nearby, Kwashim leaned against a tree, completely unconcerned, a smirk growing on her lips as she noticed how nervous he was. Forch stood in the shadows, not crouching, but *rusts*—he could have been one of the trees, for all the emotion he showed. Waxillium glanced at Idashwy, with her large eyes, and she blushed, looking away.

Telsin snuck back to them. “She’s in there.”

“That’s our grandmother’s office,” Waxillium said.

“Of course it is,” Telsin said. “And she got called into her office for an emergency. Right, Idashwy?”

The quiet girl nodded. “I saw Elder Vwafendal running past my meditation room.”

Kwashim grinned. “So she won’t be watching.”

“Watching what?” Waxillium asked.

“The Tin Gate,” Kwashim said. “We can get out into the city. This is going to be even easier than usual!”

“Usual?” Waxillium said, looking in horror from Kwashim to his sister. “You’ve done this *before*?”

“Sure,” Telsin said. “Hard to get a good drink in the Village. Great pubs two streets over though.”

“You’re an *outsider,*” Forch said to him as he stepped up. He spoke slowly, deliberately, as if each word required separate consideration. “Why should you care if we leave? Look, you’re shaking. What are you afraid of? You lived most of your life out there.”

*You’re* an outsider, they said. Why was his sister always able to worm her way into any group? Why did he always have to stand on the outside?

“I’m not shaking,” Waxillium said to Forch. “I just don’t want to get into trouble.”

“He’s *going* to turn us in,” Kwashim said.

“I’m not.” *Not for this anyway,* Waxillium thought.

“Let’s go,” Telsin said, leading the pack through the forest to the Tin Gate, which was a fancy name for something that was really just another street—though granted, it had a stone archway etched with ancient Terris symbols for the sixteen metals.

Beyond it lay a different world. Glowing gas lamps marching along streets, newsboys trudging home for the night with unsold broadsheets tucked under their arms. Workers heading to the rowdy pubs for a drink. He’d never really known that world; he’d grown up in a lavish mansion stuffed with fine clothes, caviar, and wine.

Something about that simple life called to him. Perhaps he’d find *it* there. The thing he’d never found. The thing everyone else seemed to have, but he couldn’t even put a name to.

The other four youths scuttled out, passing the building with shadowed windows where Waxillium and Telsin’s grandmother would usually be sitting and reading this time of night. The Terris didn’t employ guards at the entrances to their domain, but they *did* watch.

Waxillium didn’t leave, not yet. He looked down, pulling back the sleeves of his robe to expose the metalmind bracers he wore there.

“You coming?” Telsin called to him.

He didn’t respond.

“Of course you’re not. You never want to risk trouble.”

She led Forch and Kwashim away. Surprisingly though, Idashwy lingered. The quiet girl looked back at him questioningly.

*I can do this,* Waxillium thought. *It’s nothing big.* His sister’s taunt ringing in his ears, he forced himself forward and joined Idashwy. He felt sick, but he fell in beside her, enjoying her shy smile.

“So, what was the emergency?” he asked Idashwy.

“Huh?”

“The emergency that called Grandmother away?”

Idashwy shrugged, pulling off her Terris robe, briefly shocking him until he saw that she wore a conventional skirt and blouse underneath. She tossed the robe into the bushes. “I don’t know much. I saw your grandmother running to the Synod Lodge, and overheard Tathed asking about it. Some kind of crisis. We were planning to slip out tonight, so I figured, you know, this would be a good time.”

“But the emergency…” Waxillium said, looking over his shoulder.

“Something about a constable captain coming to question her,” Idashwy said.

A *constable*?

“Let’s go, Asinthew,” she said, taking his hand. “Your grandmother is likely to make short work of the outsider. She could be on her way here already!”

He’d frozen in place.

Idashwy looked at him. Those lively brown eyes made it hard for him to think. “Come on,” she urged. “Sneaking out is hardly even an infraction. Didn’t you *live* out here for fourteen years?”

Rusts.

“I need to go,” he said, turning back to run toward the forest.

Idashwy stood in place as he left her. Waxillium entered the woods, sprinting for the Synod Lodge. *You know she’s going to think you’re a coward now,* part of him observed. *They all will.*

Waxillium skidded to the ground outside his grandmother’s office window, heart thumping. He pressed against the wall, and yes, he *could* hear something through the open window.

“We police ourselves, constable,” Grandmother Vwafendal said from inside. “You know this.”

Waxillium dared to push himself up, peeking in the window to see

Grandmother seated at her desk, a picture of Terris rectitude, with her hair in a braid and her robes immaculate.

The man standing across the desk from her held his constable's hat under his arm as a sign of respect. He was an older man with drooping mustaches, and the insignia on his breast marked him as a captain and a detective. High rank. Important.

*Yes!* Waxillium thought, fiddling in his pocket for his notes.

"The Terris police themselves," the constable said, "because they rarely need policing."

"They don't need it now."

"My informant—"

"So now you have an informant?" Grandmother asked. "I thought it was an anonymous tip."

"Anonymous, yes," the constable said, laying a sheet of paper on the desk. "But I consider this more than just a 'tip.'"

Waxillium's grandmother picked up the sheet. Waxillium knew what it said. He'd sent it, along with a letter, to the constables in the first place.

*A shirt that smells of smoke, hanging behind his door.*

*Muddied boots that match the size of the prints left outside the burned building.*

*Flasks of oil in the chest beneath his bed.*

The list contained a dozen clues pointing to Forch as the one who'd burned the dining lodge to the ground earlier in the month. It thrilled Waxillium to see that the constables had taken his findings seriously.

"Disturbing," Grandmother said, "but I don't see anything on this list that gives you the right to intrude upon our domain, Captain."

The constable leaned down to rest his hands on the edge of her desk, confronting her. "You weren't so quick to reject our help when we sent a fire brigade to extinguish that blaze."

"I will always accept help saving lives," Grandmother said. "But I need no help in locking them away. Thank you."

"Is it because this Forch is Twinborn? Are you frightened of his powers?"

She gave him a scornful look.

"Elder," he said, taking a deep breath. "You have a criminal among you—"

"*If* we do," she said, "we will deal with the individual ourselves. I have visited the houses of sorrow and destruction you outsiders call prisons, Captain. I will not see one of my own immured there based on hearsay and anonymous fancies sent via post."

The constable breathed out and stood up straight again. He set something new down on the desk with a snap. Waxillium squinted to see, but the constable was covering the object with his hand.

“Do you know much about arson, Elder?” the constable asked softly. “It’s often what we call a companion crime. You find it used to cover a burglary, to perpetrate fraud, or as an act of initial aggression. In a case like this, the fire is commonly just a harbinger. At best you have a firebug who is waiting to burn again. At worst … well, something bigger is coming, Elder. Something you’ll all regret.”

Grandmother drew her lips to a line. The constable removed his hand, revealing what he’d put on the desk. A bullet.

“What is this?” Grandmother said.

“A reminder.”

Grandmother slapped it off the table, sending it snapping against the wall near where Waxillium hid. He jumped back and crouched lower, heart pounding.

“Do not bring your instruments of death into this place,” Grandmother hissed.

Waxillium got back to the window in time to see the constable settling his hat on his head. “When that boy burns something again,” he said softly, “send for me. Hopefully it won’t be too late. Good evening.”

He left without a further word. Waxillium huddled against the side of the building, worried the constable would look back and see him. It didn’t happen. The man marched out along the path, disappearing into the evening shadows.

But Grandmother … she hadn’t believed. Couldn’t she see? Forch had committed a crime. They were just going to leave him alone? Why—

“Asinthew,” Grandmother said, using Waxillium’s Terris name as she always did. “Would you please join me?”

He felt an immediate spike of alarm, followed by shame. He stood up. “How did you know?” he said through the window.

“Reflection on my mirror, child,” she said, holding a cup of tea in both hands, not looking toward him. “Obey. If you please.”

Sullenly, he trudged around the building and through the front doors of the wooden lodge. The whole place smelled of the wood stain he’d recently helped apply. He still had the stuff under his fingernails.

He stepped into the room and shut the door. “Why did you—”

“Please sit down, Asinthew,” she said softly.

He walked to the desk, but didn’t take the guest seat. He remained standing, right where the constable had.

“Your handwriting,” Grandmother said, brushing at the paper the constable had left. “Did I not tell you that the matter of Forch was under control?”

“You say a lot of things, Grandmother. I believe when I see proof.”

Vwafendal leaned forward, steam rising from the cup in her hands. “Oh, Asinthew,” she said. “I thought you were determined to fit in here.”

“I am.”

“Then why are you listening at my window instead of doing evening meditations?”

He looked away, blushing.

“The Terris way is about *order,* child,” Grandmother said. “We have rules for a reason.”

“And burning down buildings isn’t against the rules?”

“Of *course* it is,” Grandmother said. “But Forch is not your responsibility. We’ve spoken to him. He’s penitent. His crime was that of a misguided youth who spends too much time alone. I’ve asked some of the others to befriend him. He *will* do penance for his crime, in our way. Would you rather see him rot in prison?”

Waxillium hesitated, then sighed, dropping into the chair before his grandmother’s desk. “I want to find out what is right,” he whispered, “and do it. Why is that so hard?”

Grandmother frowned. “It’s easy to discover what is right and wrong, child. I will admit that always *choosing* to follow what you know you should do is—”

“No,” Waxillium said. Then he winced. It wasn’t wise to interrupt Grandmother V. She never yelled, but her disapproval could be sensed as surely as an imminent thunderstorm. He continued more softly. “No, Grandmother. Finding out what’s right *isn’t* easy.”

“It is written in our ways. It is taught every day in your lessons.”

“That’s one voice,” Waxillium said, “one philosophy. There are so many. …”

Grandmother reached across the desk and put her hand on his. Her skin was warm from holding the teacup. “Ah, Asinthew,” she said. “I understand how hard it must be for you. A child of two worlds.”

*Two worlds,* he thought immediately, *but no home.*

“But you must heed what you are taught,” Grandmother continued. “You promised me you would obey our rules while you were here.”

“I’ve been trying.”

“I know. I hear good reports from Tellingdwar and your other instructors. They say you learn the material better than anyone—that it’s as if you’ve lived here all your life! I’m proud of your effort.”

“The other kids don’t accept me. I’ve tried to do as you say—to be *more* Terris than anyone, to *prove* my blood to them. But the kids … I’ll never be one of them, Grandmother.”

“‘Never’ is a word youths often use,” Grandmother said, sipping her tea, “but rarely understand. Let the rules become your guide. In them, you will find peace. If some are resentful because of your zeal, let them be. Eventually, through meditation, they will make peace with such emotions.”

“Could you … maybe order a few of the others to befriend me?” he found himself asking, ashamed of how weak it sounded to say the words. “Like you did with Forch?”

“I will see,” Grandmother said. “Now, off with you. I will not report this indiscretion, Asinthew, but please promise me you will set aside this obsession with Forch and leave the punishment of others to the Synod.”

Waxillium moved to stand up, and his foot slipped on something. He reached down. *The bullet.*

“Asinthew?” Grandmother asked.

He trapped the bullet in his fist as he straightened, then hurried out the door.

* * *

“Metal is your life,” Tellingdwar said from the front of the hut, moving into the final parts of the evening recitation.

Waxillium knelt in meditation, listening to the words. Around him, rows of peaceful Terris were similarly bowed in reverence, offering praise to Preservation, the ancient god of their faith.

“Metal is your soul,” Tellingdwar said.

So much was perfect in this quiet world. Why did Waxillium sometimes feel like he was dragging dirt in solely by being here? That they were all part of one big white canvas, and he a smudge at the bottom?

“You preserve us,” Tellingdwar said, “and so we will be yours.”

*A bullet*, Waxillium thought, the bit of metal still clenched in his palm. *Why did he leave a bullet as a reminder? What does it mean?* It seemed an odd symbol.

Recitation complete, the youths, children, and adults alike rose and stretched. There was some jovial interaction, but curfew had nearly arrived, which meant that the younger set had to be on their way to their homes—or in Waxillium’s case, the dormitories. He remained kneeling anyway.

Tellingdwar started gathering up the mats people had used for kneeling. He kept his head shaved; his robes were bright yellows and oranges. Arms laden with mats, he paused as he noticed Waxillium hadn't left with the others. "Asinthew? Are you well?"

Waxillium nodded tiredly, climbing to his feet, legs numb from kneeling so long. He plodded toward the exit, where he paused. "Tellingdwar?"

"Yes, Asinthew?"

"Has there ever been a violent crime in the Village?"

The short steward froze, his grip tightening on the load of mats. "What makes you ask?"

"Curiosity."

"You needn't worry. That was long ago."

"*What* was long ago?"

Tellingdwar retrieved the remaining mats, moving more quickly than before. Perhaps someone else would have avoided the question, but Tellingdwar was as candid as they came. A classic Terris virtue—in his eyes, avoiding a question would be as bad as lying.

"I'm not surprised they're still whispering about it," Tellingdwar said. "Fifteen years can't wash away that blood, I suppose. The rumors are wrong, however. Only one person was killed. A woman, by her husband's hand. Both Terris." He hesitated. "I knew them."

"How did he kill her?"

"Must you know this?"

"Well, the rumors…"

Tellingdwar sighed. "A gun. An outsider weapon. We don't know where he got it." Tellingdwar shook his head, dropping the mats into a stack at the side of the room. "I guess we shouldn't be surprised. Men are the same everywhere, Asinthew. You must remember this. Do not think yourself better than another because you wear the robe."

Trust Tellingdwar to turn any conversation into a lesson. Waxillium nodded to him and slipped out into the night. The sky rumbled above, foretelling rain, but there was no mist yet.

*Men are the same everywhere, Asinthew.…* What was the purpose, then, of everything they taught in here? If it couldn't prevent men from acting like monsters?

He reached the boys' dorm, which was quiet. It was just after curfew, and Waxillium had to bow his head to the dormmaster in apology before rushing down the hallway and into his room on the ground floor. Waxillium's father had insisted he be given a room to himself, because of his noble heritage. That had only served to set him apart from the others.

He shucked off his robe and threw open his wardrobe. His old clothing hung there. Rain began to patter against his window as he threw on some trousers and a buttoning shirt, which he found more comfortable than those rusting robes. He trimmed his lamp and sat back on his cot, opening a book for some evening reading.

Outside, the sky rumbled like an empty stomach. Waxillium tried to read for a few minutes, then tossed the book aside—nearly knocking over his lamp—and threw himself to his feet. He walked to the window, watching the water stream down. It fell in patches and columns, because of the thick canopy of leaves. He reached over and extinguished the lamp.

He stared at the rain, thoughts tumbling in his head. He'd have to make a decision soon. The agreement between his grandmother and his parents required Waxillium to spend one year in the Village, and only a month of that remained. After that, it would be his choice whether to stay or to leave.

What awaited him outside? White tablecloths, posturing people with nasal accents, and politics.

What awaited him here? Quiet rooms, meditation, and boredom.

A life he detested or a life of mind-numbing repetition. Day after day after day … and …

Was that someone moving through the trees?

Waxillium perked up, pressing against the cool glass. That *was* someone trudging through the wet forest, a shadowed figure with a familiar height and posture, stooped and carrying a sack over his shoulder. Forch glanced toward the dormitory, but then continued on into the night.

So they were back. That was faster than he'd expected. What was Telsin's plan for getting into the dorms? Slip in through the windows, then claim they'd come home before curfew and the dormmaster just hadn't seen them?

Waxillium waited, wondering if he'd spot the three girls as well, but saw nothing. Only Forch, disappearing into the shadows. Where was he going?

*Another fire,* Waxillium thought immediately. But Forch wouldn't do it in this rain, would he?

Waxillium glanced at the clock ticking quietly on his wall. An hour after curfew. He hadn't realized he'd spent so much time staring at the rain.

*Forch is not my problem,* he told himself firmly. He walked back to lie on his bed, but soon found himself pacing instead. Listening to the rain, anxious, unable to stop his body from moving.

Curfew …

*Let the rules become your guide. In them find peace.*

He stopped beside the window. Then he pushed it open and leaped out, bare feet sinking into the wet, rubbery ground. He scrambled forward, streams of water spraying across his head, trickling down the back of his shirt. Which way had Forch gone?

He took his best guess, passing enormous trees like hewn monoliths, the rush of rain and streaming water drowning out all else. A boot print in the mud near a tree trunk hinted he was on the right track, but he had to lean down low to see it. Rusts! It was getting dark out here.

Where next? Waxillium turned about. *There,* he thought. *Storage hall.* An old dormitory, now unoccupied, where the Terris kept extra furniture and rugs. That would be a perfect target for arson, right? Plenty of stuff inside to burn, and nobody would expect it in this rain.

*But Grandmother spoke to him,* Waxillium thought, scrambling through the rain, feet cold as he kicked up fallen leaves and moss. *They'll know it was him.* Didn't he care? Was he *trying* to get into trouble?

Waxillium stepped up to the old dormitory, a three-story mass of blackness in the already dark night, showers of water streaming off its eaves. Waxillium tested the door, and it was unlocked of course—this was the Village. He slipped inside.

There. A pool of water on the floor. Someone *had* entered here recently. He followed in a crouch, touching the footprints one after another, until he reached the stairwell. Up one flight, then another. What was up here? He reached the top floor and saw a light ahead. Waxillium crept through a hallway with a rug down the center, approaching what turned out to be a flickering candle set on a table in a small room cluttered with furniture and with dark, heavy drapes on the walls.

Waxillium stepped up to the candle. It shivered, frail and alone. Why had Forch left it here? What was—

Something heavy smashed across Waxillium's back. He gasped in pain, thrown forward by the blow, stumbling into a pair of chairs stacked atop one another. Boots thumped on the floor behind him. Waxillium managed to throw himself to the side, rolling to the floor as Forch smashed an old wooden post into the chairs, cracking them.

Waxillium scrambled to his feet, his shoulders throbbing. Forch turned toward him, face all in shadow.

Waxillium backed away. "Forch! It's all right. I just want to talk." He winced as his back hit the wall. "You don't have to—"

Forch came at him swinging. Waxillium yelped and ducked into the hallway. "Help!" he shouted as Forch followed him. *"Help!"*

Waxillium had meant to scramble toward the stairs, but he'd gotten turned around. Instead he was running away from them. He slammed his shoulder against the door at the end of the hallway. That would lead to the upper meeting room, if the dormitory here had the same layout as his own. And maybe another set of steps?

Waxillium pushed through the door and into a brighter room. Old tables stacked atop one another surrounded an open space at the center, like an audience and a stage.

There, in the middle and lit by a dozen candles, a young boy of maybe five lay tied to a wooden plank that stretched between two tables. His shirt had been cut off and lay on the floor. His cries were muffled by a gag, and he struggled weakly against his bonds.

Waxillium stumbled to a halt, taking in the boy, the line of gleaming knives set out on a table nearby, the trails of blood from cuts on the boy's chest.

"Oh, hell," Waxillium whispered.

Forch entered behind him, then closed the door with a click.

"Oh, *hell,*" Waxillium said, turning, wide-eyed. "Forch, what is wrong with you?"

"Don't know," the young man said softly. "I've just got to see what's inside. You know?"

"You went with the girls," Waxillium said, "so you'd have an alibi. If your room is found empty, you'll say you were with them. A lesser infraction to hide your true crime. Rusts! My sister and the others don't know that you slipped back, do they? They're out there drunk, and they won't even remember that you were gone. They'll swear you were—"

Waxillium cut off as Forch looked up, eyes reflecting candlelight, face expressionless. He held up a handful of nails.

*That's right. Forch is a—*

Waxillium shouted, throwing himself toward a pile of furniture as nails zipped from Forch's hand, Pushed by his Allomancy. They hit like hail, snapping against wooden tables, chair legs, and the floor. A sudden pain struck Wax in the arm as he scuttled backward.

He cried out, grabbing his arm as he got behind cover. One of the nails had ripped off a chunk of his flesh near the elbow.

Metal. He needed *metal*.

It had been months since he'd burned steel. Grandmother wanted him to embrace his Terris side. He raised his arms, and found them bare. His bracers …

*In your room, idiot,* Waxillium thought. He fished in his trouser pocket. He always used to keep …

A pouch of metal flakes. He dug it out as he scrambled away from Forch, who threw aside tables and chairs to get to him. In the background, the captive child whimpered.

Waxillium's fingers trembled as he tried to get the packet of metal flakes open, but it suddenly leaped from his fingers and shot across the room. He spun on Forch, desperate, just in time to see the man slide a metal bar off a table and toss it.

Waxillium tried to duck. Too slow. The Steelpushed bar slammed against his chest, throwing him backward. Forch grunted, stumbling. He wasn't practiced with his Allomancy, and hadn't properly braced himself. His Push threw him backward as much as it tossed Waxillium.

Still, Waxillium hit the wall with a grunt, and he felt something *crack* inside of him. He gasped, his vision blackening as he dropped to his knees. The room wavered.

*The pouch. Get the pouch!*

He searched the floor around him, frantic, barely able to think. He needed that metal! His fingers, bloodied, brushed it. Eager, he snatched the pouch and pulled open the cloth top. He tipped back his head to dump the flakes in.

A shadow thundered over to him and kicked him in the stomach. The broken bone inside of Waxillium gave, and he screamed, having gotten barely a pinch of metal into his mouth. Forch slapped the pouch out of his hand, scattering the flakes, then picked him up.

The youth looked bulkier than he should have. Tapping a metalmind. A frenzied part of Waxillium's brain tried to Push on the man's bracers, but Feruchemical metalminds were infamously difficult to affect with Allomancy. His Push wasn't strong enough.

Forch shoved Waxillium out the open window, dangling him by his neck. Rain washed over Waxillium, and he struggled for breath. "Please … Forch…"

Forch dropped him.

Waxillium fell with the rain.

Three stories down, through the branches of a maple tree, scattering wet leaves.

Steel burned to life inside of him, spraying blue lines from his chest to nearby sources of metal. All above, none below. Nothing to Push on to save himself.

Except one bit in his trouser pocket.

Waxillium Pushed on it, desperate, as he tumbled in the air. It shot through his pocket, down along his leg, cutting a line in the side of his foot before being propelled down into the ground by his weight. Waxillium jerked in the air, slowing as soon as the bit of metal hit the ground.

He crashed onto the sodden pathway feet-first, pain jolting up his legs. He fell back to the ground, and found himself dazed but alive. His Push had saved him.

Rain fell on his face. He waited, but Forch didn't come down to finish him off. The youth had slammed the shutters, perhaps worried someone would see the light of his candles.

Every part of Waxillium ached. Shoulders from the first blow, legs from the fall, chest from the bar—how many ribs had he broken? He lay there in the rain, coughing, before finally rolling over to find the bit of metal that had saved his life. He found it easily by following its Allomantic line, and dug in the mud, pulling out something and holding it up.

The constable's bullet. Rain washed his hand, cleansing the metal. He didn't even remember stuffing it into his pocket.

*In a case like this, the fire is often just a harbinger.…*

He should go get help. But that boy above was already bleeding. The knives were out.

*Something bigger is coming, Elder. Something you'll all regret.*

Suddenly Waxillium hated Forch. This place was perfect, serene. Beautiful. Darkness shouldn't exist here. If Waxillium was a smudge on the white canvas, this man was a pit of pure blackness.

Waxillium shouted, climbing to his feet and throwing himself through the back door and into the old building. He climbed two flights in a haze of stumbling pain before slamming open the door into the meeting room. Forch stood above the weeping child, a bloody knife in his hand. He turned his head slowly, showing Waxillium one eye, half of his face.

Waxillium threw the single bullet up between them, its casing glittering in candlelight, then *Pushed* with everything he had. Forch turned and Pushed back.

The reaction was immediate. The bullet stopped in midair, inches from Forch's face. Both men were thrown backward, but Forch caught himself on a group of tables, staying steady. Waxillium was slammed against the wall beside the doorway.

Forch smiled, and his muscles swelled, strength drawn from his metalmind. He pulled his bar from the table of knives and threw it at Waxillium, who cried out, Pushing against it to stop it from smashing him.

He wasn't strong enough. Forch continued to *Push,* and Waxillium had so little steel. The bar slipped forward in the air, pressing against Waxillium's chest, pushing him against the wall.

Time froze. One bullet hanging just before Forch, their main fight over the bar which—bit by bit—crushed Waxillium. His chest flared in pain, and a scream slipped from his lips.

He was going to die here.

*I just want to do what is right. Why is that so hard?*

Forch stepped forward, grinning.

Waxillium's eyes fixed on that bullet, glittering golden. He couldn't breathe. But that bullet …

*Metal is your life.*

A bullet. Three parts metal. The tip.

*Metal is your soul.*

The casing.

*You preserve us …*

And the knob at the back. The spot the hammer would hit.

In that moment, to Waxillium's eyes, they split into three lines, three parts. He took them all in at once. And then, as the bar crushed him, he let go of two bits.

And *shoved* on that knob at the back.

The bullet exploded. The casing flipped backward into the air, Pushed by Forch's Allomancy, while the bullet itself zipped forward, untouched, before drilling into Forch's skull.

Waxillium dropped to the ground, the bar propelled away. He collapsed in a heap, gasping for breath, rainwater streaming from his face to the wooden floor.

In a daze, he heard voices below. People finally responding to the shouts, then the sound of gunfire. He forced himself to his feet and limped through the room, ignoring the voices of Terrismen and women who climbed the steps. He reached the child and ripped off the bonds, freeing him. Instead of running in fear, however, the little boy grabbed Waxillium's leg and held on tight, weeping.

People poured into the room. Waxillium leaned down, picking up the bullet casing off the wet floor, then stood up straight and faced them. Tellingdwar. His grandmother. The elders. He registered their horror, and knew in that moment they would hate him because he had brought violence into their village.

Hate him because he had been right.

He stood beside Forch's corpse and closed one hand around the bullet casing, resting his other on the head of the trembling child.

“I will find my own way,” he whispered.

## TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER

The hideout door slammed against the other wall, shedding a burst of dust. A wall of mist fell in around the man who had kicked it open, outlining his silhouette: a mistcoat, tassels flaring from motion, a combat shotgun held up to the side.

“Fire!” Migs cried.

The lads unloaded. Eight men, armed to their teeth, fired at the shadowy figure from behind their barricade inside the old pub. Bullets swarmed like insects, but *parted* around this man in the long coat. They pelted the wall, drilling holes in the door and splintering the doorframe. They cut trails through the encroaching mist, but the lawman, all black in the gloom, didn’t so much as flinch.

Migs fired shot after shot, despairing. He emptied one pistol, then a second, then shouldered his rifle and fired as quickly as he could cock it. How had they gotten here? Rusts, how had this *happened*? It wasn’t supposed to have gone like this.

“It’s useless!” one of the lads cried. “He’s gonna kill us all, Migs!”

“Why’re you just standin’ there?” Migs shouted at the lawman. “Be at it already!” He fired twice more. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Maybe he’s distracting us,” one of the lads said, “so his pal can sneak up behind us.”

“Hey, that’s…” Migs hesitated, looking toward the one who had spoken. Round face. Simple, round coachman’s hat, like a bowler, but flatter on top. Who was that man again? He counted his crew.

Nine?

The lad next to Migs smiled, tipped his hat, then decked him in the face.

It was over blurringly quick. The fellow in the coachman’s cap laid out Slink and Guillian in an eyeblink. Then suddenly he was closer to the two on the far side, slapping them down with a pair of dueling canes. As Migs turned—fumbling for the gun he’d dropped—the lawman leaped over the barricade with tassels flying and kicked Drawers in the chin. The lawman spun, leveling his shotgun at the men on the other side.

They dropped their guns. Migs knelt, sweating, beside an overturned table. He waited for the gunshots.

They didn’t come.

“Ready for you, Captain!” the lawman shouted. A pile of constables rushed through the doorway, disturbing the mists. Outside, morning light was starting to dispel those anyway. Rusts. Had they really holed up in here all night?

The lawman swung his gun down toward Migs. “You might want to drop that gun, friend,” he said in a conversational tone.

Migs hesitated. “Just shoot me, lawman. I’m in too deep.”

“You shot two constables,” the man said, finger on the trigger. “But they’ll live, son. You won’t hang, if I have my way. Drop the gun.”

They’d called those same words before, from outside. This time, Migs found himself believing them. “Why?” he asked. “You coulda killed us all without breaking a sweat. *Why?*”

“Because,” the lawman said, “frankly, you’re not worth killing.” He smiled in a friendly-type way. “I’ve got enough on my conscience already. Drop the gun. We’ll get this sorted out.”

Migs dropped the gun and stood, then waved down Drawers, who was climbing up with his gun in hand. The man reluctantly dropped his weapon too.

The lawman turned, cresting the barricade with an Allomantic leap, and slammed his shortened shotgun into a holster on his leg. The younger man in the coachman’s hat joined him, whistling softly. He appeared to have swiped Guillian’s favorite knife; the ivory hilt was sticking out of his pocket.

“They’re yours, Captain,” the lawman said.

“Not staying for the booking, Wax?” the constable captain asked, turning.

“Unfortunately, no,” the lawman said. “I have to get to a wedding.”

“Whose?”

“Mine, I’m afraid.”

“You came on a raid the morning of your *wedding*?” the captain asked.

The lawman, Waxillium Ladrian, stopped in the doorway. “In my defense, it wasn’t my idea.” He nodded one more time to the assembled constables and gang members, then strode out into the mists.

# PART ONE

# 1

Waxillium Ladrian hurried down the steps outside the bar-turned-hideout, passing constables in brown who bustled this way and that. The mists were already evaporating, dawn heralding the end of their vigil. He checked his arm, where a bullet had ripped a sizable hole through the cuff of his shirt and out the side of his jacket. He'd felt that one pass.

"Oi," Wayne said, hustling up beside him. "A good plan that one was, eh?"

"It was the same plan you always have," Wax said. "The one where I get to be the decoy."

"Ain't my fault people like to shoot at you, mate," Wayne said as they reached the coach. "You should be happy; you're usin' your talents, like me granners always said a man should do."

"I'd rather not have 'shootability' be my talent."

"Well, you gotta use what you have," Wayne said, leaning against the side of the carriage as Cob the coachman opened the door for Wax. "Same reason I always have bits of rat in my stew."

Wax looked into the carriage, with its fine cushions and rich upholstery, but didn't climb in.

"You gonna be all right?" Wayne asked.

"Of course I am," Wax said. "This is my second marriage. I'm an old hand at the practice by now."

Wayne grinned. "Oh, is that how it works? 'Cuz in my experience, marryin' is the one thing people seem to get worse at the more they do it. Well, that and bein' alive."

"Wayne, that was almost profound."

"Damn. I was aimin' for insightful."

Wax stood still, looking into the carriage. The coachman cleared his throat, still standing and holding the door open for him.

"Right pretty noose, that is," Wayne noted.

"Don't be melodramatic," Wax said, leaning to climb in.

"Lord Ladrian!" a voice called from behind.

Wax glanced over his shoulder, noting a tall man in a dark brown suit and bow tie pushing between a pair of constables. "Lord Ladrian," the man said, "could I have a moment, please?"

"Take them all," Wax said. "But do it without me."

"But—"

"I'll meet you there," Wax said, nodding to Wayne. He dropped a spent bullet shell, then Pushed himself into the air. Why waste time on a carriage?

Steel at a comfortable burn inside his stomach, he shoved on a nearby electric streetlight—still shining, though morning had arrived—and soared higher into the air. Elendel spread before him, a soot-stained marvel of a city, leaking smoke from a hundred thousand different homes and factories. Wax shoved off the steel frame of a half-finished building nearby, then sent himself in a series of leaping bounds across the Fourth Octant.

He passed over a field of carriages for hire, rows of vehicles waiting quietly in ranks, early morning workers looking up at him as he passed. One pointed; perhaps the mistcoat had drawn his attention. Coinshot couriers weren't an uncommon sight in Elendel, and men soaring through the air were rarely a point of interest.

A few more leaps took him over a series of warehouses in huddled rows. Wax thrilled in each jump. It was amazing how this could still feel so wonderful to him. The breeze in his face, the little moment of weightlessness when he hung at the very top of an arc.

All too soon, however, both gravity and duty reasserted themselves. He left the industrial district and crossed finer roadways, paved with pitch and gravel to create a smoother surface than cobbles for all those blasted motorcars. He spotted the Survivorist church easily, with its large glass and steel dome. Back in Weathering a simple wooden chapel had been sufficient, but that wasn't nearly grand enough for Elendel.

The design was to allow those who worshipped full view of the mists at night. Wax figured if they wanted to see the mists, they'd do better just stepping outside. But perhaps he was being cynical. After all, the dome—which was made of segments of glass between steel supports, making it look like the sections of an orange—was able to open inward and let the mist pour down for special occasions.

He landed on a rooftop water tower across from the church. Perhaps when it had been built, the church's dome had been tall enough to overshadow the surrounding buildings. It would have provided a nice profile. Now, buildings were rising taller and taller, and the church was dwarfed by its surroundings. Wayne would find a metaphor in that. Probably a crude one.

He perched on the water tower, looming over the church. So he was here, finally. He felt his eye begin to twitch, and an ache rose within him.

*I think I loved you even on that day. So ridiculous, but so earnest.…*

Six months ago, he'd pulled the trigger. He could still hear the gunshot.

Standing up, he pulled himself together. He'd healed this wound once. He could do so again. And if that left his heart crusted with scar tissue, then perhaps that was what he needed. He leaped off the water tower, then slowed by dropping and Pushing on a shell casing.

He hit the street and strode past a long line of carriages. Guests were already in attendance—Survivorist tenets called for weddings either very early in the morning or late at night. Wax nodded to several people he passed, and couldn't help slipping his shotgun out of its holster and resting it on his shoulder as he hopped up the steps and shoved the door open before him with a Steelpush.

Steris paced in the foyer, wearing a sleek white dress that had been chosen because the magazines said it was fashionable. With her hair braided and her makeup done by a professional for the occasion, she was actually quite pretty.

He smiled when he saw her. His stress, his nervousness, melted away a little.

Steris looked up as soon as he entered, then hurried to his side. "And?"

"I didn't get killed," he said, "so there's that."

She glanced at the clock. "You're late," she said, "but not very late."

"I'm … sorry?" She'd insisted he go on the raid. She'd planned for it, in fact. Such was life with Steris.

"I'm sure you did your best," Steris said, taking his arm. She was warm, and even trembling. Steris might be reserved, but unlike what some assumed, she wasn't emotionless.

"The raid?" she asked.

"Went well. No casualties." He walked with her to a side chamber, where Drewton—his valet—waited beside a table spread with Wax's white wedding suit. "You realize that by going on a raid on the morning of my wedding, I'll only reinforce this image that society has of me."

"Which image?"

"That of a ruffian," he said, taking off his mistcoat and handing it to Drewton. "A barely civilized lout from the Roughs who curses in church and goes to parties armed."

She glanced at his shotgun, which he'd tossed onto the sofa. "You enjoy playing with people's perceptions of you, don't you? You seek to make them uncomfortable, so they'll be off balance."

"It's one of the simple joys I have left, Steris." He smiled as Drewton unbuttoned his waistcoat. Then he pulled off both that and his shirt, leaving him bare-chested.

"I see I'm included in those you try to make uncomfortable," Steris said.

"I work with what I have," Wax said.

"Which is why you always have bits of rat in your stew?"

Wax hesitated in handing his clothing to Drewton. "He said that to you too?"

"Yes. I'm increasingly convinced he tries the lines out on me." She folded her arms. "The little mongrel."

"Not going to leave as I change?" Wax asked, amused.

"We're to be married in less than an hour, Lord Waxillium," she said. "I think I can stand to see you bare-chested. As a side note, *you're* the Pathian. Prudishness is part of your belief system, not mine. I've read of Kelsier. From what I've studied, I doubt he'd care if—"

Wax undid the wooden buttons on his trousers. Steris blushed, before turning around and finally putting her back to him. She continued speaking a moment later, sounding flustered. "Well, at least you agreed to a proper ceremony."

Wax smiled, settling down in his undershorts and letting Drewton give his face a quick shave. Steris remained in place, listening. Finally, as Drewton was wiping the cream from Wax's face, she asked, "You have the pendants?"

"Gave them to Wayne."

"You … *What?*"

"I thought you wanted some disturbances at the wedding," Wax said, standing and taking the new set of trousers from Drewton. He slipped them on. He hadn't worn white much since returning from the Roughs. It was harder to keep clean out there, which had made it worth wearing. "I figured this would work."

"I wanted *planned* disturbances, Lord Waxillium," Steris snapped. "It's not upsetting if it's understood, prepared for, and controlled. Wayne is rather the opposite of those things, wouldn't you say?"

Wax did up his buttons and Drewton took his shirt off the hanger nearby.

Steris turned around immediately upon hearing the sound, arms still folded, and didn’t miss a beat—refusing to acknowledge that she’d been embarrassed. “I’m glad I had copies made.”

“You made *copies* of our wedding pendants?”

“Yes.” She chewed her lip a moment. “Six sets.”

“*Six?*”

“The other four didn’t arrive in time.”

Wax grinned, doing up the buttons on his shirt, then letting his valet handle the cuffs. “You’re one of a kind, Steris.”

“Technically, so is Wayne—and actually so was Ruin, for that matter. If you consider it, that’s not much of a compliment.”

Wax strapped on suspenders, then let Drewton fuss with his collar. “I don’t get it, Steris,” he said, standing stiffly as the valet worked. “You prepare so thoroughly for things to go wrong—like you know and expect that life is unpredictable.”

“Yes, and?”

“And life *is* unpredictable. So the only thing you do by preparing for disturbances is ensure that something *else* is going to go wrong.”

“That’s a rather fatalistic viewpoint.”

“Living in the Roughs does that to a fellow.” He eyed her, standing resplendent in her dress, arms crossed, tapping her left arm with her right index finger.

“I just … feel better when I try,” Steris finally said. “It’s like, if everything goes wrong, at least I *tried*. Does that make any sense?”

“As a matter of fact, I think it does.”

Drewton stepped back, satisfied. The suit came with a very nice black cravat and vest. Traditional, which Wax preferred. Bow ties were for salesmen. He slid on the jacket, tails brushing the backs of his legs. Then, after a moment’s hesitation, he strapped on his gunbelt and slid Vindication into her holster. He’d worn a gun to his last wedding, so why not this one? Steris nodded in approval.

Shoes went last. A new pair. They’d be hideously uncomfortable. “Are we late enough yet?” he asked Steris.

She checked the clock in the corner. “I planned for us to go in two minutes from now.”

“Ah, delightful,” he said, taking her arm. “That means we can be spontaneous and arrive early. Well, late-early.”

She clung to his arm, letting him steer her down the side chamber toward the entrance to the dome, and the church proper. Drewton followed behind.

“Are you … certain you wish to proceed?” Steris asked, stopping him before they entered the walkway to the dome.

“Having second thoughts?”

“Absolutely not,” Steris said immediately. “This union is quite beneficial to my house and status.” She took Wax’s left hand in both of hers. “But Lord Waxillium,” she said softly, “I don’t want you to feel trapped, particularly after what happened to you earlier this year. If you wish to back out, I will accept it as your will.”

The way she clutched his hand as she said those words sent a very different message. But she didn’t seem to notice. Looking at her, Wax found himself wondering. When he’d first agreed to the marriage, he’d done so out of duty to his house.

Now, he felt his emotions shifting. The way she’d been there for him these last months as he’d grieved … The way she looked at him right now …

Rust and Ruin. He was actually *fond* of Steris. It wasn’t love, but he doubted he would love again. This would do.

“No, Steris,” he said. “I would not back out. That … wouldn’t be fair to your house, and the money you have spent.”

“The money doesn’t—”

“It’s all right,” Wax said, giving her hand a little squeeze. “I have recovered enough from my ordeal. I’m strong enough to do this.”

Steris opened her mouth to reply, but a knock at the door heralded Marasi sticking her head in to check on them. With dark hair and softer, rounder features than Steris, Marasi wore bright red lipstick and a progressive lady’s attire—a pleated skirt, with a tight buttoned jacket.

“Finally,” she said. “Crowd is getting fidgety. Wax, there’s a man here wanting to see you. I’ve been trying to send him away, but … well…”

She came into the room and held the door open, revealing the same slender man in the brown suit and bow tie from before, standing with the ash girls in the antechamber that led to the dome proper.

“You,” Wax said. “How did you get here before Wayne?”

“I don’t believe your friend is coming,” the man said. He stepped in beside Marasi and nodded to her, then closed the doors, shutting out the ash girls. He turned and tossed Wax a wadded-up ball of paper.

When Wax caught it, it clinked. Unfolding it revealed the two wedding pendants. Scrawled on the paper were the words: *Gonna go get smashed till I can’t piss straight. Happy weddings ’n stuff.*

“Such beautiful imagery,” Steris observed, taking Wax’s wedding pendant in a white-gloved hand as Marasi looked over his shoulder to read the note.

"At least he didn't forget these."

"Thank you," Wax said to the man in brown, "but as you can see, I'm quite busy *getting married*. Whatever you need from me can—"

The man's face turned translucent, displaying the bones of his skull and spine beneath.

Steris stiffened. "Holy One," she whispered.

"Holy pain," Wax said. "Tell Harmony to get someone else this time. I'm busy."

"Tell … *Harmony*…" Steris mumbled, her eyes wide.

"Unfortunately, this is part of the problem," the man in brown said, his skin returning to normal. "Harmony has been distracted as of late."

"How can God be distracted?" Marasi asked.

"We're not sure, but it has us worried. I need you, Waxillium Ladrian. I have a job you'll find of interest. I realize you're off to the ceremony, but afterward, if I could have a moment of your time…"

"No," Wax said.

"But—"

*"No."*

Wax pulled Steris by the arm, shoving open the doors, striding past Marasi, leaving the kandra. It had been six months since those creatures had manipulated him, played him, and lied to him. The result? A dead woman in his arms.

Bastards.

"Was that really one of the *Faceless Immortals*?" Steris said, looking over her shoulder.

"Yes, and for obvious reasons I want nothing to do with them."

"Peace," she said, holding his arm. "Do you need a moment?"

"No."

"You're sure?"

Wax stopped in place. She waited, and he breathed in and out, banishing from his mind that awful, *awful* scene when he'd knelt on a bridge alone, holding Lessie. A woman he realized he'd never actually known.

"I'm all right," he said to Steris through clenched teeth. "But God should have known not to come for me. Particularly not today."

"Your life is … decidedly odd, Lord Waxillium."

"I know," he said, moving again, stepping with her beside the last door before they entered the dome. "Ready?"

"Yes, thank you." Was she … teary-eyed? It was an expression of emotion he'd never seen from her.

"Are *you* all right?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Forgive me. It's just … more wonderful than I'd imagined."

They pushed open the doors, revealing the glistening dome, sunlight streaming through it and upon the waiting crowd. Acquaintances. Distant family members. Seamstresses and forgeworkers from his house. Wax sought out Wayne, and was surprised when he didn't find the man, despite the note. He was the only real family Wax had.

The ash girls scampered out, sprinkling small handfuls of ash on the carpeted walkway that ringed the perimeter of the dome. Wax and Steris started forward in a stately walk, presenting themselves for those in attendance. There was no music at a Survivorist ceremony, but a few crackling braziers with green leaves on top let smoke trail upward to represent the mist.

*Smoke ascends while ash falls,* he thought, remembering the priest's words from his youth, back when he'd attended Survivorist ceremonies. They walked all the way around the crowd. At least Steris's family had made a decent showing, her father included—the red-faced man gave Waxillium an enthusiastic fist-raise as they passed.

Wax found himself smiling. This was what Lessie had wanted. They'd joked time and time again about their simple Pathian ceremony, finalized on *horseback* to escape a mob. She said that someday, she'd make him do it proper.

Sparkling crystal. A hushed crowd. Footsteps on scrunching carpet dappled with grey ash. His smile widened, and he looked to the side.

But of course, the wrong woman was there.

He almost stumbled. *Idiot man,* he thought. *Focus.* This day was important to Steris; the least he could do was not ruin it. Or rather, not ruin it in a way she hadn't expected. Whatever that meant.

Unfortunately, as they walked the remaining distance around the rotunda, his discomfort increased. He felt nauseous. Sweaty. Sick, like the feeling he had gotten the few times he had been forced to run from a killer and leave innocents in danger.

It all forced him, finally, to acknowledge a difficult fact. He wasn't ready. It wasn't Steris, it wasn't the setting. He just wasn't *ready* for this.

This marriage meant letting go of Lessie.

But he was trapped, and he *had* to be strong. He set his jaw and stepped with Steris onto the dais, where the priest stood between two stands topped with crystal vases of Marewill flowers. The ceremony was drawn from ancient Larsta beliefs, from Harmony's *Beliefs Reborn,* a volume in the Words of Founding.

The priest spoke the words, but Wax couldn't listen. All was numbness to him, teeth clenched, eyes straight ahead, muscles tense. They'd found a priest murdered in this very church. Killed by Lessie as she went mad. Couldn't they have done something for her, instead of setting him on the hunt? Couldn't they have *told* him?

Strength. He would *not* flee. He would *not* be a coward.

He held Steris's hands, but couldn't look at her. Instead, he turned his face upward to look out the glass dome toward the sky. Most of it was crowded out by the buildings. Skyscrapers on two sides, windows glistening in the morning sun. That water tower certainly did block the view, though as he watched, it shifted.…

Shifted?

Wax watched in horror as the legs under the enormous metal cylinder bent, as if to kneel, ponderously tipping their burden on its side. The top of the thing sheared off, spilling tons of water in a foaming wave.

He yanked Steris to him, arm firmly around her waist, then ripped off the second button down on his waistcoat and dropped it. He Pushed against this single metal button, launching himself and Steris away from the dais as the priest yelped in surprise.

Water *crashed* against the dome, which strained for the briefest of seconds before a section of it snapped open, hinges giving way inward to the water.

# 2

“Are you certain you’re all right, my lord?” Wax asked, helping Lord Drapen, constable-general of the Sixth Octant, down the steps toward his carriage. Water trickled beside them in little streams, joining a small river in the gutters.

“Ruined my best pistol, you realize,” Drapen said. “I’ll have to send the thing to be cleaned and oiled!”

“Bill me the expense, my lord,” Wax said, ignoring the fact that a good pistol would hardly be ruined by a little—or, well, a *lot* of—water. Wax turned the aging gentleman over to his coachman, sharing a resigned look, before turning and climbing back up the steps into the church. The carpet squished when he stepped on it. Or maybe that was his shoes.

He passed the priest bickering with the Erikell insurance assessor—come to do an initial report for when the church demanded payment on their policy—and entered the main dome. The one open section of glass still swung on its hinges up above, and the tipped water tower—its legs on the other side had kept it from crashing down completely—still blocked out much of the sky.

He passed overturned benches, discarded Marewill petals, and general refuse. Water dripped, the room’s only sound other than the echoing voice of the priest. Wax squished his way up to the dais. Steris sat on its edge, wet dress plastered to her body, strands of hair that had escaped from her wedding braids sticking to the sides of her face. She sat with arms crossed on her knees, staring at the floor.

Wax sat down next to her. “So, next time a flood is dumped on our heads, I’ll try to remember that jumping *upward* is a bad idea.” He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and squeezed it out.

"You tried to get us backward too. It merely wasn't fast enough, Lord Waxillium."

He grunted. "Looks like simple structural failure. If it *was* instead some kind of assassination attempt … well, it was an incompetent one. There wasn't enough water in there to be truly dangerous. The worst injury was to Lord Steming, who fell and knocked his head when scrambling off his seat."

"No more than an accident then," Steris said. She flopped backward onto the dais, the carpet letting out a soft squish.

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault." She sighed. "Do you ever wonder if perhaps the cosmere is out to overwhelm you, Lord Waxillium?"

"The cosmere? You mean Harmony?"

"No, not Him," Steris said. "Just cosmic chance rolling the dice anytime I pass, and always hitting all ones. There seems to be a poetry to it all." She closed her eyes. "Of *course* the wedding would fall apart. Several tons of water falling through the roof? Why wouldn't I have seen that? It's so utterly outlandish it *had* to happen. At least the priest didn't get murdered this time."

"Steris," Wax said, resting a hand on her arm. "We'll fix this. It will be all right."

She opened her eyes, looking toward him. "Thank you, Lord Waxillium."

"For what, exactly?" he asked.

"For being nice. For being willing to subject yourself to, well, me. I understand that it is not a pleasant concept."

"Steris…"

"Do not think me self-deprecating, Lord Waxillium," she said, sitting up and taking a deep breath, "and please do not assume I'm being morose. I am what I am, and I accept it. But I am under no illusions as to how my company is regarded. Thank you. For not making me feel as others have."

He hesitated. How did one respond to something like *that*? "It's not as you say, Steris. I think you're delightful."

"And the fact that you were gritting your teeth as the ceremony started, hands gripping as tightly as a man dangling for his life from the side of a bridge?"

"I…"

"Are you saddened at the fact that our wedding is delayed? Can you truly say it, and be honest as a lawman, Lord Waxillium?"

Damn. He floundered. He knew a few simple words could defuse or sidestep the question, but he couldn't find them, despite searching for what was an awkwardly long time—until saying anything would have sounded condescending.

"Perhaps," he said, smiling, "I'll just have to try something to relax me next time we attempt this."

"I doubt going to the ceremony drunk would be productive."

"I didn't say I'd drink. Perhaps some Terris meditation beforehand."

She eyed him. "You're still willing to move forward?"

"Of course." As long as it didn't have to be today. "I assume you have a backup dress?"

"Two," she admitted, letting him help her to her feet. "And I did reserve another date for a wedding two months from now. Different church—in case this one exploded."

He grunted. "You sound like Wayne."

"Well, things *do* tend to explode around you, Lord Waxillium." She looked up at the dome. "Considering that, getting drenched must be rather novel."

* * *

Marasi trailed around the outside of the flooded church, hands clasped behind her back, notebook a familiar weight in her jacket pocket. A few constables—all corporals—stood about looking as if they were in charge. That sort of thing was important in a crisis; statistics showed that if a uniformed authority figure was nearby, people were less likely to panic.

Of course, there was also a smaller percentage who were *more* likely to panic if an authority figure was nearby. Because people were people, and if there was one thing you could count on, it was that some of them would be weird. Or rather that *all* of them would be weird when circumstances happened to align with their own individual brand of insanity.

That said, today she hunted a very special kind of insane. She'd tried the nearby pubs first, but that was too obvious. Next she checked the gutters, one soup kitchen, and—against her better judgment—a purveyor of "novelties." No luck, though her backside did get *three* separate compliments, so there was that.

Finally, running out of ideas, she went to check if he'd decided to steal the forks from the wedding breakfast. There, in a dining hall across the street from the church, she found Wayne in the kitchens wearing a white jacket and a chef's hat. He was scolding several assistant cooks as they furiously decorated tarts with fruit glaze.

Marasi leaned against the doorway and watched, tapping her notebook with her pencil. Wayne sounded utterly unlike himself, instead using a sharp, nasal voice with an accent she couldn't quite place. Easterner, perhaps? Some of the outer cities there had thick accents.

The assistant cooks didn’t question him. They jumped at what he said, bearing his condemnation as he tasted a chilled soup and swore at their incompetence. If he noticed Marasi, he didn’t show it, instead wiping his hands on a cloth and demanding to see the produce the delivery boys had brought that morning.

Eventually, Marasi strolled into the kitchen, dodging a short assistant chef bearing a pot almost as big as she was, and stepped up to Wayne.

“I’ve seen crisper lettuce in the garbage heap!” he was saying to a cringing delivery boy. “And you call these grapes? These are so overripe, they’re practically fermenting! And—oh, ’ello, Marasi.” He said the last line in his normal, jovial voice.

The delivery boy scrambled away.

“What are you doing?” Marasi asked.

“Makin’ soup,” Wayne said, holding up a wooden spoon to show her. Nearby, several of the assistant cooks stopped in place, looking at him with shocked expressions.

“Out with you!” he said to them in the chef’s voice. “I must have time to prepare! Shoo, shoo, go!”

They scampered away, leaving him grinning.

“You do realize the wedding breakfast is canceled,” Marasi said, leaning back against a table.

“Sure do.”

“So why…”

She trailed off as he stuffed an entire tart in his mouth and grinned. “Hadda make sure they didn’t welch on their promif an’ not make anyfing to eat,” he said around chewing, crumbs cascading from his lips. “We paid for this stuff. Well, Wax did. ’Sides, wedding being canceled is no reason not to celebrate, right?”

“Depends on what you’re celebrating,” Marasi said, flipping open her notebook. “Bolts securing the water tower in place were definitely loosened. Road below was conspicuously empty, some ruffians—from another octant entirely, I might add—having stopped traffic by starting a fistfight in the middle of the rusting street.”

Wayne grunted, searching in a cupboard. “Hate that little notebook of yours sometimes.”

Marasi groaned, closing her eyes. “Someone could have been hurt, Wayne.”

“Now, that ain’t right at all. Someone *was* hurt. That fat fellow what has no hair.”

She massaged her temples. “You realize I’m a constable now, Wayne. I can’t turn a blind eye toward *wanton* property damage.”

“Ah, ’s not so bad,” Wayne said, still rummaging. “Wax’ll pay for it.”

“And if someone had been hurt? Seriously, I mean?”

Wayne kept searching. “The lads got a little carried away. ‘See that the church is flooded,’ I told them. Meant for the priest to open the place in the morning and find his plumbing had gotten a little case of the ‘being all busted up and leaking all over the rusting place.’ But the lads, they got a little excited is all.”

“The ‘lads’?”

“Just some friends.”

“Saboteurs.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “You think they could pronounce that?”

“Wayne…”

“I slapped ’em around already, Marasi,” Wayne said. “Promise I did.”

“He’s going to figure it out,” Marasi said. “What will you do then?”

“Nah, you’re wrong,” Wayne said, finally coming out of the cupboard with a large glass jug. “Wax has a blind spot for things like this. In the back of his noggin, he’ll be relieved that I stopped the wedding. He’ll figure it was me, deep in his subcontinence, and will pay for the damages—no matter what the assessor says. And he won’t say anything, won’t even investigate. Watch.”

“I don’t know.…”

Wayne hopped up onto the kitchen counter, then patted the spot beside him. She regarded him for a moment, then sighed and settled onto the counter there.

He offered her the jug.

“That’s cooking sherry, Wayne.”

“Yeah,” he said, “pubs don’t serve anything this hour but beer. A fellow has to get creative.”

“I’m sure we could find some wine around—”

He took a swig.

“Never mind,” Marasi said.

He lowered the jug and pulled off his chef’s hat, tossing it onto the counter. “What’re you so uptight for today, anyway? I figured you’d be whooping for joy and runnin’ around the street pickin’ flowers and stuff. He’s not marrying her. Not yet, anyway. You still got a chance.”

“I don’t *want* a chance, Wayne. He’s made his decision.”

“Now, what kinda talk is that?” he demanded. “You’ve given up? Is that how the Ascendant Warrior was? Huh?”

“No, in fact,” Marasi said. “She walked up to the man she wanted, slapped the book out of his hand, and kissed him.”

“See, there’s how it is!”

“Though the Ascendant Warrior also went on and murdered the woman Elend was planning to marry.”

“What, really?”

“Yeah.”

“Gruesome,” Wayne said in an approving tone, then took another swig of sherry.

“That’s not the half of it,” Marasi said, leaning back on the counter, hands behind her. “You want gruesome? She also supposedly ripped out the Lord Ruler’s insides. I’ve seen it depicted in several illuminated manuscripts.”

“Kind of graphic for a religious-type story.”

“Actually, they’re all like that. I think they have to put in lots of exciting bits to make people read the rest.”

“Huh.” He seemed disbelieving.

“Wayne, haven’t you ever *read* any religious texts?”

“Sure I have.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, lots of the things I read have religious texts in them. ‘Damn.’ ‘Hell.’ ‘Flatulent, arse-licking git.’”

She gave him a flat stare.

“That last one is in the Testimony of Hammond. Promise. Least, all the letters are.” Another swig. Wayne could outdrink anyone she knew. Of course, that was mostly because he could tap his metalmind, heal himself, and burn away the alcohol’s effects in an eyeblink—then start over.

“Here now,” he continued, “that’s what you’ve gotta do. Be like the Lady Mistborn. Get your murderin’ on, see. Don’t back down. He should be yours, and you gotta let people know.”

“My … murderin’ on?”

“Sure.”

“Against my sister.”

“You could be polite about it,” Wayne said. “Like, give her the first stab or whatnot.”

“No, thank you.”

“It doesn’t have to be *real* murderin’, Marasi,” Wayne said, hopping off the counter. “It can be figurative and all. But you should *fight*. Don’t let him marry her.”

Marasi leaned her head back, looking up at the set of ladles swinging above the counter. “I’m not the Ascendant Warrior, Wayne,” she said. “And I don’t particularly care to be. I don’t want someone I have to convince, someone I have to rope into submission. That sort of thing is for the courtroom, not the bedroom.”

“Now, see, I think some people would say—”

“Careful.”

“—that’s a right enlightened way to think of things.” He took a swig of sherry.

“I’m not some tortured, abandoned creature, Wayne,” Marasi said, finding herself smiling at her distorted reflection in a ladle. “I’m not sitting around pining and dreaming for someone else to decide if I should be happy. There’s nothing there. Whether that’s due to actual lack of affection on his part, or more to stubbornness, I don’t care. I’ve moved on.”

She looked down, meeting Wayne’s eyes. He cocked his head. “Huh. You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“Damn right.”

“Moved on…” he said. “Rusted nuts! You can *do* that?”

“Certainly.”

“Huh. You think … I should … you know … Ranette…”

“Wayne, if ever someone should have taken a hint, it was you. Yes. Move on. Really.”

“Oh, I took the hint,” he said, taking a swig of sherry. “Just can’t remember which jacket I left it in.” He looked down at the jug. “You sure?”

“She has a *girl*friend, Wayne.”

“’S only a phase,” he mumbled. “One what lasted fifteen years.…” He set the jug down, then sighed and reached into the cupboard from before, taking out a bottle of wine.

“Oh, for *Preservation’s* sake,” Marasi said. “That was in there all along?”

“Tastes better iffen you drink something what tastes like dishwater first,” Wayne said, then pulled the cork out with his teeth, which *was* kind of impressive, she had to admit. He poured her a cup, then one for himself. “To moving on?” he asked.

“Sure. To moving on.” She raised her cup, and saw reflected in the wine someone standing behind her.

She gasped, spinning, reaching for her purse. Wayne just raised his cup to the newcomer, who rounded the counter with a slow step. It was the man in the brown suit and bow tie. No, not the man. The *kandra*.

“If you’re here to persuade me to persuade him,” Wayne said, “you should know that he doesn’t ever listen to me unless he’s pretty drunk at the time.” He downed the wine. “’S probably why he’s lived so long.”

“Actually,” the kandra said, “I’m not here for you.” He turned to Marasi, then tipped his head. “My first choice for this endeavor has rejected my request. I hope you don’t take offense at being my second.”

Marasi found her heart thumping quickly. “What do you want?”

The kandra smiled broadly. “Tell me, Miss Colms. What do you know about the nature of Investiture and Identity?”

# 3

Wax, at least, had a change of clothing that wasn't wet—the suit he had worn on the raid. So he was pleasantly dry as his carriage pulled up to Ladrian Mansion. Steris had returned to her father's house to recover.

Wax put aside his broadsheet and waited for Cob, the new coachman, to hop down and yank open the carriage door. There was a frantic eagerness to the little man's motions, as if he knew that Wax only used a coach for propriety's sake. Leaping home on lines of steel would have been far faster, but just as a lord couldn't walk everywhere, Steelpushing around town too much in the daytime when not chasing criminals made members of his house uncomfortable. It simply wasn't what a house lord did.

Wax nodded to Cob and handed him the broadsheet. Cob grinned; he loved the things. "Take the rest of the day off," Wax told him. "I know you were looking forward to the wedding festivities."

Cob's grin widened, then he bobbed his head and climbed back onto the coach to see it, and the horses, cared for before leaving. He'd likely spend the day at the races.

Wax sighed, climbing the steps to the mansion. It was one of the finest in the city—luxurious with carved stonework and deep hardwood, with tasteful marble accents. That didn't stop it from being a prison. It was just a very nice one.

Wax didn't enter. Instead, he stood on the steps for a while before turning around and sitting on them. Closing his eyes, he let it all settle on him.

He was good at hiding his scars. He'd been shot almost a dozen times now, a few of those wounds quite bad. Out in the Roughs, he'd learned to pick himself up and keep on going, no matter what happened.

At the same time, it felt like things back then had been simple. Not always easy, but simple. And some scars continued to ache. Seemed to get worse with time.

He rose with a groan, leg stiff, and continued up the steps. Nobody opened the door for him or took his coat as he entered. He maintained a small staff in the house, but only what he considered necessary. Too many servants, and they'd hover and worry when he did anything on his own. It was as if the idea of him being capable drove them into feeling vestigial.…

Wax frowned, then slipped Vindication from his hip holster and raised her beside his head. He couldn't say, precisely, what had set him off. Footsteps up above, when he'd given the housekeepers the day off. A cup on a side table with a bit of wine in the bottom.

He flicked a little vial from his belt and downed the contents: steel flakes suspended in whiskey. The metal burned a familiar warmth inside of him, radiating from his stomach, and blue lines sprang into existence around him. They moved with him as he crept forward, as if he were tied with a thousand tiny threads.

He leaped and Pushed on the inlays in the marble floor, soaring up alongside the stairs to the second-story viewing balcony above the grand entryway. He slipped easily over the banister, landing with gun at the ready. The door to his study quivered, then opened.

Wax tiptoed forward.

"Just a moment, I—" The man in the light brown suit froze as he found Wax's gun pressed against his temple.

"You," Wax said.

"I'm quite fond of this skull," the kandra remarked. "It's sixth-century anteverdant, the head of a metal merchant from Urteau whose grave was shifted and protected as a side effect of Harmony's rebuilding. An antique, if you will. If you make a hole in it, I'll be *rather* put out."

"I told you I wasn't interested," Wax growled.

"Yes. I took that to heart, Lord Ladrian."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I was invited," the kandra said. He reached up and grasped the barrel of Wax's gun between two fingers, then pushed it gently to the side. "We needed a place to converse. Your associate suggested it, as—I'm told—the servants are away."

"My associate?" At that point, he heard laughter from ahead. "Wayne." He eyed the kandra, then sighed and slipped his gun into its holster. "Which one are you? TenSoon, is that you?”

“Me?” the kandra asked, laughing. “TenSoon? What, do you hear me panting?” He chuckled, gesturing for Wax to enter his own study, as if he were doing Wax some grand courtesy. “I am VenDell, of the Sixth. Pleased to meet you, Lord Ladrian. If you must shoot me, please do it in the left leg, as I’ve no particular fondness for those bones.”

“I’m not going to shoot you,” Wax said, shoving past the kandra and entering the room. The blinds had been drawn and the thick curtains left to droop down, plunging the room into almost complete darkness, save for two small new electric lamps. Why the closed curtains? Was the kandra that concerned about being seen?

Wayne lounged in Wax’s easy chair, feet up on the cocktail table, helping himself to a bowl of walnuts. A woman stretched out in a similar posture in the companion chair, wearing tight trousers and a loose blouse, eyes closed as she leaned back in the chair, hands behind her head. She wore a different body from last time Wax had seen her, but the posture—and the height—gave him good clues that this was MeLaan.

Marasi was inspecting some odd equipment set up on a pedestal at the back of the room. It was a box with small lenses on the front. She stood up straight as soon as she saw him, and—being Marasi—blushed deeply.

“Sorry about this,” she said. “We were going to go to my flat to talk, but Wayne insisted.…”

“Needed some nuts,” Wayne said around a mouthful of walnuts. “When you invited me to stay here, you *did* say to make myself at home, mate.”

“I’m still unclear as to why you *needed* a place to talk,” Wax said. “I said I wasn’t going to help.”

“Quite so,” VenDell said from the doorway. “As you were unavailable, of necessity I turned to other options. Lady Colms has been so kind as to listen to my proposition.”

“Marasi?” Wax asked. “You went to Marasi?”

“What?” VenDell asked. “That’s surprising to you? She *was* instrumental in the defeat of Miles Hundredlives. Not to mention her help during the riots Paalm instigated.”

Wax looked at the kandra. “You’re trying to get to me through another route, aren’t you?”

“Look who’s full of himself,” MeLaan said from her chair.

“He’s always full of himself,” Wayne said, cracking a walnut. “Mostly on account of him eatin’ his own fingernails. I seen him do it.”

“Is it so ridiculous,” Marasi said, “that they’d actually want my help?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it that way,” Wax said, turning to her.

“Then what way *did* you mean it?”

Wax sighed. “I don’t know, Marasi. It’s been a long day. I got shot at, got a water tower dumped on my head, and had my wedding fall apart. Now Wayne is dropping broken walnut shells all over my chair. Honestly, I think I just need a drink.”

He walked toward the bar at the back of the room. Marasi eyed him, and as he passed, she muttered, “Will you get me one too? Because this is all making me go a little crazy.”

He smiled, digging out some single-malt whiskey, pouring for himself and for Marasi. VenDell disappeared out the door, but returned a few minutes later with some piece of equipment that he hooked to the strange device. He ran a wire from the device to one of the wall lamps, pulling out the bulb and screwing in the end of the wire instead.

Leaving would feel childish, so Wax leaned against the wall and sipped his whiskey, saying nothing as VenDell turned on his machine. An image appeared on the wall.

Wax froze. It was a *picture,* similar to an evanotype—only on the wall and quite large. It displayed the Field of Rebirth in the center of Elendel, where the tombs of Vin and Elend Venture were to be found. He’d never seen anything like that image. It seemed to have been created entirely by light.

Marasi gasped.

Wayne threw a walnut at it.

“What?” he said as the others glared at him. “Wanted to see if it was real.” He hesitated, then threw another walnut. The nut made a shadow on the image where it moved between the device and the wall. So it *was* light.

“Image projector,” VenDell said. “They call it an evanoscope. By next year these will be commonplace, I should think.” He paused. “Harmony implies that if we find this wondrous, it will *really* burn our metals when the images start moving.”

“Moving?” Wax said, stepping forward. “How would they do that?”

“We don’t know,” MeLaan said with a grimace. “He accidentally let it slip, but won’t say anything more.”

“How does God,” Marasi asked, still staring at the image, “*accidentally* let something slip?”

“As I said,” VenDell said, “He has been distracted lately. We’ve tried to tease out more regarding moving images, but so far no luck. He’s often like this—says it’s vital that we discover things on our own.”

“Like a chick breaking out of its shell,” MeLaan said. “He says that if we don’t struggle and learn on our own, we won’t be strong enough to survive what is coming.”

She left the words hanging in the room, and Wax shared a look with Marasi.

“Well…” Marasi said slowly, “*that’s* ominous. Has He said anything more about Trell?”

Wax folded his arms. Trell. It was a god from the old records, long before the Catacendre—indeed, long before the Lord Ruler. Harmony had memorized this religion, with many others, during his days as a mortal.

Marasi had an obsession with the god, and one that was not unwarranted. Wax wasn’t certain whether her claim was true or not that the worship of Trell was involved in what had happened to Lessie, but the spikes they’d discovered … they didn’t seem to have been made of any metal known to man.

The kandra had confiscated those. Wax had been so deep in his sorrows that by the time he’d started to recover, they’d already been taken.

“No,” VenDell said. “And I have no update on the spikes, if that’s what you’re wondering. But this task I have for you, Miss Colms, might provide insight. Suffice it to say, we’re worried about the possible intrusion of another god upon this domain.”

“Hey,” MeLaan said, “what’s a girl gotta do to get some of that whiskey?”

“Sister,” VenDell said, twisting something on his machine, making the image brighter, “you are a representative of Harmony and His enlightenment.”

“Yup,” MeLaan said, “and I’m a tragically *sober* one.”

Wax brought her a glass, and she grinned at him in thanks.

“Chivalry,” she said, raising it.

“Manipulation,” VenDell said. “Miss Colms, I spoke to you earlier of Investiture and Identity. I promised you an explanation. Here.” He flipped something on his machine, changing the image on the wall to a list of Feruchemical metals, their attributes, and their natures. It wasn’t the pretty, artistic rendition that Wax often saw in popular lore—it was far less fancy, but much more detailed.

“The basic physical abilities of Feruchemy are well understood,” VenDell said, walking forward and using a long reed to point at a section of the projected chart. “Terris tradition and heritage has explored them for at least fifteen hundred years. Harmony left detailed explanations in the Words of Founding.

“Likewise, the abilities in the so-called mental quadrant of the chart have been outlined and discussed, tested and defined. Our understanding doesn’t reach as far here—we don't know why memories stored in a metalmind degrade the way they do when removed, or why tapping mental speed tends to make one hungry, of all things—but still, we have a great deal of experience in this area."

He paused, and circled his pointer around a group of metals and abilities at the bottom: Fortune, Investiture, Identity, and Connection. Wax leaned forward. They'd spoken of these during his year living in the Village, but only as part of the catechisms of Feruchemy and Terris belief. None of those specified what the powers actually *did*. They were considered beyond understanding, like God, or time.

"Chromium," VenDell said, "nicrosil, aluminum, duralumin. These aren't metals that most ancients knew. Only in recent times have modern metallurgical processes allowed them to become commonplace."

"Commonplace?" Wayne said. "With a single aluminum bullet, mate, I could buy you an outfit that don't look so stupid *and* have money left over for a nice hat or two."

"Be that as it may," VenDell said, "compared to the amount of aluminum in the world before the Catacendre, the metal *is* now common. Bauxite refining, modern chemical processes, these have given us access to metals on a level that was never before possible. Why, the Last Obligator's autobiography explains that early aluminum was harvested from the inside of the Ashmounts!"

Wax stepped forward along the cone of light emanating from the machine. "So what do they do?"

"Research is ongoing," VenDell said. "Ferrings with these abilities are very, very rare—and it is only in the last few decades that we've had access to enough of these metals to begin experimenting. Rebuilding society has been a … wearisome process."

"You were alive before," Marasi said. "In the days of the Ascendant Warrior."

VenDell turned, raising his eyebrows. "Indeed, though I never met her. Only TenSoon did."

"What was life like?" Marasi asked.

"Hard," VenDell said. "It was … hard."

"There are holes in our memories," MeLaan added softly. "From when our spikes were removed. It took a piece out of us. There are things we'll never get back."

Wax took a drink. There was a *weight* that came from speaking to the kandra, in realizing that most of them had already been alive for hundreds of years when the World of Ash had ended. These were *ancient* beings. Perhaps Wax should not be surprised by their presumption. To them, he—indeed, everyone else alive—was little more than a child.

“Identity,” VenDell said, slapping his reed against the wall, casting a shadow on the image. “Lord Ladrian, could another Feruchemist use your metalminds?”

“Of course not,” Wax said. “Everyone knows that.”

“Why?”

“Well … because. They’re mine.”

Feruchemy was simple, elegant. Fill your metalmind with an attribute for an hour—like Wax’s weight, or Wayne’s health and healing—and you could draw out an hour’s worth of that attribute later on. Alternatively, you could draw out a burst of power that was extremely intense but lasted only a moment.

“The raw power of both Allomancy and Feruchemy,” VenDell said, “is something we call Investiture. This is very important, as in Feruchemy, an individual’s Investiture is keyed specifically to them. To what we call Identity.”

“You’ve made me curious,” Wax said, looking at the wall as VenDell leisurely walked back to his machine. “How does it know? My metalminds … do they *recognize* me?”

“After a fashion,” VenDell said, changing the image to one of a Feruchemist tapping strength. The woman’s muscles had grown to several times their normal size as she lifted a horse above her head. “Each man or woman has a Spiritual aspect, a piece of themselves that exists in another Realm entirely. You might call it your soul. Your Investiture is keyed to your soul—indeed, it might be a *part* of your soul, much as your blood is a part of your body.”

“So if a person could store their Identity,” Marasi said, “as Waxillium does with his weight…”

“They’d be without it for a time,” VenDell said. “A blank slate, so to speak.”

“So they could use *anyone’s* metalmind?” Marasi asked.

“Possibly,” VenDell said. He cycled through pictures of several more Feruchemists using their abilities before coming to rest on an image of a set of bracers. Simple metal bands, like wide bracelets, meant to be worn on the upper arms beneath clothing. It was impossible to tell the type of metal without color, but they had ancient Terris markings engraved on them.

“Some have been experimenting with your idea,” VenDell said, “and early results are promising. However, having a Feruchemist who can use anyone's metalminds is intriguing, but not particularly life-changing. Our society is strewn with individuals who have extraordinary abilities—this would simply be one more variety. No, what interests me is the *opposite*, Miss Colms. What if a Feruchemist were to divest himself of all Identity, then fill *another* metalmind with an attribute. Say, strength. What would it do?"

"Create an unkeyed metalmind?" Marasi asked. "One that another Feruchemist could access?"

"Possibly," VenDell said. "Or is there another possibility? Most people living right now have at least some Feruchemist blood in them. Could it be that such a metalmind as I describe, one that is keyed to no single individual, might be usable by *anyone*?"

Understanding settled on Wax like a slowly burned metal. From the chair beside the image device, Wayne whistled slowly.

"Anyone could be a Feruchemist," Wax said.

VenDell nodded. "Investiture—the innate ability to burn metals or tap metalminds—is also one of the things Feruchemy can store. Lord Waxillium … these are arts we are only beginning to comprehend. But the secrets they contain could change the world.

"In the ancient days, the Last Emperor discovered a metal that transformed him into a Mistborn. A metal anyone could burn, it is said. This whispers of a hidden possibility, something lesser, but still incredible. What if one could somehow manipulate Identity and Investiture to create a set of bracers which imparted Feruchemical *or* Allomantic ability upon the person wearing them? One could make any person a Mistborn, or a Feruchemist, or *both at once*."

The room fell silent.

A walnut bounced off VenDell's head.

He immediately turned to glare at Wayne.

"Sorry," Wayne said. "Just had trouble believing someone could be so melodramatic, so I figured you might not be real. Hadda check, ya know?"

VenDell rubbed his forehead, breathing out sharply in annoyance.

"This is all fascinating," Wax admitted. "But unfortunately, it's also impossible."

"And why is that?" VenDell asked.

"You don't even know how, or if, this would work," Wax said, waving toward the screen. "And even if you could figure it out, you'd need a Full Feruchemist. Someone with at least *two* Feruchemical powers, as they'd need to be able to store their Identity in a metalmind along with another Feruchemical attribute. Rusts! To do what you proposed a moment ago, and create Allomancers too, you'd basically need someone who was already both Mistborn and Full Feruchemist."

"This is true," VenDell said.

"And how long has it been since a Full Feruchemist was born?"

"A very, very long time," VenDell said. "But, being *born* a Feruchemist isn't the only way to make this happen."

Wax hesitated, then shared a look with Marasi. She nodded, and he strode across the room to pull back the wooden panel hiding his wall safe. He did the combination and removed the book that Ironeyes had sent him. He turned, raising it. "Hemalurgy? Harmony hates it. I've *read* what the Lord Mistborn had to say on the topic."

"Yes," VenDell said. "Hemalurgy is … problematic."

"In part because we wouldn't exist without it," MeLaan said. "That's not a particularly fun thing to know—that people had to be murdered in order to bring you to sapience."

"Creating new spikes is a horrid practice," VenDell agreed. "We have no intentions of doing such a thing to experiment with Identity. Instead, we're waiting. A Full Feruchemist is bound to be born among mankind eventually—particularly with the Terris elite working so hard to preserve and condense their bloodlines. Unfortunately, our … restraint will not be shared by everyone. There are those who are growing very close to understanding how all this works."

*My uncle,* Wax thought, looking down at the book in his fingers. So far as he could tell, Edwarn—the man known as Mister Suit—was trying to breed Allomancers. What would he do with Hemalurgy, if he knew about it?

"We need to stay ahead of those who might use this for ill purposes," VenDell said. "We need to experiment and determine how these Identity-free metalminds would work."

"Doing so will be dangerous," Wax said. "Mixing the powers is *incredibly* dangerous."

"Says the Twinborn," MeLaan said.

"I'm safe," Wax said, glancing at her. "My powers don't compound—they're from different metals."

"They may not compound," VenDell said, "but they're still fascinating, Lord Waxillium. *Any* mixing of Allomancy and Feruchemy has unanticipated effects."

"What is it about you," Wax said, "that makes me want to punch you, even when you're saying something helpful?"

"None of us have been able to figure it out," MeLaan said, waving for

Wayne to toss her a walnut. “One of the cosmere’s great mysteries.”

“Now, now, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said, holding up his hands. “Is that the way to speak to someone who bears your ancestor’s hands?”

“His … hands?” Wax said. “Are you speaking metaphorically?”

“Ah, no,” VenDell said. “Breeze *did* say I could have them after he died. Excellent metacarpals. I bring them out for special occasions.”

Wax stood still for a moment, holding the book in his hand, trying to digest what the kandra had just said. His ancestor, the first Lord Ladrian, Counselor of Gods … had given this creature his hands.

In a way, Wax had shaken hands with Breeze’s corpse. He stared at his glass, surprised to find it empty, and poured some more whiskey.

“This has been a very enlightening lesson,” Marasi said. “But pardon, Your Holiness, you still haven’t explained what you need from me.”

VenDell changed the picture to one of an illustration. A man with long dark hair and a bare chest, wearing a cloak that extended behind him into eternity. His arms, crossed before him, were wrapped with intricate bracers in a fanciful design. Wax recognized the iconography, if not the specific image. Rashek. The First Emperor.

The Lord Ruler.

“What do you know of the Bands of Mourning, Miss Colms?” VenDell asked.

“The Lord Ruler’s metalminds,” Marasi said with a shrug. “Relics from mythology, like the Lady Mistborn’s knives, or the Lance of the Fountains.”

“There are four individuals,” VenDell said, “who, to our knowledge, have held the power of Ascension. Rashek, the Survivor, the Ascendant Warrior, and Lord Harmony Himself. Harmony’s Ascension granted Him a precise and in-depth knowledge of the Metallic Arts. It stands to reason that the Lord Ruler gained the same information. He understood Identity as a Feruchemical ability, and knew the hidden metals. Indeed, he gave aluminum to his Inquisitors.”

VenDell flipped the image to a more detailed illustration of those arms wrapped in bands of metal. “Curiously, nobody knows exactly what happened to the Bands of Mourning. Back when the Lord Ruler fell, TenSoon had not yet joined the Ascendant Warrior, and though he swears he heard them mentioned, the holes in his memory prevent him from saying how or when.

“The mythology surrounding the Bands is *quite* extensive. You can find myths about them dating back to before the Catacendre, and you can find someone telling new ones in a pub around the corner, invented on the spot for your amusement. But a theme runs through them all—if you held the Lord

Ruler's bracers, you supposedly gained his powers."

"That's just fancy," Wax said. "It's a natural thing to wish for, to make stories about. It doesn't mean anything."

"Doesn't it?" VenDell asked. "Lore says the Bands have the *very power* that science has only now determined is plausible to assemble?"

"Coincidence," Wax said. "And just because he *might* have created something doesn't mean he did, and just because you *think* Identity works like you say, doesn't mean you're right. Besides, the Bands would have been destroyed when Harmony remade the world. And that's not even considering that it would be foolish for the Lord Ruler to create weapons someone else could use against him."

VenDell clicked his machine. The image changed to another evanotype, this one of a mural on a wall. It depicted a room with a central dais in the shape of a truncated pyramid. Set upon a pedestal on the dais was a pair of bracers made of delicate, curling metal, shaped in spirals.

Only a mural. But it did seem like it was depicting the Bands of Mourning.

"What is that?" Marasi asked.

"One of our brothers," MeLaan said, sitting up in her chair, "a kandra named ReLuur, took this image."

"The Bands of Mourning fascinated him," VenDell said. "ReLuur spent the last two centuries chasing them. He recently returned to Elendel bearing an evanotype camera in his pack and these pictures." VenDell clicked to the next image, a picture of a large metal plate set into a wall and inscribed with a strange script.

Wax narrowed his eyes. "I don't know that language."

"Nobody does," VenDell said. "It's completely alien to us, unrelated to any Terris, Imperial, or other root. Even the old languages in Harmony's records bear no resemblance to this script."

Wax felt a chill as the images continued. Another shot of the strange language. A statue that resembled the Lord Ruler, bearing a long spear. This appeared to be covered in frost. Another shot of the mural, more detailed, which depicted bracers with many different metals twining together. Not bracers for a Ferring like Wax, but bracers for a Full Feruchemist.

Only a mural, yes. But it was compelling.

"ReLuur believed in the Bands," VenDell said. "He claims to have seen them, though his camera bore no image of the actual relics. I'm inclined to trust his words."

VenDell showed another image, of a different mural. It depicted a man standing atop a peak, hands raised above him and a glowing spear hovering there, just beyond his touch. A corpse slumped at his feet. Wax went forward, walking into the stream of light until he was standing right in front of the image, looking up at the portion he wasn't blocking. The face of the man in the mosaic had eyes upturned and lips parted as if in awe at what he held.

He wore the bracers on his arms.

Wax turned around, but standing in the stream of light he couldn't see anything in the room. "You mean to tell me your brother, this ReLuur, actually *found* the Bands of Mourning?"

"He found something," VenDell said.

"Where?"

"He doesn't know," VenDell said softly.

Wax stepped out of the light, frowning. He looked from VenDell to MeLaan. "What?" he asked them.

"He's missing a spike," MeLaan said. "Best we could determine, he was accosted before he could return here from the mountains near the Southern Roughs."

"We can't get any straight answers out of him," VenDell said. "A kandra with a missing spike … well, they aren't quite sane any longer. As you well know."

Wax shivered, a pit of emptiness shifting inside him. "Yes."

"So, Miss Colms," VenDell said, stepping away from his machine. "This is where you come in. ReLuur was … is … one of our finest. Of the Third Generation, he is an explorer, an expert at bodies, and a genius. Losing him would be a great blow to us."

"We can't reproduce," MeLaan said. "Our numbers are set. The Thirds like ReLuur … they're our parents, our exemplars. Our leaders. He is precious."

"We would like you to recover his spike," VenDell said. "From whoever took it. This will restore his sanity, and hopefully his memories."

"The longer he goes without it, the bigger the holes will be," MeLaan said.

"So perhaps you can understand our urgency," VenDell said. "And why I found it prudent to interrupt Lord Ladrian, even on what was obviously an important day. When ReLuur returned to us, he was missing an entire arm and half his chest. Though he will not—or cannot—speak of where he got these pictures, he is able to recall being attacked in New Seran. We believe someone ambushed him there, on his return, and stole the artifacts he had discovered."

"They have his spike," MeLaan said, voice tense. "It's still there. It *has* to be."

"Wait, wait," Marasi said. "Why not give him another spike? You've got enough of them lying around to make earrings, like the one you gave

Waxillium.”

The two kandra looked at her as if she were mad, but Wax couldn’t see why. He thought the question was an excellent one.

“You are misunderstanding the nature of these spikes,” VenDell all but sputtered. “First, we do not have kandra Blessings ‘lying around.’ The earrings you mention are crafted from old Inquisitor spikes, and have barely any potency to them. One might have been good enough for Lord Waxillium’s little stunt six months ago, but they would *hardly* be enough to restore a kandra.”

“Yeah,” MeLaan said. “If that worked, we’d have already used all those spikes to make new children. We can’t; a kandra Blessing must be created very specifically.”

“We *did* try something akin to what you suggest,” VenDell admitted. “TenSoon … relinquished one of his own spikes to give our fallen brother a few moments of lucidity. It was very painful for TenSoon, and—unfortunately—accomplished nothing. ReLuur only screamed, begging for his spike. He spat out TenSoon’s a moment later. Trying to use someone else’s spikes when you don’t have your own already can provoke radical changes in personality, memory, and temperament.”

“Lessie,” Wax said, voice hoarse. “She … she changed spikes frequently.”

“And each was a spike created specifically for her,” VenDell said. “Not one that had been used by another kandra. And besides, would you call her particularly stable, Lord Waxillium? You must trust us on this; we have done what we can. Here, at least.

“MeLaan will be traveling to New Seran to investigate and retrieve ReLuur’s missing spike. Miss Colms, we would like you to join her and help recover our brother’s mind. We can intervene with your superiors in the constable precinct, and make certain you are assigned field duty working for the government in a clandestine fashion. If you can restore ReLuur’s spike, we will be able to find answers.”

VenDell eyed Wax. “This will not be a wild hunt for some impossible artifact. All we want is our friend back. Of course, any clues you can discover regarding where he went on his quest, and where he got these pictures, would be appreciated. There are some people of interest in New Seran, nobility that ReLuur is fixated upon for reasons we can’t get out of him.”

Wax studied the last image for a time longer. It was tempting. Mystical artifacts were all well and good, but someone attacking—and nearly killing—one of the Faceless Immortals? *That* was interesting.

“I’ll go,” Marasi said from behind him. “I’ll do it. But … I wouldn’t mind help. Waxillium?”

A part of him longed to go. Escape the parties and the dances, the political engagements and business meetings. The kandra would know that; Harmony would know that.

Anger simmered deep within him at the thought. He’d hunted Lessie, and they *hadn’t told him*.

“This sounds like the perfect challenge for your skills, Marasi,” he found himself saying. “I doubt you need me. You are perfectly capable, and I feel a fool for having implied otherwise, even accidentally. If you do want company, however, perhaps Wayne would be willing to provide some extra protection. I’m afraid that I, however, must—”

The image on the wall flickered to a shot of a city with grand waterfalls. New Seran? He’d never been there. The streets were overgrown with foliage, and people promenaded about in clothing of striped brown suits and soft white dresses.

“Ah, I forgot,” VenDell said. “There *was* one other image in ReLuur’s belongings. We discovered it last, as the others were packed carefully away to await development. We suspect this image was taken in New Seran, just before the attack.”

“And why should I care?” Wax said. “It…”

He trailed off, feeling an icy shock as he recognized someone in the picture. He stepped back into the stream of light, pressing his hand against the white wall, trying—fruitlessly—to feel the image. “Impossible.”

She stood between two men who held to her arms tightly, as if pulling her forward against her will. Keeping her prisoner even in broad daylight. She had glanced over her shoulder toward the camera as the evanotype was taken. It must be one of the new models he’d been hearing about, that didn’t require the subject to stand still for the image to set.

The woman was in her forties, lean but solid, with long dark hair framing a face that—despite their years apart—Wax knew very, very well.

Telsin. His sister.

# 4

Two hours after the strange meeting, Wayne puttered through Wax's mansion, peeking behind pictures, lifting up vases. Where did he keep the *good* stuff?

"It *is* her, Steris," Wax was saying in the ground-floor sitting room not far away. "And that man with his back turned, holding her by the arm, that could be my uncle. They're involved in this. I *have* to go."

It had always seemed funny to Wayne how rich folk got to decide what was valuable. He inspected a picture frame that was likely pure gold. Why did anyone care about this shiny stuff? Gold could do some fun things with Feruchemy, but it was pure rubbish when it came to Allomancy.

Well, rich folk liked it. So they paid a lot for it, and that made it valuable. No other reason.

How did they decide what was valuable? Did they all just gather together, sit around in their suits and gowns, and say, "Oi. Let's start eatin' fish eggs, and make the stuff real expensive. That'll rust their brains, it will." Then they'd have a nice round of rich folks' laughter and throw some servants off the top of a building to see what kind of splats they'd make when they hit.

Wayne put the picture back. He refused to play by rich people's rules. He'd decide for himself what something was worth. And that frame was ugly. Didn't help none that Steris's cousins, who were depicted in the evanotype it held, looked like fish.

"Then you should most certainly go, Lord Waxillium," Steris said. "Why the concern? We can make arrangements to postpone other duties."

"It's infuriating, Steris!" Even from out in the hall, Wayne could hear the *I'm pacing* in his tone. "Not a word of apology, from them or Harmony regarding what they did to me. VenDell made offhanded comments—referring to me shooting Lessie as a 'stunt.' They *used* me. Lessie was only trying, in a broken way, to free me from them. Now they saunter back, no mention of what I lost, and expect me to just pick up and do their bidding again."

Poor Wax. That had busted him up right good, it had. And Wayne could see why. Still, an apology? Did people what got killed in a flood expect an apology from God? God did as God wished. You simply hoped to not get on His worse side. Kinda like the bouncer at the club with the pretty sister.

Harmony wasn't the only god, anyway. And that was what Wayne was about today.

After some silence, Wax continued, more softly. "I have to go. Even after what they did, if my uncle is really involved in this … if I can free Telsin … I have to go. Tomorrow night, there will be a gathering of the outer cities political elite in New Seran. Governor Aradel is rightly concerned, and was going to send a representative anyway. It gives me a plausible excuse to be in the city. Marasi can look for the lost spike; I can hunt down my uncle."

"It is decided, then," Steris said. "Will we be leaving immediately?"

Wax was silent for a moment. "We?"

"I assumed … I mean, if you are taking my sister, it would look very odd if I were not accompanying you." Wayne felt like he could hear her blush. "I don't mean to be presumptuous. You may, of course, do as you wish, but—"

"No," he said. "You're right. It would look odd to go alone. The gathering will include a reception, after all. I don't want to imply … I mean…"

"I can go, but stay out of your way."

"It could be dangerous. I can't ask it of you."

"If this is what you feel you must do, then I will be happy to take the risk."

"I…"

Rusts. Those two were as awkward as a man suddenly splitting his cheeks in church. Wayne shook his head, picking up one of the vases in the entryway. Good pottery, with a nice swirly-dirly pattern. Maybe that would do for his offering.

Someone knocked on the door, and Wayne put the vase back. It didn't feel right. He took one of the flowers though, and traded it for an extra sock from his back pocket. Huh. He had a silverware set in his other pocket. From the wedding breakfast? Yeah, that was right. They'd put out a place setting for him, had his name and everything. That meant the silverware had been his.

He put the fork, knife, and spoon back in his pocket and tucked the flower behind his ear, then walked to the door, reaching it right before that butler did. He gave the man a glare—it was only a matter of time before he cracked and tried to kill them all—then pulled open the door.

That kandra bloke stood on the other side. His suit now was an even *lighter* shade of tan. “You,” Wayne said, pointing. “We just got ridda you!” It had only been … what, two hours since he left?

“Good afternoon, young lad,” the kandra said. “Are the adults home?”

Darriance quite politely pushed Wayne aside and gestured for VenDell to enter. “You are expected, sir.”

“He is?” Wayne said.

“Master Ladrian said to send you in,” the butler said, pointing toward the sitting room.

“Thank you,” VenDell said, striding toward the room.

Wayne caught up with him quickly.

“Nice flower,” the kandra said. “Can I have your skeleton when you’re dead?”

“My…” Wayne felt at his head.

“You’re a Bloodmaker, correct? Can heal yourself? Bloodmaker bones tend to be particularly interesting, as your time spent weak and sickly creates oddities in your joints and bones that can be quite distinctive. I’d love to have your skeleton. If you don’t mind.”

Taken aback by this request, Wayne stopped in place. Then he ran past him, pushing into the room where Wax and Steris were talking. “Wax,” he complained, pointing, “the immortal bloke is being creepy again.”

“Greetings, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said, walking in and holding up a folder. “Your tickets, along with transcripts of everything we’ve been able to pry out of ReLuur. I warn you, most of it isn’t terribly lucid.”

Wayne glanced at Wax’s liquor cabinet. Maybe something in there would work for what he needed for his offering.

“I haven’t said that I’d go,” Wax told the immortal. “You’re roping me into this, sure as sheep in a pen.”

“Yes,” the immortal said. He held out the folder again. “In here is a list of people ReLuur mentions. You’ll find it interesting that he lists several, including the woman holding the party I’m sending you to, as having had interactions with your uncle.”

Wax sighed, then accepted it. He gestured to Steris, who had risen to curtsy. “My fiancée. We were debating whether she should accompany me or not.”

“We have made provisions for whatever you decide,” VenDell said. “Though it *will* look less suspicious if you go too, Lady Harms, I cannot guarantee your safety.”

“It might be helpful if *you* accompanied us, VenDell,” Wax said. “We could use an extra Metalborn.”

VenDell’s eyes bulged, and he turned white, like he’d been told his baby had been born with two noses. “Go out into the field? *Me?* Lord Ladrian, I assure you, that’s not what you want.”

“Why not?” Wax asked, leaning back against the wall. “You’re practically impossible to kill, and you can change your rusting shape into anything you want.”

“Wait,” Wayne said, turning away from the liquor cabinet. “You can turn into anything? Like a bunny?”

“Very small animals are extremely difficult, as we need a certain mass to hold our cognitive functions and—”

“Bunny,” Wayne said. “Can you be a *bunny*.”

“If absolutely necessary.”

“So *that’s* what that damn book was about.”

VenDell sighed, looking toward Wax. “MeLaan can perform any transformations you might need. *I* honor the First Contract, Lord Ladrian. Besides, the outside doesn’t suit me. There’s too much…” He waved his hands in front of him.

“Too much what?” Wax asked, frowning.

“*Everything,*” VenDell said—though Wayne didn’t miss that the rusting bunny glanced at him when he said it.

Wayne shook his head, trying the liquor cabinet. It was locked, unfortunately. What a fine heap of trust Wax showed in him.

“My sister will meet you at the station,” VenDell said. “Track seventeen, in four hours.”

“*Four hours?*” Steris said. “I need to send for the maids! And the valet! And…” She raised a hand to her head, looking faint. “And I need to make a *list*.”

“We’ll be there, VenDell,” Wax said.

“Excellent,” the kandra fellow said, fishing in his pocket. Wayne got interested, until he came out with a dull old bent earring, simple, old-style. “I brought you one of these.”

“No thanks.”

“But, if you need to—”

“*No thanks,*” Wax said.

The look between the two of them grew real uncomfortable, like each was accusing the other of having made an unpersonable stench of some sort. “Good, good,” Wayne said, drifting toward the door. “Meet you all at the station.”

“Aren’t you going to pack?” Steris called after him.

“Sack’s in my room,” Wayne called back. “Under my bed. I’m always packed and ready to go, mate. Never can tell when a misunderstandin’ will crop up.” He turned away, popped his hat off the rack, flipped it onto his head, and ducked out the front door.

Leave them to their discussing and their arguing and their creepy immortal bunnies. He had things that needed to be done. Well, one thing at least.

Wayne had a *quest*.

He whistled as he danced down the steps. A simple tune, easy and familiar, with an accompanying beat playing in his mind. Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Quick, energetic. He strolled down the street, but found himself less and less pleased with his flower. It was not the proper offering for the god with whom he must meet. Too obvious, too soft.

He spun it in his fingers, thoughtful, softly whistling his tune. No better ideas came to him. This area was too fancy, with mansions and gardens and men clipping hedges. The streets didn’t even stink of horse dung. It was hard to think in a place like this; everyone knew the *best* thinking happened in alleyways and slums. Places where the brain had to be alert, even panicked—where the bugger knew that if it didn’t perk up and get some geniusing done, you were likely to get yourself stabbed, and then where would it be?

Holding your brain hostage against your own stupidity—*that* was how to get stuff done. Wayne made his way to a nearby canal, and searched out a gondola man who looked bored.

“My good man,” Wayne said to himself. “My *good* man.” Yeah, that was it. Speak like you couldn’t breathe right—high First Octant accent, with a little Terris stirred in. Rich accent. Very rich.

“You, boatman!” Wayne called, waving. “Hey! Oh, do hurry. I haven’t the time!”

The boatman poled over.

“Quickly now, quickly, my good man!” Wayne shouted. “Tell me. How much for the day?”

“The day?” the boatman said.

“Yes, yes,” Wayne said, hopping into the boat. “I have need of your services for the entire day.” Wayne settled himself without waiting for a response. “Onward, now. Up the Fourth-Fifth Canal, turn right around the Hub, then east up the Irongate. First stop is in the Third Octant. She’s counting on me, you know.”

“The whole day,” the boatman said, eager. “Yes, sir, um … my lord.…”

“Ladrian,” Wayne said. “Waxillium Ladrian. We aren’t moving. Why aren’t we moving?”

The boatman began poling, so gleeful at the prospect of many hours of employment that he forgot to ask for any money up front.

“Fifty,” the man finally said.

“Hmm?”

“Fifty. For the whole day.”

“Yes, yes, fine,” Wayne said. *Dirty thief,* he thought. *Trying to cheat an upstanding citizen, and a house lord at that, merely because he acted a little distracted?* What was this world coming to? When his grandfather Ladrian had been house lord, men had *known* how to be respectful. Why, a boatman in those days would have dunked himself in the canal before taking a wuzing more than he was due!

“If you don’t mind me asking, my lord,” the boatman said. “And I mean no offense … but your clothing.”

“Yes?” Wayne asked, straightening his Roughs coat.

“Is something wrong with it?”

“*Wrong* with it?” Wayne said, stuffing his accent so full of noble indignation it was practically bleeding. “Wrong with it? Man, do you not follow fashion?”

“I—”

“Thomton Delacour himself designed these clothes!” Wayne said. “Northern outlands inspiration. It’s the height, I tell you! The height. A *Coinshot* couldn’t get higher!”

“Sorry. Sorry, my lord. I said I didn’t want to offend!”

“You can’t just *say* ‘don’t be offended’ and then say something offensive, man! That’s not how it works.” Wayne settled back, arms folded.

The boatman, wisely, said nothing more to him. After about ten minutes of travel, the time had arrived.

“Now,” Wayne said, as if to himself, “we’ll need to stop at Glimmering Point docks. And then a skid along Stansel Belt.”

He let his accent shift, a little of the Knobs—a slum—slipping in. Dull accent, like a mouth filled with cotton. The folks there used the word “skid” for practically anything. Distinctive word, that. Skiiiid. Sounded like it should be something dirty.

“Um, my lord?”

“Hm?” Wayne said. “Oh, just going over my errands. My nephew is getting married—you might have heard of the wedding, it’s all the talk of the city. So many errands. Yes indeed, the day will be quite the skid.”

That was a ruffian's accent, but just a hint, like the lemon in a good hot toddy. He slipped it in under the highborn accent.

The boatman started to get uncomfortable. "You said the Stansel Belt? Not a nice area, that."

"Need to hire some workers," Wayne said absently.

The boatman continued poling, but he was nervous now. Tapping his foot, moving the pole more quickly, ignoring calls from colleagues they passed. Something was *wrong*. Like the scent of a meat pie left under the sofa for a few days. A whole day's hiring? An outrageous sum? It might instead be a setup. Pretend to be a lord, then lure him into the slums to be robbed.…

"My lord!" the man said. "I just realized. Gotta get back. Can't be hired for the whole day. My mother, she'll need me."

"What nonsense is this?" Wayne demanded. "I haven't the time for your prattle, man! And catching another boat will waste my precious time. I'll double your fee."

Now, the man was *really* anxious. "Sorry, my lord," he said, poling to the side of the canal. "Very sorry. Can't do it."

"At least take me to Stansel—"

"No!" the man yelped. "Nope, can't do it. Gotta go."

"Well," Wayne huffed, climbing out. "I've never been treated in such a manner! And we're not even halfway down portway!"

"Sorry, my lord!" the man said, poling away as quickly as he could. "Sorry!"

Wayne cocked his hat, grinned, and checked the sign hanging from the streetlamp. Exactly where he'd wanted to go, and not a clip paid. He started whistling and strolled along the canal, keeping an eye out for a better offering. What would the god want?

*Maybe that?* he wondered, eyeing a line of people waiting at Old Dent's roadside cart, wanting to buy some of his fried potatoes. Seemed a good bet.

Wayne wandered over. "Need some help, Dent?"

The old man looked up and wiped his brow. "Five clips a small pouch, eight for a large, Wayne. And don't eat none of the stock, or I'll fry your fingers."

Wayne grinned, slipping behind the cart as the man turned back to his brazier and stirred a batch that was frying. Wayne took the customers' money —and didn't eat much of the stock—until the last man in line arrived, a fancy-looking fellow in a doorman's jacket. Probably worked at one of the hotels down the lane. Good tips at those jobs.

"Three large," the man said.

Wayne got his potatoes, took the man’s money, then hesitated. “Actually,” Wayne said, holding up a note, “do you have change? We got too many large bills.”

“I suppose,” the man said, digging in his nice eelskin wallet.

“Great, here’s a twenty.”

“I’ve got two fives and ten ones,” the man said, putting them down.

“Thanks.” Wayne took them, then hesitated. “Actually, I’ve got plenty of ones. Could I get that ten I saw in your wallet?”

“Fine.”

Wayne gave him a handful of coins and took the ten.

“Hey,” the man said, “there are only seven here.”

“Whoops!” Wayne said.

“What are you doing, Wayne?” Old Dent said. “There’s more change in the box under there.”

“Really?” Wayne glanced. “Rusts. Okay, how about you just give me my twenty back?” He counted the man back thirteen and poured the coins and bills into his hand.

The man sighed, and gave Wayne the twenty. “Can I just get some sauce for my chips?”

“Sure, sure,” Wayne said, squeezing some sauce onto the pouches, beside the potatoes. “That’s a nice wallet. Whaddaya want for it?”

The man hesitated, looking at his wallet.

“I’ll give you this,” Wayne said, plucking the flower off his ear and holding it out with a banknote worth ten.

The man shrugged and handed over the empty wallet, taking the bill and stuffing it in his pocket. He threw the flower away. “Idiot,” the man said, marching off with his potatoes.

Wayne tossed the wallet up and caught it again.

“Did you shortchange that man, Wayne?” Old Dent asked.

“What’s that?”

“You got him to give you fifty, and you gave him back forty.”

“What?” Wayne said, stuffing the wallet in his back pocket. “You know I can’t count that high, Dent. ’Sides, gave him ten extra at the end.”

“For his wallet.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “The flower was for the wallet. The bill was ’cuz I somehow ended up with an extra ten completely on accident, very innocent-like.” He smiled, helped himself to a pouch of chips, and went wandering off.

That wallet was nice. His god would like that. Everyone needed wallets, right? He got it out and opened and closed it repeatedly, until he noticed that one side was worn.

Rusts. He’d been cheated! This wouldn’t work at all for an offering. He shook his head, walking along the canal promenade. A pair of urchins sat on one side, hands out for coins. The melancholy sound of a busker rose from a little farther down the path. Wayne was near the Breakouts, a nice slum, and he caught whiffs of their distinctive odor. Fortunately the aroma wafting from a nearby bakery overwhelmed most of it.

“Here’s the thing,” he said to one of the urchins, a girl not seven. He settled down on his haunches. “I ain’t travailed enough.”

“… Sir?” the girl asked.

“In the old stories of quests, you gotta *travail*. That’s like traveling, but with an *ailment* stapled on. Headaches and the like; maybe a sore backside too.”

“Can … can I have a coin, sir?”

“Ain’t got no coins,” Wayne said, thinking. “Damn. In the stories they always tip the urchins, don’t they? Lets ya know they’re the heroes and such. Hold here for a sec.”

He stood up and burst into the bakery, real heroic-like. A woman behind the counter was just pulling a rack of meat buns out of the oven. Wayne slammed his fork down onto the plain wooden countertop, leaving it flourished there like a rusting legendary sword.

“How many buns’ll you give me for this?” he asked.

The baker frowned, looking at him, then taking the fork. She turned it over in her fingers. “Mister,” she said, “this is *silver*.”

“So … how many?” Wayne asked.

“A bunch.”

“A bunch’ll do, fair merchant.”

A moment later he emerged from the bakery holding three large paper sacks filled with a dozen buns each. He dropped a handful of change the baker had insisted on giving him into the urchins’ hands, then held up a finger as their jaws dropped.

“You,” he said, “must *earn* this.”

“How, sir?”

“Take these,” he said, dropping the sacks. “Go give the stuff inside away.”

“To who?” the girl asked.

“Anyone who needs them,” Wayne said. “But see here, now. Don’t eat more than four yourselves, all right?”

“*Four?*” the girl said. “All for me?”

“Well, five, but you bargain hard. Little cheat.” He left them stunned and danced along the edge of the canal, passing the busker, who sat strumming an old guitar.

"Something lively, minstrel!" Wayne called, tossing the silver spoon into the man's overturned hat, which awaited tips.

"Here now," the man said. "What's this?" He squinted. "A spoon?"

"Merchants are apparently desperate for the things!" Wayne called. "They'll give you half a hunnerd meat buns for one, with change to boot. Now, give me 'The Last Breath,' minstrel!"

The man shrugged, and started plucking the song from Wayne's mind. Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Quick, energetic. Wayne rocked back and forth, eyes closed. *The end of an era*, he thought. *A god to be appeased.*

He heard the two urchins laughing, and opened his eyes to see them tossing meat buns at the people they passed. Wayne smiled, then kicked himself in a smooth skid along the edge of the canal, which was slippery with a coating of slime. He managed to go a good ten feet before losing his balance and slipping.

Which, of course, plunged him right into the canal.

Coughing, he pulled himself up onto the side. Well, maybe this would count as a travail. If not, it was probably poetry, considering what he'd done to Wax this morning.

He fished out his hat, then put his back to the canal. That was the way to go. Eyes forward, back turned toward the past. No sense getting your nose stuck in things that don't matter anymore. He continued on his way, trailing water and spinning the last of the silverware—the knife—in his fingers. This was *not* the right offering for his quest. He was pretty sure of it. But what was?

He stopped at the next canal bridge, then stepped back. A short man in a uniform he didn't recognize was walking down a nearby street with a little book in hand. Motorcars were parked here in various positions, most partly up onto the sidewalks. The man in the uniform stopped at each one, writing something down in his book.

Wayne followed after him. "Here now," he asked the man. "What're you doing?"

The little man in the uniform glanced at him, then back at his notebook. "New city ordinance about the parking of motorcars requires them to be left in an orderly manner, not up on the sidewalks like this."

"So…"

"So I'm writing down the registry numbers of each one," the man said. "And we'll track down the owners and charge them a fine."

Wayne whistled softly. “That’s *evil*.”

“Nonsense,” the man said. “It’s the law.”

“So you’re a conner?”

“Fine enforcement officer,” the man said. “Spent most of my time inspecting kitchens before last month. This is a lot more productive, I’ll tell you. It—”

“That’s great,” Wayne said. “Whaddaya want for the book?”

The man regarded him. “It’s not for trade.”

“I’ve got this here nice wallet,” Wayne said, holding it up, water dripping out the side. “Recently cleaned.”

“Move along, sir,” the man said. “I am not—”

“How ’bout this?” Wayne said, yanking out the knife.

The man jumped back in alarm, dropping his notebook. Wayne snatched it, dropping the knife.

“Great trade. Thanks. Bye.” He took off at a dash.

“Hey!” the man shouted, chasing after him. “Hey!”

“No tradebacks!” Wayne shouted, hand on his wet hat, running for all he was worth.

“Come back here!”

Wayne dashed out onto the main street along the canal, passing a couple of old men sitting on a tenement’s steps near the entrance to the slums.

“That’s Edip’s boy,” one of them said. “Always gettin’ himself into trouble, that one is.”

The man got hit in the face by a meat bun a second later.

Wayne ignored that, holding his hat to his head and running all-out. The conner was a determined one. Followed Wayne a good ten streets before slowing, then stopping, hands on his knees. Wayne grinned and ducked around one last corner before slamming his back against the bricks of a building, beside a window. He was pretty winded himself.

*He’ll probably file a report*, Wayne thought. *Hope the fine they make Wax pay ain’t too large.*

He ought to find something to bring back as an apology. Maybe Wax needed a wallet.

Wayne heard something beside him, and turned to see a woman with spectacles leaning out the window to look at him curiously. She was holding a pen, and just inside the window a half-finished letter lay on the desk in front of her. Perfect.

Wayne tipped his hat, snatching the pen from her hand. “Thanks,” he said, opening the notebook and scribbling some words. As she cried out, he tossed the pen back to her, then continued on his way.

The final destination, the god's dwelling, was not far now. He veered down a street lined with trees and quaint smaller townhomes. He counted them off, then turned to the right and stood facing it. The god's new temple. She'd moved here a few months ago.

He took a deep breath, banishing the music in his head. This had to be *quiet*. He crept carefully up the long walk to the front door. There, he quietly tucked the book into the spot between the doorknob and the door. He didn't dare knock. Ranette was a jealous god, known for shooting people—for her, it was practically a governmental mandate. If the constables didn't find a few corpses on her doorstep every week, they'd start to wonder if she wasn't feeling well.

Wayne slipped away. He smiled, imagining Ranette's reaction when she opened the door, and was so distracted that he almost ran right into *Ranette herself* walking up the path to her house.

Wayne stumbled back. Perfect brown hair, pulled back to expose a gorgeous face, weathered from her time in the Roughs. A fantastic figure, round in all the right places. Tall. Taller than Wayne. So he had something to look up to.

"Wayne! What were you doing at my door?"

"I—"

"Idiot," she said, shoving past him. "You'd better not have broken in. Tell Wax I delivered those cords to him just now. He needn't have sent someone to check on me."

"Cords?" Wayne asked. What cords?

She ignored the question, muttering. "I swear, I *am* going to shoot you, you little maggot."

He watched her go, smiled to himself, then turned and continued walking away.

"What's this?" she said from behind him.

He kept walking.

"Wayne!" she shouted at him. "I'll shoot you, right now. I swear I will. Tell me what you've done."

He turned around. "It's just a gift, Ranette."

"A notebook?" she asked, flipping the pages.

He shoved his hands into his trouser pockets and shrugged. "Writin' book," he said. "You're always writin' stuff down, thinkin' about things. Figured if there's one thing you could always use more of, it's a writin' book. All those ideas you have must get pretty crowded up there. Makes sense you'd need places to store them."

"Why's it damp?"

"Sorry," he said. "Forgot and stuck it in my pocket for a moment. But I got it right back out. I fought ten constables for that, I'll have you know."

She flipped through it, eyes narrowed in suspicion, until she reached the last page. "What's this?" She held it up close and read the words he'd scrawled on the back page. "'Thank you and goodbye'? What's wrong with you?"

"Nothin's wrong," Wayne said. "I just figured it was time."

"You're leaving?"

"For a little, but that's not what the words mean. I'm sure we'll see each other again. Perhaps frequently and such. I'll see you … but I won't be *seein'* you again. See?"

She looked at him for a long moment, then seemed to relax. "You mean it?"

"Yeah."

"Finally."

"Gotta grow up sometime, right? I've found that … well, a man wantin' something don't make it true, you know?"

Ranette smiled. Seemed an awful long time since he'd seen her do that. She walked to him, and he didn't even flinch when she extended her hand. He was proud of that.

He took her hand, and she raised his, then kissed it on the back. "Thank you, Wayne."

He smiled, let go, and turned to leave. One step into it, though, he hesitated, then shifted his weight to his other foot and leaned toward her again. "Marasi says you're courtin' another girl."

"… I am."

Wayne nodded. "Now, I don't want to go wrong, seein' as I'm being so gentlemanly and grown-up and the like. But you can't blame a man for gettin' ideas when hearing something such as that. So … I don't suppose that there's a chance for the *three* of us to—"

"Wayne."

"I don't mind none if she's fat, Ranette. I likes a girl what has something to hold on to."

*"Wayne."*

He looked back at her, noting the storm in her expression. "Right," he said. "Right. Okay. Yeah. I don't suppose, when we're lookin' fondly on this conversationalizing and our memorable farewell, we could both just forget I said that last part?”

“I’ll do my best.”

He smiled, took off his hat, and gave her a deep bow he’d learned off a sixth-generation doorman greeter at Lady ZoBell’s ballroom in the Fourth Octant. Then he stood up straight, replaced his hat, and put his back toward her. He found himself whistling as he went on his way.

“What is that song?” she called after him. “I know it.”

“‘The Last Breath,’” he said without turning back. “The pianoforte was playin’ it when we first met.”

He turned the corner, and didn’t look back. Didn’t even check if she’d sighted on him with a rifle or something. Feeling a spring in his step, he made his way to the nearest busy intersection and tossed the empty wallet into the gutter. It wasn’t long before a carriage-for-hire pulled up, and its coachman glanced to the side, saw the wallet, and scrambled down to grab it.

Dashing out from an alley, Wayne beat the man to it, diving for the wallet and rolling on the ground. “It’s mine!” he said. “I seen it first!”

“Nonsense,” the coachman said, swatting Wayne with his horse reed. “I dropped it, you ruffian. It’s mine!”

“Oh, is that so?” Wayne said. “How much is innit?”

“I need not answer to you.”

Wayne grinned, holding up the wallet. “I tells you what. You can have it and everything that’s inside. But you take me to the Fourth Octant west train station.”

The coachman eyed him, then held out his hand.

Half an hour later, the coach rolled up to the rail station—a bleak-looking building with peaked towers and tiny windows, as if to taunt those trapped inside with a scant view of the sky. Wayne sat on the back footman’s stand, legs swinging over the side. Trains steamed nearby, rolling up to platforms to gorge themselves on a new round of passengers.

Wayne hopped down, tipped his hat to the grumbling coachman—who seemed well aware he’d been had—and strolled in through the open doors. He shoved his hands in his pockets and looked about until he found Wax, Marasi, and Steris standing amid a small hill of suitcases, with servants waiting at the ready to carry them.

“Finally!” Wax snapped. “Wayne, our train is nearly boarding. Where have you been?”

“Makin’ an offering to a beautiful god,” Wayne said, looking up toward the building’s high ceiling. “Why do you suppose they made this place so big? Ain’t like the trains ever come in here, eh?”

“Wayne?” Steris asked, wrinkling her nose. “Are you drunk?”

He put a bit of a slur into his speech. “Course not. Why … why’d I be drunk at this hour?” He looked at her lazily.

“You’re insufferable,” she said, waving to her lady’s maid. “I can’t believe you risked being late for a little liquor.”

“Wasn’t a *little*,” Wayne said.

When the train arrived, he joined the others in climbing aboard—Steris and Wax had ordered an entire *car* set aside for the lot of them. Unfortunately, the last-minute hiring meant it had to be hitched all the way at the back, and Wayne had to share a room with Herve the footman. Bugger that. He knew for a fact the man snored. He’d find someplace else to sleep, or else just stay up. The train to New Seran wasn’t going to take *that* long. They’d arrive before sunrise.

In fact, as the thing finally started to chug into motion, he swung out his compartment’s window—much to Herve’s consternation—and climbed up onto the roof. He sat there whistling softly, watching Elendel pass for a time, wind ruffling his hair. A simple tune, easy and familiar, and the accompanying beat played on the tracks below. Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Quick … energetic.

He lay down then, staring at the sky, the clouds, the sun.

Eyes forward, back turned toward the past.

# PART TWO

# 5

Watching the passing scenes, Wax was immediately struck by how *populated* the land was south of Elendel.

It was easy to forget how many people lived in cities other than the capital. The railway rolled along beside a river wide enough to swallow whole towns up in the Roughs. Villages, towns, and even cities sprinkled the route, so common that the train barely went five minutes without passing another one. Between the towns, orchards stretched into the distance. Fields of wheat bowed and danced. Everything was green and vibrant, refreshed on evenings when the mists came out.

Wax turned from the window and dug into the package Ranette had sent him. Inside, in a fitted, plush-lined case, was a large double-barreled shotgun. Beside it, in their own indentations, were three spheres each wrapped with a thin cord.

The spheres and cords he'd expected. The shotgun was a treat.

*Experimenting with extra-powerful loads,* a note read, *and enormous slugs, for stopping Thugs or full-blooded koloss. Please test. Will require increased weight on your part to fire. Recoil should be exceptional.*

Rust and Ruin, the shells for this thing were almost as wide as a man's wrist. It was like a cannon. He held one up as the train slowed into a station. It wasn't quite dark yet, but windows in the town were bright with electricity.

Electric lights. He lowered the shell, studying them. The outer cities had electricity?

*Of course they do, idiot,* he immediately thought to himself. Why wouldn't they? He'd fallen into the same trap he'd once mocked others for. He'd started to assume that anything important, trendy, or exciting happened inside Elendel. That sort of attitude had annoyed him when he’d lived in the Roughs.

The train yielded a handful of passengers and picked up fewer, which surprised Wax, considering the crowded platform. Were they waiting for another train? He leaned to the side to get a better look out the window. No … the people were clumped together, listening to one of their number shout something Wax couldn’t hear. As he strained to read a sign one of the people carried, someone threw an egg and it *splatted* right beside his window.

He pulled back. The train started up again, having waited only a fraction of the time it normally did at a stop. As it eased out of the station, more eggs flew toward it. Wax finally got a good look at the sign. END ELENDEL OPPRESSION!

Oppression? He frowned, leaning as the train turned a bend, letting him watch the crowd of people on the platform. A few hopped onto the tracks and shook fists.

“Steris?” he asked, packing away Ranette’s box. “Have you paid attention to the outer cities situation?”

No reply came. He glanced toward his fiancée, who still sat across the compartment from him, huddled in her seat with a blanket around her shoulders. She didn’t appear to have noticed the stop or the eggs; her face was stuck so far into her book that snapping it closed would have caught her nose.

Landre, the lady’s maid, had gone to ready Steris’s bed, and Wayne was doing who knows what. So the two of them were alone in the room.

“Steris?”

No reply. Wax cocked his head, trying to read the spine and make out what had her so fascinated, but she’d wrapped the volume in a cloth cover. He inched to the side, and saw that her eyes were wide as she read. She turned the page quickly.

Wax frowned, rising and leaning across to get a view of one of the pages. Steris saw him, jumped, and snapped the book closed. “Oh!” she said. “Did you say something?”

“What are you reading?”

“History of New Seran,” Steris said, tucking the book under her arm.

“You looked shocked as you read.”

“Well, I don’t know if you realize it, but the name Seran has a very disturbing history. What did you want to ask me?”

Wax settled back. “I saw a crowd on the train platform. They seemed angry about Elendel.”

“Oh, hum, yes. Let’s see. Outer cities … political situation.” She seemed to need a moment to compose herself. What *had* she read in that history that was so disconcerting? “Well, I’m not surprised to hear of it. They aren’t happy, for obvious reasons.”

“You mean the taxation issues? They’re *that* upset?” He looked out the window, but they were too far away now for him to make out the crowd. “We only tax them a little, to maintain infrastructure and government.”

“Well, they would argue that they don’t need our government, as they have their own city administrations. Waxillium, many in the Basin feel that Elendel is trying to act as if our governor were some kind of emperor—something that was supposed to have ended when the Lord Mistborn stepped down after his century of rule.”

“But our taxes don’t pay Governor Aradel,” Wax said. “They pay for things like constables to police the docks and the maintenance of the railway lines.”

“Technically that is correct,” Steris said. “But then all goods are *also* taxed when they enter Elendel using the very railway lines and rivers we maintain. Have you noticed that there are almost no railway lines traveling directly from city to city outside of Elendel? Other than the interchange at Doriel, everyone wishing to go from one outer city to another must go *toward* Elendel. Want to ship something from Elmsdel to Rashekin? Have to pass through Elendel. Want to sell metals in Tathingdwel? Have to pass through Elendel.”

“A hub system makes perfect sense,” Wax said.

“And it also lets us tax practically all goods shipped throughout the entire Basin,” Steris said. “By outer cities arguments, that means we’re taxing them *twice*. First by our levies to maintain the railway lines, then a second time by making them pass everything through us. They’ve lobbied for years to get some direct lines running around the Basin in a loop, and have always been denied.”

“Huh,” Wax said, settling back.

“The rivers are just as bad,” Steris said. “We don’t control where they were placed, of course. But they do all flow toward Elendel, so we control water traffic. There are roadways between towns, but they’re horribly inefficient compared to water or rail travel, so Elendel tariffs basically set prices around the Basin. We can be certain that any goods produced in the city are never undercut, and can provide incentives for things we *don’t* produce to be sold at a discount in the city.”

Wax nodded slowly. He’d had an inkling, and had heard about the outer cities’ complaints. But he’d always read Elendel broadsheets on the matter; to hear it spelled out so directly by Steris made him marvel at his own shortsightedness.

“I should have paid more attention. Perhaps I should talk to Aradel about this.”

“Well, there are reasons Elendel does as it has.” Steris set her book aside and stood to get down a piece of luggage. Wax eyed the book, noting that she’d marked her page. He reached toward it, but a sudden jerk by the train sent Steris sitting back down with a thump, and she set her suitcase on the book. “Lord Waxillium?”

“Sorry. Continue.”

“Well, the governor and Senate are trying to maintain a single unified nation in the Basin, rather than letting it fracture into a bunch of city-states. They’re using the economics to push the outer cities to accept centralized rule in exchange for lowered tariffs. Even Aradel, as a moderate liberal, has accepted that this is good for the Basin as a whole. Of course, the noble houses don’t care so much about unity as reaping the benefits of a stranglehold on trade.”

“And I assume I’ve benefited from these policies?”

“Benefited?” Steris said. “You practically thrive on them, Lord Waxillium. Your textiles and metalworks would be undercut dramatically without these tariffs. You’ve voted for maintaining them twice and for *raising* them once.”

“I … have?”

“Well, I have,” Steris said. “You did tell me to see to your house’s interests in voting at—”

“Yes, I know,” Wax said, sighing.

The train rocked on its tracks, rhythmic thumps sounding from below. Wax turned back to the window, but they weren’t passing a town at the moment, and everything was growing dark. No mist tonight.

“Is something wrong, Lord Waxillium?” Steris asked. “Whenever we speak of politics or house finances, you grow distant.”

“It’s because I’m a child sometimes, Steris,” Wax said. “Please, continue your instruction. These are things I need to learn. Don’t let my foolishness discourage you.”

Steris leaned forward and rested her hand on his arm. “These last six months have been difficult. You can be excused for letting your attention toward politics lapse.”

He continued looking out the window. Following Lessie’s first death, he’d lost himself. He’d determined not to react that way again, and had thrown his attention into working with the constables. Anything to keep him occupied, and to prevent him from lapsing into the same melancholy inactivity that had struck him when he'd first lost her.

"I've still been a fool. And maybe there's more. Steris, I've never had a mind for politics, even when I was trying to do my duty. It might be beyond me."

"In our months together, I've come to see you as a fiercely intelligent person. The puzzles I've seen you solve, the answers I've seen you tease out … Why, they're nothing short of remarkable. You are most certainly capable of caring for your house. Begging your pardon, I'd say it is not your mind, but what you mind, that is the issue."

Wax smiled, looking toward her. "Steris, you're a delight. How could anyone ever think you dull?"

"But I *am* dull."

"Nonsense."

"And when I asked you to help me review my list of preparations for the trip?"

That list had been *twenty-seven* pages long. "I still can't believe you got all those things into our bags."

"All of—" Steris blinked. "Lord Waxillium, I didn't *bring* all of those things."

"But you made a list."

"To think of everything we *might* need. I feel better when something goes wrong if I've contemplated that it might. At least this way, if we run into something we've forgotten, I can feel good knowing I figured we might need it."

"But if you didn't bring all of that stuff, then what is in all those boxes? I saw Herve struggling to lug a few of them up to the train."

"Oh," Steris said, opening the suitcase she'd gotten down. "Why, our house finances, of course."

Indeed, inside was a large stack of ledgers.

"This trip was unplanned," Steris explained, "and I have to prepare an accountability report for the banks by next month. House Ladrian has recovered for the most part from your uncle's spending—but we need to maintain strict books in order to convince lenders we're solvent, so they will be willing to work with us."

"We have accountants, Steris," Wax said.

"Yes, this is their work," she said. "I need to check it over—you can't simply *turn in* someone else's work without making certain the work was done properly. Besides, they're off three clips in this quarter's financials."

"Three clips?" Wax said. "Out of how much money?"

“Five million.”

“They’re off three hundredths of a boxing,” Wax said, “out of five *million*. I’d say that’s not bad.”

“Well, it’s within the thresholds the banks demand,” Steris said, “but it’s still sloppy! These financials are how we represent ourselves to the world, Lord Waxillium. If you want to overcome the impression people have of House Ladrian and its indulgences, you must agree that we have a responsibility to present ourselves— You’re doing it again.”

Wax started, sitting up straighter. “Excuse me.”

“Distant look in your eyes,” Steris noted. “Aren’t you the one who is always talking about the responsibility men have to uphold the law?”

“Different thing entirely.”

“But your responsibility to your house—”

“—is why I’m here, Steris,” Wax said. “Why I came back in the first place. I recognize it. I acknowledge it.”

“You just don’t like it.”

“A man doesn’t have to like his duty. He just has to do it.”

She clasped her hands in her lap, studying him. “Here, let me show you something.” She rose, reaching for another suitcase on the rack above her seat.

Wax took her moment of distraction as a chance to slip the book she’d been reading out from its hiding place. He flipped forward to the page she’d marked, curious to discover exactly what about New Seran had captivated her so.

He was completely shocked, then, when the page didn’t contain a historical description, but instead *anatomy* sketches. Along with long descriptions explaining … human reproduction?

The room grew very still. Wax glanced up to find Steris staring at him with a look of horror on her face. She went beet red and dropped to her seat, covering her face with her hands and groaning loudly.

“Um…” Wax said. “I guess … hm…”

“I think I’m going to throw up,” Steris said.

“I didn’t mean to pry, Steris. You were just acting so *odd*, and so fascinated by what was in the book—”

She groaned again.

Wax sat, awkward in the shaking train car, searching for words. “So … you don’t have any … experience in these matters, I assume.”

“I keep asking for details,” Steris said, slumping back into her seat and leaning her head back against the wall, looking up at the ceiling. “But nobody will tell me anything. ‘You’ll figure it out,’ they say with a wink and a grin. ‘The body knows what to do.’ But what if mine *doesn’t*? What if I do it *wrong*?”

“You could have asked me.”

“Because *that* wouldn’t be embarrassing,” Steris said, closing her eyes. “I know the basics; I’m not an idiot. But I *need* to provide an heir. It’s vital. How am I supposed to do this properly if I don’t have any information? I tried to interview some prostitutes about it—”

“Wait. You did?”

“Yes. A trio of very nice young ladies; met them for tea, but they clammed up the moment they discovered who I was—they even got strangely protective, and wouldn’t give me any details *either*. I get the impression they thought I was cute. What about being a spinster could possibly be cute? Do you realize I’m almost *thirty*?”

“One foot in the grave, obviously,” Wax said.

“It’s easy to joke when you’re a man,” she snapped. “You’re not on a deadline to provide something useful to this arrangement.”

“You’re worth more than your ability to bear children, Steris.”

“That’s right. There’s my money too.”

“And all *I* am to this arrangement is a title,” Wax said. “It goes both ways.”

Steris settled back, breathing in and out through her teeth for a few moments. Finally she cracked one eye. “You can shoot things too.”

“What every proper lady needs in a man.”

“Murdering is very traditional. Goes all the way back.”

Wax smiled. “Actually, if you want to be *strictly* traditional—going back to the Imperial Pair—it was the lady in the relationship who did the murdering.”

“Either way, I apologize for my tirade. It was completely uncalled for. I shall endeavor to be firmer with myself following our union.”

“Don’t be silly,” Wax said. “I like seeing moments like this from you.”

“You like it when ladies are in distress?”

“I like it when you show me something new. It’s good to remember that people have different sides.”

“Well,” she said, taking the book, “I can continue my research at another point. Our wedding has been delayed, after all.”

*This was to be the night,* he realized. *Our first night of marriage.* He’d known, of course, but thinking about it made him feel … what? Relieved? Sad? Both?

“If it eases your mind,” Wax said as she tucked the book into her suitcase, “we won’t need to be … involved with any real frequency, particularly once a child is provided. I don't imagine your research will be necessary for more than a dozen or so occasions."

As he said it she wilted, shoulders slumping, head bowing. She was still facing away from him, digging in her suitcase, but he spotted it immediately.

Damn. That had been a stupid thing to say, hadn't it? If Lessie had been here, she'd have stomped on his toe for that one. He felt sick, then cleared his throat. "That was injudicious of me, Steris. I'm sorry."

"The truth should never be the wrong thing to say, Lord Waxillium," she said, straightening and looking toward him, composed once again. "This is exactly as our arrangement was to be, as I know full well. I *did* write the contract."

Wax crossed the train car, then sat next to her, resting his hand on hers. "I don't like this talk from you. Or from me. It's become a habit for us to pretend this relationship is nothing more than titles and money. But Steris, when Lessie died…" He choked off, then took a deep breath before continuing. "Everyone wanted to talk to me. Speak at me. *Blather* about how they knew what I was feeling. But you just let me weep. Which was what I needed more than anything. Thank you."

She met his eyes, then squeezed his hand.

"What we are together," Wax said to her, "and what we make of our future need not be spelled out by a piece of paper." Or, well, a large stack of them. "The contract need not set our bounds."

"Pardon. But I thought that was exactly the purpose of a contract. To define and set bounds."

"And the purpose of life is to push our bounds," Wax said, "to shatter them, escape them."

"An odd position," Steris said, cocking her head, "for a lawman."

"Not at all," Wax said. He thought for a moment, then crossed to his side of the chamber again and dug into Ranette's box, getting out one of the metal spheres wound with a long cord. "Do you recognize this?"

"I noticed you looking at it earlier."

Wax nodded. "Third version of her hook device, like the one we used to climb ZoBell Tower. Watch."

He burned steel and Pushed on the sphere. It leaped from his fingers, streaking toward the bar on the luggage rack, trailing the cord behind—which he held in his hand. As the sphere reached the rack, Wax Pushed on a specific thin blue line revealed by his Allomantic senses. It pointed to a latch hidden inside the sphere, like the one inside Vindication that turned off the safety.

A hidden set of hooks deployed from the sphere. He tugged the cord, and was pleased to find that it locked into place, catching on the luggage rack.

*Way more handy than the other designs,* Wax thought, impressed. He Pushed on the switch a second time, and the mechanism disengaged, retracting the hooks with a snap. The ball fell to the couch beside Steris, and Wax pulled it into his hand by the cord.

"Clever," Steris said. "And this relates to the conversation how?"

Wax Pushed on the sphere again, but this time didn't engage the mechanism. Instead he held the cord tight, giving the sphere about three feet of line. It jerked to a stop in midair, hovering. He kept Pushing, upward and away from him at an angle—but also held the cord, and that kept the sphere from falling.

"People," Wax said, "are like cords, Steris. We snake out, striking this way and that, always looking for something new. That's human nature, to discover what is hidden. There's so much we can do, so many places we can go." He shifted in his seat, changing his center of gravity, which caused the sphere to rotate upward on its tether.

"But if there aren't any boundaries," he said, "we'd get tangled up. Imagine a thousand of these cords, zipping through the room. The law is there to keep us from ruining everyone else's ability to explore. Without law, there's no freedom. That's why I am what I am."

"And the hunt?" Steris asked, genuinely curious. "That doesn't interest you?"

"Sure it does," Wax said, smiling. "That's part of the discovery, part of the *search*. Find who did it. Find the secrets, the answers."

There was, of course, another part—the part Miles had forced Wax to admit. There was a certain perverse anger that lawmen directed at those who broke the law, almost a *jealousy*. How dare these people escape? How dare they go the places nobody else was allowed to?

He let the sphere drop, and Steris picked it up, looking it over with a meticulous eye. "You talk about answers, secrets, and the search. Why is it you hate politics so much?"

"Well, it might be because sitting in a stuffy room and listening to people complain is the *opposite* of discovery."

"No!" Steris said. "Every meeting is a mystery, Lord Waxillium. What are their motives? What quiet lies are they telling, and what truths can you discover?" She tossed his sphere back to him, then took her suitcase and set it on the small cocktail table in the center of the cabin. "House finances are the same."

"House finances," he said, flatly.

“Yes!” Steris said. She fished in the suitcase, getting out a ledger. “See, look.” She flipped it open and pointed at an account.

He looked at the page, then up at her. *Such excitement,* he thought. But … ledgers?

“Three clips,” he said. “The tables are different by three clips. I’m sorry, Steris, it’s a meaningless amount. I don’t see—”

“It’s *not* meaningless,” she said, scooting over to sit beside him. “Don’t you see? The answer is *here* somewhere, in this book. Aren’t you even curious? The mystery of where they went?” She nodded to him, excited.

“Well, I suppose you could show me how to look,” he said. He dreaded the idea, but then, she looked so happy.

“Here,” she said, handing him a ledger, then fishing out another. “Look at goods received. Compare the dates and the payouts to the ledger! I’m going to study maintenance.”

He glanced toward the window in their door, half expecting Wayne to be out there in the hallway, snickering himself senseless at the prank. But Wayne was not there. This was no prank. Steris grabbed her own ledgers and attacked them with as much ferocity as a hungry man might a good steak.

Wax sighed, sat back, and started looking through the numbers.

THE
NEW ASCE
Vol. 6, No.220
NEW SERAN, 8th of CL

ALLOMANCER JAK
presents

## Nicki Savage, Paranatural Detective
in...

## The Constructs of Antiquity

When a thief steals a large map of New Seran, Ms. Savage is on the case. The map's secret pocket contains her father's parting gift to her, the location of a tribe of metal beings—the kalkis—lost creations of the Lord Ruler. Currently the only one keeping our daring debutante from the secrets of the Unknown Constructs of Antiquity is the magical burglar she calls the Haunted Man!

### *Part Two*
### "The Ghastly Gondola!"

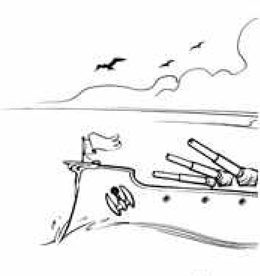
I arrived just as the gondola doors slammed shut and the whole conveyance lurched away. Behind the glass doors, the haunted man smiled, the green glow of his devices lighting him from below.

I ran alongside the car, matching pace with it while at the same time digging out my trusty little bottle of chromium for a quick swig. Warmth rose from my stomach to my throat, and so did my confidence.

As the car slid away from the dock, I leapt into the air.

*(Continued below the fold!)*

# BILMING'S NEW
# 'AMUSE' ELENDE



A week ago, Bilming's Lord Mayor Bastien Severington stood at the city's impressive harbor and greeted high-ranking officials and noblepersons of the Elendel Senate. Like the peaceable tortoise—symbol of Bilming's great city—Governor Severington's gracious invitation to Elendel's elite has been seen as a gesture of friendship and unity.

More impressive than the harbor are the rows of ships docked there. Most are the usual familiar clippers and cargo ships, but among them float metal beasts like sharks among turtles. These are the warships developed by Lord Mayor Severington and the late Dr. Florin Malin, predecessor to the Basin's current Minister of Science and Technology.

"Each ship carries eight 12-inch twin guns with each turret having a range of sixteen miles," said Severington. "Other improvements include reinfoced armor hulls, electrical rangefinders, and a top speed of 24 miles an hour. We call them Pewternauts."

But some members of Elendel's delegation were not impressed.

"What an amusing display of toys," said Senator Inis Julien. "Why do we need warships? The Basin is alone on land and on the seas. From whom do we need protection?"

*(Continued on back.)*

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## Broken Gondola Strands Passengers

An unidentified disturbance halted the Zinc Line yesterday evening about sunset, according to the New Seran Transportation Authority. The NSTA carried passengers home the old-fashioned way, on donkeys and rickshaws down the switchbacks. We see this as proof for the need of a back-up emergency transport system.

*(Continued on back.)*

Ø Drink to the Health of Elendel! Ø

NOW PLAYING!
at the Uptown Trio Theater
THE
DEN OF THE
SURVIVOR!

A crew of freedom fighters
**RISE UP AGAINST OPRESSION**
and
**OVERTHROW A CORRUPT GOV'T**

## The Ghastly Gondola!

The monks of Baz-Kor had trained me well, their practiced moves designed to get a leecher close enough to touch another Allomancer and drain them of their reserves. But it was the ballet lessons that enabled my jump from the platform onto the

# 6

Marasi stopped on the image of the monster.

It was evening; people chatted softly around her in the dining car, and the train rolled around a picturesque bend, but for a moment she was transfixed by that image. A sketch of violent, rough lines that somehow conveyed a terrible dread. Most of the pages in the stack VenDell had delivered contained transcripts of questions answered—or, more often, not answered—by the wounded kandra.

This was different. A wild sketch using two colors of pencil to depict a terrible visage. A burning red face, a distorted mouth, horns and spikes streaking out along the rim. But black eyes, drawn like voids on the red skin. It looked like a childhood terror ripped right out of a nightmare.

The bottom of the page had a caption. *ReLuur's sketch of the creature described on 8/7/342.* Yesterday.

The next page was an interview.

*VenDell: Describe to us again the thing you saw.*

*ReLuur: The beast.*

*VenDell: Yes, the beast. It guarded the bracers?*

*ReLuur: No. No! It was before. Fallen from the sky.*

*VenDell: The sky?*

*ReLuur: The darkness above. It is of the void. It has no eyes. It looks at me! It's looking at me now!*

*Further questioning was delayed for an hour as ReLuur whimpered in the corner, inconsolable. When he became responsive again, he drew this sketch without prompting, muttering about the* thing *he had seen. Something is wrong* *with the eyes of the creature. Perhaps spikes?*

Spikes. Marasi pulled her purse from under the table, digging into it as the couple at the table behind her laughed loudly, calling for more wine. Marasi pushed aside the two-shot pistol she had tucked inside and took out a thin book, a copy of the one that Ironeyes had given to Waxillium.

Inside it she found the description she wanted, words written by the Lord Mistborn, Lestibournes. *So far as I've been able to figure out, Hemalurgy can create practically anything by rewriting its Spiritual aspect. But hell, even the Lord Ruler had trouble getting it right. His koloss were great soldiers—I mean, they could eat* dirt *and stuff to stay alive—but they basically spent all day killing each other on a whim, and resented no longer being human. The kandra are better, but they turn to piles of goop if they don't have spikes—and they can't reproduce on their own.*

*I guess what I'm saying is that you shouldn't experiment too much with this aspect of Hemalurgy. It's basically useless; there are a million ways to mess up for every one way there is to get a good result. Stick to transferring powers and you'll be better off. Trust me.*

It was so *odd* to read the Lord Mistborn's words and have them sound so casual. This was the Survivor of the Flames, the governor who had ruled mankind in benevolence for a century, guiding them on the difficult path to rebuild civilization. He sounded so *normal*. He even admitted in one section to having Breeze, Counselor of Gods, write most of his speeches for him. So all of the famous words, quotes, and inscriptions attributed to the Lord Mistborn were fabrications.

Not that he was a fool. No, the book was full of insight. Disturbing insight. The Lord Mistborn advocated gathering the Metalborn who were elderly or terminally ill, then asking them to sacrifice themselves to make these … spikes, which could in turn be used to create individuals of great power.

He made a good argument in the book. It wouldn't have been so disturbing if it had been easy to dismiss.

She studied the descriptions of Hemalurgic experiments in the book, trying to ignore the loud couple behind her. Could this drawing be of a new kind of Hemalurgic monster, like those Wax had encountered under Elendel? Designed by the Set, or perhaps the result of a failed experiment? Or was this instead related to the continually ephemeral Trell, the god with an unknown metal?

She eventually put them aside and focused on her primary task. How to find ReLuur's spike? He'd been wounded in some kind of explosion that had ripped off part of his body, and he'd been forced to flee, leaving the flesh—

and the spike—behind.

Kandra flesh remained in its humanlike state once cut free of the body, so those cleaning up after the explosion would have simply disposed of it, right? She needed to see if they'd created some kind of mass grave for people killed in that explosion. Of course, if the Set knew what to look for in a kandra's corpse, they might have recovered the spike. The pictures—and the possibility they were experimenting with Hemalurgy—made that more plausible. So that was another potential lead. And …

And was that Wayne's voice? Marasi turned to look at the laughing couple behind her. Sure enough, Wayne had joined them, and was chatting amicably with the drunk pair, who wore fine evening attire. Wayne, as usual, was in Roughs trousers and suspenders, duster hung on the peg beside the table.

He saw Marasi and grinned, drinking a cup of the couple's wine before bidding them farewell. The train hit a sharp bump, causing plates to rattle on tables as Wayne slid into the seat across from Marasi, his face full of grin.

"Mooching wine?" Marasi asked.

"Nah," he said. "They're drinking bubbly. Can barely stand the stuff. *I'm* mooching accents. Those folks, they're from New Seran. Gotta get a feel for how people talk there."

"Ah. You do realize it's proper to remove your hat indoors, correct?"

"Sure do." He tipped his hat at her, then leaned back in his chair and somehow got his booted feet up on the small table. "What're *you* doin' in here?" he asked.

"The dining car?" Marasi asked. "I just wanted a place to spread out."

"Wax rented us out an entire *train car,* woman," Wayne said, pointing at a passing waiter, then pointing at his mouth and making a tipping motion. "We've got like six rooms or somethin' all to ourselves."

"Maybe I simply wanted to be around people."

"And we ain't people?"

"That is subject to some dispute in your case."

He grinned, then winked at her as the waiter finally stepped over.

"You wanted—" the waiter began.

"Liquor," Wayne said.

"Would you care to be a little more specific, sir?"

"*Lots* of liquor."

The waiter sighed, then glanced at Marasi, and she shook her head. "Nothing for me."

He moved off to obey. "No bubbly!" Wayne shouted after him, earning him more than one glare from the car's other occupants. He then turned to eye

Marasi. “So? Gonna answer my question? What’re you hidin’ from, Marasi?”

She sat for a moment, feeling the rhythmic rattle of the train’s motion. “Does it ever bother you to be in his shadow, Wayne?”

“Who? Wax? I mean, he’s been putting on weight, but he’s not *that* fat yet, is he?” He grinned, though that faded when she didn’t smile back. And, in an uncharacteristic moment of solemnity, he slid his boots off the table and rested one elbow on it instead, leaning toward her.

“Nah,” he said after some thought. “Nah, it doesn’t. But I don’t care much if people look at me or not. Sometimes my life is easier if they *ain’t* looking at me, ya know? I like listening.” He eyed her. “You’re sore that he thought you couldn’t do this on your own?”

“No,” she said. “But … I don’t know, Wayne. I studied law in the first place—studied famous lawkeepers—because I wanted to become something others thought I couldn’t. I got the job at the precinct, and thought I’d accomplished something, but Aradel later admitted he was first interested in hiring me because he wanted someone who could get close to, and keep an eye on, Waxillium.

“We both know the kandra wanted him on this mission, and they arranged the meeting with me to try to hook him. At the precinct, when I accomplish something, everyone assumes I had Waxillium’s help. Sometimes it’s like I’m no more than an *appendage*.”

“You’re not that at all, Marasi,” Wayne said. “You’re important. You help out a lot. Plus you smell nice, and not all bloody and stuff.”

“Great. I have no idea what you just said.”

“Appendages don’t smell nice,” Wayne said. “And they’re kinda gross. I cut one outta a fellow once.”

“You mean an appendix?”

“Sure.” He hesitated. “So…”

“Not the same thing.”

“Right. Thought you was makin’ a metaphor, since people don’t need one of those and all.”

Marasi sighed, leaning back and rubbing her eyes with the heels of her hands. Why was she discussing this with *Wayne* again?

“I understand,” he said. “I know what you’re feeling, Mara. Wax … he’s kind of overwhelming, eh?”

“It’s hard to fault him,” Marasi said. “He’s effective, and I don’t think he even knows that he’s being overbearing. He fixes things—why should I be upset about that? Rusts, Wayne, I *studied* his life, admiring what he did. I should feel lucky to be part of it. And I do, mostly.”

Wayne nodded. “But you want to be your own person.”

“Exactly!”

“Nobody’s forcing you to stay with us,” Wayne noted. “As I recall, Wax spent a lot of effort at first trying to keep you from always gettin’ involved.”

“I know, I know. I just … Well, this once I was thinking for a time that I might be able to do something important on my own.” She took a deep breath, then let it out. “It’s stupid, I know, but it still feels frustrating. We’ll do all this work, find that spike, and get back to the kandra—then they’ll thank Waxillium.”

Wayne nodded thoughtfully. “I knew this fellow once,” he said, leaning back again, feet on the table, “who thought it would be a good idea to take people huntin’. City folk, you know? Who ain’t never seen an animal larger than a rat what ate too much? Out in the Roughs, we got lions. Fierce things, with lotsa teeth an—”

“I know what a lion is, Wayne.”

“Right. Well, Chip—that’s his name—he got some broadsheets printed up, but borrowed some notes from his girl in order to do it. And so she thought she should get a piece of the money once he got people to pay for this trip. Well, the first money came in, and they got in a fight and she ended up stabbing him right in his holster, if you know what I mean. So he stumbles out into the street all bleedin’, and that’s where the constables found him and told him you can’t be killin’ no lions. There’s a law about it, see, as they’re some kind of noble natural treasure, or some such.

“Anyway, they took Chip and stuffed him in jail, where they slammed the bars—by accident—on his rusting fingers. Broke his hand up right good, and he can’t bend the tips of his fingers no more.”

His drink arrived—a bottle of whiskey and a small cup. He took it, telling the waiter to charge Waxillium, then poured some and settled back.

“Is that the end?” Marasi asked.

“What?” Wayne said. “You want *more* to happen to the poor fellow? Right sadistic of you, Marasi. Right sadistic.”

“I didn’t mean…” She took a deep breath. “Did that have any relevance to the situation I’m in?”

“Not really,” Wayne said, taking a drink, then removing a little wooden box from his pocket and getting out a ball of gum. “But I tell ya, Chip, he has it *really* bad. Whenever I’m thinkin’ my life is miserable, I remember him, and tell myself, ‘Well, Wayne. At least you ain’t a broke, dickless feller what can’t even pick his own nose properly.’ And I feels better.”

He winked at her, popped the gum in his mouth, then slipped away from the table. He waved to MeLaan, who was wearing a fine lace gown and oversized hat. A normal woman would have needed *quite* the corset to pull off the outfit, but the kandra had probably just sculpted her body to fit. Which was horribly unfair.

Marasi stared at the notes. Wayne had left her feeling confused, which was not unusual, but perhaps there was wisdom in what he said. She dug back into the research, but it wasn't too long before she started to droop. It was getting late, the sun having fully set outside, and they wouldn't arrive for another few hours. So she packed up the stack of pages inside their large folder.

As she did, something slipped out of the folder. Marasi frowned, holding it up. A small cloth pouch. Opening it revealed a small Pathian earring and a note.

*Just in case, Waxillium.*

She yawned, tucking it away, and pushed out of the dining car. The private car Waxillium had hired for them was two cars back, at the tail end of the train. She held tight to the sheets as she stepped onto the open-air platform between cars, wind whipping at her. A short railman stood here, and eyed her as she crossed to the next car. He didn't say anything this time, though last time he'd tried to encourage her not to move between cars, insisting that he'd bring her food if she wished.

The next car over was first-class, with a row of private rooms on one side. Marasi passed electric lights glowing on the walls as she crossed the car. Last time she'd been on a train, those had been gas, with bright, steady mantles. She liked progress, but these seemed much less reliable—they'd waver when the train slowed, for example.

She crossed to the final car, then passed her own room and walked toward the room where Waxillium and Steris had taken dinner, to check on them. Both were still there, surprisingly. Waxillium she had expected, but late nights were not Steris's thing.

Marasi slid open the door, peeking in. "Waxillium?"

The man knelt on the floor, his seat covered in ledgers and sheets of paper. Eyes intent on one of them, he held up his hand toward her in a quieting gesture as she started to ask what he was doing.

Marasi frowned. Why—

"Aha!" Waxillium proclaimed, standing up. "I found it!"

"What?" Steris said. "Where?"

"Tips."

"I looked in tips."

"One of the dockworkers turned the request in late," Waxillium said, grabbing a sheet and spinning it toward Steris. “He tipped a dock boy four clips to run a message for him, and asked for reimbursement. Dockmaster gave it to him, and filed a note, but he wrote the four like a three and the accountants recorded it that way.”

Steris looked it over with wide eyes. “You bastard,” she said, causing Marasi to blink. She’d *never* heard language like that from Steris. “How did you figure this out?”

Waxillium grinned, folding his arms. “Wayne would say it’s because I’m brilliant.”

“Wayne has the mental capacity of a fruit fly,” Steris said. “In comparison to him, anyone is brilliant. I…” She trailed off, noticing Marasi for the first time. She blinked, and her expression became more reserved. “Marasi. Welcome. Would you like to sit?”

“On what?” Marasi asked. Every surface was covered in ledgers and pages. “The luggage rack? Are those house *finances*?”

“I found a lost clip,” Waxillium said. “The last one, I should add, which gives me two for the evening, while Steris found one.”

Marasi stared at Steris, who started clearing a place for her to sit. She looked to Waxillium, who stood beaming with the sheet in his hand, looking it over again as if it were some lost metal he’d rescued from a labyrinth.

“A lost clip,” Marasi said. “Great. Maybe you can find something in these.” She held up the pages VenDell had given her. “I’m heading to bed for a few hours.”

“Hmm?” Waxillium said. “Oh, sure. Thanks.” He set down the page with some reluctance, taking the folder.

“Be sure to look at the drawings of monsters,” Marasi said, yawning. “Oh, and this was in there.” She tossed him the pouch with the earring and walked back into the hallway.

She walked toward her room, feeling the train slow once more. Another town? Or were there sheep crossing the tracks again? They were supposed to be getting into the part of the route that was the prettiest. Too bad it would be so dark out.

She walked back to her door, first of those in their car, and glanced out the front window toward the rest of the train, which she was surprised to see moving off into the distance. She gaped for a moment, and then the door at the other end of the car burst open.

The man standing on the platform beyond leveled a gun down the corridor and fired.

# 7

“Well, I think you showed a real talent for this, Lord Waxillium, as I believe *I* suggested—”

Wax stopped listening to Steris.

Train slowing.

Chugging sounds retreating.

Door opening.

Wax burned steel.

Steris continued talking, and he nodded absently, part of him going through the motions as the rest of him came alert. He heard a click and Pushed to his left and held it, Pushing to the right against the frame of the train car to keep himself from moving.

As the bullet passed in the hallway outside, his Push—already in place—slammed it sideways into the wall.

*Go.* His Push had shoved open the door. He dropped the earring—damn that VenDell—and Pushed to the right, on the train car’s metal window frame. This launched him out to the left, streaking into the hallway. He rammed into the wall where he’d Pushed the bullet, Vindication in hand, and drilled the surprised man at the end of the hallway in the forehead.

Marasi clipped off a scream. Steris stuck her head out into the hallway, wide-eyed. Not the smartest move, but she’d rarely been in gunfights.

“Thanks,” Marasi said.

He nodded curtly. “Get your sister behind some cover.” He slipped past her and stepped out onto the small platform between train cars—only, their car had been unhooked and left to drift. A group of three shocked-looking men on horses rode alongside the slowing car.

*Horses?* Wax thought. *Really?*

By the starlight—which was bright tonight, with no clouds and the Red Rip low on the horizon—he could see they wore vests over their shirts and sturdy trousers. A larger crowd of them galloped alongside the train ahead. This wasn't a specific attack on just his car, but a full-blown armed robbery.

That meant he had to be quick.

He shoved on the platform beneath him and decreased his weight. The three robbers nearby started firing, but Wax's Push flung him into the air above their shots and his decreased weight meant that the wind resistance pushed him backward, onto the train car. He landed, increased his weight, and picked one man off his horse.

The remaining bandits took off forward, kicking their horses and chasing after the others, yelling, "Allomancer! Allomancer!"

*Blast,* Wax thought, dropping one of the men as the other dodged his horse into a stand of trees. He was out of pistol range in a moment, and would soon catch his fellows.

Wax dropped onto the platform and rushed down the hallway. The room he'd shared with Steris was empty, but he spotted quivering blue lines in the one next door. Marasi had wisely piled everyone into the servants' compartment.

"Robbery," Wax said as he threw open the door, startling the servants, Marasi, and Steris. Most of them sat on the floor, though Marasi was by the window, peeking out. And Steris was on the built-in seat, remarkably composed.

"Robbers?" Steris asked. "Really, Lord Waxillium, *must* you bring your hobbies with you everywhere we go?"

"They're going after the rest of the train," Wax said, pointing. "The first thieves must have recognized this car as a private one, probably lush with riches to plunder, and so they uncoupled it. But something is wrong."

"Other than people trying to kill us?" Marasi asked.

"No," Steris said, "in my experience, that's quite normal."

"What's *wrong,*" Wax said, "is that they're riding horses."

The others stared at him.

"Horseback train robberies," Wax said, "are something out of the story magazines. Nobody *actually* does that. What good does it do to board a moving train, risking your life, when you can just stop the vehicle like the Vanishers did?"

"So our bad guys…" Marasi said.

“New to this,” Wax said. “Or they’ve been reading too much cheap fiction. Either way, they’re still going to be dangerous. I can’t risk leaving you here, in case they come back for you. So keep your heads down and *hang on*.”

“Hang on?” Herve said. “Why—”

Wax ducked back out into the hallway and ran to the back end of the car. After checking out the doorway, he jumped onto the tracks behind the private car, which was finally rolling to a stop. Then he tapped his metalminds and increased his weight.

A lot.

The gravel sank under his feet as his body became increasingly heavy. He gritted his teeth, flared his metal, and *Pushed*.

The car lurched in place as if another train had crashed into it. His Push sent it rattling along the tracks, and Wax let out his breath. His muscles didn’t hurt, but he felt as if he’d slammed into a wall.

He released his metalmind, returning his weight to normal, and Pushed on the rails to pull himself out of the gravel. He almost lost a boot in the process.

He Pushed against the tracks once more, sending himself chasing after the moving car. *Not nearly fast enough*, he thought as he dropped to the ground and increased his weight again. The car rocked as he shoved it, then he hopped and followed, repeating the process three more times to get it up to speed. Then finally he Pushed himself all the way up to it, jamming his shoulder against the back wall and using Allomancy on the tracks behind to sustain and increase the momentum.

Ground passed behind in a blur, rows and rows of wooden ties, the steel rails with a continuous stream of metal lines that pointed toward Wax’s chest. He groaned, and moved so his back was toward the wall. Still, the Pushing threatened to crush him, as he couldn’t increase his weight here much or risk ripping up the tracks.

They shot past a group of horses with a few youths guarding them—the bandits’ extra mounts. Wax raised Vindication and fired a few shots into the air, but the horses were too well trained to spook at the sound.

He redoubled his Push as he thought he heard gunfire ahead of him. A moment later, his car slammed into the train proper. Wax let go, dropping to the platform, his back aching. The couplers had engaged, however, and the car remained attached to the rest of the train.

He peeked into the car, then ducked in, passing the room where the others were hiding. In his own compartment, he dropped Vindication into her holster, then yanked his gun case off the top rack.

“Waxillium?” Marasi said, slipping into the room.

“You seen Wayne?” Wax asked.

“He was in the dining car a little bit ago.”

“He’ll be fighting already. If you see him, let him know I’m going to hit the front of the train, then sweep backward.” Wax snapped one Sterrion closed, now loaded, then reached for the second.

“Got it,” Marasi said. She hesitated. “You’re worried.”

“No masks.”

“No…”

“Robbers wear masks,” Wax said. He clicked the second Sterrion closed, then buckled on his gunbelt. Vindication, after a reload, went back into his shoulder holster.

“And men who don’t wear masks?”

“They don’t care if they’re seen.” He looked over and met her eyes. “They’re already outlaws, and don’t have anything to lose. Men like that kill easily. What’s more, it’s obvious to me that they’ve never tried a train robbery before. Either they are very, very desperate—or someone put them up to this.”

She paled. “You don’t think the attack is a coincidence.”

“If it is, I’ll eat Wayne’s hat.” He eyed the shotgun Ranette had given him, then tied on his thigh holster and slipped it in. Then he hung two of her cord-and-sphere contraptions from his gunbelt. Finally, he reached up and took a rifle bag off the top shelf and tossed it to Marasi.

“Watch Steris,” he said. “See if you can find Wayne; check on the next car or two, but don’t worry about advancing farther if you meet resistance. Just hold your ground and protect these people.”

“Right.”

He moved toward the hallway, but as soon as he stepped out a hail of gunfire drove him back again. He cursed. All it would take was one aluminum bullet—which he couldn’t Push on—and he’d be dead.

He took a deep breath, then glanced out quickly while Pushing, and counted four bandits on the rear platform of the next car forward.

They fired again. He ducked back and watched the blue lines of bullets as they flew, taking chunks of wood paneling off the wall and splintering his doorframe. It didn’t appear that any of the bullets were aluminum.

“Distraction?” Marasi asked.

“Yes, please,” Wax said, increasing his weight and Pushing on the window frame, launching it out of the side of the car and against a passing tree. “Fire a few times as I leave, then give me a count of twenty, followed by a distraction.”

“Will do.”

Wax threw himself out the window. Immediately he fired Vindication downward, burying a bullet in the ground and giving him something to Push on to launch himself upward. Marasi fired a few quick shots inside, and hopefully the robbers would assume his shot had been inside as well.

Soaring high, wind whipping at his hair and suit coat, he shot a second bullet into the ground, but farther out, and used it to nudge himself to the right—placing him above the train.

He didn't let himself touch down, instead using a Push on the nails in the train roof to keep flying forward. He soared over his own car and the one the robbers were in, finally landing on the dining car, which was third from the back.

As he turned to face the rear, his mental count hit twenty. A second later, he heard a spray of gunfire coming from Marasi. That was his mark; Wax dropped between the dining car and the robbers' car.

He fell practically on top of one of the robbers, who was backing out of the second car from the end—which he hadn't expected. Wax leveled his gun, but the surprised man punched him in the gut.

Wax grunted, increasing his weight. The platform beneath him strained, but when he shoved the robber with his shoulder, it sent the man tumbling toward the tracks. The robber had kindly left the door open for him, and he had a clean shot at the backs of his fellows at the far end, who were focused on Marasi in the last train car beyond.

Wax didn't shoot; he just Pushed on the metal they were carrying. The men flipped off the rear platform, dropping into the space between cars. One caught the railing. Wax shot him in the arm, then turned, leveling his gun toward the dining car.

People cringed inside, hiding under tables, whimpering. Rusts … Without bandanas or identifying marks to watch for, he'd have trouble spotting the bandits. He set up his steel bubble, a faint Push away from himself in all directions that excluded his own weapons. It was far from perfect—he'd been shot several times while using it—but it did help.

He turned and strode into the second car from the back, the one the robbers had been using, checking for hostiles at each door, his steel bubble rattling doorknobs. First-class passengers were hiding here, and none appeared hurt.

In Wax's car, Marasi ducked out of the room, carrying one of Wax's favorite hats. She shrugged apologetically at its numerous holes.

"If I find Wayne, I'll send him to you," he told her, reaching to his gunbelt for a metal vial. He came up with wet fingers, and his belt clinked with broken glass.

Damn. The robber who'd slugged him had broken his vials. He hurriedly hopped over the space between cars, entering their private car again. "I need metal," he explained at Marasi's inquisitive look.

He stepped up to his room, then hesitated as a hand stuck out of the next room down, holding a small vial.

"Steris?" he said, walking to her. She was still sitting on the plush train bench—though her face was paler than before. "Steel flakes in suspension," she said, wiggling the vial.

"Since when have you carried one of these?" Wax asked, taking it from her.

"Since about six months ago. I put one into my purse in case you might need it." She raised her other hand, displaying two more. "I carry the other two because I'm neurotic."

He grinned, taking all three. He downed the first one, then nearly choked. "What the hell is in this?"

"Other than steel?" Steris asked. "Cod-liver oil."

He looked at her, gaping.

"Whiskey is bad for you, Lord Waxillium. A wife *must* look out for her husband's health."

He sighed and drank one more, then tucked the last into his gunbelt. "Stay safe. I'm going to scout the train." He left and threw himself out the end door, Pushing on the tracks and launching himself in a high arc upward.

The land spread before him, bathed in starlight. The southern end of the Basin, approaching the Seran mountain range, was far more varied in geography than the northern portion. Here, hills rolled across the land, which slowly increased in elevation.

The Seran River cut a strikingly straight path through the hills, often having carved out gorges and canyons. The train line stayed up higher, hugging the tops of hillsides, though its path required it to cut two or three times across the river on large latticework bridges.

The train consisted of eight passenger cars, several cargo cars, and a dining car. He let himself drop, focusing on a specific car near the front where gunshots sounded. As he landed just behind that car, someone stumbled out onto the platform, holding his face.

*Armed bank guard,* he thought, noting the man's uniform. The train was bringing a payroll shipment inside a courier car disguised as if carrying a more mundane cargo. What was that scent in the air? Formaldehyde? The guard was gasping, and soon another stumbled out after him.

Both fell a moment later to gunfire from inside the courier car. Wax dropped down onto the platform beside the fallen men, checking on them. One was still moving; Wax knelt and moved the man's hand to cover the hole in his shoulder. "Press hard," he said over the sounds of the thumping track. "I'll be back for you."

The man nodded weakly. Wax took a deep breath and stepped into the courier car, where his eyes immediately started burning. Men moved inside, wearing strange masks and working at a large safe in the center. Half a dozen dead guards lay strewn across the floor of the car.

Wax started shooting, flooring several of the robbers, then Pushed himself out again, then upward as the others took cover and started firing back. He landed on the car behind the courier car, holstered Vindication—who was out of bullets—and brought out a Sterrion.

He prepared to drop down to try picking off more robbers, but an explosion inside the courier car interrupted him. It was a small blast, as explosions went, but it still left Wax's ears ringing. He winced and dropped to the platform, noticing figures moving in the smoke, stooping beside the safe, removing its contents. Others started firing at him.

He ducked to the side, then Pushed the door to the courier car closed, blocking the gunfire with the reinforced metal door. He grabbed the wounded guard under the arms and pulled him backward over the small gap between platforms and into the passenger car behind. This was another car with private compartments, though second-class, where those rooms had been filled with larger groups.

It was currently empty; the passengers, hearing the gunfire in the next car, had fled down the train. He checked each room anyway. Afterward, he propped the wounded man against the wall inside one of the rooms and tied a handkerchief around the wound, pulling it tight.

"The money…" the guard said.

"They've got the money," Wax replied. "Stopping them isn't worth risking any more lives."

"But…"

"I got a good look at several of them," Wax said, "and hopefully so did you. We'll give descriptions, chase them down, set a trap on *our* terms. Besides, if they leave now, there might be time to help a few of your friends in there."

The guard nodded weakly. "Couldn't stop them. They threw bottles through the windows.… And then the doors ripped off. Steel doors, Pushed into the room, twisted off their hinges like they were paper…"

Wax felt a chill. So the bandits had Metalborn too. Wax peeked around the wall back toward the courier car, and found the door he'd closed open again. A thin man stood on the platform, wearing a long coat and supporting himself on a cane. He gestured, speaking urgently and motioning for another bandit to lumber toward Wax's car—a hulking brute who had to be almost seven feet tall.

Wonderful. "Get in here," Wax said to the guard, pulling open the luggage compartment in the room's floor. "Keep your head down."

The guard crawled into the compartment, which was cramped and shallow, but large enough for a person, even with a few pieces of luggage in it. Wax pulled out both Sterrions, crouching in the doorway of the private room. The train continued to rock, going around a bend. The thing hadn't stopped. Did the engineer not know about the attack, or was he hoping to get to the next town?

Rusts, the courier car changed all of Wax's assessments. Maybe this *wasn't* about him. But why not simply stop the train and raid it in the wilderness? Too many questions, and no time to answer them. He had a bandit to kill. He'd have to jump out and surprise the brute, bring him down quick. If he was the Metalborn, surprise would be—

Something bounced down the hallway and came to a rest on the floor beside Wax, just outside the doorway in which he crouched. A small metal cube. He jumped back, fearing an explosive, but nothing happened. What had that been?

And then he realized with a deep, bone-chilling horror that he was no longer burning metal. There was nothing inside of him *to* burn.

His steel reserves had—somehow—vanished.

* * *

Marasi fired three shots with the rifle, driving the bandits in the next car back under cover. *Impressive,* she thought, absently handing the weapon to Steris for reloading. She'd always used a target rifle before. You took one shot at a time with those, cocking between, but Waxillium's rifle had a wheel full of cartridges that turned on its own, like a revolver.

Steris handed back the gun, and Marasi took aim again, waiting for any bandit bits to peek out. She hid just inside the door to the servants' compartment, and the bandits hadn't made any serious attempts at advancing on her position.

Someone said something beside her. Marasi glanced into the room, where Drewton was speaking. Marasi pulled out one of her wax earplugs.

"What?" she asked.

"Are those earplugs?" the valet asked.

"What do they look like?" she said, then sighted down the rifle and fired a shot.

Drewton shoved his hands over his ears. Indeed, in the small chamber, the shot was loud enough that she was annoyed he'd made her remove her earplug.

"You carry them with you?" Drewton asked.

"Steris does." Apparently. Marasi had been a little surprised when Steris had pulled out a pair for herself, then—an unconcerned look on her face—handed a pair to Marasi.

"So you *expected* this to happen?"

"More or less," Marasi said, watching for movement from the bandits.

He seemed aghast. "This sort of thing happens *often*?"

"Would you say it happens often, Steris?" Marasi asked.

"Hmm?" Steris said, removing an earplug. "What was that?"

Marasi fired a shot, then looked up. *Think I winged that one.* "The valet wants to know if this sort of thing happens often to us."

"You more than me," Steris said conversationally. "But when Lord Waxillium is around, things *do* tend to pop up."

"Things?" Drewton said. "Pop up? This is a rusting train robbery!"

Steris regarded the valet with a cool expression. "Didn't you inquire about your prospective master before entering Lord Waxillium's employ?"

"Well, I mean, I *knew* he had an interest in the constabulary. Like some lords have an interest in the symphony, or in civic matters. It seemed odd, but not ungentlemanly. I mean, it's not as if he was involved in the *theater*."

*They've gone quiet over there,* Marasi thought, nervously tapping one finger against the rifle barrel. Were they going to try to cross over onto the top of her car again? One of the holes in the ceiling still dripped blood from the previous attempt.

To the side, Steris clicked her tongue disapprovingly at Drewton's words. He hadn't done his homework, which was a dreadful sin in Steris's eyes. Little could be worse than entering a situation without being *thorough*.

"Is … is he going to come back?" Drewton asked.

"Once he's finished," Steris said.

"Finished with what?"

"Killing the rest of them, hopefully," she said.

Marasi found herself surprised at Steris's bloodthirst. Of course, the woman hadn't been *quite* the same since her kidnapping eighteen months back. It wasn't that Steris acted traumatized—but she'd changed.

“They aren’t trying to get to us anymore,” Drewton said. “Did they retreat?”

“Maybe,” Marasi said. *Probably not.*

“Should we go look?” Drewton asked.

“We?”

“Well, you.” He tugged at his collar. “Gunfights. I had not actually expected gunfights. Aren’t the servants usually left out of such extravagances?”

“Most of the time,” Marasi said.

“Except when the house blew up,” Steris added.

“Except then.”

“And … you know,” Steris said.

“Best not to mention it.”

“Mention what?” Drewton asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” Marasi said, glaring at Steris. Honestly. If the man couldn’t do a little research before taking a job—

“Wait,” Drewton said, frowning. “What exactly happened to Lord Ladrian’s *previous* valet?”

Motion in the hallway again. Marasi snapped her rifle up, ready to fire. However, the person who moved out into the hallway wasn’t one of the bandits, but an older woman in a fine traveling dress. A bandit walked behind her, gun to her head.

Marasi shot him right in the forehead.

She gaped, shocked at herself, and almost dropped the gun. Fortunately the remaining bandit—seeing that the ploy hadn’t worked—ran out of the car, fleeing toward the front of the train.

Rusts! Marasi felt sweat trickle down her temple. She’d fired so quickly, without even thinking. The poor hostage stood there, blood from the dead man all over her. Marasi knew what that felt like. Yes, she did.

Beside her, Drewton let out a few oaths that would have made Harmony blush. “What were you thinking?” he demanded of her. “You could have hit the woman.”

“Statistics … Statistics say…” Marasi took a deep breath. “Shut up.”

“Huh?”

*“Shut up.”* She stood, holding the gun in nervous hands, and made her way into the next car.

The woman had found her husband—alive, fortunately—and was crying in his arms. Marasi stood over the bandit corpse, then looked back out at the roof of her car, where another one lay. She *hated* this part. A year and a half working with Waxillium hadn’t made killing any easier. It was unnerving, and it was such a waste! If you had to shoot a man, society had already failed.

Marasi steeled herself and did a quick check of the rooms of the first-class car, determining that the bandits had well and truly retreated. One of the first-class passengers claimed to have experience with a gun, and she handed him the rifle and set him watching to be certain no bandits returned.

From there she went to the dining car, checking on the passengers, calming them. Gunshots came from farther up the train. Waxillium was doing his job. His effective, *brutal* job. The next car up—fourth from the end—was a second-class car, with packed rooms. She checked on the people here too.

Between the two cars, she found four people who had been shot. One was dead, another seriously wounded, so Marasi went to see if Steris had, by chance, brought any bandages or medical equipment. The chances were slim, but this *was* Steris. Who knew what she had planned for?

Marasi passed Drewton, who sat morosely on a seat in one of the first-class cabins, obviously wondering how an expert cravat-tier had ended up in the middle of a virtual war zone. Steris, however, wasn’t in the servants’ compartment. Nor was she in the one she had been sharing with Waxillium.

Increasingly frantic, Marasi searched through the first-class rooms. No Steris. Finally, she thought to ask the man she’d posted on guard.

“Her?” he said. “Yes, miss. She went by here a few minutes ago, moving up the train. Should I have stopped her? She seemed very determined about something.”

Marasi groaned. Steris must have slipped past while she was checking in the rooms of the second-class car. Frustrated, she took her rifle back and chased after her sister.

* * *

Wax’s metal reserves were gone.

Wax knelt, completely stunned. This was impossible. How in Harmony’s name?

He twisted, discovering that the enormous bandit had stepped into this car. Doors rattled around the man, shaking as if someone were trying violently to get out. Wax ducked into the hallway and lifted his gun, but it was flipped from his fingers by a Push. Immediately after, Wax *himself* was shoved backward by his gunbelts. He slammed into the opposite wall of the car, right next to the closed door leading toward the back of the train.

He groaned in pain. How? How had they…?

He shook his head, then heaved against the wall, using his breakaway buckles to rip free of his gunbelts. He dropped to the floor, leaving his guns and the metal vial stuck to the wall as the brute loped toward him.

Wax dodged under the man's first swing and delivered a punch right into the man's side. It felt like punching a steel wall. He danced backward, but rusts, it had been years since he'd gotten into a real fistfight—and he was slower than he'd once been. The giant's next right hook caught him as he tried to jab for the face.

His vision flashed, and his cheek erupted in pain. The blow shoved him into the side wall. *Rusts!* Where was Wayne? The brute came in again, and Wax dodged to the side, barely, and managed to connect with the man's face. Once, twice, three quick jabs.

The brute smiled. Doors still rattled around him—he was a Coinshot, obviously, Pushing out with a bubble like the one Wax used. It even pressed a little on the metalminds Wax wore on his upper arms, which were resistant to Allomancy.

This man could have ended the fight at any moment by grabbing a bit of metal and shooting it. He *preferred* the hand-to-hand fight. Indeed, the man raised his fists and nodded to Wax, still grinning, inviting him to come in for another round.

*To hell with that.*

Wax turned and slammed his shoulder against a door into an empty second-class compartment and made for the window.

"Hey!" the man said behind him. *"Hey!"*

Wax leaped at the window and increased his weight. He hit the window shoulder-first, arms covering his face, and smashed through—then barely managed to catch the bottom window frame as he fell outside.

Fingers dripping blood from the broken glass, he pulled himself up, stood on the windowsill, and scaled the outside of the train, finally heaving himself onto the roof. Wind rushed around him, and he was shocked to see that he wasn't alone up here. Ahead about four cars, a group of armed men pressed toward the front of the train, bearing something large and seemingly heavy. What in the name of the lost metal was that?

"Hey!" the large bandit said again as he climbed the side of the car.

Wax sighed, then kicked the man in the face as he tried to pull himself onto the top. The man growled. Wax kicked him again, then stomped on one of his hands. The man glared at Wax, then dropped back down to the window and climbed inside.

*You can beat anybody,* Wayne always said, *so long as you don't let them fight back properly.*

Wax moved to the center of the train car. He felt he should be chasing down those men up ahead. But he was unarmed now, and the Coinshot below was bound to pester him.

*You have what you wanted,* he thought at the robbers. *Why are you still fighting?*

The brute's head appeared a moment later, peeking over the lip of the car's roof, near the rear platform, which had a ladder. Wax rushed him, preparing to kick again, but the brute climbed up too quickly. He was holding something.

One of Wax's gunbelts. Damn.

The man grinned, stepping onto the rooftop, pulling Ranette's enormous shotgun out and dropping the gunbelt. Beneath them, the train shot out of the forest and rolled toward an open bridge rising hundreds of feet above the river below.

The brute raised the shotgun as if to fire from the hip.

*Excellent.*

Wax dove for the rooftop as the brute pulled the trigger, and the massive kick Ranette had built into the gun took him entirely by surprise. The weapon ripped out of his fingers, jerking backward and falling down between the cars. The man howled, cradling his hand.

Wax tackled him in the chest. The man grunted, stumbling backward, but caught himself before he toppled off the train. Wax didn't care.

He was after the gunbelt, which had fallen at the man's feet. He snatched it with fingers still wet with blood. It held Ranette's two cord devices, along with a single, glorious metal vial.

Wax yanked it out, tucking the gunbelt into his waistband. However, the vial lurched in his fingers. He snatched it, holding on tightly, but the brute's Push sent him backward across the train's roof in a skid. He slipped and fell to his knees, catching the side of the train.

The Coinshot kept Pushing. Wax clung to the rooftop with his left hand, but his right arm—which held the metal vial—strained in its socket. The brute smiled and started walking forward. Each step closer let him Push harder.

Wax gritted his teeth. The cuts on his fingers were superficial, though they stung like hell and the blood made his grip slippery. He struggled, trying to pull the vial toward his mouth, but failed.

Ranette's sphere devices. They hung from the gunbelt tucked into his waist. Could he use those? How? Beneath him, the train started across the bridge.

The thug advanced on Wax, rolling his shoulder and trying to make a fist despite his broken thumb. Behind the man something moved on the ladder. A head coming up? Wayne!

No. He saw the tip of a gun wave as the person climbed. Wayne wouldn't have a gun. Marasi?

Steris appeared at the lip of the roof, wind blowing her hair wildly. She looked from the huge robber to Wax, then seemed to gasp—though the wind was too loud for Wax to hear it. She scrambled up and set herself, crouching on one knee, holding Ranette's shotgun.

Oh no.

"Steris!" he shouted.

The brute spun, noticing her as she set the gun at her shoulder, wide-eyed, dress rippling against her body in the wind.

She pulled the trigger. Unsurprisingly, the shot went wild, but it did manage to clip the brute in the arm, spraying blood. The man grunted, releasing his Push on Wax.

Unfortunately, the enormous kick of that gun—intended to be used to fight Allomancers—hurled Steris backward.

And right off the side of the train.

# 8

Wax leaped off the side of the train and raised the vial to his mouth.

Steris toppled below, falling toward the river. He ripped the cork free with his teeth and turned over in the air, sucking down the contents of the vial. Cod-liver oil and metal flakes washed into his mouth. Swallowing took a precious moment.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

*Power.*

Wax shouted, flaring steel and Pushing on the tracks up above. He shot downward in a blur, slamming into Steris, grabbed her, and Pushed on the shotgun that toppled beneath her.

It hit the water.

They slowed immediately. Water viscosity being what it was, you could Push off something sinking. A second later, the shotgun hit the bottom of the churning river, and that left the two of them hanging about two feet above the water's surface. A faint, solitary blue line led from Wax to the shotgun.

Steris breathed in short, frantic gasps. She clung to him, blinked, then looked down at the river.

"What is *wrong* with that gun!" she said.

"It's meant for me to shoot," Wax said, "when my weight is increased to counteract the kick." He looked up toward the disappearing train. It had crossed the river, but now would have to slow and chug its way down some switchbacks on a hill on the other side, coming out of the highlands to head on toward New Seran.

“Hold this,” he told Steris, handing her his gunbelt and removing the two spheres. “What were you thinking? I told you to stay back in the other car.”

“As a point of fact,” she said, “you did *not*. You told me to stay safe.”

“So?”

“So, it has been my experience that the safest place in a gunfight is near you, Lord Waxillium.”

He grunted. “Hold your breath.”

“What? Why should I—”

She yelped as he Pushed on the steel bridge supports nearby, plunging them down into the river. Ice-cold water surrounded them as Wax kept Pushing, plunging downward until he reached his gun—easily located by its blue line—settled into the muck on the bottom. Ears throbbing from the pressure, he snatched the gun, replacing it with one of Ranette’s sphere devices, then Pushed.

They popped back out of the river, trailing water, and Wax Pushed them as high as his anchor would allow and handed Steris the shotgun to hold. From there, he Pushed off one of the support beams below—launching them upward and to the side. A Push on one from the other direction sent them bounding upward the other way, and he was able to work them toward the top of the bridge.

The angle of these Pushes had sent them out away from the tracks, unfortunately. When they soared up past the bridge, he needed to sling Ranette’s other sphere device out—getting it into a small gap between bridge struts. He engaged the hooks, so that the Push from below, combined with the taut cord in his hand, swung him and Steris in an arc.

He landed on the tracks, a soggy Steris in one arm, cord in the other. He could imagine Ranette’s grin as he told her how well the thing had worked. He disengaged the hooks and yanked the device back into his hand, though he had to wind the cord manually.

Steris’s teeth chattered audibly, and he glanced at her as he finished winding, expecting to see her frightened and miserable. Instead, despite being dripping wet, she had a stupid grin on her face, eyes alight with excitement.

Wax couldn’t help smiling himself as he stowed Ranette’s sphere and tied on his gunbelt, then shoved his shotgun into the holster. “Remember, you’re not supposed to find things like that fun, Steris. You’re *supposed* to be boring. I have it on good authority from this woman I know.”

“A tone-deaf man,” Steris said, “can still enjoy a good choir—even if he could never participate.”

“Not buying the act, my dear,” Wax said. “Not any longer. You just climbed on top of a moving train car and shot a bandit, rescuing your fiancé.”

“It behooves a woman,” she said, “to show an interest in her husband’s hobbies. Though I suppose I should be outraged, as this is the second dunking you’ve given me in a very short period of time, Lord Waxillium.”

“I thought you said the first one wasn’t my fault.”

“Yes, but this was twice as cold. So it evens out.”

He smiled. “You want to wait here, or join me?”

“Um … join you?”

He nodded to the left. Far below, the train hit the end of its switchbacks down the hillside, leveling out to approach the final bend before heading southward. Her eyes opened wider, then she grabbed him in a tight grip.

“When we land,” he said, “keep your head down and find a place to hide.”

“Got it.”

He took a deep breath, then launched them high in a powerful arc through the night air. They sailed across the river, coming down like a bird of prey toward the front of the train.

Wax slowed himself and Steris with a careful Push on the engine, setting down atop the coal tender. Inside the cab right in front of them, a bandit held a gun to the engineer’s head. Wax let go of Steris, then spun around and pumped the shotgun—popping the expended shells into the air—and Pushed on the shells, sending them through the back of the engine cab and right into the bandit’s head. She dropped, falling on the engine controls.

Wax was nearly thrown off as the train lurched, slowing down. He spun, grabbing Steris by the arm. To his right, the startled engineer grabbed the lever, smoothing out the deceleration. Holding Steris to him, Wax leaped with a short Push into the open rear of the engine, where they landed beside the engineer and the dead bandit.

“What are they doing?” he asked, dropping Steris, then kneeling and taking the dead bandit’s pistol.

“They have some device,” the engineer said, frantic, pointing. “They’re installing it between the coal tender and the first car. Shot my fireman when he tried to defend me, the bastards!”

“Where’s the next town?”

“Ironstand! We’re getting close. Few more minutes.”

“Get us there as quickly as you can, and call for some surgeons and the local constables the moment we arrive.”

The man nodded frantically. Wax closed his eyes and took a deep breath to orient himself.

*The final push. Here we go.*

* * *

Halfway through the train, Marasi had reason to curse Waxillium Ladrian. Well, *another* reason. She added it to the list.

Though she was supposed to be finding Steris, she spent most of her time being mobbed by worried passengers who needed soothing. Apparently the bandits had quickly worked their way through the second- and third-class cars, shaking people down for what little money they had. The people were terrified, upset, and looking for anyone with a hint of authority to comfort them.

Marasi did her best, settling them onto benches, checking to see if any more people were seriously wounded. She helped bandage a young man who had stood up to a bandit, and now bore a shot in the side as a result. He might make it.

Passengers had seen Steris come through here. Marasi tried to contain her worry and peeked into the next car in the line. It was deserted save for one passenger standing calmly at the far end, cane in hand, blocking the passage.

Marasi checked the various rooms as she entered, rifle held at the ready, but spotted no bandits. This was the last car before the cargo cars—which, oddly, were at the front of this train. This car's interior showed its share of bullet holes in the woodwork, suggesting Waxillium had been here.

"Sir?" Marasi asked, hastening to the lone man. He was slender, and younger than she'd expected him to be from behind, considering how his posture slumped, and how he relied upon the cane to keep him upright. "Sir, it's not safe for you here. You should move to the rear cars."

He turned toward her with raised eyebrows. "I am always inclined to obey the wishes of a pretty woman," he said. She could see that he kept one hand stiff at his side, fingers closed as if clutching something. "But what of you, miss? Is there no danger to you?"

"I can care for myself," Marasi said, noting that the next car in line was crowded with corpses. She felt sick.

"Indeed!" the man said. "You look quite capable. Quite capable indeed." He leaned in. "Are you more than you appear, perhaps? A Metalborn?"

Marasi frowned at the odd question. She'd taken a dose of cadmium, of course—for all the good it would do. Her Allomancy was generally something to laugh at; she could slow down time in a bubble around herself, which meant speeding it up for everyone else.

A wonderful power if you were bored and waiting for the play to start. But it wasn't of so much use in combat, where you'd be left frozen in place while your enemies could escape, or just set themselves up to shoot you when the bubble dropped. True, she could make the bubble fairly large, so she could catch others inside of it—but that would still leave her trapped, and likely with hostiles.

The man smiled at her, then abruptly raised his hand, the one that appeared to be clutching something. Marasi started to react, bringing her rifle up. But at that moment, the train unexpectedly lurched, slowing as if someone had leaned on the brake. The man cursed, stumbling and slamming into the wall before falling to the floor. Marasi caught herself, but dropped the rifle.

She looked at the man, who regarded her with wide eyes before maladroitly stumbling to his feet—one of his legs didn't work right—and hastening out of the train car onto the platform, slamming the door behind him.

Marasi stared after him, confused. She'd assumed he was pulling a gun on her, but that hadn't been the case at all. The object had been far too small. She reached for her gun, and beside it on the floor she was surprised to find a small metal cube with bizarre symbols on it.

Gunfire sounded ahead. Marasi tucked the curiosity away and shouldered her rifle, determined to find Waxillium and, hopefully, her stupid sister.

* * *

Eyes closed, Wax felt the metal burning. That fire, comfortable and familiar. Metal was his soul. Compared to it, the chill of the river was no more than a raindrop on a bonfire.

He felt the gun in his fingers. A bandit's gun, unfamiliar to him, yet he knew it—knew it by the lines pointing at its barrel, trigger, levers, the bullets inside. Five shots left. He could see them even with his eyes closed.

*Go.*

He opened his eyes and leaped out of the engine, Pushing himself forward in a rush. He passed over the coal tender, then burst into the first cargo car—laden with mail in heaping sacks—and passed through in a tempest. He skidded out onto its rear platform and Pushed to either side, launching two bandit guards upward and outward, one in each direction.

The train ran up beside the river here. Trees blurred past on the left, water on the right. Wax launched himself upward, onto the top of the second cargo car, noting the bandits with their device here. Another, larger group had gathered on top of the next car, the one they'd robbed.

Wax fired with cold precision, killing the three bandits. He stepped up to the “device” the engineer had mentioned, which was nothing more than a large case of dynamite and a trigger linked to a clock. Wax ripped the detonator off, tossed it aside, then Pushed the entire box away to be sure. It plunged into the river.

Something Pushed his gun out of his hand. He spun, finding the large bandit from before lumbering toward him across the roof. He’d left the larger group of bandits on the next rooftop over.

*You again*, Wax thought with a growl, dropping his gunbelt, but resting his foot on it to keep it from blowing away. The man came running toward Wax. With the brute very close, Wax knelt and yanked out Ranette’s sphere device.

The bandit Pushed on that, of course—causing the sphere to leap backward to the side. Wax kept a firm hold on the cord, wrapping it with a yank around the bandit’s leg.

The bandit stared down in confusion.

Wax Pushed, shoving the sphere into a batch of trees, engaging its hooks. “I believe this is your stop.”

The large man suddenly *flew* off the train, yanked by the cord—which was now hooked to a tree. Wax picked up his gunbelt and advanced on the larger group of bandits, wind whipping around him on the rooftop.

He was facing down at least a dozen of them—and he had no weapon. Fortunately, the group was busy throwing one of their members off the train.

Wax blinked in surprise. But that was indeed what they were doing—they tossed one of the bandits overboard. It was the man with the cane, who hit the water beside the train with a splash. A group of the others started to follow suit, leaping into the river. One spotted Wax, pointing. Six remaining bandits leveled weapons.

Then froze.

Wax hesitated, the wind at his back. The men didn’t move. Didn’t flinch. Didn’t even blink. Wax hopped across to the next car, then took a cork from his pocket—from one of his vials—and tossed it toward the men.

It hit some invisible barrier and froze there, hanging in the air. Wax grinned, then dropped down between the cars and pushed into the one the men were standing on. There he found Marasi standing atop a bunch of suitcases, her shoulders pressed against the train’s ceiling just below the men so she could engage a speed bubble and freeze them all in place.

# 9

Wax had never shot a doctor before, but he *did* like trying out new experiences. Perhaps today would be the day.

"I'm fine," he growled as the woman dabbed with cotton at the wound on his face, where the massive brute had punched him. His lip had split.

"I'll decide that," she said.

Nearby, the Ironstand constables marched four befuddled bandits along the train platform, which was flooded with light from a few tall arc lamps. Wax sat on a bench near where the other surgeons were attending to the wounded. Farther back, in the shadows of the night, a tarp covered the bodies they'd retrieved. There were far too many of those.

"It looks worse than it is," Wax said.

"You had blood all over your face, my lord."

"I wiped my forehead with a bloody hand." She had wrapped that hand with gauze already, but had agreed that the cuts were superficial.

Finally she stepped back and sighed, nodding. Wax stood up, grabbing his damp suit coat and striding toward the train. He saw Marasi peering out of the front. She shook her head.

No sign of Wayne or MeLaan.

The lump inside Wax's stomach grew two sizes. *Wayne'll be fine,* he told himself. *He can heal from practically anything.* But there *were* ways to kill a Bloodmaker. A shot to the back of the head. Prolonged suffocation. Basically, anything that would have forced Wayne to keep healing until his Feruchemical storages ran out.

And, of course, there was the *other* thing. The strange effect that had somehow stolen Wax's Allomantic powers. If that worked on Feruchemy too …

Wax strode onto the train, stepping past Marasi without saying a word, and started his own search. The train was dark, now that it had stopped—and the only lights came from the platform outside. There wasn't much to see by.

"Lord Waxillium?" Constable Matieu said, sticking his head in between two of the cars. The spindly man had a ready smile, which fell off his face as Wax bustled past.

"Busy," Wax said, entering the next car.

Blue lines let him see sources of metal even in the darkness. Wayne would be carrying metal vials and his bracers. *Look for faint sources of metal, hidden behind something.* Perhaps … perhaps they'd just knocked him out and stuffed him somewhere.

"Um…" the constable said from behind. "I was wondering if any of your other servants will be needing, um, emotional support."

Wax frowned, looking out the window to where Drewton was sitting, surrounded by no fewer than three nurses. He accepted a cup of tea from one while he complained about his ordeal. Wax could hear it even inside the train car.

"No," Wax said. "Thank you."

Matieu followed him through the train. He was the local captain, though from what Wax gathered, this town was small enough that his "big cases" usually were on the order of who had been stealing Mrs. Hutchen's milk off her doorstep. He was glad to have found surgeons. Most of them probably worked half their time on cows, but it was better than nothing.

Not a few younger officers stood on the platform. They'd put away their stupid autograph books, fortunately, though they seemed deflated that their captain wouldn't let them pester Wax.

*Where?* Wax thought, feeling more and more sick. Marasi arrived a moment later with an oil lamp, her light illuminating the train car for him as he poked through a cargo room full of mail bags.

*He won't be in here,* Wax thought. This was forward of the car that had been secretly carrying the payroll shipment. Wayne wouldn't have been able to cross through that one; they'd have had it blocked off even before the bandits arrived. Still, he wanted to be careful. He searched this one, then waved to Marasi and picked his way through the wreckage of the car that had been robbed.

Matieu tagged along. "I have to say, Lord Waxillium, that we're *very* lucky you were aboard. The Nightstreet Gang has been growing bolder and bolder, but I never thought they'd try something like this!"

"So this *is* an established gang?" Marasi said.

"Oh, sure," Matieu said. "Everyone in the area knows about the Nightstreets, though mostly they hit cities closer to the Roughs. We figure it's slim pickings out past the mountains, so they have begun to venture inward. But this! A full-on train robbery? And stealing Erikell payroll? That's daring. Those folks make weapons, you know."

"They had at least one Allomancer with them," Wax said, leading the way through the empty courier car, which still smelled faintly of formaldehyde.

"I hadn't heard that," Matieu said. "Even luckier you were along!"

"I didn't stop them from getting away, or from stealing the payroll."

"You killed or captured a good *half* of them, my lord. The ones we've got, they'll give us a lead on the others." He hesitated. "We'll have to put together a posse, my lord. They'll be making for the Roughs. Sure could use your help."

Wax swept this room, focusing on the blue lines. "And the man with the limp?"

"My lord?"

"He seemed to be in charge of them," Wax said. "A man in a fine suit who walked with a cane. About six feet tall, with a narrow face and dark hair. Who is he?"

"I don't know that one, my lord. Donny is the leader."

"Big guy?" Wax asked. "Neck like a stump?"

"No, my lord. Donny is little and feisty. Evilest rusting kig you've ever seen."

Kig. It was slang for a koloss-blooded person. Wax hadn't seen anyone among the bandits with the proper skin color for that. "Thank you, Captain," Wax said.

The man seemed to recognize it as a dismissal, but he hesitated. "And can we count on your help, my lord? When we chase down Donny and his gang?"

"I'll … let you know."

Matieu saluted, which was completely inappropriate—Wax wasn't part of this jurisdiction—and retreated. Wax continued searching, pulling open a luggage compartment beneath the first passenger car. The metal lines leading into it only pointed at a few pieces of baggage.

"Waxillium," Marasi said, "you can't help with their hunt. We have a job already."

"Might be related."

"Might not be," she said. "You heard him, Waxillium. These guys are a known criminal element.”

“Who happened to rob the very train we were on.”

“But at the same time seemed utterly shocked by the presence of an Allomancer gunman in the last car. Instead of tossing dynamite at us and riddling the coach with bullets, they sent a couple men to rob what they assumed would be easy pickings.”

Wax chewed on that, then checked another luggage compartment, bracing himself as he did so. No bodies. He let out a breath.

“I can’t think about this right now,” he said.

She nodded in understanding. They checked the other compartments, and he didn’t see any suspicious lines, so they moved on. Crossing the space between cars, he spotted Steris watching him. She sat alone on a bench with a blanket around her shoulders, holding a cup of something that steamed. She seemed perfectly calm.

He continued on. Losing friends was part of a lawman’s life; it had happened to him more times than he wanted to count. But after what had happened back in the city six months ago … well, he wasn’t sure what losing Wayne would do to him. He steeled himself, moved to the next car, and opened the first of its luggage compartments, then froze.

Faint steel lines coming from another place in this train car. They were *moving*.

Wax rushed toward them. Marasi followed, suddenly alert, her lamp held high. The lines were coming from the floor inside one of the rooms. Only no luggage was on its racks, and no litter was on its floor. It was a private compartment that hadn’t been rented out for the trip.

Wax entered and ripped open the luggage compartment in the floor. Wayne blinked up at him. The younger man had mussed hair, and his shirt was unbuttoned, but he wasn’t in any bonds that Wax could see. He didn’t seem to have been harmed at all. In fact …

Wax crouched down, Marasi’s light revealing what had been hidden to him by the overhang of the luggage compartment. MeLaan, shirt completely off, was in the compartment too. She sat up, entirely unashamed of her nudity.

“We’ve stopped!” she said. “Are we there already?”

* * *

“Well how was I supposed to know we’d get rusting attacked?” Wayne exclaimed, now properly clothed, though his hair was still a mess.

Wax sat listening with half an ear. The train officials had opened a room in the station for them to use. He knew he should be angry, but he was mostly just relieved.

“Because we are *us*,” Marasi said, arms folded. “Because we’re on our way to a dangerous situation. I don’t know. You could at *least* have told us what you were doing.” She hesitated. “And by the way, what do you *think you were doing*?”

Wayne bowed his head where he sat before her. MeLaan leaned against the wall near the door. She was looking toward the ceiling, as if trying to feign innocence.

“Movin’ on,” Wayne said, pointing at Marasi. “Like you told me to.”

“That wasn’t moving on! That was ‘Running on at full speed.’ It was ‘Shooting on forward like a bullet,’ Wayne.”

“I don’t like doin’ stuff halfway,” he said solemnly, hand over his heart. “It’s been a long time since I had me a good neckin’ on account of my diligent monogamous idealization of a beauteous but unavailable—”

“And *how*,” Marasi interrupted, “did you *not* hear the fight? There was gunfire, Wayne. Practically *on top of you*.”

“Well, see,” he said, growing red, “we was *real* busy. And we were down next to the tracks, which made a lot of noise. We’d wanted a place what was private-like, you know, and…” He shrugged.

“Bah!” Marasi said. “Do you *realize* how worried Waxillium was?”

“Don’t bring me into this,” Wax said, seated with his feet up on the next bench.

“Oh, and you *approve* of this behavior?” Marasi asked, turning on him.

“Heavens, no,” Wax said. “If I approved of half the things Wayne does, Harmony would probably strike me dead on the spot. But he’s alive, and we’re alive, and we can’t blame him for getting distracted during what we assumed would be a simple ride.”

Marasi eyed him, then sighed and walked back out onto the platform, passing MeLaan without a glance.

Wayne stood and wandered over to him, pulling his box of gum from his pocket and tapping it against his palm to settle the powder inside. “These thieves, did one of them happen to shoot her when you weren’t lookin’? ’Cuz she’s sure gotten stiff all of a sudden.”

“She was just worried about you,” Wax said. “I’ll talk to her after she’s cooled down.”

MeLaan left her position by the door. “Was there anything strange about the attack?”

“Plenty of things,” Wax said, standing and stretching. Rusts. Was he really getting too old for all this, as Lessie always joked with him? He usually felt exhilarated after a fight.

*It's the deaths,* he thought. Only one passenger had died, an older man. But they'd lost half a dozen payroll guards, not to mention the many wounded.

"One of the bandits," he said to MeLaan, "he did something that dampened my Allomancy."

"A Leecher?" she asked.

Wax shook his head. "He didn't touch me."

Leechers who burned chromium could blank another Allomancer's metals—but it required touch. "It did feel the same. My steel was there one moment, then gone the next. But MeLaan, there was some kind of device involved. A little metal cube."

"Wait," a voice said. Marasi appeared in the doorway. "A *cube*?"

All three of them looked at her, and she blushed in the harsh electric light. "What?"

"You stalked away," Wayne pointed, "indigenously."

"And now I'm stalking back in," Marasi said, striding toward Wax and fishing in her pocket. "I can be indigen—indig*nant* in here just as easily." She pulled her hand out, holding a small metal cube.

The same cube he'd seen before his steel was drained. Wax plucked it from her palm. "Where'd you get this?"

"The guy with the cane dropped it," Marasi said. "He moved as if to pull a gun on me, and raised this."

Wax turned it toward MeLaan, and she shook her head.

"That's a *real* strange gun," Wayne noted.

"Is there anything in that lore VenDell talked about," Wax said, "that mentions a device that negates Allomancy?"

"Nothing I've heard," MeLaan said.

"I mean," Wayne said, "it ain't even got a barrel."

"But you said you don't pay attention to the research, MeLaan," Marasi said, taking the cube back.

"That's true."

"And if they could shoot the rusting thing," Wayne added, "the bullet would be small as a flea."

Marasi sighed. "Wayne, can't you ever let a joke die?"

"Hon, that joke *started* dead," he said. "I'm just givin' it a proper burial."

"We need another train south," Marasi said, turning to the others.

"These bandits might have information," Wayne said. "Chasin' them down could be useful. 'Sides, I didn't get to stomp none of them, on account of some untimely snogging."

“At least it was *good* snogging,” MeLaan added. Then, to Marasi’s glare, she added, “What? It was. Poor guy hadn’t had a proper snog in years. Had a lot of pent-up energy.”

“You’re not even human,” Marasi said. “You should be ashamed. *Not to mention* that you’re six hundred years old.”

“I’m young at heart. Really—I copied this one off a sixteen-year-old that I ate a few months back.”

The room grew very still.

“Oh … was that gauche?” MeLaan said, wincing. “That *was* gauche, wasn’t it? She didn’t taste very good, if that’s anything to you. Hardly rotten at all. And … I should stop talking about this. New Seran? Are we going, or staying to chase bandits?”

“Going,” Wax said, which earned a nod from Marasi. “If this is connected, we’ll run into them later. If it’s not, then I’ll see what I can do to help once we’ve dealt with my uncle.”

“And how’re we going to get to New Seran?” Wayne said. “Doesn’t look like our train will be leaving anytime soon.”

“Freight train,” Wax said, checking the wall lists. “Coming through in an hour. They’re going to move our train onto the repair track, so we can flag that one down for a ride. It won’t be comfortable, but it will get us there by morning. Go gather your luggage. Hopefully there aren’t too many holes in it.”

Wayne and MeLaan obeyed, walking out side by side. Maybe there was actually something there between them. If anything, Wayne didn’t seem the least bit put out by being reminded just how alien, and just how old, MeLaan was.

Then again, Wayne wasn’t known for his taste in women. Or, well, his *taste* at all, really. Wax glanced at Marasi, who had remained behind. She held up the little cube, turning it over in her fingers, inspecting the intricate carvings it bore on its various faces.

“Can I get VenDell’s notes back from you?” she said. “Maybe there’s something in them about this thing.”

“More convinced this wasn’t a random train robbery?”

“Maybe a little,” Marasi said. “You should talk to my sister.”

“She seemed perfectly calm when I checked on her earlier.”

“Of course she’s calm,” Marasi said. “She’s Steris. But she’s *also* doing needlework.”

“… And that’s bad?”

“Steris only does needlework when she has an overwhelming desire to appear normal," Marasi said. "She read somewhere that it's an appropriate hobby for a woman of means. She hates it to death, but won't tell a soul. Trust me. If needlework is involved, she's upset. I could talk to her, but she's never listened to me. She didn't even know about me until we were teenagers. Besides, you'll need to get used to this."

She strode from the room, and Wax—oddly—found himself smiling. Whatever else could be said, Marasi had come a long way since he'd first met her.

He took his jacket off the hook on the wall and slipped it on, then walked back into the night. Marasi was calling for the stationmaster, probably to arrange their passage on the cargo train. Wax strolled along the tracks, passing cold electric lights, until he reached the bench where Steris worked on her needlepoint.

He settled down beside her. "Marasi says you're having a tough time of it."

Steris paused her needlepoint. "You're a very straightforward man, Lord Waxillium."

"Can be."

"But as we both know, it's all an act. You were raised among Elendel's elite. You had tutors and diction coaches. In your youth, you spent your time at parties and balls."

"And then I spent twenty years in the Roughs," Wax said. "The winds out there can weather the strongest granite. Are you surprised they can do the same to a man?"

She turned to him, head cocked to the side.

Wax sighed and leaned back, stretching his legs out, ankles crossed. "Have you ever been somewhere you didn't fit in? A place where everyone else seems to get it immediately? They know what to do. They know what to say. But rusts, you have to *work* to untangle it all?"

"That describes my entire life," Steris said softly.

He put his arm around her, and let her rest her head on his shoulder. "Well, that was how those parties were for me. Social situations were a chore. Everyone laughing, and me just standing there, stressed out of my mind and trying to figure out the right thing to do. I didn't smile a lot back then. Guess I still don't. I'd escape the parties when I could, find my way to a quiet balcony."

"And do what? Read?"

Wax chuckled. "No. I don't mind a book now and then, but Wayne is the real reader."

Steris raised her head, looking surprised.

"I'm serious," Wax said. "Granted, he likes ones with pictures now and then, but he *does* read. Often out loud. You should hear him do the voices to himself. Me … I'd just find a balcony that looked out over the city somewhere, and I'd stare. Listen." He smiled. "When I was a boy, more than a few people thought I was slow because I'd sit there staring out a window."

"Then you found your way to the Roughs."

"I was so glad to be away from Elendel and its phoniness. You call me blunt. Well, that's the man I want to be. That's the man I admire. Perhaps I'm only acting like him, but it's a sincere act. Hang me, but it is."

Steris sat quietly for a few moments, head on his shoulder, and Wax stared out into the night. A nice night, all things considered.

"You're wrong," she noted, sounding drowsy. "You do smile. Most often when you're flying on lines of steel. It's the only time I think … I think I see … pure joy in you.…"

He looked down at her, but she'd apparently dozed off, judging by the way she was breathing. He settled back, thinking about what she'd said, until the cargo train finally pulled into the station.

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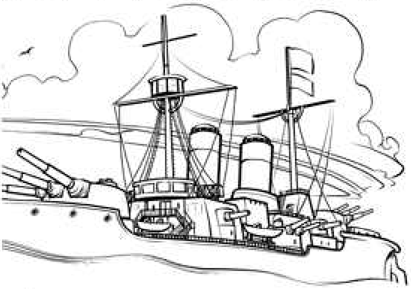
# NEWEST SHIPS DEL OFFICIALS



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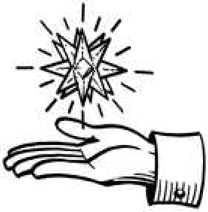
## Does Harmony Have a Metal?

The First Age philosopher Galabris Menthon meant this rhetorically, but even the Lord Mistborn thought on this when he famously said, "Having the has Sazed a metal?"

From councils to pubs, the question is still debated. But now, breakthroughs in science have brought us closer to an answer.

(Continued on back.)

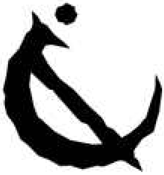


# FARTHING MANSION HIT!

An act of vandalism and thievery has the city's elite on edge. Late last night, someone broke into Farthing Mansion, stole some items, and vandalised the wall with a reverse gold symbol.

Lady Farthing is offering a reward for the return of her jewelry. Please report all information to the Uptown Precinct.

(Continued on back.)



*The mark of the vandal*

**WORKERS UNITE!**

ENORMOUS

**MASS MEETING**

**TONIGHT at 7th HOUR**

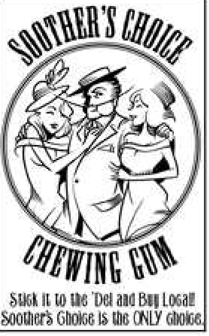
AT THE

**Crossing of Embel & 5th**

**STAND UP TO**

**UNFAIR TAXES**

**LOW WAGES**


SOOTHER'S CHOICE
CHEWING GUM
Stick it to the 'Del and Buy Local!
Soother's Choice is the ONLY choice.

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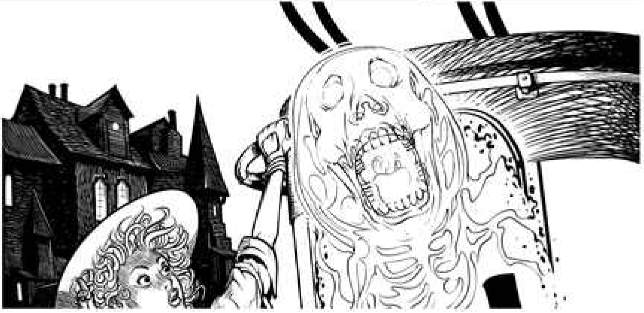

part could have avoided this whole debacle, and you wouldn't be hanging fifty feet above death from the threads of a poorly-rendered map. Climb in. Let's come to an agreement."

He reached up as if to take my offer, but something in his hand flashed in the light of the stars. Instinctively, I burnt metal, releasing one hand to touch the device.

It was an everyday hunting knife.

"Politeness," he said with a grumble. "That's not how

# 10

Wax started awake to the sound of distant explosions.

He immediately scrambled to his feet, reaching for his metals, bleary-eyed and disoriented. Where was he? Crew cabin of the cargo train. It was large, with some stiff couches in the back for the engineers to catch a nap while their train was waiting to be unloaded. Steris was asleep on one, wrapped in his jacket. Wayne dozed in the corner, hat over his face.

They'd left the servants behind for now; they would come along on the next passenger train. MeLaan had chosen to ride in the back with their luggage—she had wanted to look through her bundles of bones to pick the right body for the night.

Wax downed metals and whipped out Vindication, stumbling forward toward the sounds—which, now fully awake, he wasn't certain were explosions at all. A continuous rumble, like an earthquake, off in the distance. He stepped out into the cab proper of the engine car. This was a newer machine, one of the oil-driven ones, with no need for a coal tender.

Marasi stood near the front with the engineer, a tall fellow with bright eyes and forearms like pistons.

That rumbling … Wax frowned, lowering his gun as Marasi glanced at him. The sky was bright blue; morning had arrived. He stepped into the cabin, and could see that ahead, New Seran rose before them. The city spread across a series of enormous, flat-topped stone terraces. There were at least a dozen of them, and each was split by multiple streams, which crossed them and then dropped off the edge down to the next terrace. The sound wasn't an earthquake or explosion, but that of *waterfalls*.

In places, the drop was just a little ripple—a fall of some five feet or so. But in others, majestic waterfalls plunged fifty feet or more before pounding onto the next stone platform. It looked like a man-made effect, for the various split streams and waterfalls eventually ran back together into the river, which flowed away from the city toward distant Elendel.

Wax slid Vindication into her holster, though it took two tries because he was so mesmerized by the waterfalls. Indeed, the whole city. Buildings sprouted between the rivers, and vibrant green vines draped the cliffs like nature's own tresses. Beyond, the Seran mountains rose, lofty and whited at the tops.

Marasi grinned, leaning out of the cab to get a better look up at the heights of the city. The engineer stood by his levers, valves, and cranks trying to act casual, though he was obviously watching Wax and Marasi for their reactions.

"I often think," the man eventually said, "that Harmony was showing off a little when He made this place."

"I had no idea this was here," Wax said, stepping up beside Marasi. Behind him, Wayne yawned and stumbled to his feet.

"Yeah, well," the engineer said, "people from Elendel often forget there's a whole country out here. No offense, my lord. There's a lot of Elendel to take in, so it makes sense you'd get a little blinded by it."

"You're from New Seran?" Marasi asked.

"Born and raised, Captain Colms."

"Then you can tell us where to find our hotel, perhaps?" Marasi asked. "The Copper Gate?"

"Oh, that's a *nice* one," the engineer said, pointing. "Top terrace, in the waterman district. Look for the big statue of the Lord Mistborn. It's not two blocks from there."

"How close can you get us?" Marasi asked.

"Not close at all, I'm afraid," the engineer said. "We're not a passenger train, and even those can only go to the middle tiers. We'll be down at the bottom. It'll take you a few hours to ride the gondolas up. There are ramps too, if you'd prefer a carriage, but they take longer—and the gondolas have a better view."

Gondolas would have been wonderful, Wax thought, if most of them had had more than a few hours of sleep. With the reception tonight, they'd need to be rested and ready to go.

"Shortcut?" he asked Marasi.

"You realize I'm wearing a skirt."

"I do. What happened to that fancy new constable uniform with the trousers?”

“Packed away. Not everyone likes wearing uniforms when we don’t have to, Waxillium.”

“Well, you can wait and take the gondolas,” Wax said. “Think of me resting peacefully in a soft hotel bed while you blink bleary eyes and droop against—”

“All right, *fine,*” Marasi said, stepping up to him. “Just stay away from crowds.”

Wax grabbed her around the waist. “I’ll be back for the rest of you,” he told Wayne, who nodded. “Engineer, have our things sent to the Copper Gate, if you please.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Wax slid open the side of the cab, took another drink of metal flakes—recovered from the stash in his luggage—then pulled Marasi tight, burned steel, and leaped. A flared Push sent them soaring away from the train, which was slowing as it approached the buildings clustered around the base of New Seran.

They dropped toward these, but a shot from Vindication as they neared the ground gave him something to bounce off of. He sent them upward, past the lower tiers, using metal he found there to keep them aloft.

The homes here were much smaller than those in Elendel. Quaint, even. In Elendel, you could rarely afford to waste space on a single dwelling—even in the slums, towering apartments were the norm. There was a kind of eternal shift going on, where sections of town would fall into disrepair over time, filling with the poor while those able to afford something new moved to other sections. It was fascinating to him that, if you looked at old maps, what were now slums had once been considered prime real estate.

He saw few apartment buildings and only three skyscrapers, confined to a small commercial district on the top terrace. Though the terraces constrained the city’s boundaries, they looked large enough to hold the population. Lots of parks and small streams, none deep enough to be navigable like Elendel’s canals.

He stayed to the rooftops, rather than the streets, for Marasi’s sake—though she didn’t have much trouble with her skirt. She’d tucked it around her legs before they started, and the generally upward motion kept it from flaring.

Wax threw the two of them in great leaping arcs over residential areas until they reached the next cliff face, where he found a gondola and used it as an anchor to shoot them up the fifty feet or so toward the top tier of the terraces. He exulted in the moment, the freedom, the beauty of it. There was a majesty about soaring alongside a churning waterfall, with sparkling pools and lush gardens spreading out beneath.

They topped the cliff face, and Wax landed them softly alongside the falls. Marasi let out a held breath as he set her down; he could tell from the tension of her grip that she hadn't enjoyed the flight as much as he had. Steelpushing wasn't natural to her, nor were the heights—she backed away from the cliff as soon as she was free.

"Going to go get the others?" she asked.

"Let's find the hotel first," Wax said, pointing the way toward a statue he'd spotted upon landing. He could still make out the green patina of the statue's head over the tops of the nearby homes. He started in that direction.

Marasi joined him, and they entered a street with a fair amount of foot traffic, papergirls and boys hawking broadsheets at every corner. Fewer horses or carriages than in Elendel—almost none, though he did see a fair number of pedicabs. That made sense, with the layout of the city. He found it interesting that the gondola system wasn't only for getting between terraces; there were also lines crossing the sky above them carting people from one section of this terrace to another.

"Like a shark among minnows," Marasi mumbled.

"What's that?" Wax asked.

"Look at how people swerve around you," Marasi said. "Lord Cimines once did a study comparing constables to sharks, showing how the people in a crowded walkway responded exactly the same way as animals do to a predator moving nearby."

He hadn't noticed, but she was right. People gave him a wide berth—though not because they guessed he was a constable. It was the mistcoat duster, the weapons, and perhaps his height. Everyone seemed a little shorter down here, and he saw over the crowd by several inches.

In Elendel, his clothing had been abnormal—but so was everyone's. That city was a mishmash, like an old barrel full of spent cartridges. All different calibers represented.

Here, the people wore lighter clothing than in Elendel. Pastel dresses for the ladies, striped white suits and boater hats for the men. Compared to them, he was a bullet hole in a stained-glass window.

"Never been good at blending in anyway," he said.

"Fair enough," Marasi said. "I've been meaning to ask. Do you need Wayne tonight?"

"At the party?" Wax asked, amused. "I have trouble imagining a situation where he doesn't end up drunk in the punch bowl."

“Then I’ll borrow him,” Marasi said. “I want to check the graveyards for ReLuur’s spike.”

Wax grunted. “That will be dirty work.”

“Which *is* why I asked for Wayne.”

“Noted. What do you think the chances are you’ll find the thing buried in a grave?”

Marasi shrugged. “I figure we’ll start with the most obvious and easiest method.”

“Grave robbing is the easiest method?”

“It is with proper preparation,” Marasi said. “I don’t intend to do the digging, after all.…”

Wax stopped listening.

The chatter of the crowd faded as he froze in place, staring at a broadsheet held up by a papergirl on a nearby corner. That symbol, the jagged reverse *mah* … he knew that symbol all too well. He left Marasi midsentence, pushing through the crowd to the girl and snatching the paper.

That symbol. Impossible. FARTHING MANSION HIT, the headline read. He fished out a few clips for the girl. “Farthing Mansion? Where is it?”

“Just up Blossom Way,” the girl said, pointing with her chin and making the coins in his palm disappear.

“Come on,” he said, interrupting Marasi as she started saying something.

People did make way for him, which was convenient. He could have taken to the sky, but he found the mansion without difficulty, partially because of the people crowded outside and pointing. The symbol was painted in red, exactly like the one he’d known back in the Roughs, but this time it marred the wall of a fine, three-story stone mansion instead of a stagecoach.

“Waxillium, for the love of sanity,” Marasi said, catching up to him. “What has gotten into you?”

He pointed at the symbol.

“I recognize that,” Marasi said. “Why would I recognize that?”

“You read the accounts of my time in the Roughs,” Wax said. “It’s in there—that’s the symbol of Ape Manton, one of my old nemeses.”

“Ape Manton!” Marasi said. “Didn’t he—”

“Yes,” Wax said, remembering the nights of torture. “He hunts Allomancers.”

But why would he be here? Wax had put him away, and not just in some minor village. He’d been locked up in True Madil, biggest town in the Northern Roughs, with a jail like a vise. How in Harmony’s True Name had he gotten all the way down to New Seran?

Robbery wouldn't be the end of Manton's activities here. He always had a motive behind the thefts, a goal. *I have to figure out what he took, and why he —*

*No.*

No, not right now. "Let's get to the hotel," Wax said, ripping himself away from the sight of that red symbol.

"Rusts," Marasi said, hurrying after him. "Could he be involved somehow?"

"With the Set? Not a chance. He hates Allomancers."

"Enemy of my enemy…"

"Not the Ape," Wax said. "He wouldn't take the hand of a Metalborn trying to save him from slipping to his death."

"So…"

"So he's not part of this," Wax said. "We ignore him. I'm here for my uncle."

Marasi nodded, but seemed disturbed. They passed a Lurcher juggler, dropping balls and tugging them back up into the air—along with the occasional object from among the amused crowd of watchers. A waste of Allomantic abilities. And all these people. Suffocating. He had hoped that in leaving Elendel, he would escape crowded streets. He nearly pulled out his gun and fired a shot to clear them all away.

"Wax…" Marasi said, taking his arm.

"What."

"*What?* Rusts, your stare could nail a person's head to the wall right now!"

"I'm fine," he said, pulling his arm away from her.

"This vendetta against your uncle is—"

"It's not a vendetta." Wax picked up his pace, striding through the crowd, mistcoat tassels flaring behind him. "You know what he's doing."

"No, and neither do you," Marasi said.

"He's breeding Allomancers," Wax said. "Maybe Feruchemists. I don't need to know his exact plan to know how bad that is. What if he's making an army of Thugs and Coinshots? Twinborn. *Compounders.*"

"That might be true," Marasi admitted. "But you aren't chasing him because of any of that, are you? He beat you. In the Hundredlives case, Mister Suit *got the best of you*. Now you're going to win the war where you lost the battle."

He stopped in place, turning on her. "How petty do you think I am?"

"Considering what I just told you," she said, "I'd say I consider you precisely *that* petty. It's not wrong to be angry at Suit, Waxillium. He's holding your sister. But rusts, please don't let it cloud your judgment."

He took a deep breath, then gestured toward the mansion up the street. "You want me to go chasing after the Ape instead?"

"No," Marasi said, then blushed. "I agree that we need to stay focused on getting back the spike."

"You're here for the spike, Marasi," Wax said. "I'm here to find Suit." He nodded down the street, toward a discreet hotel sign, barely visible on the front of a building. "You go check us in. I'm going to fetch the others."

* * *

"With this suite and the others, you'll basically have the entire top floor to yourselves." The hotel owner—who insisted upon being called Aunt Gin—beamed as she said it.

Wayne yawned, rubbing his eyes as he poked through the lavish room's bar. "Great. Lovely. Can I have your hat?"

"My … hat?" The elderly woman looked up at the oversized hat. The sides drooped magnificently, and the thing was *festooned* with flowers. Like, oodles of them. Silk, he figured, but they were really good replicas.

"You have a lady friend?" Aunt Gin asked. "You wish to give her the hat?"

"Nah," Wayne said. "I need to wear it next time I'm an old lady."

"The next time you *what*?" Aunt Gin grew pale, but that was probably on account of the fact that Wax went stomping by, wearing his full rusting mistcoat. That man never could figure out how to blend in.

"Do these windows open?" Wax asked, pointing toward the penthouse suite's enormous bay windows. He stepped up onto one of the sofas and shoved on the window.

"Well, they used to open," Aunt Gin said. "But they rattled in the breezes, so we painted them shut and sealed the latches. Never could stand the thought of someone—"

Wax shoved one of them open, breaking off the latch and making a sharp cracking sound as the paint outside was ripped, perhaps some of the wood splintering.

"Lord Ladrian!" Aunt Gin said with a gasp.

"I'll pay for the repairs," Wax said, hopping off the couch. "I need that to open in case I have to jump out."

"Jump—"

"Aha!" Wayne said, pulling open the bar's bottom cabinet.

"Alcohol?" Marasi asked, walking by.

"Peanuts," Wayne said, spitting out his gum and then popping a handful of nuts into his mouth. “I ain’t had nothin’ to eat since I swiped that fruit in Steris’s luggage.”

“What are you babbling about?” Steris asked from the couch, where she was writing in her notebook.

“I left you one of my shoes in trade,” Wayne said, then dug in his duster’s pocket, pulling out the other shoe. “Speaking of that, Gin, will you swap me your hat for this one?”

“Your *shoe*?” Aunt Gin asked, turning back toward him, then jumping as Wax forced open another window.

“Sure,” Wayne said. “They’re both clothes, right?”

“What would I do with a man’s shoe?”

“Wear it next time you gotta be a fellow,” Wayne said. “You’ve got the perfect face for it. Good shoulders, too.”

“Well, I—”

“Please ignore him,” Steris said, rising and walking over. “Here, I’ve prepared for you a list of possible scenarios that might transpire during our residence here.”

“Steris…” Wax said, forcing open the third and final window.

“What?” she demanded. “I will not have the staff unprepared. Their safety is our concern.”

“Fire?” Aunt Gin asked, reading the list. “Shoot-outs. Robbery. Hostage situations. *Explosions?*”

“That one is completely unfair,” Wax said. “You’ve been listening to Wayne.”

“Things *do* explode around you, mate,” Wayne said, munching peanuts. Nice bit of salt on these.

“He’s right, unfortunately,” Steris said. “I’ve accounted for seventeen explosions involving you. That’s a huge statistical anomaly, even considering your profession.”

“You’re kidding. Seventeen?”

“Afraid so.”

“Huh.” He had the decency to look proud of it, at least.

“A pastry shop once blew up while we was in it,” Wayne said, leaning in to Aunt Gin. “Dynamite in a cake. Big mess.” He held out some peanuts toward her. “How about I throw in these peanuts with the shoe?”

“Those are *my* peanuts! From this very room!”

“But they’re worth more now,” Wayne said. “On account of my being *real* hungry.”

“I told you to ignore him,” Steris said, tapping on the notebook she’d handed Aunt Gin. “Look, you only read the table of contents. The rest of the pages contain explanations of the possible scenarios I’ve outlined, and suggested responses to them. I’ve sorted the list by potential for property damage.”

Wax leaped into the center of the room, then thrust his hand forward. The door quivered.

“What … what is he doing?” Aunt Gin asked.

“Checking to see where the best places in the room are for slamming the door with his mind,” Wayne said. “In case someone bursts in on us.”

“Just read the notebook, all right?” Steris requested in a pleasant tone.

Aunt Gin looked toward her, seeming bewildered. “Are these things … threats?”

“No, of course not!” Steris said. “I only want you to be prepared.”

“She’s thorough,” Wayne said.

“I like to be thorough.”

“Usually that means if you ask her to kill a fly, she’ll burn down the house just to be extra sure it gets done.”

“Wayne,” Steris said, “you’re needlessly making the lady concerned.”

“Flooding from a diverted waterfall,” Aunt Gin said, reading from the book again. “Koloss attack. *Cattle stampede through the lobby?*”

“That one is highly unlikely,” Steris said, “but it never hurts to be prepared!”

“But—”

The door to the adjoining suite slammed open. “Hello, humans,” MeLaan said, stepping into the doorway wearing nothing more than a tight pair of shorts and a cloth wrapped around her chest. “I need to put on something appropriate for tonight. What do you think? Large breasts? Small breasts? *Extra*-large breasts?”

Everybody in the room paused, then turned toward her.

“What?” MeLaan said. “Picking a proper bust size is vital to a lady’s evening preparations!”

Silence.

“That’s … kind of an improper question, MeLaan,” Steris finally said.

“You’re just jealous because you can’t take yours off to go for a run,” MeLaan said. “Hey, where is that bellboy with my things? I swear, if he drops my bags and cracks any of my skulls, there will be *fury* in this room!” She stalked away.

“Did she say *skulls*?” Aunt Gin said.

The door slammed.

“Aha!” Wax said, lowering his hand. “There it is.”

Marasi approached and wrapped her arm around the elderly lady’s shoulders, leading her away. “Don’t worry. It won’t be nearly as bad as they make it seem. Likely nothing will happen to you or your hotel.”

“Other than Wax rippin’ your windows apart,” Wayne noted.

“Other than that,” Marasi said, giving him a glare.

“Young lady,” Aunt Gin said under her breath, “you need to get away from these people.”

“They’re fine,” Marasi said, reaching the door. “We’ve just had a long night.”

Aunt Gin nodded hesitantly.

“Good,” Marasi said. “Now, when you get down below, would you please send someone to the trade bureau for me? Have them collect the names of each and every person who works at the local graveyards.”

“Graveyards?”

“It’s vitally important,” Marasi said, then pushed the woman out and shut the door.

“Graveyards?” MeLaan said, sticking her head into the room. She was now completely bald. “Reminds me. Would you order me something to eat? A nice hunk of aged meat.”

“Rotting, you mean,” Wax said.

“Nothing like the odor of a nice flank after a day in the sun,” MeLaan said, ducking back into her room as a knock came at the other door. “Ah! My bags. Excellent. What? No, of course there aren’t corpses in these. Why would I need bones with the flesh still on them? Thank you. Bye.”

Wayne popped the last of the peanuts into his mouth. “I dunno about you all, but *I’m* gonna find a place to snore for a few hours.”

“Sleeping arrangements, Waxillium?” Marasi asked.

“You and Steris in the suite across the hall,” Wax said, “Wayne and I in here. MeLaan gets her own room. She probably wants to, um…”

“Melt?” Marasi offered.

“… on her own.”

“I’m good, really,” MeLaan called from the next room. A second later she opened the door again. She wore the same bones and build, but this time she was completely bare-chested.

It wasn’t a woman’s chest.

“I solved the problem,” MeLaan said. “I’ll go as a fellow. That will probably be more covert anyway. Just have to choose the right bones.”

Wayne cocked his head. She’d sculpted her face too, giving herself masculine features. Steris's eyes were bulging. At least that was worth seeing.

"You're…" Steris said. "You'll become a…"

"A man?" MeLaan asked. "Yeah. It'll look better when I've decided on the right body. Need to settle on a voice, too." She looked around the room. "Um, is this a problem?"

Everyone looked at Wayne for some reason. He thought for a moment, then shrugged. Maybe he should have given his shoes to *her*.

"You don't *mind*?" Steris demanded of him.

"It's still her."

"But she looks like a man!"

"So does the lady what runs this house," Wayne said, "but she has kids, so someone still decided to take her an—"

"It will do, MeLaan," Wax said, resting a hand on Steris's arm. "Assuming you can get into the party."

"Don't worry about that," she said, spinning around. "I will get in, and be ready to give you support. But this is your play, Ladrian, not mine. You're the detective; I'm just around for the punchy-punchy, stabby-stabby."

She closed the door. Wayne shook his head. *Now that, that's a situation a man don't rightly encounter all that often.…* Well, he'd found occasion to be an old lady now and then, so it made sense to him. It was probably good for a woman to be a fellow once in a while, if only to offer some perspective. Easier to piss too. Couldn't discount that.

"She assumes," Wax said, "that our detective style isn't *normally* the punchy-punchy, stabby-stabby type."

"To be fair," Wayne said, "it's usually a more shooty-shooty, whacky-whacky type."

Marasi rubbed her forehead. "Why are we having this conversation?"

"Because we're tired," Wax said. "Get some sleep, everyone. Wayne, you're going to go with Marasi tonight and dig up some graves." He took a deep breath. "And I, unfortunately, am going to a party."

# 11

Wearing a formal cravat and jacket reminded Wax of the year after he'd left the Village. A year when his uncle had gleefully wrapped him in the packaging of a young nobleman and presented him to the city's elite, feeling he'd won some kind of war when Wax was expelled from Terris society.

Wax had moved back in with his parents, of course. But it had been his uncle who had overseen his education, grooming him specifically as heir to the house. After that time in the Village, Wax's life had grown to be less and less about his immediate family—he'd barely seen his parents during that year, despite living with them.

That was when his uncle's grip had really started to strangle him. Wax tapped his fingers on the armrest of his carriage, remembering those parties. How much were his memories of them colored by his uncle's presence?

The carriage eventually pulled up before a resplendent mansion with stained-glass windows and limelights burning outside. A classical style of lighting, though the interior had little in common with the ancient keeps of lore it was meant to evoke—as he well knew from the floor plans he'd memorized earlier today, while the others were sleeping.

This mansion was more sprawling than imposing, with a multipeaked roof design, like the profile of a mountain range. A line of carriages waited to pull through the coach portico and drop off their occupants.

"You're nervous," Steris said, laying her hand on his arm. She wore white lace gloves, and her dress—which she'd fretted over for at least an hour—was one of the filmy and gauzy ones that the most fashionable ladies in Elendel were wearing this year. The skirt was more full and cloudlike than the more traditional gowns Steris usually favored.

He'd been surprised when she'd chosen it. Most of her wardrobe, especially on this trip, was chosen for utility. Why wear this now?

"I'm not nervous," Wax said, "I'm contemplative."

"Shall we go over the plan?"

"What plan?" Wax said.

ReLuur, in his ravings, had directed them toward this party of Kelesina Shores, who was a lady of some prestige in New Seran—and who he implied was connected to all this. She was their best lead, though ReLuur's notebook had also listed five other families he thought were of interest.

The problem was, none of those notes mentioned *why* they were of interest—or what it was ReLuur thought they knew. Why would a group of lords and ladies of the outer cities elite have anything to do with an ancient archaeological relic? True, some noblemen liked to consider themselves "gentlemen adventurers." But those types mostly sat around smoking cigars and talking. At least that fop Jak actually left his rusting house.

Time wore on, as carriages moved up the drive with all the speed of a line of cows on a hot day. Finally, Wax kicked open his door. "Let's walk."

"Oh dear," Steris said with a sigh. "Again?"

"Don't tell me you didn't plan for this."

"I did. But this line isn't that long, Lord Waxillium. Don't you think this time maybe we should wait?"

"I can see the rusting front doors," Wax said, pointing. "We can walk to them in thirty seconds. Or we can sit here and wait as pompous people waddle out of their seats and fuss with their scarves."

"I see the night is starting off on the right foot," Steris said. Wax hopped down, ignoring the footman's offered hand. He waved the man back, and helped Steris from the vehicle himself. "Go ahead and park," he called to the coachman. "We'll call for you when we're done." He hesitated. "If you hear gunshots, go back to the hotel. We'll make our own way."

The coachman started, but nodded. Wax held his arm out for Steris, and the two strolled along the path into the mansion grounds, passing carriages full of people who seemed to be trying to glare at them without actually looking in their direction.

"I've prepared a list for you," Steris said.

"I'm so surprised."

"Now, no complaining, Waxillium. It will help. I've put the list in this little book," Steris said, producing a palm-sized notebook, "for ease of reference. Each page contains a conversation opener, indexed to the people it will likely work best upon. The numbers below list ways you could segue the conversation into useful areas and perhaps figure out what our targets are up to, and what their connection is to the Bands of Mourning."

"I'm not socially incompetent, Steris," Wax said. "I can make small talk."

"I know that," Steris said, "but I'd rather avoid an incident like the Cett party.…"

"Which Cett party?"

"The one where you head-butted someone."

He cocked his head. "Oh, right. That smarmy little man with the ridiculous mustache."

"Lord Westweather Cett," Steris said. "Heir to the house fortune."

"Right, right…" Wax said. "Stupid Cetts. In my defense, he did call me out. Demanding to duel a Coinshot. I probably saved his life."

"By breaking his nose." She held up her hand. "I am not requesting justifications or explanations, Lord Waxillium. I merely thought I'd do what I could to help."

He grumbled, but took the book, flipping through it by lamplight as they walked across the grounds. At the back of the book were descriptions of the various people likely to be at the party. He'd memorized some descriptions VenDell had sent, but this list was far more extensive.

As usual, Steris had done her research. He smiled, tucking the book into his jacket pocket. Where had she found the time? They continued up the path, though Wax froze as he heard rustling in the shrubbery nearby. He burned steel instantly, noticing some moving points of metal, and his hand went to the pistol under his jacket.

A dirty face peered out and grinned. The eyes were milky white. "Clips for the poor, good sir," the beggar said, stretching out a hand and exposing long, unkempt fingernails and a ragged shirt.

Wax kept his hand on his weapon, studying the man.

Steris cocked her head. "Are you wearing cologne, beggar?"

Wax nodded as he too smelled it, faintly.

The beggar started, as if surprised, then grinned. "It's got a good kick to it, my lady."

"You've been *drinking* cologne?" Steris asked. "Well, that can't be healthy."

"You should be away from here, beggar," Wax said, eyeing the cluster of attendants and coachmen closer to the building's entrance. "These are private grounds."

"Oh, my lord, I know it, I do." The beggar laughed. "I own the place, technically. Now, regarding those coins for old Hoid, my *good* lord…” He pushed his hand forward farther, eyes staring sightlessly.

Wax dug in his pocket. “Here.” He tossed the man a banknote. “Get off the grounds and find yourself a proper drink.”

“A generous lord indeed!” the beggar said, dropping to his knees and fishing for the banknote. “But too much! Far too much!”

Wax took Steris’s arm again, walking her toward the imposing front doors.

“My lord!” the beggar screeched. “Your change!”

He saw the blue line moving and reacted immediately, spinning and catching the coin, which had been hurled with exacting accuracy at his head. So, not blind after all. Wax snorted, pocketing the coin as a passing groundsman saw the beggar and shouted, “Not you again!”

The beggar cackled and disappeared back into the shrubs.

“What was *that* about?” Steris asked.

“Damned if I know,” Wax said. “Shall we?”

They proceeded down the row of waiting carriages, and though the line had sped up during their stroll, they still reached the front doors before they otherwise would have. Wax tipped his head toward a large woman who barely fit through the door of her carriage, then strode up the steps with Steris on his arm.

He presented his card at the door, though they would know to watch for him. This was no simple reception; this was about politics. There would probably be only one official speech—that of the host to the attendees—but everyone knew why they were here. To mingle, share ideas, and likely be invited to donate to one of many causes reflecting outer cities interests.

Wax passed the doorkeeper, who cleared his throat and pointed toward an alcove in the side of the entryway. There, servants were taking hats, coats, and shawls.

“We’ve nothing to check,” Wax said, “thank you.”

The man took Wax’s arm gently as he tried to proceed. “The lady of the house has asked that all attendees be unburdened of items of a vulgar nature, my lord. For the safety of all parties attending.”

Wax blinked, then finally got it. “We have to check weapons? You’re kidding.”

The tall man said nothing.

“I don’t think he’s the joking type,” Steris noted.

“You realize,” Wax said, “that I’m a Coinshot. I could kill a dozen people with your cufflinks.”

“We’d appreciate it if you didn’t,” the doorkeeper said. “If you please, Lord Ladrian, there are to be *no* exceptions. Do we need to call the house Lurcher to make certain you are being honest with us?”

“No,” Wax said, pulling his arm free. “But if something goes wrong tonight, you’re going to wish we’d never had this conversation.” He walked with Steris to the counter where white-gloved servants were taking hats in exchange for tickets. He reluctantly took Vindication from the holster under his arm and set her on the counter.

“Is that all, my lord?” the woman there asked.

He hesitated, then sighed and knelt, pulling his backup gun—a tiny two-shotter—from the holster on his calf. He dropped it onto the counter.

“Might we have a look in the lady’s purse?” the servant asked.

Steris submitted.

“You realize,” Wax said, “that I’m a deputized constable. If anyone should be armed, it’s me.”

The servants said nothing, though they seemed embarrassed as they handed back Steris’s purse and gave Wax a ticket for his weapons.

“Let’s go,” he said, pocketing the pasteboard and trying—unsuccessfully—to hide his annoyance. Together they approached the ballroom.

* * *

Wayne liked how banks worked. They had *style*. Many people, they’d keep their money out of sight, hidden under beds and some such. What was the fun of that? But a bank … a bank was a target. Building a place like this, then stuffing it full of cash, was like climbing atop a hill and daring anyone who approached to try to knock you off.

He figured that must be the point. The sport of it. Why else would they put so much valuable stuff together in one place? It was supposed to be a message, proof to the little people that some folks were so rich, they could use their money to build a house for their money and *still* have enough money left to *fill* that house.

Robbing such a place was suicide. So all that potential thieves could do was stand outside and salivate, thinking of the stuff inside. Really, a bank was like a giant sign erected to say “rust off” to everyone who passed by.

Which was magnificent.

He and Marasi stopped on the long flight of steps up to the front, which was set with stained-glass windows and banners, after the classical cantonesque style of architecture. Marasi wanted to come here before the graveyards. Something about the bank records leading them to the right location.

“All right, see,” Wayne said, “I’ve got it figured out. I’m gonna be a rich fellow. Made loads off of the sweat and blood o’ lesser men. Only I won’t say it like that, ’cuz I’ll be in *character*, you see.”

“Is that so?” Marasi said, starting up the steps.

“Yup,” Wayne said, joining her. “Even brought me fancy hat.” He held up a top hat and spun it on his finger.

“That hat belongs to Waxillium.”

“No it don’t,” Wayne said, putting it on. “I gave ’im a rat for it.”

“A … rat?”

“Minus the tail,” Wayne said. “On account of this hat bein’ kinda dusty when I took it. Anyway, I’ll be the rich fellow. You be my younger brother’s daughter.”

“I’m not young enough to be your niece,” Marasi said. “At least not one who…” She trailed off as Wayne scrunched his face up good, emphasizing wrinkles, and brought out his fake mustache. “… Right,” she added. “I’d forgotten about that.”

“Now, my dear,” Wayne said, “while I am distracting the employees of this fine establishment with a depository request, you shall steal into their records room and acquaint yourself with the requisite information. It shouldn’t test your skills, as I shall regale them with descriptions of my wealth and prestige, which should draw the attention of most who are still working at this late hour.”

“Wonderful,” Marasi said.

“As an aside, my dear,” Wayne added, “I am not fond at all of your dalliance with that farmhand upon our estate. He is far beneath you in stature, and your indiscretion will surely besmirch our good name.”

“Oh please.”

“Plus he has warts,” Wayne added as they reached the top of the steps. “And is prone to extreme bouts of flatulence. And—”

“Are you going to talk about this the entire time?”

“Of course! The bank’s employees need to know how I toil with the next generation and its woefully inadequate ability to make decisions *my* generation found simple and obvious.”

“Grand,” Marasi said, pushing through the bank’s broad glass doors.

A banker immediately rushed up to them. “I’m sorry. We’re *very* near closing.”

“My good man!” Wayne began. “I’m certain you can make time for the investment opportunity you will soon find present in—”

“We’re from the Elendel Constabulary,” Marasi interrupted, taking out her engraved credential plate and holding it up. “Captain Marasi Colms. I’d like to look over some of your deposit records. Shouldn’t take but a few minutes, and I’ll be out of your hair.”

Wayne floundered, then gaped at her as the banker—a squat, swarthy man who had a gut like a cannonball and a head to match—took her certification and looked it over. That … that was *cheating*!

“What records do you need?” the banker asked guardedly.

“Do any of these people have accounts with you?” Marasi asked, proffering a paper.

“I suppose I can check…” the banker said. He sighed and walked farther into the building to where a clerk sat going over ledgers. He slid through a door behind the desk, and Wayne could hear him muttering to himself in the room beyond.

“Now I’ve gotta say,” Wayne said, pulling off the top hat, “that was the *worst* example of actin’ I’ve ever seen. Who would believe that the rich uncle has a *constable* for a niece, anyway?”

“There’s no need to lie when the truth will work just as well, Wayne.”

“No need … Of *course* there’s need! Why, what happens when we have to thump some people, then run off with their ledgers? They’re gonna *know* it was us, and Wax’ll have to pay a big heap of compensatory fines.”

“Fortunately, we’re not going to be thumping anyone.”

“But—”

“No thumping.”

Wayne sighed. Fat lot of fun this was going to be.

* * *

“I’ll have you know that we take the privacy of our patrons very seriously,” the banker explained, hand protectively on the ledgers he’d retrieved from the records room. They sat in his office now, and he had a little desk plaque that named him MR. ERIOLA. Neither of the others seemed to grasp why Wayne snickered when he read that.

“I understand,” Marasi said, “but I have a healthy suspicion one of these men is a criminal. Certainly you don’t want to abet their activities.”

“I don’t want to violate their trust in me either,” the banker said. “What makes you so certain these men are criminals? Do you have any proof?”

“The proof,” Marasi said, “will be in the numbers.” She leaned forward. “Do you know how many crimes can be proven by looking at statistics?”

“Considering the question, I’m going to assume it’s a nontrivial number,” the banker said, leaning back in his chair and lacing his hands on his ample belly.

“Er, yes,” Marasi said. “Most crimes can be traced to either passion or wealth. Where wealth is involved, numbers come into play—and where numbers come into play, forensic accounting gives us answers.”

The banker didn’t seem convinced—but then, in Wayne’s estimation, he didn’t seem completely human either. He was at least part dolphin. The man continued plying Marasi with questions, obviously stalling for some reason. That made Wayne uncomfortable. Usually when people stalled like that, it was so their mates could have time to arrive and administer a proper beating.

He bided his time playing with objects on the banker’s desk, trying to build a tower of them, but he kept his eyes on the door. If someone *did* arrive to attack them, he’d have to toss Marasi out the window to get away.

A moment later the door swung open. Wayne grabbed for Marasi, his other hand going for one of his dueling canes, but it was only the clerk from outside. She bustled over to the banker—so Wayne didn’t feel a bit guilty admiring her bustle, so to speak—and handed him a half sheet of paper.

“What’s that?” Marasi asked as the woman left.

“Telegram,” Wayne guessed, relaxing. “Checkin’ up on us, are you?”

The banker hesitated, then turned the paper around. It contained a description of Wayne and Marasi, followed by the words, *They are indeed constables under my command. Please afford them every courtesy and liberty in your establishment—though do keep an eye on the short man, and check your till after he leaves.*

“Here, now,” Wayne said. “That’s right unfair. Those things cost a clip every five words to send, they do. Old Reddi wasted good money libelin’ me.”

“Technically, it’s defamation,” Marasi said.

“Yup,” Wayne said, “manure, through and through.”

“Defa*mation,* Wayne, not … Oh, never mind.” She met the eyes of the banker. “Are you satisfied?”

“I suppose,” he said, then slid the ledgers over to her.

“Numbers,” Marasi said, digging in her purse for a moment. She brought out a small book and tapped it with one finger. “This contains a list of the common wages for workers in the cemetery business, by the job they do.” She pulled open the ledgers. “Now, looking at the deposits by our men in question, we can find patterns. Who is putting more money in the bank than their payroll would reasonably account for?”

“Surely this isn’t enough to convict a man,” the banker said.

“We’re not looking to convict,” Marasi said, looking through the first ledger. “I just need a little direction.…”

In the minutes that followed, Wayne got his tower to balance with six separate items, *including* the stapler, which left him feeling rather proud. Eventually, Marasi tapped on one of the ledgers.

“Well?” the banker asked. “Did you find your culprit?”

“Yes,” Marasi said, sounding disturbed. “All of them.”

“… All of them.”

“Every rotten one,” Marasi said. “No pun intended.” She took a deep breath, then slapped the ledger closed. “I guess I could have picked one at random, Mister Eriola. But still, it is good to know.”

“To know what?”

“That they’re all crooked,” she said, and started fishing in her purse again. “I should have guessed. Most corpses are buried with *something* valuable, if only the clothing. No use letting that all rot away.”

The banker paled. “They’re selling the *clothing* off the *dead people*.”

“That,” Marasi said, slipping a small bottle of Syles brandy out of her purse and setting it on the table, “and perhaps any jewelry or other personal effects buried with the bodies.”

“Hey,” Wayne said. “I’m right dry in the throat, I am. That would sure hit me well, like a morning piss after a nine-pinter the night afore.”

“That’s horrible!” the banker said.

“Yes,” Marasi said, “but if you think about it, not *too* horrifying. The only crimes being perpetrated here are against the dead, and their legal rights are questionable.”

Wayne fished in his pocket a moment, then brought out a silver letter opener. Where did he get that? He set it on the table and took the drink, downing it in one shot.

“Thank you for your time, Mister Eriola,” Marasi continued, taking the letter opener and sliding it toward the banker. “You’ve been very helpful.”

The banker looked at the letter opener with a start, then checked his desk drawer. “Hey, that’s *mine*,” he said, reaching into the desk and pulling out something that looked like a piece of cord. “Is this … a rat’s tail?”

“Longest I ever seen,” Wayne said. “Quite a prize. Lucky man, you are.”

“How in the world did you…” The banker looked from Wayne to Marasi, then rubbed his head. “Are we finished here?”

“Yes,” Marasi said, standing. “Let’s go, Wayne.”

“Off to make an arrest?” the banker said, dropping the tail into the wastebasket, which was a crime in and of itself. The thing was almost two hands long!

“Arrest?” Marasi asked. “Nonsense, Mister Eriola. We aren’t here to arrest anyone.”

“Then what was the point of all that?”

“Why,” Marasi said, “I had to know whom to employ, of course. Come along, Wayne.”

# 12

So little had changed since Wax's youth. Oh, the people at this party wore slightly different clothing: formal waistcoats had grown stouter, and hemlines had risen to midcalf while necklines had plunged, with mere bits of gauze draping across the neck and down the shoulders.

The people, though, were the same. They weighed him, calculating his worth, hiding daggers behind ready smiles. He met their condescending nods, and didn't miss his guns as much as he would have thought. Those were not the right weapons for this fight.

"I used to be so nervous at these things," Wax said softly to Steris. "When I was a kid. That was when I still cared about their opinions, I guess. Before I learned how much power over a situation you gain when you decide that you don't care what others think of you."

Steris eyed a couple of passing ladies in their completely laceless gowns. "I'm not certain I agree. How you are perceived *is* important. For example, I'm regretting my choice of gown. I was shooting for fashionable, but fashion is different down here. I'm not in style; I'm avant-garde."

"I like it," Wax said. "It stands out."

"So does a pimple," Steris said. "Why don't you get us some drinks, and I'll take stock of the room and figure out where our targets are?"

Wax nodded in agreement. The grand ballroom was carpeted and adorned with golden chandeliers—though their candleholders glowed with electric lights. The ceiling wasn't terribly high, but the walls were colorfully decorated with false archways that each held a mural. Classical pieces, like the Ascendant Warrior rising above a flock of ravens—the typical depiction of the Lord Ruler's wraiths, of whom only Death himself remained.

Though nobody approached him, they also didn't avoid him. If anything they remained determinedly in his path, refusing to budge—then acted like they hadn't noticed him as he wove around them. He was from Elendel, their political enemy, and in not moving they made a statement.

Rusts, he hated these games.

The bar covered almost the entire length of the far wall, and was serviced by at least two dozen bartenders, so as to make absolutely certain none of the very important guests had to wait. He ordered wine for Steris and a simple gin and tonic for himself, which got him a raised eyebrow. Apparently that wasn't fancy enough. Should have ordered straight-up whiskey.

He turned and scanned the room as the bartender prepared the drinks. Soft music by a harpist helped cover the many conversations. It made him uncomfortable to admit that some of the casual discussions in a room like this could do more to affect the lives of the Basin's people than putting any criminal—no matter how vile—in prison.

*Marasi is always talking about things like that,* he thought. *How the lawkeeping of the future will be about statistics, not shotguns.* He tried to imagine a world where murders were prevented by careful civic planning, and found himself unable to see it. People would always kill.

Still, sometimes it was hard not to feel like the one chandelier in the room that still required candles.

"Your order, my lord," the bartender said, setting the drinks down on fancy cloth napkins, each embroidered with the date of the party. Those would be for the attendees to take as keepsakes.

Wax fished a coin from his pocket for a tip and slid it to the bartender. He grabbed his drinks to head back to Steris, but the bartender cleared his throat. The man held up the coin, and it was not a fivespin as Wax had meant to give him. In fact, it was unlike any coin Wax had ever seen.

"Was this a mistake, my lord?" the man asked. "I don't mean to be ungrateful, but I'd hate to take something that looks like a memento."

*The symbols on that coin …* Wax thought, stepping back to the bar. *They're the same ones as on the walls in the pictures ReLuur took.* He nearly overturned the wineglass of another guest in his haste to grab the coin back. He absently shoved the bartender another tip and held up the coin.

Those *were* the same symbols, or very similar. And it had a face on the back, that of a man looking straight outward, one eye pierced by a spike. The large coin was made of two different metals, an outside ring and an inner one.

The coin certainly didn't seem old. Was it new, or merely well-preserved?

Rust and Ruin … how had this gotten into his pocket?

*The beggar tossed it to me,* Wax thought. But where had *he* gotten it? Were there more of these in circulation?

Troubled, he struck out to find Steris. As he walked, he passed Lady Kelesina, the party's hostess and the woman who was his eventual target. The older woman stood resplendent in a gown of black and silver, holding miniature court before a group of people asking after one of her civic projects.

Wax listened in for a moment, but didn't want to confront the woman yet. He eventually located Steris standing beside a tall, thin table near the corner. There weren't any chairs in the ballroom. No dancing either, though there was a dance floor raised an inch or two in the center of the chamber.

Wax set the coin on the table and slid it to Steris.

"What's this?" she asked.

"The coin that the beggar threw at me. Those symbols look similar to the ones in the pictures ReLuur took."

Steris pursed her lips, then turned the coin over and looked at the other side. "A face with one eye spiked through. Does it mean something?"

"No idea," Wax said. "I'm more interested in how that beggar got it—and why he threw it at me. It has to be a relic ReLuur found at that temple. Could he have lost it, or traded it to someone, in the city?"

He tapped the table with one finger, certain now that beggar had been something more than he pretended. He was equally certain that if he went hunting now, he'd find that the man had vanished.

Eventually, Wax pocketed the coin. "We have to hope that the answers are in this room somewhere. Assuming Kelesina really is involved."

"Then it's time get to work."

"I passed her back there. Shall we?"

"Not yet. See that couple over there? The man has on a maroon waistcoat."

Wax followed her nod. The couple she indicated were young, well-dressed, and smug. Great.

"That is Lord Gave Entrone," Steris said. "Your houses have had some minor business dealings—he's in textiles—which should give you an opening to speak with him."

"I've heard of him," Wax said. "I courted a cousin of his once. It went poorly."

"Well, he's *also* on the list your mad kandra made in his notebook, so he might know something. He's young, dynamic, and well-regarded—but not terribly important, so he'll work nicely as a first try."

"Right," Wax said, eyeing Entrone, who had drawn a crowd of several more young women as he told a story that involved lots of gesturing. He took a deep breath. “You want to take the lead?”

“It should be you.”

“You sure? I can’t help feeling I’d be better put to use with Marasi and Wayne, digging in graves—while you are comfortable here. You’re good at these things, Steris. You really are—and *don’t* give me any more of your rhetoric about being ‘boring.’”

Her expression grew distant. “In this case, it’s not that I’m boring, it’s more that … I’m off. I’ve learned to fake being normal, but lists of prepared comments and jokes can only take me so far. People can sense that I’m not being authentic—that I don’t like the things they like or think the way they do. Sometimes it amazes me that people like Wayne, or even those kandra, can be so startlingly human when I feel so alien.”

He wished he could figure out how to keep her from saying things like that. He didn’t know the right words; every time he tried to argue the point, it only seemed to make her withdraw.

Steris held out an arm to him. He took it, and together they crossed the room toward Lord Gave and the small crowd he had drawn. Wax had worried about how to break into the conversation, but as soon as he neared, the people talking to Gave stepped back and made room for him. His reputation and status preceded him, apparently.

“Why, Lord Waxillium!” Gave said with a knowing smile. “I was *delighted* when I heard that you were going to attend our little gathering! I’ve wanted to meet you for years.”

Wax nodded to him, then to his date and a couple he’d been chatting with. Those two didn’t retreat.

“How are you finding New Seran, my lord?” one of the ladies asked him.

“Seems mighty inconvenient to get around,” Wax said. “Nice otherwise, though.”

They laughed at that, as if he’d said something humorous. He frowned. What had he missed?

“I’m afraid,” Gave said, “you won’t find much to interest you here. New Seran is a quiet city.”

“Oh, but what are you saying, Lord Gave!” the other young man said. “Don’t misrepresent our town. The nightlife here is fantastic, Lord Waxillium! And the symphony has been given a citation of excellence by two of your previous governors.”

“Yes,” Gave said, “but there aren’t many shoot-outs.”

The others gave him blank stares.

“I was a lawman,” Wax told them, “in the Roughs.”

“A…” one of the ladies said. “You oversaw a city’s constable precinct?”

“No, he was a *real lawman,*” Gave said. “The ‘ride a horse and shoot bandits’ type. You should read the accounts—they’re all the rage in the Elendel broadsheets.”

The three others regarded him with bemused expressions. “How … unique,” one of the ladies finally said.

“The accounts are exaggerated,” Steris said quickly. “Lord Waxillium has only been *directly* responsible for the deaths of around a hundred people. Unless you include those who died of infection after he shot them—I’m still not sure how to count those.”

“It was a difficult life,” Wax said, looking toward Gave, who smiled behind his cup of wine, eyes twinkling. For a man like him, Wax and Steris were obviously good sport. “But that is behind me now. Lord Gave, I wanted to thank you for our years of mutually profitable trade.”

“Oh, don’t bring business into it, Lord Waxillium!” Gave said, with a tip of his wine. “This is a *party*.”

The others laughed. Again, Wax had no idea why.

*Damn,* he thought, looking between them. *I* am *rusty.* He’d complained, dragged his feet, but he hadn’t expected to be *this* clumsy.

Focus. Gave knew something about the Bands of Mourning, or at least ReLuur had thought he did.

“Do you have any hobbies, Lord Gave?” Wax asked, earning an eager nod from Steris at the comment.

“Nothing of real note,” Gave said.

“He *loves* archaeology!” his date said at the same time though. He gave her a dry look.

“Archaeology!” Wax said. “That’s hardly unnotable, Lord Gave.”

“He loves relics!” the lady said. “Spends hours at the auction house, snatching up anything he—”

“I like *history,*” Gave interjected. “Artwork from times past inspires me. But you, dear, are making me sound too much like one of those gentlemen adventurers.” He sneered at the term. “I’m sure you saw the type up in the Roughs, Lord Waxillium. Men who’d spent their lives in society, but suddenly decided to go off seeking some kind of thrill or another where they don’t belong.”

Steris stiffened. Wax met the man’s gaze levelly. The insult, veiled though it was, was similar to those he’d suffered in Elendel society.

“Better they try something new,” Wax said, “as opposed to wasting their lives in the same old activities."

"My Lord Waxillium!" Gave said. "Disappointing one's family is *hardly* original! People have been doing it since the days of the Last Emperor."

Wax made a fist at his side. He was accustomed to insults, but this one still got under his skin. Perhaps it was because he was on edge, or perhaps it was because of his worry about his sister.

He pushed down his anger, Steris squeezing his arm, and tried another tactic. "Is your cousin well?"

"Valette? Most certainly. We are all pleased with her new marriage. I'm sorry your relationship didn't work out, but the man who courted her after you was *dreadful*. When titles are part of a union, it's always unpleasant to see what crawls out from the mists looking for a bone."

He didn't look at Steris as he said it. He didn't need to. That sly smile, so self-satisfied as he sipped his wine.

"You rat," Wax growled. "You rusting, spineless rat." He reached for his gun, which—fortunately—wasn't there.

The other three young nobles looked to him, shocked. Gave grinned in a cocky way before adopting an expression of outrage. "Excuse me," he said, turning his date by the arm and striding away. The others scuttled after.

Wax sighed, lowering his arm, still angry. "He did that *deliberately,*" he muttered. "Didn't he? He wanted an excuse to leave the conversation, so he insulted me. When that didn't work, he flung one at you, knowing I'd overreact."

"Hmmm…" Steris said. "Yes, you have the right of it." Steris nodded. Other people nearby made conversation, but they left an open space around Wax and Steris.

"I'm sorry," Wax said. "I let him get to me."

"That's why we tried him first," Steris said. "Good practice. And we *did* learn something. The archaeology comment prodded too close to something he didn't want to discuss. He turned to veiled insults to distract us."

Wax took a deep breath, shoving away his annoyance at this entire situation. "What now? Do we try another one?"

"No," Steris said, thoughtful. "We don't want our targets to know that we're approaching them specifically. If you interact with unaffiliated people in between, our pattern will be more difficult to spot."

"Right," Wax said, looking through the busy hall as the harpist retreated and a full band, with brass—something you'd never see at a party in Elendel—began setting up instruments in her place.

He and Steris sipped drinks as the music started. Though it was slow enough to encourage dancing with a partner, there was a pep to it Wax hadn't expected. He found he quite liked it. It seemed to be able to beat out his frustration, turn it to something more excited instead.

"Why don't you go there next?" Steris said, nodding toward a distinguished older woman with her grey hair in a bun. "That's Lady Felise Demoux, accompanied by her nephew. You've had business dealings with her; she's exactly the sort of person you'd be expected to seek out. I'll refill our drinks."

"Get me a seltzer," Wax said. "I'll need my mind clear for this."

Steris nodded, moving off through the crowd as people made way for dancing in the center of the room. Wax approached Lady Demoux and introduced himself with a card given to her nephew, then requested a dance, which was accepted.

Small talk. He could do small talk. *What is wrong with you, Wax?* he thought at himself as he accompanied Lady Demoux to the dance floor. *You can interrogate a criminal without trouble. Why do you dread simple conversation?*

Part of him wanted to dismiss it as mere laziness. But that was his response to everything he didn't want to do—an excuse. What was it really? Why was he so reluctant?

*It's because these are their rules. If I play by them, I accept their games.* It felt like he was accepting their collar.

He turned to raise his hand to the side for Lady Demoux to take. However, as he did, a *different* woman slid into place and grasped his hand, towing him into the dancing and away from the perimeter. He was so surprised that he let it happen.

"Excuse me?" Wax said.

"No excuses necessary," the woman said, "I won't take but a moment of your time." She looked to be Terris, judging by her dark skin—though hers was darker than most he'd seen. Her hair was in tight braids, streaked with grey, and her face bore full, luscious lips. She took the lead in the dance, causing him to stumble.

"You realize," she said, "that you are a very rare specimen. Crasher: a Coinshot and a Skimmer."

"Neither are that rare," Wax said, "in terms of Metalborn."

"Ah, but any Twinborn combination is rare indeed. Mistings are one in a thousand; most Ferrings even more unusual, and their bloodlines constrained. To arrive at any specific combination of two is highly improbable. You are one of only three Crashers ever born, Lord Waxillium."

"What, really?"

"I cannot, of course, be one hundred percent certain of that figure. Infant mortality on Scadrial is not as bad as some regions, but still shockingly high. Tell me, have you ever tried increasing your weight while in midair?"

"Who are you?" Wax said, stepping into the dance and seizing back control, twisting her to his right.

"Nobody important," she said.

"Did my uncle send you?"

"I have little interest in your local politics, Lord Waxillium," she replied. "If you would kindly answer my questions, I will let you be."

He turned with her to the music. They danced more quickly than he was accustomed to, though the steps were familiar. The constant intrusion of those brass instruments drove the song, made his steps seem to spring. Why had he mentioned his uncle? Sloppy.

"I've increased my weight while moving," he said slowly. "It doesn't do anything—all things fall at the same speed, regardless of how heavy they are."

"Yes, the uniformity of gravitation," the woman said. "That's not what I'm curious about. What if you're soaring through the air on a Steelpush and you suddenly make yourself heavier. What happens?"

"I slow down—I'm so much heavier that it's harder to Push myself forward."

"Ahh…" the woman said softly. "So it is true."

"What?"

"Conservation of momentum," she said. "Lord Waxillium, when you store weight, are you storing mass, or are you changing the planet's ability to recognize you as something to attract? Is there a difference? Your answer gives me a clue. If you *slow* when you become heavier midflight, then that is not likely due to you having trouble Pushing, but due to the laws of physics."

She stepped back from him in the middle of the dance, releasing his hands and sidestepping another couple, who gave them a glare for interfering with the flow of the dance. She produced a card and handed it toward him. "Please experiment with this further and send me word. Thank you. Now, if I can just figure out why there's no redshift involved in speed bubbles…"

With that she wandered off the floor, leaving him befuddled in the middle of the dancing. Suddenly conscious of how many stares he was drawing, he lifted his chin and sauntered off the dance floor, where he found Lady Demoux and apologized to her profusely for the interruption. She allowed him to have the next dance, which passed without incident, save for Wax having to hear a protracted description of Lady Demoux's prize-winning hounds.

Once done, he tried to find the strange woman with the braids, even going so far as to approach the doorkeeper and ask after her. The card had an address in Elendel, but no name.

The doorman claimed he hadn't admitted anyone by that description, which left Wax even more troubled. His uncle *was* trying to breed Allomancers. A woman asking after the specifics of Allomantic powers couldn't be a coincidence, could it?

He did pass MeLaan. Square-chinned, standing over six feet tall, her masculine body bulged with muscles beneath her tuxedo, and she'd drawn a gaggle of interested young ladies. She winked at Wax as he passed, but he gave her no response.

Steris had a drink waiting for him at the table, where she was flipping through pages of her notebook and mumbling. As Wax neared, he noticed a young man approach and try to engage her in conversation, but she dismissed him with a wiggle of her fingers, not even looking up. The man, deflated, drifted away.

Wax stepped up to the table. "Not interested in dancing?"

"What would be the point?" she said.

"Well, I'm going out and dancing, so maybe you could too."

"You are lord of your house," Steris said absently, still reading. "You have political and economic obligations. Anyone who would want to do the same with me is simply trying to get to you, something for which I have no time."

"Either that," Wax said, "or he thought you were pretty."

Steris looked up from her notes and cocked her head, as if the thought hadn't even occurred to her. "I'm engaged."

"We're new here," Wax said, "largely unknown save to those who pay attention to Elendel politics. The lad probably didn't know who you were."

Steris blinked very pointedly. She actually seemed *troubled* by the idea that someone unknown might find her attractive. Wax smiled, reaching for the cup she'd set out for him. "What is this?"

"Soda water," she said.

He held it up to the light. "It's *yellow*."

"All the rage here, apparently," Steris said. "With lemon flavoring."

Wax took a drink, then nearly choked.

"What?" Steris asked, alarmed. "Poison?"

"Sugar," Wax said. "About seven cups of it."

Steris took a sip, then pulled back. "How odd. It's like champagne, only … not."

Wax shook his head. What was wrong with people in this city?

“I’ve decided upon our next target,” Steris said, pointing toward a man across the room leaning against the archway near some tanks of exotic fish. In his thirties, he wore his jacket unbuttoned with a kind of purposeful sloppiness. Occasionally, someone else would approach and talk to him for a short time, then move back out into the crowd.

“They’re reporting to him?” Wax asked.

“Devlin Airs,” Steris said with a nod. “Informant. You’ll find his sort at any party. He’s either one of the least important people in the room or one of the most important, depending upon the secrets you’re interested in discovering. He was also on ReLuur’s list.”

Wax studied the man for a time, and when he looked back toward Steris, half of his fizzy yellow drink was gone. She looked innocently in the other direction.

“Probably best,” she said, “if you approach him alone. His type doesn’t like an audience.”

“All right,” Wax said, taking a deep breath.

“You can do this, Lord Waxillium.”

He nodded.

“I mean it,” Steris said, resting her hand on his. “Lord Waxillium, this is exactly what you’ve been doing for the last twenty years, in the Roughs.”

“I could shoot people there, Steris.”

“Could you really? Is that how you solved things? You couldn’t get answers, so you shot somebody?”

“Well, I’d usually just punch them.”

She gave him a raised eyebrow.

“To be honest, no, I didn’t have to shoot—or punch—all that often. But the rules *were* different. Hell, I could *make* the rules, if I needed to.”

“Same goes here,” Steris said. “These people know things that you need to know. You need to either trick them or trade with them. As you’ve always done.”

“Perhaps you’re right.”

“Thank you. Besides, who knows? Maybe he’ll pull a knife on you, and you’ll get an excuse to punch him anyway.”

“Don’t get my hopes up,” he said, then gave her a nod, and walked across the room.

* * *

The gates to the Seran New District Cemetery were topped with a crouching statue of the Survivor, scarred arms spread wide and gripping the metalwork arch on either side. Marasi felt dwarfed by the statue's looming intensity—brass cloak tassels spreading out in a radial flare behind him, his metallic face glaring down at those who entered. A spear through his back pierced the front of his chest, the polished tip emerging to hang a foot below the center of the arch.

When she and Wayne passed beneath it, Marasi felt as if it should drip blood upon her. She shivered, but didn't slow her step. She refused to be intimidated by the Survivor's glare. She'd been raised Survivorist, so the gruesome imagery associated with the religion was familiar to her.

It was just that every time she saw a depiction of the Survivor, his posture seemed so demanding. It was like he *wanted* people to recognize the contradiction in his religion. He commanded that people survive, yet the death imagery associated with him was a cruel reminder that they'd eventually fail in that task. Survivorism therefore was not about winning, but about lasting as long as you could before you lost.

The Survivor himself, of course, broke the rules. He always had. Doctrine explained he was not dead, but surviving—and planning to return in their time of greatest need. But if the end of the world hadn't been enough to get him to return in his glory, then what could *possibly* do so?

They wound through the graveyard, seeking the caretaker's building. Evening had fallen, and the mists had decided to come out tonight. She tried not to take that as any kind of sign, but it *did* make the place look extra creepy. Gravestones and statues were shadowed in the churning mists. Some nights, she saw the mists as playful. Tonight their unpredictable motions seemed more a crowd of shifting spirits, watching her and Wayne, angered at their intrusion.

Wayne started whistling. That sent another shiver up Marasi's spine. Fortunately, the gravekeeper's building was now only a short distance up the path—she could see its lights creating a bubble of yellow in the mists.

She stuck close to Wayne, *not* because she felt more comfortable having him beside her. "Our target is a man named Dechamp," she said. "Should be the night gravekeeper, and one of those whose ledger entries show regular upticks in income. He's grave robbing for sure. In fact, this cemetery showed the highest frequency of that, *and* the ledgers listed it as the place the city pays to take care of unidentified bodies. I'm reasonably certain the kandra's remains ended up here; we just need to find this man and get him to dig for us."

Wayne nodded.

"This won't be like with the banker," Marasi said. "Who was reluctant, but ultimately helpful.”

“Really?” Wayne said. “Because I thought he was kind of a tit.…”

“Focus, Wayne. We’ll have to use the full weight of the law here, to push this man. I suspect we’ll have to offer clemency to get him to help us.”

“Wait, wait,” Wayne said, stopping on the path, tendrils of mist curling around his brow, “you’re gonna flash your goods at him *too*?”

“I really wish you wouldn’t phrase it that way.”

“Now, listen,” Wayne said softly, “you were right ’bout the banker. You did damn good work in there, Marasi, and I’m not too proud to admit it. But authority works different out here in the world of regular men. You bring out your credentials with this fellow, and I guarantee he’s gonna react like a rabbit. Find the nearest hole, hunker down, not say a word.”

“Good interrogation techniques—”

“Ain’t worth beans if you’re in a hurry,” Wayne said, “which we are. I’m puttin’ my foot down.” He hesitated. “’Sides, I already lifted your credentials.”

“You…” Marasi started, then rummaged through her purse and discovered that the small, engraved plate that held her constable’s credentials was gone, replaced with an empty bottle of Syles brandy. “Oh please. This isn’t worth *nearly* the same as those credentials.”

“I know I gave you a good deal,” Wayne said. “’Cuz yours is only a bit of useless metal—which is about what it’d be worth here, in this cemetery.”

“You *will* give the credentials back after we’re done.”

“Sure. If you fill that bottle in trade.”

“But you said—”

“Convenience fee,” Wayne said, then looked up the path toward the gravekeeper’s building. He took his top hat off and stomped on it.

Marasi stepped back, hand to her breast, as Wayne ground the hat beneath his heel, then brought it up and twisted it the other way. Finally, after inspecting it critically, he pulled a knife off his metalbelt and cut a hole in the hat’s side. He tossed aside his duster and cut off one of the straps of his suspenders.

When the top hat went back on his head, he looked shockingly like a vagrant. Of course, he was always one step from *that*, but it was still surprising how much of a difference two little changes could make. He spun the knife in his hand and inspected Marasi with a critical eye. The sun had set completely, but with the light of the city diffusing through the mists, it could actually be brighter on a night like this than on one without any mist.

“What?” Marasi said, uncomfortable.

"You look too fancy," Wayne said.

Marasi glanced down at herself. She wore a simple, sky-blue day dress, hem at midcalf, laced up the sleeves and neck. "This is pretty ordinary, Wayne."

"Not for what we'll be doin'."

"I can be your employer or something."

"Men like this don't open up none if there's someone respectable about." He spun the knife in his hand, then reached for her chest.

"Wayne!" she said.

"Don't be so stiff. You want this done right, right?"

She sighed. "Don't get too frisky."

"Sooner get frisky with a lion, Mara. That I would."

He cut the opaque lace window out of her bodice, leaving her with a plunging neckline. Her sleeves went next, shortened by a good foot to above the elbow. He took the lace there and tied it like a ribbon around her dress right beneath her breasts, then pulled the laces on the back of the dress more tightly. That lifted and thrust her upper chest outward in a decidedly scandalous way.

From there, he made a few choice slits on the skirt before rubbing dirt on the bottom parts. He stepped back, tapping his cheek thoughtfully, and nodded.

Marasi looked down, inspecting his handiwork, and was actually impressed. Beyond enhancing the bust, he'd cut along seams, pulling out threads, and the effect wasn't so much *ruined* as *used*.

"Everyone looks at the chest first," Wayne said, "even women, which is kinda strange, but that's the way it is. Like this, nobody will care that the dirt looks too fresh and the rest of the dress ain't aged properly."

"Wayne, I'm shocked," she said. "You're an *excellent* seamstress."

"Clothes is fun to play with. Ain't no reason that can't be manly." His eyes lingered on her chest.

"Wayne."

"Sorry, sorry. Just gettin' into character, you know." He waved for her to follow, and they headed up the path. As they did, Marasi realized something.

She wasn't blushing.

*Well, that's a first*, she thought, growing strangely confident.

"Try not to open your mouth much," Wayne advised as they approached the hut. "On account of you normally soundin' way too smart."

"I'll see what I can do."

He snapped a branch off a tree they passed, spun it around his finger, then held it down before himself like a gnarled cane. Together they approached the glowing building: a small, thatched structure that had a few weathered mistwraith statues sticking up from its mossy yard. The statues—made in the form of skeletons with skin pulled tight across the skulls—were traditionally thought to ward away the real things, as mistwraiths could be very territorial. Marasi suspected the creatures could tell the difference between real and stone members of their species—but of course, scientists claimed that the mistwraiths hadn’t even survived the Catacendre in the first place. So the question was probably moot.

A greasy little man with a blond ponytail whistled to himself beside the hut, sharpening his shovel with a whetstone. *Who sharpens a shovel?* Marasi thought as Wayne presented himself, chest thrust out, improvised cane before him as if he were some grand attendee at a ball.

“And are you,” Wayne said, “bein’ the one called Dezchamp?”

“Dechamp,” the man said, looking up lazily. “Now, now. Did I leave that gate open again? I am supposed to be closin’ the thing each night. I’ll have to be askin’ you to leave this premises, sir.”

“I’ll make my way out, then,” Wayne said, pointing with his cane-stick, yet not moving. “But afore I go, I would like to make you aware of a special business proposition regardin’ you and me.”

Wayne had exaggerated his accent to the point that Marasi had to pay strict attention to make out what he was saying. Beyond that, there was a more staccato sense to it. More stressed syllables, more of a rhythm to the sentences. It was, she realized, very similar to the accent the gravekeeper was using.

“I’m a honest man, I am,” Dechamp said, drawing his whetstone along his shovel. “I don’t have no business I needs to discuss, particularly not at a time of night like this one here.”

“Oh, I’ve heard of your honesty,” Wayne said, rolling back on his heels, hands on his cane before him. “Heard it spoken of from one street to the next. Everyone’s talkin’ ’bout your honesty, Dechamp. It’s a right *keen* topic of interest.”

“If everyone’s sayin’ so much,” Dechamp replied, “then you’ll know I already got plenty of people with whom to share my honesty. I’m … gainfully contracted.”

“That don’t matter none for our business.”

“I do think it might.”

“See, it won’t,” Wayne said, “on account of my needin’ only one special little item, that nobody else would find of interest.”

Dechamp looked Wayne up and down. Then he eyed Marasi, and his eyes lingered as Wayne had said they would. Finally Dechamp smiled and stood, calling into the hut. “Boy? Boy!”

A child scrambled out into the mists, bleary-eyed and wearing a dirty smock and trousers. “Sir?”

“Go and kindly do a round of the yard,” Dechamp said. “Make sure we ain’t disturbed.”

The boy grew wide-eyed, then nodded and scampered off into the mists. Dechamp rested his shovel on his shoulder, pocketing the whetstone. “Now, what can I be callin’ you, good sir?”

“Mister Coins will do,” Wayne said. “And I’ll be callin’ you Mister Smart Man, for the decision you just made right here and now.”

He was changing his accent. It was subtle, but Marasi could tell he’d shifted it faintly.

“Nothing is set as of yet,” Dechamp said. “I just like to give that boy some exercise now and then. Keeps his health.”

“Of course,” Wayne said. “And I understand completely that nothing has been promised. But I tell you, this thing I want, ain’t *nobody* else goin’ to give you a clip for it.”

“If that’s so, then why are you so keen for it?”

“Sentimental value,” Wayne said. “It belonged to a friend, and it was really hard for him to part with it.”

Marasi snorted in surprise at that one, drawing Dechamp’s attention.

“Are you the friend?”

“*I don’t speak skaa*,” she said in the ancient Terris language. “*Could you perhaps talk in Terris, please?*”

Wayne winked at her. “No use, Dechamp. I can’t get her to speak proper, no matter how much I try. But she’s fine to look at, ain’t she?”

He nodded slowly. “Iffen this item be under my watchful care, where might it be found?”

“There was a right tragic incident in town a few weeks back,” Wayne said. “Explosives. People dead. I hear they brought the pieces to you.”

“Bilmy runs the day shift,” Dechamp said. “He brought ’em in. The ones what weren’t claimed, the city put in a nice little grave. They was mostly beggars and whores.”

“And right undeservin’ of death,” Wayne said, taking off his hat and putting it over his breast. “Let’s go see them.”

“You want to go *tonight*?”

“Iffen it ain’t too much a sweat.”

“Not much sweat, Mister Coins,” Dechamp said, “but your name had better match your intentions.”

Wayne promptly got out a few banknotes and waved them. Dechamp snatched them, sniffed them for some reason, then shoved them in his pocket. “Well, those ain’t coins, but they’ll do. Come on, then.”

He took out an oil lantern, then led them into the mists.

“You changed your accent,” Marasi whispered to Wayne as they followed a short distance behind.

“Aged it back a tad,” Wayne explained softly. “Used the accent of a generation past.”

“There’s a difference?”

He looked shocked. “Of *course* there is, woman. Made me sound older, like his parents. More authority.” He shook his head, as if he couldn’t believe she’d even asked.

Dechamp’s lantern reflected off the mists as they walked, and that actually made it harder to see in the night, but he’d probably need it when digging. It did little to dispel the eeriness of gravestones broken by the occasional twisted mistwraith image. She understood, logically, why the tradition would have grown up. If there was one place you wanted to keep scavengers away from, it would be the graveyard. Except that the place had its own set of human scavengers, so the statues weren’t working.

“Now,” Dechamp said, and Wayne caught up to listen, “I’ll have you know that I *am* an honest man.”

“Of course,” Wayne said.

“But I’m also a thrifty man.”

“Ain’t we all,” Wayne said. “I never buys the fancy beer, even when it’s last call and the bartender halves it to empty the barrel.”

“You’re a man after my own heart, then,” Dechamp said. “Thrifty. What’s the good of lettin’ things rot and waste away, I says. The Survivor, he didn’t waste nothing useful.”

“Except noblemen,” Wayne said. “Wasted a fair number o’ them.”

“Wasn’t a waste,” Dechamp said, chuckling. “That there was *weapons* testing. Gotta make sure your knives is workin’.”

“Indeed,” Wayne said. “Why, sometimes the sharp ends on mine need *lotsa* testin’. To make sure they don’t break down in the middle of a good killin’.”

They shared a laugh, and Marasi shook her head. Wayne was in his element—he could talk about stabbing rich people all day long. Never mind that he himself was wealthier, now, than most of Elendel.

She didn’t much care to listen to them as they continued to laugh and joke, but unfortunately she also didn't want to get too far away in this darkness. Yes, the mists were supposed to belong to the Survivor, but *rusts,* every second tombstone looked like a figure stumbling toward her in the night.

Eventually the gravekeeper led them to a freshly filled grave tucked away behind a few larger mausoleums. It was unmarked save for the sign of the spear, carved in stone and set into the dirt. Nearby, a few other new graves—these open—awaited corpses.

"You might want to grab a seat," Dechamp said, hefting his shovel. "This'll go fast, since the grave is upturned, but not *that* fast. And you might tell the lady to watch the other way. There's no tellin' what bits I might toss up."

"Grab a seat…" Wayne said, looking around at the field of tombstones. "Where, my good man?"

"Anywhere," Dechamp said, starting to dig. "They don't care none. That's the motto of the gravekeeper, you know. Just remember, they don't care none. …"

And he set to it.

# 13

*I have to accept their rules,* Wax thought, crossing the room to the informant. *They're different, no matter what Steris says. But I* do *know them.*

He'd decided to stay in the Basin and do what he could here. He'd seen the dangers on the streets of Elendel, and had worked to fight them. But those were a lesser wound—it was like patching the cut while the rot festered up the arm.

Chasing down the Set's lesser minions … they probably *wanted* him doing those things. If he was going to protect the people, he was going to have to gun for more important targets. That meant keeping his temper, and it meant dancing and playing nice. It meant doing all the things his parents, and even his uncle, had tried to teach him.

Wax stopped near the alcove the informant, Devlin, occupied. The man was watching the nearby fish tank, which stood beneath a depiction of Tindwyl, Mother of Terris, perched on the walls during her last stand against the darkness. In the tank, tiny octopuses moved across the glass.

After a moment's waiting, the informant nodded toward him. Wax approached and rested his arm against the glass of the tank beside Devlin, a short, handsome man with a hint of hair on his upper lip and chin.

"I expected you to be arrogant," Devlin noted.

"What makes you think that I'm not?"

"You waited," Devlin said.

"An arrogant man can still be polite," Wax said.

Devlin smiled. "I suppose he can be, Lord Waxillium." One of the little octopuses seized a passing fish in its tentacles and dropped from the side of the tank, holding the squirming fish and pulling it up toward its beak.

“They don’t feed them,” Devlin noted, “for a week or so before a party. They like the show they provide.”

“Brutal,” Wax said.

“Lady Kelesina imagines herself the predator,” he said, “and we all her fish, invited in to swim and perhaps be consumed.” Devlin smiled. “Of course, she doesn’t see that she’s in a cage as well.”

“You know something about that cage?” Wax asked.

“It’s the cage we’re all in, Lord Waxillium! This Basin that Harmony created for us. So perfect, so *lush*. Nobody leaves.”

“I did.”

“To the Roughs,” Devlin said, dismissive. “What’s *beyond* them, Waxillium? Beyond the deserts? Across the seas? Nobody cares.”

“I’ve heard it asked before.”

“And has anyone put up the money to find the answers?”

Wax shook his head.

“People can ask questions,” Devlin said, “but where there is no money, there are no answers.”

Wax found himself chuckling, to which Devlin responded with a modest nod. He had developed a subtle way of explaining that he needed to be paid to give information. Oddly, despite the immediate—and somewhat crass—demand, Wax found himself more comfortable here than he’d been with Lord Gave.

Wax fished in his pocket and held out the strange coin. “Money,” he said. “I have an interest in money.”

Devlin took it, then cocked an eyebrow.

“If someone could tell me how this could be spent,” Wax noted, “I would be enriched. Really, we all would be.”

Devlin turned it over in his fingers. “Though I’ve never seen the exact image on this one, coins like these have been moving with some regularity through black-market antiquities auctions. I’ve been baffled as to why. There is no reason to keep them secret, and it would not be illegal to sell them in the open.” He flipped the coin back to Wax.

He caught it with surprise.

“You didn’t expect me to answer so frankly,” Devlin said. “Why do people so often ask questions when they’re not expecting answers?”

“Do you know anything else?” Wax asked.

“Gave bought a few,” Devlin said, “then immediately stopped, and the pieces he purchased are no longer on display in his home.”

Wax nodded thoughtfully and dug into his pocket for some money to offer the informant.

"Not here," Devlin said, rolling his eyes. "One hundred. Send a note of transfer to your bank and have them move it to my account."

"You'd trust me?" Wax asked.

"Lord Waxillium, it's my *job* to know whom to trust."

"It will be done, then. Assuming you have a little more for me."

"Whatever is being covered up," Devlin said, looking back toward the fish tank, "a good quarter of the nobility in the city is embroiled in it. First I was curious; now I'm terrified. It involves a massive building project to the northeast of here."

"What kind of building project?" Wax asked.

"No way of knowing," Devlin said. "Some farmers have seen it. Claimed Allomancers were involved. News died before it got here. Quashed. Smothered. Everything's been strange in New Seran lately. A murderer from the Roughs showing up, attacking the homes of rich Metalborn, then *you* come to a party…"

"This project to the northeast," Wax said. "Allomancers?"

"I don't have anything more on it," Devlin said, then tapped the fish tank, trying to frighten one of the little octopuses.

"What about the explosion a few weeks back?" Wax asked. "The one in the city?"

"An attack by this murderer from the Roughs, they say."

"Do you believe them?"

"It didn't kill any Metalborn," Devlin said.

*None that you know of,* Wax thought. Where did Hemalurgy fit into all of this?

Devlin stood and nodded to Wax, extending a hand as if in farewell.

"That's it?" Wax asked.

"Yes."

"Steep price for so little," Wax said, taking the hand.

Devlin leaned in, speaking softly, "Then let me give you a bit more. What you're involved in is dangerous, more than you can imagine. Get out. That's what I'm doing."

"I can't," Wax said as Devlin pulled back.

"I know you, lawman," Devlin said. "And I can tell you, the group you chase, you don't need to worry about them. They won't be a danger for decades, perhaps centuries. You're ignoring the bigger threat."

"Which is?" Wax asked.

“The rest of the people in this room,” Devlin said, “the ones not involved in your little conspiracy—the ones who care only about how their cities are being treated.”

“Pardon,” Wax said, “but they don’t seem like nearly the same level of danger to me.”

“Then you aren’t paying attention,” Devlin said. “Personally, I’m curious to find out how many lives the Basin’s first civil war claims. Good day, Lord Ladrian.” He walked away, snapping his fingers as he passed a few people. One of them scuttled off to follow him.

Wax found himself growling softly. First that woman during the dancing, now this fellow. Wax felt like he was being jerked around on the end of someone’s string. What had he even found out? Confirmation that artifacts were being sold? So someone else had found the place that ReLuur had evanotyped?

*A building project,* Wax thought. *Allomancers*.

Civil war.

Feeling cold, Wax moved back through the crowd. He rounded a group of people, noting that Steris was gone from their table—though she’d finished his cup of sweetened soda water before leaving. He turned and started through the crowd, looking for her.

That, by chance, brought him unexpectedly face-to-face with a statuesque woman with her hair in a bun and a ring on each finger. “Why, Lord Waxillium,” Kelesina said, waving for her companions to withdraw, leaving her alone with Wax. “I was hoping to get a chance to speak with you.”

He felt an immediate spike of panic—which he shot in the head and dumped in a lake. He would *not* be intimidated by one of Suit’s lackies, no matter how wealthy or influential. “Lady Shores,” he said, taking her hand and shaking it rather than kissing it. He might not be in the Roughs, but he didn’t intend to take his eyes off his enemy.

“I hope you’ve been enjoying the party,” she said. “The main address is about a half hour away; you might find it of note. We’ve invited the mayor of Bilming himself to speak. I’ll be certain to get you a transcript to bring back to your peasant governor, so that you needn’t worry about memorizing the details.”

“That’s very courteous of you.”

“I—” she began.

Rusts, he was *tired* of letting someone else steer his conversation tonight.

“Have you seen Lord Gave?” Wax interrupted. “I insulted him by accident earlier. I wish to make amends.”

“Gave?” Kelesina said. “Don’t mind him, Waxillium. He’s hardly worth the bother.”

“Still,” Wax said. “I feel like I’m wearing blocks of concrete on my feet and trying to dance! Every step I take, I smash *somebody’s* toes. Rusts, I’d hoped that people down here wouldn’t be as touchy as they are in Elendel.”

She smiled. The words seemed to put her at ease, as if she were getting from him exactly what she expected.

*Use that,* Wax told himself. But how? This woman had decades’ worth of experience moving in social circles. Steris could opine all she wanted about his virtues, but he’d spent years doing target practice instead of attending parties. How could he expect to match these people at their own game?

“I’m sorry to see you didn’t bring your associate,” Kelesina said.

“Wayne?” Wax asked, genuinely incredulous.

“Yes. I’ve had letters regarding him from friends in Elendel. He seems so colorful!”

“That’s one way to put it,” Wax said. “Pardon, Lady Kelesina, but I’d sooner bring my *horse* to a party. It’s better behaved.”

She laughed. “You are a charmer, Lord Waxillium.”

This woman was guilty as sin, and he knew it. He could feel it. He did the next part by instinct. He pulled the coin from his pocket and held it up.

“Maybe you can answer something for me,” he said, and realized he’d started to let a Roughs accent slip into his voice. *Thanks for that, Wayne*. “I was given this outside, by mistake I think. I asked some folks in here about it, and some of them got so pale in the face, I’d have thought they’d been shot.”

Kelesina froze.

“Now personally,” Wax said, flipping it over, “I think it has to do with those rumors of what’s happenin’ out northeast. Big dig in the ground, I’ll bet? Well, I figure this must be from that. Relic from the old days. Mighty interesting, eh?”

“Don’t be taken in by those rumors, Lord Waxillium,” she said. “After stories circulated, people began coining things like those in the city to sell to the gullible.”

“Is that so?” Wax said, trying to sound disappointed. “That’s a shame. It sounded really interesting to me.” He pocketed the coin as the band started another song. “Care for a dance?”

“Actually,” she said, “I promised the next one already. Can I find you later, Lord Waxillium?”

“Sure, sure,” he said, then gave her a nod as she withdrew. He stepped back to his table, watching her move pointedly through the crowd with frightened motions.

“Was that Lady *Kelesina*?” Steris said, joining him, holding another cup of the sweetened yellow drink.

“Yup,” Wax said.

“I wasn’t planning to talk to her until after the speech,” Steris said, huffing. “You’ve thrown off my entire timeline.”

“Sorry.”

“It will have to do. What did you discover from her?”

“Nothing,” Wax said, still watching Lady Kelesina as she met with some men in suits nearby. She kept her face calm, but the curt way she motioned … yes, she sure was agitated. “I told her what I’d discovered.”

“You *what*?”

“I tipped her off that I was on to them,” Wax said, “though I tried to act stupid. I don’t know if she bought that part. Wayne’s far better than I am at it. He’s a natural, you see.”

“You’ve ruined it then?”

“Maybe,” Wax said. “But then, if this were the Roughs and I were confronting a criminal—but had no evidence—this is what I’d do. Let it slip that I was suspicious of them, then watch where they go.”

Lady Kelesina stalked from the hall, leaving one of the other men to give apologies. Wax could almost hear them. *The lady has a matter of some urgency to take care of at the moment. She will return shortly.*

Steris followed his gaze.

“Ten notes says she’s gone to contact Suit,” Wax said, “and let him know that I’m on to them.”

“Ah,” Steris said.

He nodded. “I figured I couldn’t outtalk her, no matter how hard I tried. But she’s not used to being chased by the law. She will make simple mistakes, ones that even a rookie stagecoach robber would never make.”

“We’ll need to follow her somehow.”

“That would be the plan,” Wax said, drumming his fingers on the table. “I may have to start a fight and get thrown out.”

“Lord Waxillium!” Steris said, then started fishing in her purse.

“I’m sorry. I’m having trouble thinking of something else.” It was a weak plan though. Getting thrown out would likely alert Kelesina. “We need a distraction, an excuse to leave. Something believable, but not *too* disconcerting … What is that?”

Steris had removed a small vial of something from her purse. “Syrup of ipecac and saltroot,” she said. “To induce vomiting.”

He blinked in shock. “But why…”

“I had assumed they might try to poison us,” Steris said. “Though I considered it only a small possibility, it’s best to be prepared.” She laughed uncomfortably.

Then she downed the whole thing.

Wax reached for her arm, but too late. He watched in horror as she stoppered the empty vial and tucked it into her purse. “You might want to get out of the splash radius, so to speak.”

“But … Steris!” he said. “You’ll end up humiliating yourself.”

She closed her eyes. “Dear Lord Waxillium. Earlier, you spoke of the power of not caring about what others thought of you. Do you remember?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you see,” she said, opening her eyes and smiling, “I’m trying to practice that skill.”

She proceeded to vomit all over the table.

* * *

The digging continued, and Marasi passed the time reading inscriptions on gravestones. Wayne, for his part, had settled down on a grave with his back to the stone, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. As she passed to check on the progress, she found him rummaging in his pocket. A moment later, he pulled a *sandwich* out and started eating. When he saw Marasi staring at him, he held it toward her, wagging it to see if she wanted a bite.

Feeling sick, she turned away from him and sought out more grave inscriptions. This was obviously the poorer section of the yard; plots were close together, and the markers were small and simple. The mist wove between them, curling around her as she knelt beside a stone, wiped off the moss, and read the memorial left for the child buried here. *Eliza Marin. 308–310. Ascend and be free.*

The steady sound of the gravedigger’s shovel accompanied her as she moved between the graves. Soon she was too far from the light to make out the inscriptions. She sighed, turning, and found someone standing in the mists nearby.

She practically jumped out of her shoes, but the shifting mists—and the figure’s too-steady posture—soon revealed this to be a statue. Marasi approached, frowning. Who had paid for a statue to be placed in the paupers’ section of the graveyard? It was old, having sunken a foot or so on the right side as the ground shifted, tipping the statue askew. It was also masterly, an extraordinary figure cut of gorgeous black marble standing some eight feet tall and resplendent in a sweeping mistcloak.

Marasi rounded it, and was not surprised to find a feminine figure with short hair and a petite, heart-shaped face. The Ascendant Warrior was here, settled among the graves of the impoverished and the forgotten. Unlike Kelsier's statue, which had loomed over those who passed beneath his gaze, this one seemed about to take flight, one leg raised, eyes toward the sky.

"For years, I wanted to be you," Marasi whispered. "Every girl does, I suppose. Who wouldn't, after hearing the stories?" She'd even gone so far as to join the ladies' target club because she figured if she couldn't Push bits of metal around, a gun was the closest she could get.

"Were you ever insecure?" Marasi asked. "Or did you always know what to do? Did you get jealous? Frightened? Angry?"

If Vin had been an ordinary person at any point, the stories and songs had forgotten. They proclaimed her the Ascendant Warrior, the woman who had slain the Lord Ruler. A Mistborn and a legend who had carried the world itself upon her arms while Harmony prepared for divinity. She'd been able to kill with a glare, tease out secrets nobody else knew, and fight off armies of enraged koloss all on her own.

Extraordinary in every way. It was probably a good thing, or the world wouldn't have survived the War of Ash. But rusts … she left a hell of a reputation for the rest of them to try to live up to.

Marasi turned from the statue and crossed the springy ground back to Wayne and Dechamp. As she approached, the gravedigger climbed out and stuck his shovel into the earth, digging a flask from his pack and taking a protracted swig.

Marasi peeked into the grave. He had made good time—the earth had been dug out of the hole four feet deep.

"Wanna share that with a fellow?" Wayne asked Dechamp, standing.

Dechamp shook his head, screwing the lid back on his flask. "My gramps always said, never share your booze with a man who ain't shared his with you."

"But that way, nobody'd share their booze with anybody!"

"No," Dechamp said. "It just means I get twice as much." He rested his hand on his shovel, looking into the grave. Without the steady rhythm of his work, the graveyard was silent.

They had to be close to the bodies now. The next part would be unpleasant—sorting through the corpses for one that was in pieces, then checking that to see if it contained a spike. Her stomach churned at the thought. Wayne took another bite of his sandwich, hesitated, and cocked his head.

Then he grabbed Marasi under the arm and heaved, flipping her into the grave. The impact knocked the breath out of her.

Gunfire sounded above a moment later.

# 14

Marasi gasped as Wayne slid into the shallow grave, flopping down square on top of her. It knocked the wind out of her *again*.

Wayne grunted, and the gunshots stopped a moment later. Still trying to recover, Marasi stared up at the black sky and swirling mist. It took her a moment to realize that the mist was frozen in place.

“Speed bubble?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Wayne said, then groaned, twisting to the side and putting his back to the earthen wall so he wasn’t lying directly on her. His shoulder glistened with something wet.

“You’ve been hit.”

“Three times,” Wayne said, then winced as he turned his leg. “No, four.” He sighed, then took a bite of his sandwich.

“So…”

“Give me a sec,” he said.

She twisted in the grave and peeked up over the earthen lip. Nearby, Dechamp fell slowly—as if through molasses—toward the ground, blood spraying from several gunshot wounds, droplets hanging in the air. A vanishing muzzle flash from the darkness revealed the origin of the gunfire: a group of figures on the path, shadowed and nearly invisible. Bullets zipped through the mist, leaving trails.

“How’d you know?” she asked.

“They made the crickets stop,” Wayne said. “Dechamp musta sold us out. I’d bet Wax’s hat that he sent that boy to fetch these fellows.”

“The Set was here first,” Marasi said, her stomach sinking.

“Yeah.” Wayne poked at one of the holes in his shirt, wiggling it around to check that the wound had healed. With his other hand, he stuffed the last bite of sandwich into his mouth, then joined her in peeking up over the lip of the grave. Above, a lethargically moving bullet hit the invisible edge of Wayne’s speed bubble. In an eyeblink, it zipped across the air—barely a foot over Marasi’s head—before hitting the other side, where it slowed down again.

She cringed belatedly. Anytime something entered a speed bubble, it was refracted, changing trajectory. While it was unlikely one would get bounced so radically that it would point downward toward them, it *was* possible. Beyond that, Wayne’s bendalloy burned extremely quickly. He’d have to drop the bubble before too long.

“Plan?” Marasi asked.

“Not dyin’.”

“Anything more detailed than that?”

“Not dyin’ … today?”

She gave him a pointed look. Another pair of bullets zipped overhead while, outside the speed bubble, Dechamp’s body hit the ground.

“We’ve gotta get close to them,” Wayne said, slipping one of his dueling canes out from the loop on his belt.

“That’s going to be hard,” Marasi said. “I think they’re scared of you.”

“Yeah?” Wayne asked, sounding encouraged. “You really think?”

“They’re unloading enough ammunition to take down a small army,” Marasi said, ducking as a bullet entered the speed bubble, “and they opened fire even though Dechamp was caught in the barrage. While I doubt he meant much to them, it indicates they were scared enough that they didn’t dare waste a moment to wait for him to climb back into the grave.”

Wayne nodded slowly, grinning. “How ’bout that. I gots me a *reputation*. I wonder…”

Marasi glanced behind them. This grave was near several others that had been left open earlier, waiting for occupants. “Can you get your speed bubble big enough to include one of those other graves from in here?”

He followed her gaze, then rubbed his chin. “The closest one maybe, if I drop this bubble and move to the back of this grave before makin’ another.” He couldn’t move a bubble once it was in place, and couldn’t leave its confines without it dissipating.

“So we have to get them to come check on our corpses,” Marasi said. “Which might be hard, if they’re really that scared of you.”

“Nah,” Wayne said, “might actually be easy.”

“How—”

“Runnin’ outta time,” Wayne said. “You still got that little popgun in your purse?”

She pulled out the small pistol. “It has terrible range,” she said, “and only two shots.”

“Don’t matter none,” Wayne said. “Once I drop this, fire it at the fellows. Then be ready to move.”

She nodded.

“Here we go,” Wayne said.

The bubble dropped.

Mists leaped back into motion, swirling above, and the sudden sound of gunfire pervaded the graveyard. Dechamp twitched, and he gasped, eyes going glassy in the lanternlight. Marasi waited until the assailants stopped shooting, the cracks of their guns echoing in the night. Then she leveled her little gun and squeezed off two shots toward the shadows.

She ducked back down, uncertain what that was supposed to have accomplished. “You realize we’re now trapped *and* unarmed, Wayne.”

“Yup,” he said. “But if those fellows are really bothered by my fearsome reputation…”

“What?” Marasi asked, glancing toward him as he peeked over the edge. A few cracks sounded as the dark figures fired back, but it wasn’t as frantic as before. What was …

“There!” Wayne said, leaping toward the back of the grave and then popping up a speed bubble. “Ha! They came prepared, they did. Good men.”

Marasi risked peeking up again. She came almost face-to-face with a spinning piece of dynamite frozen in the air, the wick spraying sparks and smoke that mixed with the mists. She yelped, scrambling back. It was almost to the speed bubble.

“Across we go,” Wayne said, taking off his top hat and tossing it out of their grave toward the next one. He scrambled after it. Marasi joined him, staying low and hoping that the attackers wouldn’t notice. Wayne’s speed bubble would make them blurs to the eyes of the men, but it was dark and the mists would help obscure things.

She slid across and down into the other grave, which was deeper than the first. Wayne nodded to her, then dropped the bubble.

Marasi pressed her back to the side of the grave, squeezed her eyes shut, plugged her ears, and counted in her head. She only reached two before an explosion shook the ground and dropped a wave of dirt into their grave. Rusts! People must have heard that halfway across the city.

She glanced at Wayne, who took out his other dueling cane and twirled one in each hand. She heard footsteps scraping outside, and imagined the shadowy attackers cautiously creeping up to check on people they'd supposedly killed.

*Can you beat them on your own?* Marasi half whispered, half mouthed at Wayne.

He grinned and mouthed back, *Does a guy wif no hands got itchy balls?* He grabbed the side of the grave and hauled himself out. The mists above froze a moment later as Marasi was caught in a speed bubble—Wayne, putting one up and trapping half the men nearby in it with him.

She was accustomed, by now, to the sound of wood on a man's skull, but it still made her wince. The speed bubble dropped as someone managed to get a shot off, but more groaning and cursing followed.

A short time later Wayne appeared at the top of the grave, backlit by the flickering lantern in the mists. He shoved his dueling canes into their loops, then knelt and held out his hand.

Marasi reached up to accept his help from the grave.

"Actually," Wayne said, not taking her hand, "I was hopin' you'd hand me my hat."

* * *

"We'll send for your carriage, Lord Waxillium," said the assistant house steward. "We're terribly sorry about the unfortunate occasion of your lady's distress. You're certain she ate nothing here that might disagree with her?"

"She had only drinks," Wax said, "and few of those at that."

The cook relaxed visibly. She towed one of the maids away by the arm as soon as she saw that Wax had noticed her. He stood in the doorway of a guest chamber, and behind him Steris lay on the bed, eyes closed.

The assistant steward—an aged Terriswoman in the proper robes—clicked her tongue softly, looking over her shoulder toward the vanishing cook and maid. Despite her displeasure, Wax could tell that she too was relieved to hear that the food at the party couldn't be blamed. No need for the other guests to worry.

A piercing voice echoed down the hallway. Someone—a man with a high-pitched tone—was announcing the reception's speaker. Wax could hear easily; the introducer was assisted by electric amplifiers. It seemed the Tarcsel girl's devices had spread even to New Seran. The assistant steward took an unconscious step back toward the ballroom.

"Feel free to go," Wax told her. "We'll wait here for a half hour or so to be certain my lady is well rested, and by then our carriage will certainly be waiting."

"If you're certain.…"

"I am," Wax said. "Just see to it that we're not disturbed. Miss Harms grows most discomforted by noises when she's ill."

The steward bowed and retreated down the hallway toward the ballroom. Wax clicked the door closed, then approached the bed where Steris lay. She cracked an eye open, then glanced at the door to be sure it was closed.

"How do you feel?" Wax asked.

"Nauseated," Steris said, half propping herself on one elbow. "That was a tad hasty on my part, wasn't it?"

"Haste was appreciated," Wax said, checking the wall clock. "I'll give it a few minutes to make sure the hall is clear, then duck out. I'm not certain how long Kelesina will be away, but I'll need to move quickly to learn anything."

Steris nodded. "Do you think they might have her here? Your sister, I mean."

"Unlikely," Wax said. "But anything is possible. I'll settle for a lead of any sort."

"What's she like?"

"She seemed like your average full-of-herself noblewoman. Certain that —"

"Not Lady Kelesina, Waxillium. Your sister."

"I…" Wax swallowed, checking the clock. "I haven't seen her in decades, Steris."

"But you work so eagerly to rescue her."

He sighed, settling down beside Steris. "She was always the bold one, when we were kids. I was careful, earnest, trying so hard to figure out what to do. And Telsin … she seemed to have it all in hand. Until I left the Village and she stayed."

"More Terris than you, then."

"Maybe. I always thought she hated the place, considering how often she found excuses to escape. Then she stayed." He shook his head. "I never knew her, Steris. Not as I should have. I was too focused on myself. I can't help feeling that I failed everyone—Mother, Father, Telsin herself—by not remaining close to her when I was out in the Roughs. And I'm failing them again by leaving her under my uncle's control."

Steris, still lying on the bed, squeezed his hand.

"I'll find her," Wax said. "I'll make it right. I ran to the Roughs, thinking I didn't need any of them. But as the years pass, Steris, I find I want less and less to be alone. I can't explain it, I guess. She's my *family*. My only family."

Outside, a new voice started talking. Introduction done, Lord Severington had begun his speech. Wax glanced at the clock, then stood. “All right. I need to go and explore while everyone else is distracted by the speech.”

Steris nodded, then swung her feet over the side of the bed and took a deep breath.

“You should wait here,” Wax said. “This could be dangerous.”

“Have you forgotten what I said last night?” she asked.

“The safest place to be is most certainly *not* near me, Steris,” Wax said.

“Regardless, you may need to escape quickly. There won’t be time to come back for me. And if you’re spotted, someone will wonder why you are alone—but if we’re together, we can say we were just leaving, and were looking for the way to our carriage.”

Those were good arguments. He reluctantly nodded, motioning for her to follow. She did so with alacrity, waiting beside the door as he opened it and peeked out. He could hear Lord Severington’s voice even better.

“… time to show those in Elendel that their tyranny is not only unjust, it is against the will of the Survivor, who died in the name of freedom.…”

The hallway was empty. Wax stepped out, Steris at his side. “Try not to look like you’re sneaking,” he suggested softly.

She nodded, and together they moved down a long hallway set with brass gas lamps that had been converted to electricity. According to the mansion layout he had memorized, the ballroom and these small guest quarters were in their own wing to the east. If they moved west along this hallway, took this corner …

They passed under an archway into the mansion’s central atrium, where a stream ran through the center of the mansion—diverted from one of the waterfalls, then cascading down a set of arranged rocks covered in chimes. Only a few lights glowed on the walls, giving the atrium a dusklike feeling.

“That humidity must be awful for the mansion’s woodwork,” Steris noted. “What practical reason could they have to run a *river* through the middle of their house?”

“I’m sure the reasons aren’t practical at all,” Wax said. Nearby, a maid passed in from another doorway. She saw him and froze.

Wax glared at her, standing up straight, putting as much nobleman sneer into his expression as he could muster. The young woman didn’t challenge them, but ducked her head and scuttled away, carrying her stack of linens.

They picked their way through the dim atrium. Above, broad glass windows would have given a view of the sky—but instead mist spun and swirled. Wax raised his fingers in greeting toward the distant mists, but stopped himself.

Harmony watched through those mists. Harmony the impotent, Harmony the meaningless. He set his jaw and turned away from the windows, leading Steris along a path in the indoor garden, which was set with small rocks and plants. From his maps, he guessed that Kelesina would be up on the second floor somewhere. As they followed the path northward, walking along the stream, he spotted a second-floor balcony.

"Honestly," Steris muttered, "how can they even know if the water is *sanitary*? A river running through their gardens wasn't enough? It has to go through the house itself?"

Wax smiled, studying that balcony. "I'm going to scout ahead up there. Speak loudly if someone confronts you. That will warn me, and I'll sneak back."

"Very well," Steris said.

He dug in his pocket for a few coins, feeling old-fashioned as he burned steel and prepared to jump.

"Do you want something more substantial?" Steris asked.

He glanced at her, then down at her purse. "They searched your purse."

"That they did," she said, then took the hem of her skirt, lifting it up to the side and revealing a small handgun strapped to her thigh. "I worried they'd do something like that. So I made other plans."

Wax grinned. "I could get used to having you around, Steris."

She blushed in the dim light. "I might, uh, need your help getting the thing off."

He knelt down, realizing that she'd used approximately seven rolls of tape to strap the gun in place. Also, being Steris, she'd worn shorts under the dress—in case she had to do what she was doing. Two pairs, judging by the bit of cloth he saw peeking out from under the top one.

Wax set to work extricating the gun. "I see you didn't want this coming off accidentally."

"I kept imagining it falling out and firing," Steris said, "mid-dance."

Wax grunted, working at her thigh beneath her dress. "You realize that if this were a play, this is exactly the point where someone would walk in on us."

"Lord Waxillium!" Steris said. "What kind of theater have you been attending?"

"The kind you find in the Roughs," Wax said, yanking the gun free. It proved to be one of his Riotings, a .22 six-shot he kept in his gun case but rarely used. It would do. He stood up, letting Steris settle her skirt back down. "Nice work."

“I tried a shotgun first,” she said, blushing. “You should have seen me try to walk with one of those on my leg!”

“Stay out of sight, if you can,” he told her, then dropped a coin and launched himself toward the upper balcony.

* * *

Marasi stepped into the gravekeeper’s shack, clicking the door closed behind her. Wayne looked up from breaking the legs off a chair.

“Is that necessary?” Marasi asked.

“Dunno,” he said, snapping off another one. “It’s fun, though. How are our toughs?”

Marasi glanced out the window toward where a group of the local constables were carting away the last of the thugs. It turned out that setting off dynamite in the middle of the city was a fine way to get the attention of the authorities.

“They don’t know anything,” she said. “Hired muscle, paid and sent to do the hit. The ones who hired them mentioned your name, which turns out to have been a mistake.”

“I’m famous,” Wayne said happily, snapping another leg off. The hut had been thoroughly ransacked, drawers ripped out, cushions slit, furniture in shambles. Wayne looked at the chair leg he’d broken, apparently checking to see if it was hollow, then tossed it over his shoulder.

“We can try to follow the payments to those men,” Marasi continued, “but I suspect that Suit was too careful for this to be traced. And there’s no sign of the runner boy.”

Wayne grunted, stomping on the floor in one section, then taking a few steps and stomping again.

“The police brought an Allomancer,” Marasi continued. “And there’s no metal in that grave, so if the spike was ever there, it isn’t now.” She sighed, leaning back against the wall. “Rust and Ruin … I hope Waxillium is having more luck than we are.”

Wayne kicked a hole in the floor with the heel of his boot. Marasi perked up, then walked over as he fished around in a compartment he’d found.

“Aha!” he exclaimed.

“What is it?” Marasi asked.

Wayne brought out a bottle. “Dechamp’s hidden booze stash.”

“That’s all?”

“All? It’s great! A fellow like that hides his booze well. Too many other workers around to swipe the stuff.”

"So we're at a dead end."

"Well, there's an account book on the desk there that I found under a false bottom in the drawer," Wayne noted, taking a swig of the dark liquid he'd found. "Lists everybody what paid the people here for a grave robbin' in the last few years."

Marasi started. "When did you find that?"

"First," Wayne said. "Hardly had to search for it. The booze though, that they hid well. Good priorities, these folks."

Marasi stepped over some stuffing from one of the sofas and picked up the ledger. It didn't belong to Dechamp, but to the graveyard as a whole. It listed plots, what had been found in them, and to whom it had been sold.

*It's so the boss of the place can keep track of what they've sold and what they haven't,* Marasi thought. And to keep track of his minions, to be certain they didn't get any ideas about making their own side business of grave robbing.

Next to an entry from a few days back was a note from the manager. *If anyone comes looking to investigate this plot, send to me immediately.*

Marasi closed the book, then fished from her pocket the paper that listed workers at the graveyard. "Come on," she said to Wayne. "We have one more stop to make tonight."

green glow of his devices lighting him from below.

I ran alongside the car, matching pace with it while

my confidence.

As the car slid away from the dock, I leapt into the air.

(Continued below the fold!)

turret having a range of sixteen miles," said Severington. "Other improvements include reinfoced armor hulls,

on land and on the seas. From whom do we need protection?"

(Continued on back.)

# Broken Gondola Strands Passengers

An unidentified disturbance halted the Zinc Line yesterday evening about sunset, according to the New Seran Transportation Authority. The NSTA carried passengers home the old-fashioned way, on donkeys and rickshaws down the switchbacks. We see this as proof for the need of a back-up emergency transport system.

(Continued on back.)

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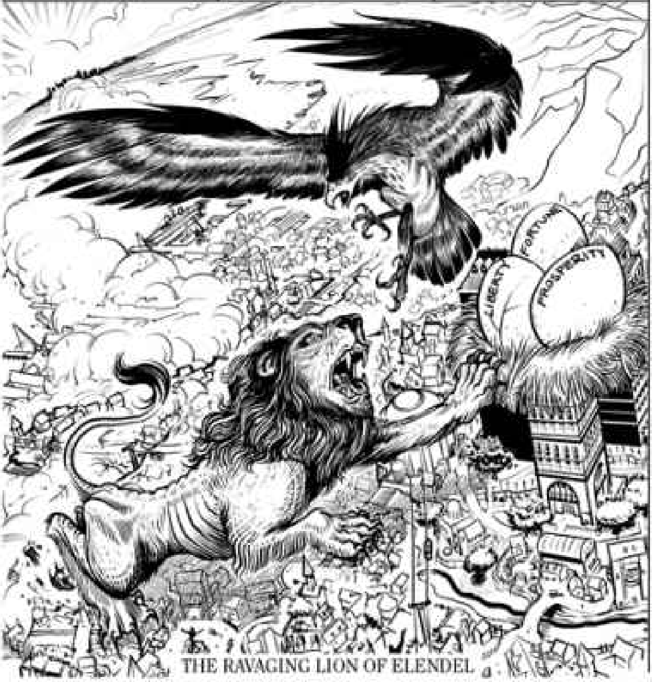

THE RAVAGING LION OF ELENDEL

# The Ghastly Gondola!

The monks of Baz-Kor had trained me well, their practiced moves designed to get a leecher close enough to touch another Allomancer and drain them of their reserves. But it was the ballet lessons that enabled my jump from the platform onto the moving gondola.

I landed perfectly on the small ridge surrounding the bottom of the car and managed a firm grip on the outer door handles. I was safe for the moment, but the ridge I'd landed on was only a few inches wide. If I didn't find a way inside the gondola soon, even my ballet-enhanced toe strength would fail, dropping me almost a hundred feet to the city below, where rooftops glowed in the failing sun like boxings in an open purse.

Ethereal light emanated from inside the car, casting the haunted man's shadow against the windows. Each burst showed him striving to ready some arcane device, presumably to provide his escape.

From my satchel, I retrieved the device I had stolen from him when last we grappled. Covered in strange symbols and weirdly warm to the touch, it was much heavier than it appeared, and I had no clue how to operate it.

But ignorance is no match for invention. I slammed the rod of metal into the door glass, shattering it.

An uncanny explosion answered me, and my Baz-Kor reflexes pulled me abruptly to the side as a bolt howled past. It was neither an arrow nor a bullet, but a blast of pure energy shaped like a ghost. Its entirely too-human scream made the hairs on my neck stand on end, and the frame of the broken door rusted and crumbled in the wake of its passing. What manner of man could harness the powers of the dead? If the energy had enveloped me as well, would I also have disintegrated in an instant? I breathed deep and rushed into the car.

Strange mechanical devices littered the floor, and above

# 15

Templeton Fig smoothed the feathers of his dead white crow. He knew for a fact that this animal was an authentic albino, not some knockoff crafted by an opportunist who had heard of his collection. By now, he had seen enough dead animals bleached white to spot a fake.

He had stuffed this bird himself, prize of his collection, and set it looking over its shoulder with a small strip of rabbit skin in its beak. Such a magnificent creature. People always found it striking, as its coloring was the opposite of what they expected. Things like cats and dogs sometimes had white coloring naturally, and so his albino specimens of those weren't as spectacular.

He replaced the glass dome over the crow, then stepped back and clasped his hands, looking at the white animals in a row. Frozen in death. Perfection. Only … the suckling boar. Had it been moved to the side? The housekeeper had better not have decided to dust his collection again.

He stepped up, twisting the glass jar that held the boar. Behind him, fire crackled in his hearth, though it wasn't particularly cold outside. He even had the window open. He liked the contrast—warmth from the fire, a cool breeze from outside. As he was trying to get the boar just right, the door to his study creaked.

"Templeton?" a quiet voice asked, peeking in. Destra had bags under her eyes, hair frazzled. Her nightgown seemed to have swallowed her. The woman had lost more weight. Soon she would be positively skeletal. "Are you coming to bed?"

"Later," he said, looking back to his boar. There.

“*When* later?”

“Later.”

She winced at his tone and pulled the door closed behind her. The woman should know better than to disturb him. Sleep. How could he sleep until he knew what had happened at the graveyard? One did not disappoint the men with whom he had been dealing. They asked for something to be done, and you saw it done.

He would know soon. He stepped forward, moving his albino squirrel to the end of the line. Did it look better that way? He reached up and wiped the sweat from his brow, then moved the squirrel back. No, that wasn’t right either. Then how was he to—

His fire stopped crackling.

Templeton’s breath caught. He turned slowly in place, fishing in his vest pocket for his handkerchief. The fire was still there, but it was *motionless*. Trell’s soul! What could have frozen the flames?

Something thumped on his door. Templeton backed away, fingers clawing at his pocket, still seeking that handkerchief. The door thumped again, and his back hit the shelf where he kept his collection. He tried to whisper an inquiry, but he was having trouble breathing.

The door burst open and the gravedigger Dechamp—eyes staring sightlessly, blood covering his shirt—fell into the room.

Templeton screamed then, scuttling away from the door, and put his back to the far wall of his small den. His fingers found the windowsill, gripping it for strength as he stared at the corpse lying in the doorway.

Something tapped on his window.

Templeton squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to look. Frozen fire. A body on his floor. He was dreaming. It was a nightmare. It wasn’t possible.…

*Tap. Tap. Tap.*

He found his handkerchief finally and clutched it, his eyes squeezed shut.

“Templeton.” The rasping voice drifted in through the window.

Templeton turned slowly and faced the window. He opened his eyes.

Death stood outside.

Cloaked in black, Death’s face was hidden beneath the hood—but two metal spikes protruded from the cowl, catching the firelight on their heads.

“I’m dead,” Templeton whispered.

“No,” Death whispered. “You can die when I say. Not before.”

“Oh, *Harmony*.”

“You are not His,” Death whispered, standing in the darkness outside. “You are mine.”

“What do you want from me? Please!” Templeton slumped to his knees. He forced himself to glance back toward Dechamp. Would that body rise? Would it come for him?

“You have something of mine, Templeton,” Death whispered. “A spike.” He raised his arms, letting the cloak shift back and expose white skin. A spike was stuck through one arm. The other arm was bare, save for a bloody hole.

“It wasn’t my fault!” Templeton screamed. “They insisted! I don’t have it!”

*“Where.”*

“Sent by courier!” Templeton said. “To Dulsing! I don’t know more. Oh, please. Please! They demanded I recover the spike for them. I didn’t know it was yours! It was just a rusting piece of metal. I’m innocent! I’m…”

He trailed off, realizing that the fire had started crackling again. He blinked, focusing again on the window. It was empty. A … a dream after all? He turned and found Dechamp’s corpse still leaking blood on the floor.

Templeton whimpered and huddled down. He was honestly relieved when the constables burst into the room a short time later.

* * *

Wayne shucked the awful, heavy cloak and held up his arm, healing his wounds. Not much left in his metalmind. He was going to have to be sparing after this. Those bullet wounds earlier had taken a lot out of him.

“You didn’t need to *actually* cut holes in your arm, Wayne,” Marasi said, joining him in the garden—he’d trampled some very nice petunias to get to the window.

“Course I did,” Wayne replied, wiping away the blood. “You’ve gotta be *authentic*.” He scratched at his head, and shifted the wires that held two half spikes hovering in front of his eyes.

“Take that thing off,” Marasi said. “It looks ridiculous.”

“He didn’t think so,” Wayne said. Inside the house, the constables dragged Templeton Fig away. The information in the ledger Wayne had found should be enough to see him well and truly incarcerated. Poor chap. He didn’t really do anything *wrong*. You can’t steal from a person that’s already dead. But then, people were strange about their stuff. Wayne had given up on trying to figure out all their little rules.

He’d send the fellow some fruit in prison. Might make him feel better. “How was the accent?” he asked.

“Worked well enough.”

“I wasn’t sure how Death ’imself would sound, you know? I figured all important-like, like Wax when he’s tellin’ me to take my feet off the furniture.

Mixed with some real *old*-soundin' tones, like a grandfather's grandfather. And grindy, like a man what is choking to death."

"In fact," Marasi said, "he's quite articulate, and not at all 'grindy.' And the accent is strange—not like anything I've heard before."

Wayne grunted, taking off his head spikes. "Can you do it for me?"

"What? The accent?"

Wayne nodded eagerly.

"No. Not a chance."

"Well, next time you meet that guy, tell 'im he's gotta come talk to me. I need to hear what he sounds like."

"What does it matter?"

"I gotta hear," Wayne said. "For next time."

"Next time? How often do you expect you'll be imitating Death?"

Wayne shrugged. "This is the fourth so far. So you never can tell." He took the last swig of Dechamp's brandy, then slung his cloak over his shoulder and started through the mists back toward the road.

"Dulsing," Marasi said.

"You know it?"

"It's a little farming settlement," Marasi said. "Maybe fifty miles northeast of New Seran. I read about it in my textbooks—there was a landmark water rights case there—but it's isolated and tiny, barely worth anyone's time. What in the world does the Set want with it?"

"Maybe they like their tomatoes real fresh," Wayne said. "I know I do."

Marasi grew silent, obviously deep in thought, worried for some reason. Wayne left her to it, digging out his tin of gum, tapping it, then flipping it open and selecting one of the soft, powder-covered balls to chew. So far as he was concerned, this had been a bang-up night. Dynamite, a nice brawl, free brandy, and getting to scare the piss out of someone.

It was the simple things that made his life worth living.

* * *

Wax had little luck with the first set of rooms he scouted. Though they supposedly belonged to Kelesina, they proved to be empty. He was tempted to ransack them for information, but decided that would take too long—and would be too incriminating at the moment. Being discovered lost in a hallway was excusable; being discovered going through a lady's desk drawers was another thing entirely.

He prowled back to the atrium and checked on Steris, gave her a wave, then continued down another hallway. This one bordered the outer wall and had windows open to the mists, which streamed in with their own miniature waterfalls. Likely some servant had the duty to close those windows on a misty night, but had gotten distracted by the party.

He listened at a set of doors, and heard nothing other than a voice drifting in from the window—the voice of Lord Severington, still plowing through his speech in the ballroom. With the amplification devices, Wax could make out a word here and there.

"… suffer the rule … new Lord Ruler?… improper taxation … era must end…"

*I will have to give that more attention*, Wax thought, prowling through the hallway toward the next set of rooms. Severington was mayor of Bilming, the port city west of Elendel. It was the only major one in the Basin besides Elendel itself—and was an industrial powerhouse. If conflict *did* come, they'd be spearheading it.

*They're spearheading it now,* Wax realized as more words drifted up to him.

He continued down the hallway, listening at the next set of doors. He was about to turn away, when he heard a voice. There was someone inside. Wax crouched down, ear to the door, wishing he had a Tineye along to listen for him. That voice …

That was his uncle.

Wax pressed his ear up against the door, heedless of how he'd look to someone entering the hallway. Rusts … he couldn't make out much. A half word here and there. But it *was* Edwarn. Another voice spoke, and that was almost certainly Kelesina.

The gap under the door was dark. Wax put his hand to his pocket and the handgun secreted there, then turned the door's knob and eased it open. Beyond was some kind of study, completely dark but for the thin strip of light under the door on the far side. Wax slipped inside, closed the door behind him, and scuttled through the room—stifling a curse as he smacked his arm on an end table. Heart thumping, he put his back to the wall beside the other door.

"Never mind that," his uncle was saying. His voice was muffled, as if he were speaking through a cloth or a mask or something. "Why have you interrupted me? You know the importance of my work."

"Waxillium knows about the project," Kelesina said. "And he's found one of the coins. He's acting stupid, but he *knows*."

"The diversions?"

"He's not biting."

"You're not trying hard enough then," Suit said. "Kidnap one of his friends and leave a letter, purportedly from one of his old enemies. Challenge his wits, draw him into an investigation. Waxillium cannot resist a personal grudge. It will work."

"The train robbery didn't," Kelesina said. "What of that, Suit? We wasted vital resources, important connections I had spent years cultivating, on that attack. You promised that if we attacked while he was on board, he wouldn't be able to resist investigating. Yet he ignored it. Left Ironstand that same night."

Wax felt a chill as a whole set of assumptions shifted within him. The train robbery … had it been a *distraction,* intended to draw his attention away from pursuing the Set?

"Recovering the device," Suit said, "was worth the risk."

"You mean the device Irich immediately lost?" Kelesina demanded. "That one shouldn't be trusted with important missions. He's too eager. You should have let me recover the item once Waxillium was off the train."

"There was a good chance he'd take the bait," Edwarn said. "I know my nephew; he's probably still itching to go after those bandits. If he's at your party instead, then you aren't doing your duty properly. I haven't time to hold your hand on this, Kelesina. I need to be off to the second site."

Wax frowned. The train hadn't been just a distraction, it seemed. But the words left him with a deeper sense of worry. He'd chased half a dozen leads during the last year, anticipating that he was close on the heels of his uncle. How many of those had been plants? And how many of his other cases had been intentional distractions? And Ape Manton? Was he really even in New Seran? Likely not.

Edwarn spoke a truth. He knew Wax well. Too well, for a man he'd barely seen in the last twenty years.

"Well," Suit said, "you have your chance now to recover the device, as you promised you could. How is that going?"

"It wasn't in the things he checked at the party," Kelesina said. "We snuck a spy among the hotel staff, and she will search for it in his rooms. I'm telling you, Irich—"

"Irich was punished," Suit said. Why did his voice sound so much smaller than Kelesina's? "That is all you need know. Recover it for me, and other mistakes might be forgiven. It is only a matter of time before they accidentally use Allomancy near it."

"And *then* will we see this 'miracle' you keep promising, Suit?" she demanded. "A few more speeches like this one, and Severington will have the entirety of the Basin whipped into a frenzy. Completely ignoring that Elendel has us outmanned and outgunned."

"Patience!" Suit said, sounding amused.

"*You* try to be patient. They're bleeding us dry. You promised to crush that city, provide an army, and—"

"Patience," Suit repeated softly. "Stop Waxillium. That is your part of the bargain now. Keep him in the city; keep him distracted."

"That's *not* going to work, Suit," Kelesina said. "He knows too much already. That damn shapeshifter must have told him—"

"You let it escape?"

Kelesina was silent.

"I thought," Suit said, voice growing cold, "that you had disposed of the creature. You presented its spike to me, claiming the other had been destroyed."

"We … may have assumed too quickly."

"I see," Suit said.

The two did not speak for a protracted moment. Wax raised his gun beside his head, sweat trickling down his brow in the dark room. He toyed with breaking in right then. He had evidence on Kelesina in the form of the wounded kandra and his own testimony. Several people died in that blast. Murder.

But did he have enough against Edwarn? Would his uncle just slip away again? Rusts, an army? They spoke of destroying Elendel. Dared he wait? If he took her and Suit right now, she might break, testify against him—

Footsteps.

They came from the hallway outside. As they approached the door, he made a snap decision, dropping a coin—it wasn't the special one, he had that in a different pocket—and Pushing.

Light from the hallway poured into the room as the door opened, revealing the steward from before. She crossed the room in a rush, and blessedly didn't turn on the room's lights—instead walking straight to the doorway that Wax had been listening at.

She didn't look up and see Wax pressed to the ceiling above her, Pushing against a coin she walked right over in her haste to knock on the door. Kelesina called for her to enter.

"My lady," the steward said in an urgent tone. "Burl sent me word while watching the party for Allomancers. He sensed someone using metals in this direction."

"Where is Waxillium?"

“His fiancée was sick,” the steward said. “We brought her to a guest room to recover.”

“Curious,” Uncle Edwarn said. “And where is he now?”

Wax dropped to the floor with a thump, leveling his gun at the people inside the room. “He’s right here.”

The steward spun, gasping. Kelesina rose from her seat, eyes wide. And Uncle Edwarn …

Uncle Edwarn wasn’t in the room. The only thing there was a boxy device on the table in front of Kelesina.

# 16

“Why, Waxillium!” the box said, projecting his uncle’s voice. “So good to hear your dulcet tones. I presume your entrance was properly dramatic?”

“It’s a telegraph for voices,” Wax said, stepping forward. He kept his gun on Kelesina, who backed up to the wall of the small room. She’d gone completely pale.

“Something like that,” Edwarn said, his voice sounding small. The electric mechanism didn’t reproduce it exactly. “How is Lady Harms? I hope her ailment was nothing too distressing.”

“She’s fine,” Wax snapped, “no thanks to the fact that you tried to have us all killed on that train.”

“Now, now,” Edwarn said. “That wasn’t the point. Why, killing you was an afterthought. Tell me, did you look into the casualties on the train? One passenger killed, I believe. Who was he?”

“You’re trying to distract me,” Wax said.

“Yes, I am. But that doesn’t mean I’m lying. In fact, I’ve found that telling you the truth is a far better method in general. You should look into the dead man. You’ll be impressed by what you find.”

*No. Stay focused.* “Where are you?” Wax demanded.

“Away,” Suit said, “on matters of *great* import. I do apologize for not being able to meet you in person. I offer up Lady Kelesina as a measure of my condolences.”

“Kelesina can go to hell,” Wax said, grabbing the box and lifting it, nearly yanking the wires in the back from the wall. “Where is my sister!”

“So many impatient people in the world,” Edwarn’s voice said. “You really should have focused on your own city, Nephew, and kept your attention on the little crimes fed to you. I've tried being reasonable. I fear I'm going to have to do something drastic. Something that will be certain to divert you."

Wax felt cold. "What are you going to do, Suit?"

"It's not about what I'm going to do, Nephew. It's about what I'm *doing*."

Wax glanced toward Kelesina, who had been reaching for the pocket of her dress. She raised her hands, frightened, right as something enormous *smashed* into Wax. He stumbled against the table, overturning it.

Wax blinked in shock. The steward! She'd grown to incredible strength, arms bulging beneath her robes, neck thick as a man's thigh. Wax cursed, raising his gun, which the steward immediately slapped from his hand.

His wrist screamed in pain and he winced, *Pushing* on the nails in the wall to throw himself in a roll across the floor away from the steward. He came up fishing in his pocket for coins, but the steward wasn't focused on him. She grabbed Wax's gun off the floor, then turned toward Kelesina, who screamed.

*Oh no …*

The shot left his ears ringing. Kelesina fell limp to the floor, blood dribbling from the hole in her forehead.

"He killed her!" a voice screamed from the doorway outside. Wax spun to find the maid he'd seen earlier standing there, hands to her face. "Lord Ladrian *killed* our lady!" The woman ran away screaming the words over and over, although she'd obviously had a clear view of the room.

"You bastard!" Wax shouted toward the box.

"Now, now," the box said. "That's patently false, Waxillium. You have a very clear understanding of my parentage."

The steward walked over to Kelesina, fishing at something on Kelesina's body. Then, for some reason, the steward shot the dead woman again.

Either way, this gave Wax a chance to seize the box, which had fallen from the table near him.

"You'd better be careful, Nephew," the box said. "I've told them to kill you if they can. In this case, a dead scapegoat will work as well as a living one."

Wax roared, ripping the box free of the wall and Pushing it out the doorway, into the next room. He brought his hand up and Pushed back on the gun in the steward's hand as she tried to aim it at him.

She cursed in Terris. Wax turned and scrambled from the smaller room into the one beyond, where he'd first hidden from the steward. He kicked the door shut to give himself some cover, then Pushed on his coin from before and leaped over a couch, soaring through the room. He scooped up the box communication device and skidded out into the hallway.

Half a dozen men in black coats and white gloves were advancing down the hallway toward him. They froze in place, then leveled their weapons.

Rusts!

Wax Pushed on the frames of the windows and reentered the room as the men opened fire. The inner door into the room that had held the telegraph opened, and Wax Allomantically shoved it back, cracking it into the steward's face.

Another way out. Servants' corridors? Blue lines pointed all around him and he looked for one out of place … there! He Pushed on it, opening a hidden door in the wall which led into a small passage, lit with dangling lightbulbs, that servants used. Still carting the telegraph box, he leaped through it as men piled into the sitting room behind him.

The weaving maze of passages let him keep ahead of them, though he did have to spend a coin taking one of them out as they got too close. That drove the others back, but notably, he couldn't sense any metal on their bodies. Aluminum weapons. This was one of Suit's kill squads, likely contacted and sent into action the moment Kelesina had telegraphed him.

Wax burst out of the passageways into a room that he hoped would let him circle back toward the atrium. If they'd found Steris …

He dashed through a conservatory, lit by several dim electric lights and lined with maps on the walls, and entered one of the hallways he'd explored earlier. Excellent. He charged toward the central atrium, but as soon as he reached the balcony's stairway down, something leaped from the shadows and blindsided him.

The Terriswoman, face bleeding from where the slammed door had broken her nose, growled and grabbed him around the neck. He Pushed a coin up at her, but it didn't have time to gain momentum. It hit her in the chest, then stayed there as he Pushed on it, trying to push her off. He strained, his vision growing dark, until a fist punched the Terriswoman across the face.

She let go, stumbling back and shaking. Wax gasped for breath, looking up at MeLaan looming over him.

"Rusts!" she said with a deep bass voice. "You *did* start without me."

The Terriswoman came charging in again, and Wax rolled to the side, fishing for coins. He brought up his last three in a handful as the steward punched MeLaan across the face. Something cracked audibly, and Wax hesitated as the steward stumbled back, clutching her mangled hand, the knuckles apparently shattered, the thumb ripped almost free.

MeLaan grinned. Her face had split where she'd been struck, revealing a gleaming metal skull underneath. "You really should be careful what you punch.”

The Terriswoman lurched to her feet, and MeLaan casually grabbed her own left forearm in her right hand and *ripped* it off, revealing a long, thin metal blade attached to the arm at the stump. As the Terriswoman came for her, MeLaan thrust the weapon through the woman’s chest. The steward gasped and collapsed to her knees, then deflated like a punctured wineskin.

“Harmony, I love this body,” MeLaan said, glancing toward Wax with a goofy grin on her face. “How did I ever consider wearing another?”

“Is that whole thing aluminum?” Wax asked.

“Yup!”

“It must be worth a fortune,” Wax said, standing and putting his back to the wall. The balcony was in front of him, the hallway he’d come down to his left. The kill squad would be following soon.

“Conveniently, I’ve had a few hundred years to save up,” MeLaan said. “It —”

Wax pulled her to cover beside the wall with him; she was actually lighter than he had anticipated, considering that she had metal bones.

“What?” she asked softly.

Wax raised a coin, listening for footfalls. On the balcony before him, the Terriswoman twitched. When he heard the footstep he increased his weight a fraction, then spun around the corner and grabbed the first man’s gun in one hand, twisting it toward the floor. It fired ineffectively, and Wax pressed his other hand against the man’s chest and Pushed on the coin there.

Man and coin went flying back down the hallway toward his fellows, who leaped to the side. Wax was left with the aluminum gun, which he flipped in the air and caught, squeezing off four shots. The first pulled a little left, hitting the enemy in the arm, but he was able to place the next shots right in their chests.

All three dropped. The fourth man groaned from the floor where Wax had Pushed him.

“Damn,” MeLaan said.

“Says the woman who just ripped half her arm off.”

“It goes back on,” MeLaan said, picking up her forearm, which she slid back over the blade. Blood dribbled from where she’d broken the skin. “See? Good as new.”

Wax snorted, tucking the stolen aluminum gun into his waistband. “You can get out on your own?”

She nodded. “Want me to recover the guns you checked?”

“Can you?”

"Probably."

"That would be wonderful." Wax walked to the Terriswoman and checked to see that she was dead, then fished in her pockets until he came up with the gun she'd used to kill Kelesina. There was something else in her pocket as well. A metal bracelet of pure gold.

*The Terriswoman took this off Kelesina,* Wax thought, turning it over in his fingers as he remembered the moment earlier, when the murderer had knelt beside Kelesina's body.

He burned steel, and his hunch proved correct. While he could sense the bracelet, the line was much thinner than it should have been. This was a metalmind, and one heavily Invested with healing power.

"Was Kelesina Terris?"

"How should I know?" MeLaan asked.

He pocketed the bracelet and grabbed the box telegraph device—which he wanted to send to Elendel for inspection—and tossed it to MeLaan. "Bring that, if you don't mind, and meet us at the hotel. Be ready to leave the city. I doubt we're staying the night."

"And you were so certain we'd be out of here without a fight."

"I never said that. I said it wouldn't get so bad that I needed Wayne. And it didn't."

"A semantic technicality."

"I'm a nobleman. Might as well learn *something* from my peers." He saluted her with the small gun, then dropped off the balcony and used a coin to slow himself. "Steris?"

She crawled from a nearby shrub. "How did it go?"

"Poorly," Wax said, looking up toward the ceiling, then removing his dinner jacket. "I may have accidentally let them implicate us in Lady Kelesina's murder."

"Bother," Steris said.

"Their evidence will depend on whether they can trace the bullets back to me," Wax said, "and whether they recover any of my prints from the area. Either way, they'll be producing fake witnesses to try to make it look like I came down here *specifically* to assassinate Kelesina. Grab on."

Steris grabbed him with, he noted, no small amount of eagerness. She really did enjoy this part. He took the bullets from his .22 and held them in one hand, then launched off the coin below to shoot them toward the ceiling. He flung the bullets toward the skylights and Pushed them in a spray to weaken a window, then raised his arm—wrapped in his jacket—over his head and crashed them through the glass and out into the swirling mists.

They landed on the roof as Wax got his bearings. Out in the mists, he felt better almost immediately, and his hand—which had been smarting where the Terriswoman smacked his gun away—stopped throbbing.

“Did you learn anything useful?” Steris asked.

“Not sure,” Wax said. “Most of what I overheard was about a rebellion against Elendel. I know Edwarn is heading somewhere important. He called it the second site? And he said something about what I think is that little cube Marasi found.”

He pulled her tight again, then sent them in a Push upward through the mists in the direction of their hotel. She held to him tightly, but watched the lights of the city beneath with awe.

“He had Kelesina murdered,” Wax said. “I should have seen it. Should have anticipated.”

“At least,” Steris said over the sound of the passing wind, “the mists are out. They’ll have trouble tracking us.”

“You did well tonight, Steris. Very well. Thank you.”

“It was engaging,” she said as he dropped them onto a rooftop. Her smile, which she let out readily, warmed him. She was proof that, despite his dislike of the politics in the Basin, it had good people. Genuine people. Strikingly, he had been forced to realize something almost exactly like that about the Roughs after first moving there.

She was gorgeous. Like an uncut emerald sitting in the middle of a pile of fakes cut to sparkle, but really just glass. Her enthusiasm balanced, somewhat, his concern over what had happened. Missing Suit. Being implicated. Lessie would say …

No. He didn’t need to think of Lessie right now. He smiled back at Steris, then pulled her tighter and Pushed, launching them straight up. Higher, up away from this district. The city’s taller buildings were visible only as lines of lights in the night, pointing upward through the mists. He launched up off a rooftop, then passed a shaking gondola, moving by electricity and carrying a group of gawking passengers. It rocked as Wax launched them sideways from it toward the skyscrapers.

Two were near enough one another, and with a quick series of furious Pushes, he was able to throw himself and Steris up through the swirling mists in a succession of arcs, first one way, then the other. He crested the tops and Pushed off one, sending them up a little farther. He had hoped that with the elevation of this highest terrace of the city—

Yes. They burst from the mists into a realm seen by very few. The Ascendant’s Field, Coinshots called it: the top of the mists at night. White stretched in all directions, churning like an ocean's surface, bathed in starlight.

Steris gasped, and Wax managed to hold them in place by Pushing against the tips of the two skyscrapers below. Without a third, he wasn't certain how long he could balance, but for the moment they remained steady.

"So beautiful…" Steris said, clinging to him.

"Thank you again," Wax said to her. "I still can't believe you snuck a gun into the party."

"It's only appropriate," Steris said, "that you would make a smuggler out of me."

"Just as you try to make a gentleman out of me."

"You're already a gentleman," Steris said.

Wax looked down at her as she held to him while trying to stare in every direction at once. He suddenly found something burning in him, like a metal. A protectiveness for this woman in his arms, so full of logic and yet so full of wonder at the same time. And a powerful affection.

So he let himself kiss her. She was surprised by it, but melted into the embrace. They started to drift sideways and arc downward as he lost his balance on his anchors, but he held on to the kiss, letting them slip back down into the churning mists.

* * *

Wayne put his feet up on the table in their hotel suite, a new book open in front of him. He'd picked it up earlier, when poking through the city.

"You oughtta read this thing, Mara," he called to Marasi, who paced back and forth behind his couch. "Strangest thing you ever heard. These blokes, they build this ship, right? Only it's meant to go *up*. Uses a big explosion or some such to send it to the stars. These other blokes steal it, right, and there's seven of them, all convicts. They go lookin' for plunder, but end up on this star what has no—"

"How can you read?" Marasi asked, still pacing.

"Well, I'm not right sure," Wayne said. "By all accounts, I should be dumber than a sack full o' noodles."

"I mean, aren't you nervous?" Marasi asked.

"Why should I be?"

"Something could go wrong."

"Nah," Wayne said. "I'm not along. Wax can only get into so much trouble without me to—"

Something hit the window, causing Marasi to jump. Wayne turned to see Wax clinging to one of the windowsills, Steris tucked under one arm like a sack of potatoes—well, a sack of potatoes that had a very nice rack, anyway. Wax pulled open the window, set Steris inside, then swung in himself.

Wayne popped a peanut into his mouth. “How’d it go?”

“Eh,” Wax said. He had lost his dinner jacket somewhere, and blood—hopefully not his own—covered one arm of his shirt. His cravat drooped, half tied.

“We figured out where Suit and his people are likely holed up,” Wayne said as Marasi ran over to check on her sister, who looked flustered, but alive and such.

“You’re kidding,” Wax said.

“Nope,” Wayne said, then grinned and popped a peanut. “What’d you find?”

“Clues about Marasi’s cube,” Wax said, pulling off his cravat. “And something about a building project, and a potential army. Suit’s timetable seems to be more advanced than I’d thought.”

“Cheery,” Wayne said. “So…”

Wax sighed, then pulled out his billfold and tossed a note at Wayne. “You win.”

“You had a *bet*?” Marasi demanded.

“Friendly wager,” Wayne said, making the note disappear. “Can I bring these peanuts when we go?”

“Go?” Marasi said, standing up.

Wayne thumbed toward Wax, who had pulled out his travel bag. “We’re leaving. Marasi, Steris, I’d suggest packing lightly. You have about fifteen minutes.”

“I’m already packed,” Steris said, standing up.

“I—” Marasi looked from him to her, seeming baffled. “What did you *do* at that party?”

“Hopefully,” Wax said, “not start a war. But I can’t say for certain.”

Marasi groaned. “You let him do this,” she accused Steris.

Steris blushed. Wayne always found that expression odd from her, seeing as how she had the emotions of a rock and all.

What followed was an energetic bout of motion as Wax and Marasi both ran to pack things. Wayne sidled up to Steris and popped a peanut in his mouth. “You got that preparin’-your-bags-early thing from me, didn’t you?”

“I … Well, yes, actually.”

“What will you trade me for it, then?” Wayne said. “Gotta have a good trade when you take stuff.”

“I’ll think about it,” Steris said.

Fifteen minutes later, the four of them piled into a carriage driven by MeLaan in her male body. A bedraggled Aunt Gin stood on the doorstep of her hotel watching them. She held a wad of cash in her hand—a wad that included the money Wayne had won off Wax. He'd left it as a tip on account of him putting his boots up on the furniture.

A furiously loud set of bells sounded in the distance, and it drew closer. "Is that the constables?" Aunt Gin asked, sounding horrified.

"Afraid so," Wax said, pulling the door closed.

The carriage lurched into motion, and Steris leaned out the window, waving farewell to the poor innkeeper.

"Framed for murder!" Steris called to her. "It's on page seventeen of the list I gave you! Try not to let them harass our servants too much when they arrive!"

* * *

A few hours later, Wax stepped up to a cliff in the darkness and let the mists enfold him.

He missed darkness. It was never dark in the city, not as it had been in the Roughs. Electric lights were only exacerbating the issue. Everything glowing, casting away the darkness—and with it, stillness. Silence. Solitude.

A man found himself when he was alone. You only had one person to chat with, one person to blame. He fished in his mistcoat pocket and was surprised to find a cigar. He thought he was out of these, good stout Tingmars brought down from Weathering.

He cut this one with his belt knife, then lit it with a match. He savored it, drawing in the smoke, holding it, then puffing it out to churn in the mists. A little bit of him to mix with Harmony. May He choke on it.

At his side, he turned a little metal spike over in his fingers. The earring VenDell had sent.

It was nearly identical to the one he'd used to kill Lessie.

Eventually, footsteps on pine needles signaled someone approaching. He pulled on his cigar, giving a warm glow to the mists and revealing MeLaan's face. Her feminine one. She'd finished changing, and was doing up the buttons on her shirt as she joined him.

"You going to get some sleep?" she asked softly.

"Maybe."

"Last I checked," she said, "humans still need it. Once in a while."

Wax pulled on his cigar, then blew out into the mists again.

"Suit wants you to go back to Elendel, I figure," MeLaan said. "He's trying to set it up so that you'll have no choice, so far as you see it."

"We're in a bad spot, MeLaan," Wax said. "The emissary that Aradel sends to a political rally ends up murdering the host? If the outer cities weren't tense before, they will be now. At the very best, it will be a huge political embarrassment. At the worst, I've started a war."

Wind blew, rustling pine branches he couldn't see. He couldn't even see MeLaan; clouds must have rolled in, blocking the starlight. Sweet, enveloping darkness.

"If there is war," she said, "Suit will have started it. Not you."

"I might be able to prevent it," Wax said. "Governor Aradel needs to know, MeLaan. If the outer cities are going to claim assassination—use it as the brand to start a bonfire—I can't just vanish. I *have* to get to Elendel. That way, I can claim I knew the New Seran justice system was corrupt, and so I fled to safety. I can make my case in the broadsheets before news spreads; I can convince Aradel I didn't kill the woman. If I do anything else, it will look like I'm hiding."

"Like I said," MeLaan said. "He's set it up so that you have no choice—so far as you see it."

"You see it differently?"

"I've been a lot of people, Ladrian. Seen through a lot of eyes. There's always another perspective, if you look hard enough."

He pulled on his cigar and held the smoke a long moment before letting it out in a slow dribble. MeLaan crept away. Did her kind need sleep? She'd implied they didn't, but he couldn't say for certain.

Alone with his cigar, he tried to sort through what he wanted to do. Go back to Elendel, as forced upon him by Suit's minions, or chase after the mystery—as forced upon him by Harmony's minions. He rolled the earring in his fingers, and confronted the hatred simmering inside of him.

He'd never hated God before. After Lessie's supposed death the first time, he hadn't blamed Harmony. Rusts, even after Bleeder had raised the question of why Harmony hadn't helped, Wax hadn't responded with hatred.

But now … yes, that hatred was there. You could take knocks, out in the Roughs. You lost friends. You sometimes had to kill a man you didn't want to kill. But one thing you never did: You never betrayed a companion. Friends were too rare a privilege out in those wilds, where everything seemed to want you dead.

By hiding the truth from him, Harmony had stabbed him square in the back. Wax could forgive a lot of things. He wasn't sure this was one of them.

His cigar eventually ran out. His questions lingered. By the time he hiked back toward their campsite, the mist was retreating for the night. He fed the horses—six of them, purchased at the New Seran bottom terrace shipping yards, along with a full-sized stagecoach used to do runs to the Southern Roughs.

They'd narrowly escaped New Seran. Galloping their carriage, they'd managed to descend the ramps before the police, but only after Wax had been forced to bring down a gondola line.

The police hadn't given chase after that, as if realizing they didn't have the resources to hunt someone like Waxillium Dawnshot, at least not without a lot of backup. Wax still wanted to be moving. Though he was tired to the bones, he couldn't let himself—or anyone else—rest long. Just in case.

As the others groggily piled into the vehicle, MeLaan took the reins from him and climbed up to the driver's seat. Wayne hopped into the spotter's seat beside her, and she gave him a grin.

"Where to, boss?" she asked, turning to Wax. "Back home?"

"No," Wax said. "We ride to Dulsing, the place Wayne and Marasi located." The direction of the building project.

"You found another perspective, I see," MeLaan said.

"Not yet," Wax said softly, climbing into the stagecoach. "But let's see if Harmony dares try to give me one."

# PART THREE

# 17

Marasi had read a lot about life in the Roughs in her youth, and knew what to expect of a stagecoach trip: boredom, dust, and discomfort.

It was wonderful.

She had to forcibly keep herself from hanging out the window as Wayne occasionally did, watching the scenery pass. They weren't in the Roughs, but this was close enough. The smell of the horses, the bumps in the road, the rickety creak of the wood and the springs … She had seen and done some remarkable things during her time with Waxillium, but *this* really felt as if she were living in an adventure.

Waxillium reclined across from her, feet up on the seat next to her, a wide-brimmed hat over his eyes, face bristly from a day without shaving. He'd removed his boots, which sat on the floor beside his shotgun.

It seemed surreal to remember she'd even considered a relationship with him, now that so long had passed with them working together. No, she was not interested, no longer. But she *did* admire the perfect image of him there—the gun, the boots, and the hat.

Of course, that image was distorted by the sight of Steris curled up on the seat beside him, snoring softly with her head on his shoulder. In what kind of bizarre world did Marasi's punctilious half sister end up on the adventure? Steris belonged in a sitting room with a cup of tea and a dry book about horticulture, not riding cross-country in a stagecoach toward a potential army of Allomancers. Yet here she was, snuggled up against Dawnshot himself.

Marasi shook her head. She wasn't envious of Steris, which was—frankly—remarkable, considering their upbringings. It was very hard to hate Steris.

You could be bored by her, confused by her, or frustrated with her—but hate her? Impossible.

Marasi got out her notebook to continue her report to VenDell and Constable-General Reddi, which she hoped to be able to send before reaching Dulsing.

Waxillium shifted, then tipped his hat back, eyeing her. “You should get some sleep.”

“I’ll rest when we stop.”

“Stop?”

Marasi hesitated. They’d been going for half a day already, avoiding the main roads to evade potential pursuers from New Seran. They’d crossed several fields, and spent a full hour rattling along a stone ridge to bypass some farms below in a way that left little sign of their passage.

Their path lay almost directly northeast of New Seran, skirting the mountains to their right, staying to the foothills—which meant some ups and downs, but this was still good farmland. All of the Basin was, even here at the edges, where things were dryer than in the center.

“I thought that after stopping last night—” Marasi said. “Dear. You mean to go straight there?”

“‘Straight’ is an odd term,” Waxillium said, “considering how much MeLaan has us weaving to avoid getting caught. But yes. Shouldn’t be more than another four hours or so.”

A train could have had them there in a fraction of that time, delivered in comfort. Maybe the outer cities did have reason to gripe about the way things were set up.

“Waxillium?” Marasi said as he shifted again.

“Mmm?”

“Do you think they’re real? The Bands of Mourning?”

He tipped back his hat all the way. “Did I ever tell you why I went to the Roughs?”

“As a youth?” Marasi said. “It was because you hated the politics, the expectations. Polite society that was anything but polite.”

“That’s why I left Elendel,” Waxillium said. “But why the Roughs? I could have gone to one of the outer cities, could have found a plantation somewhere to read books and live a quiet life.”

“Well…” Marasi frowned. “I guess I thought you always wanted to be a lawman.”

Waxillium smiled. “I wish I’d spotted it that easily. Should have. I spent my childhood tattling on other children for every little thing they did.”

“Then what?”

He settled back, closing his eyes. “I was chasing a legend, Marasi. Tales of the Survivor’s gold, riches to be had, stories to be made.”

“You?” Marasi started. “You were a *gentleman adventurer*?”

Waxillium winced visibly at the term. “You make me sound like that fool in the broadsheets. I tell you, Marasi, those first months were hard. Every other town was full of the unemployed from the mines shutting down, and I couldn’t enter a saloon without finding some fool baby-face like myself, up from the Basin with a head full of glory and treasure.”

“So you started hunting bounties,” she said. “You told me this part. Something about boots.”

“Eventually, yes,” Waxillium said, smiling. “Struggled for a long time up there before turning to bounties. At first, though, I had my eyes full of riches and gold. Took time to shake that out of me, but even then, becoming a lawman was about the cash. Started hunting men for money. And, well, there’d always been this streak in me that didn’t like seeing people get pushed around. Ended up in Weathering. Just another forgotten, dried-out city in the Roughs with nobody to care about it. It was six years before someone gave me credentials and made it official.”

The stagecoach cabin swayed on its straps. Up above, Marasi could hear Wayne and MeLaan chatting. So long as they weren’t making out again while trying to drive.

“When VenDell told us about this, I didn’t want the Bands to be real,” Waxillium said, looking out the window. “I hated the thought of some foolish dream pulling me away again, after I’d finally found stability in Elendel. I didn’t want that lure of excitement, the reminder of a world I’d come to love out there in the dust.”

“So you think they *are* real.”

“Here’s the thing,” he said, leaning forward, causing Steris to shift in her sleep. “My uncle hasn’t had time to breed his Allomancers, as I suspect he’s been doing. The plans he and the Set have concocted, they’re long-term investments. But he promised *something* to Kelesina, and he really sounded like he thinks he can deliver. You have the device?”

Marasi pulled the small metal cube from her purse. Waxillium fished in his pocket and brought out his coin, the one some beggar had apparently given him. He held up the two next to each other, sunlight through the window gleaming off the cube and highlighting the otherworldly symbols on its sides.

“Something strange *is* going on, Marasi,” Waxillium said. “Something important enough to draw my uncle’s attention. I don’t have the answers. I need to find them."

She found herself smiling at the intensity in his eyes. "It's not the treasure hunter that made you decide to go to Dulsing. It's the detective."

He smiled. "You were listening to what MeLaan said to me last night?"

Marasi nodded.

"You were supposed to be asleep," Waxillium said. He flipped the coin, caught it, then tossed the cube back to her. "Going to Aradel would have been the mature, prudent move, but I have to find the answers. And who knows? Maybe the Bands are real. If so, then getting them away from Suit is *at least* as important as informing the governor of what happened in New Seran."

"You think your uncle is trying to make Allomancers with technology, rather than by birth."

"A frightening power in the hands of a man like my uncle," Waxillium said, leaning back into his seat. "Get some sleep. We're probably going to infiltrate this building project in Dulsing during the night."

He settled with his hat over his eyes again. Marasi felt she should do as he said, and so tried to doze off. Unfortunately, there were too many thoughts in her head for sleep.

After some time, she gave up and returned to her letter. In it, she explained what they'd done and discovered. She needed to send this soon. Perhaps she could find a telegraph station when they changed horses, and send the letter in time for it to make a difference.

Once done with the letter, she moved to her notes about the missing kandra spike. Kelesina, acting on behalf of the Set, had tried to kill ReLuur, and had assumed success. When Suit had demanded proof, she'd ordered the spike dug up and sent to him in Dulsing. But where would it be kept there? Someplace secure, presumably. How in the world was she going to find it?

She held up the little cube. Suit had asked after this. Could she use that somehow?

Marasi frowned, turning the cube. The sides had little grooves between them. She looked closer, and in the sunlight spotted something she hadn't seen before. A tiny little knob hidden in one groove. It looked like … well, a switch. Nestled in, where it couldn't be flipped accidentally.

She used a hairpin to reach in and flip the switch. It moved just as she'd expect it to.

*A switch.* It seemed so … mundane. This was either a mystical relic or some kind of secret technology. You didn't use a switch on things like that; you held them up to starlight, or spoke the special command phrases, or did a dance on the last day of the month while eating a kumquat.

The switch didn’t seem to have done anything. So, Marasi swallowed and burned a pinch of cadmium.

The cube began to vibrate in her fingers.

Then the entire coach lurched, rocking as if it had been struck by something very hard. Marasi hit her head on the roof, then was slammed back down onto her seat.

The horses screamed, but MeLaan somehow kept them under control. Within moments, the coach had pulled to a stop.

“What the hell was that?” Waxillium said, hauling himself up off the floor, where he had ended up in a jumble with Steris.

Marasi groaned, sitting up and holding her head. “I did something stupid.”

“How stupid?” Waxillium asked.

“I was testing the device,” Marasi said, “and used Allomancy.”

Wayne’s head appeared at the door a moment later, hanging down from above. “Was that a speed bubble?”

“Yes,” Marasi said.

“That jolt damn near killed the horses,” Wayne said.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

Waxillium helped Steris sit up. “What … what went wrong?” she asked, befuddled.

“Marasi used a speed bubble while we were moving,” Waxillium said. “We hit the threshold and towed her out of it, popping the thing and lurching us from one time frame to the next.”

“But, she used it on the train,” Steris said.

“Speed bubbles move with you if you’re on something massive enough,” Waxillium said. “Otherwise, the spinning of the planet would pop you out of every one you made. The train was heavy and fast. The stagecoach is small and just slow enough. So—”

“So I should have known better,” Marasi said, blushing. “I haven’t done that since I was a kid. But Waxillium, it *buzzed*.”

“What?”

“The cube, it—” Marasi started, realizing she’d dropped the cube in the confusion. She searched around frantically before finally locating it near his foot. She held it up triumphantly. “It had a switch.”

“A switch?”

She turned it to the side, showing them the little switch. “You have to slip something small in to move it,” she said. “But it works now.”

He looked at it, baffled, then showed it to Steris, who squinted. “What kind of eldritch device,” Steris said, “has an *on switch*?”

“Makes sense, I guess,” Waxillium said. “You don’t want your eldritch devices turning on accidentally.”

“Might end up almost killing your stagecoach drivers,” Wayne grumbled.

“It didn’t stop your Allomancy?” Waxillium asked Marasi, rubbing his chin.

She shook her head. She could still sense her metal reserves. “It didn’t seem to do anything.”

“Huh.” Waxillium held it up. “Could be dangerous.”

“So we’re testing it, then?” Wayne asked, hanging into the window.

“Of course we are,” Waxillium said. “But *away* from the coach.”

* * *

Wax held the vibrating cube in his hand. It did respond to his metal burning, but didn’t seem to do anything else.

They’d stopped near a stand of towering walnut trees, and Wayne was filling his pockets while Marasi watched Wax experiment from a safe distance. MeLaan watered the horses at a stream down the way. Nearby, a field of carrots grew with green sprouts, completely uncultivated. The air smelled fresh, of life untouched.

He held up the buzzing cube and let his metals die off. The cube stopped vibrating. He burned them again, and it responded—starting slowly, but picking up after about a second or two. But what did it *do*? Why didn’t it blank his Allomancy as it had on the train?

*Maybe it doesn’t work on the person activating it,* he thought. That would make some kind of sense, though he couldn’t fathom how it could tell. “Hey, Wayne,” he said.

“Yeah, mate?”

“Catch.”

Wax tossed the cube to him. Wayne caught it, then jumped as his belt—which held his metal vials and any coins on his person—ripped free from its breakaway straps and sprang away from him. He turned, watching it flop to the ground a good twenty feet down the hill, and when he approached it, it scooted away.

Wax ran toward him, and as he did, the shotgun in his leg holster pressed backward, as if being Pushed. The effect wore off a few seconds later, and by the time he reached Wayne, the cube had stopped buzzing.

Wayne held it up. “What was *that*?”

Wax plucked the device from his fingers as Marasi rushed over to join them. “It doesn’t steal Allomancy, Wayne. It never did.”

“But—”

“It takes the metal one is burning,” Wax said, “and somehow … extends it. You saw. It Pushed your metal away, as if a Coinshot were there near you. The cube used Allomancy.”

The three of them stood stunned, looking at the little device.

“We need to try it again,” Wax said. “Wayne, hold this and burn your bendalloy. Marasi, go stand over there. Wayne, once you’re ready, throw the cube to her.”

They did as directed. Wax stood back. When Wayne ignited his metals, he suddenly became a blur inside his speed bubble. The cube zipped out an eyeblink later and soared through the air toward Marasi, deflected somewhat but still moving in the right direction.

It engaged just before reaching her, and she became a blur, zipping over to pick up the cube, then zipping back. It took a count of ten before the cube stopped working, dropping her into ordinary time.

“Did you see that?” Marasi said, awed, holding the cube. “It created a speed bubble for me. It *fed* off Wayne’s Allomancy, and replicated it!”

“It’s what we’ve been lookin’ for, then?” Wayne asked, joining them, having dropped his own bubble.

“Not quite,” Wax replied, taking the cube and holding it up. “But it’s certainly encouraging. It looks like you have to be an Allomancer to use this—it doesn’t grant new powers, but it does extend the ones you have. It’s like … like an Allomantic grenade.”

Marasi nodded eagerly. “Which means that the man on the train, the one who used this on us, is a Leecher. He can remove Allomancy in others, and he gave that power to the cube, which he threw at you.”

“It engages a second or so after you throw it,” Wax said with a nod. “Useful.”

“And it’s proof that Suit has technology he’s been hiding,” Marasi said.

“We knew that from the communication device,” Wax said, “but yes, this is even more curious. I’m half tempted to think all this talk of the Bands of Mourning came from rumors about this technology the Set has been developing.”

“And the symbols?”

“No idea,” Wax said. “Some kind of cipher they developed?” He tapped the cube, then handed the thing to Marasi.

“Why me?” she asked.

“It’s yours. You found it; you figured out how to turn it on. Besides, I have a feeling it’s going to be the most effective in your hands.”

She held it a moment, then her eyes widened. Being a Pulser wasn't very useful when you were catching yourself in a bubble where you moved slowly compared to everyone else. However, if you could trap someone *else* in that bubble …

Wayne whistled softly.

"I'll try not to lose it," Marasi said, tucking the device away. "We'll need to study it later, find out how it works."

*I wonder …* Wax thought, remembering something else. He played his hunch, reaching into his pocket and fishing out the golden bracelet that Kelesina had been wearing.

He tossed it to Wayne.

"What's this?" Wayne asked, holding it up toward the sky. "Pretty hoop o' gold, that is. Who'd you trade this off of? I could use this, mate. It would make a nice metalmind."

"I think it's already one," Wax said, deflating. It had been a silly idea in the first place.

Wayne gasped.

"What?" Marasi said.

"It's a metalmind," Wayne said. "Damn me, but it is. And I can *sense* it. Wax, you got your knife?"

Wax nodded, yanking his knife from his gunbelt, and when Wayne proffered his hand, he sliced a small cut along the back. It resealed immediately.

"Maaaate," Wayne whispered. "It's someone else's metalmind, but I can *use* it."

"Like VenDell said," Wax said, taking the bracelet from Wayne's fingers. "A metalmind with no Identity. Rusts. I have to flare my metal to even get the *faintest* line pointing to it. This thing must be stuffed full of power."

More than any metalmind he'd ever sensed, in fact. He could usually push on those without too much trouble. He'd barely be able to shift this one.

"Why didn't I notice what it was immediately?" Wayne said. "I had to be told. And, oh, rusts! This is proof of the Bands of Mourning, ain't it?"

"No," Wax said. "*I* can't sense a reserve in the bracelet—I can't use this, as I'm not a Bloodmaker. It's not a metalmind anybody can use, just one that anyone with the right powers already can use."

"That's still remarkable," Marasi said.

"And disturbing," Wax said, staring at that innocent-looking loop. The only way to have created this would involve using a Feruchemist with two powers. So either the Set had access to full-blooded Feruchemists, or his fears were coming true. They'd figured out how to use Hemalurgy.

*Or it's a relic,* he thought. *There's that possibility.* Perhaps this and the box were artifacts of another time.

He tossed the bracelet back to Wayne. "How much is in it?"

"A heap," Wayne said. "But it's not endless. The reservoir got smaller when I healed that cut."

"Hang on to it, then," Wax said, turning as he heard his name. MeLaan was at the edge of the glade, waving. Wax left Wayne and Marasi, striding over to the tall, slender kandra woman, still worried about what these discoveries meant. What did the bracelet indicate? Was there more to be discovered? Metalminds that granted anyone who touched them incredible powers? For the first time, he really started to wonder. What if the Bands *were* real? What would happen to society if Metalborn powers were simply something you could purchase?

He trudged up to MeLaan. "I think you'll want to see this," she said, waving for him to follow her up the side of a steep hill covered in foliage. At the top, they had a view of the land to the northeast. Some was cultivated in rows and rings, but much was like what they'd just left—wilderness blooming with random patches of fruits or vegetables. A cool breeze blew across him, barely enough to temper the heat of the sunlight above.

Seeing it all, feeling that perfect breeze, made Wax realize what annoyed him so much about the problems between Elendel and the outer cities. Did these people comprehend what life was like out in the Roughs, where planting was fraught with uncertainty, and the danger of starvation was real?

*They think people are foolish for living in the Roughs,* Wax thought, taking the old-fashioned spyglass that MeLaan handed him. *They don't understand what it's like to get trapped out there for generations, too poor—or too stubborn—to return to the Basin.*

Freedom in the Roughs came at a cost. Either way, the Basin was—literally—paradise, crafted for men by a God who wanted to compensate the world for a millennium of ashes and ruin. It seemed that even in paradise, men would find reasons to squabble and fight.

Wax raised the spyglass. "What am I looking for?"

"Check the road about a mile up," MeLaan said. "By that creek with the bridge over it."

He spotted a couple of men lounging in a field with axes. From the looks of it, they'd been cutting at the trunk of a dead tree. Another fallen tree crossed the roadway.

"What do you see?" MeLaan asked.

“A roadblock that doesn’t want to look like one,” Wax said. “That tree across the road is arranged to seem as if it just fell there, but the furrows on the ground indicate it was dragged there intentionally, and has been moved a time or two since being placed.”

“Good eye,” MeLaan said.

“You can’t have it,” he said, turning the spyglass and looking toward the farmsteads in the area. “Soldiers stationed in that farmhouse over there, I’d guess. And none of the other homes have smoke rising from them. Probably abandoned. You’re unlikely to find a farmstead this time of day without dinner in the oven.”

“They’re waiting for us?”

“No, this is too extensive for that,” Wax said. “This is a perimeter. They’re trying not to have it look like one, to prevent word from spreading, but they’ve cordoned off this entire area. What the hell is happening in there?”

MeLaan shook her head, looking baffled.

“Well, we can’t take the coach any farther,” Wax said, handing back the spyglass. “How are you at bareback?”

“Well, I haven’t thrown any riders off recently, but I don’t get occasion to be a horse very often, so I can’t say how I’ll feel today.”

Wax blinked.

“Oh, you meant *riding,*” MeLaan said. “Yeah, I’m fine. I doubt I’m the one you’ll have to worry about.” She nodded back toward Steris walking into the grove, trailed by Wayne, who had filled his hat with walnuts.

“Right,” Wax said.

Hopefully some of their horses would prove docile.

* * *

Twilight settled upon the land fitfully, like a tired eye struggling to stay open. It was the variety of the land down here in the south, Wax figured. One moment you could be riding through a wooded hollow, all in shadow, and the next you’d crest a hill into an open field and find that the sun hadn’t quite dropped below the horizon yet.

Still, darkness did eventually arrive, but with it came no mists. Wax realized he’d been longing to feel them envelop him again.

MeLaan led the sortie, keeping to forested areas when possible. She or Wayne would scout ahead, listening for patrols, but the Set was attempting to hold such a large area that they obviously couldn’t watch the whole wilderness. Marasi, of course, was an accomplished rider—and seemed pleased to have a reason to change into her new constable’s trousers and jacket.

Steris surprised him. She did just fine, even riding in a skirt. She'd packed one full enough that she could tuck it beneath her and ride bareback without exposing too much. She took to it without complaint, as she'd done with practically everything else on this trip.

The few farmsteads or hunter's camps they passed on their ride were empty. Wax felt a mounting disquiet. Yes, this was a small, largely unpopulated region in the Basin's backwaters—but it was still profoundly disturbing that the Set could dominate it so fully.

Once they reached the final patch of trees near the village, MeLaan scouted ahead, then came back and waved for him to follow. He crawled up with her to peer at the village from the tree line.

Bright electric floodlights lit the perimeter around an enormous structure in what obviously had once been the center of the village of Dulsing. Wooden, windowless, huge, it was still under construction, judging by the scaffolding at the sides and the unfinished roof at the top. The town's buildings had mostly been torn down, leaving only a few at the perimeter untouched.

The roofless top of the building glowed with a warm light. Where were they getting so much electricity? MeLaan handed him the spyglass and he raised it, inspecting the perimeter. Those were definitely soldiers, wearing red uniforms with some mark on the breast that wasn't distinguishable at this distance. They carried rifles at their shoulders, and the floodlights created a bright ring around the place. Focused outward, not toward the building, which left plenty of shadowed areas inside that ring. So they'd have cover once they got past the perimeter.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Is that some kind of bunker?"

"Doesn't look like any fort *I've* seen," MeLaan whispered. "With those flimsy walls? Looks more like a big warehouse."

A warehouse as large as a small town. Wax shook his head in bafflement, then spotted something near the far side of the village. A waterfall? It was outside the lights, but he thought he could see mist rising from where it plunged down, and a small stream did run through the village.

"High ground that direction," he said.

"Yeah," she said. "The maps mention the waterfall over there. Small but pretty, supposedly."

"Must have hooked a turbine up to it," he said. "That's where the power is coming from. Let's get back to the others."

They crawled through the underbrush again to where Wayne, Marasi, and Steris waited in the dim woods. "They're here all right," Wax whispered. "We have to find a way to get in. Tons of soldiers. Well-guarded perimeter."

"Fly in," Steris suggested.

"Not gonna work," Wayne said. "They had a Seeker back at the party; you think they won't have one here? The moment one of us burns a metal, we'll draw a hundred of Suit's goons to welcome us with a handshake and a friendly bit of murderin'."

"What then?" Marasi asked.

"I need to see," Wayne said.

"There's a better vantage on the other side, we think," Wax said. He pointed, and MeLaan led the way in the darkness, walking her horse between the towering hardwoods. Wax fell in with Steris at the tail of the group, and lagged a little to be able to speak with her privately.

"Steris," he whispered, "I've been considering how to proceed once we decide how to infiltrate. I've thought about bringing you in with us, and I just don't see that it's feasible. I think it would be best if you stayed and watched the horses."

"Very well."

"No, really. Those are *armed soldiers*. I can't even fathom how I'd feel if I brought you in there and something happened. You need to stay out here."

"Very well."

"It isn't subject to—" Wax hesitated. "Wait. You're all right with this?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" she asked. "I barely have any sense of where to point a gun, and have hardly any capacity for sneaking—that's really quite a scandalous talent if you think about it, Lord Waxillium. While I *do* believe that people tend to be safest when near you, riding into an enemy compound is stretching the issue. I'll stay here."

Wax grinned in the darkness. "Steris, you're a gem."

"What? Because I have a moderately healthy sense of self-preservation?"

"Let's just say that out in the Roughs, I was accustomed to people always wanting to try things beyond their capacity. And they always seemed determined to do it right when it was the most dangerous."

"Well, I shall endeavor to stay out of sight," Steris said, "and not get captured."

"I doubt you need to worry about that all the way out here."

"Oh, I agree," she said. "But that *is* the sort of statistical anomaly that plagues my life, so I'll plan for it nonetheless."

With some difficulty, they navigated to the eastern edge of the town, where they left Steris and the horses. Wax dug some supplies off the pack animal. Metal vials, extra bullets, plenty of guns—including the aluminum one he'd stolen back at Kelesina's place. And the last of Ranette's ball-and-string devices, which he tucked into the pouch on his gunbelt.

After climbing up some switchbacks, they were able to settle onto a darkened ridge above the falls—which were nowhere near as impressive as he'd imagined—and study the town. Well, the remnants of it.

"I wish we could see into that building," Marasi said, handing back the spyglass.

Wax grunted in agreement. They were *almost* high enough to see what was going on inside. Certainly, those flickering lights bespoke considerable activity: people moving down below, passing before the lights in the large chamber. But what were they doing, and why were they still at it well into the night?

"Gonna be hard to sneak in there," Wayne said.

"You could kill one of the guards for me," MeLaan said, settling onto a rock. "I'd eat him, take his shape, and slip us in that way."

Wax blinked, then glanced at Marasi, who seemed sick.

"Really," MeLaan said, "you all need to stop staring at me like that when I offer pragmatic suggestions."

"It's not pragmatic," Marasi said. "It's cannibalism."

"Technically it's not, as we're different species. Honestly, if you look at our physiology, I share less in common with humans than you do with a cow—and nobody gasps when you eat one of *those.* You didn't have trouble with it back in the mansion with Innate's bodyguard."

"She was already dead," Wax said. "Thank you for the suggestion, MeLaan, but getting you a guard's body is out of the question."

"We don't like killin' folks," Wayne said. "At least, unless they start shootin' at us. They're just chaps what are doing their job." He looked to Marasi, as if for support.

"Don't look at me," Marasi said. "I'm reeling from watching *you* trying to take the moral high ground."

"Focus, Wayne," Wax said. "How are we going to get in? Shall we try a Fat Belt?"

"Nah," Wayne said, "too loud. I think we should do Spoiled Tomato."

"Dangerous," Wax said, shaking his head. "I'd have to do the placement just right, between the lit perimeter and the shadowed part near the walls."

"You can do it. You make shots like that all the time. Plus, we got this shiny new metalmind, full o' health waitin' to be slurped up."

"A mistake could ruin the whole infiltration, healing power or no," Wax said. "I think we should do Duck Under Clouds instead."

“You kiddin’?” Wayne said. “Didn’t you get *shot* last time we tried that?”

“Kinda,” Wax admitted.

MeLaan stared at them, baffled. “Duck under Clouds?”

“They get like this,” Marasi said, patting her on the shoulder. “Best not to listen too closely.”

“Tube Run,” Wayne said.

“No glue.”

“Banefielder?”

“Too dark.”

“Blackwatch Doublestomp.”

Wax hesitated. “… The hell is that?”

“Just made it up,” Wayne said, grinning. “It’s a nifty code name though, eh?”

“Not bad,” Wax admitted. “And what type of plan is it?”

“Same as Spoiled Tomato,” Wayne said.

“I said that was too dangerous.”

“Nothin’ else will work,” Wayne said, standing. “Look, are we going to sit here arguing, or are we going to do this?”

Wax debated for a moment, eyeing the grounds, thinking. Could he get the placement right?

But then, did he have a better plan? That perimeter was very well guarded, but it was a dark night. If his life in the Roughs had taught him one thing, it was to trust his instincts. Unfortunately, at that moment they agreed with Wayne.

So, before he could talk himself out of it, he pulled his shotgun from its holster and tossed it to Wayne. The shorter man caught it with distaste—guns and Wayne didn’t agree. His arms immediately started shaking.

“Try to hold on tight,” Wax said. “Make an opening on the north side, if you can.”

He increased his weight, flared his metal, and Pushed on the gun, using it as an anchor to hurl Wayne out off the rocky outcropping and over the camp. The man soared from the Push before dropping through the darkness, some fifty feet toward the ground below.

Marasi gasped. “Spoiled Tomato?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Wax said. “Apparently it makes a mess sometimes when he lands.”

* * *

*To rust with that Wax*, Wayne thought as he plummeted toward the ground, his hat blowing off. *Tossin’ a gun to a fellow without even warnin’ him. Why,* *that's just—*

He hit.

Now, there was a trick to falling to your death. Bodies hitting the ground were *loud*. Louder than anyone ever expected.

He mitigated this by hitting feet-first—his legs both snapped immediately—then twisted onto his side, breaking his shoulder, but dampening some of the sound by rolling with the impact. He tapped his fancy new metalmind right before his head smacked the ground, dazing him.

He ended up in a crumpled, broken heap beside a pile of rocks. *Of course* Wax would have sent him into a pile of rocks. As his vision cleared, he tried to glance at his legs, but he couldn't move. Couldn't feel anything, actually, which was quite pleasant. It was always nice when you snapped the spine—helped with the pain.

Not that the pain went *completely* away, mind you. But he and pain were old friends what shared a handshake and a beer now and then. Didn't much like one another, but they had a working relationship. Sensation—and agony—flooded back into him as his metalmind healed his spine, focusing on the worst wounds first. He drew in a deep breath. A snapped spine could suffocate a man. People didn't know that. Or, well, the ones who *did* know had suffocated already.

As soon as he could move—even while his legs were healing—he twisted and used his good arm to position one of the large rocks in the pile. Looked like these stones were here intended for shoring up the sides of the stream, perhaps to make a pathway across. Wayne put them to good use, reaching up with his other hand as his shoulder healed. Wax had placed him well, right in the dark area between the perimeter watchposts and the building. But that didn't mean he was safe.

Wayne stumbled to his feet, dragging Wax's gun, his leg twisting about and bones reknitting. Damn fine metalmind, that gold bracelet was. An extensive healing like this would have cost him months of saving up, but this metalmind was still mostly full.

He stumbled away as quietly as he could, leaving a large rock balanced on the others as he sought a place deeper in the shadows, then hid the gun near the building so his damn hand would stop shaking.

He got away none too soon. A pair of soldiers were approaching from the perimeter.

"It was over here," one said to the other. As they drew closer, one of the spotlights turned around and shone on the area, giving them light and quite nearly exposing Wayne. He froze in the shadows near a pile of work equipment, sweating as his toes popped softly, the bones grinding against one another as they knit back into their proper places.

The guards didn't hear. They stepped up to where he'd fallen—no tomato splat of blood this time, fortunately—and looked around. One nudged the stone accidentally, and it fell off the peak where Wayne had placed it, rolling down the side of the small pile and clattering against the other rocks. The men looked at it, then nodded, doing a quick sweep but heading back to their post and returning the light to its scan of the nearby area. The noise they'd heard had merely been some rocks shifting. Nothing significant.

Wayne stood up straight in the darkness and stopped tapping the bracelet metalmind. He felt good. Renewed, like he always did after a big healing. Felt like he could do something impossible, run up a mountain, or eat the entire boar and chips plate at Findley's all on his own.

He crept off through the shadows, about important business. Fortunately, he found his hat almost immediately, near another rock pile. That done, he moved on to less important matters, like making an opportunity to help the others sneak in.

Wax had said north side. *Let's see.…* He kept close to the building, and even resisted the urge to go sneaking in on his own to find out what in Ruin's name was in there.

Time to think like a guard. It was hard, as he didn't have a guard's hat. He settled into the shadows and listened as a pair of them passed on patrol, digesting their accents like a nice snack of pretzel sticks with mustard.

After about fifteen minutes of watching, he picked out a likely candidate and kept pace as the man did his rounds, though Wayne stayed in the shadow. The lanky fellow had a face like a rabbit, but was tall enough he could probably have picked all the walnuts he wanted without needing a stepladder.

*Here I am,* Wayne thought, *in the middle of nowhere! Guarding a big old barn. This isn't what I signed up for. I haven't seen my daughter in eight months. Eight months! She's probably talking by now. Rusts. This life.*

The man turned to go back the other way on his rounds, and someone barked out at him from one of the stations with the floodlights, saying something Wayne couldn't hear. The tone was unmistakable.

*And my superiors,* Wayne thought, turning and slinking along in the shadows, still keeping pace with the man. *Oh, how they lean on me! Every little thing gets me a talking-to. Shouting. That's all this life is. Being yelled at day in and day out.*

Wayne smiled, then scuttled ahead of the man, looking for something he'd stepped over earlier. A set of black cords, each as thick as his finger, plugged into a big box near the building. As the guard came strolling past, not paying much attention, Wayne carefully lifted the cords.

The guard's foot caught on them. In that moment, Wayne yanked them from the hub.

The floodlights nearest to him went out.

Men immediately started shouting. The guard panicked in the darkness. "I'm sorry!" he shouted. "I didn't mean to. I wasn't watching my feet!"

Wayne slipped away and found a nice quiet nook between two stacks of sandbags as the guards shouted and argued, and the poor man was chewed out. Some people came in to fix the cords, though Wayne had tossed them to the side, so it took some time searching in the dark to find the ends and get them connected.

The lights came back on. Wayne was taking a long swig from his leather canteen as Wax, Marasi, and MeLaan joined him in the shadows. "Nice," Wax whispered.

"It wasn't, actually," Wayne whispered. "It was pretty mean. That poor guard ain't done nothin' wrong, and everybody keeps yellin' at him."

Wax took the lead at that point, prowling along the side of the big barnlike building. The roof wasn't the only thing still unfinished—the entrances were open, not fitted with proper doors. They stopped beside one and Wayne pointed, whispering to Wax where his shotgun was.

Wax fetched it, then snuck through the doorway. They followed, Wayne last of all. The cavernous interior was lit by a few electric lanterns here and there, and they passed a long light lattice that was obviously going to be installed in the ceiling, once the roof was done. It was brighter than outside in here, but not by much, and there were stacks of boxes and supplies arranged in rows, which let them sneak through and stay hidden. Once they got to the front of the rows of boxes, Wax hesitated, and the two women peered around him. Nobody gave Wayne a good view, which was how it always went. First he got yelled at on the job, then this.

He wiggled between them, getting a good elbow into Marasi's midriff—which earned him a glare, as if she didn't know that proper crowd-wiggling protocol involved getting friendly with one another's extremities. He managed to peek between Wax and MeLaan, finally getting a glimpse at what had stopped them.

It was a boat.

Of course, the common word "boat" didn't do the thing justice. Wayne stared at the massive construction, searching for a better description. One that would capture the majesty, the incredible scale, of the thing he was seeing.

“That’s a *damn big boat,*” he finally whispered.

Much better.

Why would they be building a ship here, miles and miles from the ocean? The thing couldn’t be easy to move. It filled almost the entire building, with a curved bottom and a prow—unfinished on one side—that was easily three stories high. The thing had two long, armlike extensions at the sides. Pontoons? They were big, and one wasn’t finished yet, ending in a jagged line of construction.

Jagged? Wayne frowned. That didn’t look like the way you built something. In fact, now that he studied it, that prow looked more *crumpled* than *unfinished*.

“Someone broke it,” Wayne said, pointing. “They were trying to move it, and cracked off one pontoon.”

“It has to be a warship,” Marasi said. “They *are* preparing for a war.”

“I think Wayne is right,” Wax said. “Look at the gouges in the dirt, the damage to the hull. They were transporting this thing through here, and it rolled free and cracked. So the Set constructed this building to cut it off from the view of anyone outside while they repair it.”

“Engineers,” Wayne said, pointing at some people who were *obviously* smart types, walking along the outside of the ship and pointing, carrying clipboards and wearing dark brown suits and skirts. The type teachers at schools would wear, thinking they were the height of fashion.

“It’s not like any ship I’ve seen,” Marasi said, shouldering her purse and clutching her rifle.

“You brought your purse,” Wayne said, “on a darin’ infiltration?”

“Why not?” she said. “Purses are handy. Anyway, if the Set has technology like that speaking telegraph, what will they put on a ship like this? And why did they build it away from the sea in the first place?”

“Suit will have answers,” Wax said, eyes narrowing. “Marasi, I assume you’re still after the spike?”

“Yes,” she said, determined.

“I’m going to find my uncle. Who do you want? Wayne or MeLaan?”

“MeLaan this time,” Marasi said.

Wax nodded. “Stay hidden, but if Wayne and I get spotted, try to help. We’ll do the same for you. If you find that spike, return to this point and lie low. If all goes well, we’ll slip back out together.”

“And if all doesn’t go well?”

“Which it won’t,” Wayne added.

“Meet back where we left Steris and the horses,” Wax said, sliding a gun from the holster at his side. MeLaan did the same, only her holster was her *leg*. Like, the skin split and she reached in through a slit in her trousers and slipped the gun out—a sleek, long-barreled thing.

Wayne whistled softly. She grinned, then gave him a kiss. “Try not to get shot too many times.”

“You neither,” he said.

They split up.

# 18

Marasi snuck through the warehouse, her rifle's strap an uncomfortable weight on her shoulder. She was glad for the trousers—they were quieter than rustling skirts—but she kept worrying that the scientists and workers in the room would notice the sound of her boots on the packed earth.

Probably not. The warehouse was hardly silent. Though it was night, and activity was muted, some people were still working. Along one side of the room, a few carpenters sawed lengths of wood, each stroke echoing back from the walls. The group of engineers made exclamations as they discussed aspects of the large vessel.

*They seem surprised by it,* Marasi thought. *As if they're not the ones who built it in the first place.* Were they new to the project, then?

Guards dotted the warehouse, but there weren't nearly as many as outside. She and MeLaan kept to the shadowed edge of the chamber, near the piles of boxes and supplies, but still had to pass uncomfortably close to a group of soldiers sitting at a small table playing cards.

The soldiers didn't notice them. Eventually, MeLaan and Marasi managed to reach the south wall, which was one of the long sides of the rectangular building. Here, rooms had been built into the structure, and they were more finished than the rest, complete with doors and the occasional window.

"Living quarters?" Marasi whispered, pointing.

"Maybe," MeLaan replied, crouching beside her. "So how are we going to find the spike?"

"I'd assume it's inside a safe of some sort."

"Maybe," MeLaan said. "Or it could be in a desk drawer in one of those rooms, or packed away in a box … or hell, they may have just thrown it away. Suit only seemed to want it because he required proof that poor ReLuur had been dealt with."

Marasi took a deep breath. "If that's the case, we'll have to interrogate Suit once Waxillium finds him. But I don't think they threw it away. We know the Set is researching ways to make Allomancers, and we know they're interested in Hemalurgy. They'd study the spike instead of tossing it."

MeLaan nodded thoughtfully. "But it could still be practically anywhere."

Not far away, the scientists—led by a man with a limp—walked up a plank ramp, peering into the open side of the boat. *It's him,* Marasi thought. The same one from the train robbery. He was showing the newcomers around the project.

They stepped inside.

"I've got an idea," Marasi said.

"How crazy is it?"

"Less crazy than tossing Wayne off a cliff."

"Not a high bar, but all right. How do we start?"

Marasi pointed at the hole in the hull that the scientists had entered through. "We get in there."

* * *

Wax moved along behind the supply pallets in the direction opposite Marasi's, feeling as if he were stepping through the shadow of progress. He'd pondered the transformations that Elendel had undergone during his absence: motorcars and electric lights, skyscrapers and concrete roads. It was like he'd left one world and come back to another.

That seemed only the beginning. Enormous warships. Technology that enhanced Allomancy. Bracers that one Feruchemist could fill, and another could use. He couldn't help but feel intimidated, as if this behemoth ship were a soldier from another time, come to stamp out all the dusty old relics like Wax.

He pulled up beside the last stack of planks in the line, Wayne joining him. The man yanked out his canteen, which was of sturdy, stiff leather, worked to the shape of a small bottle. He took a swig and offered it to Wax, who accepted it and downed a drink.

He coughed softly. "Apple juice?"

"Good for the body," Wayne said, tucking the canteen away.

"I was not expecting that."

"Gotta keep the stomach guessin', mate," Wayne said. "Or it'll grow complacent and all. How’re we gonna find your uncle?”

“Perspective?” Wax asked, nodding toward the middle reaches of the warehouse, where a complex network of temporary construction catwalks ringed the inside of the building. They were unpopulated in the night. “We’d have a view of the entire area, but wouldn’t be too noticeable from below.”

“Sounds good,” Wayne said. “You up for it, though? You’re gonna have to climb up like a regular person. No Steelpushes.”

He didn’t have any metal inside of him—too easy to use reflexively. His vials sat unused on his belt.

“I’ll be fine,” Wax said dryly. He waited until nearby guards and workers had passed, then led the way in a low run along the shadows of the building. The lights were aimed on the ship, away from the walls. He had to hope that the few workers walking about weren’t focused on the dark reaches of the large chamber.

Two full-sized catwalks ran the length of the wall up high, and leading toward them were a series of ladders and shorter catwalks as landings, to hold supplies. He grabbed the bottom ladder and climbed up one level, then another. By the third one, his arms were aching. He made himself lighter, which helped, but he still had to stop and catch his breath on the fifth tier. Just as making his body heavier granted him the strength to move his oversized muscles, getting lighter always seemed to cost him some of his strength.

“Gettin’ old,” Wayne said with a grin, passing him and starting up the next ladder.

“Don’t be dense,” Wax said, grabbing the ladder below him and climbing. “I’m trying to pace myself. What if we reach the top and have to fight?”

“You can throw your wooden teeth at ’em,” Wayne said from above. “Do some cane waggin’ as well. I’m sure you’re cross about stayin’ up so late.”

Wax growled softly and climbed up onto the next tier, but in fact he was winded to the point that arguing was taxing. The younger man seemed to realize it, and had a wide grin on his face as they climbed up the final two tiers to the bottom catwalk.

“I should deck you right in your grin,” he grumbled as he joined the still-smiling Wayne on the catwalk. “But you’d just heal.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I’d fall over and groan. Considerin’ your age, it’s more important to make you feel you’ve accomplished somethin’ in a day.”

Wax shook his head, turning and stepping to the side along the catwalk. The board under his foot immediately cracked. His leg slipped through, and though he caught himself and yanked the foot out, for the first time in ages he felt a little of what others must feel at being up so high. That ground was far,

far below, and he didn't have any metals in him at the moment.

He growled and stepped around the hole. "That was *not* my fault. The board was weak."

"Sure, sure," Wayne said. "It's okay, mate. Most folks put on a little weight as they hit their twilight years. 'S natural and all."

"If I shot you," Wax said, "nobody would blame me. They'd probably just say, 'Wow. You lasted that long? I'd have shot him years ago.' Then they'd buy me a pint."

"Now, that hurts, it does," Wayne said. "I—"

"Who are *you*?"

Wax froze, then both he and Wayne looked upward toward the person leaning out over the railing of the upper catwalk, staring down at them. An engineer, by the looks of it, in a white coat over vest and cravat. He frowned at them, then seemed to recognize Wax, his eyes widening.

"Rust," Wax swore, raising his hands as Wayne moved immediately, jumping up. Wax gave him a boost, and he kicked off and grabbed the railing of the upper catwalk. The engineer started to cry out, but Wayne snatched the man's ankle, toppling him with a thump.

Wayne swung up in a heartbeat, and another thump sounded. Wax waited, nervous. Moments passed.

"Wayne?" he hissed. "Are you up there?"

A moment later, the engineer's unconscious face appeared over the side of the catwalk, eyes closed.

"Of course he's up here," Wayne said from up above, imitating the voice of the unfortunate engineer and wiggling the head like a puppet's. "You just tossed that bloke up here, mate! You've forgotten already? Memory loss. You must be gettin' *real* old."

* * *

Technically, every person in the world was dying—they were merely doing it very slowly. Irich's curse was not that he was dying. It was that he could *feel* it happening.

As he shuffled down the hallways of the enormous wooden ship, he had to keep close watch on the floor, because the slightest dip or cleft could cause him to trip. When he gestured toward the wall where they'd found the burned maps—explaining to the other scientists—his arm felt as if it were strapped with a ten-pound weight.

His left hand barely worked anymore; he could grip his cane, but he couldn't stop his hand from trembling as he did so—and he practically had to drag his left leg with each step. The shortness of breath had begun. His physician said that one day, he simply wouldn't have the strength to breathe.

On that day, Irich would suffocate alone, unable to move. And he could feel it coming. Step by excruciating step.

"And what is this, Professor Irich?" Stanoux asked, gesturing toward the ceiling. "Such a fascinating pattern!"

"We aren't certain," Irich said, leaning on his cane and looking upward—a task that was surprisingly difficult. Rusts. He hadn't had trouble tipping his head back before, had he?

*Step by step.*

"It looks like a ship," Stansi said, cocking her head.

Indeed, the golden pattern on the corridor ceiling *did* look something like a small ship. Why paint it here? He suspected it would take years to sort out this vessel's many secrets. Once, Irich would have been content to spend his entire life picking through these oddities, writing about each and every one.

Today however, his "entire life" seemed far too short a period to be spent on such endeavors. Suit and Sequence wanted their weapons, and they could have them, for Irich desired only one thing.

A miracle.

"Please, continue with me," Irich said, walking down the corridor with his latest gait. He had to develop a new one every few months, as more of his muscles grew too weak or refused to function. Step, cane, shuffle, breathe. Step, cane, shuffle, breathe.

"What marvelous woodwork!" Stanoux said, adjusting his spectacles. "Aunt, do you recognize what kind of wood this is?"

Stansi stepped up beside him, waving over the guard with the lantern so she could admire the strange hardwood. Irich had shown similar interest in the ship's details at first, but each day his patience grew more strained.

"Please," Irich said. "You shall have all the time you wish to study, prod, and theorize. But only *after* we have solved the primary problem."

"Which is?" Stansi asked.

Irich gestured toward an arched doorway ahead, guarded by a soldier with another lantern. She saluted as Irich passed. Technically, he was an Array—a rank of some influence within the Set. Suit and his people had a high regard for scientific thought. The power and prestige, however, were meaningless to him. Neither could grant him additional breaths of life.

Past the doorway, he waved for his group of five scientists to gaze upon the grand machinery that filled the hold of the strange vessel. It was like nothing he had ever seen, without gears or wires. It looked more like a *hearth,* only constructed of a lightweight metal with lines of other metals running away from it along the walls. Like a spiderweb.

“This ship,” Irich said, “is filled with enigmas. You have noticed the odd patterns on the ceilings, but questions like those are barely the *beginning*. What is the purpose of the room hung with dozens of black hoods, like those worn by an executioner? We have found what appear to be musical instruments, but they seem incapable of making any sounds. The ship has an ingenious system of plumbing, and we have identified facilities for both men and women—but there is a *third* set of rooms with an indecipherable marking on the doors. For whom were these built? People of the lower class? Families? A *third* gender? So many questions.

“One question tops them all, and we feel that answering it will provide the very linchpin. It is why I have called for you, the most brilliant minds of the outer cities. If you can answer this, we will gain the technological might to secure our freedom from Elendel oppression once and for all.”

“And what question might that be?” Professor Javie asked.

Irich turned back to them. “Why, how this thing *moves* of course.”

“You don’t know?”

Irich shook his head. “It defies all scientific knowledge available to us. Some mechanisms were undoubtedly damaged in the crash, but as you can see, the vehicle is mostly intact. We *should* have been able to ascertain its method of propulsion, but so far it eludes us.”

“What of the navigators?” Stanoux asked. “The crew? Did none survive?”

“They have been uncooperative,” Irich said. *And somewhat fragile.* “Beyond that, the language barrier has so far proven insurmountable. That is why I invited you, Lord Stanoux, as one of the world’s foremost experts on ancient, anteverdant languages. Perhaps you can decipher the books found on this ship. Lady Stansi, you and Professor Javie will lead our engineers. Imagine the power we would have with a fleet of such ships. We would dominate the Basin!”

The scientists shared looks. “I don’t know that I want *any* group having access to such power, Professor,” Lady Stansi said.

Ah, right. These were not politicians. He should not employ the same rhetoric he had used when Suit sent him to gather funds from the wealthy. “Yes,” he admitted, “it will be a terrible burden. But surely you can see that this knowledge is better off in our hands, rather than in the hands of those at Elendel? And think of what we will *learn*, what we could *know*.”

They took that better, nodding in turn. He would have to speak with Suit—these people must not see themselves as serving a totalitarian army, but a benign freedom movement seeking knowledge and peace. That would be difficult, with all these rusted soldiers marching about and saluting everyone.

He prepared for an explanation of what they knew, intending to divert the scientists with promises of knowledge, when he heard a voice echo down the hallway. “Professor Irich?”

He sighed. What now? “Excuse me,” he said. “Lady Stansi, perhaps you will wish to inspect this fixture, which appears to provide some kind of power to the ship. It does not have electricity, so far as we can discern. I would value your unbiased opinions before I tell you what we have concluded. I must go deal with something.”

They seemed amenable to this—enthusiastic even. He left them and limped down the hallway. *Too slow, too slow*, he thought, both of his walk and the possibility of progress from the scientists. He couldn’t wait upon research, experimentation. He needed answers *now*. He had thought that on the train, they might find …

But no, of course not. An idle hope. He should never have left this project. Back in the hallway, he found no sign of the person who had called to him. Frustrated, he made it all the way back to the doorway before turning and searching down one of the side hallways. They should know better than to call for him! Could they not see the difficulty he had in traversing even a short distance?

He started back up the hallway, but hesitated as he noticed a small storage compartment that had popped open on the wall. There were hundreds of these scattered throughout the ship, containing ropes or weapons or other items. But this one had dropped something to the floor. A small, silvery cube.

His heart leaped in excitement. Another of the devices? Such luck! He had thought all these compartments searched by now. He struggled to pick it up, going down on his good knee and fishing for it, then lurched back to his feet.

A plan was already forming. He would tell Suit that it had been recovered by one of his spies in New Seran. His punishments would be lifted, and perhaps he would be allowed to move to the second site, perhaps join the expedition.

Excited, he sent a soldier to watch the scientists, then hobbled out of the ship, glad that something was finally going *right* for him.

* * *

Marasi cracked a closet door within the strange ship, then looked after the man called Irich, who limped through the gaping hole in the wall. MeLaan slipped out of a closet across the hallway from her and held up a warding hand to Marasi, then snuck to the opening to watch where Irich went.

Marasi waited, anxious. Though her duties as a constable usually related more to analysis and investigation, she'd gone on her share of raids in Elendel. She'd thought herself hardened, but *Harmony,* this mission was starting to rub her nerves raw. Too little sleep, and so much sneaking about, hiding, knowing that at any moment someone could turn a corner and find you there, looking guilty as sin.

MeLaan finally waved her forward, and she scrambled out of the closet and knelt beside the kandra at the entrance.

"He went into that room," MeLaan said, pointing at a door along the wall. "Now what?"

"We wait just a bit longer," Marasi said. "And see if he comes back out."

* * *

Wax prowled along the wooden planks of the interior scaffolding. MeLaan's spyglass let him get a good look at the ground floor, though he'd have much preferred binoculars. He scanned the whole area, noticing with interest as Marasi and MeLaan entered the ship.

That ship … something about it bothered him. He hadn't been on many boats, but the decks atop the enormous thing seemed off to him. Where were the masts? He'd assumed them torn down, but from above, he could see no broken stumps. So, was this ship propelled through the water by a steam engine, perhaps? Gasoline?

After rounding the entire building on the catwalk, he saw no sign of his uncle.

"Still nothing?" Wayne asked as he lowered the spyglass a last time.

Wax shook his head. "There are some rooms built into the north side of the structure. He could be in there. He might also be inside the ship."

"So what do we try next?"

Wax tapped the end of the spyglass against his palm. He'd been struggling with the same question. How did he find his prey without alerting the guards camped outside?

Wayne nudged him. Down below, the limping man came back out of the boat. Wax focused the spyglass on him, watching as he crossed to one of the nearby rooms.

"Did he look anxious about somethin' to you?" Wayne asked.

"Yeah," Wax said, lowering the spyglass. "What did those two women *do* in there?"

"Maybe they—"

“I don’t want to hear your guess,” Wax said. “Really.”

“Fair enough.”

“Come on,” Wax said, leading the way back around the shadowed catwalks toward the ladders.

“You have an idea?” Wayne asked.

“More of an impression,” Wax said. “Suit doesn’t like talking to minions. Everyone we’ve interviewed indicates the same thing—he chooses underlings with some power and repute and lets them handle things. Miles, the Marksman. My uncle loathes being bothered.”

“So…”

“That man with the limp,” Wax said, “probably has a similar role here. He’s an Allomancer, and I heard him referenced in Lady Kelesina’s mansion; he’s an important underling, though perhaps not in favor right now. Either way, he likely reports directly to my uncle.”

“So follow him long enough…” Wayne said.

“… and we should find Suit.”

“Sounds good,” Wayne said. “Unless he reports every afternoon at tea, which would have us waitin’ a *long* time.”

Wax paused by the ladder, noticing with surprise that the man with the limp had already left the rooms. Wax’s view was partially obscured by the massive ship, but he did catch sight of the man hobbling around the front of the vessel, again walking with a determined air.

Wax held up a hand to Wayne, then crouched down with the spyglass. The limping man crossed the warehouse to a solitary room, much like a guard chamber, built into the southwest corner. A soldier here stepped aside, letting the limping man enter. As the door swung open, Wax got a good glimpse of the room beyond.

His sister was inside.

He almost dropped the spyglass. The door swung shut, so he couldn’t get a second glimpse, but he *had* seen her. Sitting at a small table, loomed over by the large Coinshot brute Wax had fought on the train.

“Wax?” Wayne asked.

“It’s Telsin,” Wax whispered. “She’s being held inside that room.” He found himself rising and reaching for one of his metal vials.

“Whoa, *whoa,* mate,” Wayne said, grabbing his arm. “I’m all for charging in recklessly and whatnot, but don’t you think it would be best to talk this through? You know, before we get all ‘Let’s shoot this place up.’”

“She’s *here*, Wayne,” he said. “This is why I came.” He felt cold. “She’ll know things about our uncle. She’s the key. I’m going in after her.”

"All right, all right," Wayne said. "But Wax, doesn't it strike you as worryish that *I'm* havin' to be the voice of reason here?"

Wax looked down at his friend. "It probably should."

"Yeah, I'll say. Look, I've got an idea."

"How bad an idea is it?"

"Compared to burnin' Allomancy, going in shooting, and inevitably drawing the attention of all those guards, not to mention the Set's kill squads? I'd say compared to that, it's a pretty *damn* good idea."

"Tell me."

"Well, see," Wayne said, sticking his gum to one of the catwalk's support beams, "we've got this *very* nice engineer's outfit over there on the unconscious fellow, and ever since that party half a year back, I been workin' on my smart-person talk. . . ."

# 19

Marasi waited inside the ship, forcing herself—with effort—to remain calm. How did Waxillium do it? He and Wayne could be so relaxed, it seemed like they could take a nap in the middle of a firefight.

Well, she stood her ground—or rather, knelt it—and was rewarded. Through the hole in the ship's hull, she watched the wall of the warehouse where the rooms were. Irich soon hobbled out of one, then shuffled off and called toward some guards.

"What was that he said?" Marasi asked.

"He told them to 'Send to Mister Suit,'" MeLaan said. "You think he really stashed that device in the same place as they're keeping the spike?"

"That's the hope," Marasi said.

"Shall we?"

Marasi nodded, then prepared herself for another nerve-racking experience. MeLaan led, strolling down the planks and out into the open. Marasi followed, keeping her head high as MeLaan had told her. *Look like you belong,* the kandra had said. *The first rule of impersonation is to* belong.

She felt completely exposed, as if she were dancing naked in the middle of Elendel's Hub. They reached the bottom of the gangway, walking with excruciating slowness, and crossed the floor of the warehouse to the door. Was Marasi walking too stiffly? She couldn't check over her shoulder—MeLaan had warned her about that. But surely a quick glance wouldn't hurt anything.…

*Stay firm.* MeLaan tried the door, and blessedly it opened. The two of them stepped through into an empty hallway, and Marasi shut the door. No shouts of alarm followed. She was positive one of the carpenters had glanced at them, but nobody had said a word.

"Nice work," MeLaan said.

"I feel like I'm going to puke."

"Must run in the family," MeLaan said, leading her along the hallway. It had bare wooden walls and smelled of sawdust, and a solitary electric light hung from the ceiling. Melaan stopped at the simple door at the end, listened carefully, then tried the knob. This one was locked.

"You can open it?" Marasi said. "Like you did before?"

"Sure," MeLaan said, kneeling by the doorknob. "No problem. I'll try something more mundane first." She cocked her hand, and a set of picks *sprouted* from the skin of her forearm. She plucked them free and started working on the door.

"Handy," Marasi said.

"Pun intended?"

"That depends," she said, checking over her shoulder. The hallway was still empty. *Fool girl.* "How many times have you heard that joke?"

MeLaan smiled, focused on her lockpicking. "I've been alive pushing seven hundred years now, kid. You'll have trouble finding jokes I *haven't* heard."

"You know, I should really interview you sometime."

MeLaan cocked an eyebrow in her direction.

"You kandra have a unique perspective on society," Marasi explained softly. "You've seen trends, movements across large scales."

"I suppose," MeLaan said, twisting her lockpick. "What good does it do?"

"Statistics show that if we make subtle changes to our environment—the way we approach our legal system, or employment rates, maybe even our city layout—we can positively influence the people living in that environment. Your head may hold the key to what those changes should be! You've seen society evolve, move; you've watched the shifting of peoples like the tides on a beach."

"My thigh," MeLaan said, twisting the doorknob with a click, then pushing the door open a crack. She nodded, standing up straight.

"Your … what?" Marasi asked.

"You said my head might hold the key," MeLaan said, striding into the chamber beyond—a small, surprisingly well-furnished room. "It's actually my thigh, right now. A kandra stores its cognitive system through its entire body, but my memories right now are in a solid metal compartment in my thigh. Safer that way. People aim for the head."

“So what’s in your head?”

“Eyes, sensory apparatus,” MeLaan said. “And an emergency canteen.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope,” MeLaan said, hands on hips, scanning the room. Another door on the left led farther into the system of rooms built along the side of the warehouse, but there were no windows out to the main chamber, which was good.

Though the room smelled of new sawdust, like the rest of the building, here that was mixed with a scent of wood polish and a faint odor of cigar smoke. Light from a small electric desk lamp revealed a tidy study, with rows of books in a bookcase, two plush chairs with a maroon and yellow pattern in front of the desk, and several decorative plants that probably had to be rotated outside each day to keep from wilting.

Marasi trailed through the room, noting its oddities. Every room had them—marks of individuality, clues to the life of the occupant. The desk drawers had wide, exaggerated handles on them. The stand lamp in the corner had been bolted to the wooden floor, as had the chairs, likely to keep them in place should Irich stumble into them. Marasi was not familiar with the man’s disease, but it appeared he liked his chambers to accommodate a little fumbling.

MeLaan went straight for the bookcase, then began pulling books off, toppling them to the ground. “It’s always behind the books,” she said. “People don’t like to read, they like to be seen as someone who reads. I—”

“MeLaan?” Marasi said, then pointed to the large safe in the corner.

“Ah,” MeLaan said, mid-ransack. She knocked the last few books off the shelf, perhaps for completeness’s sake, then strode to the safe. “Hmm … This is going to be a little tougher. Can’t crack something like this with a set of picks.”

“Can you manage it?” Marasi asked.

“Patience,” MeLaan said. “Bring over that lamp.”

Marasi took it from the desk, stretching out the cord to its fullest and directing its light for MeLaan.

“Hmmm…” MeLaan said, then pressed her hand against the safe, ignoring the dial. Her fingers and palm went translucent, and then her flesh began to *wiggle*, squeezing into the joints, leaving behind crystalline bones held together with the barest of sinew.

Marasi swallowed, mouth suddenly tasting bitter. She’d known MeLaan could do this, but watching it was something else. She busied herself propping the lamp on the arm of the desk chair to give MeLaan light, though the kandra now knelt with eyes closed, so who knew if she needed it any longer? Marasi then started rummaging through the desk drawers to see if she could find anything important.

*Harmony send that Irich goes back to the scientists after this,* Marasi thought*, instead of returning here to catch up on paperwork.*

"The world back then," MeLaan said suddenly, "wasn't all that different from the one now."

Marasi hesitated. MeLaan still knelt with her eyes closed, her strange bones exposed. The flesh had gone translucent all the way up to her elbow.

"What do you mean?" Marasi asked.

"People talk about that time," MeLaan said. "The time of the Lord Mistborn, right after the Catacendre. They speak of it in hushed tones as if it were some time of legends."

"It was," Marasi said. "The Counselor of Gods, Hammond, Allrianne Ladrian. They forged a new world."

"Yeah, sure," MeLaan said. "But they also squabbled like children, and each one had their own vision of what this 'new world' should be. Half the reason you're having troubles now was because they didn't care about settlements outside of Elendel. The Originators were big-city people, through and through. You want trends? Want to know what I've seen? People are people. Hell, even *kandra* act the same, in our own way. Life then was like life now, only you have better street food."

Marasi pondered this, then turned back to the desk. She'd still want to interview some kandra—but perhaps ones who were a little more … reflective than MeLaan.

In the desk, she found a notebook with some of Irich's observations and sketches about the ship, written in a shaky scrawl, along with a map of the area. The more she discovered, the more certain she was that the Set *hadn't* built this vessel. They were studying it as much as repairing it.

Marasi tucked the book into her purse. *See, handy,* she thought. After that, she rose to check the other door out of the room. She wouldn't want to have some random carpenter wander in. She cracked it open and peeked into a completely dark room, and was immediately hit with a pungent odor like that of the slums. Unwashed bodies, dirt and grime. Frowning, she opened the door wider.

The shaded illumination of the lamp—which faced the wrong way to give direct light—crept hesitantly into the room. Shadows stretched long from a few bare tables and a stack of boxes. And beyond them … were those *cages*? Yes. Perhaps four feet tall, with thick bars, the cages looked like the type you might use to contain a large animal.

They were empty. “MeLaan?” Marasi asked, glancing at the kandra—who did not respond. She looked utterly absorbed by her task.

Marasi inched into the room, wishing for another light. What did they keep in here? Guard dogs? She hadn’t seen any of those at the perimeter. She stopped near one of the three large cages, bending over to see if she could determine what kind of animal had been kept in it.

Something rustled in the next cage over. Marasi’s breath caught. What she’d mistaken for a lump of blankets or pillows was *moving*. She glanced toward the desk in the other room, where she’d set her rifle.

The thing lurched and slammed against the bars.

Marasi gasped, jumping away, her back crashing against the stack of nearby boxes. Inside the cage, dim light reflected from a too-flat face of red and black. Dark pits of eyes.

The pictures. Marasi had forgotten the pictures that ReLuur had left. Horrible faces of red and black, with those deep, dark eyes. Images as if from a nightmare, drawn in frantic, scribbled strokes.

The monsters were real. And there was one in the cage here, swathed in thick fur, face of polished red. It regarded her, silent, then reached out between the bars with a shockingly human hand and whispered a single word through lips that somehow didn’t move.

“Please.”

* * *

Wayne turned down his saunter and added a fair measure of scramble to his step instead. This engineer, he didn’t like being here, among all these soldiers. He’d spent his life building houses and working on skyscrapers, and now here he was, basically in the middle of a bivouac!

That ship *was* marvelous, but he had a distinct worry. It was secret. And secret projects were the kind where little men like himself disappeared when everything was finished.

*No, something’s wrong,* Wayne thought, halfway across the floor of the warehouse. He didn’t stop walking, but he turned his steps in a little circle, like he was pacing. Something was wrong, but what *was* it?

“Wayne?” Wax hissed from the shadows nearby, crouched beside a barrel of pitch.

Wayne ignored him, continuing his loop. He … he was a scientist. No, no, an engineer. He was a working man. Learned enough, but not some fancy professor who was paid to stand all day and talk. He built things, and he hated being in this place, with all its guns. He encouraged life, and the soldiers were the opposite of that. They, they …

*No*, he thought again, raising hands to the sides of his head. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

*Shape up, Wayne. This was* your *plan. You've gotta make it work.*

What was wrong? He … He was a …

He stopped. Then reached into the pocket of his vest and took out a charcoal pencil. He held it up, inspecting it, before slipping it behind his ear. He let out a long sigh.

He was an engineer. A no-nonsense man who saw that things got done. He liked it here, as they had a military way about them—they said what they wanted, and were straight with him. Men were rewarded for hard work.

He didn't like all those guns. And he certainly didn't like the men in charge of this place. There was something *off* about them. But he held his tongue.

Relaxing, Wayne crossed the rest of the way to the door guard. False nose, mustache, a little extra air in the cheeks to fatten his face, and a perpetual squint in the right eye. Came from looking at plans all the time, he figured. But he didn't need a monocle. Those things looked downright stupid.

He stepped up to the guard. "The lattice supports of the apricity are completely liminal!"

The man blinked at him.

"Don't just stand there!" Wayne said, waving toward the walls of the warehouse. "Can't you see that the forebode malefactors are starting to bow? We could have a full-blown bannock on our hands at any minute!"

"What…" the guard said. "What am *I* supposed to—"

"Please," Wayne said, pushing him aside—the man let him—and pulling open the door.

The scene beyond was as Wax had described it. That was Telsin, all right. Dark hair, rugged body. Almost like a Roughs woman. He'd seen her evanotypes all over the mansion. Looked older now. Being a prisoner could do that to somebody.

Tweaked-leg and thick-neck stood beside her table, and both turned with annoyance toward him.

*Now*, Wayne thought, focusing on tweaked-leg, *the real test.*

"We've got a serious problem," Wayne said. "I've been checking the integrity of the structure, and the caronals are completely nepheligenous out there! We are about to have a full-blown case of ximelolagnia if somebody doesn't do something."

The bespectacled man looked at Wayne, blinked once, then said, "Well, of course we will, you idiot. But what do we *do* about it?”

Wayne held back a smile, tucking it into his pocket for later use. It seemed to him that the smarter a man was, the more likely he was to pretend he knew more than he did. Like the way the drunkest fellow at the pub was always the one who was most sure he could handle another pint. Tweaked-leg would sooner sell his own grandmother as a footstool than admit he didn’t know what Wayne was talking about.

“Quickly,” Wayne said, gesturing. “We’ve got to hold it up while I ratchet the saprostomous underlays! You’ll need to supervise while I work!”

Tweaked-leg sighed, but walked out. Thankfully, his thick-necked companion followed. Within moments, Wayne had this guy pushing against the supports of the ship’s pontoon while tweaked-leg observed, a few guards joining in to help.

A soft thump from behind indicated that Wax had dealt with the guard at the door. Normally Wayne would feel left out, since he didn’t get to do any hitting. This time though, Wayne got to make a bunch of idiots stand with their hands pressed against some wood, thinking they were keeping the ship from tipping over.

So it evened out.

* * *

“Please.”

The creature spoke with a strange accent, but the voice was unmistakably human. Marasi breathed in and out in sharp breaths, regarding that hand reaching for her. A human hand.

Lips that didn’t move … polished skin … That wasn’t a face, but a *mask*. This wasn’t some horrible creature, but a person in a wooden mask, the eyeholes caught by the shadows. What Marasi had mistaken for fur was thick blankets clutched around the person’s shoulders.

“Marasi?” MeLaan asked. The kandra appeared in the doorway. “I got it open. What are you doing— What the hell is *that*?”

“It’s a person,” Marasi said. The masked one turned toward MeLaan, and the new angle lit the holes in its mask, illuminating human eyes with brown irises.

Marasi stepped forward. “Who are you?”

The person turned back to her and said something completely unintelligible. Then it paused, and said, “Please?” That was a man’s voice.

“We’ve got to go,” MeLaan said. “Safe is open.”

“Is the spike inside?” Marasi asked.

“See for yourself.”

Marasi hesitated, then hustled into the other room, passing MeLaan.

“Please!” the man cried, huddled against the bars, reaching out.

The safe gaped open in the corner of the room. The top shelf was cluttered with objects, including the little Allomantic grenade. Prominent among them was also a length of silvery metal. Kandra spikes, as proven in the Bleeder case, were smaller than Marasi might have once imagined—less than three inches long, and slender, not at all like the spikes in Death’s eyes.

She knelt beside the safe, taking it out.

“We have it,” Marasi said, turning toward MeLaan. “Do you want to carry it?”

MeLaan shook her head. “We don’t touch one another’s spikes.”

Marasi frowned, remembering the stories. “Didn’t the Guardian—”

“Yes.”

MeLaan’s face remained impassive, but her tone was stern. Marasi shrugged, tucking the spike into her purse, then searched in the safe. She left the banknotes—stupid, she knew, but it felt more like really robbing to take those—and took back the little cube that stored Allomantic charges.

Beside it were several other small relics—each was coinlike, with cloth bands attached to the sides. They too bore the strange inscriptions in an unknown language. Marasi picked one up, then looked over MeLaan’s shoulder into the other room, where the man in the mask slumped against his bars.

Marasi tucked the disc in her purse, then reached farther into the safe, taking out something she’d noticed earlier. A small set of keys. She stood up and strode through the room.

“Marasi?” MeLaan asked, sounding skeptical. “It might have some kind of disease.”

“He’s not an *it,*” Marasi said, stepping up to the cage.

The figure twisted to regard her.

Hand quivering only a little, she unlocked the cage, getting the right key on the second try. As soon as the lock clicked, the figure lunged for the cage door, throwing it open. Outside, he stumbled—he obviously hadn’t been allowed to stand up straight for some time.

Marasi backed away until she was beside MeLaan. The tall kandra woman watched with a skeptical expression, arms folded, as the masked figure staggered up against the boxes, holding to them. He panted, then lurched away from the boxes toward the back of the room. There was a door there that Marasi hadn’t noticed in the gloom, and the man frantically shoved it open, stepping into the next room. Lights flicked on as the man found a switch within.

"If he alerts the guards, I'm blaming you," MeLaan said, joining Marasi as they walked after the man. "I would hate to have to tell Wax that…" MeLaan trailed off as they reached the next room over.

"By the Father and the First Contract," MeLaan whispered.

The floor was stained red. Operating tables of sleek metal crowded one wall, gleaming garishly compared to the macabre floor. On the wall hung a dozen wooden masks like the one the man wore.

He had fallen to his knees before them, looking up. Dried blood stained the wall where it had dripped from a few of the masks.

Marasi raised her hand to her mouth, taking in the gruesome scene. There were no bodies, but the blood bespoke a massacre. The man she'd rescued lifted his mask with a trembling hand, tipping it back so it rested on the top of his head, exposing his face. A young face, much younger than she'd imagined. A youth not yet twenty, she guessed, with a short, wispy beard and mustache. He stared up at those masks, unblinking, hands spread to the sides in disbelief.

Marasi stepped forward, moving to lift the hem of her skirt so as not to brush that bloody ground—before remembering she had on trousers.

As she reached the youth, he turned to her.

"Please," he whispered, tears in his eyes.

* * *

Wax stepped into the room.

Telsin sat twirling a pencil in her hand. There was a speaking box before her on the table, but making no sound. She turned lazily to see who had entered, then froze in place, gaping.

He closed the door quietly, aluminum gun in his other hand. He started to speak, but Telsin leaped from her chair and threw herself into his arms. Head against his chest, she started weeping softly.

"Rusts," he said, holding her, feeling awkward. "What did they do to you, Telsin?" He wasn't certain what he'd expected from their reunion, but this hadn't been it. He didn't think he'd ever seen her cry. He certainly couldn't remember it.

She shook her head, pulling back, sniffling and setting her jaw. She looked … old. Not that she was ancient, but he remembered her as a youth, not a middle-aged woman.

Stupid though it sounded, he hadn't expected age to come for Telsin. She had always seemed invincible.

"No other ways out of this room?" Wax asked, glancing about.

"No," she said. "Do you have another weapon?"

He pulled out one of his Sterrions and handed it to her. "Do you know how to use it?"

"I'm a fast learner," she said, looking far more comfortable now that she had a gun in hand.

"Telsin," Wax said. "Is he here? Our uncle?"

"No. I was just speaking with him through that device. He likes … he likes to check in on me. I have to tell him how wonderful I think my accommodations are. He pretends I'm his guest, even still."

"Well, you're not. Not anymore. Let's go." Hopefully Wayne's distraction was still working.

Telsin, however, sat down in her chair again. She gripped that gun in both hands, held before her, but she stared unseeingly. "There's so much to ask. Why did you come back? Rusts … why did you *leave*, Waxillium? You didn't come when I sent to you, when I was engaged to Maurin, when our parents died—"

"There isn't time," Wax said, seizing her by the shoulder.

She looked up at him, dazed. "You were always the quiet one. The thoughtful one. How did you get here? I … Your face, Waxillium. You're old."

The door suddenly slammed open. The tall, thick-armed man that Wax had fought on the train stood there, looking stunned. He turned from Wax to Telsin, and opened his mouth.

Telsin shot him.

* * *

"We need to go," MeLaan said.

"We're bringing him," Marasi said, pointing to the man.

"Why?"

"Haven't you figured it out, MeLaan?" Marasi asked. "That ship out there *wasn't* built by the Set. It's from somewhere else, someplace distant and alien. It probably wrecked near our coast, and the Set brought it here to be studied."

MeLaan cocked her head. "Harmony does say odd things sometimes, about other peoples, not from the Basin—" She blinked, focusing on the man kneeling on the bloody floor. "Wow. *Wow*."

Marasi nodded. Proof that there was life past the Roughs, and the deserts beyond. She couldn't let him stay here, particularly not with the Set.

“Bring him then,” MeLaan said, moving out of the room. “And let’s get back to the meeting point.”

Marasi gestured toward the way out, trying to usher the masked man along. He just knelt there on the bloody floor, looking up at those hollow masks on the wall.

Then, with a trembling finger, he reached up and slid his mask back down over his face. He stood and pulled his blankets tight, shambling after Marasi as she crossed the room with the cages and entered the study.

MeLaan was already out in the hallway beyond. Marasi fetched her rifle and moved to join the kandra. Rusts, what was Waxillium going to say when he found out she’d picked up a stray? She could almost hear his voice. *You freed him, Marasi, but for all he knows you’re a member of the same group who apparently killed his friends. Be careful.*

She stopped at the door and looked back, gripping her rifle more tightly. Waxillium could be a curmudgeon, but he was right more often than not. The masked man might be dangerous.

He had stopped inside the room with the safe, looking about, seeming dazed. How long had he been in that little cage, trapped in the darkness? Listening as his friends were taken, tortured, and killed.

Rust and Ruin …

His eyes found the safe, fixating upon it, and then he crossed the room in a shuffle. He reached inside, and for a moment she assumed he was going for the banknotes. But of course not—he pulled out one of the little discs with the straps.

He held it up, seeming awed, then shucked off the blankets he’d been wearing like a cloak. She’d expected him to be wearing a loincloth or something savage underneath, but instead he was dressed in trousers that went down to just below his knees, under which he wore tight white socks. His shirt was loose and white, and over it he wore a snug red vest—matching his mask in coloring—with a double row of buttons up the front.

She’d never seen clothing like it before, but it was hardly *savage*. The man yanked up one sleeve, exposing his arm, and strapped on the disc by its cloth ties. He let out a relieved sigh.

Looking toward her again, he seemed more confident now. He was a short man, even a few inches shorter than Wayne, but seemed to have grown a foot by standing up straight and discarding those thick blankets. But rusts, how were they going to sneak him out? He was hardly inconspicuous with that mask. Perhaps Marasi and MeLaan could openly move short distances in here without drawing attention, but this man certainly couldn’t.

A series of gunshots rang out in the warehouse.

Perhaps sneaking wouldn’t be an issue.

# 20

The corpse slumped into the room, one hand still on the doorknob, face frozen in an expression of shock. Telsin had fired four times and had only hit twice, but that was enough.

Wax cursed, grabbing his sister by the arm and towing her across the room. With his other hand, he found a vial of metal flakes on his belt.

“I’ll kill them all, Waxillium,” she whispered. “Each and every one of them. They held me.…”

Great. On one hand, he couldn’t blame her. On the other hand, this was going to be rusting inconvenient. He downed the metal vial, then peeked out of the doorway to see the engineers and carpenters scattering for cover as guards came running toward Wax’s position. A few were very near, the ones Wayne had led away, and one pointed at him and shouted.

The room’s flimsy walls seemed like they’d be about as effective against bullets as stern words were against the town drunk. As the first soldier took a shot at him—Wax shoved back with a Steelpush—he made a decision.

“Hang on to me,” he said, pulling Telsin to his side. He took one step out of the room, fired into the ground, and sent them on a Push up into the air. Soldiers pointed, leveling guns, but in a moment he was on the top of the large ship. As he’d seen earlier, it was wide and flat up here, though the planks were smoother than the deck of any ship he’d seen, and the gunwales were like the crenellated tops of a fort or old tower.

He dropped Telsin. “I’ll be back soon,” he promised, leaping over the side of the ship. The man who had shot at him earlier wasn’t giving up, and fired more rounds. Splinters popped off the sides of the ship as Wax fired

Vindication and dropped the man. Wax landed, bounced off a stray nail, then skidded to a stop beside a stack of boxes where Wayne was hiding.

"What?" Wayne asked. "Get impatient?"

"My sister shot one of them."

"Nice."

Wax shook his head. Soldiers had started to pour into both ends of the large structure. "Not nice. There will be kill squads mixed among those soldiers, Wayne. Aluminum bullets. We need to get Marasi and MeLaan and go. Fast."

Wayne nodded. Wax took another draught of steel flakes, in case he lost his gunbelt, then nodded. "Speed us to the other side."

Wayne ran out, and Wax followed. Gunfire sounded, but Wayne popped up a speed bubble. It only covered about ten feet, but that was plenty to throw off aim. Wayne let Wax pass him, then they charged through the edge, side by side. The bubble collapsed, and bullets zipped through the air back where they'd been.

They ran on, but about the time the soldiers got another bead on them, Wayne created another bubble. This lurched them forward again, and shortly they were able to dive behind the broken section of the ship's pontoon and take cover. Soldiers cried out, confused by the Allomancy—but if there were kill squads among them, trained hazekiller hit men, they wouldn't be so easily fooled.

Wax led the way, darting along the front of the ship, in its shadow. As soon as someone started firing, Wayne tossed up another bubble, and the two of them repositioned. Wayne made to run out, but Wax stopped him, arm on shoulder.

"Wait."

Safely inside this speed bubble, Wax looked back across the cavernous hall. They were close to the eastern side, and soldiers in slow motion set up a perimeter, clogging the doorway and kneeling in ranks. Captains at the rear yelled, pointing, and bullets flew toward the last spot where Wayne and Wax had been seen.

Uncomfortably, more shots streaked through the air where—if they'd been following their previous pattern—they would have exited the speed bubble.

"Damn," Wayne said, eyeing the bullets. He tossed over his canteen. Wax took a drink, judging distances and feeling the surreal sensation of standing calmly in a maelstrom of gunfire, sipping apple juice.

"They're goin' all-out," Wayne said.

"Our reputation precedes us. How much time have you got left?"

"Two minutes, maybe. I've got more bendalloy on the horse, in case. The kandra stocked me up before we left."

Wax grunted. Two minutes could go very quickly. He pointed at the large hole in the ship's side, where a plank ramp led to the thing's insides. "I saw the ladies go in there."

"Funny," Wayne said, "'Cuz *I* see them peekin' out over there."

Wax followed his gesture, and indeed saw MeLaan's face behind a barely opened door out of one of the rooms at the side of the warehouse. Wax took a deep breath. "All right. Those armies will cut us apart, Allomancy or no, if we don't hide quickly. Those rooms will do. We can move through them toward the outer wall of the building, I can break through it, and we flee into the night that direction."

"Right," Wayne said. "And your sister?"

"She should be safe for the moment," Wax said. "Once we break out, I'll launch myself to the roof, then come back down through the open part and grab her."

"Sounds good," Wayne said, "'cept for one thing."

Wax handed back the canteen. "Here."

"Ha!" Wayne said, taking it. "But I was talkin' about *that*." He pointed toward the ship. A figure was climbing down one of the rope ladders that hung over the side of the ship. Telsin had *not* stayed put.

"Rust and *Ruin*," Wax snapped.

"Under a minute left, mate."

"Get her inside a bubble!" Wax shouted, gesturing. "I'll join the other two. Go!"

They split, the speed bubble falling. A sudden storm of gunfire assaulted Wax's ears as he dropped to the ground, feet forward, and Pushed against the metal supports in the ship behind him. He skidded across the packed dirt of the floor, bullets flying overhead, and reached the door that MeLaan flung open for him. His heels hit the threshold—the corridor had a wooden floor—and he popped up onto his feet, landing inside with a dusty thump.

"I'll have you know," Marasi said, "that *we* managed to do our job without alerting anyone."

"I'll send you a plaque," Wax said, pointing toward a strange, short man standing behind her. "What the hell is that?"

The man pointed back.

"His people must have built the ship," Marasi said. "They had him caged in there, Waxillium."

"Damn," MeLaan said from the doorway. "That army isn't playing games." It was hard to hear her over the gunfire.

“I found my sister,” Wax said. “Suit’s people must know how angry that will make him. We need to—”

“Wax!” MeLaan said, pointing.

He squeezed back up beside her. Wayne had almost reached his sister, who pressed herself against the ship’s side, eyes frantic. But Wayne had been hit. He lurched in place, holding his shoulder, as another bullet hit him right in the neck. He fell in a spray of blood.

Wayne could heal from that, with his new, strange metalmind. Unfortunately, the soldiers didn’t stop firing. Another bullet hit Wayne’s side as he dropped and played dead, then another. In an eyeblink he was healed and up, but then another round dropped him.

They were prepared. They knew. You want to kill a Bloodmaker? Knock him down and keep shooting.

Seeing his friend bleeding, facing some fifty men on his own, awakened something primal in Wax. He didn’t think; he didn’t shout orders. He tore from the hallway in a furious Push on the nails in the walls, soaring out into the warehouse proper a foot or so above the ground, pulling up dust in his wake.

The soldiers had been waiting for this. They had formed up on both sides of the warehouse, using boxes as cover, and they sent out twin waves of bullets—completely uncaring that they risked catching one another in the crossfire. Killing an Allomancer was worth the danger.

They could only wish to be so lucky.

To Wax’s eyes, the room became a frantic network of blue lines, a loom full of a mad weaver’s threads. He shouted, Pushing to both sides, shoving sprays of bullets in either direction and creating a ballooning hub of open space.

Several bullets continued to fly, though he noticed them only because one clipped him on the shoulder. Wax spun and yanked Vindication from her holster. A second volley came, and—his mind instantly matching blue lines with bullets fired—he shot once, dropping one of the men among the ranks who had fired an aluminum bullet.

More bullets came in a storm, but Wax swept them aside like dishes off a table. He was at the mercy of anyone firing aluminum, so he kept moving, dashing across the floor and leaping, Pushing behind himself and severely reducing his weight once he’d finished Pushing. The result was immediate; he sped up like an arrow, flying through the air with a roar of wind in his ears.

He landed before Wayne in a skid and Pushed bullets away from the healing man with a roar, then increased his weight and *Pushed* on the hull of the ship nearby. The wood crumpled, nails popping free of joints and planks tearing away before his fury, creating a second hole.

"Inside!" he shouted at his sister, prone on the ground nearby.

She nodded, scurrying in, and Wayne—still bleeding from a dozen different places—joined her in a crawl, throwing himself in through the opening.

*Can't let them stay there,* Wax thought, Pushing himself away as another round of bullets pelted the area. One didn't deflect when he Pushed it, but he couldn't pick out the owner from among the dozens of firing men. Damn.

The ship was a death trap. Yes, it would provide cover, but if they took refuge there the troops would surround them. But Wayne needed a moment to heal. That meant keeping the soldiers—

Three men in jet-black suits launched in succession over the hunkered-down soldiers. The guns they bore had no Allomantic metal trails. Wax cursed, dropping Vindication and ripping the shotgun from its holster on his leg.

The first of the Allomancers to land Pushed on Wax. He felt it as a jolt on the shotgun as he leveled the thing—increasing his weight and setting it against his shoulder—to fire.

The Allomancer smiled, Pushing on the slug as it left the barrel. But the huge powder load of the gun—designed to bring down Thugs—sent the man sprawling backward from his own Push. Dazed, he was just able to glance up as the next slug hit him in the face.

*Thanks, Ranette.*

The other two Allomancers ducked down as they landed, expecting more fire, but the powerful shotgun held only two rounds. Wax dropped it into its holster as he knelt, grabbing Vindication.

*Behind!* If there was a kill squad from one direction, they'd likely send another for him the other way too. The regular soldiers were mostly a distraction.

He twisted, Pushing around himself and leveling Vindication to surprise a man and woman in suits sneaking up on him. He dropped the woman.

The male Allomancer opened fire. Too many shots. No metal lines. Wax—

The bullets froze in the air.

Wax blinked, and then noticed something that had fallen to the ground near the enemy Allomancer: a small metal cube. Marasi crouched inside the doorway where she'd been hiding, MeLaan standing over her and drawing fire—absorbing bullets with her flesh like it was no big deal.

Wax grinned, then stepped aside. The Allomantic grenade ran out a second later, and the man who had been trapped inside the bubble fired again, trying to kill a Wax who was no longer there.

Wax leveled his own gun and killed the fellow.

* * *

Marasi wished she knew where her earplugs had gotten to. Honestly, how did Waxillium survive without them? The man had to be half deaf by now.

A bullet popped up dust on the ground near her. MeLaan knelt beside Marasi, giving her cover from one direction and taking another series of hits. She grunted. “This doesn’t hurt,” she said. “But it’s not particularly *pleasant* either.”

Ahead, Waxillium dodged shots from two more members of the kill squad and scooped up the device. Marasi leveled her rifle, trying to concentrate. Everyone was moving so quickly, and the *bullets*. They zipped in the air all around her. She brought down several soldiers, trying to focus on the ones that were firing in her direction. Many had taken shelter behind boxes on either side, so they weren’t firing in coordinated volleys anymore. They seemed to know that their job was to make a lot of noise and try to distract Wax while others, better equipped and better trained, actually tried to take him down.

Still, it was remarkable he didn’t get hit. Waxillium dashed past, mistcoat tassels flying, and swept bullets from the air. Then he launched himself toward the catwalks above.

Two men in suits followed. Allomancers. Marasi took aim at one and fired, but her shot was deflected.

Speaking of which … Though gunfire still popped in the huge room, no bullets hit the ground near Marasi, and none seemed to be striking MeLaan.

*But why?* Then Marasi spotted the little cube nearby. Waxillium had charged and then dropped it in front of them as he ran by. Marasi grinned, fishing an aluminum round from her purse. She could feel the device Pushing on her gun, but it was far enough away that it didn’t matter.

A hand fell on her shoulder. She jumped, then found the small masked man behind her. Rusts! She’d almost forgotten about him. His other hand was frozen halfway toward his mask, and behind it his eyes were wide.

She followed his gaze, which was focused on Waxillium, who landed beyond them. He must have increased his weight manyfold, for he was able to Push a group of boxes by their nails and send them flying backward, along with many soldiers.

“Fotenstall,” he whispered in awe.

“Allomancer,” Marasi said with a nod.

“Hanner konge?”

“I have no idea what that means,” Marasi said. “But that cube thing will soon stop buzzing, so we need to move. MeLaan? Do we retreat back?”

“Please,” the masked man said, gesturing toward the ship. He pointed frantically. “Please!”

Marasi ignored him, scrambling across the ground—entering the warehouse proper—and grabbing the device. It had indeed stopped buzzing.

Waxillium landed nearby, sweeping a round of shots away from her, and Marasi charged the thing in her hand. It seemed like last time … yes, by burning just a tad of her cadmium she was able to get it buzzing, yet not slow herself down too much. She somehow poured the power into the device and tossed it at the people who landed nearby, chasing Waxillium.

It froze them in place.

“Nice work so far,” Waxillium said. “But we’re going to have to split up. Get back into those hallways. I’ll follow soon. You’re too exposed out here!”

The men lurched out of her speed bubble. Waxillium started firing at them, but they ducked, and one grabbed the little cube.

Marasi brought him down with the aluminum bullet she’d chambered.

Waxillium grinned. “Go!” he said, charging the other man, who yelped and leaped into the air, Pushing himself away. Waxillium scooped up the little cube as he passed, then he too launched into the air.

“Come on,” MeLaan said, grabbing Marasi by the shoulder. A bullet took the kandra in the face, ripping off a chunk of her cheek and exposing green crystalline bone underneath.

The masked man cried out in fear, pointing and mumbling in his language.

“You should see me in the mornings,” MeLaan said. She gestured back toward the hallways. Marasi moved to follow.

The masked man pulled on her arm, pointing more frantically at the ship. “Please, please, *please*.”

Marasi hesitated. A bad idea in the middle of a firefight. Fortunately, most everyone seemed to be concentrating on Waxillium.

Something bit her in the left side. She looked down to see what it was, and was surprised to see red blooming on her coat around a hole.

A bullet hole.

“I’ve been shot!” she said, more surprised than pained. Shouldn’t that hurt? She’d been *shot*!

She stared at the blood, *her blood*, until the masked man grabbed her by the shoulders and started towing her toward the ship. MeLaan cursed and helped him. Marasi realized she’d dropped her gun, and struggled against them, trying to reach for it, suddenly frantic that she *not* leave it behind.

That made almost no sense, and part of her acknowledged it, but rusts—

*Shock,* she thought. *I'm going into shock.*

*Oh, hell.*

* * *

Wax soared high above the floor of the warehouse, zipping past the catwalks, where several gunmen with rifles had set up. He flipped Ranette's ball device outward—catching it around the railing of the catwalk—and hung on tight, pivoting sharply in the air. The gunmen started, trying to draw a bead on him as he landed behind them.

He stepped back and Pushed one gunman out at just the right moment, shoving him into the air as the last of the kill-squad Allomancers shot up past the catwalks, bearing a stunned expression at Wax's sudden change of direction. He collided with the rifleman in midair, and Wax turned, Pushing the other rifleman away. The poor man screamed as he fell.

Farther down the catwalk, two more men had set up with crossbows and wooden shields. Lovely.

Wax increased his weight. The entire catwalk shattered as he crashed downward through the wood, destroying the supports. He Pushed himself off a falling bar, shooting back out into the air, spinning Ranette's ball device on its cord. Above him, the suited man shook off the frantic gunman, dropping him and Pushing off to send himself into the air.

Wax flipped Ranette's ball upward and let go of the cord, still falling backward. The confused Allomancer caught the device by the cord as it passed.

Wax shot him in the chest.

*Shouldn't drop your Allomantic shield,* Wax thought, twisting in the air as he fell. *Even to catch a neat toy.*

As he approached the ground, Wax slowed himself on a spent bullet, then landed with a flare of mistcoat tassels. The dead Allomancer thumped to the ground beside him.

The ball dropped from his fingers and rolled toward Wax. "Thanks," Wax said, scooping it up. Where was—

Marasi. Down and bleeding, being dragged into the ship. *Damn!* Wax growled, launching himself into the air again as more soldiers fired. This place was a mess. Too many soldiers, many of whom were advancing on the ship, hiding a group of men with modern crossbows behind them. As one got close to the ship, Wayne peeked out.

"Wayne!" Wax shouted, passing overhead. He pocketed Ranette's ball and pulled out the Allomantic grenade—which was buzzing furiously—and dropped it.

Wayne looked up just in time to snatch the thing from the air, then looked down at it with surprise. When the first bullet curved away from him, Wayne grinned instead, then let out a whoop and flung it at the men in front of him. The thing rolled among them, tossing weapons aside with its power.

Wax sighed, landing on the top of the ship. Of *course* he'd throw it.

Wayne followed by jumping among the approaching soldiers, energetically laying about with his dueling canes. A bullet came startlingly close to Wax. More aluminum? As Wayne enthusiastically busted heads, Wax launched off the ship and landed among the advancing soldiers, increased his weight, and Pushed outward with a flare of strength. That tossed people away from him in a blast.

When the bodies fell, three men stood, stupefied, holding guns Wax couldn't sense.

He brought them down with a Sterrion—his other guns were out of bullets—then turned as he heard something distant. Horns blaring, a command. He leaped to the side, enough men dead or dropped that he could get a clear view out one of the doors into the night.

Men were streaming out of the buildings in the village. Dozens. He had a sinking feeling of dread. How long until his metals gave out? How many could he fight until someone with a crossbow or an aluminum bullet got lucky and hit him? He roared, launching himself upward in a leap over the fallen men he'd Pushed. Many were climbing to their feet. He was one man, not an army. He needed to run.

"Back!" he shouted at Wayne, who already had a crossbow bolt sticking from his thigh. The shorter man joined him, running toward cover inside the wrecked ship.

* * *

Marasi squeezed her eyes shut against the pain. It had finally come, arriving with a vengeance. MeLaan had given her a painkiller to chew, but it hadn't done anything yet.

"Dieten," the masked man said, putting her hand on her wound, which he'd bound with a strip of cloth from his shirt. She cracked an eye and saw him nod encouragingly, though with the mask down over his face she could see only his eyes.

Well, she wasn't dead. Even if *rusts* it hurt. And she thought she remembered reading somewhere that getting shot in the stomach—even on the side—wasn't good.

*Don't think about that.* What was going on? She gritted her teeth, shoved down her panic at being wounded, and tried to assess their situation. MeLaan watched the battlefield from beside the hole in the ship. Waxillium's sister stood nearby, cradling a handgun, eyes intense. Outside, gunfire, grunts, and screams accompanied Waxillium and Wayne doing what they did best: creating havoc.

Apparently the havoc quota had been filled, for a few moments later Waxillium swooped in through the hole. He nodded to MeLaan, his face shining with sweat, breathing heavily. Wayne scrambled in a moment later. He had a *crossbow bolt* sticking from his leg.

"Well, that was fun," Wayne said, plopping down and taking a deep breath. "Ain't been whooped so bad since the last time I played cards with Ranette."

"Marasi," Waxillium said, walking over to her. He pushed the masked man aside. "Thank Harmony you're alive. How bad is it?"

"I … don't really have much to compare it to," she said through clenched teeth.

Waxillium knelt beside her, lifting the bandage and grunting. "You'll live, unless that nicked the intestines. That could be bad."

"What kind of bad?"

"Painful bad."

"I might be able to do something," MeLaan said. "I'll check it out once we're safe. Speaking of which, how exactly *are* we going to get away?"

Waxillium didn't respond immediately. He looked exhausted. He glanced up at his sister, who was still muttering and holding her pistol. Outside the ship, it had gone unnervingly quiet.

"Our best bet is still going out through one of the warehouse's walls," Waxillium said. "We're going to have to push toward those rooms Marasi and MeLaan were in."

"That's gonna be dangerous, Wax," Wayne said, stumbling to his feet, *still* ignoring the bolt in his thigh. "They'll have formed up, knowing we're going to try to make a break for it."

"We can manage," Waxillium said. "With me Pushing, we get to those rooms, find an outer wall, then break through."

"And if they're waiting on the other side?" MeLaan asked.

"Hopefully they won't be. It—"

"Guys," Wayne said. "I don't think we have time to plan!"

Gunfire sounded outside again, and bullets started snapping against the hull. Wayne scrambled away from the opening. Marasi thought she could hear Irich out there, shouting for the soldiers not to damage the ship, but the firing continued. It seemed someone had overruled him.

“Please,” the masked man said, taking Marasi by the arm and pointing.

Marasi managed to get to her feet, though the pain made her eyes water. The masked man gestured, holding her by the arm.

She followed. Easier than trying to complain.

“We’re going to have to push through it,” Waxillium said from behind.

“I want to *kill* them,” Waxillium’s sister said. “I need more bullets.”

“Yeah, let’s have you focus on running, Telsin. Everyone get ready on my mark. Wayne, did you happen to grab that grenade?”

“Yup.”

“We’ll use it to make a speed bubble at the halfway point,” Waxillium said.

“No luck there,” Wayne said. “Completely outta bendalloy.”

“Damn,” Waxillium said. “Then we…” He trailed off. “Marasi? Where are you going?”

She continued limping along with the masked man. “He wants to show us something,” Marasi said.

“They’re coming!” Wayne shouted, peeking around the corner. “Fast!”

Marasi focused on moving down the corridor, one hand holding to her wound. She heard Waxillium curse, then gunfire sounded in the hallway. Waxillium was firing on men trying to pile in through the hole after them. *Trapped in here,* Marasi thought.

The masked man let go of her suddenly, then scrambled up the hallway ahead. “Don’t—” Marasi said, but he stopped, threw open a panel in the wall, then reached in and pulled something.

A section of the ceiling, painted with one of the strange golden patterns, fell open. A rope ladder dropped down, hanging only halfway to the floor. The masked man jumped up and grabbed it.

“There’s a hidden room here!” Marasi called.

“Better than nothing,” Waxillium called back. “Everyone up!”

Wayne went next, jumping up and catching the ladder and climbing it with a lithe step. MeLaan could touch it without needing to jump, and she hoisted herself next. Waxillium’s sister barely managed to grab the thing, but she climbed up with a hand from MeLaan.

Marasi stood looking with despair at the ladder, trying to imagine climbing it with her pain, until Waxillium seized her around the waist and Pushed them both up in a spinning leap. They landed inside the trapdoor, finding themselves in a narrow, low-ceilinged room fitted with a few chairs that were bolted to the floor. A single small window to the left looked out of the hull, letting in a sliver of light. The place looked like a railway compartment.

“Great,” Wayne said. “At least now we can die in relaxed positions.”

The masked man was fiddling with something near the wall. Some kind of trunk? He got it open and pulled out another one of those small, coinlike medallions with the straps on the sides. He pulled off the one he was wearing, and immediately gave a visible shiver, then slapped this one on instead.

“How’s that?” he asked, looking back at them.

Marasi blinked in shock. He’d said it in her language—strangely accented, true, but intelligible.

“No?” the man asked. “You’re looking at me confused, still. These things never work right. She swore that—”

“No, it works!” Marasi said. “At least, *I* can understand you.” She looked to the others, who nodded.

“Aha!” the man said. “Great, great. Put these on.” He tossed a medallion at each of them. “Touching the skin, please, maskless barbarians. Except you, Metallic One. You will not need one, yah?”

Marasi took hers and settled down on one of the seats, feeling dizzy. The painkiller seemed to finally be doing something, but she was still exhausted.

Below, shouts sounded in the hallway.

“Somebody better shut that door,” the masked man said, crawling down on the floor and fiddling with something underneath a counter.

Wayne obliged, pulling up the ladder, which was tied to the trapdoor. It clicked closed, leaving them in even greater gloom. A gunshot sounded below, then another. Marasi jumped as the bullets *hammered* against the floor of the room.

“Does this place have any other exits?” Waxillium asked.

The masked man yanked on something, and the room shook with a jolt. “Nope,” he said.

“Then why did you lead us here?” Waxillium demanded, grabbing him by the arm.

The masked man looked back at him. “Medallions on, yah?”

More bullets pelted the floor, but didn’t penetrate into the room, fortunately.

“What do they do?” MeLaan asked.

“Make you lighter,” the masked man said.

As soon as he said it—as soon as she knew what it did—something inside of Marasi understood. She was holding metal that, somehow, she could *feel*. It wanted something from her, and she poured it in, filling the metal … the *metalmind*.

She grew lighter, rising on her seat, the force of her body pushing less on her backside. Telsin gasped, obviously experiencing a similar sensation.

“Now that,” Wayne said, “that’s *right* strange.”

“Great Metallic One,” the masked man said, glancing at Waxillium, “I, of course, wouldn’t *dare* give orders to one of your stature, even if you wear your bare face out at all times. Who am I to judge? Even if you look equally crass as these others—even the cute one—I’m sure you’re not. But, if I may be so bold as to suggest—”

“What?” Waxillium asked.

“A little Push,” the masked man said, pointing downward. “On my mark.”

“If I Push downward,” Waxillium said, “I’ll just fly up and hit the ceiling.” He hesitated as the masked man pointed to a pair of straps connected to the floor, with wooden handholds at the ends. Waxillium looked at them, then looked at the masked man, who nodded eagerly.

Even in the darkness, Marasi could see the curiosity on Waxillium’s face. Despite the men shouting below, the muffled sound of gunshots, he was still the lawman—the detective. Questions teased him. He stepped over to the straps, picked them up, and held them firmly, bracing himself with his feet on the floor.

“Ready,” he said.

“A moment,” the masked man said, reaching for a lever. He yanked it hard, and the entire room shook, then *slid* sideways. Out of the hull, like a drawer in a dresser being opened. Marasi could see out of the front end now, which proved to have a large glass window that had been blocked by wood earlier.

“Go!” the man said.

Waxillium must have Pushed, for the room shook, then rose into the air. They weren’t in a room at all, but in a small boat that could detach from the main vessel.

ence have brought us closer to an answer.

*(Continued on back.)*

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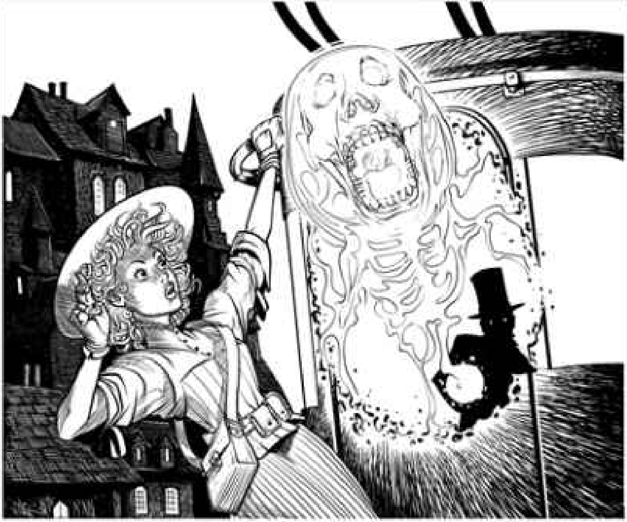


them stood the haunted man. When last we'd met, he'd worn a mistcloak, the hood of which had obscured his face, but now I could see him clearly.

Lightning flashed in his cold eyes and wind disarranged his sand-colored hair. In one hand, he held the rolled tapestry like a baton. With the other, he pointed an alien-looking pistol at me. No doubt the origin of the ghost he'd launched earlier.

The runes on the pistol's side flared emerald. I burnt chromium and lunged forward into a Baz-Kor move meant to stop Coinshots before they fill you full of holes. Just as the green runes turned red, my hand touched the metal of the device.

When I drain a Misting of metal reserves, I feel something I can only describe as pulling power from the metal and returning this power to some external source. The metal remains, but the power is gone.

I imagined that same intent as I touched the pistol. I pulled power from the device and returned it . . . elsewhere.

The red glowing runes went out like candles in wind.

It worked! The haunted device was certainly something of another world—neither Feruchemical nor Allomantic—yet my chromium touch had affected it.

The haunted man glanced at the pistol and gritted his teeth. "What in helmore did you do?"

He touched a few of the runes on the side of his pistol-like device, and the symbols began to glow again. He pointed the gun at me, this time mere inches from my face. My chromium trick had not broken the pistol as I'd hoped. If I couldn't permanently leech its power, I'd have to relieve the haunted man of it altogether.

My Baz-Kor training took over, and I executed a movement meant to knock a gun from an aggressor's hands. One smooth maneuver took me behind my opponent and out of range of the pistol. Now the haunted man stood between me and the gondola's rusted opening. My next move sent the alien pistol flying from the man's grip and out into open air.

The haunted man spun to meet me, surprise registering in his eyes. I took the instant to seize the map.

Unfortunately, I was only able to grab one end, and it unrolled between me and the haunted man. Each of us held tight to the long ends of the map. I only needed to find the pouch on it with my father's instructions sewn inside. After that, it did not matter to me whether this thief took the rest of the tapestry or not.

"Shadows, woman!" said the man. "Leave me alone!" He clutched his end of the map and jumped from the hole in the side of the car.

The sudden jolt on the tapestry pulled me to the ground and dragged me across the floor till my head and arms dangled out over the void, though I still managed to hang on with both hands to my edge of the map, the only thing keeping the haunted man from falling to his doom.

"Bloody helmore!" he yelled. "Would you just let go!"

"I will *not*!" I gripped the fabric tighter.

"It's just a stupid map." He studied the tapestry. Adjusting his grip a few inches to the side, he crumpled the linen between his fingers and began to climb.

"It's my inheritance!" I yelled back.

"I don't care if it's the Survivor's bathrobe. *Just give it to me!*"

"You are entirely disagreeable!" I said.

"Then you're starting to figure me out."

I trust you will not judge me too harshly if the pleasant timbre of the comic stranger's voice had me completely enchanted. His hair like gold, his eyes like blue ice. If you ever meet me in person, I will gladly give a more detailed description.

"Truthfully," I said, "a little politeness on your part could have avoided this whole debacle, and you wouldn't be hanging fifty feet above death from the threads of a poorly rendered map. Climb in. Let's come to an agreement."

He reached up as if to take my offer, but something in his hand flashed in the light of the stars. Instinctively, I burnt metal, releasing one hand to touch the device.

It was an everyday hunting knife.

"Politeness," he said with a grumble. "That's not how I work."

He clutched his side of the tapestry and cut through the top of it with his knife. Between us, a V shape formed just before the map ripped completely in half.

I gasped as he fell backward into the mist, clutching his piece of the tapestry.

I pulled away from the edge, frantically searched my half of the map for the hidden pocket, and found it almost immediately. The lack of a knife, however, meant I would have to wait to open it until I returned to the mansion. Still, I was relieved that although the haunted man was gone and my father's map ruined, I had the information I needed to continue my quest. I do admit, though, that if the haunted man still lives, he wound up with the better half of the map.

After disembarking the lift, I walked to the location where my foe would have hit the ground. I found no trace of him, and though no one witnessed his fall, a young white-haired man was there and offered to tell me a story. I declined.

It was not until I had returned home that I lit up the electric lamp and found Pinecone Allomouser the Third asleep with her kittens on my bed. Careful not to disturb them, I used a sewing knife to make quick work of the tapestry's hidden pocket. Inside was a folded piece of vellum written on in my father's flowing penmanship.

*My dearest Nicelle,*

*In this letter I am at long last able to disclose to you the secrets of the Unknown Constructs of Antiquity. . . .*

*—Continued next week!!—*

# 21

Wax stood in the center of the small vessel, Pushing against some kind of plate down below, designed—obviously—for this very purpose. It would be attached to the shelf the vessel had been on—not something that rose with it, but some kind of launchpad for an Allomancer to use as an anchor.

This vessel, though tiny, should still have been too heavy to lift. He should have broken those straps he held to, or been crushed by the force of his own Push. Yet he managed it. He held to those straps—essentially hitching himself to the ship—and lifted it, with all the people inside, off a ledge that had extended from the mother vessel.

*It's those medallions,* he realized. *They allow everyone to do as I do—to make themselves light, nearly as light as air.* That meant he was really only lifting the ship itself, along with their equipment.

The vehicle was small—barely six feet wide, though it was maybe twice as long—and had wide openings like doorways on either side. Those had faced walls inside the pocketlike shelf they'd popped out of, but now they exposed the air.

All in all, the thing felt like the cab of a motorcar with the doors ripped off. As the craft rose, small pontoons on extended arms folded down and clicked into place. Wax had a brief view of surprised soldiers on the portion of the catwalk he hadn't broken, and then they were out, rising through the opening in the warehouse roof.

The strange man in the red mask scrambled through the vehicle and leaned out one of the holes in the walls to look downward. He looked solemn as he saluted the ship below, then bowed his head, whispering something.

Finally, he turned to Wax. “You are doing great, O Divine One!”

“I’m not going to be able to Push it much higher,” Wax said with a grunt. “The anchor is too far away.”

“You shouldn’t need to,” the man said, scrambling past Marasi—he patted her on the shoulder—then fiddling with some controls at the front of the machine. “I’ll need the primer cube, please,” he said, holding out a hand to Wayne.

“Huh?” Wayne said, looking away from where he’d been hanging out the other door to look down. A few distant gunshots sounded as soldiers took potshots at the hovering vehicle. “Oh, this?” Wayne took out the Allomantic grenade.

“Yah,” the man said, snatching it. “Thanks!” He spun and pressed it against Wax’s arm until—as he was still burning steel to keep them afloat—it started buzzing.

The little man turned and snapped the cube into place under the shelf at the front of the ship. The machine shook, and then something started thumping underneath them. A fan? Yes, a very large one, blowing downward, powered by an unseen motor.

“You can let go, Great Being of Metals,” the man said, looking back at Wax. “If it suits your divine desires.”

Wax eased off on his Push. They immediately started to sink.

“Reduce your weight!” the man cried. “I mean, if it is aligned with your magnificent will, O Metabolic One.”

“Metabolic?” Wax asked, filling his metalmind and decreasing his weight. The ship stabilized in the air.

“Uh,” the masked man said, seating himself at the front, “well, we’re supposed to use a different title each time, yah? I’ve never been very good at this, Your Magnificence. Please don’t launch a coin directly into my skull. I’m not insolent, just stupid.” He pushed a lever forward, and smaller fans began whirring at the ends of the pontoons.

“They’re not boats,” MeLaan whispered. “Not this one, not the big one below. They’re flying ships.”

“Harmony’s Bands,” Marasi said. She was very pale, holding to her wounded stomach.

Flying ships that ran on some kind of Allomancy. Rust and Ruin. Wax felt the world seem to lurch around him. If electricity had changed life so dramatically, what would *this* do? Wax forced himself to shake out of his stupor and looked to the short masked man. “What’s your name?” Wax said.

“Allik Neverfar, Tall One,” the man said.

“Wait here a moment then, Allik.”

“Whatever you desire, O—”

Wax jumped out of the vehicle before he could be praised—or insulted, he couldn’t tell which these were—again. He got a better look at the small airship as he left. Yes, it looked more like a long motorcar cab than it did a boat, with that flat bottom. The large fan was separated from the ship by a short space, allowing air intake above. The doorways on the walls didn’t seem to close; it was fortunate the seats had straps.

Wax dropped through the sky, afraid to Push off the small airship, but was able to use anchors down below to slow and direct himself toward the forests north of the camp.

He wanted to be quick. That ship wasn’t up so high that it would be safe if they had access to cannons. He dropped into the forest and surprised Steris, who sat on her horse with the others in a line, all packed and ready to go.

“Lord Waxillium!” she cried. “I assumed you’d be coming, and prepared —”

“Great,” Wax said, walking to his horse. “Get down, and grab your pack and Marasi’s.”

She did so without objection or question, pulling off her small pack of essentials, then fetched that of Marasi. Wax did the same for MeLaan and Wayne.

“We’re leaving the horses?” Steris asked.

He released the horses, then grabbed Steris around the waist. “Turns out we’ve found something better.” He pulled out one of his older guns, then dropped it—he’d need a large chunk of metal to get them high enough—and Pushed, launching them from the forest and into the sky.

He’d worried about maneuvering—doing so up high wasn’t easy without skyscrapers to Push against. However, Allik steered the ship toward him, allowing him to get Steris one of the armbands, then set her into the vessel before climbing in himself. It managed to accept the new weight of the supplies, though Allik had to pull a lever to keep them from sinking.

“Seven people,” the masked man said. “And supplies. Above the weight *Wilg* is supposed to carry, but she should manage. Until our metal runs out. The question is, where do you want her to take us?”

“Elendel,” Wax said, walking toward the front of the little ship.

“Great,” Allik said. “And … where is that?”

“North,” Wax said, pointing. The little shelf at the front of the vehicle—like the dash of a motorcar—had a compass set into it. “If you head west first though, and find the river, we can—”

"No." Telsin seized Wax by the arm. "We need to talk."

Gunfire sounded below, followed by an echoing boom. Great. They *did* have a cannon.

"Just get us away from here," Wax said to Allik as he let Telsin tow him toward the back of the small ship. He passed Wayne, still hanging halfway out of one of the two open doorways and gawking. Marasi was on the floor, with MeLaan checking her wound, while Steris had already started packing their bags into an efficient pile between two of the seats.

The fans whirred and the ship began to move—not quickly, but steadily—away from the enemy camp. Wax settled onto a bench at the back of the ship with his sister. Rusts … Telsin. Finally. It had been a year and a half since he'd promised to stop his uncle and free her. Now here she was, sitting beside him.

She looked like a modern woman, with her hair in curls, wearing a stylish dress of contemporary fashion—thin material, hem up right below the knees, a neckline to emphasize a long neck and delicate drooping chains. If you didn't look at her eyes, you could have assumed she was a fine lady on her way to a ball.

If you did look into her eyes, all you found was coldness.

"Waxillium," she said softly, "there's a weapon of some sort to the south, hidden among the mountains separating the Basin from the Roughs. Uncle Edwarn has found it. He's on his way there."

"How much do you know?" Wax asked, taking her hand. "Telsin, do you know what he's planning? Is it a revolution?"

"He doesn't tell me much," she said. Her voice was so calm, so cold, compared to how it had been before. Always full of passion, ever nudging him to do things he should not. It seemed like they'd leeched the life out of her, during her months of captivity. "We have dinner together most nights when he is here, but he grows angry if I ask about his work. He wanted me for one of his … his projects, originally, but my age makes that impossible. Now I am just a pawn. To use against you, I believe."

"No longer," Wax said, squeezing her hand. "No more, Telsin."

"And if he finds this weapon?" she asked. "He seems *convinced* it is there, and that it will give his group the power to dominate the Basin. Waxillium, we *can't* let him have it." Some passion returned to her eyes, some of the Telsin he remembered. "If he seizes the Basin, then he will take me again. He will kill you, and he *will take me*."

"We'll get to Elendel, inform the governor, and then send an expedition."

"And if that takes too long?" Telsin said. "Do you know what the weapon is? The thing he is searching for?”

Wax looked down at the medallion strapped to her arm. “Feruchemy and Allomancy anyone can use.”

“The Lord Ruler’s own power, Waxillium,” Telsin said, passionate. “The Bands of Mourning. We could find them, use them before he does. He has to travel by foot on a treacherous mountain trail. I heard them preparing for it. We, however…” She looked out the doorway, toward the passing landcape. This was a view few ever saw. A view once reserved only for Coinshots.

“Let me check on Marasi,” Wax said. “Then we’ll decide.”

* * *

Marasi soared above the world, looking at a land bathed in starlight. Trees like shrubs. Rivers like streams. Hills like little lumps. The land was Harmony’s garden. Was this how He saw it, with God’s perspective?

The Path taught he was all around, that his body was the mists—that he saw all and *was* all. The mists were pervasive, but visible only when he wanted them to be. She’d always liked this teaching, as it made her feel His nearness. Yet other aspects of the Path bothered her. There was no structure to it, and because of that everyone seemed to have their own idea of how it should be followed.

Survivorists, like Marasi herself, regarded Harmony differently. Yes, he was God, but to them he was more a *force* than a benevolent deity. He was there, but he was as likely to help a beetle as he was to help a man, for all were the same to him. If you *really* wanted to get something done, you prayed to the Survivor, who had—somehow—survived even death.

Marasi winced as MeLaan continued to work. “Hmm, yes,” MeLaan said. “Very interesting.”

Marasi lay on the floor of the vehicle, near the doorway, head on a pillow made from a wadded-up jacket. The wind wasn’t too bad, contrary to what Marasi would have expected, as they weren’t moving terribly fast—though the fans did make a fair amount of noise.

MeLaan had spread Marasi’s uniform aside in a very improper way, barely keeping the most important bits covered. Nobody seemed to care though, so Marasi didn’t make a fuss. Besides, that was far less disconcerting than what MeLaan was doing to her. The kandra woman knelt over Marasi, hand on her side, the flesh having liquefied and run down *into* the wound.

It was discomfortingly like what had happened when she’d picked the lock, as if Marasi were just another puzzle to be manipulated. Rusts, she could *feel* MeLaan poking around in there with bits of flesh that had become tentacles.

“I’m going to die, aren’t I?” Marasi asked softly.

“Yes,” MeLaan said. Light from a small lantern from their packs illuminated her face. “Nothing I can do about that.”

Marasi squeezed her eyes shut. It served her right, running about like some lawman from the Roughs, scrambling through firefights and assuming she was invincible.

“How is it?” Waxillium’s voice asked. Marasi opened her eyes to see him leaning over, and she found herself blushing at her state of near-nudity. Of course. Her final emotion would be embarrassment because of damned *Waxillium Ladrian*.

“Hmm?” MeLaan asked, pulling her arm out, the flesh forming back over her crystalline bones. “Oh. I caught a hole in the intestines, as you’d guessed. Sewed that up tight, using some catgut I made from some spare intestines I had brewing. I patched it with some of my flesh, grafted on.”

“She’ll reject the flesh.”

“Nah. I took a bite and replicated her skin. Her body will think it’s hers.”

“You *ate* part of me?” Marasi said.

“Wow,” Waxillium said. “That’s … wow.”

“Yeah, well, I’m incredible,” MeLaan said. “Excuse me.” She reached her hand out the open side of the flying vehicle, then dropped a stream of something vile. “Had to slurp up things inside there to clean everything out. The safest way.” She eyed Marasi. “You *owe* me.”

“Is that the part of me you … um … ate?” Marasi asked.

“No, just what was leaking,” MeLaan said. “That grafted patch over the wound should hold until you heal on your own—I melded it to your veins and capillaries. It’s going to get itchy, but don’t scratch it, and let me know if it starts to go necrotic.”

Marasi hesitated, then prodded at her wound with exploratory fingers. She found only tight flesh, like that from a scar, patching the hole. It barely hurt, more a dull pain like a bruise. She sat up, amazed. “You said I was going to die!”

“Of course you’re going to die,” MeLaan said, cocking her head. “You’re mortal. Can’t turn you into a kandra by just— Oh, you thought *today*. Hell, girl. That shot barely clipped you.”

“You’re an awful person,” Marasi said. “You realize this.”

MeLaan grinned, nodding to Waxillium, who offered a hand to help Marasi up. She quickly straightened her uniform, though MeLaan had cut it in ways that made modesty difficult. She’d have to dig into her pack for something new, but how would she ever change in the vehicle’s crowded confines?

She sighed, taking Waxillium's hand and letting him pull her to her feet. For now she kept one hand at her waist, preventing her trousers from falling off. He offered her his mistcoat and, after a moment's hesitation, she put it on.

"Thanks," she said, noting that underneath the coat he had been wearing a bandage of his own, upper left arm, right below the shoulder. Had he also been shot during the fighting? He hadn't said anything, which made her feel even more foolish.

Waxillium nodded his head toward the front of the vehicle, where Allik sat with his feet up on the dash, leaning back. Due to the mask, it was impossible to read his expression, but she felt his posture was reflective.

"You feel up to talking with him?" Waxillium asked.

"I suppose," Marasi said. "I'm a little light-headed and a lot humiliated. But other than that, I'm fine."

Waxillium smiled, then took her arm. "You got ReLuur's spike?"

"Yes," Marasi said, though she fished in her purse to make sure, to have her fingers on it, just in case. She held it up.

"These degrade if they're out of a body, don't they?" Waxillium said, glancing at MeLaan, who had settled in a doorway with her legs dangling out, completely ignoring the perfectly good seats.

"How do you know about that?" she asked.

"The book Ironeyes gave me."

"Oh, right," MeLaan said, her expression darkening. "That. You know, the Lord Mistborn was wrong to create it."

"I've read it, regardless."

MeLaan sighed, looking out. "The longer it's away from ReLuur, the more its Blessing will weaken. But they are powerful, and can last some time—besides, even if the Blessing degrades, the spike will still restore his mind anyway. With some … loss of memory." Her voice caught on that last part, and she turned away.

"Well, we have it thanks to you," Waxillium said, looking at Marasi. "And I have my sister. So we should turn back to Elendel and find out what Allik knows."

"We should," Marasi agreed. "But your uncle—"

"You heard my conversation with Telsin?"

"Enough of it." When she hadn't been distracted by the fear that she was dying. *Stupid kandra.*

"And what do you think?" Waxillium asked.

"I don't know, Waxillium," Marasi said. "Did we really come here for the spike, or even your sister?"

“No,” he said softly. “We came to stop Suit.”

Marasi nodded, then dug a little more in her purse, bringing out the notebook she’d stolen from Irich’s study. She flipped to the page with the map and held it so both she and Waxillium could see it.

It had a spot clearly labeled *Second Site,* some kind of base camp in the mountains. And beyond that, something high up among some other peaks, indicated as dangerously high. Notes from Irich said, *Temple reported to be here*.

“The weapon,” Waxillium said, brushing the map with his fingers. “The Bands of Mourning.”

“It’s real.”

“My uncle thinks it is.” Waxillium hesitated. “And I do too.”

“Can you imagine him as a Mistborn,” Marasi said, “and a Full Feruchemist? Immortal—like Miles, only far worse. Possessing the strength of all metals. Like the Lord Ruler come again.”

“My uncle said he was going to the second site,” Waxillium said, studying the map. “It’s possible that his expedition hasn’t gotten to the temple yet, though. They know where it is, from their interrogations, but they were still planning their expedition. With this machine, we could beat him there.”

Waxillium drew in a deep breath, then nodded toward Allik up in his seat. “Will you talk to him? Find out what he knows.”

“The man’s been through a *lot,* Waxillium,” Marasi said softly. “I think they must have tortured and murdered his friends. He doesn’t deserve an interrogation right now.”

“We don’t deserve a lot of things that happen to us, Marasi. Talk to him, please. I’d do it, but the way he treats me … well, I think you’ll get better answers.”

She sighed, but nodded and climbed past Wayne, who was—unsurprisingly—slumped in a seat and snoring away. Steris sat with hands in her lap, content, as if riding in a flying machine were an everyday occurrence. Telsin sat in the very back.

Marasi wobbled. Rusts, she *was* light-headed. Fortunately, the front of the vehicle had two seats, the one Allik used and a smaller stool next to him. Allik glanced at her, and she realized she’d been wrong about his posture. He wasn’t pensive, he was *cold*. He sat there with arms wrapped around himself, and even shivered a little.

She was surprised. It was colder up here than down below, true, but she wasn’t particularly cold herself. Then again, she was wearing Waxillium’s coat now.

Allik turned back toward the windshield as she settled down on the stool. “I had assumed,” he said, “that everyone up here in the land of the Sovereign was a barbarian. Nobody wears masks, and what your people did to my crewmates…”

He shivered again. This didn’t seem to be the cold.

“But then you let me out,” he continued. “And you had one of *them* with you, a grand Metalborn of the precious arts. So I’m left confused.”

“I don’t feel like a barbarian,” Marasi said. “But I doubt all but the most barbarous of people *feel* like one. I’m sorry about what happened to your friends. They had the misfortune of running across a group of very evil people.”

“There were fifteen masks on the wall,” Allik said. “But *Brunstell*’s crew was nearly a hundred, yah? I know that some died in the crash, but the rest … do you know where they might be?” He looked to her, and she could see pain in his eyes behind the mask.

“Maybe,” Marasi said, surprised to realize she might. She turned the notebook around, showing the map. “Do you know anything about this?”

Allik stared at it. “How did you get that?”

“I found it in the desk of one of your captors.”

“They couldn’t communicate with us,” Allik said, taking the notebook. “How did they get this from us?”

Marasi grimaced. While torture was a terribly ineffective method of interrogation, at least as far as legal cases were concerned, she suspected it *was* a powerful motivator for overcoming barriers.

“You think they’re here,” Allik said, pointing at the map. “You think the men who captured them, the evil men, brought my crewmates to find the Sovereign’s temple.”

“It sounds like something Suit would do,” Marasi said, glancing back at Waxillium, who had settled into a seat behind her and leaned forward to listen. “Bring guides, or experts, just in case. He’s on his way here, the leader of those who killed your friends.”

“Then that is where I must go,” Allik said, sitting up and changing the direction of the ship. “*Wilg* and I will drop you somewhere, if you demand it, for I’m not *about* to make that one angry.” He thumbed over his shoulder at Waxillium. “But I’ve got to find my crewmates.”

“Who is the Sovereign?” Waxillium asked from behind.

Allik winced. “Surely he was not as great as you, Remarkable One.”

Waxillium said nothing.

“He’s staring at me, isn’t he?” Allik asked softly of Marasi.

She nodded.

"Eyes like icicles," Allik said, "drilling into me from behind." He spoke more loudly. "The Sovereign was our king from three centuries ago. He told us he was your king first. And your god."

"The Lord Ruler?" Waxillium said. "He died."

"Yes," Allik said. "He told us that too."

"Three hundred years ago," Waxillium said. "Exactly?"

"Three hundred and thirty, Persistent One."

Waxillium shook his head. "That's after Harmony Ascended. Are you *sure* about those dates?"

"Of course I'm sure," Allik said. "But if you wish me to revise my beliefs in order to—"

"No," Waxillium said. "Just speak the truth."

Allik sighed, rolling his eyes, an odd expression to see from one in a mask. "Gods," he whispered to her. "Very temperamental. Anyway, the Sovereign came about ten years after the Ice Death happened, yah? Silly name, but you've got to call it something. The land was beautiful and warm, and then it froze."

Marasi glanced toward Waxillium, frowning. He shrugged. "Froze?" she said. "I don't recall hearing of freezing."

"It's frozen right now!" Allik said, shivering. "You had it here too, you must have. Over three centuries ago, the Ice Death came."

"The Catacendre?" Waxillium said. "Harmony remade the world. Saved it."

"*Froze* it," Allik said, shaking his head. "The land was soft and warm, and now it is harsh and broken and frozen."

"Harmony…" Marasi whispered. "Allik's from the South, Waxillium. Haven't you read the old books? The people from the Final Empire never went in that direction. The oceans boiled, supposedly, if you got too close to the equator."

"The people who lived down south adapted," Waxillium said softly. "No Ashmounts to fill the sky with ash, to cool it…"

"So, the world nearly ended," Allik continued. "And the Sovereign, he came and he saved us. Taught us this." He gestured toward the armband he wore, with the medallion, then paused. "Well, not *this* one in particular. This one." He reached into his desk and took out the other medallion he'd worn, the one he'd taken out of the safe back in the warehouse. He put it on, swapping it for the language one, and sighed in contentment.

Marasi watched him, then raised her hand as if to touch his, and he nodded, allowing it. His skin grew warmer even as she sat there. “Heat,” she said, glancing toward Waxillium. “This medallion stores heat. That’s a property of Feruchemy, right?”

Waxillium nodded. “The most archetypal. In the ancient days, my Terris ancestors dwelled in the highlands, often traveling through snow-filled mountain passes. The ability to store their heat, then draw upon it, allowed them to survive where nobody else could.”

Allik sat, basking in his warmth for a time, before—with obvious reluctance—pulling off his medallion and swapping it quickly for the one that somehow allowed him to speak to them.

“Without these,” he said, holding up the first medallion, “we’d be dead. Gone. All five peoples extinct, yah?”

Marasi nodded. “And he taught you this? The Sovereign?”

“Sure did. Saved us, bless him. Taught us that the Metalborn were pieces of God, each one of them, though we didn’t have any of those at first. He gave us devices, and started the Firemothers and Firefathers, who live to fill these medallions so the rest of us may leave our homes and survive in this too-cold world. After he left, we used his gifts to figure out the rest, like these that make us fly.”

“The Lord Ruler,” Marasi said, “seeking redemption for what he did up here by saving the people down there.”

“He was *dead,*” Waxillium said. “The records—”

“Have been wrong before,” Marasi said. “It had to be him, Waxillium. And that means the Bands…”

Waxillium moved up beside Allik, on the other side. The masked man eyed him, as if made very uncomfortable by his presence.

“These,” Waxillium said, plucking the heat-giving medallion off the dash. “You can create these, as you wish?”

“If we have the Metalborn to do so, and the Excisors, yes. The Excisors are the gifts the Sovereign made for us.”

“So with one of those devices, a Metalborn can create a medallion like this—one for *any* Allomantic or Feruchemical ability?”

“Holy words,” Allik said. “But if anyone can say them, it is you, O Blasphemous One. Yes. Any.”

“And did one of you create a medallion that grants *all* of the powers?” Waxillium asked.

Allik laughed.

Marasi frowned. “Why laugh?”

“You think us gods?” Allik said, shaking his head. “You see that? The one you hold? It is very complicated. It is stored with the ability to give yourself a sliver of holiness."

"Investiture," Waxillium said. "This inner ring is nicrosil. You tap it, and it grants you Investiture—turning you into a temporary Feruchemist who has the ability to fill a metalmind with weight." He held up the medallion. "The iron on this is for convenience, right? You can fill it, but so long as you're tapping the Investiture, you could touch any source of iron and turn it into a metalmind."

"You know much about this, Mysterious One," Allik said. "You are wise and—"

"I learn quickly," Waxillium said, glancing at Marasi. She nodded for him to continue. This was fascinating … but the Metallic Arts was not one of her areas of expertise. Waxillium had a passion for it though. "What's this other ring built into the medallion?"

"That grants the warmth," Allik said. "It is a grand combination—*two* attributes, from separate rings. Took us long to make these work, yah? The one I wear now, also grants two. Weight and Connection. I've *seen* medallions with three. Twice in my life only. Every attempt at four has failed."

"So wear multiple medallions," Waxillium said. "Strap thirty-two to your body, and have all the abilities."

"I'm sorry, great Wise One," Allik said. "You are obviously very knowledgeable about this, and know things that none of us would *ever* think to try. How could we be so foolish as to not realize that we could simply—"

"Shut it," Waxillium growled.

Allik flinched.

"Doesn't work?" Waxillium asked.

Allik shook his head. "They interfere with each other."

"So to create one with multiple powers…"

"You must be very skilled," Allik said. "More skilled than any who has lived among us. Or…" He chuckled. "Or you'd have to have all the powers, rather than adding yours to the medallion, then passing it to another to have it added to! If that were the case, you'd be a great god indeed. As powerful as the Sovereign."

"He *did* create one of these," Waxillium said, rubbing the medallion with his thumb. "One with all of the abilities. A bracer, or a set of them, that granted all sixteen Allomantic abilities and all sixteen Feruchemical abilities."

Allik wilted.

"That's why you're here, isn't it, Allik?" Waxillium asked, looking into the man's eyes.

Marasi leaned forward. Waxillium said he wasn't good at reading people, but he was wrong. He was great at it—so long as reading them involved bullying them.

"Yes," Allik whispered.

"You traveled from your lands to find the Bands of Mourning," Waxillium said. "Why are they up here?"

"Hidden away," Allik said. "When the Sovereign left us, he took them with him, along with his priests, his closest servants. Well, some of them eventually returned, yah? With stories to tell. He'd taken them on a great journey, and had them build a temple for him in a hidden range of mountains. He'd left the priests there, with the Bands, and told them to protect them until he returned for them. And, that was dumb, yah? Because we could *really* use those to fight the Deniers of Masks."

"Deniers of masks? Like us?"

"No, no," Allik said, laughing. "You're just barbarians. The Deniers are *really* dangerous."

"Hey," Wayne called from behind them, hair whipping in the wind, hat held in his hands. When had he woken up? "We knocked your big ship outta the sky, didn't we?"

"You?" Allik said, laughing. "No, no. You could not have so harmed *Brunstell*. He fell to a great storm. It is a danger of our ships—so light, so easily troubled by storms. We would have landed *Brunstell,* but we were in the mountains, searching. We were so close to the temple, but then … yah. Blown out of the mountains over your lands. Smashed into that poor village. The barbarians there were nice at first. Then the others came."

He shrank down in his chair.

Waxillium patted him on the shoulder.

"Thank you, Wonderful One," Allik said. He heaved a sigh. "Well, ever since the Sovereign's elite told us the stories, we've tried to find the bracers."

"Find them?" Waxillium said. "You told us he'd left the Bands there for himself."

"Well, yah, but everyone interprets it as a challenge. A test sent by the Sovereign? He was fond of those. Why would he let priests tell us about them, if he didn't want us to come claim them?

"Only, after years of searching, everyone started thinking the temple was some fancy legend, lost in time. Everyone's uncle had a map, yah? The type worth less than the paper it's written on? But then, recently, some interesting stories started circulating. Talk of lands up here, and of mountains nobody had explored. We sent several scout vessels, and they returned with stories of your people, in this land.

“Well, five or six years back, the Hunters sent a big ship up with a quest to finally find the temple. And they succeeded, we think. One skimmer came back with a map of where they’d been. The rest froze to death; a blizzard in the mountains overwhelmed their medallions.”

Wind rocked the small ship as Allik fell silent.

“We’re going after that temple, right?” Marasi asked, looking at Waxillium.

“Damn right we are.”

# 22

Marasi had plenty of time to think as they traveled southward toward the mountains. Allik guessed the trip would take about two hours, which surprised her. She'd imagined an airship to be a fast-moving vehicle, but this was likely slower than a train. Still, being able to proceed there in a straight line instead of having to follow the landscape was a distinct advantage.

Even with the fans whirring in their casings, the airship seemed to spend much of its time gliding. Allik would increase their height or lower it, trying to find favorable winds—and he complained that he didn't know the airstreams of this area. He did his navigation using devices she didn't recognize along with some startlingly accurate maps of the lower Basin. How often had these people prowled through the skies up here, hidden in the darkness, observing and making their maps?

Most of the others slept, comfortably tapping warmth as Allik had taught them. When Marasi considered sleeping herself, she could not banish the image of falling from one of those doorways and awakening just as she hit the ground—even with the waist belts tying them all in.

Wayne gave her something else to help with the pain, though he wouldn't say what it was. It felt good though, and she could mostly ignore her aching side. She settled into the seat beside Allik and chatted with him. She felt guilty, as that required him to wear the medallion that let him translate, but he seemed as eager to talk as she was. She could not say whether that was because he was starved for interaction following his incarceration, or if he wanted to be distracted from thinking about the friends he'd lost during his journey.

Over the next two hours, he told her more about the medallions they wore, and the legends of the Bands of Mourning. In Allik's lore, the Lord Ruler had filled them with a great deal of every attribute—but had also crafted them to grant any person who used them the ability to draw those forth. A kind of challenge to mankind to find them, along with a warning not to. Allik didn't seem to consider this a contradiction at all.

He also spent more time telling her about life where he was from—a place over the mountains, across the entire Southern Roughs and the wastelands beyond. A distant, wonderful place where everyone wore masks, though not everyone wore them in the same way.

Allik's own people preferred to change masks according to their professions or moods. Not each day, certainly, but it wasn't uncommon for them to change their mask as often as a lady in Elendel might change her hairstyle. There were other groups though. One gave a mask to each child, and those only changed once, when they reached adulthood. Allik claimed that these people—called Hunters—even grew *into* their masks somehow, though Marasi found that difficult to believe. Still other people, to whom he referred derisively, wore only plain, unpainted masks until they did something to earn a more ornate one.

"They are the Fallen," he explained to her, wagging one hand before himself in a gesture she didn't understand. "They were our kings, yah? Before the world froze. They offended the Jaggenmire, which is why everything went wrong, and—"

"Wait," Marasi said, speaking softly so the others could sleep, "the … yayg—"

"Jaggenmire?" he asked. "It didn't translate? You don't have a word for it in your language, then. It's like a god, only not."

"Very descriptive."

Surprisingly he lifted his mask, something she'd only seen him do that once, when he'd knelt before the masks of his friends. He didn't seem to consider it an infraction of any sort, and kept talking. She liked being able to see his face, even if his wispy beard and mustache looked a little ridiculous—it made him look younger than he really was, unless he was lying about being twenty-two.

"It's like…" he said, grimacing, "like a thing that runs the world, yah? When something grows, or dies, the Jaggenmire make that happen. There is Herr, and his sister Frue, who is also his wife. And she makes things stop, and he makes things go, but neither can—"

"—make life on their own," Marasi said.

"Yah!" he said.

"Ruin and Preservation," she said. "The old Terris gods. They're one now. Harmony."

"No, they were *always* one," Allik said. "And always apart. Very odd, very complex. But anyway, we were talking about the Fallen, yah? They work doing anything they can to relieve their burden of failure. A compliment means a lot to them, but you have to be careful, because if you tell them they did well, they might take your compliment to heart and travel back to their people to tell everyone. Then *you* might be called in to testify about how good a job they did, so they can change their mask. And their language, that's a *real* pain. I speak a smattering of it—always useful, so you don't have to wear the medallion—and it makes my head spin as if I'd been flying too high for way too long."

She smiled, listening to him go on, gesturing wildly as he spoke—which she figured was only natural, if everyone's faces were covered all the time.

"Do you speak many languages?" she asked, as he took a breath, finally pausing his narrative.

"I don't even speak my own that well," he said with a grin. "But I'm trying. Seems like a good skill for a skimmer pilot to have, since it's often my job to pilot *Wilg* and take people between ships or towers. And if I'm going to sit half the day in a class, I figure it should be something useful. Though mathematics has—"

"Class?" Marasi asked, frowning.

"Sure. What do you think we do all day on the ship?"

"I don't know," Marasi said. "Swab decks? Tie ropes. Um … trim … stuff. Deckhand types of things."

He looked at her, eyes bulging, then slapped his mask down. "I'm going to pretend that you did *not* just compare me to a common *lowship*man, Miss Marasi."

"Ummm…"

"You have to be something more special than that, if you want to fly. We're expected to be gentlemen and ladies. We've thrown people *overboard* for not knowing the proper dance moves."

"What, really?"

"Yah, really." He hesitated. "All right, so we tied a rope to his foot first." He made a gesture she had started to realize was something like a smile or a laugh. "He dangled there below *Brunstell* for a good five minutes, cursing up a storm. He never got the cistern three-step wrong again, though! And Svel always said to him…"

Allik trailed off, growing silent.

“And?” Marasi prodded.

“Sorry. His mask … Svel, I mean. On the wall…”

*Oh*. The conversation died, Allik staring out the front of the ship, then making a few adjustments to their heading. Outside, the landscape was dark save for a few pinpricks of towns, now far to their left. Though they’d initially skirted the Seran Range, Allik had moved the skimmer into the mountains about a half hour back. Now they flew over the tops of the peaks, having ascended higher than they’d been when flying over the Basin.

“Allik,” Marasi said, resting her hand on his arm. “I’m sorry.”

He didn’t respond. And so, hesitantly—fully aware that she was probably doing something taboo—she reached out and lifted his mask. He didn’t stop her, and the motion revealed eyes staring sightlessly, a tear trickling down each cheek.

“I’m never going to see them again,” he said softly. “*Brunstell* is crashed; I’ll never serve on him again. Hell, I’m never going to see *home* again, am I?”

“Of course you will,” Marasi said. “You can fly there.”

“*Wilg* won’t last on the stone I’ve got,” he said, wiping the tears from first one cheek, then the other.

“The stone?”

“Fuel,” Allik said, glancing at her. “What, you think *Wilg* flies on clouds and dreams?”

“I thought it flew on Allomancy.”

“Allomancy Pushes the impellers,” Allik said. “But ettmetal is what supports it.”

“I don’t think that one translated either,” Marasi said, frowning.

“Here, see,” Allik said, kneeling down and opening the compartment where he’d put the little cube that Waxillium called an Allomantic grenade. It was attached to a metal shell, which glowed softly at the center. Allik pointed, and to the side she could see a greater light blazing with a pure whiteness. A stone, burning like a limelight.

*Or like Allomancy itself,* Marasi realized. “What kind of metal *is* it, though?”

“Ettmetal,” Allik said, shrugging. “There’s a little bit in the primer cube too, to make it work. A lot more to make a ship like *Wilg* go, and a lot, *lot* more to get *Brunstell* into the air. You don’t have this metal?”

“I don’t think so,” Marasi said.

“Well, what we have in *Wilg*, it’ll be enough to fly us a day or two. After that, we’d need an Allomancer Pushing full-time. So unless His Greatness the

Drowsy One back there wants to fly with me all the way back, I'm stuck, yah?"

"You said there was more on *Brunstell*."

"Yah, but *they* have it." He grinned. "At first, the evil ones didn't know how to care for it. Got some wet. *That* was a good day."

"Wet?"

"Ettmetal explodes if it gets wet."

"What kind of metal *explodes* if you put it in water?"

"This kind," he said. "Anyway, your evil men, they got most of ours."

"And we're going to stop them," Marasi said firmly. "We'll get your crewmates back, stick you on your ship—or some of these skimmers, if the big one won't fly anymore—and send you home."

He settled back in his seat, closing the panel under the dash. "That's what we're going to do," he agreed, nodding. Then he eyed her, his mask still up. "Of course, your people don't have what we do. No airships at all. So they'll simply let me and mine soar away, no information demanded, with this technology?"

Rusts. He was clever. "Maybe we can give the governor some technology," she said, "like a few medallions. Then promise him trade between our two peoples, fueled by the goodwill of having helped you and yours get home. That will erase some of the shame of what Suit did."

"There are those from my lands who might find your Basin up here … tempting, with no defenses against attack from above."

"All the more important to have allies among your people."

"Maybe," he said, pulling his mask back down. "I appreciate your genuine nature. You have no mask to hide your emotions. So odd, but welcome in this case. Still, I have to wonder if this will be more complicated than you say. If we do find the relics, what you call the Bands of Mourning, who keeps those? They are ours, yet I cannot see your Metalborn lord letting them slip away from him."

Another difficult question. "I … I honestly don't know," Marasi said. "But you could say we have as much a claim to them as you, since it was *our* ruler who created them."

"A ruler you killed," he pointed out. "But let us not argue about it, yah? We will find what we find, and then determine what to do." He hesitated. "I must tell you something, Miss Marasi. It is possible we will find nothing at the temple but destruction."

She frowned, settling on her seat, wishing he still had the mask up so she could read his face. "What do you mean?"

"I told you of the ones who came seeking the temple," Allik said.

"The Hunters," Marasi said.

He nodded. "They were warriors, in the time before the freezing. Now they hunt answers to what happened to us, and secrets to making it never happen again. Miss Marasi, I have known many, and they can be a good people—but very, very stern. They believe that the Bands of Mourning were left with us as a test—but opposite the one we all assume. They think the Sovereign intended to see if we would take the power when we should not. And so…"

"What?" Marasi asked.

"Their ship," he said, looking toward her, "that came up here first. It carried bombs, great ones, made from the ettmetal. Intended to *destroy* the Bands. They did not succeed, it is said. But anything could have happened. The place of the temple is said to be frozen beyond anything else in this world. A dangerous place for my kind." He shivered visibly, then looked longingly at the medallion set on the desk before him.

"Go ahead," Marasi said, "put it on."

He nodded. They'd had to do this several times during the flight so far, letting Allik warm himself with the Feruchemical device. Marasi wore one herself, comfortably warm—though up this high, the air was probably freezing.

Allik settled back, and Marasi—curious—picked up the Connection medallion that he had set down. She turned it over in her fingers, noting the sinuous lines down the center, dividing it into separate metals. Iron for weight, duralumin for Connection, and most importantly nicrosil, to give her the ability to tap metals in the first place.

She knew enough Metallic theory to identify the metals, but Connection … what did it actually do? And how did that make him speak a *language* of all things?

Suddenly feeling foolish, she smiled and took off her medallion. The ship immediately dipped due to her restored weight. She let out a squeal of alarm and immediately donned the weight/Connection one instead, then blushed—making herself light again—as Waxillium whipped his gun out and leaped to his feet. So he hadn't been sleeping, but eavesdropping. He looked around to see what had caused the lurch.

None of the others stirred. Wayne kept snoring.

Marasi held up the disc to Allik, then tapped Connection. She waited for some reaction inside of her, but it didn't seem to do anything.

"We've been foolish," she said. "I could have been wearing this all along, and speaking *your* language. Then you could have been warm the entire time."

Allik grinned at her, then said something completely unintelligible.

"What's going on?" Waxillium said from behind her.

"Nothing," Marasi said, blushing again. It wasn't working. Why wasn't it working?

Allik gestured to her, and she switched back to her previous medallion—working very carefully this time to avoid causing a jolt, but mostly failing. How did he transition between them so smoothly?

He made a gesture, like a hand drawn across his face, that she thought indicated a smile. "Clever, but it won't work on you."

"Why?"

"Because we're in your lands," he said. "The visitor always has to wear the medallion. It's filled with Connection, yah? Blank Connection, to no place. But Connection can't just be connected to *nothing,* so when you tap it, it reaches out and connects you to the place where you are. Makes your soul think you were raised in this place instead, so your language changes."

Marasi frowned, though Waxillium perked up, pulling up between their two seats. "Curious," he said. "Very curious."

"It is the way of the world," Allik said with a shrug.

"Then why do you have an accent still?" Marasi asked. "If your brain thinks it was raised here?"

"Ah," Allik said, raising his finger. "My soul thinks I was raised here, in your lands, but it knows that I am Malwish by descent, and that parents are from Wiestlow, so I cannot help but have an accent, yah? I got it from them. It is how the medallions always work."

"Strange," Marasi repeated.

"Yah," Allik agreed. But Waxillium was nodding, as if it made perfect sense to him.

"Those mountains to the right," Waxillium said, pointing. "Those are some taller peaks than the ones we've been passing."

"Yah!" Allik said. "Good eye, O Observan—"

"Stop with the titles."

"Yes, um, O Confusing … er…" Allik took a deep breath. "Those are the peaks we're seeking. Getting close. We'll have to climb *Wilg* up even higher. Cold temperatures, dangerous altitudes."

He hesitated as Waxillium pointed at something ahead. Difficult to see, but distinct once Marasi noticed it. Light, hovering in the darkness—only a glimmer, but stark against the blackness.

"The Seran Range is uninhabited," Waxillium said, "except in a few of the valleys. Too cold, too many storms.”

“So if there’s a light…” Marasi said.

“Suit has left on his expedition,” Waxillium said, standing up straight. “Time to wake the others.”

# 23

Wayne was awakened quite rough-like, in a manner unbefitting his grand dreams, in which he was king of the dogs. Had a crown shaped like a bowl and everything. He blinked his eyes, feeling nice and warm, and got hit with a blast of air. Drowsy, he remembered he was flying in some kind of rusting *airship* with a fellow what had no face. And that was almost as good as that dog thing.

“Can you bring us down closer?” Telsin asked.

“If I do,” the masked guy said, “they’ll hear us, even with *Wilg*’s fans on low speed. We need to pass over those people below, but I will keep us very high.”

Rusts! Wax’s sister hung half out of the machine’s open side, looking down, though Wayne could barely make her out with the light so low. He hadn’t figured that Telsin would be the adventurous type, what with Wax being all calm and careful most of the time. Yet there she was, doing her best imitation of a pub sign flapping in the wind. He nodded in appreciation, then untied his little belt thing, and got up to look at what she was seeing.

He stepped over their packs, which had toppled from the neat stack Steris had made, then leaned out next to Telsin. That let him look down at a long line of people—lit by lanterns—trudging through what appeared to be waist-high snow. Poor sods.

Wax stepped up to the other opening, looking down with his spyglass. Wayne couldn’t see much, himself. He held on with one hand and took out his box of gum, shaking it. Only one ball left. Damn. Well, at least it had plenty of powder on it. That would help perk him up, it would.

"Do you see him?" Telsin asked.

"I think so," Wax said. "Wait. Yes, that's him. I'll bet they left on their expedition the moment they got word of what happened with us at the warehouse." He reached into his holster and took out one of his guns. He gave the rusting things names, but Wayne could never keep them straight. It was one of the ones with the long tubey thing on the front what spat bits of metal at the bad guys.

"Let me do it," Telsin said, voice passionate.

Wayne hesitated, ball of gum halfway to his mouth. That was quite the bloodthirst this woman had.

"You can't make a shot like this," Wax said. "Not sure if I can either."

"Let me try," Telsin begged. "I don't care what it takes. I want him dead. Another will take his place, but I *want him dead.*"

Wax sighted for a long moment, and everyone in the ship seemed to hold their breath. Finally, Wax lowered his gun. "No," he said. "Your testimony in court will do more against the Set than killing a man for no reason other than vengeance. And I'd rather have him to interrogate anyway." He holstered the gun.

Wayne nodded. Reliable chap, that Wax. Steady. The same on a good day and a bad. Wayne moved to retreat into the ship's interior, but as he scrambled over the seats, he somehow got tangled a little with Telsin and, in the process, kicked one of the packs out the opening.

Wayne stared down, aghast, as it fell and actually *hit* one of the men on the head.

"What did you do?" Telsin demanded.

Wayne winced.

"What did Wayne do now?" Marasi asked, a sense of resignation in her voice.

"He kicked that pack out right on top of them," Telsin said.

"'S not my fault," he said. "Wax woke me up too soon. Put me off balance." He looked back at the ship's other occupants. Wax sighed, moving up beside the pilot. Steris and MeLaan sat on the back bench, out of the way —MeLaan lounging in a rather attractive way, Steris bent over a large notebook. Taking notes? What was *wrong* with that woman?

Down below, the men in the snow held their lanterns high and scanned the sky, seeming confused.

"Move us away," Wax said to the masked pilot, pointing. "Go the direction they're hiking."

"Yes, Decisive One," the pilot fellow said, and the fans at the sides of the thing grew louder. “Hold on, everyone.”

The ship shifted. Not quickly, but it did start moving again. Neat trick that had been, staying in place while flying. Birds couldn’t do that, just Coinshots. Wayne moved forward, sidling past Marasi to get a good look out the front of the ship.

“Wind is picking up,” the pilot mentioned. “Might be a storm, as if things weren’t cold enough already.”

“There,” Wax said, pointing. “What was that?”

“I’ll bring us around,” the pilot fellow said, swinging the ship, which rocked precariously. Another gust of wind brought flakes of snow in through the openings in the ship’s walls.

“That’s it,” Wax said, peering through the curtain of snow. “Harmony’s Rings … it’s really here.”

“I don’t see anything,” Wayne said, squinting.

“Hold on to something,” the pilot fellow said. “Or make sure you’re strapped in. I’m going to land.”

So Wayne grabbed the man’s arm.

“Something *else*.”

Wayne grabbed the chair’s back, and good thing he did, since the ship pitched to the side as it came down. The landing wasn’t too bad, assuming you liked getting shaken about and then having your face smacked into the wall.

Wayne blinked, finding himself in blackness. A moment later MeLaan managed to relight her lantern and hold it up, showing that the ship had settled halfway on its side, one of the fan wings—which could fold up so the thing could fit in the larger ship—having bent up on its hinges, with a big heap of snow pushed in through the hole in the ship’s side.

“Is that how it usually goes?” Wax asked, standing up shakily on the sloping floor.

“Landing is difficult,” the pilot fellow admitted.

“Technically,” Marasi said from the back, “it’s not. It’s probably the easiest thing to do with a flying ship, assuming you’re not picky.”

Wayne snorted, climbing across the ship to the side that was pointed upward, and hopped out. The snow crunched when he dropped into it. He hadn’t expected that—the only snow he’d seen had been the occasional flurry up in the Roughs, and it never got anywhere *near* this deep. Why would it crunch? The stuff was made of water, not cereal flakes.

He stumbled out of the high pile of snow onto a windswept rocky portion of ground. Snow pelted him like grains of sand, but it didn’t seem to be coming from the sky, just getting blown in from the side. He shivered and tapped more warmth. The clouds happened to roll out of the way, releasing starlight like a bouncer stepping back and letting folks into the night's most exclusive club.

That light cascaded down, white and calm, upon a rusting *castle* in the middle of the mountains. A bleak stone fortress, cut of the same stone as the field. It looked to be only one story, hunkered down against the wind, but it glowed in the starlight like the spirit of some ancient building from anteverdant days.

Wayne breathed out slowly, his breath making white mist before him. "Nice," he said, nodding. "Nice." The folks that built this, they had *style*.

Marasi clambered out of the ship, wearing Wax's mistcoat for some reason, and almost fell face-first in the snow. She stood on top of the white fluff, a gust of wind almost knocking her over again, until suddenly she sank down into it farther with a crunch. She'd finally remembered to stop filling her weight metalmind. Easy mistake to make, if you weren't accustomed to being a Feruchemist.

She pushed through the snow and joined Wayne, wiping melted snow from her brow. She looked to be doing well, considering that she'd been shot.

"Suit and his people aren't far off," she said. "And they know we're here, now."

"Then we find the Bands first," Wax said from behind them. It was seriously unfair how he glided up out of the machine, then soared on a quick jump to land next to them, no stumbling in that snow. Seriously. Why had Harmony made the stuff? Didn't seem to serve much of a purpose. "Everyone grab your things. Allik, remove the grenade from the ship, just in case."

They all hurried to obey, Marasi climbing back in the machine, then joining Steris in handing the packs out. Allik emerged, wearing that mask of his still, and stood on the side of his ship, staring at the fortress and shaking his head. He then turned and patted his ship, like it was some kind of puppy, until Steris appeared and chased him away for some reason. A few moments later Marasi climbed out, wearing a dress instead of her uniform, but with trousers on underneath. She tossed Wax his mistcoat.

Figures. A woman *would* have to change outfits for this. Can't infiltrate a remote, ancient temple without properly accessorizing. Wayne ran his hand through his hair, then had a moment of panic. His *hat*! He scrambled back toward the ship, looking around frantically, but then spotted it peeking from a snowdrift nearby, having fallen free as they landed. He picked it up with a sigh of relief.

“Everyone back,” Wax said, steadying himself with a stable footing, the wind blowing his mistcoat tassels back and whipping them about. The others moved away from the ship, and Wax grunted, Pushing. The ship skidded back softly into the snow, piling it up in a wave. Wax Pushed until the thing was completely buried.

“Nice,” Wayne said.

“Let’s hope one of their Coinshots or a Lurcher doesn’t spot it beneath the snow,” Wax said, turning toward the temple and shouldering his shotgun. “Come on, let’s get out of this wind.”

They picked up the packs and started across the stone field toward the fortress. Steris had found another lantern somewhere, and lit it. Wayne hurried his step and fell in beside that pilot fellow with the mask.

“You know,” Wayne said, “I’m an Allomancer too.”

The man said nothing.

“I figured you’d want to know,” Wayne said, “since it seems like this is your religion and all. In case you wanted someone else to worship.”

Again no reply.

“I’m a Slider,” Wayne said. “Speed bubbles, you know? Those fancy titles would work for me just fine, I think. Handsome One. Smart One. Um … Guy wif the Great Hat.”

The only sound was that of their footfalls and the gusting wind.

“Now, see,” Wayne said, “this is unfair. Wax doesn’t want you to worship him, right? But you *gotta* have someone to worship. It’s human nature. It’s ingratiated in us. So, I’m willin’ to be accommodatin’ and let you—”

“He can’t understand you, Wayne,” Marasi said, marching past. “He’s swapped metalminds to keep himself warm.”

Wayne stopped in place as they all hiked onward. “Well, when he gets his brain back, someone tell him I’m a god, all right?”

“Will do,” Wax called from up ahead.

Wayne sighed, moving to catch up, but then stopped. What was that off to the side? He shouldered his pack and hiked over, ignoring Marasi’s call that he turn back. There *was* something there, near the cliffs. A hulking shape bigger than a house, the exposed bits covered in frost.

Wax strode over, squinting against the wind, and grunted. “Another ship,” he said. “The one that the Hunters sent.”

“The who?”

“Group of people from Allik’s region,” Wax said. “They came here to destroy the place. Fortunately, it seems they didn’t succeed.” He turned to go, but Wayne nudged him, nodding toward a hand sticking from one of the snowbanks. Looking more closely, he was able to pick out a dozen corpses, perhaps more, lying there in this icy place, frozen for all time.

Wax nodded, then they hiked back toward the others. Marasi and Steris had waited, along with the masked man—who had crossed half the distance to the new ship, then stopped, staring at it. Telsin had strode on ahead, MeLaan tailing her. He quickly joined the rest of them as they followed after Telsin and MeLaan.

“Your sister,” Wayne said to Wax, “is kinda…”

“Severe?” Marasi said.

“I was gonna say bonkers,” Wayne admitted. “Though I’m not sure if it’s the good kinda bonkers or the bad kind, as of yet, as I haven’t had time to give it the proper evaluatin’.”

“She’s been through a lot,” Wax said, eyes ahead. “We’ll get her home and give her some physicians to talk to. She’ll mend.”

Wayne nodded. “Course, she won’t fit in wif us anymore if she does.”

They continued, and that fortress, *rusts* it was impressive. Made of broad stone blocks, the type that some poor fellow probably broke his back lugging about, it had steps out front leading up to an enormous statue. At first he was surprised, as all the way out here seemed an odd place for a sculpture—but then, the ones back in Elendel had been shat on by about a million birds, so perhaps this was the *best* place to keep your statue.

The group of them made their way up the steps, fighting the wind. The medallion meant the wind wasn’t cold enough to chill his nethers, but it was still annoying. At the top of the steps they had to walk around that statue, which was in the shape of a fellow in a long coat holding a spear to his side, its tip resting on the stones. Wayne scratched his face, stepping back and craning his neck.

“What’s wrong with his eye?” Wayne asked, pointing.

Marasi stepped up beside him, squinting in the darkness. “A spike,” she said softly. “Like on that coin of Waxillium’s.”

Yup, that was it. One spike, jutting through his right eye. Wayne rounded the statue, which had snow piled about its base.

“One spiked eye,” Wax said, thoughtful. “This place was built by the Lord Ruler. Why would he have them make a statue of him with one eye spiked through?”

“He carries a spear,” Marasi said. “For the one that he used to kill the Survivor?”

“A metal spear,” Wax noted. “But no lines. Aluminum. Looks like some on his belt too. Expensive.”

Marasi nodded. “The Lord Ruler was run through with three spears, by the Lord Mistborn’s testimony. ‘Once stabbed by a beggar, for the poverty he brought. Once stabbed by a worker, for the slavery he enforced. Last stabbed by a prince, for the lords he corrupted.’ The spears didn’t hurt him.”

“Come on,” Telsin called from inside the building, where she’d been joined by Steris.

Wax and the masked fellow moved off, but Wayne kept looking up at the statue.

“So I’ve been thinkin’,” Wayne said as MeLaan passed him.

“Yeah?” she asked, glancing at him.

Rusts. Wax might think it weird, considering she was like a billion years old or something, but it seemed like even *longer* since a woman had looked at him like that. It wasn’t a lusty look or anything like that, it was … what was the word …

Fond.

Yup, that would do.

“Wayne?” she asked.

“Oh, right. Um, well, this place is abandoned, right? So none of the stuff in it belongs to anyone.”

“Well, I’m sure a lot of people would *claim* it,” MeLaan said. “But ownership would be tough to prove.”

“So…”

“So I’d say don’t touch anything anyway,” MeLaan said.

“Oh. Right.”

She smiled at him, then continued on in through the open doorway behind the statue. It was big, gaping, like a fellow’s mouth after you kick ’im right in the canteen.

He looked back at the statue, then poked at the spearhead with his toe. Then he hit it with his heel. Then he hit with a rock. Finally, he twisted it a few times.

It fell right off, clanging to the stone beneath. It had been practically *hanging* free. And Wax was wrong, only the head was of metal—the oversized spear was wood. *Aluminum, you say?* Wayne thought with a smile.

Now, he didn’t care much for what rich folks said was worth money. Unless it was, by itself, worth more than a house. Little Sophi Tarcsel, the inventor, did need more funds.

He wrapped the big spearhead, which was as large as his palm, with a handkerchief to keep it from freezing his fingers off, and started whistling as he jogged after the others. As he passed, he noticed that there once *had* been gates on this doorway, big ones, but they lay in frozen splinters.

The others had gathered inside, where the temple had some kind of entryway. It had murals on either side, just like the ones that the strange kandra chap had shown back in Wax's mansion. Wayne stepped up to one, beside Wax, who was inspecting it.

Yup. Same mural. One depicting a pair of bracers on a pedestal, the other —across the way—depicting the Lord Ruler wearing them.

"We've found the place for certain, then," Wax said. "The statue was enough evidence, but this seals it. ReLuur was here."

Together they left the entryway, stepping through its only door into a long, dark hallway. What were those lumps ahead? MeLaan and Steris held their lanterns higher, though nobody seemed to have any inclination to be the first one to proceed.

The masked fellow, though, he was muttering something in funny-talk. He seemed to be following something with his eyes. A metal pattern on the wall? He stepped to the side, and dug the little grenade from his pocket. He did something, opening its side, then used tweezers to extract what looked like a small nugget of metal. He shoved it into a cavity in the wall, then pulled down a lever.

Wayne heard what he thought was distant humming, then a series of small blue lights started glowing on the walls. As was appropriate to match the atmosphere of this rusting place, they were creepier than Steris in the morning. There were no bulbs or anything rational like that, just sections of the walls that seemed to be made of translucent glass that glowed in a downright gloomy way.

It *was* enough to light up the lumps on the floor. Bodies. A right disturbing number of them, lying in awkward positions. And those pools around them … frozen blood.

Wayne whistled softly. "They *really* went far to give this place a creepy look."

"Those bodies weren't here originally," Wax said dryly. "I think they must be— Wayne, what the hell is that?"

"It fell right off," Wayne said, clutching the spearhead, which was cold to the touch, even through the handkerchief. The tip was peeking out on one side. "I didn't even look at it, Wax. Musta been loosened by the wind. See, it has a hole on the bottom for screwing off and—"

"Don't touch anything," Wax said, pointing at him. "Else."

MeLaan gave him a look.

"You shut up," Wayne said to her.

“Didn’t say a word, Wayne.”

“You *implied* one. That’s worse.”

Wax sighed, looking at the pilot fellow, who was inspecting some carvings on the wall. “Allik?” Wax said, then tapped the medallion he’d tied to his wrist.

The masked man sighed, but swapped out one of his medallions for the other. He immediately shivered. “I have now been to hell,” he said. “These mountains will rise all the way there for certain.”

“You think hell is in the *sky*?” Steris asked, standing close to Wax, practically clinging to him.

“Of course it is,” Allik said. “Dig down deep enough in the ground, and things get warm. Hell must be the other way. What did you want of me, Great Metallic Destroyer?”

Wax sighed. “Bodies,” he said, nodding down the hallway. “Traps?”

“Yes,” Allik said. “The ones who built this place were charged with protecting the Sovereign’s weapon. They knew others would eventually follow, and so the builders were bound to make it difficult, knowing that they could not remain to guard in person. Not in this place of ice and death. But…”

“What?” Wax said.

“Those masks,” Allik said.

“The masks of Hunters?” Wax asked.

Allik looked at him, shocked. “How did you recognize them?”

“I didn’t,” Wax said, walking forward carefully. Wayne joined him, as did MeLaan. Wax waved for Marasi, Steris, and Telsin to remain back, though he gestured for Allik to join them.

Together, the four of them walked to the first set of corpses. Wax knelt down beside the pool of frozen blood. The closest fellow had died miserably, with a spike through his chest. Wayne could see the trap now, the tip of it still jutting from the wall. The poor fellow’s mates must have tried to pull him free of the spike, but then had gotten caught in traps themselves.

The masks were different from Allik’s, that was for sure. Made of wood with bits of glass stuck to them, each in a different, odd pattern. And these ones showed the mouth, covering the top half the face, then running down the sides. The skin there, at the sides of the mask, seemed to have *melded* with the wood—though that might be because everything in here was as cold as a spinster’s bedroom.

Wax nudged the mask. “You said the Hunters came to destroy this place.”

“Yes,” Allik said.

“Well, I think they either lied to you, or changed their minds.” Wax nodded toward the busted doors, then down the hallway, littered with bodies. “The lure of the Bands was too powerful for these fellows. I’d guess the dead ones we found near the ship were the ones determined to go through with blowing up the whole place. Got betrayed, but then these betrayers in turn fell to the traps. The ones who returned home; what happened to them? Vanished?”

“Yes,” Allik said, cocking his head. He raised his mask, revealing a wonderfully silly mustache and beard, then regarded Wax with awed eyes. “They went back to the Hunters. Then … gone. Returned to their families, it was said.”

“Executed,” Wax said, rising. “It was discovered they helped murder the rest of their crew, then tried to steal the Bands. They turned back because of the traps killing too many of their fellows, took a skimmer because it was all they could man, and returned with a made-up story of a blizzard. They were going to gather another crew and try again. Their superiors caught them first.”

Allik seemed befuddled. “How … how did you figure that—”

“He does this all the time,” Wayne said. “Best not to encourage him.”

“Just a theory,” Wax said. “One supported by the evidence though. Steris, Telsin. I want you to stay behind while—”

“I’m going with you,” Telsin snapped. She walked forward, cold as the dead blokes on the floor. “I won’t be shoved aside, Waxillium. I won’t be left for our uncle to catch up to us and take me again.”

Wax sighed, looking toward Steris and Marasi.

“I’ll stay,” Steris said. “Someone needs to watch the entrance for Suit and his people.”

Wax nodded, glancing at Wayne. “You keep an eye on her.” Then he looked to Marasi. “You keep an eye on *him*. We’ll come get you if we find anything.”

Marasi nodded. Wayne sighed.

“You intend to go forward?” Allik said, standing up, eyes bulging. “O Great Impetuous One, far be it from me—a lowly pilot—to question your ridiculous intentions, but … seriously? Didn’t you see the *corpses*?”

“I saw them,” Wax said. “MeLaan?”

“On it,” she said, striding forward.

“Great One,” Allik said, “I cannot but think they have traps designed to kill your kind. If they thought of all this, they will have prepared for one such as you.”

“Yes,” Wax said. “That spike was all wood.”

Allik grew more frantic. “Then why would you—”

MeLaan stepped on a pressure plate, causing a spear to launch out of one of the many small holes in the wall. It moved jarringly fast, piercing right through MeLaan's torso, coming out the other side.

She sighed, looking down. "This is going to absolutely ruin my wardrobe."

Allik gawked, then lifted his hand as if to raise his mask, only it was already up. He fumbled, unable to take his eyes off MeLaan, who yanked the spear out with a casual gesture.

"Traps," Wax said, "are somewhat less threatening when you have an immortal along."

"Unless they have explosives," MeLaan said. "If I lose a spike, you'd better be ready to stick it right back in. And I was serious—this is going to be *awful* for my clothing."

"You could do it without," Wayne said hopefully.

She thought for a moment, then shrugged, reaching to grab her top.

"I'll buy you new clothing, MeLaan," Wax said, interrupting her. "We don't want to make poor Allik fall over dead."

"Actually," Allik said, "I don't think I'd mind."

"Good man," Wayne said. "Knew I liked you."

"Ignore them," Wax said. "Wayne, help guard the door. Allik, I need you with me, in case something is written in your language."

The man nodded, then put back down his mask. Made sense why he wore one now. Wayne couldn't grow a proper beard either, but at least he had the sense to shave.

MeLaan strolled down the hallway. "Telsin, stay behind me," Wax said, "and step exactly where I step. Same for you, Allik."

They left Wayne and the two ladies behind. Ahead, a large spiked log swung out of a hidden compartment and *crushed* MeLaan against the wall. She shook it off like a champ, stumbling on down the hallway while her leg re-formed.

"You know," Wayne said, looking toward Steris and Marasi, "she might be even better at the Blackwatch Doublestomp than I am."

# 24

Marasi settled in beside Wayne and Steris, watching the approach to the temple. Distant lanternlight showed Suit's group. But they were getting closer.

What would they do if the man got here? Fight? For how long? Eventually their medallions would run out of heat, and they had almost nothing in the way of supplies.

They'd simply have to count on Waxillium finding the Bands quickly; then they could escape on the skimmer and be away before Suit could do anything. The idea of that infuriating man stuck up here in the snows—having slogged miles and miles to find an empty temple—appealed to her.

At the very least, imagining his reaction distracted her from her own annoyance.

*Sit here, Marasi. Stay out of trouble. Babysit Wayne.* She knew that wasn't what he meant, but it was still galling.

Rather than sit and simmer in her own petulance, Marasi dug in her purse, pulling out the little spike that belonged to ReLuur. Such a small thing, and so clean—a shining sliver of … pewter, was it? Staring at it in the light of Steris's lantern, she wished she didn't know its history. A person had been killed to make this, their soul ripped apart so a piece could be used to make a kandra.

Even though it had been done long ago, to someone who would have been centuries dead by now anyway, she felt as if there should be blood beneath her fingers, making the spike slippery. It should not be so clean.

*Yet,* she thought, *where would mankind be without the kandra, acting as Harmony's hands—guiding and protecting us? Such good to come of* *something so awful.* Indeed, according to the Historica, without the work the kandra had done through the ages collecting atium, mankind would likely have been destroyed.

*The Lord Ruler is the same,* Marasi thought. *He was a monster. He created this spike by killing someone. And yet he somehow managed to get to Allik's people and save their entire civilization.*

Waxillium sought justice. He had an open heart—he'd spared Wayne's life all those years ago, after all—but in the end, he sought to uphold the law. That was shortsighted. Marasi wanted to create a world where law enforcement wouldn't be *needed*. Was that why she was so annoyed with him lately?

"You bein' careful with that?" Wayne asked, nodding toward the spike. "You don't want to prick yourself and turn into a kandra."

"I'm pretty sure that's not how it works," Marasi said, tucking it back into her purse.

"Never can tell," Wayne said. "I think I should carry it. Just in case."

"You'd swap it for the first trinket we passed, Wayne."

"No I wouldn't." He paused. "Why? You see somethin' good back there?"

Marasi rose and walked to Steris, who had settled primly on a stone shelf along the wall of the temple's vestibule. She sat in a ladylike posture, knees forward, back straight, writing carefully on a notebook by lanternlight.

"Steris?" Marasi asked.

The woman looked up and blinked. "Ah. Marasi. Perhaps you can help me with a topic. How useless am I?"

"Excuse me?"

"Useless," Steris said, holding her notebook. Not her little pocket one; her larger one, full-sized, which she'd brought in her pack. She used it for brainstorming lists.

Today, she'd been writing on the back of it. "I've been trying to quantify it, for reference purposes," Steris said. "I am under no illusions as to my position in this group. I am the baggage, the accident. The person who needs to be left with the horses, or sent to stay away from traps. If Lord Waxillium could have sequestered me somewhere safe along the way and left me, he certainly would have."

Marasi sighed, slumping down on the shelf beside her sister. Was this actually something the two of them could *relate* on? "I know how you feel," she said. "I spent the first year around him feeling unwelcome, as if Waxillium considered me some little puppy nipping at his heels. And now, when he finally does seem to have accepted me, he treats me as merely a tool to be used or put back on the shelf as required."

Steris cocked her head at Marasi. “I think you mistake me.”

*Of course I do,* Marasi thought with resignation. “How?”

“I did not mean to say I *minded* being treated this way,” Steris said. “I was merely stating facts. I am quite useless on this expedition, and I think that is only fair, considering my personal life experience. However, if I wish to improve, I need to know how far I have to go. Here.”

She turned her notebook to show Marasi the back, where she’d been writing. Why use the back? Either way, she’d drawn a small graph with points plotted on it. Usefulness was listed on one axis, and it had names up the other. Rusts—she’d assigned a *number* to everyone’s level of worth on the mission. Waxillium was a hundred, as was MeLaan. Wayne was a seventy-five.

Marasi was an eighty-three. She hadn’t expected that.

“I would say that ten is the threshold below which one’s uselessness outweighs the little one does add to the project. I’m thinking I might be a seven, as there are instances where it is better to have me along, though they are few. What do you think?”

“Steris,” Marasi said, pushing the notebook aside. “Why do you care about being useful here in the first place?”

“Well, why do you?”

“Because this is who I am,” Marasi said. “Who I want to be. But not you—you’re perfectly happy sitting in a parlor digging through ledgers. Yet here you are, on the top of a mountain in a blizzard, waiting for a gunfight.”

Steris pursed her lips. “I assumed,” she eventually said, “that I would be of help to Lord Waxillium at the party, and I was. It was my original understanding that this would be primarily a political enterprise.”

Of course. So analytical in everything. Marasi settled back, glancing out the doorway at those approaching lights. Wayne, fortunately, was watching carefully. He acted the fool sometimes, but he took his duties seriously.

“And then,” Steris said softly, “perhaps I came along because of the way it feels.…”

Marasi looked sharply back at her sister.

“Like the whole world has been upended,” Steris said, looking toward the ceiling. “Like the laws of nature and man no longer hold sway. They’re suddenly flexible, like a string given slack. We’re the spheres.… I love the idea that I can break out of it all—the expectations, the way I’m regarded, the way I regard myself—and *soar*.

“I saw it in his eyes, first. That hunger, that fire. And then I found it in myself. He’s a flame, Waxillium is, and fire can be shared. When I’m out here, when I’m with him, I *burn,* Marasi. It’s wonderful.”

Marasi's jaw dropped, and she gawked at her sister. Had those words left *Steris's* mouth? Careful, monotonous, *boring* Steris? She glanced toward Marasi and blushed.

"You actually love him, don't you?" Marasi asked.

"Well, love is a *strong* emotion, one that requires careful deliberation to—"

"Steris."

"Yes." She looked down at her notebook. "It's foolish, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," Marasi said. "Love is always a foolish emotion. That's what makes it work." She found herself reaching over and pulling Steris into a hug with one arm. "I'm happy for you, Steris."

"And you?" Steris asked. "When will you find someone to make you happy?"

"It's not about finding someone, Steris. Not for me."

But what was it about? She gave Steris another hug and, distracted by her own jumble of thoughts, went to check on Wayne.

"What'cha thinkin' about?" Wayne asked as she joined him beside the outer doorway.

"I just had my long-held assumptions about someone shattered in a brief moment. I'm wondering if every person I pass has similar depths, and if there's any way to avoid the mistake of judging them so shallowly that I'm rocked when they show their true complexity. You?"

"I was lookin' at you two," Wayne said, contemplative as he regarded the snowy landscape outside rather than her, "and wondering. Do sisters ever *really* get sexy with one another for a fellow to watch, or does that only happen in pub songs?"

Marasi let out a long breath. "Thank you for restoring my ability to trust my judgment, Wayne."

"Anytime."

"Those lights are still distant," Marasi said. "You think they got trapped in the snows?"

Wayne shook his head.

Marasi frowned, noting his posture—seeming relaxed, but he'd gotten out one of his dueling canes and rested it across his knees.

"What?" she asked.

"I figure," Wayne said, "that if *I* knew I'd been spotted, the best way to sneak up would be to leave my lights behind and make it *seem* like I'm goin' slowly."

Marasi looked again. She ignored the lights this time, scanning a nearer darkness full of shifting snow. And there, almost to the windswept patch of rock before the temple, she caught movement. Shadows in the shadows.

“Time to call for Waxillium?” Marasi asked.

“I think…” He trailed off, and Marasi pulled her rifle up, nervous.

“What?” she asked.

Wayne pointed to an approaching shadow. It bore a little flag, crossed with an *X*. The symbol for parley.

* * *

Wax pulled on the rope, helping MeLaan climb from the pit. She crawled over the edge, then flopped down. She’d been right about her clothing—it was ragged, pierced in several dozen places, her left trouser leg ripped completely at the thigh.

She’d compacted her body, somehow. Most of her fatty curves had become taut muscles instead, and she’d taken *off* her hair, storing it in the pack Allik carried, leaving her bald.

Wax knelt beside her, glancing down the hallway with its spikes, pits, poison darts, and other strange mechanisms. The entire temple seemed to be one long passage, intended to be as hard to move through as possible.

*Something about this is wrong,* Wax thought. But what?

MeLaan stirred on the ground.

“Rest a moment,” Wax said, hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t know if we *have* a moment, Ladrian,” she said, sitting up and accepting a canteen of water from the nervous Allik. Telsin stood nearby with arms folded, obviously annoyed at how long this was taking. She kept glancing over her shoulder, as if at any moment she expected to find Suit there to take her again.

“How are your bones?” Wax asked MeLaan.

She held up her left arm—or tried to. It had snapped at the middle of the humerus, and the rest of her arm dangled.

Wax breathed out. “You’re sure that doesn’t hurt?”

“Turned off the nerves that cause pain,” she said. “A trick we’ve learned over the last centuries. And since my bones are crystal, they can’t feel.” She grimaced as the arm straightened, the break seeming to heal. But it hadn’t, Wax knew—she couldn’t make bone, or heal it. “Another patch?”

She nodded. She had stretched ligament along the sides of the break to hold it tight. She’d done that with many of her bones already.

MeLaan moved to rise.

“We can find another way,” Wax said, standing. “Break in through one of the walls up ahead, or the roof maybe.”

"And how long will that take?"

"Depends on how much we care about what's inside."

"And wouldn't it be silly to come all this way, then *ruin* the Bands of Mourning because of our impatience?"

Wax looked down the hallway. They were most of the way through it, so he put off pushing her further. He could see a door ahead.

"You might not have to do much more anyway," Wax said. "I think I have the pattern figured out."

"What pattern?" MeLaan asked.

"Pressure plate under the second stone to your right," Wax said. "Shoots darts."

She glanced at him, then stepped forward and tapped it with her toe. Darts spat from the wall, passed before her, and bounced against the opposite wall.

"Next one is two stones ahead," Wax said. "There's a hint of a metal line leading underneath it. So far, those have been wall traps."

Another toe press. A portion of the wall opened, dropping a very large spiked log.

"Nice," MeLaan said.

"Last one should be a pit trap," Wax said, joining her in walking around the fallen log. "Check your rope. The stones those are under are raised slightly."

She tugged on it, using her right hand because the fingers of her left had been crushed. The crystal had broken beyond repair, and she now walked with the hand permanently shut, splinters of bones fused together by tendons.

"I hate the pit ones," she said. "They just keep going down. Makes me afraid of what might be at the bottom."

She stepped on the section of floor he indicated, and Wax held tightly to his side of the rope, which was tied about his waist. But instead of a pit trap, the ceiling opened, dropping a block of something. MeLaan jumped back, and the block of strangely colored ice banged to the stones beneath. It was wet, its surface oddly oily-looking.

"What in Harmony's Rings—" MeLaan said, squatting to inspect the ice.

"Acid, maybe?" Wax said. "It looks like whatever they stored up there was a liquid, but it separated over time, and half froze."

MeLaan stared at it a long time.

"What?" Wax asked.

"Nothing," she said, shaking her head. "So that's it?"

"Best as I can tell." Together, they stepped up before the end of the hallway, at a door made of stone. But there was no handle. The rest of the wall was thick stone as well.

There were some markings carved into the door, if indeed that was what it was. Circles, with symbols in them, inlaid in silver. Wax looked to Allik.

"I don't recognize any of those," the pilot said after swapping his metalminds. "If they're writing, it's not a language I understand."

"What do you want to do?" MeLaan asked.

"Let's get the others," Wax said, thoughtful. "More brains to solve this will be helpful, and Marasi might recognize those from ReLuur's notes."

They started back, letting MeLaan go first again—though Wax kept his eyes open for any indicators of traps. It was still slow going, as she wanted to be careful they'd caught everything.

Telsin fell in beside Wax, glancing once over her shoulder at the door, arms wrapped around herself, though with the medallion she couldn't be cold. Allik trailed behind them, wearing his warming medallion.

"Do you ever wonder, Waxillium," Telsin said softly, "how you got where you are?"

"Sometimes, I suppose," he said. "Though I figure I can trace it. I don't always like it, but it makes sense, if I stop and think it through."

"I can't do the same," she said. "I remember being a child, and assuming the world belonged to me. That I'd be able to seize it when I grew older, accomplish my dreams, become something great. Yet as I've aged, I feel like less and less is under my control. I can't help thinking it shouldn't be that way. How could I have been so in control as a youth, yet often feel so helpless as an adult?"

"That's our uncle's fault," Wax said. "For keeping you captive."

"Yes, and no. Wax, I'm an adult—with greying hair and over half my life behind me. Shouldn't I have a clue as to what this is all about?" She shook her head. "That's not Edwarn's fault. What have we done, Waxillium? We're alone. Our parents are dead. *We're* the adults now, yet where are our children? What's our legacy? What have we accomplished? Don't you ever feel like you never actually grew up? That everyone else did, but you're secretly faking?"

No, he didn't feel that way. But he grunted in agreement anyway—it was good to hear her show a side of herself other than feverish hatred of Suit and his people.

"Is that why you're so keen to come here?" Wax asked. "You think that what we find in there will accomplish something?"

"At least it will help society," Telsin said.

"Unless it destroys society."

"Pushing society forward is no destruction. Even if, in doing so, it leaves us behind."

She withdrew into herself again. He couldn't blame her, after her ordeal. He wished there had been time to go back to Elendel, see her situated in someplace warm and safe, before flying back here.

They retraced their steps, passing the traps they'd already set off. Fallen blocks of stone from the ceiling, darts and spears from the walls, even a stone wall that had dropped to block them, though MeLaan had kept it from falling all the way by slamming a large rock underneath. Wax had been able to wiggle into the space and Push a few coins upward to lift it farther, then they propped it up with rocks in the tracks at the sides. They still had to stoop to go underneath.

They did find two more traps, which they set off as well. Wax found himself increasingly dissatisfied. *So much work*, he thought, noting again the wall section that had fallen in to release scythes that cut the air. That trap had gotten entangled on itself, and so hadn't endangered them at all—but the ingenuity required to put it together was marvelous.

"Allik," he said, prompting the short man to swap back to his Connection medallion. "Why would your people build such an obvious resting place for the Bands? Why make this temple, which proclaims that something precious is inside, then go to the effort of making all these traps? Why not just hide the Bands someplace unassuming, like a cave?"

"They are a challenge, like I said, Thoughtful One," Allik said. "And it was not *my* people who did this, not specifically. The original priests who crafted this place were of no people currently living among us."

"Yes," Wax said, "and you told me the Sovereign left his weapon here with orders to protect it because he was going to return for it. Right?"

"That is the legend."

"These traps don't make sense, then," Wax said, waving back down the hallway. "Wouldn't they have been worried for your king's safety?"

"Simple traps could not affect him, Unobservant Master," Allik said with a laugh. A nervous laugh. He'd glanced at MeLaan again. "The traps are a declaration, and a challenge."

They walked on, but still Wax felt unsatisfied. Allik's explanations made a sort of sense—as much sense as building the temple up in the mountains. It was everything Wax would have expected from such a place, down to the smallest details.

Perhaps that was the problem.

"Wax!" Wayne's head poked into the corridor before them. They were almost back to the front entryway. "Wax, there you are. Your uncle, mate. He's here."

“How close?” Wax asked, speeding up.

“Close, close,” Wayne said. “Like, on our doorstep and demandin’ rent money close.”

He’d hoped to have the Bands before that happened. “We’ll need to try to collapse the entryway,” Wax said as he reached Wayne. “Or maybe this hallway. Seal them out while we finish in here.”

“We could do that,” Wayne said. “Or…”

“Or what?” Wax asked, stopping in place.

“We’ve got him captured,” Wayne said, thumbing over his shoulder. “Marasi has a gun to his rusting head.”

Captured? “Impossible.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said, sounding troubled. “He walked right up to us, carrying a flag. Says he wants to talk. To you.”

# 25

Wax passed from the temple’s vestibule onto the landing outside. Edwarn Ladrian, his uncle, stood at the top of the steps, just beneath the statue of the Lord Ruler. Wax was accustomed to seeing this man in a sensible suit, surrounded by luxury—so it was somehow both strange and satisfying at the same time to find Edwarn in a thick coat, hood up, fur brushing cheeks red with the cold. His beard was stuck with snow, and he smiled at Wax, gloved hands resting atop an ivory walking stick.

Marasi knelt in the doorway, her rifle trained directly on him. Edwarn stood alone, though his people—at least a hundred, perhaps more—were setting up tents and dumping supplies in piles on the stone approach.

“Waxillium!” Edwarn said. “Speaking out here in the cold would prove unpleasant. Might I join you and yours inside?”

Wax studied the man. What trick was he planning? Edwarn would never place himself solely in Wax’s power, would he?

“You can put the gun down,” Wax said to Marasi. “Thank you.”

She rose, hesitant. Wax nodded to Edwarn, who cheerily walked through the doorway. Edwarn was a stout man, plump and round-faced. As Wax stepped into the doorway after him, Edwarn pulled off his gloves and put down his hood, revealing a head of hair that was more silver than black. He removed his parka; beneath it he wore stout trousers, suspenders, and a thick white shirt. However, as he folded the parka over his arm, his cheeks returned to a normal color and he stopped shivering.

“You *do* know what the medallions do,” Wax said.

“Certainly,” Edwarn said. “But their reserves of heat are not eternal, and we don’t know how to refill them. We had to reserve their use for those who were suffering greatly from the cold during our trip.” He glanced toward Allik, who had moved up beside Marasi, taking her arm in one hand and staring death at Edwarn.

*Telsin*, Wax thought, seeking the woman out. If she shot their uncle as she had that man in the warehouse …

She stood all the way across the vestibule, just outside of it, in the hallway with the traps. Wayne had wisely sauntered over and stood nearby, back to the doorway. He nodded lazily to Wax. He was watching her.

“I see you stole one of my savages,” Edwarn said, gesturing at Allik. “He taught you to use the medallions? Both heat and weightlessness?”

Wax pursed his lips and didn’t reply.

“No need to act stupid, Nephew,” Edwarn said. “We could judge their nature from the type of metals involved, of course. It is a pity we didn’t discover the smaller flying machines hidden in the large one. That would have made my trip so much easier.”

“Why did you come here, Uncle?” Wax demanded, stepping out of the doorway and casually putting his back to the wall, in case there was a sharpshooter outside. He noticed, impressed, that Marasi had done the same.

“Why did I come? For the same reason as you, Nephew. To find a weapon.”

“I meant,” Wax said, “why did you come in here, to be taken by me. You’re giving yourself up?”

“Giving myself— Nephew, I came to *negotiate*.”

“I have no need to negotiate,” Wax said. “I have you now. You’re under arrest for treason, murder, and kidnapping. Allik will stand witness against you.”

“The savage?” Edwarn said, amused.

“I also have—”

Edwarn rapped his cane on the stones. It was banded in metal. Foolish; Wax could use that against him.

“No need, no need,” Edwarn said. “I am *not* in your custody, Nephew. Stop entertaining this fantastical delusion that you can achieve anything by harassing me. Even if you *were* to somehow drag me back to Elendel and throw me in a cage, I’d be released in days.”

“We’ll see,” Wax said. He raised Vindication, pointing it right at Edwarn’s head. “Run. Give me an excuse, Uncle. I dare you.”

“So dramatic,” Edwarn said. “Did they teach you that in the Roughs, then?” He shook his head. “Have you looked outside? I have *twenty*

Allomancers and Feruchemists here, son. All well trained, and all ready to kill. You're in *my* custody, if anything."

Wax cocked Vindication. "Lucky that I've got you, then."

"I am not so important to the Set as all that," Edwarn said with a smile. "Don't think they wouldn't shoot through me to get to you. But it won't come to that. You won't use me as a hostage. What would there be for you to gain? We've already dug out your little flying ship. You aren't getting out of here alive. Not unless I order it."

Wax clenched his jaw as Edwarn walked to the side of the entryway and settled down on a stone shelf there. He fished in his pocket and brought out a pipe, then nodded in greeting toward Steris, who had been seated on the shelf but immediately moved away.

"Could I borrow that lantern?" Edwarn asked.

Steris held out the lantern. He stuck a lighting stick into it, then used that in turn to light his pipe. He puffed at it a few times, then leaned back, smiling pleasantly. "So?"

"What do you want from me?" Wax said.

"To accompany you," Edwarn said. He nodded toward the hallway beyond. "Our interrogation of the savages—now that we've been able to force them to speak properly—indicates that there is a hallway full of traps beyond here. And…" Edwarn hesitated. "Ahh, so you've been *through* the traps, have you? Then you know about the door?"

"How do *you* know this?" Allik said, stepping forward, fists clenched. Marasi put a warning hand on his shoulder, holding him back. "What have you done to my crewmates?"

"You've made yours talk too, I see," Edwarn said. "A pity the Lord Ruler gave his fantastic knowledge to them, don't you think? Barely men. They must hide their—"

"How do you know?" Allik continued, speaking more loudly. "About the hallway? About the door?"

"Your captain knew many things you did not, I believe," Suit said. "Did she tell you about the group of Hunters she carried as subcaptain in her youth? How she got them drinking, and listened to their secrets? They were planning to return here, she said, for the prize."

"My captain," Allik said, voice strained. "She lives?"

Suit smiled, puffing on his pipe, then turned to Wax. "I can get you through the door. I have the key, passed from the lips of a dying priest, to a doomed Hunter, to an airship captain, and now at last to me." He spread his hands, smoking pipe in one.

"You're trying to trick me," Wax said, narrowing his eyes.

"Of course I am," Suit said. "The question is, can you best me? Without an accommodation, we are at an impasse. My men outside can't get in here. It's too fortified a position, and we can't risk explosives lest we damage the prize. You, however, can't get *out*. You can't get the Bands without my help, but you can't pass my army of Allomancers either. You'll starve in here."

Wax ground his teeth. Rusts, he hated this man. Edwarn … Suit … he was the infection that ate at the wounds of noble society. Spreading his disease. Bringing fever. He was the very definition of the games Wax hated.

"Waxillium," Telsin said from the doorway. "Don't trust him. He'll trick you. He'll win. He always wins."

"We'll try it your way, Uncle," Wax said reluctantly. "I'll let you open the door, but then you must return here."

Edwarn sniffed. "I get to go inside, past the door, and see what is there. Otherwise, you will get no help from me."

"You'll be under guard. I'll have a gun to your head."

"I have no objection to this." He puffed on his pipe, held the smoke in his mouth, then let it out between the teeth of his smile.

Wax gave his uncle a thorough frisk. He had no Allomantically reactive metal on his body save for that on his cane, but he didn't have any aluminum either. At least not in a large enough concentration to be dangerous.

"You first," Wax said, waving his gun toward the doorway. He ignored Telsin's glare. Wayne stood up and held her to the side as Edwarn sauntered through, trailing pipe smoke. Marasi fell in beside Wax as he followed, gripping her rifle with white knuckles. Allik, Steris, and MeLaan came next. Wayne and Telsin took the rear, keeping Wax's sister as far from Uncle Edwarn as possible.

"You sure about this?" Marasi asked as they passed rubble, strewn spears, and darts.

Wax didn't answer. He thought furiously about what his uncle could be planning. What had Wax missed? He had several theories by the time they reached the door.

Edwarn stood before it, looking the symbols up and down. "Push on that one," he said, pointing toward one of the engraved circles. "With Allomancy."

Wax cleared everyone back save Wayne. The shorter man nodded, wearing the bracelet that would let him heal great amounts, speed bubble at the ready in case somehow Edwarn planned the activation of the door to be a trap.

Wax Pushed. Something clicked.

"Now there," Edwarn said, pointing. "The one with the triangular shape."

*Click.*

"Finally this one," Edwarn said, tapping one with the back of his hand.

"That's it?" Wax said.

"Get them wrong and the thing freezes shut, I'm told," Edwarn said idly. "It has a clockwork timer. Won't be ready again for ten years. You could spend a lifetime guessing, and still have only a small chance of opening it." He looked at Wax and smiled. "Apparently these symbols spell out something the Lord Ruler would have understood."

Wax glanced back at Allik, who shook his head, baffled. "They really make no sense to me."

Wax turned around, held his breath, and Pushed on the final symbol. It clicked. Then, with a deep scrape of stone on metal, the entire thing *slid* to the side, opening a path. Edwarn stepped toward it, but Wax leveled his gun, causing the man to hesitate.

"I'll have you know," Edwarn said, "that I worked a very long time to find what was in this place. It seems unfitting that another should pass that door before me."

"Tough," Wax said, grabbing Telsin's shoulder as she tried to slip by him and enter. "MeLaan?"

"Right," the kandra said. Rusts, she limped as she passed through the door. One of her legs was longer than the other, because of the breaks. She said she didn't feel pain, but if she chose to lie to him, he'd never know.

She stepped into the other room, which had a soft blue glow coming from it. More of those glass lights in the walls.

"Nothing hit me on the way in," she said from within. "Want me to walk around a bit?"

"Just around the doorway area," Wax called to her, gun still held on Edwarn. "Make sure it's safe for us."

They waited a tense few moments. No traps activated in the other room that he could hear.

"How can you wait?" Telsin asked. "Knowing what could be back there? A wonder beyond understanding."

"It isn't going anywhere."

"You never want to know what's beyond the door," Telsin whispered. "You never did chase the horizon. Where is your curiosity?"

"It's alive and well. The things I'm curious about are simply different from the ones you find exciting."

"All clear," MeLaan said from the other room.

Wax nodded for the others to go first, everyone but him and Edwarn. "Stay near the door," he told them.

Once they were inside, he stepped closer to his uncle.

"Threatening," Edwarn said, looking him up and down. "You separated us from the others, Waxillium. Planning a little intimidation?"

"I care for the people in that room," Wax said softly. "I suspect more than a monster like you can ever know."

"You think me emotionless?" Edwarn said, his voice stern. "I tried to spare *your* life, Waxillium. I argued before the Set on your behalf. There was a time when I loved you like a son."

Wax raised Vindication again.

"When we're done with this," Wax said, "you're going to give me names. The others in the Set. I'm going to drag you back to Elendel, and there you'll talk."

"And you'd brutalize me to get those names, no doubt," Edwarn said.

"I follow the law."

"Which can be changed—or bent—to suit your needs. You call me a monster; you hate me because I seek rule. And yet you serve those who do the very same things as I. Your senate? It strangles the life from children with its economic policies." Edwarn stepped forward, a motion which put the barrel of Wax's gun right at his temple. "The longer you live, Waxillium, the more you'll know I am right. The difference between *good* and *evil* men is not found in the acts they are willing to commit—but merely in what *name* they are willing to commit them in."

"Waxillium?" Marasi appeared at the stone doorway. "You'll want to see this."

Wax ground his teeth together and felt his eye twitching. He pulled the gun away from his uncle's head and waved it toward the door.

Edwarn sauntered in, pipe trailing smoke. Wax followed, and entered the solitary room at the center of the fortresslike temple. The dais here was the one depicted in the mural at the temple's entrance. It rose from the center of the room, gilded and slender, with steps leading up to it. On it was a small square pedestal topped with red velvet and a golden rack suitable for the display of a precious relic. A soft white light, not blue like those at the sides of the room, shone from above the dais and illuminated the whole thing.

The whole empty thing.

Shattered glass lay on the floor of the dais. Wax could pick out corners; it was the remains of a glass box that had once topped the pedestal, enshrouding what had lain there.

The room was quiet and still, frost on the floor in places, dust disturbed by the opening of the stone door floating in the air. There were no other doors or openings in the walls.

“Gone,” Wax whispered. “Someone beat us here.”

# 26

“Why’s everyone looking at me?” Wayne said.

“Natural reaction,” Marasi said. She held a gun on Edwarn, as did MeLaan.

Wax carefully picked his way across the floor. *Looks like a throne room,* he thought absently. The others started to follow, and he held them back with an upraised hand.

“Stay in this center row walking toward the dais,” he ordered them, not looking. “There’s a pit trap on either side, and that slightly depressed square over there? It’ll drop a sharpened blade from the ceiling.”

“How does he know that?” Steris asked. She clutched her notebook, within which she made lists.

“Wax has a natural affinity for things what kill people,” Wayne said. “You’re all still lookin’ at me. Rusts, you think I somehow got in here and lifted the rusting thing?”

“No,” Marasi admitted. “But someone did. ReLuur the kandra?”

“No,” Wax said, crouching and picking among the pieces of glass on the steps leading up to the pedestal. “These have been here a long time, judging by the dust.”

There was no way the kandra had gone down that corridor outside. Too many traps were left, and all the ones that had been sprung had bodies near them.

It was likely that the kandra had snapped his pictures and wisely returned home to gather more of his kind and mount a proper expedition. Kandra were immortal; he wouldn’t be hasty in trying to get in here. He’d have planned to take years studying the temple and extracting its secrets.

Who, then?

Telsin passed him, stepping to the dais. Glass crunched under her feet, and Wax glanced up to see her staring at the empty pedestal, aghast. “How?” she murmured.

MeLaan shook her head. “What would *you* do, if you’d secretly stolen the thing? Leave the place gaping open to let everyone know, or reset the traps and sneak away?”

*No,* Wax thought. Reset the traps? Unlikely. He glanced at his uncle, who stood with pipe in hand, staring at the dais with bristling anger. He was surprised by this.

Or was that an act? Was this all a setup, after taking the Bands, to throw Wax off? Wax brushed the dust from a piece of glass, then dropped it and selected a larger chunk, one of the corner pieces. Wax eyed it critically, then took another piece and set it alongside.

“This *is* a disappointment,” Edwarn said. He seemed genuinely troubled.

*This wasn’t him,* Wax thought, stretching out one of his mistcoat tassels and using it judge the length of the shard of glass. *No, this goes back way further than that.…*

He stood up, the arguments of the others becoming a distant buzz to him as he regarded the supposed resting place of the Bands of Mourning. A small velvet-topped pedestal, frozen in time.

“I guess that is that,” Edwarn said. “Time for this to end, then.”

Wax spun, whipping out his gun. He pointed it not at Edwarn, but at his sister.

She stared him down, hand at her pocket. Then she slowly removed a gun. Where had she gotten that? He couldn’t sense it. Aluminum.

“Telsin,” Wax said, voice hoarse.

Edwarn wouldn’t have come in here without a mole. She made the most sense. But *rusts.*

“I’m sorry, Waxillium,” she said.

“Don’t do this.” He hesitated. Too long. She raised the gun.

He fired. She did the same. His shot swerved away from her, Pushed by Allomancy. But her shot—aluminum—took him just below the neck.

* * *

Marasi moved before she had time to think. Her rifle already in position, she shot at Suit. Whatever was happening, having him dead couldn’t hurt.

Unfortunately, her bullet veered as well, missing Edwarn. Then her weapon flew backward from her hands. Suit smiled at her with infuriating unconcern.

At the pedestal, Waxillium stumbled back. He'd been hit right where the collarbone met his neck. He tried to remain on his feet, but Telsin shot him a *second* time, in the abdomen. Waxillium collapsed, rolled down the steps to the base of the dais, and groaned.

Edwarn was an Allomancer.

Telsin was in the Set.

Again, Marasi reacted before she knew what she was doing. Wayne leaped for Suit, but Suit took a hit from the dueling canes without flinching, then used his own cane—which was banded in metal—and Pushed it against Wayne.

Wayne was flung toward Marasi, canes clattering to the floor. He grunted, hitting the ground as Marasi tried to leap for Suit. Perhaps if she caught just him in a bubble with her, Wayne could—

Her metal reserves were gone. Wayne stumbled up behind her, looking similarly confused. Telsin had tossed something between the two of them.

A small metal cube. Another Allomantic grenade. She was an Allomancer too. She tossed a bag of something to Suit. Coins.

Wayne recovered from his surprise, leaping toward Edwarn again. But the man Pushed a handful of coins. Wayne cursed, flinching in midair as the coins ripped through his body. Marasi watched in horror, and nearby someone screamed.

Shock. No. She wouldn't let herself be stunned. She hurled herself at Suit, though he casually shoved her aside. She briefly caught hold of his shirt as she fell, but then her fingers slipped. Her head knocked against the stones as she hit.

Dazed, she was able to see Waxillium stumble to his feet. He lurched, bleeding, as Telsin fired again. Then he charged: but not for the doorway, or for Suit. He scrambled toward the side of the room, away from everything. The only thing in that direction was a corner, surely trapping him—

The floor dropped, plunging Waxillium into the pit.

Nearby, Wayne climbed to his feet.

"Keep him down!" Suit shouted, launching coins at Wayne.

Telsin, atop the dais, fired on Wayne. She wasn't a terribly good shot, but between her and Edwarn, they managed to hit several times.

That didn't drop him, not with the gold metalmind. He made a rude gesture and ran out the door, healing from the wounds almost as soon as he was hit.

Suit growled as Telsin's weapon clicked, out of bullets. Marasi tried to grab Suit by the legs and maybe trip him, but he kicked her in the chest. She grunted, breath knocked out of her, and Suit put his foot against her throat.

“Wayne!” Suit yelled. “Come back or I’ll kill the others!”

No reply. Wayne, it seemed, had taken the chance to escape down the hallway outside. Good. He wasn’t abandoning them; he had correctly realized that their chances were best if he escaped.

“I’ll do it!” Suit yelled. “I’ll kill her!”

“You think he cares about that?” Telsin asked.

“Honestly, I can’t tell with that one,” Suit said. He waited a moment to see if Wayne replied, then sighed, taking his foot off Marasi’s neck.

Dazed, still having trouble breathing, she took stock of the situation. MeLaan was writhing on the floor. When had that happened? Allik and Steris stood frozen with wide eyes. This had all taken place in a flash. A few years back, Marasi would have been like those two, stunned and confused. She was impressed, on one level, that she’d been able to react as quickly as she had.

Her growth hadn’t been enough. Edwarn picked up her rifle, sighting it on her. “Over you go,” he said, gesturing with the gun for Marasi to crawl to Steris and Allik so he could cover them all at once. She considered trying something, but what? Her metal reserves were gone, and the import of what had just transpired was settling upon her.

Waxillium was maybe bleeding to death at the bottom of that pit. Wayne had escaped, but had no bendalloy. MeLaan was down.

She might have to do something about this herself.

“Please,” Allik said, frantically grabbing Marasi by the arm as she joined the other two. “Please.”

He was panicked, but she couldn’t blame him. He’d seen Waxillium—the man he worshipped—fall, and was once again in Suit’s hands. Steris narrowed her eyes at Telsin.

Waxillium had seen the truth, but too slowly. He hadn’t searched her, and he’d hesitated instead of firing. For all his cleverness, Waxillium had a hole in his judgment regarding Suit and Telsin. He always had.

*Not that you did any better,* Marasi thought.

Telsin walked calmly down the steps, holding her handgun before herself. “That was bungled.”

“Bungled?” Edwarn said. “I thought it went well.”

“I let Waxillium escape.”

“You shot him thrice,” Edwarn said. “He’s as good as dead.”

“And you’re going to trust that?” Telsin asked.

Edwarn sighed. “No.”

Telsin nodded, her expression calm as she slid a knife from her pocket, then knelt and plunged it into MeLaan. Steris cried out, stepping toward them.

“What did you do to her?” Marasi asked.

They didn’t answer, but Marasi suspected the truth. There were liquids that, when injected into kandra, immobilized them and made them start to lose their shapes. It was temporary, but Marasi could only guess that while she had been focused on Suit, Telsin had somehow used one of those on MeLaan. With her arms twisted, her legs broken, the kandra’s skeleton hadn’t been in any shape for her to fight.

Telsin worked for a gruesome moment and came out with a spike. She tucked it into her pocket, then kept working. Suit walked over to Marasi, and through his ripped shirt Marasi caught a glint of metal peeking between two of his ribs. Not a large spike like the one Ironeyes had. Something more subtle.

They hadn’t just been experimenting with Hemalurgy—they’d used spikes to grant themselves powers.

Telsin finally got the second spike out of poor MeLaan and pocketed it. The kandra melted, a mess of greenish-brown flesh and muscles without anything to cling to—oozing out of her clothing, leaving her bones and her skull of green crystal to gaze vacantly at the ceiling.

Telsin pointed toward the pit Waxillium had fallen into. “Chase him down.”

“Me?” Suit said. “Surely we can wait for—”

“No waiting,” Telsin said. “You know him best. You hunt him down. He is still alive. I’ve met rocks less durable than my brother.”

Suit sighed again, but nodded this time, swapping guns with Telsin so he’d have the aluminum pistol, then reloading it. He walked toward the pit. Marasi glanced at Telsin, who watched MeLaan’s remains but held the rifle at the ready.

Should Marasi charge her? Suit obeyed *her*. She wasn’t simply a member of the Set; she outranked Waxillium’s uncle. And she was obviously an Allomancer; the way she’d used the Allomantic grenade proved that.

Suit climbed down, using a rope. Shortly after that, Marasi heard footsteps outside, and soon an array of soldiers in uniforms like those from the warehouse piled in.

“The short one,” Telsin said, urgent. “Wayne. Did you pass him?”

“Sir?” one of the soldiers asked. “No, we haven’t seen him.”

“Damn,” Telsin said. “Where did that rat get to? I need as many men as we can get scouring that hallway and the plain outside. He’s *extremely* dangerous, particularly if he has another vial of bendalloy.”

Marasi turned to Steris, who was still dazed, eyes wide, still looking at the hole where Waxillium had fallen. Allik held Marasi’s arm, his eyes visible behind his mask.

“I’ll get us out of this,” she whispered to them.

Somehow.

# 27

*He'll tell on us.… You know he will.*

Wax rolled onto his back, staring upward. Darkness. The pit had twisted during the fall—he remembered ramming into one of its curves—and deposited him here.

Rusts … how could his vision swim when he couldn't *see* anything? He fumbled at his gunbelt and came up with a vial, which he managed to down, replenishing his metal reserves.

*You coming? Of course you're not. You never want to risk trouble.*

No. He *could* see something. A lone candle in a black room. He blinked his eyes, but it was gone. A vision of the past. A memory …

*Light in a dark room. Set there to distract …*

That was what the dais up above had been. The Bands had *never* been there. The people who had built the place left the broken glass, the empty rack, the dais and the pedestal—all as a ruse. But they'd made a mistake.

The glass box they'd broken had been too large to fit on the pedestal.

*Candle in a dark room …* Wax thought. That meant the Bands were somewhere else. He blinked, and thought—as his eyes adjusted—he actually could pick out light.

He wasn't in a narrow pit. That hole had dumped him out somewhere. He heaved himself over in a twist, coming to his knees, and felt at his gut. Blood there. A bad hit, all the way through, judging by the wetness he felt trickling down the back of his thigh. He'd taken a shot to the leg too, but that didn't matter. He'd broken that leg in his fall anyway.

The shot near his neck was the worst. He knew this without even touching it, knew it by the way his body worked—by the way pieces of him were growing numb, the way certain muscles didn't respond right.

That light. A soft blue. Not a candle, but one of the built-in lights of the building. He crawled toward the light, dragging his broken leg, scraping on stone, sweat streaming down the sides of his face and mixing with the blood he spilled to the ground.

"Harmony," he whispered. "Harmony."

No reply. Now he prayed? What of his hatred?

For a time, that light was everything to him. An hour could have passed as he crawled, or perhaps it had been only a minute. As he neared, he saw sentries in the darkness. People sitting arrayed before the light, casting long shadows into the depths of the room. The ceiling was low, barely taller than a man could stand. That was why … why the people had to sit.…

*Focus!* he thought at himself, flaring his metal. The sentries had metal on them. And … yes, one other faint line, pointing toward a spot on the floor up ahead. Another trap.

The flared metal seemed to bring him clarity, helping him push back the muddled sensation. Blood loss. He was fading quickly. Still, a shade more alert, he saw those sentries for what they were. Corpses. Seated, somehow, draped in warm clothing. He passed the first row of them and looked in on frozen faces, shriveled with the passing of time but remarkably well preserved. Each held a mask in its lap. They sat in four concentric rings, looking at the light up ahead.

Here, the ones who had built this place had died. Then how … how had word of the key to the door been passed on.…

Wax crawled among the huddled dead, frozen despite their warm clothing. He could imagine them seated here, waiting for the end, as the heat in their metalminds dwindled. The cold, creeping in as night does after sunset, a final, consuming darkness.

And ahead, another pedestal. Smaller, carved of white rock. A simple light glowing on its top revealed a set of metal bracers. No fancy trimmings here, just the silent reverence of the dead.

Something sounded behind him, a scrape of boots on stone; then a light flooded the room from there.

"Waxillium?" Edwarn's voice called.

Wax huddled down.

"I know you're here, son," Edwarn said. "That's quite the trail of blood you're leaving. This is over, as you must realize."

*He's an Allomancer now,* Wax thought, remembering what Edwarn had done to Marasi's gun. The man carried a pistol, the aluminum one that Telsin had used.

Telsin … How long had she been working with them? He hated that he'd guessed, hated that his first instinct—even if he'd been right—had been to pull a gun on his only sibling. It just made too much sense. She'd caused Wayne to knock the backpack out the door. She'd killed the brute in the warehouse, when he'd been about to speak—potentially addressing her, outing her as a member of the Set.

Suit wouldn't … wouldn't have come into the temple with them unless he had the upper hand.…

He needed to stay focused. Edwarn was approaching. Wax was tempted to Push a bullet toward the man, but held himself back. Edwarn raised the light, illuminating the vast emptiness and looking slowly around himself. He didn't seem to have spotted Wax, and the bodies all had some metal on them, so Edwarn's steelsight wouldn't reveal Wax. But the blood trail would soon betray him.

Still, Wax waited. He bowed himself, huddling down in the line of figures, imitating their stooped postures.

*Have to get those bracers* …

He'd get shot before he could reach them. If he could even make it that distance without passing out.

"I *did* try to protect you," Suit said.

"What did you do to my sister?" Wax demanded, his voice echoing in the darkness.

Suit smiled, walking forward, scanning the bodies. If he could draw the man closer …

"I didn't do anything to her," Suit said. "Son, *she* recruited *me*."

"Lies," Wax hissed.

"The old world is dying, Waxillium!" Edwarn said. "I told you that a new one will soon be born, a world where men like you don't belong."

"I can find my place in a world of airships."

"That's not what I'm talking about," Suit said. "I'm talking about the secrets, Waxillium. The world where constables exist only to make people feel secure. It will be a world of shadows, of hidden government. The shift is already happening. Those who rule these days are not the men who smile at crowds and make speeches."

Edwarn moved around a corpse, then followed Wax's blood trail with his eyes. Only a few more steps.

"The day of kings has passed," Edwarn said. "The day of mighty men to be worshiped has gone, and with its passing goes the right of Allomancers to power. No more will their gifts hinge on the whims of fate. Instead, the powers will come to those who deserve them. Who can *use* them.”

He raised his foot to step, then hesitated, looking down. He grinned, moving his foot backward and making Wax’s heart fall. “Trying to goad me into stepping onto the trap? Such a brash plan, Waxillium.” He glanced upward. “Looks like it’s rigged to drop this entire section of ceiling. You’d be caught in it too.”

Edwarn turned and looked right at where Wax was sitting, trying to hide among the corpses.

Wax raised his head. “It would have been worth the cost.” He still had his shotgun, but doubted he had the strength to use it. Instead, kneeling, he held out a single bloodied hand, clutching a bullet in it. “Shall we see how good you are, Uncle?”

A duel. Perhaps he could win a duel.

Edwarn regarded him, then shook his head. “I think not.”

He stepped on the pressure plate, triggering the trap.

* * *

Telsin marched Marasi and the others out of the temple. And, once they were outside, Telsin reached to Marasi’s arm and ripped free the medallion there.

Marasi gasped, clutching her purse as the cold descended upon her like a swarm of insects, nipping at every bit of exposed skin. Her dress suddenly seemed flimsy, useless. She might as well have been naked. Telsin repeated the process for Steris, then reached for Allik’s arm.

“Please,” Marasi said. “He—”

Telsin grabbed the medallion. Allik tried to pull away, but one of the guards cuffed him across the face, cracking his mask and sending him to the snowy ground. The guard reached down, ripping off the medallion.

Allik gasped loudly, huddling on the cold stone. Beyond them, the field was a flurry of activity. Tents flapped in the wind, and men scurried around the fallen Hunter airship. A group of people in masks were being marched across the field to a particularly large tent—so, Allik’s crewmates were still alive.

One man with a red uniform beneath his thick coat hiked up the steps. “Lady Sequence,” he said to Telsin as he reached the top. “We’ve located what we think must be the weapon.”

“The Bands?” Marasi asked.

Telsin looked at her drolly. “The Bands were a possibility. An engaging one, yes, and I will not deny my disappointment. Irich will be particularly displeased. But we didn't come here for them."

*The airship*, Marasi realized, looking toward it. *Bearing a bomb intended to destroy the temple.*

A bomb that had never been used. Men moved about the large airship, investigating it. *This* was what Suit and the others had come for.

Marasi stepped forward, but one of the guards grabbed her while another dug in her purse to check for anything dangerous. Another batted Steris's notebook from her fingers, then began to frisk Steris none too gently.

"The ship is in good repair despite the elements, Sequence," the soldier told Telsin as Marasi watched helplessly. "It didn't crash as the other one did."

"Excellent," Telsin said. "Let's see if that thing has any of the powering metal left in it." She started down the steps, her warming medallion letting her ignore the freezing cold. She seemed like a spirit in her sleek, airy gown beside men in full winter gear. She hesitated, looking back at Marasi and the others.

"Search them thoroughly," she informed the men. "I sensed faint metal from the older woman, but it's gone now. Her notebook must have metal bindings. I don't believe that they have any aluminum guns—besides the one that Waxillium had. Either way, keep watch on them. They're insurance against the short one, who is still out here somewhere."

* * *

The roof fell in on them.

Wax shouted, diving toward the pedestal and the two simple bracers. Suit took a different tack; he Pushed himself back away from the bracers, out of the path of the stones.

Rock hit Wax like a fist slamming him to the ground. Bones crunched inside of him. He gasped, but got a mouthful of dust.

He knew how bad it was when the pain faded. As the dust settled, he found he couldn't move any part of his body. A weight rested on his back, pinning him with his head to the side. One of his hands hung within his view, the fingers mangled. He couldn't feel them. Nothing. Just his face. Enough to feel the tears of pain and failure on his cheeks.

*Steel.* He tried burning it.

He felt a few wisps of it inside of him, a warmth that became the only thing he could sense.

Rubble shifted nearby, and rocks clattered. A second later Suit appeared, a cut in his arm resealing. He dusted himself off and glanced at Wax.

"The trouble with Hemalurgy is in its limitations," he said. "If you kill a man and steal his Metallic abilities, the resulting gift to you is weakened. Did you know that? What's more, if you spike yourself too much, you become subject to Harmony's … interference. Indeed, by the stories, you might open yourself to the interference of any idiot Soother or Rioter with enough talent." He shook his head. "I am limited to three boons, even if we have discovered how to make someone else be weak, while we gain the benefit."

He glanced toward the bracers. "But if there is a way to gain more powers, and not be subject to Harmony … now that would be something. I see why Telsin was so eager."

He left Wax, passing the frozen corpses of the dead masked ones, bits of them sticking from beneath fallen rocks. Crushed. Some even looked to have shattered.

Suit stepped up to the pedestal. "Behold me, Waxillium. Today, I become a god."

Wax tried to cry out, but his lungs wouldn't hold enough air. He tried to heave himself free, but his body no longer worked. He was dying. Though steel burned fitfully inside of him, he was dying.

No. He was already dead. His body just hadn't quite realized it yet.

Suit held the Bands. Wax twisted his head as best he could, pinned as he was, to see it. The bearded man smiled broadly, waiting.

Nothing happened.

Suit strained, his face darkening. Then he turned the bracers around, looking them over. He put them on.

Still, nothing happened.

"Drained," he said with disgust. "After all this, we find them *empty* of attributes. What a waste." He sighed, then walked over to Wax, sliding the aluminum gun from his pocket. "I have no doubt that Irich's scientists will be able to puzzle out how the Bands were made. Take that thought with you into the eternities, Waxillium. Be sure to shake Ironeyes's hand for me. I intend to never meet him."

He pressed the gun against Wax's head.

And then something slammed into Suit. The man cried out, and a scuffle followed, along with the gun discharging. Suit cursing. Feet on stone.

A second later, Wayne scrambled into view. He knelt beside Wax and looked him over, seeming horrified.

"Wayne," Wax croaked. "How…?"

"Ah, 's nothing," his partner said. "Slipped out and fell down another of those holes. That one ended in spikes, I'm afraid. But I was able to heal up and climb out, once the soldiers had passed, then slip into this pit. You picked a better hole to fall in than I did, for sure."

"Suit…"

"He ran," Wayne said. "Didn't want to face me himself, not with me healing. Right cowardly, that one.…" He trailed off, looking down at Wax's body, pinned by the rock. "I—"

"Find Steris and Marasi," Wax croaked. "Help them escape."

"Wax," he said, shaking his head. "No. *No*. I can't do this without you."

"Yes you can. Fight."

"Not that part," Wayne said. "The rest of it. Livin'. We … we'll get you out of this." He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms, then looked at the stone on top of Wax, then down at the blood pooling beneath.

Then he sat back, running his hands through his hair, eyes wide, as if in shock. Wax tried to urge him on, but his lips wouldn't move.

Not enough strength.

* * *

Marasi huddled on the cold ground with Steris and Allik, surrounded by armed men who searched their possessions. It was still night out here, but sunrise had to be close.

Waxillium would have found a way out of this.

*Stop comparing yourself to him,* she thought. *Is it any wonder you stand in his shadow, when that's all you can see yourself doing?*

She needed to solve this. A dozen plans ran through her head, all stupid. The guard nearby still had her purse.

ReLuur's spike, it might be in there. Since it was Hemalurgically Invested, it might not have registered to the eyes of an Allomancer looking for metals on her. The guard dumped the purse out, spilling the contents onto the cold stone.

No spike. Instead, among her notebooks and handkerchiefs tumbled a palm-sized wedge of metal. The aluminum spearhead from the statue?

*Wayne, I'm going to* … She gritted her teeth. When had he swapped her for the spike? That man!

"I searched that purse already," another guard noted. "No weapons."

"Well then, what's this?" the first guard said, picking up the wedge-shaped piece of aluminum.

The second guard snorted. "You're welcome to try to kill someone with that if you want. It's dull."

Marasi wilted, feeling stupid. Even if she had the spike, what would she do? She couldn’t overpower armed guards.

Then what *could* she do?

Someone fell through the sky and thumped to the ground nearby. She perked up, thinking it must be Waxillium. Instead it was Suit, clothing ripped and dusty, carrying a gun. The guards saluted, the one with her purse dropping it and the metal wedge. One of her glass makeup jars rolled away.

Poor Allik huddled beside Steris. He’d stopped shivering, and his skin was turning blue. Steris met her eyes, and looked resigned.

Suit strode past. He looked far more intimidating dropping through the air using Allomantic abilities than he had bundled up for the weather and standing on the steps of the temple.

“Is my brother dead?” Telsin demanded, turning from her group of engineers nearby.

“Yes,” Suit said. “Though I encountered the short one.”

“You killed him?”

“Left him distracted,” Suit said. “I thought you’d want to see what I found.” He held up something that gleamed in the powerful lights the crew had set up. Two silvery bracers, each as long as a forearm. “There was a hidden chamber down there, Sequence. And my, what a secret it contained.”

Telsin shoved between her scientists and scrambled up to Suit. She took the bracers, awed.

“They don’t work,” Suit noted.

“What do you mean?”

“They’re out of attributes, I think. Their reserves gone.”

“But they grant Allomancy too,” Telsin said, putting them on and waving toward one of the guards, who tossed her a vial of metals. She downed it, eager.

“Well?” Suit asked.

“Nothing.”

*A decoy,* Marasi thought. Like the glass case and the empty pedestal … yes, that had been one too. She could see now why Waxillium had been doing his measuring.

Waxillium. He couldn’t really be …

No. What could she do? Not fight. But think. These Bands were a decoy. A second layer of falsehood to confuse intruders.

So where were the real ones?

* * *

Candles in a dark room.

*They're another decoy,* Wax thought, mind muddled. *Those bracers were too perfect, just like the stories. They were left to fool us.*

Like the symbols of Wax's old adversary, painted on the door of a mansion. Meant to distract. Delay.

*This place was made for the Lord Ruler,* Wax thought. *Those traps … those traps are stupid. What if one* did *catch him? The whole thing has to be a decoy.*

So what? There was another temple out there? Maybe they *had* hidden it in a cave?

He could barely see anymore. Wayne held his hand, tears streaming down his face. Everything was fading. The cold … coming … like darkness …

*No,* Wax thought, *it wouldn't be somewhere else. He'd need to be able to find it. He'd recognize it.…*

It was.

It was here!

Wax gasped, and tried to form the words, eyes wide. Wayne gripped his hand, knuckles white.

He couldn't feel it.

The darkness arrived, and Wax died.

# 28

Wax stilled.

Wayne let the hand fall limp. He wanted to just sit here. Stare at nothing like those fellows in rows nearby, the ones that weren’t crushed. Sit and become nothing.

All his life, only one man had believed in him. Only one man had forgiven him, had encouraged him. The rest of this damned race could burn away and become ash, for all Wayne cared. He hated them all.

But … what would Wax say?

*He left me, the bastard,* Wayne thought, wiping his eyes. In that moment, he hated Wax too. But then, Wayne loved him more than the hatred. He growled, and stumbled to his feet. He had no weapons; he’d dropped his dueling canes above.

He stared at Wax’s body, then knelt and felt along the man’s leg. He got ahold of something and yanked it free. The shotgun.

Wayne’s hands immediately started shaking.

“You stop that,” he hissed at them. “We’re done with that.”

He cocked the shotgun, then went looking for a way out of this tomb.

* * *

*The whole temple is a decoy,* Marasi thought, trembling in the cold. *So where are the actual Bands?*

The place was built for the Lord Ruler, who would supposedly return to claim his weapon. Where would you put that weapon?

*He’d know what it looked like,* Marasi thought. *He built it. We think it was* *in the shape of bracers, but it didn't have to be. Could be anything.*

That would be smart, if you were making a weapon. These metalminds, you had to know what they did before they worked. You could protect yourself, so only someone who knew what to look for could use your weapon.

And in that case, the people who built the temple could have left the weapon where the returning Lord Ruler would see it, but everyone else would pass right by, digging farther into the temple to encounter traps, pits, and decoys—all designed to either kill them or convince them that they'd successfully robbed the place.

Where did you put the weapon? On the doorstep, under the sign of the Sovereign himself, in his very own hand. Marasi turned, frantic, searching out the oversized spearhead.

It lay right beside her, where the guard had dropped it. Waxillium had called it aluminum because he couldn't sense it, but he hadn't looked closely enough.

If he had, he'd have seen it was made of different interwoven metals, wavy, like the folds forged into the blade of a sword. He couldn't Push on it, not because it was aluminum.

But because it was a metalmind, stored with more power than any they'd ever seen.

* * *

Around Wax, everything became misty and indistinct. The cavern, the rocks, the ground itself—all just mist. He could stand on it somehow.

Harmony stepped up beside Wax in the misty darkness. They fell in beside one another, walking as was natural for men to do. God looked much as Wax had always imagined Him. Tall, peaceful, hands laced before Himself. Face like a long oval, serene and human, though He towed behind Him a cloak of timelessness. Wax could *see* it, trailing after. Storms and winds, clouds and rain, deserts and forests, all reflected somehow in this creature's wake. His robe was the Terris V pattern, where each V was not a color, but an age. A *strata* of time, like those of a deep rock uncovered.

"They say," Wax said softly, "that You come to all people when they die."

"It is a duty I consider to be among my most sacred," Harmony said. "Even with other pressing matters, I find time to take this walk." He had a quiet voice, familiar to Wax. Like that of a forgotten friend.

"I'm dead then."

"Yes," Harmony said. "Your body, mind, and soul have separated. Soon one will return to the earth, another to the cosmere, and the third … Even I do not know.”

Wax continued walking. The shadowy cavern vanished, and Wax had a feeling of *blurring*. Mists became darkness, and all he could see was a distant light, like the sun below the horizon.

“If You can take time to walk with us,” Wax said, bitter, “why not come a little earlier? Why not *stop* the walk before it must begin?”

“Should I prevent all hardship, Waxillium?”

“I know where this is going,” Wax said. “I know what You’re going to say. You value choice. Everyone theorizes about it. But You *can* help. You’ve done it before, in placing me where I needed to go. You intervene. So why not intervene more? Prevent children from being killed. Make certain that constables arrive in time to stop deaths. You don’t have to take away choice, but You *could* do more. I know You could.”

He left the last part unsaid.

*You could have saved her. Or at least told me what I was doing.*

Harmony nodded. It felt bizarre to be demanding things, but rusts … if this was the end, Wax wanted a few answers.

“What is it to be God, Waxillium?” Harmony asked.

“I don’t think that’s a question I can answer.”

“It is not one I ever thought I’d have to answer either,” Harmony said. “But obviously, it has been forced upon me. You would have me intervene and stop the murders of innocents. I could do this. I have considered it. If I were to stop every one, what then? Do I stop maimings as well?”

“Of course,” Wax said.

“And where do I hold back, Waxillium? Do I prevent all wounds, or do I prevent only those caused by evil people? Do I stop a man from falling asleep so that he will not tip a candle and burn down his house? Do I stop all harm that could ever befall a person?”

“Maybe.”

“And once nobody is ever hurt,” Harmony said, “will people be satisfied? Will they not pray to me and ask for more? Will some people still curse and spit at the sound of my name because they are poor, while another is rich? Should I mitigate this, make everyone the same, Waxillium?”

“I won’t be caught in this trap,” Wax said. “You’re the God, not me. You can find a line where You prevent the worst. *You* can find a line where You’re stopping the worst that is reasonable, while still letting us live our lives.”

The light ahead suddenly rolled outward, and Wax found that they’d been rounding a *planet*. They stood high above it, and had stepped from darkness into sunlight, which let Wax see the world below, bathed in a calm, cool light.

Beyond that hung a haze of red. All around, pressing in upon the world. He could feel it choking him, a miasma of dread and destruction.

"Perhaps," Harmony said softly, "I have already done just as you suggest. You do not see it, because the worst never reaches you."

"What is it?" Wax asked, trying to take in that vast redness. It beat inward, but he could see something, a thin strip of light—like a bubble around the world—stopping it.

"A representation," Harmony said. "A crude one, perhaps." He looked to Wax and smiled, like a father at a wide-eyed child.

"We're not done with our conversation," Wax said. "You let her die. *You let me kill her*."

"And how long," Harmony asked softly, "must you hate yourself for that?"

Wax clenched his jaw, but couldn't force down the trembling that took him. He lived it again, holding her as she died. Knowing he'd killed her.

That hatred *seethed* inside of him. Hatred for Harmony. Hatred for the world.

And yes. Hatred for himself.

"Why?" Wax asked.

"Because you demanded it of me."

"No I didn't!"

"Yes. A part of you did. An eventuality I can see, one of many possible Waxilliums, all you—yet not set. Know yourself, Waxillium. Would you have had another kill her? Someone she didn't know?"

"No," he whispered.

"Would you have had her live on, a slave in her mind? Corrupted by that *cursed* spike that would forever leave her scarred, even if replaced?"

"No." He was crying.

"And if you had known," Harmony said, holding his eyes, "that you'd never have been able to pull that trigger unless your eyes were veiled? If you'd realized what knowledge of the truth would do to you—stilling your hand and trapping her in an endless prison of madness—what would you have asked of me?"

"Don't tell me," Wax whispered, squeezing his eyes shut.

The silence seemed to stretch until eternity.

"I am sorry," Harmony said with a gentle voice, "for your pain. I am sorry for what you did, what we had to do. But I am not sorry for making you do what had to be done."

Wax opened his eyes.

"And when I hold back, staying my hand from protecting those below," Harmony said, “I must do it out of trust in what people can do on their own.” He glanced toward the red haze. “And because I have other problems to occupy me.”

“You didn’t tell me what it was,” Wax said.

“That is because I do not know.”

“That … frightens me.”

Harmony looked to him. “It should.”

Down below, a tiny spark flickered on one of the landmasses. Wax blinked. He’d seen it, despite the incredible distance.

“What was that?” he asked.

Harmony smiled. “Trust.”

* * *

Marasi clutched the spearhead in two hands.

And tapped *everything*.

Power flooded into her, lighting her up like an inferno. Snow hung motionless in the air. She stood up and reached to the belt of one of her captors, removing one of his vials of metal. She took them all, several from each guard, and drank them. She was tapping a metalmind, letting her move at a speed so fast that when she lifted her hand, she could briefly see the pocket of vacuum left behind. She smiled.

Then she burned her metals. All of them.

In that one transcendent moment, she felt herself change, expand. She felt the Lord Ruler’s own power, stored in the Bands of Mourning—the spearhead clutched in her fingers—surge through her, and she felt she would burst. It was as if an ocean of light had suddenly been pumped into her arteries and veins.

Blue lines exploded from her, first pointing at metals, then multiplying, changing, *transforming*. She saw through it all, everything in blue. There were no people or objects, just energy coalesced. The metals shone brilliantly, as if they were holes into someplace different. Concentrated essence, providing a pathway to power.

She was using the reserves with startling quickness. She slowed her speed, and for some reason the people beside her jumped, holding their ears. She cocked her head, then *PUSHED*.

The Push flung the guards a good fifty feet. That left her facing Suit and Telsin, who regarded her with horrified expressions. They were glowing energy to her, but she recognized them. They had spikes inside of them.

Convenient. Those spikes resisted Pushes, but not enough to bother Marasi now. She lifted a hand and flung both of them away by the very metals they'd used to pierce themselves.

All around, guards grabbed guns and turned on her. She swept them backward, then lifted herself off the ground, Pushing on the trace minerals in the stone beneath her.

She hung there, and was surprised to see something spinning around her. Mist? Where was it coming from?

*Me,* she realized.

She hovered in the sky, flush with power. In that moment, she *was* the Ascendant Warrior. She held the fullness of what Waxillium had barely tasted his whole life. She could be him, eclipse him. She could bring justice to entire peoples. Holding it all within her, having it and measuring it, she finally admitted the truth to herself.

*This isn't what I want.*

She would not let her childhood dreams hold sway over her any longer. She smiled, then threw herself through the air in a Push toward the temple.

* * *

Steris watched her sister *fly away*.

"Unexpected," she said. And here she assumed she'd been prepared for anything. Marasi starting to glow, throwing people around with Allomancy as if they were dolls, then streaking away and leaving a trail of mist … well, that hadn't been on the list. It hadn't even made the *appendix*.

She looked down at poor Allik, so cold he'd stopped shivering. "I shall have to enlarge my projections of what is plausible during activities such as this, don't you think?"

He mumbled something in his language. "Foralate men!" He waved his hand in a gesture. "Forsalvin!"

"Telling me to flee without you?" Steris said, walking over and retrieving her notebook. "Yes, running while they are all confused would be wise, but I don't plan to leave yet." She opened the notebook, which she'd hollowed out with Wax's knife in the rear of the skimmer, while Marasi was talking with Allik up front and the others slept. "Did you know that when I evaluated everyone's usefulness on this expedition, I gave myself a seven out of a hundred? Not very high, yes, but I couldn't reasonably give myself the lowest mark possible. I do have my uses."

She turned the large notebook, showing an extra medallion from the skimmer's emergency store settled protectively into the gouged-out section she'd made.

She smiled at Allik, pulled it free, and pressed it into his hand. He let out a long, relieved sigh, and the blown snow that had stuck to his face melted away.

Nearby, soldiers were regaining their feet and shouting to one another.

“And now,” Steris said, “I think your earlier suggestion has merit.”

* * *

“Now what?” Wax asked Harmony. “I fade off into nothing?”

“I don’t believe it’s nothing,” God said. “There is something beyond. Though perhaps my belief is merely my own desire wishing it to be so.”

“You are not encouraging me. Aren’t You omnipotent?”

“Hardly,” Harmony said, smiling. “But I believe that parts of me *could* be.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“It won’t until I make it do so,” Harmony said, extending His hands to either side. “In answer to your question, however, you don’t fade just yet. Though soon. Right now, you make a choice.”

Wax looked from one of the deity’s hands to the other. “Does everyone get this choice?”

“Their choices are different.” He proffered His hands to Wax, as if offering them for him to take.

“I don’t see the choice.”

“My right hand,” Harmony said, “is freedom. You can feel it, I think.”

And he could. Soaring, released from all bonds, riding upon lines of blue light. Adventure into the unknown, seeking only the fulfillment of his own curiosity. It was glorious. It was what he’d always wanted, and its lure thrummed through him.

*Freedom.*

Wax gasped. “What … what is the other one?”

Harmony held up His left hand, and Wax heard something. A voice?

“Wax?” it said.

Yes, a frantic voice. Feminine.

“Wax, you have to know what it does. It will heal you, Wax. Waxillium! Please…”

“That hand,” Wax said, looking at it. “That hand is duty, isn’t it?”

“No, Waxillium,” Harmony said gently. “Although that is how you’ve seen it. Duty or freedom. Burden or adventure. You were always the one who made the *right* choice, when others played. And so you resent it.”

“No I don’t,” Wax said.

Harmony smiled. The understanding in His face was infuriating.

“This hand,” Harmony said, “is not duty. It is but a different adventure.”

“Wax…” the voice said from below, choked with emotion. It belonged to Marasi. “You *have* to tap the metalmind.”

Wax reached toward the left hand, and Harmony—shockingly—pulled it away. “Are you certain?”

“I have to.”

“Do you?”

“I *have* to. It’s who I am.”

“Then perhaps,” Harmony said, “you should stop hating that, my son.” He extended the hand.

Wax hesitated. “Tell me one thing first.”

“If it is within my means.”

“Did she come here? When she passed?”

Harmony smiled. “She asked me to look after you.”

Wax seized the left hand with his own. He was immediately pulled toward something, like air being sucked through a hole. Warmth bathed him; then it became a *fire*. Pulling breath into his lungs, he screamed, heaving, throwing the boulder off. It clattered to the side, and he found himself in the low-roofed chamber beneath the temple.

Such strength! He hadn’t thrown that rock with muscles, but with *steel*. His body reknit even as he launched himself to his feet by Pushing on tiny traces of metal in the ground beneath him. He landed and looked down at his left hand. The one that had been dangling, broken, before his face as he died.

Clutched in it was an oversized spearhead crafted from sixteen different metals melded together. He looked up from it and toward Marasi, who regarded him with tearstained eyes, but a broad smile.

“You found it,” Wax said.

She nodded eagerly. “Just took a little old-fashioned detective work.”

“You saved me,” Wax said.

Rust and Ruin … such *power*. He felt as if he could level cities or build them up anew.

“Suit and your sister are outside,” Marasi said. “I left the others there. I don’t— Well, I wasn’t thinking straight. Or maybe I was thinking too much. Here.” She handed him a vial of metals.

Wax took it, then held up the Bands. “You could have done this yourself.”

“No,” Marasi said. “I couldn’t have.”

“But—”

“I couldn’t have,” Marasi said. “It just … isn’t me.” She shrugged. “Does that make sense?”

“Surprisingly, yes.” He flexed his hand around the Bands.

“Go,” Marasi said. “Do what you do best, Waxillium Ladrian.”

“Which is what? Break things?”

“Break things,” Marasi said, “*with style*.”

He grinned, then downed the vial of metals.

# 29

“Waxillium’s followers have the Bands!” Suit whispered to himself as he crossed the dark, stony field. Snow had begun falling—a bitter, icy snow, nothing like the soft flakes he’d occasionally seen in the eastern Basin. “It is a crisis. They will be coming for us. We must move up our timetables!”

He chewed on the words, mulling them over as he pulled his coat tight. Warming device notwithstanding, that wind was *annoying*.

Would they buy his argument? No, not dire enough.

“Waxillium and his people have the Bands!” he whispered to himself. “This will undoubtedly let the kandra devise the means of creating metalminds anyone can use. We must move up our timetables and seize Elendel now, or we will find ourselves technologically outmatched!”

Yes. Yes, that was the idea. Even the most careful of the Series would be distressed by the prospect of being technologically outmaneuvered. This would convince them to give him the leeway he desired.

Anything could be an advantage. He’d wanted the Bands for himself, but in lieu of that, he’d find something else.

Suit *always* found the advantage.

He passed soldiers scurrying about and unloading weapons on the frozen plain of rock. They’d planned for a potential fight here, as he’d worried he might encounter more of the masked savages.

“Sir!” one of the men called. “Orders?”

He gestured toward the sky. “If anyone other than the Sequence drops from the air or approaches your position, *shoot* them. Then keep shooting, even after they are down.”

“Yes, sir!” the soldier said, waving to a group of his men. He turned toward an empty rack, then paused. “My rifle? Who took my rifle!”

Suit continued on past, tossing the fake Bands of Mourning into the snow and leaving the troops to—hopefully—slow down Waxillium’s minions. He eagerly marched aboard the new airship. Now this device, *this* was an advantage. The Bands could serve one man, make a deity out of him. A fleet of ships like this could deify an entire army.

The wooden hallway inside had gaslights set into lamps with austere metal housings. It was all distinctly plainer than the ship that had crashed in Dulsing—the wood here was unornamented, unpolished. The other ship had felt decorated like a den. This one, a warehouse.

*Probably cheaper to build this way,* he thought, nodding his head in approval.

Footsteps clattered above as men charged through one of the corridors on another deck, and Suit brushed the snow from his arms as a technician ran up to him, bearing the red uniform of the Set’s Hidden Guard.

“My lord,” the man said, proffering one of the medallions. “You’ll need this.”

Suit took it and rolled up his sleeve to strap it to his upper arm. “Is this ship operational?”

The man’s eyes lit up. “Yes, sir! The machinery is operational, sheltered as it was from the weather. Sir … it’s *amazing*. You can *feel* the energy pulsing off that metal. We did have to send men out to unclog the fans—a few of the Coinshots helped—and we have them moving now. Fed is down below, priming the weight-changing machinery with her Feruchemy, to lighten the ship. That should be the last step!”

“Then lift us off,” Suit said, walking toward where he assumed the bridge would be found.

“My lord Suit?” the man called after him. “Aren’t we waiting for the Sequence?”

He hesitated only briefly. Where had she gotten to?

*Another advantage?* he thought. He could stand being Sequence.

“She will join us aloft if she can,” he said. “Our priority is to get this ship, and its secrets, to a secure location.”

As the technician saluted and ran to obey, Suit filled his medallion, becoming lighter. So much easier than getting his spikes had been. It was hard not to feel that their experiments in Hemalurgy had been a waste, a dead end.

The ship quivered, and the fans started up with a much louder sound than he had expected. Before he reached the bridge, the thing rocked, and he heard ice cracking above the sound of the fans. He leaned over to a porthole, looking out as the ground retreated.

It *worked*. Immediately, implications flooded his mind. Travel. Shipping. Warfare. New regions could be settled. New types of buildings and docks would be needed.

It would all flow through him.

He suppressed a smile—best to celebrate *after* he was safely away—but he could not stop the heady sensation. The Set had been planning for events a century or more away, putting careful plots into motion at his suggestion. He was proud of those, but truth be told, he'd rather they rule in *his* lifetime.

And with this, he could do so.

* * *

Jordis huddled in the tent, watching her crew die.

It had been long coming, this death. The last ember of the fire, refusing to give up its spark. During the terrible march through the dead rain, her people had been given tiny sips of warmth from a metalmind. Enough to barely keep them alive, like plants locked in a dark shed for most of the day.

But now, in this place, the cold was too pervasive—and the hardships of the march too devastating. She crawled among her crew and whispered encouragement, though she could no longer feel her fingers or toes. Most of the men and women of the ship couldn't even nod. A few had started removing their clothing, complaining of heat. Chillfever had struck them.

Not long now. The maskless devils seemed to know this; they'd posted only a single guard at the tent. Her people could have snuck away out the back, perhaps. But what would they sneak toward? Death outside in the winds rather than death inside here?

*How do the maskless survive it?* she wondered. They must be devils indeed, born of the frost itself, to be so capable of withstanding the cold.

Jordis knelt beside Petrine, the enginemaster and eldest of her crew. How had the woman survived so long? She was by no means feeble, but she was past her sixth decade. Petrine lifted her hand and gripped Jordis's arm—though her wrinkled eyes were shadowed by the mask, Jordis needed no gesture or expression to know Petrine's emotions.

"Do we attack?" Petrine asked.

"For what purpose?"

"We could die by their weapons instead of the cold."

Wise, those words. Perhaps they could—

A loud thump came from outside the tent. Jordis found her feet, surprisingly, though most of the others remained huddling where they lay. The front of the tent burst open and a man with a familiar—but broken—mask appeared there.

Impossible. Was the chillfever striking her too?

The man raised his mask and displayed a bearded, youthful face. “I am sorry to have come in unannounced,” Allik said. “But I bear gifts, as is traditional for visiting someone’s house unannounced, yes?”

He held up a gloved fist, which clutched a bundle of medallions by their cords.

Jordis looked from the medallions to young Allik, then back. For once she didn’t even care about how free he was with raising his mask. She stumbled to him, seizing one of them, unable to believe.

The wonderful warmth ran through her, like a sunrise within. She sighed in relief, her mind clearing. It *was* him. “How?” she whispered.

“I,” Allik proclaimed, “have made friends with some of the devils.” He gestured to the side and a female maskless one almost toppled in, wearing one of the long dresses that were popular here, carrying an armful of rifles.

She said something in her language, dropping the guns to the floor of the tent and dusting off her hands.

“I think she wants us to start shooting the other ones,” Allik said as Jordis quickly grabbed the other medallions and began distributing them to the most severely afflicted of her people. “I, for one, am *more* than happy to oblige.”

Petrine continued the distribution as Jordis armed herself with one of the guns. Though the warmth was wonderful, she still felt weak, and she didn’t want to look in her boots to see if her toes had frostbite. “I don’t know that we will put up much of a fight.”

“Better than no fight at all, yes, Captain?” Allik asked.

“This is true,” Jordis admitted, and made a sign of respect, touching her right shoulder with her left hand, then lowering her hand to touch her wrist. “You did well. Almost I forgive you for your terrible dancing.” She turned to Petrine. “Arm the men and women with these weapons. Let’s kill as many of the devils as we can.”

* * *

Wax ripped from the temple in a burst of might and Allomancy. He spun above the building, rocks flung by his explosive exit tumbling in the air around him, trailing mist. Below, a storm of gunfire broke out on the previously quiet mountainside, though they weren’t firing at him.

Above it, an airship lumbered through the sky, fans whirring powerfully on its two pontoons. It was awesome to behold, but the ship was obviously not spry. It moved with the ponderous motions of something very large, and very heavy—even with the weight reduction granted by the medallions.

Wax was tempted to crush the ship. Push the nails from their mountings, rip the thing apart in a storm of destruction, dumping Suit and his traitorous sister to the frozen ground below. He almost did it. But … rusts. He wasn't an executioner. He was a lawman. He'd rather die than betray that.

Well, die *again*.

He dropped, then used the trace metals in the stonework of the temple as an anchor to send himself soaring across the ground in a swoop. A few of the soldiers below took halfhearted shots at him, but most seemed engrossed in a gunfight with a group of people in masks who had taken up a position behind a rocky shelf.

*Steris, Allik,* Wax thought, identifying them. *Good.*

He landed among the soldiers and flung them aside. He grabbed an aluminum pistol from one of their racks, loaded it, then waved to the masked people before hurling himself into the sky after the airship.

He was strong. Incredibly strong. The Bands, still clutched in his left hand, somehow gave him not just Allomancy, but *ancient* Allomancy. The potency of those who had lived long ago, during the time of the Lord Ruler. Perhaps even more. Was that possible?

*What did you create?* he wondered. *And how long will it last?*

His resources were diminishing. Not merely the metals inside of him, but the reserves stored inside the Bands. Stores that changed his level of Investiture.

He should have held back, he knew—reserved it for study, or for use in a future emergency—but *rusts* it was intoxicating. He reached the airship easily, despite only having a few shell casings to Push upon below. He soared up and landed on the ship's nose, then smashed his hand through one of the windows to the bridge, any cuts healing immediately.

Inside, Suit sat alone. There was no sign of pilots, technicians, or servants. Just a wide, half-oval deck, not even carpeted, and Suit in a chair.

Wax climbed in and raised the aluminum pistol. His boots thumped on the wood. He did a quick scan. *People in the hallway outside,* he thought. *And a bit of metal in Suit's mouth.* The old coin-in-the-mouth trick, a way to hide metal from an Allomancer. Anything inside the body was very hard to sense.

Unless you were bearing the very powers of creation, that is.

"And so," Suit said, lighting his pipe, "our confrontation comes at long last."

“Not much of a confrontation,” Wax said, still alight with power. “I could destroy you a hundred different ways right now, Uncle.”

“I don’t doubt that you could,” Suit said, shaking out his match, then puffing on the pipe. Trying to hide the coin. Talking around a pipe let him have a reason to sound odd. “And here I can only destroy you *one* way.”

Wax leveled his pistol.

Suit looked right at it and smiled. “Do you know why I’ve always beaten you, Nephew?”

“You haven’t beaten me,” Wax said. “You’ve refused to fight. That is an entirely different thing.”

“But sometimes the only way to win *is* to refuse to fight.”

Wax strode forward, wary of traps. He thought faster, moved faster than normal. The blue lines spread from him as a brilliant web, seeking sources of metal smaller—and farther away—than he could normally sense. At times this seemed to flicker, and for a moment he saw the *radiance* inside of each person and thing. It felt as if he might be able to move those too.

An awed voice in the back of his mind whispered, *They’re all the same. Metal, minds, men, all the same substance.…*

“What have you done, Uncle?” Wax asked softly.

“And here I must answer my own question,” Edwarn said, shaking his head and standing. “I beat you, Waxillium, *not* because of preparation—though it is extensive. I beat you not because of wit or strength of arm, but because of a unique ability of mine. Creativity.”

“You’re going to bludgeon me with paintings?”

“Always quick with a wry comment!” Suit said. “Bravo.”

*“What have you done?”*

“I armed the bomb,” Suit said. “It is set to explode in mere moments. Unless I stop it.”

“Let it explode,” Wax said, holding up the Bands—metallic strata weaving across the triangular chunk of metal. “I’m pretty sure I’ll survive it.”

“And those below?” Suit asked. “Your friends? My captives? From the sounds of it, they’re fighting quite vigorously for their freedom. How sad it will be to see them vaporized by an explosion I’ve been told should be enough to destroy a large city all on its—”

Wax increased the speed of his thoughts, tapping zinc. He sorted through a dozen scenarios. Find the explosives and Push them away? How far could he get them? Would Suit detonate the bomb before he could arrive?

His speed of body was nearly tapped out—Marasi must have used that in getting to him—so yes, Suit would have time, though would he actually *do* it?

Would he blow himself up, along with this ship, to defeat Wax?

If this were an ordinary criminal, Wax would have bet strongly against it. Unfortunately, Suit and the Set in general had demonstrated a level of fanaticism he had not expected. Like the way Miles had acted as he was executed. These people were not just thugs and thieves; they were political reformers, slaves to an ideal.

What else? What else could Wax do? He discarded scenario after scenario. Get Marasi and the others to safety: too slow. Shoot Suit now: the man could heal himself, and Wax might not have time to get to the bomb and remove it before the blast happened anyway. Push the ship upward? He wouldn’t be able to do that fast enough; unless he Pushed slowly, he’d rip the vessel apart.

“—own,” Suit said.

“What do you want?” Wax demanded. “I’m not going to let you go.”

“You don’t need to,” Suit said. “I have little doubt that you’d chase me across the world, Waxillium. I might be creative, but you … you are *tenacious*.”

“What, then?”

“You drop the Bands out the window,” Suit said. “I order the bomb disarmed. Then we face one another as men, without unnatural advantages.”

“You think I’d trust you?”

“You don’t need to,” Suit said. “Just give me your word you’ll do it.”

“Done,” Wax said.

“Disarm the device!” Suit shouted toward the door. He strolled to the front of the ship and spoke into a tube there. “Disarm it and stand down.”

Feet thumped away from the door. Wax could actually watch them go—not by their metals, but by the signature their souls made. In moments, he could see nobody there, or hiding anywhere around the bridge.

A voice soon echoed up through the tube. The tin Wax burned let him hear. “Done, my lord.” A pause. “Thank Trell for that.” The voice sounded relieved.

Suit turned to Wax. “There is a tradition in the Roughs, is there not? Two men, a dusty road, guns on their hips. Man against man. One lives. The other dies. A dispute settled.” He patted the sidearm at his hip. “I can’t give you a dusty road, but perhaps we can squint and pretend that the frost is playing that role.”

Wax drew his lips to a line. Edwarn looked entirely sincere. “Don’t make me do this, Uncle.”

“Why?” Suit said. “I know you’ve been *itching* for this exact opportunity! You have an aluminum gun, I see. The same as mine. No Steelpushing to interfere. Just two men and their sidearms."

"Uncle…"

"You've dreamed of it, son. The chance to shoot me, no questions asked, and not be running afoul of the law. Besides, to the law I'm already dead! Your conscience can rest. I won't give in, and I'm armed. The only way to stop me is to shoot me. Let's do it."

Wax fingered the Bands of Mourning, and felt himself smiling. "You don't understand at all, do you?"

"Oh, I do. I've seen it in you! The hidden hunger of the lawman, wishing to be cut free so he can kill. It's what defines you and your type."

"No," Wax said. He unhooked the holster from his leg, the one that had held his shotgun, and slipped the Bands into its leather pouch. His remaining bullets and metal vials followed, leaving him with no metals, save the aluminum gun.

"Perhaps I have felt hidden hunger," Wax said. "But it isn't what defines me."

"Oh, and what does?"

Wax tossed the leather holding the Bands out the broken window, then slipped his gun into his side holster. "I'll show you."

* * *

Telsin scrambled in the snow, climbing through it, frantic.

Suit was an idiot. She'd always known this, but today made it manifest. Flying away in the ship? That was the *first* place they'd go to chase him. He was as good as dead.

Today was a disaster. An unparalleled disaster. Waxillium knew of her subterfuge. The Set was exposed. Their plans were crumbling.

Something had to be salvageable. She stumbled to a small clearing in the snow, near the temple entrance, where her people had deposited the skimmer that she and Waxillium had ridden in on. Still functional, hopefully. She knew how it worked—she'd watched carefully during their trip. All she needed to do was—

Something *banged* behind her.

She blinked at the sudden spray of redness on the snow all around her. Flakes of it.

Her blood.

"You killed one of my friends today," a ragged voice said from behind. "I'm not going to let you take a second."

She fell to her knees before the craft, then turned her head. Wayne stood behind her in the snow, his face haggard, holding a shotgun.

"You…" Telsin whispered. "You can't … guns…"

"Yeah," Wayne said, cocking the shotgun. "About that."

He lowered the barrel to her face and fired.

* * *

Marasi climbed the previously hidden steps back into the room with the broken glass and the ornate pedestal. She didn't know what had opened this hidden path, but she was glad for it. Ever blunt, Waxillium had simply ripped himself a hole out of the catacombs, going straight up through the stone—half this chamber had collapsed as a result—but following his route would have been an arduous climb.

The power was gone. She'd handed it over to Waxillium, but instead of feeling deflated, she felt … peaceful. Hers was the serenity of a woman who'd lain stretched out on a perfect summer day, feeling the sun as it slowly sank. Yes, the light was gone now, but *oh* what a joy it had been.

Poor MeLaan was still here, and her form had started to incorporate the bones, slowly assembling them in a strange configuration. With no spikes, she'd become a mistwraith. Marasi knelt beside her, but wasn't certain what comfort she could offer. At the very least, MeLaan seemed to still be alive.

Marasi rose, then hurried down the hallway with the traps, reaching the entryway with the murals. Outside, a war was going on, hundreds of gunshots echoing in the cold, snow-filled night. She was surprised to see that the people in masks seemed to be winning. The soldiers had been pushed back to the edge of the stone field, their backs to a series of gulfs and cliffs. They had nowhere to retreat, and many of their number lay dead or wounded.

She thought she saw Waxillium's influence in the way some of those bodies lay, as if tossed through the air to land crumpled. Marasi nodded in satisfaction. Let him do the job he came to do.

She still had one of her own to finish. She strode out of the temple, down the steps past the statue of the Lord Ruler holding what now, with the spearhead removed, appeared to be only a staff.

Now where would she find—

A loud gunshot from quite nearby. She swiveled her head, searching for the source. A second one sounded.

A moment later, Wayne emerged through the snowstorm, head down, expression shadowed. He carried a shotgun on his shoulder, and clutched not one, but *three* small metal spikes in his other hand.

* * *

Wax stood quietly on the bridge of the ship, waiting for his uncle to move.

This didn’t work the way it did in the stories. You didn’t outdraw a man; couldn’t happen, not without Feruchemical speed. If you waited for him to start moving, you would be too slow. He’d tried it with blanks on the fastest men he knew.

The man who drew first got the first shot. That was that.

Suit drew.

Wax Pushed on the metal window frame behind him. He crossed the distance between them in a blur, even as Suit fired. The bullet hit Wax in the shoulder, but Wax collided with the surprised Suit, knocking them both to the floor of the bridge.

Suit grabbed his arm. Wax’s metal reserves vanished.

“Aha!” Suit said. “I made myself a Leecher! I can drain the metals from anyone who touches me, Waxillium. You’re dead. No Bands. No Allomancy. I win.”

Wax grunted, clinging tight to Suit as they rolled. “You forget,” he said. “I’m not surprised. You’ve always hated it. I’m a *Terrisman,* Uncle.”

He increased his weight manyfold.

He tapped everything he had in his arm bracer, hundreds of hours spent being lighter than he should have been. He brought it all out in one moment of desperation.

The airship lurched. And then the floor shattered.

Wax clung to Suit as they fell, holding him tight, though one hand was weakening from the gunshot. They crashed through two levels of the ship—Suit’s body, which tapped healing, bearing the brunt of the damage—before smashing out the bottom, battered, bleeding, and thrashed by splintered wood.

Suit looked horrified. “You fool! You—”

Wax spun them in the air, pointing Suit downward as they plummeted. Snow-filled air was a roaring wind around them, flakes streaking past.

Suit screamed.

And then he Pushed.

Suit dropped the coin from his mouth and used his Allomancy to Push it downward in a straight shot. It hit the approaching ground and slowed the two of them with a lurch.

Wax decreased his weight just enough that Suit’s Push was sufficient to keep them alive. They crashed into the snow, some distance from the plateau with the temple.

Wax recovered first. He lurched to his feet and pulled Suit up by one hand, the two of them standing alone in a field of white. Suit looked up at him, dazed by the fall and the impact.

"The definition of a lawman, *Uncle,* is easy," Wax said, feeling blood from a dozen cuts trickle down his face. He lifted Suit by the front of his clothing, bringing him close. "He's the man who takes the bullet so nobody else has to."

With that, Wax decked him across the face and dropped him to the snow, unconscious.

* * *

MeLaan swam in a sea of terror. Terror within her own mind; a piece of her knowing this was not right. This being ruled by instinct, this craven set of impulses.

But this was what she did. Food. She needed food.

No. First a place to hide. From the trembling sounds. Hide away, find a crack. She continued building a body that would let her walk. Flee.

So cold. She didn't understand coldness. It wasn't a thing that should be. And she couldn't taste dirt, just stone. Stone everywhere.

Frozen stone.

She felt like screaming. Something was missing. Not food. Not a place to hide, but … something. Something was horribly, horribly, horribly wrong.

An object dropped on her. It was cold, but not stone. This wasn't food. She enfolded it and intended to spit it away, but then something happened.

Something wonderful. She gobbled up the second one as it was dropped, and began to undulate, frantic. It came *back*. Memory. Knowledge. Rationality.

Self.

She exulted in it, ignoring the little holes that were now poked in her memory. She remembered most of the trip here, but something had happened in the room with the Bands.… No, the Bands hadn't been there, and …

She formed eyes first, and she knew what she would see when she opened them. She'd already tasted him on the air, and knew his flavor.

"Welcome back," Wayne said, grinning. "I think we won."

# 30

Marasi accepted the canteen from Allik. It steamed from the top although it was only lukewarm to the touch. She sat on the steps up to the temple, swathed in about forty blankets. She'd surrendered her medallion to one of the Malwish people until more could be secured from the airship.

And its recovery was an interesting sight to say the least. Waxillium stood on the rocky section before the plateau, heaving with two hands and Pulling on nothing visible. Up ahead, the rogue airship slowly sank through the snow-filled sky, drawn toward Waxillium on an invisible tether.

"Will it break apart?" Allik asked.

She looked at him with surprise, then down at his language medallion.

"Warm choc and a blanket will do me for a minute," he said, settling down and pulling his blanket around him. "Others are in greater need, yah? The ship. Will it break?"

Marasi looked up toward it. She could imagine Suit's people aboard, trying desperately to make the engines work harder, the fans blow more powerfully. It sank anyway. Waxillium Ladrian—bearing the Bands of Mourning and supremely annoyed—was like a force of nature.

She smiled and sipped her drink.

"Rusts!" she said, looking at it. "What is this?" It was sweet, thick, warm, chocolaty, and *wonderful*.

"Choc," he said. "Sometimes it is a man's only succor in this frozen, lonely world, yah?"

"You *drink chocolate*?"

"Sure. Don't you?"

She never had. Plus, this was far sweeter than the chocolate she was used to. Not bitter at all. She took a long, soothing draught. “Allik, this is the most wonderful thing I’ve ever experienced. And I just held the powers of creation themselves.”

He smiled.

“I don’t think your ship is in danger,” Marasi said. “He’s Pulling on it evenly, and slowly. He’s a careful man, Waxillium is.”

“Careful? It seems to me he is very proficient at breaking things. That doesn’t sound particularly careful, yah?”

“Well,” Marasi said, sipping her drink, “he does it with amazing precision.”

Indeed, it wasn’t long before the airship settled down onto the rocks, still in one piece. Waxillium held it in place, then raised the Bands of Mourning in one hand, winds, snows, and even traces of mist swirling around him.

The fans slowly powered down. A short time later, soldiers exited with hands up. Wayne and MeLaan scurried up to them, gathering weapons while Allik’s people boarded the ship to secure it and search for anyone lurking inside.

Marasi waited through it all, sipping her melted chocolate and thinking. ReLuur’s spike lay safely wrapped in a handkerchief, tucked into her pocket. In her mind’s eye, she saw Wayne again as he had been, trudging through the snow, gun to his shoulder, a pattern of frozen blood flaking his skin. Alongside this image was the glee with which Waxillium had launched into the sky to chase down his uncle.

There was a darkness to these men that the stories hadn’t conveyed. Marasi was glad for it, but she had stepped to that ledge, then turned back. Proud though she was of having fulfilled her mission for the kandra, she had decided that things would be different for her in the future. She was all right with that.

It was what she had chosen.

“Frosts,” Allik said after some time. “We’d better go do something, yah?”

She looked up from her now-empty canteen of chocolate to follow Allik’s gesture. The Malwish airship crew had returned from their inspection, and the enemy soldiers had been led away—to be safely locked in the ship’s brig, Marasi believed.

Suit was still where Waxillium had put him: tied to the top of the Lord Ruler’s spear, feet dangling. He’d been gagged, he’d had his metalminds removed, and Waxillium had used Allomancy to leech away his metals. And this *still* seemed like it might not be cautious enough. He still had his spikes, as they weren’t sure how to remove them without killing him. He shouldn’t be able to do anything without metals, but she couldn't help being worried.

Steris had joined Waxillium on the field, and he'd put his arm around her shoulders. Marasi smiled. Now *that* was an image she'd never thought she'd find comforting. But they would do well together.

Unfortunately, trouble approached Waxillium and Steris in the form of Allik's captain and some of her airmen. The two groups faced one another, MeLaan and Wayne falling in beside Waxillium—Wayne casually carrying that shotgun, MeLaan standing a good two inches taller than anyone else, arms folded, her posture unyielding.

Right. "Let's go," Marasi said to Allik.

Allik's captain, Jordis, wore one of the translation medallions—and she didn't flinch before the gust of wind that accompanied Marasi as she arrived.

"We thank you for your help," Jordis was saying, her voice touched by the same accent Allik had. "But our appreciation does not allow us to ignore thievery. We expect that our property will be returned."

"I don't see any of your property here," Waxillium replied coldly. "I see only an artifact *we* recovered. Well, that and my airship."

"Your—" Jordis sputtered. She stepped forward. "Since crashing in your lands, my crew has been incarcerated, tortured, and *murdered*. You seem to be itching for a war, Allomancer."

Drat. Marasi had been hoping she'd share Allik's reverence for Waxillium. Indeed, much of the crew seemed nervous about him, but the captain obviously didn't mean to back down.

"If there is to be war," Waxillium said, "giving you a powerful weapon does not seem the method to save my people. I cannot help what Suit and his people did to you—they are outlaws, and what they did was deplorable. I will see them brought to justice."

"And yet you steal from us."

"Do you deny," Waxillium asked, "that this temple was *empty* upon my arrival? Do you deny that this airship was from nation other than your own? I cannot steal what was not owned, Captain. By right of salvage, I claim this relic and that ship. You may—"

Marasi was about to step between them when, curiously, Steris spoke up, interrupting Wax.

"Lord Waxillium," she said. "I think it prudent to let them take the ship."

"What? Like hell I'm going to—"

"Waxillium," Steris said softly. "They're tired, miserable, and a long way from home. How do you suggest, otherwise, that they are to return to those they love? Is that justice?"

His lips tightened. “The Set has one of these ships to study, Steris.”

“Then,” Steris said, looking to Jordis, “we will beg—in return for the generosity of this gift—that the Malwish people open trade with us. I suspect we can purchase ships from them more quickly than the Set can build their own.”

Marasi nodded. *Not bad, Steris.*

“If they’ll sell,” Waxillium said.

“I think that they will,” Steris said, looking to Jordis. “Because the good captain will persuade them that access to our Allomancers is worth relinquishing a technological monopoly.”

“That’s true,” Marasi said, stepping up to the rest, Allik with her. “We’re rare among you, aren’t we?”

“We?” Allik asked as the captain looked to her.

“I’m an Allomancer too,” she said, amused. “You didn’t see me charging the cube device back in the warehouse?”

“I was … a little distracted.…” he said, sounding woozy. “Oh dear. Um. Great One.”

Marasi sighed, looking to Jordis.

“I can promise you nothing,” the captain said to Steris, sounding reluctant. “The Malwish are but one of many. Another nation among us may see you up here as weak and decide to strike.”

“Then,” Steris said, “you *might* want to inform them that the Bands of Mourning are here, ready to punish those who attack.”

Jordis hissed. Marasi couldn’t see her features behind the mask, but the hand swipe she made did not look pleased. “Impossible. You give me the lesser prize to distract me from the greater, yah? We will not give you the Sovereign’s weapon.”

“You’re not giving it to *us*,” Steris said. She looked to MeLaan, who watched with crossed arms. “Allik. Your people have stories of creatures like her, do you not?”

“Tell the others,” Marasi said to Allik. “Please.”

He removed his medallion and launched into a furious explanation in his language, waving his hands, then gesturing at MeLaan. She cocked an eyebrow, then made her skin translucent—displaying a skeleton that was so cracked and mangled, Marasi was left momentarily stunned. How was MeLaan still standing?

The captain took this in.

“We,” Steris said, “will give the Bands to the immortal kandra. They are wise and impartial, tasked with serving all people. They will promise not to let us use the Bands unless we are attacked by your kind."

There was no way to tell what Captain Jordis thought, her expression hidden behind that mask. When she did speak, she made a few curt gestures—but those could be faked far more easily than facial expressions, Marasi figured. What did one make of a society where everyone hid their true feelings behind a mask, only letting out calculated reactions?

"This is an unpleasant accommodation," Jordis said. "It means I will limp back to my people, half my crew dead and my ship exchanged for one decades out of date."

"True," Steris continued at Waxillium's side—he merely stood there with arms folded, *looming,* as he was so good at doing. "But Captain, you will return with something more valuable than an old relic or even your fallen ship. You'll have new trading partners in a land brimming with Metalborn. Has it been mentioned that my lord Waxillium holds an important seat in our government? That he has a dramatic influence over trade, tariffs, and taxation? Those among your people who secure favorable treaties with us could become very rich indeed."

Jordis regarded them, then folded her arms, facing Waxillium directly. "It is still unpleasant." Jordis was much shorter, but she managed to loom pretty well herself. In fact, Marasi got the distinct impression that the woman wanted to shout at them, attack in a rage, seek retribution for what had been done to her and hers. Anything but just simply trade.

Perhaps some emotions were too strong to be hidden even by a mask.

Jordis finally nodded. "Very well. Let it be done. But I will not leave without a draft agreement—a promise of intentions, if nothing else."

Marasi breathed a sigh of relief, shooting Steris a nod of appreciation. Still, she did not miss the stiffness in Jordis's posture as she and Waxillium shook hands. The Basin had not made a friend this day. Hopefully some last-minute scrambling had prevented them from making an enemy.

"I have one further request," Waxillium said to her.

"What?" Jordis asked, suspicious.

"Nothing terrible or costly," Waxillium said. "Honestly, I'd just like a ride."

* * *

The Southerners agreed, fortunately. They didn't particularly want to carry a brigful of enemy soldiers all the way south. Wax had to make it very clear they couldn't keep Suit himself, and the captain relented with minimal argument. She seemed to realize that her best chance of seeing justice done to all of those who had brutalized her crew lay in letting Wax do some thorough interrogations.

He kept his relationship to the man quiet.

As the Malwish crew prepared the ship for travel, Wax stood before the statue of the Lord Ruler, with that single spike in his eye. He'd checked the belt, which was aluminum. No kind of charge. If there had ever been two bracers, he had to assume they'd been made into this one spearhead.

Marasi passed behind him. "I'm going to go check our skimmer for supplies we might have left behind."

Wax nodded. *I held your power,* he thought toward the statue, *if only a tiny bit of it. Rusts … I think I understand.*

He'd given the Bands to MeLaan, and she had made them vanish into her flesh. He was *glad* to know that they were effectively out of his reach. Too much power.

He raised his finger in farewell to the Lord Ruler, then jogged off after Marasi.

"Aradel and the Senate won't like this deal," Wax noted as he reached her. "Particularly the part about us giving away the Bands."

"I know," Marasi said.

"As long as I can tell him it wasn't my idea."

She glanced at him. "You don't seem too broken up about losing the Bands."

"I'm not," he admitted. "I was worried, honestly. The Bands are drained, mostly, but we could probably recharge them by compounding. The power they offer is something…"

"… Sublime and devastating at once?" Marasi asked. "Dangerous because of what it could do in the wrong hands, yet somehow *more* dangerous in your own?"

"Yes."

They shared something in that moment, swept by winds. Something they'd touched, something—hopefully—only they would know.

They turned together without a word, seeking the skimmer. Jordis would want to load it on the ship, but first there was a corpse Wax needed to see. He didn't blame Wayne for what he'd done to Telsin. Yes, taking her to Elendel for justice—and interrogation—would have been better. And yes, he found that he'd rather have pulled the trigger himself. Harmony was right about that.

But either way, Telsin was dealt with. That meant—

Blood on the snow.

No skimmer.

More importantly, no body.

Marasi froze in place as they drew near, but Wax approached the empty patch of ground. She had slipped away, again. He found he was not surprised, though he was impressed. She'd gotten the skimmer aloft and away during the fighting, escaping during the chaos.

*Wayne should have known she might be able to heal herself,* Wax thought, going down on one knee beside the eerie pattern of blood drops that seemed to outline a body.

"It's not done, then," Marasi said.

Wax brushed the drops of blood, frozen to the ground. He'd spent the last eighteen months trying to save this woman. And when he finally had, she'd killed him.

"It's not done," he said. "But in some ways, that's better."

"Because your sister isn't dead?"

He turned toward Marasi. It seemed that despite hours in this frozen place, the cold had only just reached inside of him.

"No," he said. "Because now I have someone to hunt."

# 31

"Wax, you *gotta* see this!"

Wax tipped his head back, bleary-eyed. These bunks were not particularly pleasant, but at least the airship flew in a calm, smooth manner. That was nice, as the skimmer had always felt as if it were one gust of wind away from plowing nose-first into a hillside.

Wayne hung halfway out of the room's large window.

"That window opens?" Wax asked, surprised.

"Any window opens," Wayne said, "if you push hard enough. Look, you've *gotta* see this."

Wax sighed, climbing up and leaning out of the window beside Wayne. Beneath them, Elendel spread out as a vast sea of lights.

"Like rivers of fire," Wayne mumbled. "Look how it follows patterns. Rich areas more lit, roads all in lines. Beautiful."

Wax grunted.

"That's all you can say, mate?"

"Wayne, I see this basically every night."

"Now, that there, that ain't fair. You should feel guilty."

"For being a Coinshot?"

"For cheatin' at life, Wax."

"How about I feel appreciative instead?"

"Suppose that'll do."

Wax settled down on his bunk, then pulled on his boots, doing the laces. He ached like a man beaten senseless. He wished he could blame the strain of the last few days, but he'd held the Bands of Mourning and had been healed completely.

That meant these aches came merely from sleeping a few hours on this bunk. Rusts. He *was* getting old. Upon considering that, however, he found that mortality didn't frighten him as it once had.

"We should get up to the bridge," he suggested, standing. It had been a full day since they'd left the mountains. They'd stopped at a town to telegraph ahead at Wax's insistence, then waited until the next night to fly the rest of the way. He had had no intention of bringing a massive flying warship anywhere near the city without at least giving warning first.

Jordis had been amenable, once he'd promised her supplies for their trip home in repayment. Marasi worried about the captain, he knew, but he had looked into the woman's eyes behind the mask. She was a soldier, a killer, despite her claims of hers being a simple trading vessel.

She knew. Wax had held the Bands. He could have swept the Malwish away and stolen their ship without a second thought. Instead, he'd given in to Steris's compromise. Strong words notwithstanding, Jordis realized she'd gotten more out of this deal than she had any reason to expect.

Wayne joined him outside their room, and they stepped aside as a few wearied airmen passed. He couldn't see their faces, but could read a world of emotions from their hunched backs and subdued speech.

"They've been broken," Wayne whispered, looking over his shoulder as the airmen continued on. "Ain't fair what happened to these folks, Wax."

"Is life ever fair?"

"It has been to me," Wayne said. "More than fair, I reckon. Considering what I deserve."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Wax asked.

"What?"

"You used a gun, Wayne."

"Bah, that was a shotgun. Barely counts."

Wax rested a hand on his friend's shoulder.

Wayne shrugged. "Guess my body figured, 'What the hell?'"

"I thought it meant you'd forgiven yourself."

"Nah," Wayne said. "I was just real mad at your sister."

"You knew, didn't you?" Wax asked, frowning. "That she'd heal?"

"Well, I didn't wanna kill someone in cold blood—"

"That's good, I suppose."

"—but there weren't no fire around to light her with first."

"Wayne…"

The shorter man sighed. "I saw the metalminds peekin' outta her sleeves.

Figured, if you're gonna give yourself one power from a Feruchemist, you'd wanna be able to heal. I ain't gonna kill your sister, mate. But I didn't mind makin' her jump a bit, and I needed MeLaan's spikes."

Wayne's gaze grew distant. "Shoulda stayed there, I suppose. To stop her from runnin', you know? But I wasn't of sound mind, so to speak. I thought you were *dead*, mate. Really thought it. And I kept thinkin' to myself, 'Would Wax kill her for real? Or would he give her another chance, like he gave me?' So I let her be. I stayed my hand, 'cuz it was the last thing I could do for you. Does that make sense?"

Wax squeezed Wayne's shoulder. "Thank you. I'm glad you're learning."

It felt disingenuous to say that when inside, in truth, he wished Wayne had stripped off her metalminds and left her a frozen corpse.

Wayne grinned. Wax nodded in the direction the airmen had gone. "I'll meet you up there."

"Going to go fetch your woman?" Wayne said. "She's gonna have a hard time adjustin' to life back here, away from her native habitat of the frozen, icy, desolate wastes up—"

"Wayne," Wax interrupted, soft but firm.

"Hum?"

"Enough."

"I was just—"

*"Enough."*

Wayne stopped with his mouth open, then licked his lips and nodded. "Right, then. See you up above in a few, mate?"

"We'll be right along."

Wayne scampered off toward the bridge. Wax trailed through the hallway, heading down several doors to the room Steris and Marasi had been sharing. He raised his hand to knock, but it was cracked, so he peeked in. Steris lay on a bunk, wrapped in a blanket, sleeping softly. There was no sign of Marasi; she'd mentioned wanting to watch the approach to the city from the bridge.

He hesitated at the door, watching her sleep. He almost left; she'd been through so much these last few days. She had to be exhausted. Once they reached Elendel, they'd still have to unload the prisoners and bring the supplies on board—it could be hours before the ship had to leave. She could sleep a little longer, couldn't she?

The door creaked as he leaned against it, and Steris started awake. Her eyes found him immediately. Then she smiled, relaxing, and huddled up against her pillow. She was wearing a travel dress under the blanket.

Wax stepped into the room and took a seat on the bunk across from Steris;

there was so little space in this room that his knees touched her bunk after he sat. And these were the rooms the airmen considered large. He leaned forward, taking Steris's hand in his.

She squeezed it, eyes closed once more, and they sat there. Still. Everyone else could wait a few minutes.

"Thank you," Wax said softly.

"For what?" she said.

"Coming with me."

"I didn't do much."

"You were extremely helpful at the party," Wax said. "And your negotiations with the Malwish … Steris, that was incredible."

"Perhaps," she said. "But I still feel that I was basically luggage for most of the trip."

He shrugged. "Steris, I think we're all like that. Shuffled from place to place by duty, or society, or God Himself. It seems like we're just along for the ride, even in our own lives. But once in a while, we *do* face a choice. A real one. We may not be able to choose what happens to us, or where we'll stop, but we point ourselves in a direction." He squeezed her hand. "You pointed yourself toward me."

"Well," she said, smiling, "being near you *is* generally the safest place.…"

He cupped her face with his hand, all callused and rough. *Another adventure.*

Eventually, an airman came looking for them, and Wax reluctantly stood, helping Steris up. Then they walked—arm in arm—through the hallways of the ship and up to the bridge, where the others waited.

Here, Wax was able to appreciate what Wayne had seen. With the panoramic view from the bridge, the city really was gorgeous at night. *Is this a sight that will become commonplace?* Wax thought as Steris squeezed his arm, grinning at the sight. This airship technology was new, but not many years had passed since he'd seen his first motorcar on the road.

Marasi had been directing Captain Jordis through the city. Wax couldn't read anything in the captain's posture, or those of her crew. Were they impressed by the size of the city and the height of the skyscrapers? Or were these things commonplace in the South?

They approached Ahlstrom Tower, and Wax could only imagine the stories this would prompt in the broadsheets the next morning. Good. He hated subterfuge; let the people of Elendel know, to a man, that the world had just become a much larger place.

Ahlstrom Tower, in which Wax had an ownership interest, had a flat top.

The captain had assured him that she could land her ship "on a nail, so long as the head is smooth enough." True to her word, they set it down.

"You're certain you don't want to stay?" Marasi asked Jordis. "Visit our city, find out what we're *actually* like?"

"No. Thank you." The words sounded forced, to Wax. But who was to say, with the accent muddying things? "We will take your offer of supplies and be away tonight."

Time to debark. Together—the others filing after—Wax and Steris made their way through the halls again.

"It almost feels," Steris said softly, "like this entire experience was a dream. I need to write it all down quickly, lest it fade."

Wax found himself nodding as he thought of his meeting with Harmony.

The hallway led to a junction where the wall had opened and a long docking bridge had been settled in place, leading down to the rooftop. Below, Wax picked out several figures craning their necks to look at the ship. Governor Aradel had come in person.

Allik stood at the door, and he lifted his mask as Wax approached. No bow or nod, just the mask lift. Among this people, perhaps that was the same thing—as behind him, the other airmen did the same.

"Mighty One," Allik said to Wax. "May your next fire be known to you."

"And you, Allik."

"Oh, it is," he said with a grin. "For *my* next fire is home, yah?" He looked to Marasi, and then reached up and removed his mask—the broken one, which he had glued. He held it out with two hands, which caused a few gasps behind him.

"*Please*," Allik said. The word had more accent to it than the way he'd been speaking before.

The captain, who had not lifted her mask to Wax, grew stiff at the gesture. Marasi hesitated, then accepted the mask. "Thank you."

"Thank you, Miss Marasi," Allik said. "For life." He took a flat, unornamented mask from his waist and pulled it on by the leather strap. It was really nothing more than a curved piece of wood with holes for the eyes. "I look forward to my homecoming, but my next fire after that may be here again. I plan to take you up on your offer to visit this city."

"So long as you bring some more choc," Marasi said, "you can visit any time you like."

Wax smiled, and then the five of them relinquished their weight medallion metalminds to the captain, a formality they'd been instructed was customary. Jordis had already presented Wax with one of each, translation and heat-storing, as a gift for him to keep. Wayne had likely stolen another set, though Wax intended to wait until they were off the ship to ask.

Wax led them down the gangway, Steris on his arm.

"Seriously, Waxillium," Marasi said, walking up beside them. "You need to import that chocolate of theirs. I don't know what they put in it, but it's amazing. You think the airships are going to be big? Wait until you *taste* this stuff."

"Hey," Wayne said, pulling up on his other side, but then twisting his neck to look at the people in the ship behind them. "Marasi, I think that pilot fellow *fancies* you."

"Thank you," Marasi said, "for lending us your brilliant powers of observation, Wayne."

"That could be useful politically," Steris noted.

"Please," Marasi said. "He's practically a *child* compared to me. And don't you snicker."

"I wouldn't dare," Wax said, eyes ahead. He didn't miss how reverently Marasi carried the mask, however.

Ahead, a group of the governor's aides and guards clustered together in a protective bubble, as if they could stave off the weirdness before them—and what it represented—through collective body heat. Aradel himself stood apart, as if he'd pushed out of the group.

Wax strolled up to him, Steris on his arm, and waited.

"Damn," Aradel finally said.

"I *did* warn you," Wax replied.

Aradel shook his head in awe, eyes wide. "Well, maybe this will distract everyone from the disaster you all started in New Seran."

"Bad?" Steris asked.

Aradel grunted. "Senate's had my balls over the fire for two days straight, screaming about war and irresponsible leadership. As if I *ever* had any influence over you people." He started, finally ripping his gaze from the airship, and coughed—as if realizing what he'd just said, and whom he'd said it to.

Wax smiled. Aradel was blunt, but usually displayed more tact than this. You couldn't go far as a constable without *some* understanding of how to deal with people's egos.

"Apologies, Lady Harms," he said. "Ladrian, I need to hear what happened in New Seran. The honest truth of it, from your own mouth."

"You'll have it," Wax promised. "Tomorrow."

"But—"

"Governor," Wax said. "I appreciate your position, but you have *no idea* what we've been through these last few days. My people need rest. Tomorrow. Please."

Aradel grunted. "Fine."

"Did you prepare the thing I requested?" Wax asked.

"It's below," Aradel said, turning back toward the airship. "In the penthouse." The governor took a deep breath, looking at that enormous airship again. Constable-General Reddi had led a group of constables up to accept the transfer of prisoners.

Wax could now see that the ship had landed only *half* on the building. One fan spun lazily, keeping the ship in place. *Likely done that way on purpose,* he thought of the landing, *as a message. The crew wants to remind us that while we might get this technology soon, we'll still be many years behind them in its use.*

"I think we'll be fine," Wax said to Aradel. "If the outer cities had thoughts about attacking us, I suspect this might stall them. Spread the knowledge that an *airship* flew through central Elendel and let me off—then left peaceably."

"We have initial treaties in place, Your Honor," Steris added. "Favorable to us for trade. That should give the hawks pause, and could buy us time to smooth things over."

"Yes, perhaps," Aradel said. "It's going to be a tough metal for the Senate to swallow though, Ladrian. Not the airship itself, but the fact that I'm—apparently—just going to let it fly off." He hesitated. "I haven't told them what you said about the other item."

"Bands of Mourning?" Wax said.

Aradel nodded, too politic to say what Wax was certain he was thinking. *What have you gone and done to me this time, Ladrian?*

"MeLaan?" Wax asked. "Would you mind taking over here?"

"Sure," she said, striding toward them. She wore an outfit borrowed from the Southlanders, a man's breeches and boots that went up to midcalf. She rested an arm on the governor's shoulder.

"Holy One," Aradel said, his voice strained but reverent. He eyed Wax. "You realize precisely how unfair it is to deal with you, when you can fall back on heavenly messengers to talk you out of trouble?"

"That's nothing," Wax said, guiding Steris toward the steps down. "Ask me sometime about the conversation I had with God the last time I died."

"That was vicious," Steris said as they reached the steps.

"Nonsense," Wax said. "He's a politician now. He needs practice being thrown off balance in conversations. Helps him prepare for debates and such."

She eyed him.

"I'll be better," he promised, holding the door open for her. Marasi moved to join them, but Wayne caught her by the arm and shook his head.

"Better?" Steris asked from the stairwell. "So this means no more complaining about parties."

"Of course I'll gripe," Wax said, following her into the stairwell, leaving the others behind. "It's a defining character feature. But I'll try and confine the worst of it to you and Wayne."

"And I," Steris said, "shall promise to be properly amazed by your exploits saving everyone from everything." She smiled at him. "And to always carry a few vials of metal with me, just in case. By the way, where are we going?"

He grinned, guiding her down to the top floor of the skyscraper, a regal penthouse that—currently—was unoccupied, the tenants having moved to Elmsdel for an extended holiday. Seated in a chair in the hall outside the apartment proper was a tired-looking man in the garb of a Survivorist priest, his formal mistcloak—really more of a shawl—worn over robes adorned with stitching up the sleeves representing scars.

Steris looked to Wax, curious.

"I was wondering, Steris," Wax said, "if you'd be willing to be my bride."

"I've already agreed—"

"Yes, but last time I asked with an expectation of a contract," Wax said. "It was the lord of a house asking a woman of means for a union. Well, that request stands, and thank you. But I'm asking again. It's important to me.

"Will you be my bride? I want to be married to you. Right now, before the Survivor and that priest. Not because words on a paper say we have to, but because we want to." He took her by the hand, and spoke more softly. "I'm painfully tired of being alone, Steris. It's time I admitted that. And you … well, you're incredible. You truly are."

Steris started sniffling. She pulled her hand free of his and wiped her eyes.

"Is that … good crying or bad?" Wax asked. All these years dealing with women, and he still couldn't tell the difference sometimes.

"Well, this wasn't on any of my lists, you see."

"Ah." He felt his heart lurch.

"And," she continued, "I can't remember a time when I missed something for one of my lists, only to have it be so wonderful." She nodded, red-nosed and sniffly. "And it is. Thank you, Lord Waxillium." She paused. "But tonight! So soon? Don't the others deserve to attend a wedding?"

"They *did* attend one," Wax said. "It's not our fault there wasn't a marriage at the end. So … what do you think? I mean, if you're tired from the trip, don’t let me pressure you. I just thought—”

In response, she kissed him.

# EPILOGUE

Marasi found it invigorating to work by candlelight. Perhaps it was the primordial danger of it. Electric lights felt safe, contained, harnessed—but an open flame, well, that was something raw. Alive. A little spark of fury which, if released, could destroy her and everything she worked on.

She worked with a lot of such sparks these days.

Spread on her desk in the octant constabulary headquarters were notes, files, interviews. She'd been present for most of them over the last two weeks, advising Constable-General Reddi. The two of them worked so closely these days, it was sometimes hard to remember how difficult he'd been to her during her early days in the constabulary.

Though Suit himself hadn't broken, many of his men had talked. They knew just enough to be infuriating. They'd been recruited from among the dissident young men of the outer cities—their ears stuffed with stories of the Survivor and his fight against imperial rule. They'd been trained in cities like Rashekin and Bilming, far from central rule. In closed compounds that were much more extensive than anyone had known.

Aradel and the others had focused on these details. Troops, timetables, technology—like the long-distance speaking device Waxillium had stolen from Lady Kelesina's mansion. They geared up for war, all the while talking peace.

They were scared, and legitimately so. Decades of not-so-benign neglect had created this snarl. Hopefully it could still be peacefully untangled. Marasi left that to politicians. She cut through the jingoism, the rhetoric, and turned her attention to something else. Stories among the men of something unusual, beyond the rumors of airships and new Allomantic metals.

She held up one sheet covered in notes. Half mentions, admissions made with sideways glances, always spoken of in whispers. Tales of men with red eyes who visited in the night. She added the stories to her files of research about Trell, the ancient god that people were somehow worshipping again. A god that had crafted spikes to corrupt the kandra Paalm, and whose name was on the lips of many of the prisoners.

She'd spent months researching, and so far felt like she knew nothing. But she *would* find answers, one way or another.

* * *

Suit's captors thought to shock him with the austerity of his quarters. A common cell in the prison's nethers, with a bucket for facilities and one blanket on the bed. A tired, pointless tactic. As if he'd known only rose petals and feather beds in his life; as if he'd never slept on a stone slab.

Well, they would see. Anything could be an advantage. In this case, it was a chance to prove himself. He would not break, and they would see.

So it was that he wasn't at all surprised when, after two weeks of captivity, the door to the corridor outside his cell clicked open one night and a stranger stalked in. Male this time, with a ragged beard and wild hair. A beggar stolen off the street, Suit guessed.

You could tell them by the way they walked. Never a stroll, never leisurely. Always fast, determined. Purposeful.

Of course, the softly glowing red eyes were another sign. So far as Suit had been able to determine, Waxillium and his fools had no knowledge of these creatures. They didn't understand, couldn't understand.

The Set had Faceless Immortals of its own.

Suit stood, pulling down the sleeves of his prisoner's jumpsuit and swiping the wrinkles from his shoulders. "Two weeks is longer than I expected."

"Our timeline is not yours."

"I was not complaining," Suit said. "Merely observing. I am perfectly willing to wait upon Trell's pleasure."

"Are you?" the Immortal asked. "It is our understanding that you push for an acceleration."

"I was merely stating my perspective," Suit said. "So that a proper discourse can be engaged."

The creature studied him through the bars. "You didn't break or spill secrets."

"I did not."

"We are impressed."

"Thank you."

Advantage. Even two weeks in prison can be used to prove a point.

“The timeline will be accelerated, as you have requested,” the Immortal said.

“Excellent!”

The creature reached into its pocket and removed a device like a small package wrapped in wires. One of Irich’s early attempts at creating an explosive device from the metal that powered the airships. It had proven ineffective, barely more explosive than dynamite, when they needed something that could end cities.

“What is that?” Suit asked, growing nervous.

“Our accelerated pace will no longer require the Set to have its full hierarchy.”

“But you need us!” Suit said. “To rule, to manage civilization on—”

“No longer. Recent advances have made civilization here too dangerous. Allowing it to continue risks further advances we cannot control, and so we have decided to remove life on this sphere instead. Thank you for your service; it has been accepted. You will be allowed to serve in another Realm.”

“But—”

The creature engaged the explosive device, blowing itself—and Suit—to oblivion.

* * *

Wax started awake. Had that been an explosion?

He looked around the quiet bedroom suite of the tower penthouse. Steris curled up on the bed next to him, perfectly still in her sleep, though she held lightly to his arm. She often did that, as if afraid to let go and risk all this ending.

Looking at her there in the starlight, he was shocked by the deep affection he felt for her. His surprise didn’t concern him. He could remember many a morning waking next to Lessie, feeling that same surprise. Amazement at his good fortune, astonishment at the depth of his own emotion.

He gently lifted her hand away, then pulled the sheet up around her before slipping from the bed and strolling bare-chested across the room toward the balcony.

They’d stayed here in the penthouse through the honeymoon, rather than returning to the mansion. It felt like a good way to have a new beginning, and Wax was starting to think he might like to relocate here more permanently. He was a new person for what seemed like the hundredth time in his life, and this was a new age. This was no longer an era of quiet mansions and smoking-room conversations; it was an era of bold skyscrapers and vibrant downtown politics.

The mists were out, curling around outside, though the skyscraper was tall enough he thought he could see stars and the Red Rip through that mist. He moved to push open the doors and step out onto the balcony, but paused, noticing his dressing table, upon which Drewton had set out a row of objects. The valet had gone through Wax's things, from his pockets and from his possessions recovered from the hotel in New Seran. Drewton probably wanted to know which should be kept, and which disposed of.

Wax smiled, brushing his fingers over the wrinkled cravat he'd worn to the party with Steris. He remembered tossing it to the ground as he changed to trousers and mistcoat in his room, prior to their quick escape from the city. Drewton had laid it out, along with a napkin from the party, monogrammed, and even a bottle cap he'd swiped in case he needed something to Push on. But Drewton had set it out on its own little cloth as if it might be the most important thing in the world.

Wax shook his head, resting a hand on the door out to the balcony. Then he froze and looked back at the table.

It was right there. The coin he'd been given by the beggar, shining in the faint starlight. Drewton must have found it in his pocket. Wax reached out, hesitated a moment, and then slipped it from the table before stepping out into the mist.

*Could it be?* he wondered, holding up the coin. Two different metals. One was silvery. Could that be nicrosil? The other was copper. A Feruchemical metal. Though the pattern printed on the face wasn't the same, and the coin itself was smaller, this didn't look all that different from one of the Southerner medallions.

As soon as he thought of it—as soon as he knew what it might do—the metalmind started working, and he found a store within him, a reserve he could tap. Wax gasped.

They called them copperminds. A very special kind of Feruchemical storage. One that stored memories.

He tapped it.

Immediately, Wax was in a different place. A barren land, with no one in sight and only dust blowing around him. It was a difficult perspective to experience, for only half of the viewer's eyesight was normal.

The other was all in blue, lines everywhere. The vision of a man spiked through the eye.

The figure crossed those desolate reaches, passing half-tended crops left to die and rattle in the wind. Ahead lay a town—or the remnants of one.

He heard his own boots on the dirty rock, the wind blowing, and felt cold. He continued on into the town, passing foundations marked by old, burned-out fires. Somehow, he knew that the inhabitants here—as in other villages and towns he'd passed—had torn down their own walls for firewood, in desperation to survive.

Bodies lay in the street, stripped. Their clothing had been taken for burning after they'd frozen in what most men would consider only mildly cold weather.

Ahead stood a bunkerlike stone dwelling. Long and narrow, it reminded him of something—not something Wax knew, but a memory in the mind of the man storing this experience. A memory of something long ago that flickered in his consciousness, then was lost in a moment.

The traveler continued, stepping up to the doorway, which was open. They'd burned the door.

Inside, a mass of people huddled together for warmth, wrapped uselessly in blankets. No fires left.

They'd burned even their masks.

The traveler moved among them, drawing some concern, though most people stared with dull eyes. Awaiting death. He found the leaders near the center, the elders, aged and wearing cloth masks on their faces—the only things they had left. One ancient woman looked up at him and lifted her mask.

He saw her normally in one world, and outlined in blue in another. The traveler reached out and took the woman by the shoulder, kneeled down, and whispered a single word.

Wax came out of that memory with a shock, dropping the coin, startled and stepping back.

The coin plinged against the balcony and settled to a stop near his feet.

That arm … That *arm*. Lined with a network of scars layered atop one another, as if made by scraping the skin time and time again. The haunting word he'd spoken echoed in Wax's mind.

*"Survive."*

# POSTSCRIPT

Marasi, Wax, and Wayne will return in *The Lost Metal*, the epic finale of Mistborn: Era Two. I plan to release this after *Oathbringer*, the third volume of the Stormlight Archive, which I'm hard at work writing at this moment.

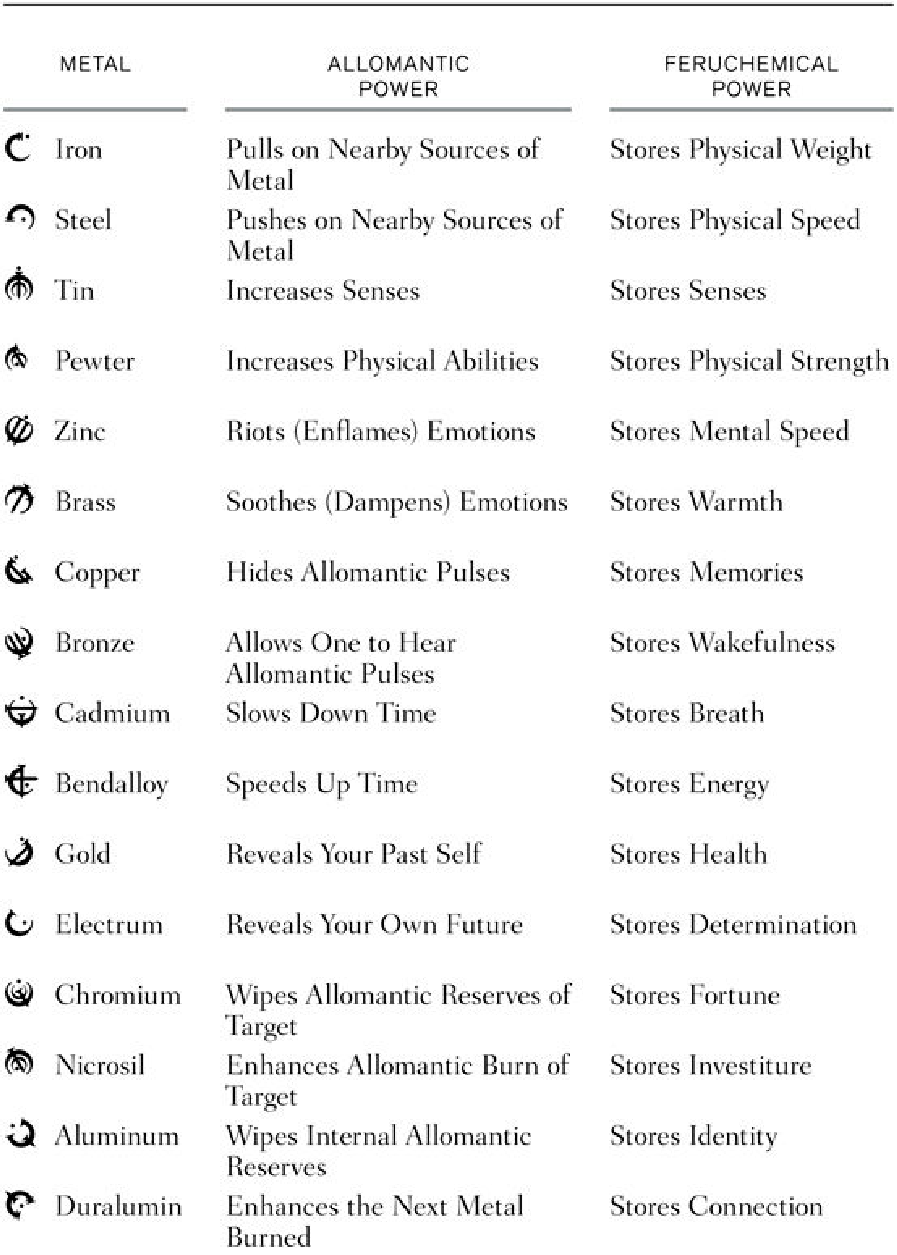
To tide you over until *Oathbringer*, I have just released a special digital-only novella that is intended to be read after *The Bands of Mourning*, though it takes place during the events of the original Mistborn Trilogy. Ten years in the making, *Mistborn: Secret History* might answer a few of your questions.

There's always another secret.

BRANDON SANDERSON
*January 2016*

# ARS ARCANUM

## METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART



| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Weight |
| Steel | Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal | Stores Physical Speed |
| Tin | Increases Senses | Stores Senses |
| Pewter | Increases Physical Abilities | Stores Physical Strength |
| Zinc | Riots (Enflames) Emotions | Stores Mental Speed |
| Brass | Soothes (Dampens) Emotions | Stores Warmth |
| Copper | Hides Allomantic Pulses | Stores Memories |
| Bronze | Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses | Stores Wakefulness |
| Cadmium | Slows Down Time | Stores Breath |
| Bendalloy | Speeds Up Time | Stores Energy |
| Gold | Reveals Your Past Self | Stores Health |
| Electrum | Reveals Your Own Future | Stores Determination |
| Chromium | Wipes Allomantic Reserves of Target | Stores Fortune |
| Nicrosil | Enhances Allomantic Burn of Target | Stores Investiture |
| Aluminum | Wipes Internal Allomantic Reserves | Stores Identity |
| Duralumin | Enhances the Next Metal Burned | Stores Connection |

**LIST OF METALS**

**ALUMINUM:** A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of his or her metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their spiritual sense of identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them it is not yet well understood. Aluminum itself and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

**BENDALLOY:** Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluids intake.

**BRASS:** Soother Mistings burn brass to Soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

**BRONZE:** Seeker Mistings burn bronze to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

**CADMIUM:** Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

**CHROMIUM:** Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer’s metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

**COPPER:** Coppercloud Mistings (a.k.a. Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields the Smoker from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

**DURALUMIN:** A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals' power. Mistings who can burn Duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connecter Ferrings can store spiritual connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people's awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

**ELECTRUM:** Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

**GOLD:** Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

**IRON:** Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

**NICROSIL:** Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

**PEWTER:** Pewterarm Mistings (a.k.a. Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

**STEEL:** Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot’s center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

**TIN:** Tineye Mistings who burn tin increase the sensitivity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the sensitivity of one of the five senses into a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their sensitivity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

**ZINC:** Rioter Mistings burn zinc to Riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

## ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally these are spoken of as the “Metallic Arts,” though there are other names for them.

**Allomancy** is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology—meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their Spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn’t actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn’t much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the “God Metals” locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, however, the other metals are not in wide use.

**Feruchemy** is still widely known and used at this point on Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren’t spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the interbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if one could make metalminds out of alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

**Hemalurgy** is widely unknown in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world’s rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra, who (for the most part) serve Harmony.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many throughout history have maligned it as an “evil” art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual Realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great import to the cosmere, it is this one. I think there are many possibilities for its use.

### COMBINATIONS

It is possible on Scadrial to be born with ability to access both Allomancy and Feruchemy. This has been of specific interest to me lately, as the mixing of different types of Investiture has curious effects. One needs look only at what has happened on Roshar to find this manifested—two powers, combined, often have an almost chemical reaction. Instead of getting out exactly what you put in, you get something new.

On Scadrial, someone with one Allomantic power and one Feruchemical power is called “Twinborn.” The effects here are more subtle than they are when mixing Surges on Roshar, but I am convinced that each unique combination also creates something distinctive. Not just two powers, you could say, but two powers … and an effect. This demands further study.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nazrilof

Brandon Sanderson grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He lives in Utah with his wife and children and teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. He is the author of such bestsellers as the Mistborn® trilogy and its sequels, *The Alloy of Law* and *Shadows of Self;* the Stormlight Archive novels *The Way of Kings* and *Words of Radiance;* and other novels, including *The Rithmatist* and *Steelheart*. In 2013, he won a Hugo Award for Best Novella for *The Emperor's Soul*, set in the world of his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*. Additionally, he was chosen to complete Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time® sequence. For behind-the-scenes information on all of Brandon Sanderson's books, visit brandonsanderson.com. Or sign up for email updates here.

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*Words of Radiance*

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1. Metals Quick Reference Chart
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3. On the Three Metallic Arts

About the Author

By Brandon Sanderson from Tom Doherty Associates

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THE BANDS OF MOURNING

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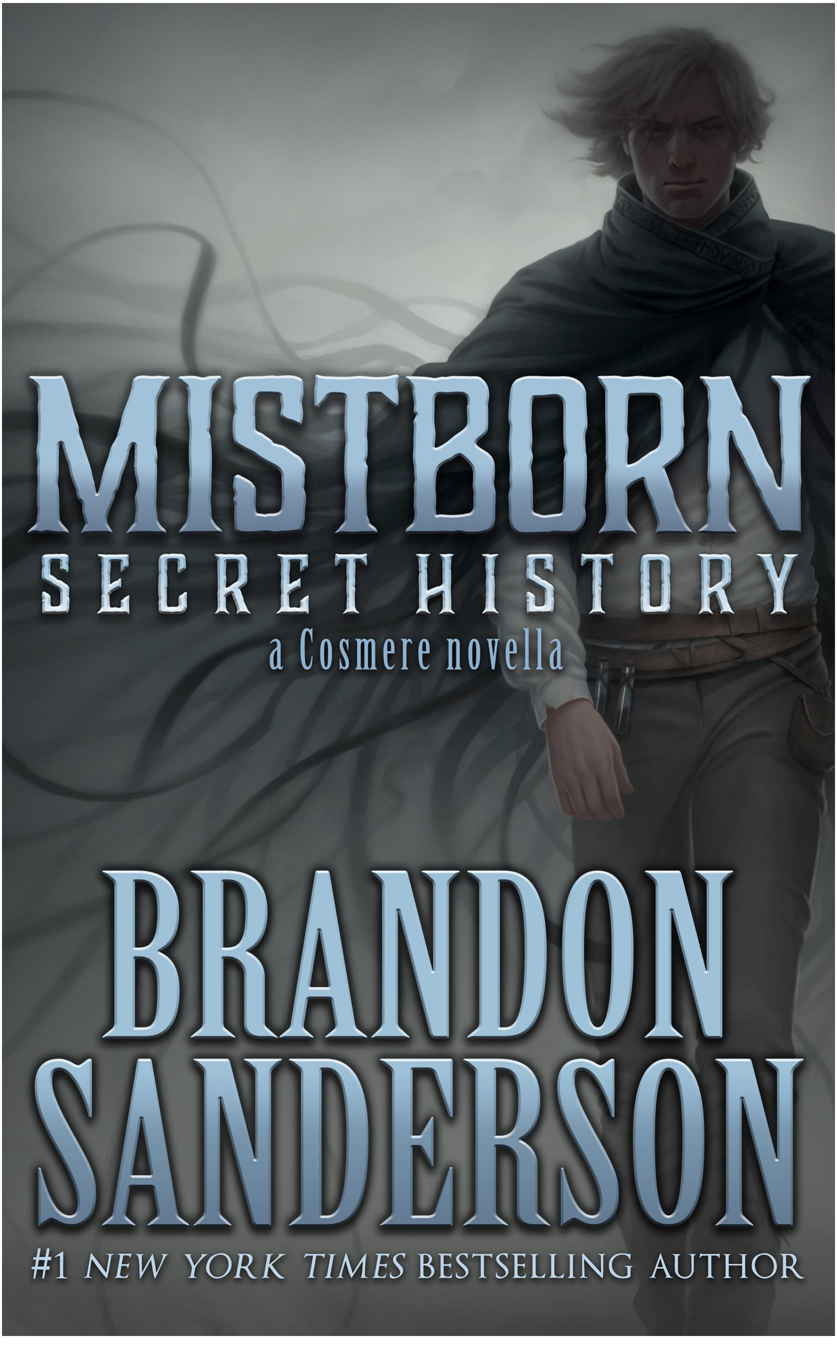

# MISTBORN

## SECRET HISTORY

a Cosmere novella

BRANDON SANDERSON

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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## SECRET HISTORY

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DRAGONSTEEL ENTERTAINMENT

# PREFACE

This story contains enormous spoilers for the first three Mistborn novels. Seriously, please don't read this unless you've read those books. I'd actually prefer you wait until you've finished book six, *The Bands of Mourning*, because some of the reveals in this story will spoil that book as well.

What follows is something I started planning in 2004, over a decade ago at this point. For years I wasn't certain if I'd be able to write it; it depended on how popular Mistborn was, and on whether people cared about the greater cosmere or not.

Well, responses to both have been incredible. So, off and on over the years I worked on scenes for this when I had a spare moment. Though I love how it turned out, I want to warn you. Structurally, this isn't like most pieces I've written. It relies on knowledge of the original Mistborn Trilogy, and though it tells its own cohesive narrative, the elements of that narrative are scattered across three years' time in-world.

That creates something unlike anything I've done before. Something weird, but audacious in its own right.

Now, it's finally time to reveal some secrets.

FOR NATHAN HATFIELD

*Who helped Mistborn come to be*

## Part One

# Empire

# 1

Kelsier burned the Eleventh Metal.

Nothing changed. He still stood in that Luthadel square, facing down the Lord Ruler. A hushed audience, both skaa and noble, watched at the perimeter. A squeaking wheel turned lazily in the wind, hanging from the side of the overturned prison wagon nearby. An Inquisitor's head had been nailed to the wood of the wagon's bottom, held in place by its own spikes.

Nothing changed, while everything changed. For to Kelsier's eyes, two men now stood before him.

One was the immortal emperor who had dominated for a thousand years: an imposing figure with jet-black hair and a chest stuck through with two spears that he didn't even seem to notice. Next to him stood a man with the same features—but a completely different demeanor. A figure cloaked in thick furs, nose and cheeks flush as if cold. His hair was tangled and windswept, his attitude jovial, smiling.

It was the same man.

*Can I use this?* Kelsier thought, frantic.

Black ash fell lightly between them. The Lord Ruler glanced toward the Inquisitor that Kelsier had killed. "Those are very hard to replace," he said, his voice imperious.

That tone seemed a direct contrast to the man beside him: a vagabond, a mountain man wearing the Lord Ruler's face. *This is what you really are,* Kelsier thought. But that didn't help. It was only further proof that the Eleventh Metal wasn't what Kelsier had once hoped. The metal was no magical solution for ending the Lord Ruler. He would have to rely instead upon his other plan.

And so, Kelsier smiled.

"I killed you once," the Lord Ruler said.

"You tried," Kelsier replied, his heart racing. The other plan, the secret plan. "But you can't kill me, Lord Tyrant. I represent that thing you've never been able to kill, no matter how hard you try. I am hope."

The Lord Ruler snorted. He raised a casual arm.

Kelsier braced himself. He could not fight against someone who was immortal.

Not alive, at least.

*Stand tall. Give them something to remember.*

The Lord Ruler backhanded him. Agony hit Kelsier like a stroke of lightning. In that moment, Kelsier flared the Eleventh Metal, and caught a glimpse of something new.

The Lord Ruler standing in a room—no, a cavern! The Lord Ruler stepped into a glowing pool and the world shifted around him, rocks crumbling, the room twisting, everything *changing.*

The vision vanished.

Kelsier died.

It turned out to be far more painful a process than he had anticipated. Instead of a soft fade to nothingness, he felt an awful *tearing* sensation—as if he were a cloth caught between the jaws of two vicious hounds.

He screamed, desperately trying to hold himself together. His will meant nothing. He was rent, ripped, and hurled into a place of endless shifting mists.

He stumbled to his knees, gasping, aching. He wasn't certain what he knelt upon, as downward seemed to just be more mist. The ground rippled like liquid, and felt soft to his touch.

He knelt there, enduring, feeling the pain slowly fade away. At last he unclenched his jaw and groaned.

He was alive. Kind of.

He managed to look up. That same thick greyness shifted all around him. A nothingness? No, he could see shapes in it, shadows. Hills? And high in the sky, some kind of light. A tiny sun perhaps, as seen through dense grey clouds.

Kelsier breathed in and out, then growled, heaving himself to his feet. "Well," he proclaimed, "*that* was thoroughly awful."

It did seem there was an afterlife, which was a pleasant discovery. Did this mean . . . did this mean Mare was still out there somewhere? He'd always offered platitudes, talking to the others about being with her again someday. But deep down he'd never believed, never really thought . . .

The end was not the end. Kelsier smiled again, this time truly excited. He turned about, and as he inspected his surroundings, the mists seemed to withdraw. No, it felt like Kelsier was *solidifying*, entering this place fully. The withdrawal of the mists was more like a clearing of his own mind.

The mists coalesced into shapes. Those shadows he'd mistaken for hills were buildings, hazy and formed of shifting mists. The ground beneath his feet was also mist, a deep vastness, like he was standing on the surface of the ocean. It was soft to his touch, like cloth, and even a little springy.

Nearby lay the overturned prison wagon, but here it was made of mist. That mist shifted and moved, but the wagon retained its form. It was like the mist was trapped by some unseen force into a specific shape. More strikingly, the wagon's prison bars *glowed* on this side. Complementing them, other white-hot pinpricks of light appeared around him, dotting the landscape. Doorknobs. Window latches. Everything in the living world was reflected here in this place, and while most things were shadowy mist, metal instead appeared as a powerful light.

Some of those lights moved. He frowned, stepping toward one, and only then did he recognize that many of the lights were people. He saw each as an intense white glow radiating out from a human form.

*Metal and souls are the same thing,* he observed. Who would have thought?

As he got his bearings, he recognized what was happening in the living world. Thousands of lights moved, flowing away. The crowd was running from the square. A powerful light, with a tall silhouette, strode in another direction. The Lord Ruler.

Kelsier tried to follow, but stumbled over something at his feet. A misty form slumped on the ground, pierced by a spear. Kelsier's own corpse.

Touching it was like remembering a fond experience. Familiar scents from his youth. His mother's voice. The warmth of lying on a hillside with Mare, looking up at the falling ash.

Those experiences faded and seemed to grow *cold*. One of the lights from the mass of fleeing people—it was hard to make out individuals, with everyone alight—scrambled toward him. At first he thought perhaps this person had seen his spirit. But no, they ran to his corpse and knelt.

Now that she was close, he could make out the details of this figure's features, cut of mist and glowing from deep within.

"Ah, child," Kelsier said. "I'm sorry." He reached out and cupped Vin's face as she wept over him, and found he could feel her. She was solid to his ethereal fingers. She didn't seem able to feel his touch, but he caught a vision of her from the real world, cheeks stained with tears.

His last words to her had been harsh, hadn't they? Perhaps it was a good thing that he and Mare had never had children.

A glowing figure surged from the fleeing masses and grabbed Vin. Was that Ham? Had to be, with that profile. Kelsier stood up and watched them withdraw. He had set plans in motion for them. Perhaps they would hate him for that.

"You let him kill you."

Kelsier spun, surprised to find a person standing beside him. Not a figure made of mist, but a man in strange clothing: a thin wool coat that went down almost to his feet, and beneath it a shirt that laced closed, with a kind of conical skirt. That was tied with a belt that had a bone-handled knife stuck through a loop.

The man was short, with black hair and a prominent nose. Unlike the other people—who were made of light—this man looked normal, like Kelsier. Since Kelsier was dead, did this make the man another ghost?

"Who are you?" Kelsier demanded.

"Oh, I think you know." The man met Kelsier's eyes, and in them Kelsier saw eternity. A cool, calm eternity—the eternity of stones that saw generations pass, or of careless depths that didn't notice the changing of days, for light never reached them anyway.

"Oh, hell," Kelsier said. "There's actually a God?"

"Yes."

Kelsier decked him.

It was a good, clean punch, thrown from the shoulder while he brought his other arm up to block a counter strike. Dox would be proud.

God didn't dodge. Kelsier's punch took him right across the face, connecting with a satisfying *thud*. The punch tossed God to the ground, though when he looked up he seemed more shocked than pained.

Kelsier stepped forward. “What the hell is wrong with you? You’re real, and you’re letting *this* happen?” He waved toward the square where—to his horror—he saw lights winking out. The Inquisitors were attacking the crowd.

“I do what I can.” The fallen figure seemed to distort for a moment, bits of him expanding, like mists escaping an enclosure. “I do . . . I do what I can. It is in motion, you see. I . . .”

Kelsier recoiled a step, eyes widening as God *came apart*, then pulled back together.

Around him, other souls made the transition. Their bodies stopped glowing, then their souls lurched into this land of mists: stumbling, falling, as if ejected from their bodies. Once they arrived, Kelsier saw them in color. The same man—God—appeared near each of them. There were suddenly over a dozen versions of him, each identical, each speaking to one of the dead.

The version of God near Kelsier stood up and rubbed his jaw. “Nobody has ever done that before.”

“What, really?” Kelsier asked.

“No. Souls are usually too disoriented. Some do run, though.” He looked to Kelsier.

Kelsier made fists. God stepped back and—amusingly—reached for the knife at his belt.

Well, Kelsier wasn’t going to attack him, not again. But he *had* heard the challenge in those words. Would he run? Of course not. Where would he run to?

Nearby, an unfortunate skaa woman lurched into the afterlife, then almost immediately *faded*. Her figure stretched, transforming to a white mist that was pulled toward a distant, dark point. That was how it looked, at least, though the point she stretched toward wasn’t a place—not really. It was . . . Beyond. A location that was somehow distant, pointing away from him no matter where he moved.

She stretched, then faded away. Other spirits in the square followed.

Kelsier spun on God. “What’s happening?”

“You didn’t think *this* was the end, did you?” God asked, waving toward the shadowy world. “This is the in-between step. After death and before . . .”

“Before what?”

"Before the Beyond," God said. "The Somewhere Else. Where souls must go. Where *yours* must go."

"I haven't gone yet."

"It takes longer for Allomancers, but it will happen. It is the natural progress of things, like a stream flowing toward the ocean. I'm here not to make it occur, but to comfort you as you go. I see it as a kind of . . . duty that comes with my position." He rubbed the side of his face and gave Kelsier a glare that said what he thought of his reception.

Nearby, another pair of people faded into the eternities. They seemed to accept it, stepping into the stretching nothingness with relieved, welcoming smiles. Kelsier looked at those departing souls.

"Mare," he whispered.

"She went Beyond. As you will."

Kelsier looked toward that point Beyond, the point toward which all the dead were being drawn. He felt it, faintly, begin to tug on him as well.

*No. Not yet.*

"We need a plan," Kelsier said.

"A plan?" God asked.

"To get me out of this. I might need your help."

"There *is* no way out of this."

"That's a terrible attitude," Kelsier said. "We'll never get anything done if you talk like that."

He looked at his arm, which was—disconcertingly—starting to blur, like ink on a page that had been accidentally brushed before it dried. He felt a *draining*.

He started walking, forcing himself into a stride. He wouldn't just stand there while eternity tried to suck him away.

"It is natural to feel uncertain," God said, falling into step beside him. "Many are anxious. Be at peace. The ones you left behind will find their own way, and you—"

"Yes, great," Kelsier said. "No time for lectures. Talk to me. Has anyone ever resisted being pulled into the Beyond?"

"No." God's form pulsed, unraveling again before coming back together. "I've told you already."

*Damn,* Kelsier thought. *He seems one step from falling apart himself.*

Well, you had to work with what you had. "You've got to have some kind of idea what I could try, Fuzz."

"What did you call me?"

"Fuzz. I've got to call you something."

"You could try 'My Lord,'" Fuzz said with a huff.

"That's a terrible nickname for a crewmember."

"Crewmember . . ."

"I need a team," Kelsier said, still striding through the shadowy version of Luthadel. "And as you can see, my options are limited. I'd rather have Dox, but he's got to go deal with the man who is claiming to be you. Besides, the initiation to this particular team of mine is a killer."

"But—"

Kelsier turned, taking the smaller man by the shoulders. Kelsier's arms were blurring further, drawn away like water being pulled into the current of an invisible stream.

"Look," Kelsier said quietly, urgently, "you said you were here to comfort me. This is how you do it. If you're right, then nothing I do now will matter. So why not humor me? Let me have one last thrill as I face down the ultimate eventuality."

Fuzz sighed. "It would be better if you accepted what is happening."

Kelsier held Fuzz's gaze. Time was running out; he could *feel* himself sliding toward oblivion, a distant point of nothingness, dark and unknowable. Still he held that gaze. If this creature acted anything like the human he resembled, then holding his eyes—with confidence, smiling, self-assured—would work. Fuzz would bend.

"So," Fuzz said. "You're not only the first to punch me, you're also the first to try to *recruit* me. You are a distinctively strange man."

"You don't know my friends. Next to them I'm normal. Ideas please." He started walking up a street, moving just to be moving. Tenements loomed on either side, made of shifting mists. They looked like the ghosts of buildings. Occasionally a wave—a shimmer of light—would pulse through the ground and buildings, causing the mists to writhe and twist.

"I don't know what you expect me to tell you," Fuzz said, hustling up to walk beside him. "Spirits who come to this place are drawn into the Beyond."

"You aren't."

"I'm a god."

*A god. Not just "God." Noted.*

"Well," Kelsier said, "what is it about being a god that makes you immune?”

“Everything.”

“I can’t help thinking you aren’t pulling your weight on this team, Fuzz. Come on. Work with me. You indicated that Allomancers last longer. Feruchemists too?”

“Yes.”

“People with power,” Kelsier said, pointing toward the distant spires of Kredik Shaw. This was the road the Lord Ruler had taken, heading toward his palace. Though the Lord Ruler’s carriage was now distant, Kelsier could still see his soul glowing up there somewhere. Far brighter than the others.

“What about him?” Kelsier said. “You say that everyone has to bend to death, but obviously that isn’t true. He is immortal.”

“He’s a special case,” Fuzz said, perking up. “He has ways of not dying in the first place.”

“And if he did die?” Kelsier pressed. “He’d last even longer on this side than I am, right?”

“Oh, indeed,” Fuzz said. “He Ascended, if just for a short time. He held enough of the power to expand his soul.”

*Got it. Expand my soul.*

“I . . .” God wavered, figure distorting. “I . . .” He cocked his head. “What was I saying?”

“About how the Lord Ruler expanded his soul.”

“That was delightful,” God said. “It was spectacular to watch! And now he is *Preserved*. I am glad you didn’t find a way to destroy him. Everyone else passes, but not him. It’s wonderful.”

“Wonderful?” Kelsier felt like spitting. “He’s a tyrant, Fuzz.”

“He’s unchanging,” God said, defensive. “He’s a brilliant specimen. So unique. I don’t agree with what he does, but one can empathize with the lamb while admiring the lion, can one not?”

“Why not stop him? If you disagree with what he does, then do something about it!”

“Now, now,” God said. “That would be hasty. What would removing him accomplish? It would just raise another leader who is more transient—and cause chaos and even more deaths than the Lord Ruler has caused. Better to have stability. Yes. A constant leader.”

Kelsier felt himself stretching further. He’d go soon. It didn’t seem his new body could sweat, for if it could have his forehead would certainly be drenched by now.

“Maybe you would enjoy watching another do as he did,” Kelsier said. “Expand their soul.”

“Impossible. The power at the Well of Ascension won’t be gathered and ready for more than a year.”

“*What?*” Kelsier said. The *Well of Ascension*?

He dredged through his memories, trying to remember the things Sazed had told him of religion and belief. The scope of it threatened to overwhelm him. He’d been playing at rebellion and thrones—focusing on religion only when he thought it might benefit his plans—and all the while, *this* had been in the background. Ignored and unnoticed.

He felt like a child.

Fuzz kept speaking, oblivious to Kelsier’s awakening. “But no, you wouldn’t be able to use the Well. I’ve failed at locking him away. I knew I would; he’s stronger. His essence seeps out in natural forms. Solid, liquid, gas. Because of how we created the world. He has plans. But are they deeper than my plans, or have I finally outthought him . . . ?”

Fuzz distorted again. His diatribe made little sense to Kelsier. He felt as if it was important, but it just wasn’t *urgent*.

“Power is returning to the Well of Ascension,” Kelsier said.

Fuzz hesitated. “Hm. Yes. Um, but it’s far, far away. Yes, too far for you to go. Too bad.”

God, it turned out, was a terrible liar.

Kelsier seized him, and the little man cringed.

“Tell me,” Kelsier said. “Please. I can feel myself stretching away, falling, being pulled. Please.”

Fuzz yanked out of his grip. Kelsier’s fingers . . . or rather, his soul’s fingers . . . weren’t working as well any longer.

“No,” Fuzz said. “No, it is not right. If you touched it, you might just add to his power. You will go as all others.”

*Very well,* Kelsier thought. *A con, then.*

He let himself slump against the wall of a ghostly building. He sighed, settling down in a seated position, back to the wall. “All right.”

“See, there!” Fuzz said. “Better. Much better, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Kelsier said.

God seemed to relax. With discomfort, Kelsier noticed God was still leaking. Mist slipped away from his body at a few pinprick points. This creature was like a wounded beast, placidly going about its daily life while ignoring the bite marks.

Remaining motionless was hard. Harder than facing down the Lord Ruler had been. Kelsier wanted to run, to scream, to scramble and move. That sensation of being drawn away was *horrible*.

Somehow he feigned relaxation. "You asked," he said, as if very tired and having trouble forcing it out, "me a question? When you first appeared?"

"Oh!" Fuzz said. "Yes. You let him kill you. I had not expected that."

"You're God. Can't you see the future?"

"To an extent," Fuzz said, animated. "But it is cloudy, so cloudy. Too many possibilities. I did not see this among them, though it was probably there. You must tell me. Why *did* you let him kill you? At the end, you just stood there."

"I couldn't have gotten away," Kelsier said. "Once the Lord Ruler arrived, there was no escaping. I had to confront him."

"You didn't even fight."

"I used the Eleventh Metal."

"Foolishness," God said. He started pacing. "That was Ruin's influence on you. But what was the point? I can't understand why he wanted you to have that useless metal." He perked up. "And that *fight*. You and the Inquisitor. Yes, I've seen many things, but that was unlike any other. Impressive, though I wish you hadn't caused such destruction, Kelsier."

He returned to pacing, but seemed to have more of a spring to his step. Kelsier hadn't expected God to be so . . . human. Excitable, even energetic.

"I saw something," Kelsier said, "as the Lord Ruler killed me. The person as he might once have been. His past? A version of his past? He stood at the Well of Ascension."

"Did you? Hmm. Yes, the metal, flared during the moment of transition. You got a glimpse of the Spiritual Realm, then? His Connection and his past? You were using Ati's essence, unfortunately. One shouldn't trust it, even in a diluted form. Except . . ." He frowned, cocking his head, as if trying to remember something he'd forgotten.

"Another god," Kelsier whispered, closing his eyes. "You said . . . you trapped him?"

"He will break free eventually. It's inevitable. But the prison isn't my last gambit. It can't be."

*Perhaps I* should *just let go,* Kelsier thought, drifting.

"There now," God said. "Farewell, Kelsier. You served *him* more often than you did me, but I can respect your intentions, *and* your remarkable ability to Preserve yourself."

"I saw it," Kelsier whispered. "A cavern high in the mountains. The Well of Ascension . . ."

"Yes," Fuzz said. "That's where I put it."

"But . . ." Kelsier said, stretching, "he moved it. . . ."

"Naturally."

What would the Lord Ruler do, with a source of such power? Hide it far away?

Or keep it very, very close? Near to his fingertips. Hadn't Kelsier seen furs, like the ones he'd seen the Lord Ruler wearing in his vision? He'd seen them in a room, past an Inquisitor. A building within a building, hidden within the depths of the palace.

Kelsier opened his eyes.

Fuzz spun toward him. "What—"

Kelsier heaved himself to his feet and started running. There wasn't much *self* to him left, just a fuzzy blurred image. The feet that he ran upon were distorted smudges, his form a pulled-out, unraveling piece of cloth. He barely found purchase upon the misty ground, and when he stumbled against a building, he *pushed* through it, ignoring the wall as one might a stiff breeze.

"So you *are* a runner," Fuzz said, appearing beside him. "Kelsier, child, this accomplishes nothing. I suppose I should have expected nothing less from you. Frantically butting against your destiny until the last moment."

Kelsier barely heard the words. He focused on the run, on resisting that grip *hauling* him backward, into the nothing. He raced the grip of death itself, its cold fingers closing around him.

Run.

Concentrate.

Struggle to *be*.

The flight reminded him of another time, climbing through a pit, arms bloodied. He would *not be taken*!

The pulsing became his guide, that wave that washed periodically through the shadowy world. He sought its source. He barreled through buildings, crossed thoroughfares, ignoring both metal and the souls of men until he reached the grey mist silhouette of Kredik Shaw, the Hill of a Thousand Spires.

Here, Fuzz seemed to grasp what was going on.

“You zinctongued raven,” the god said, moving beside him without effort while Kelsier ran with everything he had. “You’re not going to reach it in time.”

He was running through mists again. Walls, people, buildings faded. Nothing but dark, swirling mists.

But the mists had never been his enemy.

With the thumping of those pulses to guide him, Kelsier strained through the swirling nothingness until a pillar of light exploded before him. It was there! He could see it, burning in the mists. He could almost touch it, almost . . .

He was losing it. Losing himself. He could move no more.

Something seized him.

“Please . . .” Kelsier whispered, falling, sliding away.

*This is not right.* Fuzz’s voice.

“You want to see something . . . spectacular?” Kelsier whispered. “Help me live. I’ll *show* you . . . *spectacular*.”

Fuzz wavered, and Kelsier could sense the divinity’s hesitance. It was followed by a sense of purpose, like a lamp being lit, and laughter.

*Very well. Be Preserved, Kelsier. Survivor.*

Something shoved him forward, and Kelsier merged with the light.

Moments later he blinked awake. He lay in the misty world still, but his body—or, well, his spirit—had re-formed. He lay in a pool of light like liquid metal. He could feel its warmth all around him, invigorating.

He could make out a misty cavern outside the pool; it seemed to be made of natural rock, though he couldn’t tell for certain, because it was all mist on this side.

The pulsing surged through him.

“The power,” Fuzz said, standing beyond the light. “You are now part of it, Kelsier.”

“Yeah,” Kelsier said, climbing to his feet, dripping with radiant light. “I can feel it, thrumming through me.”

“You are trapped with him,” Fuzz said. He seemed shallow, wan, compared to the powerful light that Kelsier stood amid. “I warned you. This is a prison.”

Kelsier settled down, breathing in and out. “I’m alive.”

“According to a very loose definition of the word.”

Kelsier smiled. “It’ll do.”

# 2

Immortality proved to be far more frustrating than Kelsier had anticipated.

Of course, he didn't know if he was *truly* immortal or not. He didn't have a heartbeat—which was only unnerving when he noticed it—and didn't need to breathe. But who could say if his soul aged or not in this place?

In the hours following his survival, Kelsier inspected his new home. God was right, it *was* a prison. The pool he was in grew deep at the center point, and was filled with liquid light that seemed a reflection of something more . . . potent on the other side.

Fortunately, though the Well was not wide, only the very center was deeper than he was tall. He could stay around the perimeters and only be in the light up to his waist. It was thin, thinner than water, and easy to move through.

He could also step out of this pool and its attached pillar of light, settling onto the rocky side. Everything in this cavern was made of mist, though the edges of the Well . . . He seemed to see the stone better here, more fully. It appeared to have some actual color to it. As if this place were part spirit, like him.

He could sit on the edge of the Well, legs dangling into the light. But if he tried to walk too far from the Well, misty wisps of that same power trailed him and held him back, like chains. They wouldn't let him get more than a few feet from the pool. He tried straining, pushing, dashing and throwing himself out, but nothing worked. He always pulled up sharply once he got a few feet away.

After several hours of trying to break free, Kelsier settled down on the side of the Well, feeling . . . exhausted? Was that even the right word? He had no body, and felt no traditional signs of tiredness. No headache, no strained muscles. But he *was* fatigued. Worn out like an old banner allowed to flap in the wind through too many rainstorms.

Forced to relax, he took stock of what little he could make out of his surroundings. Fuzz was gone; the god had been distracted by something a short time after Kelsier's Preservation, and had vanished. That left Kelsier with a cavern made of shadows, the glowing pool itself, and some pillars extending through the chamber. At the other end, he saw the glow of bits of metal, though he couldn't figure out what they were.

This was the sum of his existence. Had he just locked himself away in this little prison for eternity? It seemed an ultimate irony to him that he might have managed to cheat death, only to find himself suffering a fate far worse.

What would happen to his mind if he spent a few decades in here? A few *centuries*?

He sat on the rim of the Well, and tried to distract himself by thinking about his friends. He'd trusted in his plans at the moment of his death, but now he saw so many holes in his plot to inspire a rebellion. What if the skaa didn't rise up? What if the stockpiles he'd prepared weren't enough?

Even if that all worked, so much would ride upon the shoulders of some very ill-prepared men. And one remarkable young woman.

Lights drew his attention, and he leaped to his feet, eager for any distraction. A group of figures, outlined as glowing souls, had entered this room in the world of the living. There was something odd about them. Their eyes . . .

Inquisitors.

Kelsier refused to flinch, though by every instinct he dreaded these creatures. He had bested one of their champions. He would fear them no longer. Instead, he paced his confines, trying to discern what the three Inquisitors were lugging toward him. Something large and heavy, but it didn't glow at all.

*A body,* Kelsier realized. *Headless.*

Was this the one he'd killed? Yes, it must be. Another Inquisitor was reverently carrying the dead one's spikes, a whole pile of them, all placed together inside a large jar of liquid. Kelsier squinted at it, taking a single step out of his prison, trying to determine what he was seeing.

“Blood,” Fuzz said, suddenly standing nearby. “They store the spikes in blood until they can be used again. In that way, they can prevent the spikes from losing their effectiveness.”

“Huh,” Kelsier said, stepping to the side as the Inquisitors tossed the body into the Well, then dropped in the head. Both evaporated. “Do they do this often?”

“Each time one of their number dies,” Fuzz said. “I doubt they even know what they are doing. Tossing a dead body into that pool is beyond meaningless.”

The Inquisitors retreated with the spikes of the fallen. Judging by their slumped forms, the four creatures were exhausted.

“My plan,” Kelsier said, looking to Fuzz. “How is it going? My crew should have discovered the warehouse by now. The people of the city . . . did it work? Are the skaa angry?”

“Hmmm?” Fuzz asked.

“The revolution, the plan,” Kelsier said, stepping toward him. God shifted backward, getting just beyond where Kelsier would be able to reach, hand going to the knife at his belt. Perhaps that punch earlier had been ill-advised. “Fuzz, listen. You have to go nudge them. We’ll never have a better chance of overthrowing him.”

“The plan . . .” Fuzz said. He unraveled for a moment, before returning. “Yes, there was a plan. I . . . remember I had a plan. When I was smarter . . .”

“The plan,” Kelsier said, “is to get the skaa to revolt. It won’t matter how powerful the Lord Ruler is, won’t matter if he’s immortal, once we toss him in chains and lock him away.”

Fuzz nodded, distracted.

“Fuzz?”

He shook, glancing toward Kelsier, and the sides of his head unraveled slowly—like a fraying rug, each thread seeping away and vanishing into nothing. “He’s killing me, you know. He wants me gone before the next cycle, though . . . perhaps I can hold out. You hear me, Ruin! I’m not dead yet. Still . . . still here . . .”

*Hell,* Kelsier thought, cold. *God is going insane.*

Fuzz started pacing. “I know you’re listening, changing what I write, what I have written. You make our religion all about you. They hardly remember the truth any longer. Subtle as always, you worm.”

“Fuzz,” Kelsier said. “Could you just go—”

"I needed a sign," Fuzz whispered, stopping near Kelsier. "Something he couldn't change. A sign of the weapon I'd buried. The boiling point of water, I think. Maybe its freezing point? But what if the units change over the years? I needed something that would be remembered always. Something they'll immediately recognize." He leaned in. "Sixteen."

"Six . . . teen?" Kelsier said.

"Sixteen." Fuzz grinned. "Clever, don't you think?"

"Because it means . . ."

"The number of metals," Fuzz said. "In Allomancy."

"There are ten. Eleven, if you count the one I discovered."

"No! No, no, that's stupid. Sixteen. It's the perfect number. They'll see. They have to see." Fuzz started pacing again, and his head returned—mostly—to its earlier state.

Kelsier sat down on the rim of his prison. God's actions were far more erratic than they had been earlier. Had something changed, or—like a human with a mental disease—was God simply better at some times than he was at others?

Fuzz looked up abruptly. He winced, turning his eyes toward the ceiling, as if it were going to collapse on him. He opened his mouth, jaw working, but made no sound.

"What . . ." he finally said. "What have you *done*?"

Kelsier stood up in his prison.

"What have you done?" Fuzz screamed.

Kelsier smiled. "Hope," he said softly. "I have hoped."

"He was perfect," Fuzz said. "He was . . . the only one of you . . . that . . ." He spun suddenly, gazing down the shadowy room beyond Kelsier's prison.

Someone stood at the other end. A tall, commanding figure, not made of light. Familiar clothing, of both white and black, contrasting with itself.

The Lord Ruler. His spirit, at least.

Kelsier stepped up onto the rim of stone around the pool and waited as the Lord Ruler strode toward the light of the Well. He stopped in place when he noticed Kelsier.

"I killed you," the Lord Ruler said. "Twice. Yet you live."

"Yes. We're all aware of how strikingly incompetent you are. I'm glad you're beginning to see it for yourself. That's the first step toward change."

The Lord Ruler sniffed and looked around at the chamber, with its diaphanous walls. His eyes passed over Fuzz, but he didn't give the god much consideration.

Kelsier exulted. She'd done it. She'd actually *done it*. How? What secret had he missed?

"That grin," the Lord Ruler said to Kelsier, "is insufferable. I *did* kill you."

"I returned the favor."

"You *didn't* kill me, Survivor."

"I forged the blade that did."

Fuzz cleared his throat. "It is my duty to be with you as you transition. Don't be worried, or—"

"Be silent," the Lord Ruler said, inspecting Kelsier's prison. "Do you know what you've done, Survivor?"

"I've won."

"You've brought Ruin upon the world. You are a pawn. So proud, like a soldier on the battlefield, confident he controls his own destiny—while ignoring the thousands upon thousands in his rank." He shook his head. "Only a year left. So close. I would have again ransomed this undeserving planet."

"This is just . . ." Fuzz swallowed. "This is an in-between step. After death and before the Somewhere Else. Where souls must go. Where *yours* must go, Rashek."

Rashek? Kelsier looked again at the Lord Ruler. You could not tell a Terrisman by skin tone; that was a mistake many people made. Some Terris were dark, others light. Still, he would have thought . . .

*The room filled with furs. This man, in the cold.*

Idiot. That was what it meant, of course.

"It was all a lie," Kelsier said. "A trick. Your fabled immortality? Your healing? Feruchemy. But how did you become an Allomancer?"

The Lord Ruler stepped right up to the pillar of light that rose from the prison, and the two stared at one another. As they had on that square above when alive.

Then the Lord Ruler stuck his hand into the light.

Kelsier set his jaw and pictured sudden, horrifying images of spending an eternity trapped with the man who had murdered Mare. The Lord Ruler pulled his hand out, however, trailing light like molasses. He turned his hand over, inspecting the glow, which eventually faded.

“So now what?” Kelsier asked. “You remain here?”

“Here?” The Lord Ruler laughed. “With an impotent mouse and a half-blooded rat? Please.”

He closed his eyes, then he stretched toward that point that defied geometry. He faded, then finally vanished.

Kelsier gaped. “He *left*?”

“To the Somewhere Else,” Fuzz said, sitting down. “I should not have been so hopeful. Everything passes, nothing is eternal. That is what Ati always claimed. . . .”

“He didn’t have to leave,” Kelsier said. “He could have remained. Could have survived!”

“I told you, by this point rational people *want* to move on.” Fuzz vanished.

Kelsier remained standing there, at the edge of his prison, the glowing pool tossing his shadow across the floor. He stared into the misty room with its columns, waiting for something, though he wasn’t certain what. Confirmation, celebration, a change of some sort.

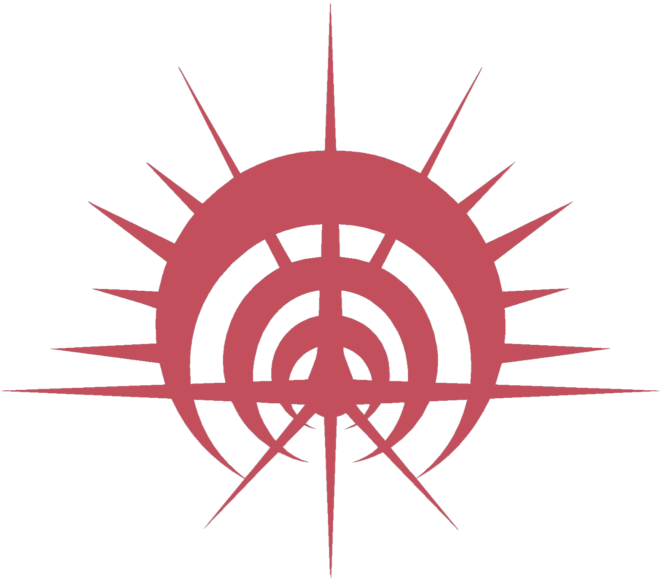
Nothing. Nobody came, not even the Inquisitors. How had the revolution gone? Were the skaa now rulers of society? He would have liked to see the deaths of the noble ranks, treated—in turn—as they had treated their slaves.

He received no confirmation, no sign, of what was happening above. They didn’t know about the Well, obviously. All Kelsier could do was settle down.

And wait.

# Part Two

# Well



# 1

What Kelsier would have given for a pencil and paper.

Something to write on, some way to pass the time. A means of collecting his thoughts and creating a plan of escape.

As the days passed, he tried scratching notes into the sides of the Well, which proved impossible. He tried unraveling threads from his clothing, then tying knots in them to represent words. Unfortunately, threads vanished soon after he pulled them free, and his shirt and trousers immediately returned to the way they'd looked before. Fuzz, during one of his rare visits, explained that the clothing wasn't real—or rather, it was just an extension of Kelsier's spirit.

For the same reason, he couldn't use his hair or blood to write. He didn't technically have either. It was supremely frustrating, but sometime during his second month of imprisonment he admitted the truth to himself. Writing wasn't all that important. He'd never been able to write while confined to the Pits, but he'd planned all the same. Yes, they had been feverish plans, impossible dreams, but lack of paper hadn't stopped him.

The attempts to write weren't about making plans so much as finding something to do. A quest to soak up his time. It had worked for a few weeks. But in acknowledging the truth, he lost his will to keep trying to find a way to write.

Fortunately, about the time he acknowledged this, he discovered something new about his prison.

Whispering.

Oh, he couldn't *hear* it. But could he "hear" anything? He didn't have ears. He was . . . what had Fuzz said? A Cognitive Shadow? A force of mind, holding his spirit together, preventing it from diffusing. Saze would have had a field day. He loved mystical topics like this.

Regardless, Kelsier *could* sense something. The Well continued to pulse as it had before, sending waves of writhing shock through the walls of his prison and out into the world. Those pulses seemed to be strengthening, a continuous thrumming, like the sense bronze lent one in “hearing” people using Allomancy.

Inside of each pulse was . . . something. Whispers, he called them —though they contained more than just words. They were saturated with sounds, scents, and images.

He saw a book, with ink staining its pages. A group of people sharing a story. Terrismen in robes? Sazed?

The pulses whispered chilling words. *Hero of Ages. The Announcer. Worldbringer.* He recognized those terms from the ancient Terris prophecies mentioned in Alendi’s logbook.

Kelsier knew the discomforting truth now. He had *met* a god, which meant there was real depth and reality to faith. Did this mean there was something to that array of religions Saze had kept in his pocket, like playing cards to stack a deck?

*You have brought Ruin upon this world. . . .*

Kelsier settled into the powerful light that was the Well, and found—with practice—that if he submerged himself in the center right before a pulse, he could ride it a short distance. It sent his consciousness traveling out of the Well to catch glimpses of each pulse’s destination.

He thought he saw libraries, quiet chambers where distant Terrismen spoke, exchanging stories and memorizing them. He saw madmen huddled in streets, whispering the words the pulses delivered. He saw a Mistborn man, noble, jumping between buildings.

Something other than Kelsier rode with those pulses. Something directing an unseen work, something interested in the lore of the Terris. It took Kelsier an embarrassingly long time to realize he should try another tactic. He dunked himself into the center of the pool, surrounded by the too-thin liquid light, and when the next pulse came he pushed himself in the opposite direction—not along with the pulse, but toward its source.

The light thinned, and he looked into someplace new. A dark expanse that was neither the world of the dead nor the world of the living.

In that other place, he found *destruction*.

Decay. Not blackness, for blackness was too complete, too *whole* to represent this thing he sensed in the Beyond. It was a vast force that would gleefully take something as simple as darkness, then rip it apart.

This force was time infinite. It was the winds that weathered, the storms that broke, the timeless waves running slowly, slowly, slowly to a stop as the sun and the planet cooled to nothing.

It was the ultimate end and destiny of all things. And it was angry.

Kelsier pulled back, throwing himself up out of the light, gasping, trembling.

He had met God. But for every Push, there was a Pull. What was the opposite of God?

What he had seen troubled him so much that he almost didn't return. He almost convinced himself to ignore the terrible thing in the darkness. He nearly blocked out the whispers and tried to pretend he had never seen that awesome, vast destroyer.

But of course he couldn't do that. Kelsier had never been able to resist a secret. This thing, even more than meeting Fuzz, proved that Kelsier had been playing all along at a game whose rules far outmatched his understanding.

That both terrified and excited him.

And so, he returned to gaze upon the thing. Again and again he went, struggling to comprehend, though he felt like an ant trying to understand a symphony.

He did this for weeks, right up until the point when the thing *looked* at him.

Before, it hadn't seemed to notice—as one might not notice the spider hiding inside a keyhole. This time though, Kelsier somehow alerted it. The thing churned in an abrupt change of motion, then *flowed* toward Kelsier, its essence surrounding the place from which Kelsier observed. It rotated slowly about itself in a vortex—like an ocean that began turning around one spot. Kelsier couldn't help but feel that an infinite, vast eye was suddenly *squinting* at him.

He fled, splashing, kicking up the liquid light as he backed away into his prison. He was so alarmed that he felt a phantom *heartbeat* thrumming inside of him, his essence acknowledging the proper reaction to shock and trying to replicate it. That stilled as he settled into his customary seat at the side of the pool.

The sight of that thing turning its attention upon him, the sensation of being tiny in the face of something so vast, deeply troubled Kelsier. For all his confidence and plotting, he was basically nothing. His entire life had been an exercise in unintentional bravado.

Months passed. He didn't return to study the thing Beyond; Kelsier instead waited for Fuzz to visit and check in on him, as he did periodically.

When Fuzz finally arrived, he looked even more unraveled than the last time, mists escaping from his shoulders, a small hole in his left cheek exposing a view into his mouth, his clothing growing ragged.

"Fuzz?" Kelsier asked. "I saw something. This . . . Ruin you spoke of. I think I can watch it."

Fuzz just paced back and forth, not even speaking.

"Fuzz? Hey, are you listening?"

Nothing.

"Idiot," Kelsier tried. "Hey, you're a disgrace to dietyhood. Are you paying attention?"

Even an insult didn't work. Fuzz just kept pacing.

*Useless,* Kelsier thought as a pulse of power left the Well. He happened to catch a glimpse of Fuzz's eyes as the pulse passed.

And in that moment, Kelsier was reminded why he had named this creature a god in the first place. There was an infinity beyond those eyes, a complement to the one trapped here in this Well. Fuzz was the infinity of a note held perfectly, never wavering. The majesty of a painting, frozen and still, capturing a slice of life from a time gone by. It was the power of many, many moments compressed somehow into one.

Fuzz stopped before him and his cheeks unraveled fully, revealing a skeleton beneath that was also unraveling, eyes glowing with eternity. This creature *was* a divinity; he was just a broken one.

Fuzz left, and Kelsier didn't see him for many months. The stillness and silence of his prison seemed as endless as the creatures he had studied. At one point, he found himself planning how to draw the attention of the destructive one, if only to beg it to end him.

It was when he started talking to himself that he really got worried.

"What have you done?"

"I've saved the world. Freed mankind."

"Gotten revenge."

"The goals can align."

"You are a coward."

"I changed the world!"

"And if you're just a pawn of that thing Beyond? Like the Lord Ruler claimed? Kelsier, what if you have no destiny other than to do as you're told?"

He contained the outburst, recovered himself, but the fragility of his own sanity unnerved him. He hadn't been completely sane in the Pits either. In a moment of stillness—staring at the shifting mists that made up the walls of the cavernous room—he admitted a deeper secret to himself.

He hadn't been completely sane *since* the Pits.

That was one reason why he didn't at first trust his senses when someone spoke to him.

"Now *this* I did not expect."

Kelsier shook himself, then turned with suspicion, worried he was hallucinating. It was possible to see all kinds of things in those shifting mists that made up the walls of the cavern, if you stared at them long enough.

This, however, was not a figure made of mist. It was a man with stark white hair, his face defined by angular features and a sharp nose. He seemed vaguely familiar to Kelsier, but he couldn't place why.

The man sat on the floor, one leg up and his arm resting upon his knee. In his hand he held some kind of stick.

Wait . . . no, he wasn't sitting on the floor, but on an object that somehow seemed to be *floating* upon the mists. The white, loglike object sank halfway into the mists of the floor and rocked like a ship on the water, bobbing in place. The rod in the man's hand was a short oar, and his other leg—the one that wasn't up—rested over the side of the log and vanished into the misty ground, visible only as an obscured silhouette.

"You," the man said to Kelsier, "are very bad at doing as you're supposed to."

"Who are you?" Kelsier asked, stepping to the edge of his prison, eyes narrowed. This was no hallucination. He refused to believe his sanity was that far gone. "A spirit?"

“Alas,” the man said, “death has never really suited me. Bad for the complexion, you see.” He studied Kelsier, lips raised in a knowing smile.

Kelsier hated him immediately.

“Got stuck there, did you?” the man said. “In Ati’s prison . . .” He clicked his tongue. “Fitting recompense, for what you did. Poetic even.”

“What I did?”

“Destroying the Pits, O scarred one. That was the only perpendicularity on this planet with any reasonable ease of access. This one is *very* dangerous, growing more so by the minute, and difficult to find. By doing as you did, you basically ended traffic through Scadrial. Upended an entire mercantile ecosystem, which I’ll admit was fun to watch.”

“Who *are* you?” Kelsier said.

“I?” the man said. “I am a drifter. A miscreant. The flame’s last breath, made of smoke at its passing.”

“That’s . . . needlessly obtuse.”

“Well, I’m that too.” The man cocked his head. “That mostly, if I’m honest.”

“And you claim to *not* be dead?”

“If I were, would I need this?” the Drifter said, knocking his oar against the front of his small loglike vessel. It bobbed at the motion, and for the first time Kelsier was able to make out what it was. Arms he’d missed before, hanging down into the mists, obscured. A head that drooped on its neck. A white robe, masking the shape.

“A corpse,” he whispered.

“Oh, Spanky here is just a spirit. It’s damnably difficult to get about in this subastral—anyone physical risks slipping through these mists and falling, perhaps forever. So many thoughts pool together here, becoming what you see around you, and you need something finer to travel over it all.”

“That’s horrible.”

“Says the man who built a revolution upon the backs of the dead. At least I only need *one* corpse.”

Kelsier folded his arms. This man was wary—though he spoke lightheartedly, he watched Kelsier with care, and held back as if contemplating a method of attack.

*He wants something,* Kelsier guessed. *Something that I have, maybe?* No, he seemed legitimately surprised that Kelsier was there. He had come here, intending to visit the Well. Perhaps he wanted to enter it, access the power? Or did he, perhaps, just want to have a look at the thing Beyond?

“Well, you’re obviously resourceful,” Kelsier said. “Perhaps you can help me with my predicament.”

“Alas,” the Drifter said. “Your case is hopeless.”

Kelsier felt his heart sink.

“Yes, nothing to be done,” the Drifter continued. “You are, indeed, stuck with that face. By manifesting those same features on this side, you show that even your *soul* is resigned to you always looking like one ugly sonofa—”

“Bastard,” Kelsier cut in. “You had me for a second.”

“Now, that’s demonstrably wrong,” the Drifter said, pointing. “I believe only one of us in this room is illegitimate, and it isn’t me. Unless . . .” He tapped the floating corpse on the head with his oar. “What about you, Spanky?”

The corpse actually mumbled something.

“Happily married parents? Still alive? Really? I’m sorry for their loss.” The Drifter looked to Kelsier, smiling innocently. “No bastards on this side. What about yours?”

“The bastard by birth,” Kelsier said, “is always better off than the one by choice, Drifter. I’ll own up to my nature if you own up to yours.”

The Drifter chuckled, eyes alight. “Nice, nice. Tell me, since we’re on the topic, which are you? A skaa with noble bearing, or a nobleman with skaa interests? Which half is more *you,* Survivor?”

“Well,” Kelsier said dryly, “considering that the relatives of my noble half spent the better part of four decades trying to exterminate me, I’d say I’m more inclined toward the skaa side.”

“Aaaah,” the Drifter said, leaning forward. “But I didn’t ask which you liked more. I asked which you *were.*”

“Is it relevant?”

“It’s *interesting,*” the Drifter said. “Which is enough for me.” He reached down to the corpse he was using as a boat, then removed something from his pocket. Something that glowed, though Kelsier couldn’t tell if it was something naturally radiant, or just something made of metal.

The glow faded as the Drifter administered it to his vessel, then—covering the motion with a cough, as if to hide from Kelsier what he was doing—furtively applied some of the glow to his oar. When he placed the oar back into the mists, it sent the boat scooting closer to the Well.

"*Is* there a way for me to escape this prison?" Kelsier asked.

"How about this?" the Drifter said. "We'll have an insult battle. Winner gets to ask one question, and the other has to answer truthfully. I'll start. What's wet, ugly, and has scars on its arms?"

Kelsier raised an eyebrow. All of this talk was a distraction, as evidenced by Drifter scooting—again—closer to the prison. *He's going to try jump for the Well,* Kelsier thought. *Leap in, hoping to be fast enough to surprise me.*

"No guess?" Drifter asked. "The answer is basically anyone who spends time with you, Kelsier, as they end up slitting their wrists, hitting themselves in the face, and then drowning themselves to forget the experience. Ha! Okay, your turn."

"I'm going to murder you," Kelsier said softly.

"I— Wait, *what*?"

"If you step inside here," Kelsier said, "I'm going to murder you. I'll slice the tendons on your wrists so your hands can't do anything more than batter at me uselessly as I kneel against your throat and slowly crush the life out of you—all while I remove your fingers one by one. I'll finally let you breathe a single, frantic gasp—but at that moment I'll shove your middle finger between your lips so that you're forced to suck it down as you struggle for air. You'll go out knowing you choked to death on your own rotten flesh."

The Drifter gaped at him, mouth working soundlessly. "I . . ." he finally said. "I don't think you know how to play this game."

Kelsier shrugged.

"Seriously," Drifter said. "You need some help, friend. I know a guy. Tall, bald, wears lots of earrings. Have a chat with him next—"

The Drifter cut off midsentence and leaped for the prison, kicking off the floating corpse and throwing himself at the light.

Kelsier was ready. As Drifter entered the light, Kelsier grabbed the man by one arm and slung him toward the side of the pool. The maneuver worked, and Drifter seemed to be able to touch the walls and floor here in the Well. He slammed against the wall, sending waves of light splashing up.

As Kelsier tried to punch at Drifter's head while he was stumbling, the man caught himself on the side of the pool and kicked backward, knocking Kelsier's legs out from beneath him.

Kelsier splashed in the light, and he tried to burn metals by reflex. Nothing happened, though there was *something* to the light here. Something familiar—

He managed to get to his feet, and caught Drifter lunging for the center, the deepest part. Kelsier snatched the man by the arm, swinging him away. Whatever this man wanted, Kelsier's instincts said that he shouldn't be allowed to have it. Beyond that, the Well was Kelsier's only asset. If he could hold the man back from what he wanted, subdue him, perhaps it would lead to answers.

The Drifter stumbled, then lunged, trying to grab Kelsier.

Kelsier, in turn, pivoted and buried his fist in the man's stomach. The motion gave him a thrill; after sitting for so long, inactive, it was nice to be able to *do* something.

Drifter grunted at the punch. "All right then," he muttered.

Kelsier brought his fists up, checked his footing, then unleashed a series of quick blows at Drifter's face that *should* have dazed him.

When Kelsier pulled back—not wanting to go too far and hurt the man seriously—he found that Drifter was smiling at him.

That didn't seem a good sign.

Somehow, Drifter shook off the hits he'd taken. He jumped forward, dodged Kelsier's attempted punch, then ducked and *slammed* his fist into Kelsier's kidneys.

It *hurt*. Kelsier lacked a body, but apparently his spirit could feel pain. He let out a grunt and brought up his arms to protect his face, stepping backward in the liquid light. The Drifter attacked, relentless, slamming his fists into Kelsier with no care for the damage he might be doing to himself.

*Go to the ground,* Kelsier's instincts told him. He dropped one hand and tried to seize Drifter by the arm, planning to send them both down into the light to grapple.

Unfortunately, the Drifter was a little too quick. He dodged and kicked Kelsier's legs from beneath him again, then grabbed him by the throat, slamming him repeatedly—brutally—against the bottom of the shallower part of the prison, splashing him in light that was too thin to be water, but suffocating nonetheless.

Finally Drifter hauled him up, limp. The man's eyes were glowing. "That was unpleasant," Drifter said, "yet somehow still satisfying. Apparently you already being dead means I can hurt you." As Kelsier tried to grab his arm, Drifter slammed Kelsier down again, then pulled him back up, stunned.

"I'm sorry, Survivor, for the rough treatment," Drifter continued.

"But you are *not* supposed to be here. You did what I needed you to, but you're a wild card I'd rather not deal with right now." He paused. "If it's any consolation, you should feel proud. It's been centuries since anyone got the drop on me."

He released Kelsier, letting him slump down and catch himself against the side of the prison, half submerged in the light. He growled, trying to pull himself up after Drifter.

Drifter sighed, then proceeded to *kick* at Kelsier's leg repeatedly, shocking him with the pain of it. He screamed, holding his leg. It should have cracked from the force of those kicks, and though it had not, the pain was overwhelming.

"This is a lesson," Drifter said, though it was difficult to hear the words through the pain. "But not the one you might think it is. You don't have a body, and I don't have the inclination to actually injure your soul. That pain is caused by your mind; it's thinking about what *should* be happening to you, and responding." He hesitated. "I'll refrain from making you choke on a chunk of your own flesh."

He walked toward the middle of the pool. Kelsier watched through eyes quivering with pain as Drifter held his hands out to the sides and closed his eyes. He stepped into the center of the pool, the deep portion, and vanished into the light.

A moment later, a figure climbed back out of the pool. Yet this time, the person was shadowy, glowing with inner light like . . .

Like someone in the world of the living. This pool had let Drifter transition from the world of the dead to the real world. Kelsier gaped, following Drifter with his eyes as the man strode past the pillars in the room, then stopped at the other side. Two tiny sources of metal still glowed fiercely there to Kelsier's eyes.

Drifter selected one. It was small, as he could toss it into the air and catch it again. Kelsier could sense the triumph in that motion.

Kelsier closed his eyes and concentrated. No pain. His leg wasn't actually hurt. *Concentrate.*

He managed to make some of the pain fade. He sat up in the pool, rippling light coming up to his chest. He breathed in and out, though he didn't need the air.

Damn. The first person he'd seen in months had thrashed him, then stolen something from the chamber outside. He didn't know what, or why, or even how the Drifter had managed to slip from one world to the next.

Kelsier crawled to the center of the pool, lowering himself down into the deep portion. He stood, his leg still aching faintly, and put his hands to the sides. He concentrated, trying to . . .

To what? Transition? What would that even do to him?

He didn't care. He was frustrated and humiliated. He needed to prove to himself that he wasn't incapable.

He failed. No amount of concentration, visualization, or straining of muscles made him do what the Drifter had managed. He climbed from the pool, exhausted and chastened, and settled on the side.

He didn't notice Fuzz standing there until the god spoke. "What were you *doing*?"

Kelsier turned. Fuzz visited infrequently these days, but when he did come, he always did it unannounced. If he spoke, he often only raved like a madman.

"Someone was just here," Kelsier said. "A man with white hair. He somehow used this Well to pass from the world of the dead to the world of the living."

"I see," Fuzz said softly. "He dared that, did he? Dangerous, with Ruin straining against his bonds. But if anyone were going to try something so foolhardy, it would be Cephandrius."

"He stole something, I think," Kelsier said. "From the other side of the room. A bit of metal."

"Aaah . . ." Fuzz said softly. "I had thought that when he rejected the rest of us, he would stop interfering. I should know better than to trust an implication from him. Half the time you can't trust his outright promises. . . ."

"Who is he?" Kelsier asked.

"An old friend. And no, before you ask, you can't do as he did and transition between Realms. Your ties to the Physical Realm have been severed. You're a kite with no string connecting it to the ground. You cannot ride the perpendicularity across."

Kelsier sighed. "Then why was he able to come to the world of the dead?"

"It's not the world of the dead. It's the world of the mind. Men—all things, truly—are like a ray of light. The floor is the Physical Realm, where that light pools. The sun is the Spiritual Realm, where it begins. This Realm, the Cognitive Realm, is the space between where that beam stretches."

The metaphor barely made any sense to him. *They all know so much,* Kelsier thought, *and I know so little.*

Still, at least Fuzz was sounding better today. Kelsier smiled toward the god, then froze as Fuzz turned his head.

Fuzz was missing half his face. The entire left side was just gone. Not wounded, and there was no skeleton. The complete half smoked, trailing wisps of mist. Half his lips remained, and he smiled back at Kelsier, as if nothing were wrong.

"He stole a bit of my essence, distilled and pure," Fuzz explained. "It can Invest a human, grant him or her Allomancy."

"Your . . . face, Fuzz . . ."

"Ati thinks to finish me," Fuzz said. "Indeed, his knife was placed long ago. I'm already dead." He smiled again, a gruesome expression, then vanished.

Feeling wrung out, Kelsier slumped alongside the pool, lying on the stones—which actually felt a little like real stone, instead of the fluffy softness of everything else made of mist.

He hated this feeling of ignorance. Everyone else was in on some grand joke, and he was the butt. Kelsier stared up at the ceiling, bathed in the glow of the shimmering Well and its column of light. Eventually, he came to a quiet decision.

He would find the answers.

In the Pits of Hathsin, he had awakened to purpose and had determined to destroy the Lord Ruler. Well, he would awaken again. He stood up and stepped into the light, strengthened. The clash of these gods was important, that thing in the Well dangerous. There was more to all of this than he'd ever known, and because of that he had a reason to live.

Perhaps more importantly, he had a reason to stay sane.

# 2

Kelsier no longer worried about madness or boredom. Each time he grew weary of his imprisonment, he remembered that feeling—that *humiliation*—he'd felt at Drifter's hands. Yes, he was trapped in a space only five or so feet across, but there was *plenty* to do.

First he returned to his study of the thing Beyond. He forced himself to duck beneath the light to face it and meet its inscrutable gaze—he did it until he didn't flinch when it turned its attention on him.

Ruin. A fitting name for that vast sense of erosion, decay, and destruction.

He continued to follow the Well's pulses. These trips gave him cryptic clues to Ruin's motives and plots. He sensed a familiar pattern to the things it changed—for Ruin seemed to be doing what Kelsier himself had done: coopting a religion. Ruin was manipulating the hearts of the people by changing their lore and books.

That terrified Kelsier. His purpose expanded, as he watched the world through these pulses. He didn't just need to understand, he needed to fight this thing. This horrible force that would end all things, if it could.

He struggled, therefore, with a desperation to understand what he saw. Why did Ruin transform the old Terris prophecies? What was the Drifter—whom Kelsier spotted in very rare pulses—doing up in the Terris Dominance? Who was this mysterious Mistborn to whom Ruin paid so much attention, and was he a threat to Vin?

When he rode the pulses, Kelsier watched for—*craved*—signs of the people he knew and loved. Ruin was keenly interested in Vin, and many of his pulses centered around watching her or the man she loved, that Elend Venture.

The mounting clues worried Kelsier. Armies around Luthadel. A city still in chaos. And—he hated to confront this one—it looked like the Venture boy was *king.* When Kelsier realized this, he was so angry he spent days away from the pulses.

They'd gone and put a *nobleman* in charge.

Yes, Kelsier had saved this man's life. Against his better judgment, he'd rescued the man that Vin loved. Out of love for her, perhaps a twisted paternal sense of duty. The Venture boy hadn't been *too* bad, compared to the rest of his kind. But to give him the throne? It seemed that even Dox was listening to Venture. Kelsier would have expected Breeze to ride whatever wind came his way, but Dockson?

Kelsier fumed, but he could not remain away for long. He hungered for these glimpses of his friends. Though each was only a brief flash—like a single image from eyes blinked open—he clung to them. They were reminders that outside his prison, life continued.

Occasionally he was given a glimpse of someone else. His brother, Marsh.

Marsh *lived.* That was a welcome discovery. Unfortunately, the discovery was tainted. For Marsh was an Inquisitor.

The two of them had never been what one would call familial. They had taken divergent paths in life, but that wasn't the true source of the distance between them—it wasn't even due to Marsh's stern ways butting against Kelsier's glibness, or Marsh's unspoken jealousy for things Kelsier had.

No, the truth was they had been raised knowing that at any point they could be dragged before the Inquisitors and murdered for their half-blooded nature. Each had reacted differently to an entire life spent, essentially, with a death sentence: Marsh with quiet tension and caution, Kelsier with aggressive self-confidence to mask his secrets.

Both had known a single, inescapable truth. If one brother were caught, it meant the other would be exposed as a half-blood and likely killed as well. Perhaps this situation would have brought other siblings together. Kelsier was ashamed to admit that for him and Marsh, it had been a wedge. Each mention of "Stay safe" or "Watch yourself" had been colored by an undercurrent of "Don't screw up, or you'll get me killed." It had been a vast relief when, after their parents' deaths, the two of them had agreed to give up pretense and enter the underground of Luthadel.

At times Kelsier toyed with fantasies of what might have been. Could he and Marsh have integrated fully, becoming part of noble society? Could he have overcome his loathing for them and their culture?

Regardless, he wasn't fond of Marsh. The word "fond" sounded too much of walks in a park or time spent eating pastries. One was fond of a favorite book. No, Kelsier was not *fond* of Marsh. But strangely, he still loved him. He was initially happy to find the man alive, but then perhaps death would have been better than what had been done to him.

It took Kelsier weeks to figure out the reason Ruin was so interested in Marsh. Ruin could *talk* to Marsh. Marsh and other Inquisitors, judging by the glimpses and the sensation he received of words being sent.

How? Why Inquisitors? Kelsier found no answers in the visions he saw, though he did witness an important event.

The thing called Ruin was growing stronger, and it was stalking Vin and Elend. Kelsier saw it clearly in a trip through the pulses. A vision of the boy, Elend Venture, sleeping in his tent. The power of Ruin coalescing, forming a figure, malevolent and dangerous. It waited there until Vin entered, then tried to stab Elend.

As Kelsier lost the pulse, he was left with the image of Vin deflecting the blow and saving Elend. But he was confused. Ruin had waited there specifically until Vin returned.

It hadn't actually wanted to hurt Elend. It had just wanted Vin to see him trying.

Why?

# 3

"It's a plug," Kelsier said.

Fuzz—Preservation, as the god had said he could be called—sat outside the prison. He was still missing half his face, and the rest of him was leaking in larger patches as well.

These days the god spent more time near the Well, for which Kelsier was grateful. He had been practicing how to pull information from the creature.

"Hmmm?" Preservation asked.

"This Well," Kelsier said, gesturing around him. "It's like a plug. You created a prison for Ruin, but even the most solid of burrows must have an entrance. *This* is that entrance, sealed with your own power to keep him out, since you two are opposites."

"That . . ." Preservation said, trailing off.

"That?" Kelsier prompted.

"That's *utterly wrong*."

*Damn,* Kelsier thought. He'd spent weeks on that theory.

He was starting to feel an urgency. The pulses of the Well were growing more demanding, and Ruin seemed to be growing increasingly eager in its touch upon the world. Recently the light of the Well had started to act differently, condensing somehow, pulling together. Something was happening.

"We are gods, Kelsier," Preservation said with a voice that trailed off, then grew louder, then trailed off again. "We permeate everything. The rocks are me. The people are me. And him. All things persist, but decay. Ruin . . . and Preservation . . ."

"You told me this was your power," Kelsier said, gesturing again at the Well, trying to get the god back on topic. "That it gathers here."

"Yes, and elsewhere," Preservation said. "But yes, here. Like dew collects, my power gathers in that spot. It is natural. A cycle: clouds, rain, river, humidity. You cannot press so much essence into a system without it congealing here and there."

Great. That didn't tell him anything. He pressed further on the topic, but Fuzz grew quiet, so he tried something else. He needed to keep Preservation talking—to prevent the god from slumping into one of his quiet stupors.

"Are you afraid?" Kelsier asked. "If Ruin gets free, are you afraid he will kill you?"

"Ha," Preservation said. "I've told you. He killed me long, long ago."

"I find that hard to believe."

"Why?"

"Because I'm sitting here talking to you."

"And I'm talking to *you*. How alive are you?"

*A good point.*

"Death for one such as me is not like death for one such as you," Preservation said, staring off again. "I was killed long ago, when I made the decision to break our promise. But this power I hold . . . it *persists* and it *remembers*. It wants to be alive itself. I have died, but some of me remains. Enough to know that . . . there *were* plans. . . ."

It was no use trying to pry out what those plans were. He didn't remember whatever this "plan" was that he'd made.

"So it's not a plug," Kelsier said. "Then what is it?"

Preservation didn't reply. He didn't even seem to hear.

"You said to me once before," Kelsier continued, speaking more loudly, "that the power exists to be used. That it *needs* to be used. Why?"

Again no answer. He was going to need to try a different tactic. "I looked at him again. Your opposite."

Preservation stood up straight, turning his haunting, half-finished gaze upon Kelsier. Mentioning Ruin often shocked him out of his stupor.

"He is dangerous," Preservation said. "Stay away. My power protects you. Do not taunt him."

"Why? He's locked up."

"Nothing is eternal, not even time itself," Preservation said. "I didn't imprison him so much as *delay* him."

"And the power?"

"Yes . . ." Preservation said, nodding.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, he will use that. I see." Preservation started, as if realizing—or maybe just recalling—something important. "My power created his prison. My power can unlock it. But how would he find someone who would do it? Who would hold the powers of creation, then *give them away* . . ."

"Which . . . we don't want them to do," Kelsier said.

"No. It will free him!"

"And last time?" Kelsier asked.

"Last time . . ." Preservation blinked, and seemed to come to himself more. "Yes, last time. The Lord Ruler. I made it work last time. I've put her into the spot to do this, but I can hear her thoughts. . . . He's been working on her. . . . So mixed up . . ."

"Fuzz?" Kelsier asked, uncertain.

"I must stop her. Someone . . ." His eyes unfocused.

"What are you doing?"

"Hush," Fuzz said, voice suddenly more commanding. "I'm trying to stop this."

Kelsier looked around, but there was nobody else here. "Who?"

"Do not assume that the me you see here is the only me," Fuzz said. "I am everywhere."

"But—"

"Hush!"

Kelsier hushed, in part because he was happy to see such strength from the god after so long motionless. After some time, however, he slumped down. "No use," Fuzz mumbled. "His tools are stronger."

"So . . ." Kelsier said, testing to see if he'd be hushed again. "Last time. Rashek used the power, instead of . . . what? Giving it up?"

Fuzz nodded. "Alendi would have done the right thing, as he perceived it. Given the power up—but that would have freed Ruin. 'Giving the power up' is a stand-in for giving the power to him. The powers would interpret that as me releasing him. My power, accepting his touch back into the world, directly."

"Great," Kelsier said. "We need a sacrifice then. Someone to take up the powers of eternity, then use them for whatever he wants instead of giving them away. Well, that is a sacrifice *I'm* perfect to make. How do I do it?"

Preservation regarded him. The creature's earlier strength was no more. He was fading, losing his human attributes. He didn't blink anymore, for example, and didn't make a pretense of breathing in before speaking. He could be utterly motionless, lifeless as an iron rod.

"You," Preservation finally said. "Using *my* power. *You.*"

"You let the Lord Ruler do it."

"He tried to save the world."

"As did I."

"You tried to rescue a boatful of people from a fire by sinking the boat, then claiming, 'At least they didn't burn to death.' " God hesitated. "You're going to punch me again, aren't you?"

"Can't reach you, Fuzz," Kelsier said. "The power. *How do I use it?*"

"You can't," Preservation said. "That power is part of the prison. This is what you did by merging your soul to the Well, Kelsier. You wouldn't be able to hold it anyway. You're not Connected enough to me."

Kelsier settled down to think on this, but before he had time to do much, he noticed an oddity. Were those *figures* in the chamber outside? Yes, they were. Living people, marked by their glowing souls. More Inquisitors come to drop off a dead body? He hadn't seen any of them for ages.

Two people stole into the corridor and approached the Well, passing rows of pillars that showed as illusory mist to Kelsier.

"They're here," Preservation said.

"Who?" Kelsier said, squinting. It was difficult to make out details of faces, with those souls glowing. "Is that . . ."

It was Vin.

"What?" Preservation said, looking toward Kelsier, noting his shock. "You thought I was waiting here for nothing? It happens today. The Well of Ascension is full. The time has arrived."

The other figure was the boy, Elend Venture. Kelsier was surprised to find he wasn't angry at the sight. Yes, the crew should have known better than to put a nobleman in charge, but that wasn't really Elend's fault. He'd always been too oblivious to be dangerous.

Besides, whatever the faults of his parentage, this Venture boy had stayed with Vin.

Kelsier folded his arms, watching Venture kneel beside the pool.

"If he touches it, I'm going to slap him."

"He will not," Preservation said. "It's for her. He knows it. I've been preparing her. I tried, at least."

Vin turned, and seemed to be to be looking at God. Yes, she *could* see him. Was there a way Kelsier could use that?

"You tried?" Kelsier said. "Did you explain what she needs to do? Your opposite has been watching her, interacting with her. I've *seen* him doing it. He tried to kill Elend."

"No," Fuzz said, haunted. "He was imitating me. He looked as I do, to them, and tried to kill the boy. Not because he cares about one death, but because he wanted her to distrust me. To think I am her enemy. But can't she tell the difference? Between his hate and destruction, and my peace. I cannot kill. I've never been able to kill. . . ."

"Talk to her!" Kelsier said. "Tell her what she needs to do, Fuzz!"

"I . . ." Preservation shook his head. "I can't get through to her, can't speak to her. I can hear her mind, Kelsier. His lies are there. She doesn't trust me. She thinks she needs to give it up. I've tried to stop this. I left her clues, and then I tried to make someone else stop her. But . . . I've . . . I've failed . . ."

*Oh, hell,* Kelsier thought. *Need a plan. Quick.*

Vin was going to give up the power. Release the thing. Even without Preservation's assertions, Kelsier would have known what Vin would do. She was a better person than he had ever been, and she never *had* thought she deserved the rewards she was given. She'd take this power, and she'd assume she had to give it up for the greater good.

But how to change that? If Preservation couldn't speak to her, then what?

Elend stood up and approached Preservation. Yes, the boy could see Preservation too.

"She needs motivation." Kelsier said, an idea clicking in his mind. Ruin had tried to stab Elend, to frighten her.

It was the right idea. He just hadn't gone far enough.

"Stab him," Kelsier said.

"What?" Preservation said, aghast.

Kelsier pushed out of his prison bonds a few steps, approaching Fuzz, who stood just outside. He strained to the absolute limits of his fetters.

"Stab him," Kelsier said. "Use that knife at your belt, Fuzz. They can see you, and you can affect their world. *Stab Elend Venture.* Give her a reason to use the power. She'll want to save him."

"I'm *Preservation,*" he said. "The knife . . . I haven't actually drawn it in millennia. You speak of acting like him, as he pretended I would act! It's horrible!"

"You have to!" Kelsier said.

"I can't . . . I . . ." Fuzz reached to his belt, and his hand shimmered. The knife appeared there. He looked down at it, the blade glistening. "Old friend . . ." he whispered at it.

He looked toward Elend, who nodded. Preservation raised his arm, weapon in hand.

Then stopped.

His half face was a mask of pain. "No . . ." he whispered. "I Preserve . . ."

*He's not going to do it,* Kelsier thought, watching Elend talk to Vin, his posture reassuring. *He can't do it.*

Only one option.

"Sorry, kid," Kelsier said.

Kelsier grabbed Preservation's shimmering arm and *slashed* it across the Venture boy's stomach.

He felt as if he were stabbing his own flesh. Not because of Venture, but because he knew what it would do to Vin. His heart lurched as she rushed to Venture's side, weeping.

Well, he'd saved this boy's life once, so this would make them even. Besides, she would rescue him. She'd *have* to save Elend. She loved him.

Kelsier stepped back, returning to his prison proper, leaving an aghast Preservation to stare at his own hand as he stumbled away from the fallen man.

"Gut wound," Kelsier whispered. "He'll take time to die, Vin. Grab the power. It's *right here*. Use it."

She cradled Venture. Kelsier waited, anxious. If she entered the pool, she'd be able to see Kelsier, wouldn't she? She'd become transcendent, like Preservation. Or would she have to use the power first?

Would that free Kelsier? He had no answers, only an assurance that whatever happened, he could not let that thing Beyond escape. He turned.

And was shocked to find it *there*. He could sense it, pressed against the reality of this world, an infinite darkness. Not just the flimsy imitation of Preservation he'd made before, but the entire vast power. It wasn't in any specific space, but at the same time it was pressed up against reality and watching with a keen interest.

To his horror, Kelsier saw it change, sending forward spines like the spindly legs of a spider. On their end, dangling like a puppet, was a humanoid figure.

*Vin* . . . it whispered. *Vin* . . .

She looked toward the pool, her posture grieved. Then she left Venture and entered the Well, passing Kelsier without seeing him and reaching the deepest point. She sank slowly into the light. At the last moment, she ripped something glowing from her ear and tossed it out—a bit of metal. Her earring?

Once she sank completely, she did not appear on this side. Instead, a storm began. A rising column of light surrounded Kelsier, blocking him from seeing anything but the raw *energy*. Like a sudden tide, an explosion, an instant sunrise. It was all around him, active, *excited.*

*You mustn't do it, child,* Ruin said through his humanlike puppet. How could it speak with such a soothing voice? He could see the force behind it, the destruction, but the face it put on was so kindly. *You know what you must do.*

"Don't listen to it, Vin!" Kelsier screamed, but his voice was lost in the roar of the power. He shouted and railed as the voice conned Vin, warning her that if she took the power she'd destroy the world. Kelsier fought through the light, trying to find her, to seize her and explain.

He failed. He failed *horribly*. He couldn't make himself heard, couldn't touch Vin. Couldn't do anything. Even his impromptu plan of stabbing Elend proved foolish, for she released the power. Weeping, flayed, ripped open, she did the most selfless thing he had ever seen.

And in so doing, she doomed them.

The power became a weapon as she released it. It made a spear in the air and ripped a hole through reality and into the place where Ruin waited.

Ruin rushed through that hole to freedom.

# 4

Kelsier sat on the lip of the now empty Well of Ascension. The light was gone, and with it his prison. He could leave.

He didn't seem to be stretching away and fading. Apparently being part of Preservation's power for a time had expanded Kelsier's soul, letting him linger. Though honestly, he wished he could vanish at this moment.

Vin—glowing and radiant to his eyes—lay beside Elend Venture, clutching him and weeping as his soul pulsed, growing weaker. Kelsier stood up, turning his back toward the sight. For all his cleverness, he'd gone and broken the poor girl's heart.

*I must be the smartest idiot around,* Kelsier thought.

"It was going to happen," Preservation said. "I thought . . . Maybe . . ." From the corner of his eye, Kelsier saw Fuzz approach Vin, then look down at the fallen Venture.

"I can Preserve him," Preservation whispered.

Kelsier spun. Preservation started waving at Vin, and she stumbled to her feet. She followed the god a few feet to something Elend had dropped, a fallen nugget of metal. Where had that come from?

*The Venture boy was carrying it when he entered,* Kelsier thought. That was the last bit of metal from the other side of the room, the twin of the one the Drifter had stolen. Kelsier approached as Vin took the nugget of metal, so tiny, and approached Elend, then put it into his mouth. She washed it down with a vial of metal.

Soul and metal became one. Elend's light strengthened, glowing vibrantly. Kelsier closed his eyes, feeling a thrumming sense of peace.

“That was good work, Fuzz,” Kelsier said, opening his eyes and smiling at Preservation as the god stepped over to him. Vin’s posture manifested incredible joy. “I’m almost ready to think you’re a benevolent god.”

“Stabbing him was dangerous, painful,” Preservation said. “I cannot condone such recklessness. But perhaps it was right, regardless of how I feel.”

“Ruin’s free,” Kelsier said, looking upward. “That thing has escaped.”

“Yes. Fortunately, before I died, I put a plan into motion. I can’t remember it, but I’m certain that it was brilliant.”

“You know, I’ve said something similar myself on occasion, after a night of drinking.” Kelsier rubbed his chin. “I’m free too.”

“Yes.”

“This is where you joke that you aren’t certain which was more dangerous to release. Me or the other one.”

“No,” Fuzz said. “I know which is more dangerous.”

“Failing marks for effort there, I’m afraid.”

“But perhaps . . .” Preservation said. “Perhaps I cannot say which is more *annoying*.” He smiled. With his face half melted off and his neck starting to go, it was unnerving. Like a happy bark from a crippled puppy.

Kelsier slapped him on the shoulder. “We’ll make a solid crewmember out of you yet, Fuzz. For now, I want to get the *hell* out of this room.”

# Part Three

# Spirit

# 1

Kelsier really wanted something to drink. Wasn't that what you did when you got out of prison? Went drinking, enjoyed your freedom by giving it up to a little booze and a terrible headache?

When alive, he'd usually avoided such levity. He liked to control a situation, not let it control him—but he couldn't deny that he thirsted for something to drink, to numb the experience he'd just been through.

That seemed terribly unfair. No body, but he could still be thirsty?

He climbed from the caverns surrounding the Well of Ascension, passing through misty chambers and tunnels. As before, when he touched something he was able to see what it looked like in the real world.

His footing was firm on the inconstant ground; though it was somewhat springy, like cloth, it held his weight unless he stamped hard—which would cause his foot to sink in like it was pushing through thick mud. He could even pass through the walls if he tried, but it was harder than it had been during his initial run, when he'd been dying.

He emerged from the caverns into the basement of Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's palace. It was even easier than usual to get turned about in this place, as everything was misty to his eyes. He touched the things of mist that he passed, so he could picture his surroundings better. A vase, a carpet, a door.

Kelsier eventually stepped out onto the streets of Luthadel a free—if dead—man. For a time he just walked the city, so relieved to be out of that hole that he was able to ignore the sense of dread he felt at Ruin's escape.

He must have wandered an entire day that way, sitting on rooftops, strolling past fountains. Looking over this city dotted with glowing pieces of metal, like lights hovering in the mists at night. He ended up on top of the city wall, observing the koloss who had set up camp outside the town but—somehow—didn't seem to be killing anyone.

He needed to see if there was a way to contact his friends. Unfortunately, without the pulses—those had stopped when Ruin escaped—to guide him, he didn't know where to start looking. He'd lost track of Vin and Elend in his excitement at leaving the caverns, but he remembered some of what he'd seen through the pulses. That gave him a few places to search.

He ultimately found his crew at Keep Venture. It was the day after the disaster at the Well of Ascension, and they appeared to be holding a funeral. Kelsier strolled through the courtyard, passing among the glowing souls of men, each burning like a limelight. Those he brushed gave him an impression of their appearance. Many he recognized: skaa he'd interacted with, encouraged, uplifted during his final months of life. Others were unfamiliar. A disturbing number of soldiers who had once served the Lord Ruler.

He found Vin at the front, sitting on the steps of Keep Venture, huddled and slumped over. Elend was nowhere to be seen, though Ham stood nearby, arms folded. In the courtyard, somebody waved their hands before the group, giving a speech. Was that Demoux? Leading the people in the funeral service? Those were certainly corpses laid out in the courtyard, their souls no longer shining. He couldn't hear what Demoux was saying, but the presentation seemed clear.

Kelsier settled down on the steps beside Vin. He clasped his hands before himself. "So . . . that went well."

Vin, of course, didn't reply.

"I mean," Kelsier continued, "yes, we ended up releasing a world-ending force of destruction and chaos, but at least the Lord Ruler is dead. Mission accomplished. Plus you still have your nobleman boyfriend, so there's that. Don't worry about the scar on his stomach. It'll make him look more rugged. Mists know, the little bookworker could use some toughening up."

She didn't move, but maintained her slumped posture. He rested his arm across her shoulders and was given a glimpse of her as she looked in the real world. Full of color and life, yet somehow . . . weathered. She seemed so much older now, no longer the child he'd found scamming obligators on the streets.

He leaned down beside her. "I'm going to beat this thing, Vin. I *am* going take care of this."

"And how," Preservation said from the courtyard below the steps, "are you going to accomplish *that*?"

Kelsier looked up. Though he was prepared for the sight of Preservation, he still winced to see him as he was—barely even in human shape any longer, more a dissolved bunch of weaving threads of frayed smoke, giving the vague impression of a head, arms, legs.

"He's free," Preservation said. "That's it. Time up. Contract due. He will take what was promised."

"We'll stop him."

"Stop him? He's the force of entropy, a universal constant. You can't *stop* that any more than you can stop time."

Kelsier stood up, leaving Vin and walking down the steps toward Preservation. He wished he could hear what Demoux was saying to this small crowd of glowing souls.

"If he can't be stopped," Kelsier said, "then we'll slow him. You did it before, right? Your grand plan?"

"I . . ." Preservation said. "Yes . . . There was a plan. . . ."

"I'm free now. I can help you put it into motion."

"Free?" Preservation laughed. "No, you've just entered a larger prison. Tied to this Realm, bound to it. There's nothing you can do. Nothing I can do."

"That—"

"He's watching us, you know," Preservation said, looking upward at the sky.

Kelsier followed his gaze reluctantly. The sky—misty and shifting—seemed so distant. It felt as if it had pulled back from the planet, like people in a crowd shying away from a corpse. In that vastness Kelsier saw something dark, thrashing, writhing upon itself. More solid than mist, like an ocean of snakes, obscuring the tiny sun.

He knew that vastness. Ruin was indeed watching.

"He thinks you're insignificant," Preservation said. "I think he finds you amusing—the soul of Ati that is still in there somewhere would laugh at this."

"He has a soul?"

Preservation didn't respond. Kelsier stepped up to him, passing corpses made of mists on the ground.

"If he is alive," Kelsier said, "then he can be killed. No matter how powerful." *You're proof of that, Fuzz. He's killing you.*

Preservation laughed, a harsh, barking noise. "You keep forgetting which of us is a god and which is just a poor dead shadow. Waiting to expire." He waved a mostly unraveled arm, fingers made of spirals of unwound, misty strings. "Listen to them. Doesn't it embarrass you how they talk? The Survivor? Ha! I Preserved them for millennia. What have *you* done for them?"

Kelsier turned toward Demoux. Preservation appeared to have forgotten that Kelsier couldn't hear the speech. Intending to go touch Demoux, to get a view of what he looked like now, Kelsier brushed one of the corpses on the ground.

A young man. A soldier, by the looks of it. He didn't know the boy, but he started to worry. He looked back at where Ham was standing—that figure near him would be Breeze.

What of the others?

He grew cold, then started touching corpses, looking for any he recognized. His motions became more frantic.

"What are you seeking?" Preservation asked.

"How many—" Kelsier swallowed. "How many of these were friends of mine?"

"Some," Preservation said.

"Any members of the crew?"

"No," Preservation said, and Kelsier let out a sigh. "No, they died during the intial break-in, days ago. Dockson. Clubs."

A spear of ice shot through Kelsier. He tried to stand up from beside the corpse he'd been inspecting, but stumbled, trying to force out the words. "No. No, not Dox."

Preservation nodded.

"Wh . . . When did it happen? How?"

Preservation laughed. The sound of madness. He showed little of the kindly, uncertain man who had greeted Kelsier when he'd first entered this place.

"Both were murdered by koloss as the siege broke. Their bodies were burned days ago, Kelsier, while you were trapped."

Kelsier trembled, feeling lost. "I . . ." Kelsier said.

*Dox. I wasn't here for him. I could have seen him again, as he passed. Talked to him. Saved him maybe?*

"He cursed you as he died, Kelsier," Preservation said, voice harsh. "He blamed you for all this."

Kelsier bowed his head. Another lost friend. And Clubs too . . . two good men. He'd lost too many of those in his life, dammit. Far too many.

*I'm sorry, Dox, Clubs. I'm sorry for failing you.*

Kelsier took that anger, that bitterness and shame, and channeled it. He'd found purpose again during his days in prison. He wouldn't lose it now.

He stood and turned to Preservation. The god—shockingly—cringed as if *frightened*. Kelsier seized the god's form, and in a brief moment was given a vision of the grandness beyond. The pervading light of Preservation that permeated all things. The world, the mists, the metals, the very souls of men. This creature was somehow dying, but his power was far from gone.

He also felt Preservation's pain. It was the loss Kelsier had felt at Dox's death, only magnified thousands of times over. Preservation felt every light that went out, felt them and knew them as a person he had loved.

Around the world they were dying at an accelerated pace. Too much ash was falling, and Preservation only anticipated it increasing. Armies of koloss rampaging beyond control. Death, destruction, a world on its last legs.

And . . . to the south . . . what was *that*? People?

Kelsier held Preservation, in awe at this creature's divine agony. Then Kelsier pulled him close, into an embrace.

"I'm so sorry," Kelsier whispered.

"Oh, Senna . . ." Preservation whispered. "I'm losing this place. Losing them all . . ."

"We are going to stop it," Kelsier said, pulling back.

"It can't be stopped. The deal . . ."

"Deals can be broken."

"Not these kinds of deals, Kelsier. I was able to trick Ruin before, lock him away, by fooling him with our agreement. But that wasn't a breach of contract, more leaving a hole in the agreement to be exploited. This time there are no holes."

"Then we go out kicking and screaming," Kelsier said. "You and me, we're a team."

Preservation seemed to *condense*, his form pulling itself together, threads reweaving. "A team. Yes. A crew."

“To do the impossible.”

“Defy reality,” Preservation whispered. “Everyone always said you were insane.”

“And I always acknowledged that they had a point,” Kelsier said. “Thing is, while they were correct to question my sanity, they never did have the right reasoning. It’s not my ambition that should worry them.”

“Then what should?”

Kelsier smiled.

Preservation, in turn, laughed—a sound that had lost its edge, the harshness gone. “I can’t help you do . . . whatever it is you think you’re doing. Not directly. I don’t . . . think well enough anymore. But . . .”

“But?”

Preservation solidified a little further. “But I know where you’ll find someone who can.”

# 2

Kelsier followed a thread of Preservation, like a glowing tendril of mist, through the city. He made sure to look up periodically, confronting that force in the sky, which had boiled through the mists there and was coming to dominate in every direction.

Kelsier would not back down. He would not let this thing intimidate him again. He'd already killed one god. The second murder was always easier than the first.

The tendril of Preservation led him past shadowy tenements, through a slum that somehow looked even more depressing on this side—all crammed together, the souls of men packed in frightened lumps. His crew had saved this city, but many of the people Kelsier passed didn't seem to know it yet.

Eventually the tendril led him out broken city gates to the north, past rubble and corpses being slowly sorted. Past living armies and that fearsome army of koloss, out beyond the city and a short hike along the river to . . . the lake?

Luthadel was built not far from the lake that bore its name, though most of the city's populace determinedly ignored that fact. Lake Luthadel wasn't the swimming or sport kind of lake, unless you fancied bathing in a soupy sludge that was more ash than it was water—and good luck catching what few fish remained after centuries of residing next to a city full of half-starved skaa. This close to the ashmounts, keeping the river and lake navigable had demanded the full-time attention of an entire class of people, the canal workers, a strange breed of skaa who rarely mixed with those from the city proper.

They would have been horrified to find that here on this side, the lake—and actually the river as well—was inverted somehow. Opposite to the way the mists under his feet had a liquid feel to them, the lake rose into a solid mound, only a few inches high but harder and somehow more substantial than the ground he'd become used to walking upon.

In fact, the lake was like a low island rising from the sea of mists. What was solid and what was fluid seemed somehow reversed in this place. Kelsier stepped up to the island's edge, the ribbon of Preservation's essence curling past him and leading onto the island, like a mythical string showing the way home from the grand maze of Ishathon.

Kelsier stuffed his hands in his trouser pockets and kicked at the ground of the island. It was some type of dark, smoky stone.

"What?" Preservation whispered.

Kelsier jumped, then glanced at the line of light. "You . . . in there, Fuzz?"

"I'm everywhere," Preservation said, his voice soft, frail. He sounded exhausted. "Why have you stopped?"

"This is different."

"Yes, it congeals here," Preservation said. "It has to do with the way men think, and where they are likely to pass. Somewhat to do with that, at least."

"But what is it?" Kelsier said, stepping up onto the island.

Preservation said nothing further, and so Kelsier continued toward the center of the island. Whatever had "congealed" here, it was strikingly stonelike. And things grew on it. Kelsier passed scrubby plants sprouting from the otherwise hard ground—not misty, inchoate plants, but real ones full of color. They had broad brown leaves with—curiously—what seemed like *mist* rising from them. None of the plants reached higher than his knees, but there were still far more than he'd expected to find here.

As he passed through a field of the plants, he thought he caught something scurrying between them, rustling leaves in its passing.

*The world of the dead has plants and animals?* he thought. But that wasn't what Preservation had called it. The Cognitive Realm. How did these plants grow here? What watered them?

The farther he penetrated onto this island, the darker it became. Ruin was covering up that tiny sun, and Kelsier began to miss even the faint glow that had permeated the phantom mists in the city. Soon he was traveling in what seemed like twilight.

Eventually Preservation's ribbon grew thin, then vanished. Kelsier stopped near its tip, whispering, "Fuzz? You there?"

No response, the silence refuting Preservation's claim earlier that he was everywhere. Kelsier shook his head. Perhaps Preservation was listening, but wasn't *there* enough to give a reply. Kelsier continued forward, passing through a place where the plants had grown to waist height, mist rising from their broad leaves like steam from a hot plate.

Finally, ahead he spotted *light*. Kelsier pulled up. He'd fallen into a prowl naturally, led by instincts gained from a life spent on the con, literally since the day of his birth. He had no weapons. He knelt, feeling at the ground for a stone or stick, but these plants weren't big enough to provide anything substantial, and the ground was smooth, unbroken.

Preservation had promised him help, but he wasn't sure how much he trusted what Preservation said. Odd, that living through his own death should make him *more* hesitant to trust in God's word. He took off his belt for a weapon, but it evaporated in his hands and appeared back on his waist. Shaking his head, he prowled closer, approaching near enough to the fire to pick out two people. Alive, and in this Realm, not glowing souls or misty spirits.

The man wore skaa clothing—suspenders, shirt with sleeves rolled up—and tended a small dinner fire. He had short hair and a narrow, almost pinched face. That knife at his belt, nearly long enough to be a sword, would come in very handy.

The other person, who sat on a small folding chair, might have been Terris. There were some among their population who had a skin tone almost as dark as hers, though he'd also met some people from the various southern dominances who were dark. She certainly wasn't wearing Terris clothing—she had on a sturdy brown dress, with a large leather girdle around the waist, and wore her hair woven into tiny braids.

Two. He could handle two, couldn't he? Even without Allomancy or weapons. Regardless, best to be careful. He hadn't forgotten his humiliation at the hands of the Drifter. Kelsier made a careful decision, then stood up, straightened his coat, and strode into their camp.

"Well," he proclaimed, "this has been an unusual few days, I can tell you *that*."

The man at the fire scrambled backward, hand on his knife, gaping. The woman remained seated, though she reached for something at her side. A little tube with a handle on the bottom. She pointed it toward him, treating it like some kind of weapon.

"So," Kelsier said, glancing at the sky with its shifting, writhing mass of too-solid tendrils, "anyone else bothered by the voracious force of destruction in the air above us?"

"Shadows!" the man shouted. "It's *you*. You're dead!"

"Depends on your definition of dead," Kelsier said, strolling over to the fire. The woman trailed him with that odd weapon of hers. "What in the blazes are you *burning* for that fire?" He looked up at the two of them. "What?"

"How?" the man sputtered. "What? When . . ."

". . . Why?" Kelsier added helpfully.

"Yes, why!"

"I have a very delicate constitution, you see," Kelsier said. "And death seemed like it would be *rather* bad for the digestion. So I decided not to participate."

"One doesn't merely *decide* to become a shadow!" the man exclaimed. He had a faintly strange accent, one Kelsier couldn't place. "It's an important rite! With requirements and traditions. This . . . this is . . ." He threw his hands into the air. "This is a *bother*."

Kelsier smiled, meeting the gaze of the woman, who reached for a cup of something warm on the ground beside her. With her other hand she tucked her weapon away, as if it had never been there. She was perhaps in her mid-thirties.

"The Survivor of Hathsin," she said, musing.

"You seem to have me at a disadvantage," Kelsier said. "One problem with notoriety, unfortunately."

"I should assume there are many disadvantages to fame, for a thief. One doesn't particularly wish to be recognized while trying to lift pocketbooks."

"Considering how he's regarded by the people of this domain," the man said, still watching Kelsier with a wary eye, "I'd expect them to be delighted to discover him robbing them."

"Yes," Kelsier said dryly, "they practically lined up for the privilege. Must I repeat myself?"

She considered. "My name is Khriss, of Taldain." She nodded toward the other man, and he reluctantly replaced his knife. "That is Nazh, a man in my employ."

“Excellent,” Kelsier said. “Any idea why Preservation would tell me to come talk to you?”

“*Preservation?*” Nazh said, stepping up and seizing Kelsier’s arm. So, as with the Drifter, they could indeed touch Kelsier. “You’ve spoken directly with one of the *Shards*?”

“Sure,” Kelsier said. “Fuzz and I go way back.” He pulled his arm free of Nazh’s grip and grabbed the other folding stool from beside the fire—two simple pieces of wood that folded together, a piece of cloth between them to sit on.

He settled it across from Khriss and sat down.

“I don’t like this, Khriss,” Nazh said. “He’s dangerous.”

“Fortunately,” she replied, “so are we. The Shard Preservation, Survivor. How does he look?”

“Is that a test to see if I’ve actually spoken with him,” Kelsier said, “or a sincere question as to the creature’s status?”

“Both.”

“He’s dying,” Kelsier said, spinning Nazh’s knife in his fingers. He’d palmed it during their altercation a moment ago, and was curious to find that though it was made of metal, it didn’t glow. “He’s a short man with black hair—or he used to be. He’s been . . . well, *unraveling.*”

“Hey,” Nazh said, eyes narrowing at the knife. He looked at his belt, and the empty sheath. “*Hey!*”

“Unraveling,” Khriss said. “So a slow death. Ati doesn’t know how to Splinter another Shard? Or he hasn’t the strength? Hmm . . .”

“Ati?” Kelsier asked. “Preservation mentioned that name too.”

Khriss pointed at the sky with one finger while she sipped at her drink. “That’s him. What he’s become, at least.”

“And . . . what is a Shard?” Kelsier asked.

“Are you a scholar, Mr. Survivor?”

“No,” he said. “But I’ve killed a few.”

“Cute. Well, you’ve stumbled into something far, far bigger than you, your politics, or your little planet.”

“Bigger than you can handle, Survivor,” Nazh said, swiping back his knife as Kelsier balanced it on his finger. “You should just bow out now.”

“Nazh does have a point,” Khriss said. “Your questions are dangerous. Once you step behind the curtain and see the actors as the people they are, it becomes harder to pretend the play is real.”

"I . . ." Kelsier leaned forward, clasping his hands before him. Hell . . . that fire was warm, but it didn't seem to be *burning* anything. He stared at the flames and swallowed. "I woke up from death after having, deep down, expected there to be no afterlife. I found that God was real, but that he was dying. I need answers. *Please*."

"Curious," she said.

He looked up, frowning.

"I have heard many stories of you, Survivor," she said. "They often laud your many admirable qualities. Sincerity is never one of those."

"I can steal something else from your manservant," Kelsier said, "if it will make you feel more comfortable that I am what you expected."

"You can try," Nazh said, walking around the fire, folding his arms and obviously trying to look intimidating.

"The Shards," Khriss said, drawing Kelsier's attention, "are not God, but they are *pieces* of God. Ruin, Preservation, Autonomy, Cultivation, Devotion . . . There are sixteen of them."

"Sixteen," Kelsier breathed. "There are fourteen *more* of these things running around?"

"The rest are on other planets."

"Other . . ." Kelsier blinked. "Other *planets*."

"Ah, see," Nazh said. "You've broken him already, Khriss."

"Other planets," she repeated gently. "Yes, there are dozens of them. Many are inhabited by people much like you or me. There is an original, shrouded and hidden somewhere in the cosmere. I've yet to find it, but I *have* found stories.

"Anyway, there was a God. Adonalsium. I don't know if it was a force or a being, though I suspect the latter. Sixteen people, together, *killed* Adonalsium, ripping it apart and dividing its essence between them, becoming the first who Ascended."

"Who were they?" Kelsier said, trying to make sense of this.

"A diverse group," she said. "With equally diverse motives. Some wished for the power; others saw killing Adonalsium as the only good option left to them. Together they murdered a deity, and became divine themselves." She smiled in a kindly way, as if to prepare him for what came next. "Two of those created this planet, Survivor, including the people on it."

"So . . . my world, and everyone I know," Kelsier said, "is the creation of a pair of . . . half gods?”

“More like fractional gods,” Nazh said. “And ones with no particular qualifications for deityhood, other than being conniving enough to murder the guy who had the job before.”

“Oh, hell . . .” Kelsier breathed. “No wonder we’re all so bloody messed up.”

“Actually,” Khriss noted, “people are generally like that, no matter who made them. If it’s any consolation, Adonalsium originally created the first humans, therefore your gods had a pattern to use.”

“So we’re copies of a flawed original,” Kelsier said. “Not terribly comforting.” He looked upward. “And that thing? It used to be human?”

“The power . . . distorts,” Khriss said. “There’s a person in that somewhere, directing it. Or perhaps just riding it at this point.”

Kelsier remembered the puppet Ruin had presented, the shape of a man. Now basically a shell filled with a terrible power. “So what happens if one of these things . . . dies?”

“I’m very curious to see,” Khriss said. “I’ve never viewed it in person, and the past deaths were different. They were each a single, stunning event, the god’s power shattered and dispersed. This is more like a strangulation, while those were like a beheading. This should be very instructive.”

“Unless I stop it,” Kelsier said.

She smiled at him.

“Don’t be patronizing,” Kelsier snapped, standing up, the stool falling down behind him. “I am going to stop it.”

“This world is winding down, Survivor,” Khriss said. “It is a true shame, but I know of no way to save it. I came with the hopes that I might be able to help, but I can’t even reach the Physical Realm here any longer.”

“Someone destroyed the gateway in,” Nazh noted. “Someone *incredibly* foolhardy. Brash. Stupid. Didn’t—”

“You’re overselling it,” Kelsier said. “The Drifter told me what I did.”

“The . . . who?” Khriss asked.

“Fellow with white hair,” Kelsier said. “Lanky, with a sharp nose and—”

“Damn,” Khriss said. “Did he get to the Well of Ascension?”

“Stole something there,” Kelsier said. “A bit of metal.”

“*Damn,*” Khriss said, looking at her servant. “We need to go. I’m sorry, Survivor.”

“But—”

“This isn’t because of what you just told us,” she said, rising and waving for Nazh to help gather their things. “We were leaving anyway. This planet is dying; as much as I wish to witness the death of a Shard, I don’t dare risk doing it from up close. We’ll observe from afar.”

“Preservation thought you’d be able to help,” Kelsier said. “Surely there is *something* you can do. Something you can tell me. It can’t be over.”

“I’m sorry, Survivor,” Khriss said softly. “Perhaps if I knew more, perhaps if I could convince the Eyree to answer my questions . . .” She shook her head. “It will happen slowly, Survivor, over months. But it is coming. Ruin will consume this world, and the man once known as Ati won’t be able to stop it. If he even cared to.”

“Everything,” Kelsier whispered. “Everything I’ve known. Every person on my . . . my planet?”

Nearby, Nazh bent down and picked up the fire, making it *vanish*. The oversized flame just folded up upon itself in his palm, and Kelsier thought he saw a puff of mist when it did so. Kelsier picked up his stool with one finger, unscrewed the bolt on the bottom, and palmed it into his hand before handing the stool to Nazh.

Nazh then tugged on a hiking pack, tied with scroll cases across the top. He looked to Khriss.

“Stay,” Kelsier said, turning back to Khriss. “Help me.”

“Help you? I can’t even help *myself*, Survivor. I’m in exile, and even if I weren’t I wouldn’t have the resources to stop a Shard. I probably should never have come.” She hesitated. “And I’m sorry, but I cannot invite you to come with us. The eyes of your god will be upon you, Kelsier. He’ll know where you are, as you have pieces of him within. It has been dangerous enough to speak here with you.”

Nazh handed her a pack, and she slung it over her shoulder.

“I *am* going to stop this,” Kelsier told them.

Khriss lifted a hand and curled her fingers in an unfamiliar gesture, bidding him farewell it seemed. She turned away from the clearing and strode away, into the brush. Nazh followed.

Kelsier sank down. They’d taken the stools, so he settled onto the ground, bowing his head. *This is what you deserve, Kelsier,* a piece of him thought. *You wished to dance with the divine and steal from gods. Should you now be surprised that you've found yourself in over your head?*

The sound of rustling leaves made him scramble back to his feet. Nazh emerged from the shadows. The shorter man stopped at the perimeter of the abandoned camp, then cursed softly before stepping forward and removing his side knife, sheath and all, and handing it toward Kelsier.

Hesitant, Kelsier accepted the leatherbound weapon.

"It's a bad state you and yours are in," Nazh said softly, "but I rather like this place. Damnable mists and all." He pointed westward. "They've set up out there."

"They?"

"The Eyree," he said. "They've been at this far longer than we have, Survivor. If someone will know how to help you, it will be the Eyree. Look for them where the land becomes solid again."

"Solid again . . ." Kelsier said. "Lake Tyrian?"

"Beyond. Far beyond, Survivor."

"The *ocean*? That's miles and miles away. Past Farmost!"

Nazh patted him on the shoulder, then turned back to hike after Khriss.

"Is there hope?" Kelsier called.

"What if I told you no?" Nazh said over his shoulder. "What if I said I figured you were damn well ruined, so to speak. Would it change what you were going to do?"

"No."

Nazh raised his fingers to his forehead in a kind of salute. "Farewell, Survivor. Take care of my knife. I'm fond of it."

He vanished into the darkness. Kelsier watched after him, then did the only rational thing.

He ate the bolt he'd taken from the bottom of the stool.

# 3

The bolt didn’t do anything. He’d hoped he’d be able to make Allomancy work, but the bolt just settled into his stomach—a strange and uncomfortable weight. He couldn’t burn it, despite trying. As he walked, he eventually coughed it back up and tossed it away.

He stepped to the transition from the island to the misty ground around Luthadel, and felt a new weight upon him. A doomed world, dying gods, and an entire universe he’d never known existed. His only hope now was . . . to journey to the ocean?

That was farther than he had ever gone, even during his travels with Gemmel. It would take months to walk that far. Did they have months?

He stepped off the island, crossing onto the soft ground of the misted banks. Luthadel loomed in the near distance, a shadowy wall of curling mist.

“Fuzz?” he called. “You out there?”

“I’m everywhere,” Preservation said, appearing beside him.

“So you were listening?” Kelsier asked.

He nodded absently, form frayed, face indistinct. “I think . . . Surely I was . . .”

“They mentioned someone called the Eyes Ree?”

“Yes, the I-ree,” Preservation said, pronouncing it in a slightly different way. “Three letters. I R E. It means something in their language, these people from another land. The ones who died, but did not. I have felt them crowding at the edges of my vision, like spirits in the night.”

“Dead, but alive,” Kelsier said. “Like me?”

“No.”

“Then what?”

“Died, but did not.”

*Great,* Kelsier thought. He turned toward the west. “They are supposedly at the ocean.”

“The Ire built a city,” Preservation said, softly. “In a place between worlds . . .”

“Well,” Kelsier said, then took a deep breath. “That’s where I’m going.”

“Going?” Preservation said. “You’re leaving me?”

The urgency of those words startled Kelsier. “If these people can help us, then I need to talk to them.”

“They can’t help us,” Preservation said. “They’re . . . they’re callous. They plot over my corpse like scavenging insects waiting for the last beat of the heart. Don’t go. Don’t *leave me*.”

“You’re everywhere. I can’t leave you.”

“No. They’re beyond me. I . . . I cannot depart this land. I’m too Invested in it, in every rock and leaf.” He pulsed, his already indistinct form spreading thinner. “We . . . grow attached easily, and it takes one who is particularly dedicated to leave.”

“And Ruin?” Kelsier said, turning toward the west. “If he destroys everything, would he be able to escape?”

“Yes,” Preservation said, very softly. “He could go then. But Kelsier, you can’t abandon me. We . . . we’re a team, right?”

Kelsier rested his hand on the creature’s shoulder. Once so confident, now little more than a *smudge* in the air. “I’ll be back as soon as I can. If I’m going to stop that thing, I’ll need some kind of help.”

“You pity me.”

“I pity anyone who’s not me, Fuzz. A hazard of being the man I am. But you *can* do this. Keep an eye on Ruin, and try to get word to Vin and that nobleman of hers.”

“Pity,” Preservation repeated. “Is that . . . is that what I’ve become? Yes . . . Yes, it is.”

He reached up with a vaguely outlined hand and seized Kelsier’s arm from underneath. Kelsier gasped, then cut off as Preservation grabbed him by the back of the neck with his other hand, locking his gaze with Kelsier’s. Those eyes snapped into focus, fuzziness becoming suddenly distinct. A glow burst from them, silvery white, bathing Kelsier and blinding him.

Everything else was vaporized; nothing could withstand that terrible, wonderful light. Kelsier lost form, thought, very being. He transcended *self* and entered a place of flowing light. Ribbons of it exploded from him, and though he tried to scream, he had no voice.

Time didn't pass; time had no relevance here. It was not a place. Location had no relevance. Only Connection, person to person, man to world, Kelsier to god.

And that god was *everything*. The thing he had pitied was the very ground Kelsier walked upon, the air, the metals—his own soul. Preservation *was* everywhere. Beside it, Kelsier was insignificant. An afterthought.

The vision faded. Kelsier stumbled away from Preservation, who stood, placid, a blur in the air—but a representation of so much more. Kelsier put his hand to his chest and was pleased, for a reason he couldn't explain, to find that his heart was beating. His soul was learning to imitate a body, and somehow having a racing heart was comforting.

"I suppose I deserved that," Kelsier said. "Be careful how you use those visions, Fuzz. Reality isn't particularly healthy for a man's ego."

"I would call it very healthy," Preservation replied.

"I saw everything," Kelsier mumbled. "Everyone, everything. My Connection to them, and . . . and . . ."

*Spreading into the future,* he thought, grasping at an explanation. *Possibilities, so many possibilities . . . like atium.*

"Yes," Preservation said, sounding exhausted. "It can be trying to recognize one's true place in things. Few can handle the—"

"Send me back," Kelsier said, scrambling up to Preservation, taking him by the arms.

"What?"

"*Send me back.* I need to see that again."

"Your mind is too fragile. It will break."

"I broke that damn thing years ago, Fuzz. Do it. Please."

Preservation hesitantly gripped him, and this time his eyes took longer to start glowing. They flashed, his form trembling, and for a moment Kelsier thought the god would dissipate entirely.

Then the glow spurted to life, and in an instant Kelsier was consumed. This time he forced himself to look away from Preservation—though it was less a matter of *looking,* and more a matter of trying to sort through the horrible overload of information and sensation that assaulted him.

Unfortunately, in turning his attention away from Preservation he risked giving it to something else—something equally demanding. There was a second god here, black and terrible, the thing with the spines and spidery legs, sprouting from dark mists and reaching into everything throughout the land.

Including Kelsier.

In fact, his ties to Preservation were trivial by comparison to these hundreds of black fingers which attached him to that thing Beyond. He sensed a powerful satisfaction from it, along with an idea. Not words, just an undeniable fact.

*You are mine, Survivor.*

Kelsier rebelled at the thought, but in this place of perfect light, truth *had* to be acknowledged.

Straining, soul crumbling before that terrible reality, Kelsier turned toward the tendrils of light spreading into the distance. Possibilities upon possibilities, compounded upon one another. Infinite, overwhelming. The future.

He dropped out of the vision again, and this time fell to his knees panting. The glow faded, and he was again on the banks of Lake Luthadel. Preservation settled down beside him and rested his hand on Kelsier's back.

"I can't stop him," Kelsier whispered.

"I know," Preservation said.

"I could see thousands upon thousands of possibilities. In none of them did I defeat that thing."

"The ribbons of the future are never as useful as . . . as they should be," Preservation said. "I rode them much, in the past. It's too hard to see what is actually likely, and what is just a fragile . . . fragile, distant maybe. . . ."

"I can't stop it," Kelsier whispered. "I'm too like it. Everything I do serves *it*." Kelsier looked up, smiling.

"It broke you," Preservation said.

"No, Fuzz." Kelsier laughed, standing. "No. I can't stop it. No matter what I do, I can't stop it." He looked down at Preservation. "But *she* can."

"He knows this. You were right. He *has* been preparing her, infusing her."

"She can beat it."

"A frail possibility," Preservation said. "A false promise."

“No,” Kelsier said softly. “A *hope*.”

He held his hand out. Preservation took it and let Kelsier pull him to his feet. God nodded. “A hope. What is our plan?”

“I continue to the west,” Kelsier said. “I saw, in the possibilities . . .”

“Do not trust what you saw,” Preservation said, sounding far more firm than he had earlier. “It takes an infinite mind to even *begin* to glean information from those tendrils of the future. Even then you are likely to be wrong.”

“The path I saw started by me going to the west,” Kelsier said. “It’s all I can think to do. Unless you have a better suggestion.”

Preservation shook his head.

“You need to stay here, fight him off, resist—and try to get through to Vin. If not her, then Sazed.”

“He . . . is not well.”

Kelsier cocked his head. “Hurt in the fighting?”

“Worse. Ruin tries to break him.”

*Damn*. But what could he do, except continue with his plan? “Do what you can,” Kelsier said. “I’ll seek these people to the west.”

“They *won’t* help.”

“I’m not going to ask for their help,” Kelsier said, then smiled. “I’m going to rob them.”

## Part Four

# Journey

# 1

Kelsier ran. He needed the urgency, the strength, of being in motion. A man running somewhere had a purpose.

He left the region around Luthadel, jogging alongside a canal for direction. Like the lake, the canal was reversed here—a long, narrow mound rather than a trough.

As he moved, Kelsier tried yet again to sort through the conflicting set of images, impressions, and ideas he'd experienced in that place where he could perceive everything. Vin *could* beat this thing. Of that Kelsier was certain, as certain as he was that he couldn't defeat Ruin himself.

From there however, his thoughts grew more vague. These people, the Ire, were working on something dangerous. Something he could use against Ruin . . . maybe.

That was all he had. Preservation was right; the threads in that place between moments were too knotted, too ephemeral, to give him much beyond a vague impression. But at least it was something he could do.

So he ran. He didn't have time to walk. He wished again for Allomancy, pewter to lend him strength and endurance. He'd had that power for such a short time, compared to the rest of his life, but it had become second nature to him very quickly.

He no longer had those abilities to lean on. Fortunately, without a body he did not seem to tire unless he stopped to think about the fact that he *should* be tiring. That was no problem. If there was one thing Kelsier was good at, it was lying to himself.

Hopefully Vin would be able to hold out long enough to save them all. It was a terrible weight to put on the shoulders of one person. He would lift what portion he could.

# 2

I know *this place,* Kelsier thought, slowing his jog as he passed through a small canalside town. A waystop where canalmasters could rest their skaa, have a drink, and enjoy a warm bath for the night. It was one of many that dotted the dominances, all nearly identical. This one could be distinguished by the two crumbling towers on the opposite bank of the canal.

*Yes,* Kelsier thought, stopping on the street. Those towers were distinctive even in the dreamy, misted landscape of this Realm. Longsfollow. How could he have reached this place already? It was well outside the Central Dominance. How long had he been running?

Time had become a strange thing to him since his death. He had no need for food, and didn't feel tiredness beyond what his mind projected. With Ruin obstructing the sun, and the only light that of the misty ground, it was very difficult to judge the passing of days.

He'd been running . . . for a while. A long while?

He suddenly felt exhausted, his mind numbing, as if suffering the effects of a pewter drag. He groaned and sat down by the side of the canal mound, which was covered in tiny plants. Those plants seemed to grow anywhere water was present in the real world. He'd found them sprouting from misty cups.

Occasionally he'd found other, stranger plants in the landscape between towns—places where the springy ground grew more firm. Places without people: the extended, ashen emptiness between dots of civilization.

He heaved himself to his feet, fighting off the exhaustion. It was all in his head, quite literally. Reluctant to push himself back into a run for the moment, he strolled through Longsfollow. A town had grown up here around the canal stop. Well, a village. Noblemen who ran plantations farther out from the canal would come here to trade and to ship goods in toward Luthadel. It had become a hub of commerce, a bustling civic center.

Kelsier had killed seven men here.

Or had it been eight? He strolled, counting them off. The lord, both of his sons, his wife . . . Yes, seven, counting two guards and that cousin. That was right. He'd spared the cousin's wife, who had been with child.

He and Mare had been renting a room above the general store, over there, pretending to be merchants from a minor noble house. He walked up the steps outside the building, stopping at the door. He rested his fingers on it and sensed it in the Physical Realm, familiar even after all this time.

*We had plans!* Mare had said as they furiously packed. *How could you do this?*

"They murdered a child, Mare," Kelsier whispered. "Sank her in the canal with stones tied to her feet. Because she spilled their tea. Because she spilled the *damn tea*."

*Oh, Kell,* she'd said. *They kill people every day. It's terrible, but it's life. Are you going to bring retribution to* every *nobleman out there?*

"Yes," Kelsier whispered. He made a fist against the door. "I did it. I made the Lord Ruler himself pay, Mare."

And that boiling mass of writhing serpents in the sky . . . that had been the result. He'd seen the truth, in his moment between time with Preservation. The Lord Ruler would have prevented this doom for another thousand years.

Kill one man. Get vengeance, but cause how many more deaths? He and Mare had fled this village. He'd later learned that Inquisitors had come, torturing many of the people they'd known here, killing not a few in their search for answers.

Kill, and they killed in turn. Get revenge, and their vengeance returned tenfold.

*You are mine, Survivor.*

He gripped at the door handle, but couldn't do more than gain an impression of how it looked. He couldn't move it. Fortunately, he was able to push against the door and force himself through. He stumbled to a stop, and was shocked to see that the room was occupied. A solitary soul—glowing, so it was a person in the real world, not this one—lay on the cot in the corner.

He and Mare had left this place in a hurry, and had been forced to stash some of their possessions in a hole behind a stone in the hearth. Those was gone now; he'd pilfered them after Mare's death, following his escape from the Pits and his training with the strange old Allomancer named Gemmel.

He avoided the person and walked to the small hearth. When he'd returned for that hidden coin, he'd been on his way to Luthadel, his mind overflowing with grand plans and dangerous ideas. He'd retrieved the coin, but had found more than he intended. The pouch of coin, and beside it a journal of Mare's.

"If I'd died," Kelsier said, loudly, "if I'd let myself be pulled into that other place . . . I'd be with Mare now, wouldn't I?"

No reply.

"Preservation!" Kelsier shouted. "Do you know where she is? Did you see her pass into that darkness you spoke of, in that place where people go after this? I'd be with her, wouldn't I, if I'd let myself die?"

Again Preservation didn't reply. His mind certainly wasn't in all places, even if his essence was. Considering how erratic he'd been lately, his mind might not be completely in even *one* place. Kelsier sighed, looking around the small room.

Then he stepped back, realizing that the person on the cot had stood up and was looking about.

"What do you want?" Kelsier snapped.

The figure jumped. Had he *heard* that?

Kelsier walked up to the figure and touched him, gaining a vision of an old beggar, scraggly of beard and wild of eye. The man was muttering to himself, and Kelsier—while touching him—could make some of it out.

"In me head," the man muttered. "Geddouta me head."

"You can hear me," Kelsier said.

The figure jumped again. "Damn whispers," he said. "Geddouta me head!"

Kelsier lowered his hand. He'd seen this, in the pulses. Sometimes the mad whispered the things they had heard from Ruin. But it seemed they could hear Kelsier as well.

Could he use this man? *Gemmel muttered like that sometimes,* Kelsier realized, feeling a chill. *I always thought he was mad.*

Kelsier tried to speak further with the man, but the effort was fruitless. The man kept jumping and muttering, but wouldn't actually respond.

Eventually Kelsier made his way back out of the room. He'd been glad for the madman to distract him from his memories of this place. He fished in his pocket, but then remembered he didn't have the picture of Mare's flower any longer. He'd left it for Vin.

He knew the answer to the questions he'd asked of Preservation just before. In refusing to accept death, Kelsier had also given up returning to Mare. Unless there was nothing beyond the warping. Unless *that* death was real and final.

Surely she couldn't have expected him to just give in, to let the stretching darkness take him? *Everyone else I've seen passed willingly,* Kelsier thought. *Even the Lord Ruler. Why must I insist on remaining?*

Foolish questions. Useless. He couldn't go when the world was in such danger. And he wouldn't just let himself die, not even to be with her.

He left the town, turned his path to the west again, and continued running.

# 3

Kelsier knelt down beside an old cookfire, no longer burning, represented by a group of shadowy, cold logs in this Realm. He found it was important to stop every few weeks or so to catch a breather. He had been running . . . well, a long time now.

Today he intended to finally crack a puzzle. He seized the misted remains of the old cookfire. Immediately he gained a vision of them in the real world—but he pushed through that, feeling something beyond.

Not just images, but sensations. Almost emotions. Cold wood that somehow remembered warmth. This fire was dead in the real world, but it *wished* it could burn again.

It was a strange sensation, realizing that logs could have wishes. This flame had burned for years, feeding the families of many skaa. Countless generations had sat before this pit in the floor. They'd kept the fire burning almost perpetually. Laughing, savoring their brief moments of joy.

The fire had given them that. It longed to do so again. Unfortunately, the people had left. Kelsier was finding more and more villages abandoned these days. Ashfalls went on longer than usual, and Kelsier had felt occasional trembling in the ground, even in this Realm. Earthquakes.

He could give this fire something. *Burn again,* he told it. *Be warm again.*

It couldn't happen in the Physical Realm, but all things there could manifest here. The fire wasn't actually alive, but to the people who had once lived here, it had been almost so. A familiar, warm friend.

*Burn . . .*

Light burst from his fingers, pouring out of his hands, a flame appearing there. Kelsier dropped it quickly, stepping back, grinning at the crackling blaze. It looked very much like the fire that Nazh and Khriss had carried with them; the logs themselves had appeared on this side, with dancing flames.

Fire. He'd made *fire* in the world of the dead. *Not bad, Kell,* he thought, kneeling. After taking a deep breath, he pushed his hand into the fire and grabbed the center of the logs, then closed his fist, capturing the bit of mist that made up the essence of that cookfire. It all folded upon itself, vanishing.

He cupped the small handful of mist. He could feel it, like he could feel the ground beneath him. Springy, but real enough as long as he didn't push too hard. He tucked the soul of the cookfire away in his pocket, fairly certain it wouldn't burst alight unless he commanded it to do so.

He left the skaa hovel, stepping out into a plantation. He'd never been here before—this was farther west than he'd traveled with Gemmel. The plantations out here were made of odd rectangular buildings that were low and squat, but each had a large courtyard. He strolled out of this one, entering a street that ran among a dozen similar hovels.

All in all, skaa were better off out here than they were in the inner dominances. It was like saying that a man drowning in beer was better off than one drowning in acid.

Ash fell through the sky. Though he'd not been able to see it during his first days in this Realm, he'd learned to pick it out. It reflected like tiny curling bits of mist, almost invisible. Kelsier broke into a jog, and the ash streamed around him. Some passed through him, leaving him with the impression that *he* was ash. A burned-out husk, a corpse reduced to embers that drifted on the wind.

He passed far too much ash heaped up on the ground. It shouldn't be falling so heavily here. The ashmounts were distant; from what he'd learned in his travels, ash only fell once or twice a month out here. Or at least that was how it had been before Ruin's awakening. Some trees still lived here, shadowy, their souls manifested by tiny bits of curling mist that glowed like the souls of men.

He approached people on the road who were making westward, toward the coastal towns. Likely their noblemen had already fled that direction, terrified by the sudden increase of ash and the other signs of destruction. As Kelsier passed the people, he stretched out his hand, letting it brush against them and give him impressions of each one.

A young mother lamed by a broken foot, carrying her new baby close to her breast.

An old woman, strong, as old skaa needed to be. The weak were often left to die.

A young, freckled man in a fine shirt. He'd stolen that from the lord's manor, most likely.

Kelsier watched for signs of madness or raving. He'd confirmed that those types could often hear him, though it didn't always require obvious madness. Many seemed unable to make out his specific words, but instead heard him as phantom whispers. Impressions.

He picked up speed, leaving the townspeople behind. He could tell that this was a well-traveled area from the light of the mists beneath him. During his months running, he'd come to understand—and to an extent even accept—the Cognitive Realm. There was a certain freedom to being able to move unhindered though walls. To being able to peek in at the people and their lives.

But he was so lonely.

He tried not to think about it. He focused on his run and the challenge ahead. Because of the way time blended here, it didn't feel to him as if months had passed. Indeed, this experience was far preferable to his sanity-grating year trapped at the Well.

But he missed the people. Kelsier needed people, conversation, friends. Without them he felt dried out. What he wouldn't have given for Preservation, unhinged as he was, to appear and speak to him. Even that white-haired *Drifter* would have been a welcome break from the wasteland of mists.

He tried to find madmen so he could at least have *some* interaction with other living beings, no matter how meaningless.

*At least I've gained something,* Kelsier thought. A campfire in his pocket. When he got out of this, and he *would* get out of it, he'd certainly have stories to tell.

# 4

Kelsier, the Survivor of Death, finally crested one last hill and beheld an incredible sight spread before him. Land.

It rose from the edge of the mists, an ominous, dark expanse. It felt less alive than the shifting white-grey mists beneath him, but oh was it a welcome sight.

He let out a long, relieved sigh. These last few weeks had been increasingly difficult. The thought of more running had started to nauseate him, and the loneliness had him seeing phantoms in the shifting mists, hearing voices in the lifeless nothing all around.

He was a much different figure from the one who had left Luthadel. He planted his staff on the ground beside him—he'd recovered that from the body of a dead refugee in the real world and coaxed it to life, giving it a new home and a new master to serve. Same for the enveloping cloak he wore, frayed at the edges almost like a mistcloak.

The pack he carried was different; he'd taken that from an abandoned store. No master had ever carried it. It considered its purpose to sit on a shelf and be admired. So far it had still made for a suitable companion.

Kelsier settled down, putting aside his staff and digging into his pack. He counted off his balls of mist, which he kept wrapped up tight in the pack. None had vanished this time; that was good. When an object was recovered—or worse, destroyed—in the Physical Realm, its Identity changed and the spirit would return to the location of its body.

Abandoned objects were best. Ones that had been owned for a long while, so they had a strong Identity, but which currently had nobody in the Physical Realm to care for them. He pulled out the ball of mist that was his campfire and unfolded it, bathing in its warmth. It was starting to fray, the logs pocked with misty holes. He could only guess that he'd carried it too far from its origin, and the distance was distressing it.

He pulled out another ball of mist, which unfolded in his hand, becoming a leather waterskin. He took a long drink. It didn't do him any real good; the water vanished soon after being poured out, and he didn't seem to need to drink.

He drank anyway. It felt good on his lips and throat, refreshing. It let him pretend to be alive.

He huddled on that hillside, overlooking the new frontier, sipping at phantom water beside the soul of a fire. His experience in the realm of gods, that moment between time, was a distant memory now . . . but, honestly, it had felt distant from the second he'd fallen out of it. The brilliant Connections and eternity-spanning revelations had immediately faded like mist before the morning sun.

He'd needed to reach this place. Beyond that . . . he had no idea. There were people out there, but how did he find them? And what did he do when he located them?

*I need what they have,* he thought, taking another pull on the waterskin. *But they won't give it to me.* He knew that for certain. But what was it they had? Knowledge? How could he con someone when he didn't even know if they'd speak his language?

"Fuzz?" Kelsier said, just as a test. "Preservation, you there?"

No reply. He sighed, packing away his waterskin. He glanced over his shoulder toward the direction he'd come from.

Then he scrambled to his feet, ripping his knife from the sheath at his side and spinning about, putting the fire between him and what stood there. The figure wore robes and had bright, flame-red hair. He bore a welcoming smile, but Kelsier could see spines beneath the surface of his skin. Pricking spider legs, thousands of them, pushing against the skin and causing it to pucker outward in erratic motions.

Ruin's puppet. The thing he'd seen the force construct and dangle toward Vin.

"Hello, Kelsier," Ruin said through the figure's lips. "My colleague is unavailable. But I will convey your requests, if you wish it of me."

“Stay back,” Kelsier said, flourishing the knife, reaching by instinct for metals he could no longer burn. Damn, he missed that.

“Oh, Kelsier,” Ruin said. “Stay back? I’m all around you—the air you pretend to breathe, the ground beneath your feet. I’m in that knife and in your very soul. How exactly am I to ‘stay back’?”

“You can say what you wish,” Kelsier said. “But you don’t own me. I am *not* yours.”

“Why do you resist so?” Ruin asked, strolling around the fire. Kelsier walked the other direction, keeping distance between himself and this creature.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Kelsier said. “Perhaps because you’re an *evil force of destruction and pain*.”

Ruin pulled up, as if offended. “That was uncalled for!” He spread his hands. “Death is not evil, Kelsier. Death is necessary. Every clock must wind down, every day must end. Without *me* there is no life, and never could have been. Life is change, and I represent that change.”

“And now you’ll end it.”

“It was a gift I gave,” Ruin said, stretching out his hand toward Kelsier. “Life. Wondrous, *beautiful* life. The joy of the new child, the pride of a parent, the satisfaction of a job well done. These are from *me*.

“But it is done now, Kelsier. This planet is an elderly man, having lived his life in full, now wheezing his last breaths. It is not evil to give him the rest he demands. It’s a *mercy*.”

Kelsier looked at that hand, which undulated with the pinprick pressing of the spiders inside.

“But who am I talking to?” Ruin said with a sigh, pulling back his hand. “The man who would not accept his own end, even though his soul longed for it, even though his wife longed for him to join her in the Beyond. No, Kelsier. I do not anticipate you will see the necessity of an ending. So continue to think me evil, if you must.”

“Would it hurt so much,” Kelsier said, “to give us a little more time?”

Ruin laughed. “Ever the thief, looking for what you can get away with. No, a reprieve has been granted time and time again. I assume you have no message for me to deliver, then?”

“Sure,” Kelsier said. “Tell Fuzz he’s to take something long, hard, and sharp, then ram it up your backside for me.”

“As if he could harm even me. You realize that if he were in control, nobody would age? Nobody would think or live? If he had his way you'd all be frozen in time, unable to act lest you harm one another."

"So you're killing him."

"As I said," Ruin replied with a grin. "A mercy. For an old man well past his prime. But if all you plan to do is insult me, I must be going. It's a shame you'll be off on that island when the end comes. I assume you'd like to greet the others when they die."

"It can't be *that* close."

"It is, fortunately. But even if you could have done something to help, you're useless out here. A shame."

*Sure,* Kelsier thought. *And you came here to tell me that, rather than remaining quietly pleased that I was off being distracted by my quest.*

Kelsier recognized a hook when he saw one. Ruin wanted him to *believe* that the end was very near, that coming out here had been pointless.

Which meant it wasn't.

*Preservation said he couldn't leave to go where I'm going,* Kelsier thought. *And Ruin is similarly bound, at least until the world is destroyed.*

Maybe, for the first time in months, he'd be able to escape that squirming sky and the eyes of the destroyer. He saluted Ruin, tucked away his fire, then strode down the hill.

"Running, Kelsier?" Ruin said, appearing on the hillside with hands clasped as Kelsier passed him. "You cannot flee your fate. You are tied to this world, and to me."

Kelsier kept on walking, and Ruin appeared at the bottom of the hill, in the same pose.

"Those fools in the fortress won't be able to help you," Ruin noted. "I think that once this world reaches its end, I will pay them a visit. They've existed far too long past what is right."

Kelsier stopped at the edge of the new land of dark stone, like the lake that had become an island. This one was even larger. The ocean had become a continent.

"I will kill Vin while you're gone," Ruin whispered. "I will kill them all. Think about that, Kelsier, on your journey. When you come back, if there's anything left, I might have need of you. Thank you for all you've done on my behalf."

Kelsier stepped out onto the ocean continent, leaving Ruin behind on the shore. Kelsier could almost see the spindly threads of power that animated this puppet, providing a voice to the terrible force.

Damn. Its words were lies. He *knew* that.

They hurt anyway.

## Part Five

# Ire

# 1

He'd hoped to have the sun back once Ruin vanished from the sky, but after walking far enough out, he seemed to leave his world behind—and the sun with it. The sky here was nothing but empty blackness. Kelsier eventually managed to use some vines to strap his flagging cookfire to the end of his staff, which became an improvised torch.

It was a strange experience, hiking through the darkened landscape, holding a staff with an entire *campfire* on the top. But the logs didn't fall apart, and the thing wasn't nearly as heavy as it should have been. Not as hot either, particularly if—when bringing it out—he didn't make it manifest fully.

Plant life grew all around him, real to his touch and eyes, though of strange varieties, some with brownish red fronds and others with wide palms. Many trees—a jungle of exotic plants.

There were some bits of mist in here. If he knelt by the ground and looked for them, he could find little glowing spirits. Fish, sea plants. They manifested here above the ground, though in the ocean on the other side they were probably down within the depths. Kelsier stood up, holding the soul of some kind of massive deep-sea creature—like a fish, only as large as a building—in his hand, feeling its ponderous strength.

That was surreal, but so was his life these days. He dropped the fish's soul and continued onward, hiking through waist-high plants with a blazing staff lighting the way.

As he got farther from the shore, he felt a tugging at his soul. A manifestation of his ties to the world he'd left behind. He knew, without having to experiment, that this tug would ultimately grow strong enough that he wouldn't be able continue outward.

He could use that. The tugging was a tool that let him judge if he was getting farther from his world, or if he'd gotten turned around in the darkness. Navigation was otherwise next to impossible, now that he didn't have the canals and roadways to guide him.

By judging the pull on his soul, he kept himself pointed directly outward, away from his homeland. He wasn't completely certain that was where he'd find his goal, but it seemed like his best bet.

He hiked through the jungle for days, but then it started to dwindle. Eventually he reached a place where plants grew only in occasional patches. They were replaced with strange formations of rock, like glassy sculptures. The jagged things were often some ten feet or more tall. He didn't know what to make of those. He had stopped passing the souls of fish, and nothing seemed to be alive out here in either Realm.

The pull tugging him backward was growing laborious to fight. He was beginning to worry he'd have to turn around when, at long last, he spotted something new.

A light on the horizon.

# 2

Sneaking was a great deal easier when you didn’t technically have a body.

Kelsier moved in silence, having dismissed his cloak and staff. He’d left his pack behind, and though there were a few plants out here, he could pass *through* them, not even rustling their leaves.

The lights ahead pulsed from a fortress crafted of white stone. It wasn’t a city, but close enough for him. That light had an odd quality; it didn’t burn or flicker like a flame. Some kind of limelight? He drew near and pulled up beside one of the odd rock formations that were common out here. It had hooked spikes drooping from it almost like branches.

The very walls of this fortress glowed faintly. Was that mist? It didn’t seem to have the same hue to it; it was too blue. Keeping to the shadows of rock formations, Kelsier rounded the building toward a brighter light source at the back.

This turned out to be an enormous glowing cord as thick as a large tree trunk. It pulsed with a slow, rhythmic power, and the light it gave off was the same shade as the walls—only far more brilliant. It seemed to be some kind of energy conduit, and ran off into the far distance, visible in the darkness for miles.

The cord passed into the fortress through a large gate in the back. As Kelsier crept closer, he found that little lines of energy were running across the stone of the wall. They branched smaller and smaller, like a glowing web of veins.

The fortress was tall, imposing, like a keep—but without the ornamentation. It didn’t have a separate fortification around it, but its walls were steep and sheer. Guards moved atop the roof, and as one passed, Kelsier pushed himself down into the ground. He was able to sink into it completely, becoming nearly invisible, though that required grabbing hold of the ground and pulling himself downward until only the top of his head was visible.

The guards didn't notice him. He climbed back out of the ground and inched up to the base of the fortress wall. He pressed his hand against the glowing stone and was given the impression of a rocky wall far from here, in another place. An unfamiliar land with striking *green* plants. He gasped, pulling his hand away.

These weren't stones, but the spirits of stones—like his spirit of a fire. They had been brought here and constructed into a building. Suddenly he didn't feel quite so clever at having found himself a staff and a sack.

He touched the stone again, looking at that green landscape. That was what Mare had talked about, a land with an open blue sky. *Another planet,* he decided. *One that didn't suffer our fate.*

For the moment he ignored the image of that place, pushing his fingers through the spirit of the stone. Strangely, the stone resisted. Kelsier gritted his teeth and pushed harder. He managed to get his fingers to sink in about two inches, but couldn't make them go any farther.

*It's that light,* he thought. It pushed back on him. *Looks a little like the light of souls.*

Well, he couldn't slip through the wall. What now? He retreated into the shadows to consider. Should he try to sneak in one of the gates? He rounded the building, contemplating this for a short time, before suddenly feeling foolish. He hurried forward to the wall again and pressed his hand against the stones, sinking his fingers in a few inches. Then he reached up and did the same with the other hand.

Then he proceeded to scale the wall.

Though he missed Steelpushing, this method proved quite effective. He could grip the wall basically anywhere he wanted, and his form didn't have much weight. Climbing was easy, as long as he maintained his concentration. Those images of a land with green plants were very distracting. Not a speck of ash in sight.

A piece of him had always considered Mare's flower a fanciful story. And while the place looked strange, it also attracted him with its alien beauty. There was something about it that was incredibly inviting. Unfortunately, the wall kept trying to spit his fingers back out, and maintaining his grip took a great deal of attention. He continued moving; he could revel in that luxurious scene of green grass and pleasant hills another time.

One of the upper levels had a window big enough to get through, which was good. The guards on the keep's top would have been difficult to dodge. Kelsier slipped in the window, entering a long stone corridor lit by the spiderwebs of power coursing across the walls, floor, and ceiling.

*The energy must keep the stones from evaporating,* Kelsier thought. All the souls he'd brought with him had begun to deteriorate, but these stones were solid and unbroken. Those tiny lines of power were somehow sustaining the spirits of the stone, and perhaps as a side effect keeping people like Kelsier from passing through the walls.

He crept down the corridor. He wasn't sure what he was searching for, but he wouldn't have learned anything more by sitting outside and waiting.

The power coursing through this place kept giving him visions of another world—and, he realized with discomfort, the energy seemed to be permeating him. Mixing with his soul's own energy, which had already been touched by the power at the Well. In a few brief moments, he had started to think that place with the green plants looked *normal.*

He heard voices echoing in the hallway, speaking a strange language with a nasal tone. Prepared for this, Kelsier scrambled out a window and clung there, just outside.

A pair of guards hurried through the hallway beside him, and after they passed he peeked in to see that they were wearing long white-blue tabards, pikes at their shoulders. They had fair skin and looked like they could have been from one of the dominances—except for their strange language. They spoke energetically, and as the words washed across him Kelsier thought . . . He thought he could make some of it out.

*Yes. They speak the language of open fields, of green plants. Of where these stones came from, and the source of this power . . .*

"... is pretty sure he saw something, sir," one guard was saying.

The words struck Kelsier strangely. On one hand he felt they *should* be indecipherable. On the other hand he instantly knew what they meant.

"How would a Threnodite have made it all the way here?" the other guard snapped. “It defies reason, I tell you.”

They passed through the doors at the other end of the hall. Kelsier climbed back into the corridor, curious. Had a guard seen him outside then? This didn’t seem like a general alarm, so if he had been spotted, the glimpse had been brief.

He debated fleeing, but decided to follow the guards instead. Though most new thieves tried to avoid guards during an infiltration, Kelsier’s experience showed that you generally wanted to tail them—for they’d always stick close to the things that were most important.

He wasn’t certain if they could harm him in any way, though he figured it would be best not to find out, so he stayed a good distance back from the guards. After curving through a few stone corridors, they reached a door and went in. Kelsier crept up, cracked it, and was rewarded by the sight of a larger chamber where a small group of guards were setting up a strange device. A large yellow gemstone the size of Kelsier’s fist shone in the center, glowing even more brightly than the walls. That gem was surrounded by a lattice of golden metal holding it in place. All told, it was the size of a desk clock.

Kelsier leaned forward, hidden just outside the door. That gemstone . . . that had to be worth a *fortune*.

A different door into the room—one opposite him—slammed open, causing several guards to jump, then salute. The creature that entered seemed . . . well, mostly human. Wizened, dried up, the woman had puckered lips, a bald scalp, and strange silvery-dark skin. She glowed faintly with the same quiet blue-white light as the walls.

“What is this?” the creature snapped in the language of the green plants.

The guard captain saluted. “Probably just a false alarm, ancient one. Maod says he saw something outside.”

“Looked like a figure, ancient one,” another guard piped up. “Saw it myself. It tested at the wall, sinking its fingers into the stone, but was rebuffed. Then it retreated, and I lost sight of it in the darkness.”

So he *had* been seen. Damn. At least they didn’t seem to know he’d crept into the building.

“Well, well,” the ancient creature said. “My foresight does not seem so foolish now, does it, Captain? The powers of Threnody wish to join the main stage. Engage the device."

Kelsier had an immediate sinking feeling. Whatever that device did, he suspected it would not go well for him. He turned to bolt down the corridor, making for one of the windows. Behind him, the powerful golden light of the gemstone faded.

Kelsier felt nothing.

"Well," the captain said from behind, voice echoing. "Nobody from Threnody within a day's march of here. Looks like a false alarm after all."

Kelsier hesitated in the empty corridor. Then, cautious, he crept back to peek into the room. The guards and the wizened creature all stood around the device, seeming displeased.

"I do not doubt your foresight, ancient one," the guard captain continued. "But I *do* trust my forces on the Threnodite border. There are no shadows here."

"Perhaps," the creature said, resting her fingers on the gemstone. "Perhaps there was someone, but the guard was wrong about it being a Cognitive Shadow. Have the guards be on alert, and leave the device on just in case. This timing strikes me as too opportune to be coincidental. I must speak with the rest of the Ire."

As she said the word, this time Kelsier got a sense of its meaning in the language of the green plants. It meant age, and he had a sudden impression of a strange symbol made from four dots and some lines that curved, like ripples in a river.

Kelsier shook his head, dispelling the vision. The creature was walking in Kelsier's direction. He scrambled away, barely reaching a window and climbing out as the creature pushed open the door and strode through the hallway.

*New plan,* Kelsier decided, hanging outside on the wall, feeling completely exposed. *Follow the weird lady giving orders.*

He let her get a distance ahead of him, then entered the corridor and followed silently. She rounded the outer corridor of the fortress before eventually reaching the end of it, where it stopped at a guarded door. She passed inside, and Kelsier thought for a moment, then climbed out another window.

He had to be careful; if the guards above weren't already keeping close watch on the walls, they soon would be. Unfortunately, he doubted he could get through that doorway without bringing every guard in the place down on him. Instead he climbed along the outside of the fortress until he reached the next window past the guarded door. This one was smaller than the others he'd gone through, more like an arrow slit than a true window. Fortunately, it looked into the room the strange woman had entered.

Inside, an entire group of the creatures sat in discussion. Kelsier pressed up against the slit of a window, peeking in, clinging precariously to the wall some fifty feet in the air. The beings all had that same silvery skin, though two were a shade darker than the rest. It was difficult to distinguish individuals among them; they were all so old, the men completely bald, the women nearly so. Each wore the same distinctive robe—white, with hoods that could be pulled up and silver embroidery around the cuffs.

Curiously, the light from the walls was dimmer in the room. The effect was particularly noticeable near where one of the creatures was sitting or standing. It was like . . . they themselves were drawing in the light.

He was at least able to pick out the woman from before, with her wizened lips and long fingers. Her robe had a thicker band of silver. "We must move up our timetable," she was saying to the others. "I do not believe this sighting was a coincidence."

"Bah," said a seated man who held a cup of glowing liquid. "You always jump at stories, Alonoe. Not every coincidence is a sign of someone drawing upon Fortune."

"And do you disagree that it is best to be careful?" Alonoe demanded. "We have come too far, worked too hard, to let the prize slip away now."

"Preservation's Vessel *has* nearly expired," another woman said. "Our window to strike is approaching."

"An entire Shard," Alonoe said. "Ours."

"And if that was an agent of Ruin the guards spotted?" asked the seated man. "If our plans have been discovered? The Vessel of Ruin could have his eyes upon us at this very moment."

Alonoe seemed disturbed by this, and she glanced upward as if to search the sky for the watching eyes of the Shard. She recovered, speaking firmly. "I will take the chance."

"We will draw his anger either way," another of the beings noted. "If one of us Ascends to Preservation, we will be safe. Only then."

Kelsier chewed on this as the creatures fell silent. *So someone else can take up the Shard. Fuzz is almost dead, but if someone were to seize his power as he died . . .*

But hadn't Preservation told Kelsier that such a thing was impossible? *You wouldn't be able to hold my power anyway,* Preservation had said. *You're not Connected enough to me.*

He'd seen that now firsthand, in the space between moments. Were these creatures somehow Connected enough to Preservation to take the power? Kelsier doubted it. So what was their plan?

"We move forward," the seated man said, looking to the others. One at a time, they nodded. "Devotion protect us. We move forward."

"You won't need Devotion, Elrao," Alonoe said. "You will have *me*."

*Over my dead body,* Kelsier thought. Or . . . well, something like that.

"The timetable is accelerated then," said Elrao, the man with the cup. He drank the glowing liquid, then stood. "To the vault?"

The others nodded. Together they left the room.

Kelsier waited until they were gone, then tried pushing himself through the window. It was too small for a person, but he wasn't completely a person any longer. He could meld a few inches with the stone, and with effort he was able to contort his shape and *squeeze* through the wide slit.

He finally tumbled into the room, shoulders popping into their previous shape. The experience left him with a splitting headache. He sat up, back to the wall, and waited for the pain to fade before standing to give this room a thorough ransacking.

He didn't come up with much. A few bottles of wine, a handful of gemstones left casually in one of the drawers. Both were real, not souls pulled through to this Realm.

The room had a door leading into the inner parts of the fortress, and so—after peeking through—he slipped in. This next room looked more promising. It was a bedroom. He rifled through the drawers, discovering several robes like the wizened people had been wearing. And then, in the small table by the hearth, the jackpot. A book of sketches filled with strange symbols like the one he had visualized. Symbols that he felt, vaguely, he could understand.

Yes . . . These were writing, though most of the pages were filled with terms he couldn't begin to comprehend, even once he began to be able to read the symbols themselves. Terms like Adonalsium, Connection, Realmatic Theory.

The end pages, however, described the culmination of the notes and sketches. A kind of arcane device in the shape of a sphere. You could break it and absorb the power within, which would briefly Connect you to Preservation—like the lines he'd seen in the place between moments.

That was their plan. Travel to the place of Preservation's death, prime themselves with this device, and absorb his power—Ascending to take his place.

Bold. Exactly the kind of plan Kelsier admired. And now, he finally knew what he was going to steal from them.

# 3

Thievery was the most authentic form of flattery.

What could be more satisfying than knowing the things you possessed were intriguing, captivating, or valuable enough to provoke another man to risk everything to obtain them? This was Kelsier's purpose in life, to remind people of the value of the things they loved. By taking them away.

These days, he didn't care for the *little* thieveries. Yes, he'd pocketed the gemstones he'd found up above, but that was more out of pragmatism than anything else. Ever since the Pits of Hathsin, he hadn't been interested in stealing common possessions.

No, these days he stole something far greater. Kelsier stole dreams.

He crouched outside the fortress, hidden between two spires of twisting black rock. He now understood the purpose of creating such a powerful building, here at the reaches of Preservation and Ruin's dominion. That fortress protected a vault, and inside that vault lay an incredible opportunity. The seed that would make a person, under the right circumstances, into a god.

Getting to it would be nearly impossible. They'd have guards, locks, traps, and arcane devices he couldn't plan for or expect. Sneaking in and robbing that vault would test his skills to their utmost, and even then he was likely to fail.

He decided not to try.

That was the thing about big, defended vaults. You couldn't realistically leave most possessions in them forever. Eventually you had to use what you guarded—and that provided men such as Kelsier with an opportunity. And so he waited, prepared, and planned.

It took a week or so—counting days by judging the schedules of the guards—but at long last an expedition sallied forth from the keep. The grand procession of twenty people rode on horseback, holding aloft lanterns.

*Horses,* Kelsier thought, slipping through the darkness to keep pace with the procession. *Hadn't expected that.*

Well, they weren't moving terribly quickly even with the mounts. He was able to keep up with them easily, particularly since he didn't tire as he had when alive.

He counted five of the wizened ancients and a force of fifteen soldiers. Curiously, each of the ancients was dressed almost exactly the same, in their similar robes with hoods up and leather satchels over their shoulders, the same style of saddlebags on each horse.

*Decoys,* Kelsier decided. *If someone attacks, they can split up. Their enemy might not know which of them to follow.*

Kelsier could use that, particularly since he was relatively certain who carried the Connection device. Alonoe, the imperious woman who seemed to be in charge, wasn't the type to let power slip through her spindly fingertips. She intended to become Preservation; letting one of her colleagues carry the device would be too risky. What if they got ideas? What if they used it themselves?

No, she'd have the weapon on her somewhere. The only question was how to get it from her.

Kelsier gave it some time. Days of travel through the darkened landscape, keeping pace with the caravan while he planned.

There were three basic types of thievery. The first involved a knife to the throat and a whispered threat. The second involved pilfering in the night. And the third . . . well, that was Kelsier's favorite. It involved a tongue coated with zinc. Instead of a knife it used confusion, and instead of prowling it worked in the open.

The best kind of thievery left your target uncertain if anything had happened at all. Getting away with the prize was all well and good, but it didn't mean much if the city guard came pounding on your door the next day. He'd rather escape with half as many boxings, but the confidence that his trickery wouldn't be discovered for weeks to come.

And the *real* trophy was to pull off a heist so clever, the target didn't ever discover you'd taken something from them.

Each “night” the caravan made camp in an anxious little cluster of bedrolls around a campfire, much like the one in Kelsier’s pack. The ancients got out jars of light, drinking and restoring the luminance to their skin. They didn’t chat much; these people seemed less like friends and more like a group of noblemen who considered one another allies by necessity.

Soon after their meal each night, the ancients retired to their bedrolls. They set guards, but didn’t sleep in tents. Why would you need a tent out here? There was no rain to keep off, and practically no wind to block. Just darkness, rustling plants, and a dead man.

Unfortunately, Kelsier couldn’t figure out a way to get to the weapon. Alonoe slept with her satchel in her hands, watched over by two guards. Each morning she checked to make sure the weapon was still there. Kelsier managed to get a glimpse of it one morning, and saw the glowing light inside, making him reasonably certain her satchel wasn’t a decoy.

Well, that would come. His first step was to sow a little misdirection. He waited for an appropriate night, then pushed himself down into the ground, sinking his essence beneath the surface. Then he pulled himself through the rock. It was like swimming through very thick liquid dirt.

He came up near where Alonoe had just settled down to sleep, and stuck only his lips out of the ground. *Dox would have had a fit of laughter seeing this,* Kelsier thought. Well, Kelsier was far too arrogant to worry about his pride.

“So,” he whispered to Alonoe in her own language, “you presume to hold Preservation’s power. You think you’ll fare better than he did at resisting me?”

He then pulled himself down under the ground. It was black as night under there, but he could hear the thumping of feet and the cries of shock from what he’d said. He swam out a distance, then lifted an ear from the ground.

“It was Ruin!” Alonoe was saying. “I swear, it must have been his Vessel. Speaking to me.”

“So he does know,” said another of the ancient ones. Kelsier thought it was Elrao, the man who had challenged her back in the fortress.

“Your wards were supposed to prevent this!” Alonoe said. “You told me they’d stop him from sensing the device!”

“There are ways for him to know of us without having sensed the orb, Alonoe," another female said. "My art is exacting."

"How he found us is not the problem," Elrao said. "The question is why he hasn't destroyed us."

"Preservation's Vessel still lives," the other woman said, musing. "That might be preventing Ruin's direct interference."

"I don't like it," Elrao said. "I think we should turn back."

"We have committed," Alonoe replied. "We press forward. No quarreling."

The stir in the camp eventually quieted down and the ancient ones turned back to their bedrolls, though more of the guards stayed awake than usual. Kelsier smiled, then pushed himself over beside Alonoe's head again.

"How would you like to die, Alonoe?" he whispered to her, then ducked beneath the earth.

This time they didn't go back to sleep. The next day it was a bleary-eyed party that set off across the dark landscape. That night, Kelsier prodded them again. And again. He made the next week a hell for the group, whispering to different members, promising them terrible things. He was quite proud of the various ways he came up with to distract, frighten, and unnerve them. He didn't get a chance to grab Alonoe's satchel—if anything, they were more careful with it than they had been. He did manage to snatch one of the other ones while they were breaking down camp one morning. It was empty save for a fake glass orb.

Kelsier continued his campaign of discord, and by the time the group reached the jungle of strange trees their patience had unraveled. They snapped at one another and spent less time each morning or night resting. Half the party was convinced they should turn back, though Alonoe insisted that the fact that "Ruin" only *spoke* to them was proof he couldn't stop them. She pressed the increasingly divided group forward, into the trees.

Which was exactly where Kelsier wanted them. Staying ahead of the horses would be easy in this snarl of a jungle, where he could pass through foliage as if it weren't there. He slipped on ahead and set up a little surprise for the group, then came back to find them bickering again. Perfect.

He pushed himself into the center of one of the trees, keeping only his hand outside, tucked at the back, holding the knife that Nazh had given him. As the line of horses passed, he reached out and swiped one of the animals on the flank.

The creature let out a scream of pain, and chaos broke out in the line. The people near the front—their nerves taut from a week spent being tormented by Kelsier's whispers—gave their horses their heads. Soldiers shouted, warning they were under attack. Ancient ones urged their beasts in different directions, some collapsing as the animals tripped in the underbrush.

Kelsier darted through the jungle, catching up to those in the front. Alonoe had kept her horse mostly under control, but it was even darker in these trees than outside, and the lanterns jostled wildly as the animals moved. Kelsier dashed past Alonoe to a point ahead where he'd strung his cloak between two trees and lashed it in place with vines.

He climbed a tree and reached into the cloak as the front of the line—haggard and reduced in numbers—arrived. He'd lashed his fire inside the cloak, and he brought it alive as they neared. The result was a burning, cloaked figure, appearing suddenly in the air above the already frazzled group.

They screamed, calling that Ruin had found them, and split apart, running their horses in a chaotic jumble—some one direction, some another.

Kelsier dropped to the ground and slipped through the darkness, staying parallel to Alonoe and the guard who managed to remain with her. The woman soon caught her horse in a snarl of undergrowth. Perfect. Kelsier ducked away and recovered his stash of supplies, then threw on one of the robes he'd found in the fortress. He scrambled through the brush, the robe catching on things, until he was just close enough for Alonoe to see.

Then he stepped out where she could see him and called to her, waving his hand. Thinking she'd found a larger group of her people, she and her lone guard trotted their horses toward him. That, however, only served to draw them away from the rest of the group. Kelsier led her farther from the others, then ducked away into the darkness, losing her and leaving her and her guard isolated.

From there he scrambled through the dark underbrush toward the rest of the group, his phantom heart pounding.

*This*. He'd *missed* this.

The con. The excitement of playing people like flutes, twisting them about themselves, tying their minds in knots. He hurried through the forest, listening to the shouts of fright, the calls of soldiers to one another, the snorts and cries of the horses. The patch of dense vegetation had become demonic disharmony.

Nearby, one of the wizened men was gathering soldiers and his colleagues, calling for them to keep their heads, and started leading them back in the direction they'd come, perhaps to regroup with those that had been lost when the line first scattered.

Kelsier—still wearing the robe and holding his stolen satchel over his shoulder—lay down on the ground in their path, and waited until someone spotted him.

"There!" a guard said. "It's—"

Kelsier sank himself down into the ground, leaving the robe and satchel behind. The guard screamed at the sight of one of the ancients apparently *melting* to nothing.

Kelsier crept up out of the ground a short distance away as the group gathered around his robe and satchel. "She *disintegrated,* ancient one!" the guard said. "I watched it with my own eyes."

"That's one of Alonoe's robes," a woman whispered, hand pulled to her breast in shock.

Another of the ancients looked in the satchel. "Empty," he said. "Merciful Domi . . . What were we thinking?"

"Back," Elrao said. "Back! Everyone get your horses! We're leaving. Curse Alonoe and this idea of hers!"

They were gone in moments. Kelsier strolled through the forest, stepping up beside the discarded robe—which they'd left—listening to the main bulk of the expedition crash through the jungle in their haste to escape him.

He shook his head, then took a short walk through the underbrush to where Alonoe and her lone guard were now trying to follow the sounds of the main body. They were doing a pretty good job of it, all things considered.

When the ancient one wasn't looking, Kelsier grabbed the guard around the neck and hauled him into the darkness. The man thrashed, but Kelsier got him in a quick lock and hold, knocking the man out without too much trouble. He pulled the body back quietly, then returned to find the solitary ancient one standing with lantern in hand beside her horse, turning frantically.

The jungle had become eerily still. "Hello?" she called. "Elrao? Riina?"

Kelsier waited in shadow as the calls became more and more frantic. Eventually the woman's voice gave out. She slumped down in the forest, exhausted.

"Leave it," Kelsier whispered.

She looked up, red-eyed, frightened. Ancient or not, she could obviously still feel fear. Her eyes darted to one side, then the other, but he was too well hidden for her to spot him.

"*Leave it,*" Kelsier repeated.

He didn't need to ask again. She nodded, trembling, then took off her satchel and opened it, dumping out a large glass orb. The light from it was brilliant, and Kelsier had to step back lest it reveal him. Yes, there was power in that orb, great power. It was filled with glowing liquid that was far purer, and far brighter, than what the ancients had been drinking.

Exhaustion evident in her every move, the woman went to climb back onto her horse.

"Walk," Kelsier commanded.

She looked toward the darkness, searching, but didn't see him. "I . . ." she said, then licked her wizened lips. "I could serve you, Vessel. I—"

"*Go,*" Kelsier ordered.

Wincing, she unhooked the saddlebags and—lethargically—threw them over her shoulder. He didn't stop her. She probably needed those jars of glowing liquid to survive, and he didn't want her dead. He just wanted her to be slower than her companions. Once she found them, they might compare stories and realize they'd been had.

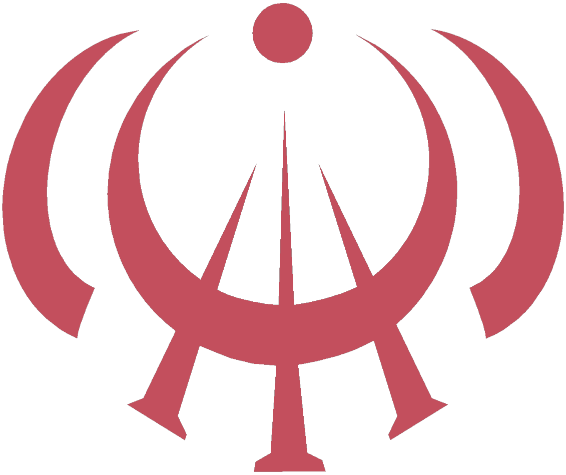
Or perhaps not. Alonoe struck out into the jungle. Hopefully they'd all conclude that Ruin had indeed bested them. Kelsier waited until she was gone, then strolled over and picked up the large glass orb. It showed no discernible way of being opened, other than shattering it.

He held the glowing orb before him and shook it, gazing at the incredible, mesmerizing liquid light within.

That was the most fun he'd had in ages.

## Part Six

# Hero



# 1

Kelsier ran across a broken world. The trouble had been apparent the moment he left the ocean, stepping back onto the misty ground that made up the Final Empire. Here he'd found the wreckage of a coastal city. Smashed buildings, shattered streets. The entire city seemed to have *slid* into the ocean, a fact he wasn't able to fully piece together until he stood above the town and noticed the shadowy remains of buildings sticking from the ocean island farther up the coast.

From there it only grew worse. Empty towns. Vast piles of ash, which manifested on this side as rolling hills that he ran across for a time before realizing what they were.

Several days into his run home, he passed a small village where a few glowing souls huddled together in a building. As he watched, horrified, the roof collapsed, dumping ash on them. Three glows winked out immediately, and the souls of three ashen skaa appeared in the Cognitive Realm, their strings to the physical world cut.

Preservation didn't appear to greet them.

Kelsier grabbed one of them, an aged woman who—as he took her hand—started and looked at him with wide eyes. "Lord Ruler!"

"No," Kelsier said. "But close. What is happening?"

She started to stretch away. Her companions had already vanished.

"It's ending . . ." she whispered. "All ending . . ."

And she was gone. Kelsier was left holding empty air, disturbed.

He started running again. He'd felt guilty leaving the horse behind in the forest, but surely the animal was better off there than it would have been here.

Was he too late? Was Preservation already dead?

He ran himself hard, the heft of the glass orb weighing down his pack. Perhaps it was the urgency, but his course became even more single-minded than it had been during his trip out. He didn't want to see the failing world, the death all around him. Compared to that the exhaustion of the run was preferable, and so he sought it, running himself ragged.

He traveled for days upon days. Weeks upon weeks. Never stopping, never looking. Until . . .

*Kelsier.*

He jolted to a halt on a field of windswept ash. He had the distinct impression of mist in the physical world. Glowing mist. *Power.* He could not see that here, but he could sense it all around him.

"Fuzz?" he said, raising a hand to his forehead. Had he imagined that voice?

*Not that way, Kelsier,* the voice said, sounding distant. But yes, it *was* Preservation. *We aren't . . . aren't . . . there. . . .*

The crushing weight of fatigue hit Kelsier. Where was he? He spun about, looking for some kind of landmark, but those were difficult to find out here. The ash had buried the canals; a few weeks back he remembered swimming down through the ground to find them. Lately . . . he'd just been running. . . .

"Where?" Kelsier demanded. "Fuzz?"

*So . . . tired . . .*

"I know," Kelsier whispered. "I know, Fuzz."

*Fadrex. Come to Fadrex. You are close. . . .*

Fadrex City? Kelsier had been there before, in his youth. It was just south of . . .

There. Just barely visible in the Cognitive Realm, he made out the shadowy tip of Mt. Morag in the distance. That direction was north.

He turned his back toward the ashmount and ran for everything he was worth. It seemed a brief eyeblink before he reached the city and was given a welcome, warming sight. Souls.

The city was alive. Guards in the towers and on the tall rock formations surrounding the city. People in the streets, sleeping in their beds, clogging the buildings with beautiful, shining light. Kelsier walked right through the city gates, entering a wonderful, radiant city where people still fought on.

In the warmth of that glow, he knew he was not too late.

Unfortunately, his was not the only attention focused here. He had resisted looking upward during his run, but he could not help but do so now, confronting the churning, boiling mass. Shapes like black snakes slithered across one another, stretching to the horizon in all directions. It was watching. It was here.

So where was Preservation? Kelsier walked through the city, basking in the presence of other souls, recovering from his extended run. He stopped at one street corner, then spotted something. A tiny line of light, like a very long piece of hair, near his feet. He knelt, picking at it, and found that it stretched all the way along the street —impossibly thin, glowing faintly, yet too strong for him to break.

"Fuzz?" Kelsier said, following the strand, finding where it connected to another—it seemed a lattice that spread through the whole city.

*Yes. I . . . I'm trying. . . .*

"Nice work."

*I can't talk to them* . . . Fuzz said. *I'm dying, Kelsier. . . .*

"Hang on," Kelsier said. "I've found something; it's here in my pack. I took it from those creatures you mentioned. The Eyree."

*I do not sense anything,* Fuzz said.

Kelsier hesitated. He didn't want to reveal the object to Ruin. Instead he picked up the thread, which had enough slack for him to slip it into the pack and press it against the orb.

"How about that?"

*Ahh* . . . *Yes* . . .

"Can this help you somehow?"

*No, unfortunately.*

Kelsier felt his heart sink further.

*The power* . . . *the power is hers. . . . But Ruin has her, Kelsier. I can't* . . . *I can't give it. . . .*

"Hers?" Kelsier asked. "Vin? Is she here?"

The thread vibrated in Kelsier's fingers like the string of an instrument. Waves came along it from one direction.

Kelsier followed them, noticing again how Preservation had covered this city with his essence. Perhaps he figured that if he was going to be strung out anyway, he should lie down like a protective blanket.

Preservation led him to a small city square clogged with glowing souls and bits of metal on the walls. They glowed so brightly, particularly in contrast to his months out alone. Was one of these souls Vin?

No, they were beggars. He moved among them, feeling at their souls with his fingertips, catching glimpses of them in the other Realm. Huddled in the ash, coughing and shivering. The fallen men and women of the Final Empire, the people even the common skaa tended to dismiss. For all his grand plans, he hadn't made the lives of these people better, had he?

He stopped in place.

That last beggar, sitting against an old brick wall . . . there was something about him. Kelsier backed up, touching the beggar's soul again, seeing a vision of a man with hands and face wrapped in bandages, white hair sticking out from beneath. Stark white hair, a fact not quite hidden by the ash that had been rubbed into it.

Kelsier felt a sudden shock, a painful *spike* that ran up his fingers into his soul. He jumped back as the beggar glanced his direction.

"You!" Kelsier said. "Drifter!"

The beggar shifted in place, but then glanced another direction, searching the square.

"What are you doing here?" Kelsier demanded.

The glowing figure gave no response.

Kelsier whipped his hand back and forth, trying to shake out the pain. His fingers had actually gone *numb*. What had that been? And how had the white-haired Drifter managed to affect him in *this* Realm?

A small glowing figure landed on a rooftop nearby.

"Oh, *hell*," Kelsier said, looking from Vin to the Drifter. He responded immediately, throwing himself toward the wall of the building and climbing desperately up it to Vin's side. "Vin. Vin, stay *away* from that man."

Of course yelling was pointless. She couldn't hear him.

Still, Kelsier seized her by the shoulders, seeing her in the Physical Realm. When had she grown so confident, so knowing? Those shoulders of hers had once cringed, but now they gave her the posture of a woman fully in control. Those eyes that had once widened in wonder were now narrowed with keen perception. Her hair was longer, but her slight build somehow seemed far more *powerful* than it had when he'd first met her.

"Vin," Kelsier said. "Vin! Listen, please. That man is trouble.

Don’t approach him. Don’t—”

Vin cocked her head, then leaped off the roof, *away* from the Drifter.

“Hell,” Kelsier said. “Did she actually hear me?”

Or was it a coincidence? Kelsier leaped after Vin, tossing himself carelessly from the building. He didn’t have Allomancy, but he was light, and could fall without getting hurt. He landed softly and sprinted across the springy ground, tailing Vin as best he could, running *through* buildings, ignoring walls, trying to stay close. She still got ahead of him.

*Kelsier* . . . Preservation’s voice whispered at him.

Something thrummed through him, a familiar jolt of power, a warmth within. It reminded him of burning metals. Preservation’s own essence, empowering him.

He ran faster, jumped farther. It wasn’t true Allomancy, but instead was something more raw and primal. It surged through Kelsier, warming his soul, letting him reach Vin—who had stopped in the street before a large building. Soon after he reached her, she took off again down the street, but this time Kelsier managed to keep pace, barely.

And she knew he was there. He could sense it in the way she leaped, trying to shake a tail, or at least catch sight of one. She was good, but this was a game he’d been playing for decades before she was born.

She *could* sense him. Why? How?

She sped up and he followed, with difficulty. His motions were clumsy; he had Preservation pushing him along, but he didn’t have the finesse of true Allomancy. He couldn’t Push or Pull; he merely jumped, grabbing hold of the shadowed walls of buildings, then throwing himself off in prowling leaps.

Still, he grinned widely. He hadn’t realized how much he had missed training with Vin in the mists, matching himself against another Mistborn, watching his protégé inch toward excellence. She was good now. Fantastic even. Remarkable at judging the force of each Push, at balancing her own weight against her anchors.

This was energy; this was excitement. Almost he forgot the troubles he faced. Almost this was enough. If he could dance the mists with Vin at night, then finding a way to recapture his life in the Physical Realm might not matter so much.

They hit an intersection and turned toward the city’s perimeter.

Vin bounded ahead on lines of steel; Kelsier hit the ground, thrumming with Preservation's power, and prepared to jump.

Something descended around him. A blackness of shredding spikes, of spider leg scratches in the air, of jet-black mist.

"Well," Ruin said from all sides. "Well, well. Kelsier? How did I not see you earlier?"

The power suffocated him, pushing him toward the ground. Ahead, a small figure bounded after Vin, created of black mist and pulsing with a similar rhythm to what Kelsier had displayed. A decoy of some sort.

*Like he did before,* Kelsier thought. *Imitating Fuzz to trick Vin.* He struggled, frustrated, against his bonds.

Preservation, in turn, whimpered like a child in Kelsier's mind, then withdrew from him. The warming power faded from within Kelsier. Remarkably, as the power dampened, so did Ruin's ability to hold Kelsier down. Ruin's strength became less oppressive, and Kelsier was able to struggle to his feet and push through the veil of sharp mists, stumbling onto the street.

"Where *have* you been?" Ruin asked. The power behind Kelsier condensed, forming into the shape of the man he'd seen before, with the red hair. The motions beneath the man's skin were more subdued this time.

"Here and there," Kelsier said, glancing after Vin. He'd never catch up to her now. "I thought I'd see the sights. Find out what death has to offer."

"Ah, very coy. Did you visit the Ire? And got turned away from them, I assume. Yes, I can guess at that. What I want to know is why you returned. I thought for certain you would flee. Your part in this is done; you did what I needed you to."

Kelsier set down his pack, hopefully keeping hidden the orb of light inside. He walked forward, strolling around Ruin's manifestation. "My part?"

"The Eleventh Metal," Ruin said, amused. "You think that was a coincidence? A story nobody else had heard of, a secret way to kill an immortal emperor? It fell right in your lap."

Kelsier took it in stride. He'd already figured that Gemmel had been touched by Ruin, that Kelsier himself had been a pawn of the creature. *But why could Vin hear me?* What was he missing? He looked after Vin again.

"Ah," Ruin said. "The child. You still think she's going to defeat me, do you? Even after she set me free?”

Kelsier spun toward Ruin. Damn. How much did the creature know? Ruin smiled and stepped up to Kelsier.

“Leave Vin alone,” Kelsier hissed.

“Leave her alone? She’s mine, Kelsier. Just as you are. I’ve known that child since the day of her birth, and have been preparing her for even longer.”

Kelsier gritted his teeth.

“So cute,” Ruin said. “You actually thought this was all your idea, didn’t you? The fall of the Final Empire, the end of the Lord Ruler . . . recruiting Vin in the first place?”

“Ideas are never original,” Kelsier said. “Only one thing is.”

“And what is that?”

“Style,” Kelsier said.

Then he punched Ruin across the face.

Or he tried to. Ruin evaporated as his fist drew close, and a copy of him formed beside Kelsier a moment later. “Ah, Kelsier,” he said. “Was that wise?”

“No,” Kelsier said. “It was merely thematic. Leave her alone, Ruin.”

Ruin smiled at him in a pitying way, then a thousand spindly, needle-like black spikes shot from the creature’s body, ripping through the robes that made up its clothing. They pierced Kelsier like spears, fraying his soul, bringing a blinding wave of pain.

He screamed, falling to his knees. It was like the stretching when he’d first entered this place, only *forced, intrusive*.

He dropped to the ground, spasming, his soul leaking curls of mist. The spikes were gone, as was Ruin. But of course the creature was never *truly* gone. It watched from that undulating sky, covering everything.

*Nothing can be destroyed, Kelsier,* Ruin’s voice whispered, intruding directly into his mind. *That’s something humans can’t understand. All things merely change, break down, become something new . . . something perfect. Preservation and I, we’re two sides to the same coin, really. For when I am done, he shall finally have his desired stillness, unchangingness. And there won’t be anything, body or soul, to disturb it.*

Kelsier breathed in and out, using familiar motions from when he’d been alive to calm himself. Finally he groaned and rolled to his knees.

“You deserved that,” Preservation noted, his voice distant.

“Sure did,” Kelsier said, stumbling to his feet. “It was worth trying anyway.”

# 2

Over the next few days, Kelsier tried to replicate his success in getting Vin to listen to him. Unfortunately, Ruin was watching for him now. Each time Kelsier got close, Ruin interfered, surrounding him, holding him back. Choking him with black smoke and driving him away.

Ruin seemed amused to keep Kelsier around the periphery of Vin's camp outside Fadrex, and didn't drive him away. But anytime Kelsier tried to speak directly with her, Ruin punished him. Like a parent slapping a child's hand for getting too close to the flame.

It was infuriating, more so because of the way Ruin's words dug at him. Everything Kelsier had accomplished had merely been part of this *thing's* master plan to be freed. And the creature *did* have some kind of hold on Vin. It could appear to her, as reinforced by how it led her away from the camp one day, in a sudden motion that confused Kelsier.

He tried to follow, running after the phantom that Ruin had made. It bounded like a Mistborn and Vin followed, obviously convinced that she'd discovered a spy. They left the camp behind entirely.

Kelsier slowed, feeling useless, standing on the misty ground outside the city and watching them vanish into the distance. She could sense that thing, and as long as it was here it overshadowed Kelsier. He'd never be able to speak with her.

Ruin's reason for leading Vin away soon manifested. Something launched an assault on Vin and Elend's army of koloss. Kelsier figured it out from the bustling of the camp, and was able to reach the scene faster than the people in the Physical Realm. It looked like siege equipment had been rolled out onto a ridge above where the koloss camped.

It rained down death upon the beasts. Kelsier couldn't do anything but watch as the sudden attack killed thousands of them. He couldn't feel any real regret when the koloss were destroyed, but it did seem a waste.

The koloss raged in frustration, unable to reach their enemy. Curiously, their souls started to appear in the Cognitive Realm.

And they were human.

Not koloss at all, but *people*, dressed in a variety of outfits. Many were skaa, but there were soldiers, merchants, and even nobility among them. Both male and female.

Kelsier gaped. He had never quite known what koloss were, but he had not expected this. Common people, made beasts somehow? He rushed among the dying souls as they faded.

"What happened to you," he demanded of one woman. "How did this happen to you?"

She regarded him with a bemused expression. "Where," she said, "where am I?"

In a moment she was gone. It seemed the transition was too much of a shock. The others showed similar confusion, holding out their hands as if surprised to find themselves human again—though not a few seemed relieved. Kelsier watched as thousands of these figures appeared, then faded away. It was a slaughter on the other side, stones crashing down all around. One passed right through Kelsier before rolling away, breaking bodies.

He could use this, but he would need something specific. Not a skaa peasant, or even a crafty lord. He needed someone who . . .

There.

He dashed through fading spirits and dodged between the glowing souls of creatures not yet dead, making for a particular spirit who had just appeared. Bald, with tattoos circling his eyes. An obligator. This man seemed less surprised by events, and more resigned. By the time Kelsier arrived, the lanky obligator was already starting to stretch away.

"How?" Kelsier demanded, counting on the obligator to understand more about the koloss. "How did this happen to you?"

"I don't know," the man said.

Kelsier felt his heart sink.

"The beasts," the man continued, "should have known better than to take an obligator! I was their keeper, and they did this to me? This world is ruined."

Should have known better? Kelsier clutched the obligator's shoulder as the man stretched toward nothingness. "How? Please, *how* is it done? Men become koloss?"

The obligator looked to him and, vanishing, said one word.

"Spikes."

Kelsier gaped again. Around him on the misty plain, souls blazed bright, flashed, and were dumped into this Realm—before finally fading to nothing. Like human bonfires being extinguished.

Spikes. Like Inquisitor spikes?

He walked to the slumped-over corpses of the dead and knelt, inspecting them. Yes, he could see it. Metal glowed on this side, and among those corpses were little spikes—like embers, small but glowing fiercely.

They were much harder to make out on the living koloss, because of the way the soul blazed, but it seemed to him that the spikes pierced into the soul. Was that the secret? He shouted at a pair of koloss, and they looked toward him, then glanced about, confused.

*The spikes transform them*, Kelsier thought, *like Inquisitors. Is that how they're controlled? Through piercings in the soul?*

What of madmen? Were their souls cracked open, allowing something similar? Troubled, he left the field and its dying, although the battle—or rather the slaughter—seemed to be ending.

Kelsier crossed the misty field outside Fadrex, then lingered out here alone, away from the souls of men until Vin returned, trailed by a shadow she didn't seem to know was there this time. She passed by, then disappeared into the camp.

Kelsier settled down near one of the little tendrils of Preservation, and touched it. "He has his fingers in everything, doesn't he, Fuzz?"

"Yes," Preservation said, his voice frail, tiny. "See."

Something appeared in Kelsier's mind, a sequence of images: Inquisitors listening with heads raised toward Ruin's voice. Vin in the creature's shadow. A man he didn't know sitting on a burning throne and watching Luthadel, a twisted smile on his lips.

Then, little Lestibournes. Spook wore a burned cloak that seemed too big for him, and Ruin crouched nearby, whispering with Kelsier's *own voice* into the poor lad's ear.

After him, Kelsier saw Marsh standing among falling ash, spiked eyes staring sightlessly across the landscape. He didn't seem to be moving; the ash was piling up on his shoulders and head.

Marsh . . . Seeing his brother like that made Kelsier sick. Kelsier's plan had required Marsh to join the obligators. He had deduced what must have happened next. Marsh's Allomancy had been noticed, as had the fervent way he lived his life.

Passion and care. Marsh had never been as capable as Kelsier. But he had always, *always* been a better man.

Preservation showed him dozens of others, mostly people in power leading their followers to doom, laughing and dancing as ash piled high and crops withered in the mists. Each one was a person either pierced by metal or influenced by people around them who were pierced by metal. He should have made the connection back at the Well of Ascension, when he'd seen in the pulses that Ruin could speak to Marsh and the other Inquisitors.

Metal. It was the key to everything.

"So much destruction," Kelsier whispered at the visions. "We can't survive this, can we? Even if we stop Ruin, we are doomed."

"No," Preservation said. "Not doomed. Remember . . . hope, Kelsier. You said, I . . . I . . . am . . ."

"I am hope," Kelsier whispered.

"I cannot save you. But we must trust."

"In what?"

"In the man I was. In the . . . the plan . . . The sign . . . and the Hero . . ."

"Vin. He has her, Fuzz."

"He doesn't know as much as he thinks," Preservation whispered. "That is his weakness. The . . . weakness . . . of all clever men . . ."

"Except me, of course."

Preservation had enough spark left to chuckle at that, which did Kelsier some good. He stood up, dusting off his clothing. Which was somewhat pointless, seeing as how there was no dust here—not to mention no actual clothing. "Come now, Fuzz, when have you known me to be wrong?"

"Well, there was—"

"Those don't count. I wasn't fully myself back then."

"And . . . when did you become . . . fully yourself?"

"Only just now," Kelsier said.

"You could . . . you could use that excuse . . . anytime. . . ."

"Now you're catching on, Fuzz." Kelsier put his hands on his hips. "We use the plan you set in motion when you were sane, eh? All right then. How can I help?"

"Help? I . . . I don't . . ."

"No, be decisive. Bold! A good crewleader is always sure of himself, even when he isn't. *Especially* when he isn't."

"That doesn't make . . . sense. . . ."

"I'm dead. I don't need to make sense anymore. Ideas? You're crewleader now."

". . . Me?"

"Sure. Your plan. You're in charge. I mean, you *are* a god. That should count for something, I suppose."

"Thank you for . . . finally . . . acknowledging that. . . ."

Kelsier deliberated, then set his pack on the ground. "You're sure this can't help? It builds links between people and gods. I'd think it could heal you or something."

"Oh, Kelsier," Preservation said. "I've told you that I am dead already. You cannot . . . save me. Save my . . . successor instead."

"Then I will give it to Vin. Would that help?"

"No. You must tell . . . her. You can reach . . . through the gaps in souls . . . when I cannot. Tell her that she must not trust . . . pierced by metal. You must free her to take . . . my power. All of it."

"Right," Kelsier said, tucking away the glass globe. "Free Vin. Easy."

He just had to find a way past Ruin.

# 3

"So, Midge," Kelsier whispered to the dozing man. "You got that?"

"Mission . . ." the scruffy soldier mumbled. "Survivor . . ."

"You can't trust anyone pierced by metal," Kelsier said. "Tell her that. Those exact words. It's a mission for you from the Survivor."

The man snorted awake; he was supposed to have been on watch, and he stumbled to his feet as his replacement approached. Kelsier regarded the glowing beings, anxious. It had taken precious days—during which Ruin had kept him far from Vin—to search out someone in the army who was touched in the head, someone with that distinctive soul of madness.

It wasn't that they were broken, as he had once guessed. They were merely . . . open. This man, Midge, seemed perfect. He responded to Kelsier's words, but he wasn't so unhinged that the others ignored him.

Kelsier followed Midge eagerly through camp to one of the cookfires, where Midge started chatting, animatedly, with the others there.

*Tell them*, Kelsier thought. *Spread the news through camp. Let Vin hear it.*

Midge continued speaking. Others stood up around the fire. They were listening! Kelsier touched Midge, trying to hear what he was saying. He couldn't make it out though, until a thread of Preservation touched him—then the words started to vibrate through his soul, faintly audible to his ears.

"That's right," Midge said. "He talked to me. Said I'm special. Said we shouldn't trust none of you. I'm holy, and you just ain't."

"What?" Kelsier snapped. "Midge, you *idiot*."

It went downhill from there. Kelsier stepped back as men around the cookfire squabbled and started shoving one another, then they began a full-on brawl. With a sigh, Kelsier settled down on the misty shadow of a boulder and watched several days' worth of work evaporate.

Someone laid a hand on his shoulder, and he glanced toward Ruin, who had appeared there.

"Careful," Kelsier said, "you'll get *you* on my shirt."

Ruin chuckled. "I was worried, leaving you alone, Kelsier. But it seems you've been serving me well in my absence." One of the brawlers punched Demoux right across the face, and Ruin winced. "Nice."

"Needs to follow through more," Kelsier mumbled. "You need to really commit to a punch."

Ruin smiled a deep, knowing, insufferable smile. *Hell,* Kelsier thought. *I hope that's not what I look like.*

"You must realize by now, Kelsier," Ruin said, "that anything you do, I will counter. Struggle serves only Ruin."

Elend Venture arrived on the scene, gliding on a Steelpush that Kelsier envied, looking properly regal. That boy had grown into more of a man than Kelsier had ever expected he would. Despite that stupid beard.

Kelsier frowned. "Where is Vin?"

"Hm?" Ruin said. "Oh, I have her."

"Where?" Kelsier demanded.

"Away. Where I can keep her in hand." He leaned toward Kelsier. "Good job wasting time on the madman." He vanished.

*I absolutely hate that man,* Kelsier thought. Ruin . . . he was no more impressive, deep down, than Preservation was. *Hell,* Kelsier thought, *I'm better at this god stuff than they are.* At least he had inspired people.

Including Midge and the rest of the brawlers, unfortunately. Kelsier stood up from the rock and finally acknowledged a fact he'd been wanting to avoid. He couldn't do anything here, not with Ruin so focused on Vin and Elend right now. Kelsier had to get to someone else. Sazed maybe? Or perhaps Marsh. If he could get through to his brother while Ruin was distracted . . .

He had to hope that the wards on that orb would shade him from the dark god's eyes, as they had when Kelsier had first arrived at Fadrex. He needed to leave this place, strike out, lose Ruin's interest and then try to contact Marsh or Spook, get them to relay a message to Vin.

It hurt him to leave her behind in Ruin's clutches, but there was nothing more he could do.

Kelsier left that very hour.

# 4

Kelsier was nowhere in particular when God finally died.

He couldn't place the location. No town nearby, at least not one that hadn't been buried in ash. He had intended to head toward Luthadel, but with all the landmarks covered over—and with no sun to guide him—he wasn't certain he'd been going the right direction.

The land trembled, the misty ground quivering. Kelsier pulled up short, looking at the sky, at first expecting that Ruin was causing this tremor.

Then he felt it. Perhaps it was the small Connection he had to Preservation from his time at the Well of Ascension. Or maybe it was the piece inside him that the god had placed, the piece inside them all. The light of the soul.

Whatever the reason, Kelsier felt the end like a long, drawn-out sigh. It sent a chill up his spine, and he scrambled to find a thread of Preservation. They had been all over the ground earlier in his trip, but now he found nothing.

"Fuzz!" he screamed. "Preservation!"

*Kelsier* . . . The voice vibrated through him. *Goodbye.*

"Hell, Fuzz," Kelsier said, searching the sky. "I'm sorry. I . . ." He swallowed.

*Odd,* the voice said. *After all these years appearing for others as they died, I never expected . . . that my own passing would be so cold and lonely. . . .*

"I'm here for you," Kelsier said.

*No. You weren't. Kelsier, he's splitting my power. He's breaking it apart. It will be gone . . . Splintered. . . . He'll destroy it.*

"Like hell he will," Kelsier said, dropping his pack. He reached inside, gripping the glowing orb filled with liquid.

*It's not for you, Kelsier,* Preservation said. *It's not yours. It belongs to another.*

"I'll get it to her," Kelsier said, taking up the sphere. He drew in a deep breath, then used Nazh's knife to smash the orb, spraying his arm and body with the glowing liquid.

Lines like threads burst out from him. Glowing, effulgent. Like the lines from burning steel or iron, except they pointed at everything.

*Kelsier!* Preservation said, his voice strengthening. *Do better than you have before! They called you their god, and you were casual with their faith! The hearts of men are NOT YOUR TOYS.*

"I . . ." Kelsier licked his lips. "I understand. My lord."

*Do better, Kelsier,* Preservation commanded, his voice fading. *If the end comes, get them below ground. It might help. And remember . . . remember what I told you, so long ago. . . . Do what I cannot, Kelsier. . . .*

*SURVIVE.*

The word vibrated through him, and Kelsier gasped. He knew that feeling, remembered that exact command. He'd heard that voice in the Pits. Waking him, driving him forward.

Saving him.

Kelsier bowed his head as he felt Preservation fade, finally, and stretch into the darkness.

Then, full of borrowed light, Kelsier seized the threads spinning around him and *Pulled*. The power resisted. He didn't know why—he had only a rudimentary understanding of what he was doing. Why did the power attune to some people and not others?

Well, he'd Pulled on stubborn anchors before. He yanked with all his might, drawing the power toward him. It struggled, defying him almost like it was alive . . . until . . .

It broke, flooding into him.

And Kelsier, the Survivor of Death, Ascended.

With a cry of exultation, he felt the power flow through him, like Allomancy a hundred times over. A feverish, molten, burning energy that washed through his soul. He laughed, rising into the air, expanding, becoming everywhere and everything.

*What is this?* Ruin's voice demanded.

Kelsier found himself confronted by the opposing god, their forms extending into eternity—one the icy coolness of life frozen, unmoving. The other the scribbling, crumbling, violent blackness of decay. Kelsier grinned as he felt utter and complete *shock* from Ruin.

"What was it," Kelsier asked, "that you said before? Anything I can do, you will counter? How about this?"

Ruin raged, power flaring in a cyclone of anger. The persona cracked apart, revealing the *thing*, the raw energy that had plotted and planned for so long, only to be stopped now. Kelsier's grin widened, and he imagined—with delight—the sensation of ripping apart this monster that had killed Preservation. This useless, outdated waste of energy. Crushing it would be so *satisfying*. He willed his boundless power to attack.

And nothing happened.

Preservation's power resisted him still. It shied away from his murderous intent, and push though he would, he couldn't make it hurt Ruin.

His enemy vibrated, quivering, and the shaking became a sound like laughter. The churning dark mists recovered, transforming back into the image of a deific man stretching through the sky. "Oh, Kelsier!" Ruin cried. "You think I mind what you have done? Why, I'd have chosen for *you* to take the power! It's perfect! You're merely an aspect of me, after all."

Kelsier gritted his teeth, then stretched forth fingers made of rushing wind, as if to grab Ruin and *throttle* him.

The creature merely laughed louder. "You can barely control it," Ruin said. "Even assuming it could harm me, you couldn't accomplish such a task. Look at you, Kelsier! You haven't form or shape. You're not alive, you're an *idea*. A *memory* of a man holding the power will never be as potent as a real one with ties to all three Realms."

Ruin shoved him aside with ease, though Kelsier felt a *crackling* at the thing's touch. These powers reacted to one another like flame and water. That made Kelsier certain there *was* a way to use the power he held to destroy Ruin. If he could figure it out.

Ruin turned his attention from Kelsier, and so Kelsier took to trying to acquaint himself with the power. Unfortunately, each thing he tried was met with resistance—both from Ruin's energy and from the power of Preservation itself. He could see himself now, in the Spiritual Realm—and those black lines were still there, tying him to Ruin.

The power he held didn't like that at all. It tumbled inside him, churning, trying to break free. He could hold on, but he knew that if he let go, it would escape him and he would never be able to recapture it.

Still, it was grand to be more than just a spirit. He could see into the Physical Realm again, though metal continued to glow brightly to his eyes. It was a relief to be able to see something other than misty shadows and glowing souls.

He wished that view were more encouraging. Endless seas of ash. Very few cities, dug out like craters. Burning mountains that spewed not only ash, but lava and brimstone. The land had cracked, creating rifts.

He tried not to think of that, but of the people. He could feel them, like he felt the very crust and core of the planet. He easily found which ones had souls that were open to him, and eagerly he swung down in. Surely among these he could find one who could deliver a message to Vin.

Yet they didn't seem to be able to hear him, no matter how he whispered to them. It was frustrating and baffling. He held the powers of eternity. How could he have lost the ability he'd had before, the ability to communicate with his people?

Around him, Ruin laughed.

"You think your predecessor didn't try that?" Ruin asked. "Your power cannot leak through those cracks, Preservation. It tries too hard to shore them up, to protect them. Only *I* can widen cracks."

Whether his reasoning was correct or not, Kelsier couldn't tell. But he did confirm time and time again that madmen could no longer hear him.

However, now *he* could hear people.

Everyone, not just the mad. He could hear their thoughts like voices—their hopes, their worries, their terrors. If he focused too long on them, directed his attention to a city, the multitude of thoughts threatened to overwhelm him. It was a buzz, a rush, and he found it difficult to separate individuals from the mess.

Above it all—land, cities, ash—hung the mists. They coated everything, even in the daytime. While trapped entirely in the Cognitive Realm, he hadn't seen how pervasive they were.

*That's power,* he thought, gazing upon it. *My power. I should be able to hold that, manipulate it.*

He couldn't. That left Ruin far stronger than he was. Why had Preservation left the mists untouched like that? It was still part of him, of course, but it was like . . . like a diffused army, spread as scouts throughout the kingdom, rather than gathered for war.

Ruin wasn't so inhibited. Kelsier could see his power at work now, revealed in ways that had been too grand for him to recognize before Ascending. Ruin ripped open the tops of ashmounts, holding them pried apart, letting death spew forth. He touched koloss all across the empire, driving them to murderous frenzies. When they ran out of people to kill, he gleefully turned them against one another.

He had hold of multiple people in every remaining city. His machinations were incredible—complex, subtle. Kelsier couldn't even follow all the threads, but the result was obvious: chaos.

Kelsier could do nothing about it. He held unimaginable power, yet he was *still* impotent. But importantly, Ruin had to *act* to counter him.

That was an important revelation. He and Ruin were both everywhere; their souls were the very bones of the planet. But their attention . . . that could only be divided so far.

If Kelsier tried to change things where Ruin was focused, he always lost. When Kelsier tried to stop the ashmounts, Ruin's arms ripping them open were stronger than his trying to seal them. When he tried to bolster Vin's armies with a sense of encouragement, Ruin acted like a blockade, keeping him away.

In a desperate attempt, he made a push to approach Vin herself. He wasn't certain what he could do, but he wanted to try battering Ruin away—push himself, and see what he was capable of doing.

He threw everything he had into it, straining against Ruin—feeling the friction of their essences meeting as he drew nearer to Vin, who was locked in a room within the palace of Fadrex. His essence meeting Ruin's caused shocks through the land, trembles. An earthquake.

He was able to draw close. He could feel Vin's mind, hear her thoughts. She knew so little—like he had known so little when he'd begun this. She didn't know about Preservation.

The clashing pushed Kelsier's essence away, ripping Preservation back from him, exposing his core—like a grinning skull as the flesh was torn free. A soul lined with darkness, but which was *Connected* to Vin somehow. Tied to her by the inscrutable lines that made up the Spiritual Realm.

"Vin!" he shouted, in agony, straining. The fight between him and Ruin caused the earthquake to intensify, and Ruin exulted in that destruction. It weakened his attention for a brief moment.

"Vin!" Kelsier said, getting closer. "Another god, Vin! There's another force!"

Confusion. She didn't see. Something leaked from Kelsier, drawing toward her. And with a shock, Kelsier saw a terrible sight, something he'd never suspected. A glowing spot of metal in Vin's ear, so similar to the color of her brilliant soul that he had missed it until he'd gotten very close.

Vin was spiked.

"What's the first rule of Allomancy, Vin!" Kelsier screamed. "The first thing I taught you!"

Vin looked up. Had she *heard*?

"Spikes, Vin!" Kelsier began. "You can't trust—"

Ruin returned and shoved Kelsier with a fierce burst of power, interrupting him. To hold on longer would have meant letting Ruin rip the power of Preservation away from him completely, and so he let himself go.

Ruin shoved him out of the building, out of the city entirely. Their clash brought incredible pain to Kelsier, and he couldn't help bearing the impression that—divine though he was—he was *limping* as he left the city.

Ruin was too focused on this place. Too strong here. He had almost all of his attention pointed at Vin and this city of Fadrex. He was even bringing in Marsh.

Maybe . . .

Kelsier tried to get close to Marsh, focusing his attention on his brother. Those same lines were there as had been with Vin, lines of Connection linking Kelsier's soul to his brother. Perhaps he could get through to Marsh too.

Unfortunately, Ruin spotted this too easily, and Kelsier was too weakened—too sore—from the previous clash. Ruin rebuffed him with ease, but not before Kelsier heard something emanating from Marsh.

*Remember yourself,* Marsh's thoughts whispered. *Fight, Marsh, FIGHT. Remember who you are.*

Kelsier felt a swelling of pride as he fled from Ruin. Something within Marsh, something of his brother, had survived. However, there was nothing Kelsier could do to help now. Whatever Ruin wanted in Fadrex, Kelsier would have to let him have it. To confront Ruin here was impossible, for Ruin could best Kelsier in a direct confrontation.

Fortunately, Kelsier had made a career of knowing when to avoid a fair fight. The con was on, and when the house guard was alert, your best bet was to lie low for a while.

Ruin watched Fadrex so intently, it would leave chinks elsewhere.

# 5

Do better, *Kelsier.*

He watched and waited. He could be careful.

*The hearts of men are not your toys.*

He floated, becoming the mists, observing how Ruin moved his pieces. The Inquisitors were his primary hands. Ruin positioned them deliberately.

*The weakness of all clever men.*

An opening. Kelsier needed an opening.

*Survive.*

Ruin thought he was in control all across the Final Empire. So sure of himself. But there were holes. He was devoting less and less attention to the broken city of Urteau, with its empty canals and starving people. One of his threads revolved around a young man who wore cloth wrapping his eyes and a burned cloak on his back.

Yes, Ruin thought he had this city in hand.

But Kelsier . . . Kelsier *knew* that boy.

Kelsier focused his attention on Spook as the young man—overwhelmed and driven to the brink of madness—stumbled onto a stage before a crowd. Ruin had driven him to this point by wearing Kelsier's form. He was trying to make an Inquisitor of the boy, while at the same time setting up the city to burn in riots and bedlam.

But his actions in this city were like so many others. His attention was too divided, with his only real focus on Fadrex. He worked in Urteau, but didn't *prioritize* it. He'd already set his plans in motion: Ruin the hopes of this people, burn the city to the ground. All it required was for a confused boy to commit a murder.

Spook stood onstage, prepared to kill in front of the crowd. Kelsier drew his attention in like a puff of mist, careful, quiet. He was the pulsing of the boards beneath Spook's feet, he was the air being breathed, he was the flame and fire.

Ruin was here, raging, demanding that Spook murder. It wasn't the careful, smiling persona. This was a purer, rawer form of the power. This piece of him had little of Ruin's attention, and he hadn't brought his full power to bear.

It didn't notice Kelsier as he drew back from the power, exposing his own soul and drawing it close to Spook. Those lines were there, the lines of familiarity, family, and Connection. Strangely, they were even *stronger* for Spook than they'd been for Marsh and Vin. Why would that be?

*Now, you must kill her*, Ruin said to Spook.

Under that anger, Kelsier whispered to Spook's broken soul. *Hope.*

*You want power, Spook?* Ruin thundered. *You want to be a better Allomancer? Well, power must come from somewhere. It is never free. This woman is a Coinshot. Kill her, and you can have her ability. I will give it to you.*

*Hope,* Kelsier said.

Back and forth. *Kill.* Ruin sent impressions, words. *Murder, destroy. Ruin.*

*Hope.*

Spook reached for the metal at his chest.

*No!* Ruin shouted, sounding shocked. *Spook, do you want to go back to being normal? Do you want to be useless again? You'll lose your pewter, and go back to being weak, like you were when you let your uncle die!*

Spook looked at Ruin, grimaced, then cut into his body and pulled the spike free.

*Hope.*

Ruin screamed in denial, his figure fuzzing, spider leg knives spearing out of the broken shape he wore. Destruction sprouted from the figure and became black mist.

Spook sank down onto the platform, slumping to his knees, then fell forward. Kelsier knelt and held him, drawing Preservation's power back to himself. "Oh, Spook," he whispered. "You poor, poor child."

He could feel the youth's spirit sputtering. *Broken.* Cracked through to the core. The boy's thoughts drifted to Kelsier. Thoughts of a woman he loved. Thoughts of his own failures. Confused thoughts.

Deep down, this boy had been following Ruin because he'd wished so desperately for Kelsier to guide him. He'd tried so hard to be like Kelsier himself.

It twisted Kelsier about, seeing the faith of this youth. Faith in him. Kelsier, the Survivor.

A pretend god.

"Spook," Kelsier whispered, touching Spook's soul with his own again. He choked on the words, but forced them out. "Spook, her city is burning."

Spook trembled.

"Thousands will die in the flames," Kelsier whispered. He touched the boy's cheek. "Spook, child. You want to be like me? Really like me? Then fight when you are beaten!"

Kelsier looked up at the spiraling, churning form of Ruin, angered. More of Ruin's attention was focusing this direction. It would soon rebuff Kelsier.

Beating it here was only a small victory, but it was proof. This thing could be resisted. Spook had done it.

And would do it again.

Kelsier looked down at the child in his arms. No, not a child any longer. He opened himself to Spook, and spoke a single, all-powerful command.

"Survive!"

Spook screamed, burning his metal, startling himself to lucidity. Kelsier stood up, triumphant. Spook lurched to his knees, his spirit strengthening.

"Whatever you do," Ruin said to Kelsier, as if seeing him there for the first time, "I counter."

The force of destruction exploded outward, sending tendrils of darkness into the city. He didn't push Kelsier away. Kelsier wasn't certain if that was because his attention was still too focused elsewhere, or if he just didn't care whether Kelsier stayed to witness the end of this city.

Fires. Death. Kelsier saw the thing's plan in a flashing moment: burn this city to the ground, extinguish all signs of Ruin's failure. End the people here.

Spook was already moving, confronting the people around him, giving orders as if he were the Lord Ruler himself. And was that . . .

Sazed!

Kelsier felt a comforting warmth upon seeing the quiet Terrisman stepping up to Spook. Sazed always had answers. But here he looked haggard, confused, *exhausted.*

"Oh, my friend," Kelsier whispered. "What has he done to you?"

The group obeyed Spook's orders, rushing off. Spook lagged behind them, walking down the street. Kelsier could see the threads of the future, in the Spiritual Realm. Coated in darkness, a city destroyed. Possibilities ending.

But a few lines of light remained. Yes, it was still possible. First this boy had to save his city.

"Spook," Kelsier said, forming himself a body of power. Nobody could see him, but that didn't matter. He fell into step beside Spook, who practically stumbled along. One foot after the other, barely moving.

"Keep moving," Kelsier encouraged. He could feel this man's pain, his anguish and confusion. His faith battered. And somehow, through Connection, Kelsier could talk to him as he'd not been able to do to others.

Kelsier shared in Spook's exhaustion with each trembling, agonized step. He whispered the words over and over. *Keep moving.* It became a mantra. Spook's young woman arrived, helping him. Kelsier walked on his other side. *Keep moving.*

Blessedly, he did. Somehow the exhausted young man stumbled all the way to a burning building. He stopped outside, where Sazed had been forced to shy away. Kelsier read their attitudes in the slump of their shoulders, the fear in their eyes, reflecting flames. He heard their thoughts, pulsing from them, quiet and afraid.

This city was doomed, and they knew it.

Spook let the others pull him back from the fires. Emotions, memories, ideas rose from the boy.

*Kelsier didn't care about me,* Spook thought. *He didn't think of me. He remembered the others, but not me. Gave them jobs to do. I didn't matter to him. . . .*

"I named you, Spook," Kelsier whispered. "You were my friend. Isn't that enough?"

Spook stopped in place, pulling against the grip of the others.

"I'm sorry," Kelsier said, weeping, "for what you must do. Survivor."

Spook pulled from the grip of the others. And as Ruin raged above, sputtering and screaming—finally bringing in his attention to begin forcing Kelsier back—this young man entered the flames.

And saved the city.

# 6

Kelsier sat on a strange, verdant field. Green grass everywhere. So odd. So beautiful.

Spook walked over and settled down next to him. The boy removed the cloth from his eyes and shook his head, then ran his fingers through his hair. “What is this?”

“Half dream,” Kelsier said, plucking a piece of grass and chewing on it.

“Half dream?” Spook asked.

“You’re almost dead, kid,” Kelsier said. “Smashed your spirit up pretty good. Lots of cracks.” He smiled. “That let me in.”

There was more to it. This young man was special. At the very least, their relationship was special. Spook believed in him as no other had.

Kelsier thought on this as he plucked another piece of grass and chewed on it.

“What are you doing?” Spook asked.

“It looks so strange,” Kelsier said. “Like Mare always said it would.”

“So you’re *eating* it?”

“Chewing it, mostly,” Kelsier said, then spat it to the side. “Just curious.”

Spook puffed in and out. “Doesn’t matter. None of this matters. You’re not real.”

“Well, that’s partially right,” Kelsier said. “I’m not completely real. Haven’t been since I died. But then I’m also a god now . . . I think. It’s complicated.”

Spook looked at him, frowning.

“I needed someone I could chat with,” Kelsier said. “I needed you. Someone who was broken, but who had resisted *him*.”

“The other you.”

Kelsier nodded.

“You always were so harsh, Kelsier,” Spook said, staring out over the rolling green fields. “I could see that deep down, you *really* hated the nobility. I thought that hatred was why you were so strong.”

“Strong like scar tissue,” Kelsier whispered. “Functional, but stiff. It’s a strength I’d rather you never need.”

Spook nodded, and seemed to understand.

“I’m proud of you, kid,” Kelsier said, giving him a fond punch to the arm.

“I almost ruined everything,” he said, eyes downcast.

“Spook, if you knew how many times *I’ve* almost destroyed a city, you’d be embarrassed to talk like that. Hell, you barely even broke that place. They’ve put out the fires, rescued most of the population. You’re a hero.”

Spook looked up, smiling.

“Here’s the thing, kid,” Kelsier said. “Vin doesn’t know.”

“Know what?”

“The spikes, Spook. I can’t get the message to her. She needs to know. And Spook, she . . . she has a spike in her too.”

“Lord Ruler . . .” Spook whispered. “Vin?”

Kelsier nodded. “Listen to me. You’re going to wake soon. I need you to remember this part, even if you forget everything else about the dream. When the end comes, get people underground. Send a message to Vin. Scratch the message in metal, for anything not set in metal cannot be trusted.

“Vin needs to know about Ruin and his false faces. She needs to know about the spikes, that metal buried within a person lets Ruin whisper to them. Remember it, Spook. Don’t trust anyone pierced by metal! Even the smallest bit can taint a man.”

Spook began to fuzz, waking.

“Remember,” Kelsier said. “Vin is hearing Ruin. She doesn’t know who to trust, and that’s why you absolutely must get that message sent, Spook. The pieces of this thing are all spinning about, cast to the wind. You have a clue that nobody else does. Send it flying for me.”

Spook nodded as he woke up.

“Good lad,” Kelsier whispered, smiling. “You did well, Spook. I’m proud.”

# 7

A man left Urteau, forging outward through the mists and the ash, starting the long trip toward Luthadel.

Kelsier didn't know this man, Goradel, personally. However, the power knew him. Knew how he'd joined the Lord Ruler's guards as a youth, hoping for a better life for himself and his family. This was a man whom Kelsier, if he'd been given the chance, would have killed without mercy.

Now Goradel might just save the world. Kelsier soared behind him, feeling the anticipation of the mists build. Goradel carried a metal plate bearing the secret.

Ruin rolled across the land like a shadow, dominating Kelsier. He laughed as he saw Goradel fighting through the ash, piled as high as snow in the mountains.

"Oh, Kelsier," Ruin said. "This is the best you can do? All that work with the child in Urteau, for this?"

Kelsier grunted as tendrils of Ruin's power sought out a pair of hands and brought them calling. In the real world hours passed, but to the eyes of gods time was a mutable thing. It flowed as you wished it to.

"Did you ever play card tricks, Ruin?" Kelsier asked. "Back when you were a common man?"

"I was never a common man," Ruin said. "I was but a Vessel awaiting my power."

"So what did that Vessel do with its time?" Kelsier asked. "Play card tricks?"

"Hardly," Ruin said. "I was a far better man than that."

Kelsier groaned as Ruin's hands eventually arrived, soaring high through the falling ash. A figure with spikes through his eyes, lips drawn back in a sneer.

"I was pretty good at card tricks," Kelsier said softly, "when I was a child. My first cons were with cards. Not three-card spin; that was too simple. I preferred the tricks where it was you, a deck of cards, and a mark who was watching your every move."

Below, Marsh struggled with—then finally slaughtered—the hapless Goradel. Kelsier winced as his brother didn't just murder, but reveled in the death, driven to madness by Ruin's taint. Strangely, Ruin worked to hold him *back*. As if in the moment, he'd lost control of Marsh.

Ruin was careful not to let Kelsier get too close. He couldn't even draw near enough to hear his brother's thoughts. Ruin laughed as, awash in the gore of the murder, Marsh finally retrieved the letter Spook had sent.

"You think," Ruin said, "you're so clever, Kelsier. Words in metal. I can't read them, but my minion can."

Kelsier sank down as Marsh felt at the plate Spook had ordered carved, reading the words out loud for Ruin to hear. Kelsier formed a body for himself and knelt in the ash, slumping forward, beaten.

Ruin formed beside him. "It's all right, Kelsier. This is the way things were *meant* to be. The reason they were created! Do not mourn the deaths that come to us; celebrate the lives that have passed."

He patted Kelsier, then evaporated. Marsh stumbled to his feet, ash sticking to the still-wet blood on his clothing and face. He then leaped after Ruin, following his master's call. The end was approaching quickly now.

Kelsier knelt by the corpse of the fallen man, who was slowly being covered in ash. Vin had spared him, and Kelsier had gotten him killed after all. He reached into the Cognitive Realm, where the man's spirit had stumbled in the place of mist and shadows, and was now looking skyward.

Kelsier approached and clasped the man's hand. "Thank you," he said. "And I'm sorry."

"I've failed," Goradel said as he stretched away.

It twisted Kelsier inside, but he didn't dare contradict the man. *Forgive me.*

Now, to be quiet. Kelsier let himself drift again, spread out. No longer did he try to stop Ruin's influence. In withdrawing, he saw that he *had* been helping a tiny bit. He'd held back some earthquakes, slowed the flow of lava. An insignificant amount, but at least he'd done something.

Now he let it go and gave Ruin free rein. The end accelerated, twisting about the motions of one young woman, who arrived back in Luthadel at the advent of a storm.

Kelsier closed his eyes, feeling the world hush, as if the land itself were holding its breath. Vin fought, danced, and pushed herself to the limits of her abilities—and then beyond. She stood against Ruin's assembled might of Inquisitors, and fought with such majesty that Kelsier was astonished. She was better than the Inquisitor he'd fought, better than any man he'd seen. Better than Kelsier himself.

Unfortunately, against an entire murder of Inquisitors, it was not nearly enough.

Kelsier forced himself to hold back. And *hell*, was it difficult. He let Ruin reign, let his Inquisitors beat Vin to submission. The fight was over too soon, and ended with Vin broken and defeated, at Marsh's mercy.

Ruin stepped close, whispering to her. *Where is the atium, Vin?* he said. *What do you know of it?*

Atium? Kelsier drew himself near as Marsh knelt by Vin and prepared to hurt her. Atium. Why . . .

It all came together for him. Ruin wasn't complete either. There in the broken city of Luthadel—rain washing down, ash clogging the streets, Inquisitors roosting and watching with expressionless spiked eyes—Kelsier understood.

Preservation's plan. It could work!

Marsh snapped Vin's arm, and grinned.

*Now.*

Kelsier hit Ruin with the full strength of his power. It wasn't much, and he was a poor master of it. But it *was* unexpected, and it drew away Ruin's attention. The powers met, and the friction—the opposition—caused them to grind.

Pain coursed through Kelsier. The ground throughout the city trembled.

"Kelsier, Kelsier," Ruin said.

Below, Marsh laughed.

"Do you know," Kelsier said, "why I always won at card tricks, Ruin?"

"Please," Ruin said. "Does this matter?"

"It's because," Kelsier said, grunting in pain, his power taut, "I could always. Force. People to choose. The card *I wanted them to*."

Ruin paused, then looked down. The letter—delivered by Goradel not to Vin, but to Marsh—did its job.

Marsh ripped free Vin's earring.

The world froze. Ruin, vast and immortal, looked on with complete and utter horror.

"You made the wrong one of us into your Inquisitor, Ruin," Kelsier hissed. "You shouldn't have picked the *good* brother. He always *did* have a nasty habit of doing what was right instead of what was smart."

Ruin looked to Kelsier, turning his full, incredible attention on him.

Kelsier smiled. Gods, it appeared, could still fall for a classic misdirection con.

Vin reached to the mists, and Kelsier felt the power within him tremble, eager. This was what they'd been meant for; this was their purpose. He felt Vin's yearning, and felt her question. Where had she felt this power before?

Kelsier rammed himself against Ruin, the powers clashing, exposing his soul. His darkened, battered soul.

"The power came from the Well of Ascension, of course," Kelsier said to Vin. "It's the same power, after all. Solid in the metal you fed to Elend. Liquid in the pool you burned. And vapor in the air, confined to night. Hiding you. Protecting you . . ."

Kelsier took a deep breath. He felt Preservation's energy being ripped from him. He felt Ruin's fury pummeling him, flaying him, ravenous to destroy him. For one last moment he felt the world. The farthest ashfall, the people in the distant south, the curling winds and the life straining—struggling—to continue on this planet.

Then Kelsier did the most difficult thing he'd ever done.

"Giving you power!" he roared to Vin, letting go of Preservation's essence so she could take it up.

Vin drew in the mists.

And Ruin's full fury came against Kelsier, slamming him down, ripping into his soul. Tearing him apart.

# 8

Kelsier was cloven asunder with a rending, pervasive pain—like that of a bone being pulled from a socket. He tumbled, unable to see or think—unable to do more than scream at the attack.

He ended up someplace surrounded by mist, blind to anything beyond its shifting. Death, for real this time? No . . . but he was very close. He could feel the stretching coming upon him again, coaxing him, trying to pull him toward that distant point where everyone else had gone.

He wanted to go. He hurt *so much*. He wanted it all to end, to go away. Everything. He just wanted it to stop.

He had felt this despair before, in the Pits of Hathsin. He didn't have Preservation's voice to guide him now, as he had then, but—weeping, trembling—he sank his hands into the misty expanse around him and *held on*. Clinging to it, refusing to go. Denying that force that called to him, promising peace and an ending.

Eventually it stilled, and the stretching sensation faded away. He had held the power of deity. The final death could not take him unless he wanted it to.

Or unless he was completely destroyed. He shuddered in the mists, thankful for their embrace, but still uncertain where he was—and uncertain why Ruin hadn't finished the job. He'd planned to; Kelsier had felt that. Fortunately, Kelsier's destruction had become an afterthought in the face of a new threat.

Vin. She'd done it! She'd Ascended!

Groaning, Kelsier pulled himself upward, finding he'd been hit so hard by Ruin's attack that he'd been driven far down into the springy, misty ground of the Cognitive Realm. He was able to pull himself out, with difficulty, and collapsed onto the surface. His soul was distorted, mangled, like a body struck by a boulder. It leaked dark smoke from a thousand holes.

As he lay there it slowly reformed, and the pain—at long last—faded. Time had passed. He didn't know how much, but it had been hours upon hours. He wasn't in Luthadel. De-Ascending—then being crushed by Ruin's power—had flung his soul far from the city.

He blinked phantom eyes. Above him the sky was a tempest of white and black tendrils, like clouds attacking one another. In the distance he could hear something that made the Realm tremble. He forced himself to his feet and walked, eventually cresting a hill where he saw—below—that figures made of light were locked in battle. A war, men against koloss.

Preservation's plan. He'd seen it, understood it in those last moments. Ruin's body was atium. The plan was to create something special and new—people who could *burn away* Ruin's body in an attempt to get rid of it.

Below, men fought for their lives, and he could saw them transcending the Physical Realm because of the body of the god that they burned. Above, Ruin and Preservation clashed. Vin did a much better job of it than Kelsier had; she had the full power of the mists, and beyond that there was something *natural* about the way she held that power.

Kelsier dusted himself off and adjusted his clothing. Still the same shirt and trousers he'd been wearing during his fight with the Inquisitor long ago. What had happened to his pack and the knife Nazh had given him? Those were lost somewhere on the endless fields of ash between here and Fadrex.

He crossed through the battle, stepping out of the way of raging koloss and transcendent men who could see into the Spiritual Realm, if only in a very limited way.

Kelsier reached the top of a hill and stopped. On another hill beyond, distant but close enough to make out, Elend Venture stood among a pile of corpses, clashing with Marsh. Vin hovered above, expansive and incredible, a figure of glowing light and awesome power—like an inspiration for the sun and clouds.

Elend Venture raised his hand, and then *exploded* with light. Lines of white scattered from him in all directions, lines that drilled through all things. Lines that Connected him to Kelsier, to the future, and to the past.

*He's seeing it fully,* Kelsier thought. *That place between moments.*

Elend ended with a sword in Marsh's neck, and looked directly at Kelsier, transcending the three Realms.

Marsh slammed an axe into Elend's chest.

"No!" Kelsier screamed. "*No!*" He stumbled down the hillside, running for Venture. He climbed over corpses, shadowy on this side, and scrambled toward where Elend had died.

He hadn't reached the position yet when Marsh took off Elend's head.

*Oh, Vin. I'm sorry.*

Vin's full attention coursed around the fallen man. Kelsier pulled to a stop, numb. She would rage. She would lose control. She would . . .

Rise in glory?

He watched, awed, as Vin's strength coalesced. There was no hatred in the thrumming that washed from her, calming all things. Above her Ruin laughed, again assuming he knew so much. That laughter cut off as Vin rose against him, a glorious, radiant spear of power—controlled, loving, compassionate, but *unyielding.*

Kelsier knew then why she, and not he, had needed to do this.

Vin crashed her power against Ruin's, suffocating him. Kelsier stepped up to the top of the hill, watching, feeling a familiarity with that power. A kinship that warmed him deep within as Vin performed the ultimate act of heroism.

She brought destruction to the destroyer.

It ended in an eruption of light. Wisps of mist, both dark and white, streamed down from the sky. Kelsier smiled, knowing that at long last it was finished. In a rush, the mists swirled in twin columns, impossibly high. The powers had been released. They quivered, uncertain, like a storm brewing.

*Nobody is holding them. . . .*

Kelsier reached out, timid, trembling. He could . . .

Elend Venture's spirit stumbled into the Cognitive Realm beside him, tripping and collapsing to the ground. He groaned, and Kelsier grinned at him.

Elend blinked as Kelsier held out a hand. "I always imagined death," Elend said, letting Kelsier help him to his feet, "as being greeted by everyone I've ever loved in life. I hadn't imagined that would include *you.*"

“You need to pay better attention, kid,” Kelsier said, looking him over. “Nice uniform. Did you *ask* them to make you look like a cheap knockoff of the Lord Ruler, or was it more an accident?”

Elend blinked. “Wow. I hate you already.”

“Give it time,” Kelsier said, slapping him on the back. “For most that eventually fades to a sense of mild exasperation.” He looked at the power still coursing around them, then frowned as a figure made of glowing light scrambled across the field. Its shape was familiar to him. It stepped up to Vin’s corpse, which had fallen to the ground.

“Sazed,” Kelsier whispered, then touched him. He was not prepared for the rush of emotion brought on by seeing his friend in this state. Sazed was frightened. Disbelieving. Crushed. Ruin was dead, but the world was still ending. Sazed had thought that Vin would save them. Honestly, so had Kelsier.

But it seemed there was yet another secret.

“It’s him,” Kelsier whispered. “He’s the Hero.”

Elend Venture placed a hand on Kelsier’s shoulder. “You need to pay better attention,” he noted. “Kid.” He pulled Kelsier away as Sazed reached for the powers, one with each hand.

Kelsier stood in awe of the way they combined. He’d always seen these powers as opposites, yet as they swirled around Sazed it seemed that they actually *belonged* to one another. “How?” he whispered. “How is he Connected to them both, so evenly? Why not just Preservation?”

“He has changed, this last year,” Elend said. “Ruin is more than death and destruction. It is peace with these things.”

The transformation continued, but awesome though it was, Kelsier’s attention was drawn by something else. A coalescing of power near him on the hilltop. It formed into the shape of a young woman who slipped easily into the Cognitive Realm. She didn’t so much as stumble, which was both appropriate and horribly unfair.

Vin glanced at Kelsier and smiled. A welcoming, warm smile. A smile of joy and acceptance, which filled him with pride. How he wished he’d been able to find her earlier, when Mare was still alive. When she’d needed parents.

She went to Elend first, and seized him in a long embrace. Kelsier glanced at Sazed, who was expanding to become everything. Well, good for him. It was a tough job; Sazed could have it.

Elend nodded to Kelsier, and Vin walked over. “Kelsier,” she said to him, “oh, Kelsier. You always did make your own rules.”

Hesitant, he didn’t embrace her. He reached out his hand, feeling oddly reverent. Vin took it, the tips of her fingers curling into his palm.

Nearby another figure had coalesced from the power, but Kelsier ignored him. He stepped closer to Vin. “I . . .” What did he say? Hell, he didn’t know.

For once, he didn’t know.

She embraced him, and he found himself weeping. The daughter he’d never had, the little child of the streets. Though she was still small, she’d outgrown him. And she loved him anyway. He held his daughter close against his own broken soul.

“You did it,” he finally whispered. “What nobody else could have done. You gave yourself up.”

“Well,” she said, “I had such a good example, you see.”

He pulled her tight and held her for a moment longer. Unfortunately, he eventually had to let go.

Ruin stood up nearby, blinking. Or . . . no, it wasn’t Ruin any longer. It was just the Vessel, Ati. The man who had held the power. Ati ran his hand through his red hair, then looked about. “Vax?” he said, sounding confused.

“Excuse me,” Kelsier said to Vin, then released her and trotted over to the red-haired man.

Whereupon he decked the man across the face, laying him out completely.

“Excellent,” Kelsier said, shaking his hand. At his feet, the man looked at him, then closed his eyes and sighed, stretching away into eternity.

Kelsier walked back to the others, passing a figure in Terris robes standing with hands clasped before him, draping sleeves covering them. “Hey,” Kelsier said, then looked at the sky and the glowing figure there. “Aren’t you . . .”

“Part of me is,” Sazed replied. He looked to Vin and Elend and held out his hands, one toward each of them. “Thank you both for this new beginning. I have healed your bodies. You can return to them, if you wish.”

Vin looked to Elend. To Kelsier’s horror, he had begun to stretch out. He turned toward something Kelsier couldn’t see, something Beyond, and smiled, then stepped in that direction.

“I don’t think it works that way, Saze,” Vin said, then kissed him on the cheek. “Thank you.” She turned, took Elend’s hand, and began to stretch toward that unseen, distant point.

“Vin!” Kelsier cried, grabbing her other hand, holding to it. “No, Vin. You held the power. You don’t have to go.”

“I know,” she said, looking back over her shoulder at him.

“Please,” Kelsier said. “Don’t go. Stay. With me.”

“Ah, Kelsier,” she said. “You have a lot to learn about love, don’t you?”

“I know love, Vin. Everything I’ve done—the fall of the empire, the power I’ve given up—that was all *about* love.”

She smiled. “Kelsier. You are a great man, and should be proud of what you’ve done. And you do love. I know you do. But at the same time, I don’t think you understand it.”

She turned her gaze toward Elend, who was vanishing, only his hand—in hers—still visible. “Thank you, Kelsier,” she whispered, looking back at him, “for all you have done. Your sacrifice was amazing. But to do the things you had to do, to defend the world, you had to become something. Something that worries me.

“Once, you taught me an important lesson about friendship. I need to return that lesson. A last gift. You need to know, you need to ask. How much of what you’ve done was about love, and how much was about proving something? That you hadn’t been betrayed, bested, beaten? Can you answer honestly, Kelsier?”

He met her eyes, and saw the implicit question.

*How much was about us?* it asked. *And how much was about you?*

“I don’t know,” he said to her.

She squeezed his hand and smiled—that smile she’d never have been able to give when he first found her.

That, more than anything, made him proud of her.

“Thank you,” she whispered again.

Then she let go of his hand and followed Elend into the Beyond.

# 9

The land shook and groaned as it died, and was reborn.

Kelsier walked it, hands shoved in his pockets. He strolled through the end of the world, power spraying in all directions, giving him visions of all three Realms.

Fires burned from the heavens. Stones crashed together, then ripped back apart. Oceans boiled, and their steam became a new mist in the air.

Still Kelsier walked. He walked as if his feet could carry him from one world to the next, from one life to the next. He didn't feel abandoned, but he did feel alone. Like he was the only man left in all the world, and the last witness of eras.

Ash was consumed by a land of stones made liquid. Mountains crashed from the ground behind Kelsier, in rhythm to his footsteps. Rivers washed down from the heights and oceans filled. Life sprang up, trees sprouting and shooting toward the sky, making a forest around him. Then that passed, and he was in a desert, quickly drying, sand boiling from the depths of the land as Sazed created it.

A dozen different settings passed him in an eyeblink, the land growing in his wake, his shadow. Kelsier finally stopped on a lofty highland plateau overlooking a new world, winds from three Realms ruffling his clothing. Grass grew beneath his feet, then blossoms sprouted. Mare's flowers.

He knelt and bowed his head, resting his fingers on one of them.

Sazed appeared beside him. Slowly, Kelsier's vision of the real world faded, and he was trapped again in the Cognitive Realm. All became mist around him.

Sazed sat down next to him. "I will be honest, Kelsier. This is not the end I had in mind when I joined your crew."

"The rebellious Terrisman," Kelsier said. Though he was in the world of mist, he could see clouds—vaguely—in the real world. They passed beneath his feet, surging around the base of the mountain. "You were a living contradiction even then, Saze. I should have seen it."

"I can't bring them back," Sazed said softly. "Not yet . . . perhaps not ever. The Beyond is a place I can't reach."

"It's all right," Kelsier said. "Do me a favor. Will you see what you can do for Spook? His body is in rough shape. He's pushed it too hard. Fix him up a little? Maybe make him Mistborn while you're at it. They're going to need some Allomancers in the world that comes."

"I'll consider it," Sazed said.

They sat there together. Two friends at the edge of the world, at the end and start of time. Eventually, Sazed stood and bowed to Kelsier. A reverent motion for one who was himself divine.

"What do you think, Saze?" Kelsier asked, staring out over the world. "Is there a way for me to get out of this, and live again in the Physical Realm?"

Sazed hesitated. "No. I do not think so." He patted Kelsier on the shoulder, then vanished.

*Huh,* Kelsier thought. *He holds the powers of creation in twain, a god among gods.*

*And he's still a terrible liar.*

# Epilogue

Spook felt uncomfortable living in a mansion when everyone else had so little. But they had insisted—and besides, it wasn't much of a mansion. Yes, it was a log house of two stories, when most lived in shanties. And yes, he had his own room. But that room was small, and it felt muggy at night. They didn't have glass for windows, and if he left the shutters open, insects got in.

This perfect new world had a disappointing amount of normalcy to it.

He yawned, closing his door. The room held a cot and a desk. No candles or lamps; they didn't yet have the resources to spare those. His head was full of Breeze's instructions on how to be a king, and his arms hurt from training with Ham. Beldre would expect him for dinner shortly.

Downstairs a door thumped, and Spook jumped. He kept expecting loud noises to hurt his ears more than they did, and even after all these weeks he still wasn't used to walking around with his eyes uncovered. On his desk one of his aides had left a little writing board—they didn't have paper—scratched on with charcoal, listing a few of his appointments for the next day. And at the bottom was a quick note.

*I finally got the smith to make this as you requested, though he was timid about handling Inquisitor spikes. Not sure why you want it so much, Your Majesty. But here you go.*

At the base of the board was a tiny spike shaped like an earring. Hesitant, Spook picked it up and held it before him. Why *did* he want this, again? He remembered something, whispers in his dreams. *Get a spike forged, an earring. An old Inquisitor spike will* *work. You can find one in the caverns that used to be beneath Kredik Shaw. . . .*

A dream? He considered, then—perhaps against his better judgment—jabbed the thing through his ear.

Kelsier appeared in the room with him.

"Gah!" Spook said, leaping back. "You! You're dead. Vin killed you. Saze's book says—"

"It's okay, kid," Kelsier said. "I'm the real one."

"I . . ." Spook stammered. "It . . . Gah!"

Kelsier walked over and put his arm around Spook's shoulders. "See, I knew this would work. You've got them both now. Broken mind, Hemalurgic spike. You can see just enough into the Cognitive Realm. That means we can work together, you and I."

"Oh hell," Spook said.

"Now, don't be like that," Kelsier said. "Our work is important. *Vital.* We're going to unravel the mysteries of the universe. The cosmere, as it is called."

"What . . . what do you mean?"

Kelsier smiled.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Spook said.

"It's a big, big place out there, kid," Kelsier said. "Bigger than I ever knew. Ignorance almost lost us everything. I'm not going to let that happen again." He tapped at Spook's ear. "While dead, I had an opportunity. My mind expanded, and I learned some things. My focus wasn't on these spikes; I think I could have worked it all out, if it had been. I still learned enough to be dangerous, and the two of us are going to figure the rest out."

Spook pulled back. He was his own man now! He didn't need to just do whatever Kelsier said. Hell, he didn't even know if this really *was* Kelsier. He'd been fooled once before.

"Why?" Spook demanded. "Why would I care?"

Kelsier shrugged. "The Lord Ruler was immortal, you know. By a combination of the powers, he managed to make himself unable to age—unable to die, under most circumstances. You're Mistborn, Spook. Halfway there. Aren't you curious about what else is possible? I mean, we have a little pile of Inquisitor spikes, and nothing to do with them. . . ."

*Immortal.*

"And you?" Spook asked. "What do you get from this?"

"Nothing big," Kelsier said. "Just a little thing. Someone once explained my problem. My string has been cut, the thing holding me to the physical world.” His smile broadened. “Well, we’re just going to have to find me a new string.”

# POSTSCRIPT

Kelsier's journey was something that I started outlining soon after finishing the first Mistborn book, back in 2003 or 2004. It's one of those things that, as a writer, is really hard not to talk about to fans when they ask questions. (And I'll admit I broke down more than once and whispered to a heartbroken fan to keep their eyes open for signs of what Kelsier might be up to in the rest of the series.)

It's always a dangerous thing for a writer to resurrect a character. It threatens to undermine the consequences in a story, and minimizes the risks characters take. At the same time, I knew Kelsier's story—in specific—was not yet finished. Readers sensed this. There was more to be told.

It has been a pleasure to be able to bring it to you. For many years, I wasn't certain if I'd actually write this story. What Kelsier was doing was canon to the Mistborn books (and the hints of what he was up to saturated the third book). However, I wasn't convinced I could write the story in a way that felt cohesive, rather than as a series of footnotes.

In the end, I decided the greater problem would have been *not* writing the story—precisely because of the hole in the Mistborn books Kelsier left. There were too many questions that couldn't be answered without this story.

Anyway, thanks as always for following along with me on this journey. And, for those who haven't read them, I'd like to take a moment here to recommend the Wax and Wayne books (Era Two of Mistborn, beginning with *The Alloy of Law*). If you enjoyed this story, I think you'll like what you find. The Wax and Wayne books take what was in the original trilogy and build upon it, expanding the lore of Scadrial in some very interesting directions.

Beyond that, if you watch closely during the Wax and Wayne books, you might figure out what Kelsier is up to during that time.

Because he's not done yet. Not even close.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So, I dropped this one on my team like a strike from a stealth bomber. They were already busy with the art and proofreading for the books we're doing this spring, and then I popped up with another surprise novella and asked if it could possibly be ready in time to be released alongside *The Bands of Mourning*.

Even though they're used to me doing things like this by now, their turnaround on *Mistborn: Secret History* was incredible. More than for almost any other story, they deserve praise for their excellent work on this one.

The incredulous Peter Ahlstrom in particular acted both in his normal roles, as well as being the primary editor, copyeditor, and proofreader for the book. He only rolled his eyes at me once in a while as I talked about this latest crazy story I wanted to publish, and he gave some particularly excellent advice on how to improve the story. If you see him around, make sure to thank him. As I type this, he's spending his entire Saturday pushing to get this book ready for publication next week.

Karen Ahlstrom did an excellent continuity edit for us, as well as building a timeline. She caught a lot of the big errors I'd made, which would have had many of you scratching your heads.

Isaać Stewart was art director for this book—he did the cover design, and as always is the creator of the awesome Allomantic symbols you see spread throughout the book. Miranda Meeks did our wonderful cover; I'm happy to finally get Kelsier on the cover of a Mistborn story.

Writing group for this book was Emily Sanderson, Karen & Peter Ahlstrom, Darci & Eric James Stone, Alan Layton, Ben "Seriously, Brandon?" Olsen, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Kaylynn ZoBell, Isaac & Ethan Skarstedt, and Isaać Stewart.

Our alpha, beta, and gamma readers were Nikki Ramsay, Mark Lindberg, Lyndsey Luther, Alice Arneson, Kristina Kugler, Megan Kanne, Karen Ahlstrom, Josh Walker, Mi'chelle Walker, Ian McNatt, David Behrens, Matt Wiens, Eric Lake, Bob Kluttz, Kelly Neumann, Jakob Remick, and Gary Singer.

Without these people catching all my silly mistakes, this book would have been a travesty of continuity. Many thanks to you all.

Finally, thanks to Joel, Dallin, Oliver, and Emily. For putting up with me all these years.

Brandon Sanderson

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MISTBORN: SECRET HISTORY

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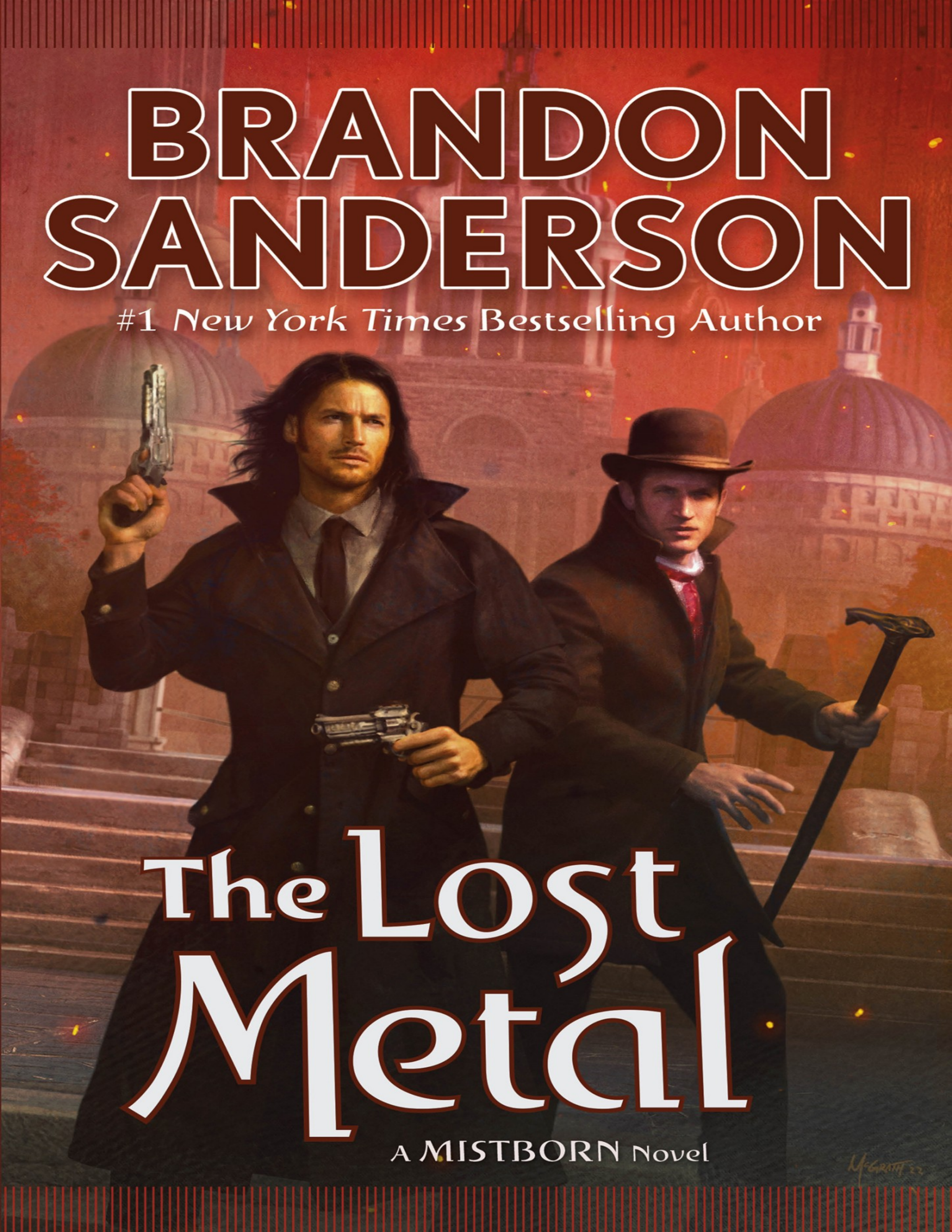

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#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

# The Lost Metal

A MISTBORN Novel

# THE LOST METAL

## A MISTBORN NOVEL

### BRANDON SANDERSON

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

THE LOST METAL

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**FOR ETHAN SKARSTEDT**

*Who is a man of Honor.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sixteen years ago, sitting in a dim booth at a local steakhouse, I first pitched to my wife an audacious idea I'd been developing: taking an epic fantasy world, and then expanding it through different eras into the future. I'd seen mashups of fantasy and science fiction before, and I'd seen epic fantasy inch toward industrial technology. But I'd never seen an author develop a world in quite this way—giving an expansive view of a planet moving into the future, using the lore of earlier book series as the foundation of religion and myth.

It was a gamble. Readers tend to like their genres well delineated. Here, I was pitching something that broke apart those genre lines in ways that historically did not sell well. Yet I was convinced that the larger-scale project (the vision of a planet and its magic throughout various eras) was worth the risk. That brings us here, to the final book of Era Two of Mistborn and my grand experiment with genre.

Whether I've been successful or not so far is up to you, the reader. But I can say this: I certainly wouldn't have gotten where I am without the help of a large number of people. I know these acknowledgments are a bit of a blur of names, but I'm so grateful to each and every one of them. These are the people who, when I come up with some new audacious plan, don't roll their eyes—they instead roll up their sleeves and make it happen.

For this book, Joshua Bilmes did his usual excellent job as my agent. On his team, Susan Velazquez and Christina Zobel were also a great deal of help, managing all the different overseas contracts and subagents.

Speaking of across the pond, I had some extra-special help from Gillian Redfearn on this book—she's my UK editor, and took the lead on this book performing the line edit work that often is shouldered by the US publisher. She did a fantastic job, and I'm lucky to have her help. In addition, I'd like to thank Emad Akhtar and Brendan Durkin at Gollancz in the UK, as well as my UK agents, John Berlyne and Stevie Finegan at the Zeno Agency.

Over in the US, Devi Pillai was the lead editor on this project, offering her excellent editorial eye for story and character as she always does. Also at Tor, I'd like to thank Molly McGhee, Tessa Villanueva, Lucille Rettino, Eileen Lawrence, Alexis Saarela, Heather Saunders, Rafal Gibek, Felipe Cruz, Amelie Littell, and Hayley Jozwiak. The copyeditor was our longtime collaborator in that field, Terry McGarry.

As for the audiobook, the irreplaceable Michael Kramer is once again giving voice to my characters and making me sound good. I appreciate you, Michael. Thank you for all you do. At Macmillian Audio, I'd like to thank Steve Wagner, Samantha Edelson, and Drew Kilman.

Increasingly these days, my books take a ton of extra work in the art department. So we'll give these gunslingers their own section—even though some of them could overlap with other sections. For instance, Peter Lutjen is Tor's art director, and deserves a hearty thanks. Chris McGrath did our jacket illustration. My internal art director at Dragonsteel is |Y‹—the artist formerly known as Isaac Stewart. He did the maps, symbols, and a lot of the work (including the writing) on the broadsheets. Keep an eye out for books by |Y‹ in the future. (Yes, I did just make up that whole symbol thing. I can do that. I have a literary license.) Our good friend and longtime collaborator Ben McSweeney did most of the art you find in the broadsheets. Rachael Lynn Buchanan was our art assistant, and Jennifer Neal provided some additional help in creating the broadsheets.

In my company, Dragonsteel, our in-house Editorial department is headed by the Insatiable Peter Ahlstrom, with Karen Ahlstrom running continuity and various additional editorial help being provided by Betsey Ahlstrom. And Kristy S. Gilbert has just come on as our Production Editor.

Dragonsteel's Fulfillment and Events team is headed by Kara Stewart, and that team includes Christi Jacobsen, Lex Willhite, Kellyn Neumann, Mem Grange, Michael Bateman, Joy Allen, Katy Ives, Richard Rubert, Sean VanBuskirk, Isabel Chrisman, Tori Mecham, Ally Reep, Jacob Chrisman, Alex Lyon, and Owen Knowlton.

Our in-house Publicity and Marketing team is headed by Adam Horne, with Jeremy Palmer as our marketing director. Our Operations team is headed by Mat "My name is actually Matt with two T's" Hatch, with Jane Horne, Emma Tan-Stoker, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Makena Saluone, and Hazel Cummings.

And, of course, my wonderful wife, Emily Sanderson, is our COO at Dragonsteel. And is the cutest person on this list.

Less cute, but still very helpful, are the members of the writing group. On this book they include: Kaylynn ZoBell, Peter Ahlstrom, Karen Ahlstrom, Alan Layton, Eric James Stone, Darci Stone, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Emily Sanderson, and Ben “Rick Stranger” Olsen. Also, of course, there is Ethan Skarstedt—to whom this book is dedicated. The real-life inspiration for Skar from Bridge Four, Ethan has been helping me get my soldiering and gunplay right for some twenty years now. Many thanks, Ethan, for helping me pretend I know what I’m talking about.

Mi’chelle Walker created our beta reader feedback database, which was super useful. The beta readers included Trae Cooper, Tim Challener, Ted Herman, Suzanne Musin, Sumejja Muratagić-Tadić, Paige Phillips, Shannon Nelson, Sean VanBuskirk, Ross Newberry, Rosemary Williams, Richard Fife, Rahul Pantula, Poonam Desai, Philip Vorwaller, Paige Vest, Mi’chelle Walker, Megan Kanne, Matt Wiens, Mark Axies Lindberg, Marnie Peterson, Lyndsey Luther, Linnea Lindstrom, Lauren McCaffrey, Kendra Wilson, Kendra Alexander, Kellyn Neumann, Kalyani Poluri, Joy Allen, Joshua Harkey, Jory “Chief Chicken Head Scratcher” Phillips, Jessie Lake, Jessica Ashcraft, Jennifer Neal, Ian McNatt, Chris “Gunner” McGrath, Gary Singer, Frankie Jerome, Evgeni “Argent” Kirilov, Erika Kuta Marler, Eric Lake, Drew McCaffrey, Deana Covel Whitney, David Fallon, David Behrens, Darci Cole, Craig Hanks, Christina Goodman, Christopher Cottingham, Chana Oshira Block, Brian T. Hill, Brandon Cole, Lingting “Botanica” Xu, Bob Kluttz, Ben Marrow, Becca Reppert, Bao Pham, Anthony Acker, Alyx Hoge, Alice Arneson, Alexis Horizon, Aaron Biggs, Joe Deardeuff, Rob West, and Jayden King.

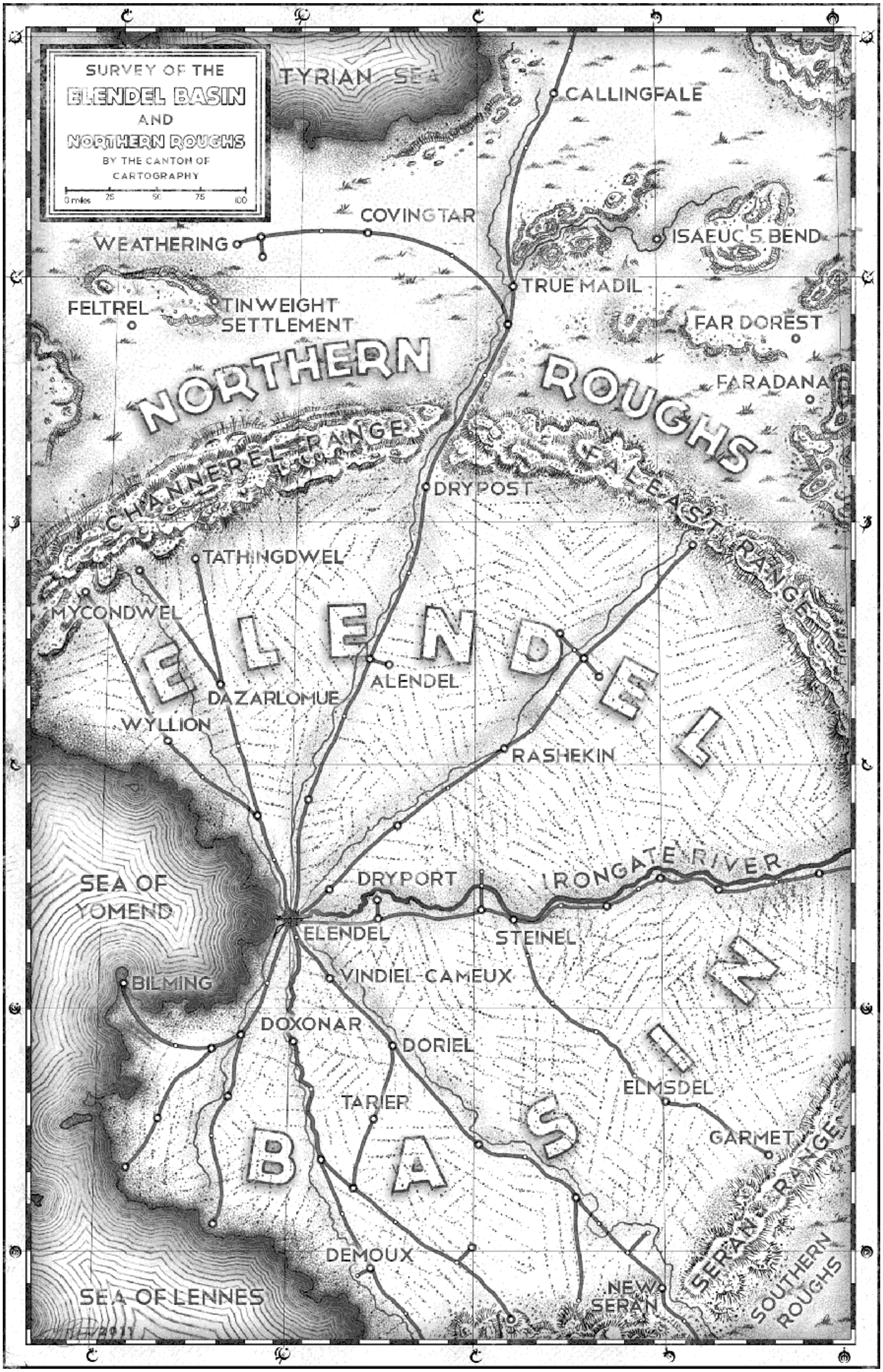
Gamma readers included many of the above, plus Sam Baskin, Glen Vogelaar, Dale Wiens, Billy Todd, Ari Kufer, Matthew Sorensen, Ram Shoham, Eliyahu Berelowitz Levin, and Aaron Ford.

We got some detailed help from a particular group on this book, people who I have asked to keep an eye on my magic systems and offer feedback on where I might need more explanations or might be in danger of contradicting myself. We’re calling them our Magic System Continuity team, but I’m officially dubbing them Arcanists going forward. They are

Joshua Harkey, Eric Lake, Evgeni Kirilov, David Behrens, Ian McNatt, and Ben Marrow.

I would like to extend a special thanks to my good friends Kalyani and Rahul, longtime beta readers, who have been encouraging me for years to look into Indian mythology and lore for inspiration for fantasy storytelling. They provided excellent consultation in this book on a certain character who the three of us worked on together to try to expand the Cosmere a little bit in this direction.

Thank you to everyone on this list. And, of course, to the readers. Mistborn has been a strange journey these last sixteen years, and I feel it’s about to get even stranger—as well as (with a little luck) even more incredible.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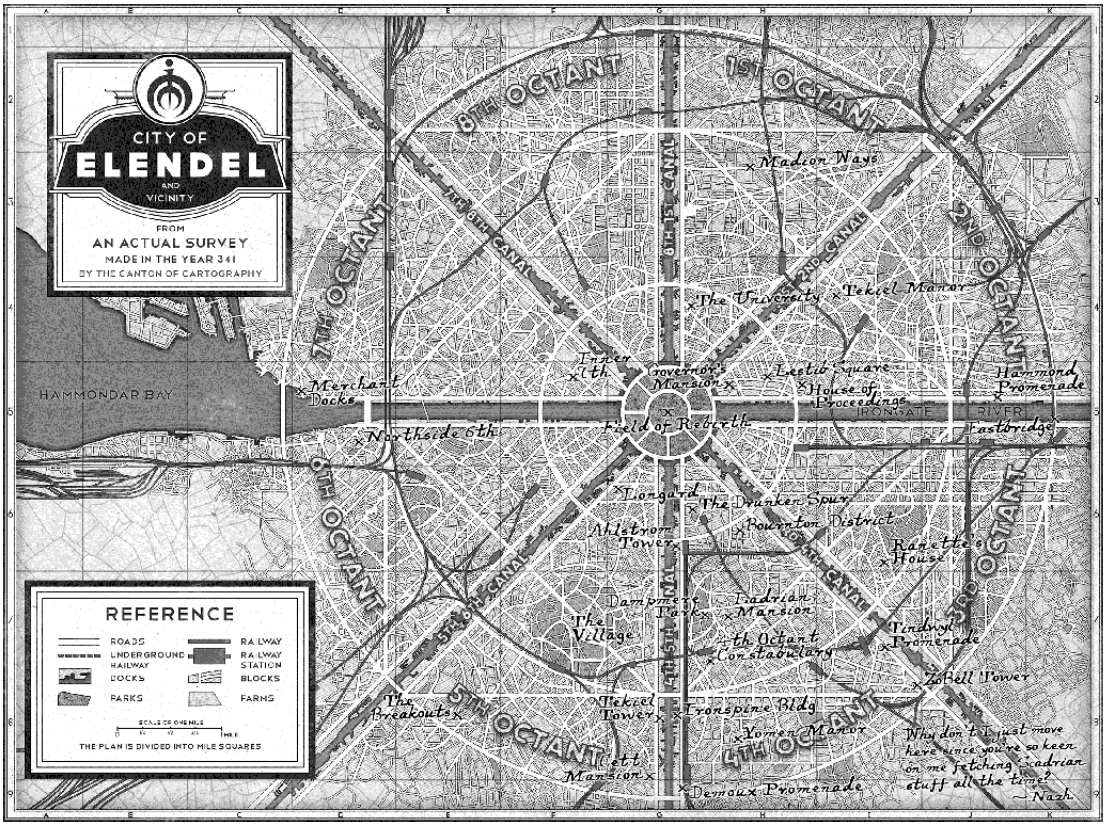
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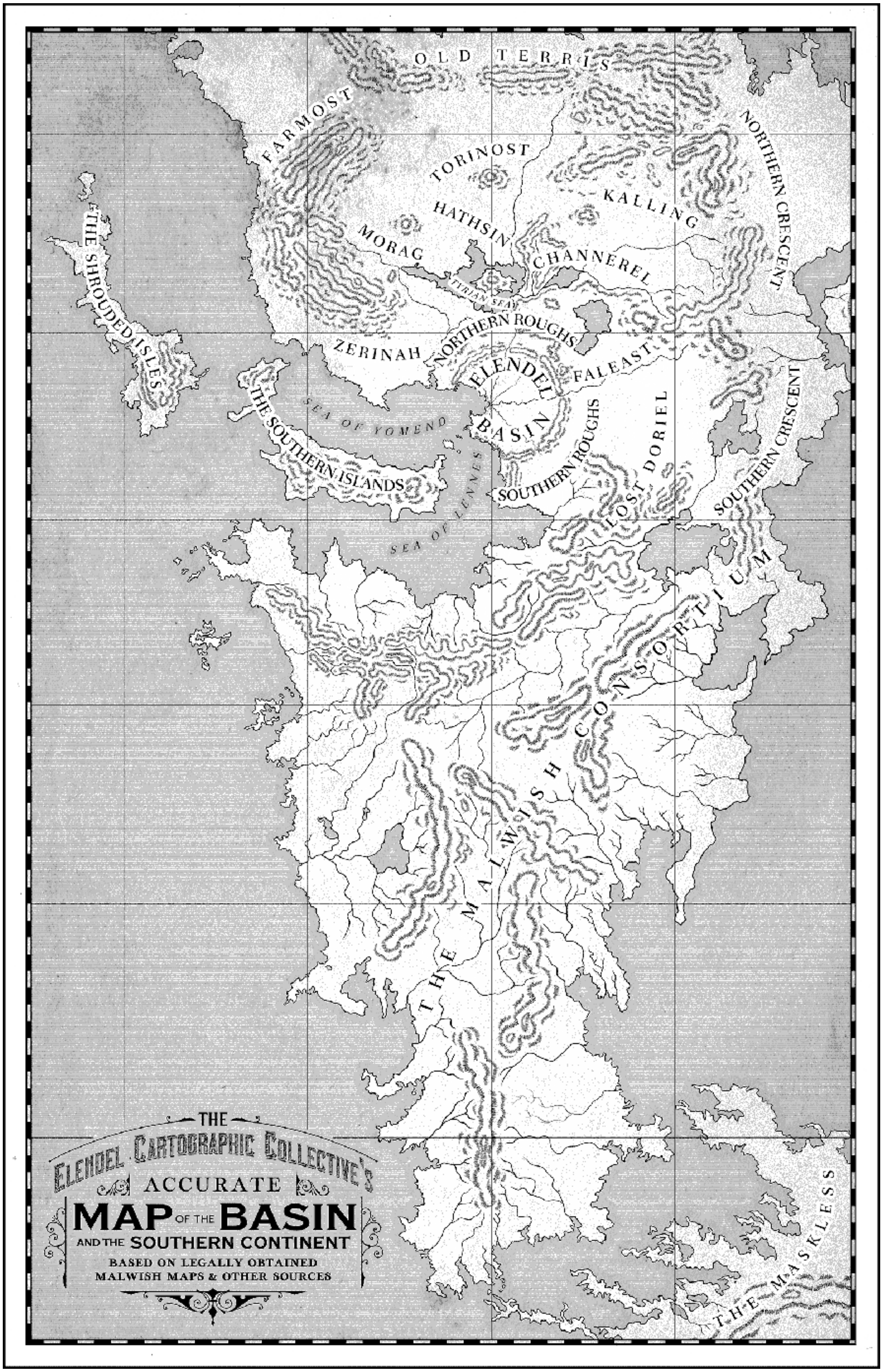
4TH 5TH CANAL
5TH 6TH CANAL
Madion Ways
The University
Tekiel Manor
Inner 7th
Governor's Mansion
Lestib Square
House of Proceedings
Hammond Promenade
Merchant Docks
Field of Rebirth
Eastbridge
Northside 6th
Longard
The Drunken Spur
Bournton District
Ahlstrom Tower
Ranette's House
Dampmere Park
Ladrian Mansion
The Village
4th Octant Constabulary
Tindwyl Promenade
ZoBell Tower
The Breakouts
Tekiel Tower
Ironspine Bldg
Yomen Manor
Cett Mansion
Demoux Promenade
Why don't I just move here since you're so keen on me fetching Scadrian stuff all the time?
~ Nazh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ACCURATE
MAP OF THE BASIN
AND THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT
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MALWISH MAPS & OTHER SOURCES

# PROLOGUE

Wayne knew about beds. Other kids in Tinweight Settlement had them. A bed sounded much better than a mat on the ground—especially one he had to share with his ma when the nights were cold, because they didn't have any coal.

Plus there were monsters under beds.

Yeah, he'd heard stories of mistwraiths. They'd hide unner your bed and steal the faces of people you knew. Which made beds soft and squishy on top, with someone underneath you could talk to. Sounded like rustin' heaven.

Other kids were scared of mistwraiths, but Wayne figured they just didn't know how to negotiate properly. He could make friends with something what lived unner a bed. You just had to give it something it wanted, like someone else to eat.

Anyway, no bed for him. And no proper chairs. They had a table, built by Uncle Gregr. Back before he got crushed by a billion rocks in a landslide and mushed into a pulp what couldn't hit people no more. Wayne kicked the table sometimes, in case Gregr's spirit was watching and was fond of it. Rusts knew there was nothing else in this one-window home Uncle Gregr had cared about.

Best Wayne had was a stool, so he sat on that and played with his cards—dealing hands and hiding cards up his sleeve—as he waited. This was a nervous time of day. Every evening he feared she wouldn't come home. Not because she didn't love him. Ma was a burst of sweet spring flowers in a sewage pit of a world. But because one day Pa hadn't come home. One day Uncle Gregr—Wayne kicked the table—hadn't come home. So Ma …

*Don't think about it,* Wayne thought, bungling his shuffle and spilling cards over the table and floor. *And don't look. Not until you see the light.*

He could feel the mine out there; nobody wanted to live nexta it, so Wayne and his ma did.

He thought of something else, on purpose. The pile of laundry by the wall that he'd finished washing earlier. That had been Ma's old job what didn't pay well enough. Now he did it while she pushed minecarts.

Wayne didn't mind the work. Got to try on all the different clothes—whether they were from old gramps or young women—and pretend to be them. His ma had caught him a few times and grown angry. Her exasperation still baffled him. Why *wouldn't* you try them all on? That's what clothes was for. It wasn't nothing weird.

Besides, sometimes folks left stuff in their pockets. Like decks of cards.

He fumbled the shuffle again, and as he gathered the cards up he did *not* look out the window, even though he could feel the mine. That gaping artery, like the hole in someone's neck, red from the inside and spurting out light like blood and fire. His ma had to go dig at the beast's insides, searchin' for metals, then escape its anger. You could only get lucky so many times.

Then he spotted it. Light. With relief, he glanced out the window and saw someone walking along the path, holding up a lantern to illuminate her way. Wayne scrambled to hide the cards under the mat, then lay on top, feigning sleep when the door opened. She'd have seen his light go out of course, but she appreciated the effort he put into pretending.

She settled on the stool, and Wayne cracked an eye. His ma wore trousers and a buttoned shirt, her hair up, her clothing and face smudged. She sat staring at the flame in the lantern, watching it flicker and dance, and her face seemed more hollow than it had been before. Like someone was taking a pickaxe to her cheeks.

*That mine's eatin' her away,* he thought. *It hasn't gobbled her up like it did Pa, but it's gnawing on her.*

Ma blinked, then fixated on something else. A card he'd left on the table. Aw, hell.

She picked it up, then looked right at him. He didn't pretend to be asleep no more. She'd dump water on him.

"Wayne," she said, "where did you get these cards?"

“Don’t remember.”

“Wayne…”

“Found ’em,” he said.

She held out her hand, and he reluctantly pulled the deck out and handed it over. She tucked the card she’d found into the box. Damn. She’d spend a day searching Tinweight for whoever had “lost” them. Well, he wouldn’t have her losing more sleep on account of him.

“Tark Vestingdow,” Wayne mumbled. “They was inna pocket of his overalls.”

“Thank you,” she said softly.

“Ma, I’ve *gotta* learn cards. That way I can earn a good livin’ and care for us.”

“A good living?” she asked. “With cards?”

“Don’t worry,” he said quickly. “I’ll cheat! Can’t make a livin’ if you don’t win, see.”

She sighed, rubbing her temples.

Wayne glanced at the cards in their stack. “Tark,” he said. “He’s Terris. Like Pa was.”

“Yes.”

“Terris people always do what they’re told. So what’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing’s wrong with you, love,” she said. “You just haven’t got a good parent to guide you.”

“Ma,” he said, scrambling off the mat to take her arm. “Don’t talk like that. You’re a *great* ma.”

She hugged him to her side, but he could feel her tension. “Wayne,” she asked, “did you take Demmy’s pocketknife?”

“He talked?” Wayne said. “Rust that rustin’ bastard!”

“Wayne! Don’t swear like that.”

“Rust that rusting bastard!” he said in a railworker’s accent instead.

He grinned at her innocently, and was rewarded with a smile she couldn’t hide. Silly voices always made her happy. Pa had been good at them, but Wayne was better. Particularly now that Pa was dead and couldn’t say them no more.

But then her smile faded. “You can’t take things what don’t belong to you, Wayne. That’s somethin’ thieves do.”

“I don’t wanna be a thief,” Wayne said softly, putting the pocketknife on the table beside the cards. “I want to be a good boy. It just … happens.”

She hugged him closer. “You *are* a good boy. You’ve *always* been a good boy.”

When she said it, he believed it.

“Do you want a story, love?” she asked.

“I’m too old for stories,” he lied, desperately wishing she’d tell one anyway. “I’m *eleven.* One more year and I can drink at the tavern.”

“What? Who told you that!”

“Dug.”

“Dug is *nine.*”

“Dug knows stuff.”

“*Dug* is *nine.*”

“So you’re sayin’ I’ll have to snitch booze for him next year, ’cuz he can’t get it himself yet?” He met her eyes, then started snickering.

He helped her get dinner—cold oatmeal with some beans in it. At least it wasn’t *only* beans. Then he snuggled into his blankets on the mat, pretending he was a child again to listen. It was easy to feign that. He still had the clothes after all.

“This is the tale,” she said, “of Blatant Barm, the Unwashed Bandit.”

“Oooh…” Wayne said. “A *new* one?”

His mother leaned forward, wagging her spoon toward him as she spoke. “He was the worst of them all, Wayne. Baddest, meanest, *stinkiest* bandit. He never bathed.”

“’Cuz it takes too much work to get properly dirty?”

“No, because he … Wait, it’s *work* to get dirty?”

“Gotta roll around in it, you see.”

“Why in Harmony’s name would you do that?”

“To think like the ground,” Wayne said.

“To…” She smiled. “Oh, Wayne. You’re so precious.”

“Thanks,” he said. “Why ain’t you told me of this Blatant Barm before? If he was so bad wouldn’t he be the first one you told stories about?”

“You were too young,” she said, sitting back. “And the story too frightening.”

Ooooh … This was going to be a *good* one. Wayne bounced up and down. “Who got ’im? Was it a lawman?”

"It was Allomancer Jak."

"Him?" Wayne said with a groan.

"I thought you liked him."

Well, all the kids did. Jak was new and interesting, and had been solving all kinds of tough crimes this last year. Least according to Dug.

"But Jak always brings the bad guys in," Wayne complained. "He never shoots a single one."

"Not this time," Ma said, digging into her oatmeal. "He knew Blatant Barm was the worst. Killer to the core. Even Barm's sidekicks—Gud the Killer and Noways Joe—were *ten* times worse than any other bandit that ever walked the Roughs."

"Ten *times*?" Wayne said.

"Yup."

"That's a lot! Almost double!"

His ma frowned for a moment, but then leaned forward again. "They'd robbed the payroll. Taking not just the money from the fat men in Elendel, but the wages of the common folk."

"Bastards!" Wayne said.

"Wayne!"

"Fine! Regular old turds then!"

Again she hesitated. "Do you … know what the word 'bastard' means?"

"It's a bad turd, the kind you get when you've *really* got to go, but you hold it in too long."

"You know that because…"

"Dug told me."

"Of course he did. Well, Jak, he wouldn't stand for stealing from the common folk of the Roughs. Being a bandit is one thing, but everyone knows you take the money what goes *toward* the city.

"Unfortunately, Blatant Barm, he knew the area real well. So he rode off into the most difficult land in the Roughs—and he left one of his two sidekicks to guard each of the key spots along the way. Fortunately, Jak was the bravest of men. And the strongest."

"If he was the bravest and strongest," Wayne said, "why was he a lawman? He could be a bandit, and nobody could stop him!"

"What's harder, love?" she asked. "Doing what's right or doing what's wrong?"

“Doing what’s right.”

“So who gets stronger?” Ma asked. “The fellow what does the easy thing, or what does the hard thing?”

Huh. He nodded. Yeah. Yeah, he could see that.

She moved the lantern closer to her face, making it shine as she spoke. “Jak’s first test was the River Human, the vast waterway marking the border with what had once been koloss lands. The waters moved at the speed of a train; it was the fastest river in the whole world—and it was full of rocks. Gud the Killer had set up there, across the river, to watch for lawmen. He had such a good eye and steady hand that he could shoot a fly off a man at three hundred paces.”

“Why’d you want to do that?” Wayne asked. “Better to shoot ’im right *in* the fly. That’s gotta hurt something bad.”

“Not that kind of fly, love,” Ma said.

“So what did Jak do?” Wayne asked. “Did he sneak up? Not very lawman-like to sneak. I don’t think they do that. I’ll bet he didn’t sneak.”

“Well…” Ma said.

Wayne clutched his blanket, waiting.

“Jak was a *better* shot,” she whispered. “When Gud the Killer sighted on him, Jak shot him first—clean across the river.”

“How’d Gud die?” Wayne whispered.

“By bullet, love.”

“Through the eye?” Wayne said.

“Suppose.”

“And so Gud lined up a shot and Jak did likewise—but Jak shot first, hitting Gud *straight* through the sights into the eye! Right, Ma!”

“Yup.”

“And his head exploded,” Wayne said, “like a fruit—the crunchy kind, the shell all *tough* but it’s gooey inside. Is that how it happened?”

“Absolutely.”

“Dang, Ma,” Wayne said. “That’s gruesome. You sure you should be tellin’ me this story?”

“Should I stop?”

“Hell no! How’d Jak get across the water?”

“He flew,” Ma said. She set her bowl aside, oatmeal finished, and gave a flourish with both hands. “Using his Allomantic powers. Jak can fly, and talk to birds, and eat rocks.”

“Wow. Eat *rocks*?”

“Yup. And so he flew over that river. But the next challenge was even worse. The Canyon of Death.”

“Ooooh…” Wayne said. “Bet that place was pretty.”

“Why do you say that?”

“’Cuz nobody’s going to visit a place called ‘Canyon of Death’ unless it’s pretty. But somebody visited it, ’cuz we know the name. So it must be pretty.”

“Beautiful,” Ma said. “A canyon carved through the middle of a bunch of crumbling rock spires—the broken peaks streaked with colors, like they was painted that way. But the place was as deadly as it was beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said. “Figures.”

“Jak couldn’t fly over this one, for the second of the bandits hid in the canyon. Noways Joe. He was a master of pistols, and could also fly, and turn into a dragon, and eat rocks. If Jak tried to sneak past, Joe would shoot him from behind.”

“That’s the smart way to shoot someone,” Wayne said. “On account of them not bein’ able to shoot back.”

“True,” Ma said. “So Jak didn’t let that happen. He had to go into the canyon—but it was *filled* with *snakes*.”

“Bloody hell!”

“Wayne…”

“Regular old boring hell, then! How many snakes?”

“A million snakes.”

“Bloody hell!”

“But Jak, he was smart,” Ma said. “So he’d thought to bring some snake food.”

“A million bits of snake food?”

“Nah, only one,” she said. “But he got the snakes to fight over it, so they mostly killed each other. And the one what was left was the strongest, naturally.”

“Naturally.”

“So Jak talked it into biting Noways Joe.”

“And so Joe turned purple!” Wayne said. “And bled out his ears! And his bones melted, so the melty bone juice leaked out of his nose! And he collapsed into a puddle of deflated skin, all while hissing and blubbering ’cuz his teeth was melting!”

“Exactly.”

“Dang, Ma. You tell the *best* stories.”

“It gets better,” she said softly, leaning down on the stool, their lantern burning low. “Because the ending has a surprise.”

“What surprise?”

“Once Jak was through the canyon—what now smelled like dead snakes and melted bones—he spotted the final challenge: the Lone Mesa. A giant plateau in the center of an otherwise flat plain.”

“That’s not much of a challenge,” Wayne said. “He could fly to the top.”

“Well he tried to,” she whispered. “But the mesa *was* Blatant Barm.”

“*WHAT?*”

“That’s right,” Ma said. “Barm had joined up with the koloss—the ones that change into big monsters, not the normal ones like old Mrs. Nock. And *they* showed him how to turn into a monster of humongous size. So when Jak tried to land on it, the mesa done gobbled him up.”

Wayne gasped. “And then,” he said, “it mashed him beneath its teeth, crushing his bones like—”

“No,” Ma said. “It tried to swallow him. But Jak, he wasn’t only smart and a good shot. He was something else.”

“What?”

“A big damn pain in the ass.”

“Ma! That’s swearin’.”

“It’s okay in stories,” Ma said. “Listen, Jak was a pain. He was always going about doing good. Helping people. Making life tough for bad people. Asking questions. He knew exactly how to ruin a bandit’s day.

“So as he was swallowed, Jak stretched out his arms and legs, then pushed—making himself a *lump* in Blatant Barm’s throat, so the monster couldn’t breathe. Monsters like that needs lotsa air, you know. And so, Allomancer Jak done *choked* Barm from the inside. Then, when the monster was dead on the ground, Jak sauntered out down its tongue—like it was some fancy mat set outside a carriage for a rich man.”

*Whoa.* “That’s a *good* story, Ma.”

She smiled.

“Ma,” he said. “Is the story … about the mine?”

“Well,” she said, “I suppose we all gotta walk into the beast’s mouth now and then. So … maybe, I guess.”

“You’re like the lawman then.”

“Anyone can be,” she said, blowing out the lantern.

“Even me?”

“Especially you.” She kissed him on the forehead. “You are whatever you want to be, Wayne. You’re the wind. You’re the stars. You are all endless things.”

It was a poem she liked. He liked it too. Because when she said it, he *believed* her. How could he not? Ma didn’t lie. So, he snuggled deeper into his blankets and let himself drift off. A lot was wrong in the world, but a few things were right. And as long as she was around, stories meant something. They was real.

Until the next day, when there was another collapse at the mine. That night, his ma didn’t come home.

# PART ONE

# 1

## TWENTY-NINE YEARS LATER

Marasi had never been in a sewer before, but it was exactly as awful as she'd imagined. The stench was incredible, of course. But worse was the way her booted feet would occasionally slip for a heart-stopping moment, threatening to plunge her down into the "mud" underneath.

At least she'd had the foresight to wear a uniform with trousers today, along with knee-high leather work boots. But there was no protection from the scent, the feel, or—unfortunately—the sound of it. When she took a step—map in one hand, rifle in the other—each boot would pull free with a *squelch* of mythical proportions. It would have been the worst sound ever, if not overmatched by Wayne's complaining.

"Wax never brought me into a rusting sewer," he muttered, raising the lantern.

"Are there sewers in the Roughs?"

"Well, no," he admitted. "Pastures smell almost as bad, and he did make me march through those. But Marasi, they didn't have *spiders.*"

"They probably did," she said, angling the map toward his lantern. "You just couldn't see them."

"Suppose," he grumbled. "But it's worse when you can see the webs. Also there's, you know, the literal sewage."

Marasi nodded to a side tunnel and they started in that direction. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"What?" he demanded.

"Your mood."

"Nothing's wrong with my rusting mood," he said. "It's precisely the mood you're supposed to have when your partner forces you to stick your frontside into a buncha stuff that comes out of your backside."

"And last week?" she asked. "When we were investigating a *perfume shop*?"

"Rusting perfumers," Wayne said, his eyes narrowing. "Never can tell what they're hiding with those fancy smells. You can't trust a man what doesn't smell like a man should."

"Sweat and booze?"

"Sweat and *cheap* booze."

"Wayne, how can you complain about someone putting on airs? You put on a different personality every time you change hats."

"Does my smell change?"

"I suppose not."

"Argument won. There are literally no holes in it whatsoever. Conversation over."

They shared a look.

"I should get me some perfumes, eh?" Wayne said. "Someone might spot my disguises if I *always* smell like sweat and cheap booze."

"You're hopeless."

"What's hopeless," he said, "is my poor shoes."

"Could have worn boots like I suggested."

"Ain't got no boots," he said. "Wax stole them."

"Wax stole your boots. Really."

"Well, they're in his closet," Wayne said. "Instead of three pairs of his poshest shoes. Which somehow ended up in my closet, completely by happenstance." He glanced at her. "It was a fair trade. I liked those boots."

Marasi smiled. They'd been working together for almost six years now, since Wax's retirement following the discovery of the Bands of Mourning. Wayne was an official constable, not some barely-within-the-law deputized citizen. He even wore a uniform once in a while. And—

—and Marasi's boot slipped again. Rusting hell. If she fell, he would *never* stop laughing. But this did seem the best way. Construction on the citywide underground train tunnels was ongoing, and two days ago a demolitions man had filed a curious report. He didn't want to blast the next section, as seismic readings indicated they were near an unmapped cavern.

This area underneath the city of Elendel was peppered with ancient caves. And it was the same region where a local group of gang enforcers kept vanishing and reappearing. As if they had a hidden entrance into an unknown, unseen lair.

She consulted the map, marked with the construction notes—and older annotations indicating a nearby oddity that the sewer builders had found years ago, but which had never been properly investigated.

"I think MeLaan is going to break up with me," Wayne said softly. "That's why maybe I've been uncharacteristically downbeat in my general disposition as of late."

"What makes you think she's going to do that?"

"On account of her tellin' me, 'Wayne, I'm probably going to break up with you in a few weeks.'"

"Well, that's polite of her."

"I think she's got a new job from the big guy," Wayne said. "But it ain't right, how slow it's goin'. 'S not the proper way to break up with a fellow."

"And what *is* the proper way?"

"Throw something at his head," Wayne said. "Sell his stuff. Tell his mates he's a knob."

"You have had some interesting relationships."

"Nah, just mostly bad ones," he said. "I asked Jammi Walls what she thought I should do— You know her? She's at the tavern most nights."

"I know her," Marasi said. "She's a woman of … ill repute."

"What?" Wayne said. "Who's been saying that? Jammi has a *great* reputation. Of all the whores on the block, she gives the best—"

"I do not need to hear the next part. Thank you."

"Ill repute," he said, chuckling. "I'm gonna tell Jammi you said that, Marasi. She worked *hard* for her reputation. Gets to charge four times what anyone else does! Ill repute indeed."

"And what did she say?"

"She said MeLaan wanted me to try harder in the relationship," Wayne said. "But I think in this case Jammi was wrong. Because MeLaan don't play games. When she says things, she means them. So it's … you know…"

"I'm sorry, Wayne," Marasi said, tucking the map under her arm and resting her hand on his shoulder.

“I knew it couldn’t last,” he said. “Rustin’ knew it, you know? She’s like, what, a thousand years old?”

“Roughly two-thirds that,” Marasi said.

“And I’m not quite forty,” Wayne said. “More like sixteen if you take account of my spry youthful physique.”

“And your sense of humor.”

“Damn right,” he said, then sighed. “Things have been … tough lately. With Wax gettin’ all fancy and MeLaan being gone for months at a time. Feel like nobody wants me around. Maybe I belong in a sewer, you know?”

“You don’t,” she said. “You’re the best partner I’ve ever had.”

“Only partner.”

“Only? Gorglen doesn’t count?”

“Nope. He’s not human. I gots papers what prove he’s a giraffe in disguise.” Then he smiled. “But … thanks for askin’. Thanks for carin’.”

She nodded, then led the way onward. When she’d imagined her life as a top detective and lawwoman, she hadn’t envisioned *this.* At least the smell was getting better—or she was getting used to it.

It was extremely gratifying to find, at the exact spot marked on the map, an old metal door set into the sewer wall. Wayne held up the lantern, and one didn’t need a keen detective’s eye to see the door had been used recently. Silvery scrapes on one side of the frame, the handle rubbed clean of the pervasive filth and cobwebs.

The people who had built the sewers had discovered it, and highlighted it as a site of potential historical significance. But the note had been lost due to bureaucratic nonsense.

“Nice,” Wayne said, leaning in beside her. “Some first-rate detectivin’, Marasi. How many old surveys did you have to read to find this?”

“Too many,” she said. “People would be surprised how much of my time is spent in the documents library.”

“They leave the research outta the stories.”

“You did this sort of thing back in the Roughs?”

“Well, the Roughs variety of it,” Wayne said. “Usually involved holdin’ some bloke’s face down in the trough until he remembered whose old prospectin’ claim he’d been filchin’, but it’s the same principle. With more swearin’.”

She handed him her rifle and investigated the door. He didn't like her to make a big deal out of it, but he could hold guns these days without his hands shaking. She'd never seen him fire one, but he said he could if he needed to.

The door was shut tight and had no lock on this side. But it seemed the people she was hunting had found it closed too—there were a bunch of marks along one edge. There was enough room to slip something between door and frame.

"I need a knife to get through this," she said.

"You can use my razor-sharp wit."

"Alas, Wayne, you aren't the type of tool I need at the moment."

"Ha!" he said. "I like that one."

He handed her a knife from his backpack where they kept supplies like rope, and extra metals in case they faced Metalborn. This kind of gang shouldn't have an Allomancer—they were your basic "shake down shopkeepers for protection money" types. Yet she had reports that made her wary, and she was increasingly sure this group was funded by the Set.

Years later, and she was still hunting answers to questions that had plagued her from the very start of her career as a lawwoman. The group known as the Set, once run by Wax's Uncle Edwarn, then revealed to involve his sister, Telsin, as well. A group that followed, or worshipped, or somehow furthered the machinations of a dark figure known as Trell. A god, she thought. From ancient times.

If she caught the right people, she might finally get the answers. But she perpetually fell short. The closest she'd gotten to answers had been six years ago, but then everyone they'd captured—including Wax's uncle—had been killed in an explosion. Leaving her to chase at shadows again, and the rest of Elendel's elite fully committed to ignoring the threat. Without evidence, she and Wax had been unable to prove that the Set even existed beyond Edwarn's lackeys.

Using the knife, she managed to undo the bar holding the door closed from the other side. The bar swung free with a soft clang, and she eased the door open to reveal a rough-hewn tunnel leading downward. One of the many that dotted this region, dating back to the ancient days before the Catacendre. To the time of myths and heroes, ashfalls and tyrants.

Together she and Wayne slipped inside, leaving the door as they’d found it. They dimmed their lantern as a precaution, then started into the depths.

# 2

“Cravat?” Steris said, reading from the list.

“Tied and pinned,” Wax said, pulling it tight.

“Shoes?”

“Polished.”

“First piece of evidence?”

Wax flipped a silvery medallion in the air, then caught it.

“Second piece of evidence?” Steris asked, making a mark on her list.

He pulled a small folded stack of papers from his pocket. “Right here.”

“Third piece of evidence?”

Wax checked another pocket, then paused, looking around the small office—his senator’s chamber in the House of Proceedings. Had he left them … “On the desk back home,” he said, smacking his head.

“I brought a spare,” Steris said, digging in her bag.

Wax grinned. “Of course you did.”

“Two, actually,” Steris said, handing over a sheet of paper, which he tucked away. Then she consulted her list again.

Little Maxillium stepped up beside his mother, looking very serious as he scanned his own list of scribbles. At five years old he knew his letters, but preferred to make up his own.

“Dog picture,” Max said, as if reading from his list.

“I might need one of those,” Wax said. “Quite useful.”

Max solemnly presented it, then said, “Cat picture.”

“Need one of those too.”

“I’m bad at cats,” Max said, handing him another sheet. “So it looks like a squirrel.”

Wax hugged his son, then put the sheets away reverently with the others. The boy's sister—Tindwyl, as Steris liked traditional names—babbled in the corner, where Kath, the governess, was watching her.

Finally, Steris handed him his pistols one at a time. Long-barreled and weighty, they had been designed by Ranette to look menacing—but they had two safeties and were unloaded. It had been a while since he'd needed to shoot anyone, but he continued to make good use of his reputation as the "Lawman Senator of the Roughs." City folk, particularly politicians, were intimidated by small arms. They preferred to kill people with more modern weapons, like poverty and despair.

"Is a kiss for my wife on that list?" Wax asked.

"Actually, no," she said, surprised.

"A rare oversight," he said, then gave her a lingering kiss. "You should be the one going out there today, Steris. You did more preparation than I."

"You're the house lord."

"I could appoint you as a representative to speak for us."

"Please, no," she said. "You know how I am with people."

"You're good with the *right* people."

"And are politicians ever right about anything?"

"I hope so," he said, straightening his suit coat and turning toward the door. "Since I am one."

He pushed out of his chambers and walked down to the Senate floor. Steris would watch from her seat in the observation balcony—by now, everyone knew how particular she was about getting the same one.

As Wax stepped into the vast chamber—which buzzed with activity as senators returned from the short recess—he didn't go to his seat. Over the last few days, senators had debated the current bill, and his was the last speech in line. He had secured this spot with many promises and much trading, as he hoped it would give his arguments the advantage, give him the best chance to avert a terrible decision.

He stood to one side of the speakers' platform and waited for everyone to sit, his thumb hooked into his gunbelt, looming. You learned to put on a good loom in the Roughs when interrogating prisoners—and he was still shocked by how many of those skills worked here.

Governor Varlance didn't look at him. Instead the man adjusted his cravat, then checked his face powder—ghostly pale skin was fashionable these days, for some arcane reason. Then he laid out his medals on the desk, one at a time.

*Rusts, I miss Aradel,* Wax thought. It had been novel to have a competent governor. Like … eating hotel food and finding it wasn't awful, or spending time with Wayne and then discovering you still had a pocket watch.

However, the governor's job was the type that chewed up the good people but let the bad ones float blissfully along. Aradel had stepped down two years back. And it *had* made sense to choose a military man as the next governor, considering the tensions with the Southern Continent. Many people among the newly discovered countries there—with their airships and strange masks—were upset about how things had gone down six years ago. Specifically, that the Elendel Basin had kept the Bands of Mourning.

Right now, Elendel faced two primary problems. The first was the people on the Southern Continent, the foremost nation of which was known as the Malwish. They made constant noise about how small and weak the Basin was. Aggressive, militaristic posturing. Varlance had been a hedge against that, though Wax *did* question where he had earned all those medals. So far as Wax knew, the newly formed army hadn't seen any actual engagements.

The second problem was far closer to home. It was the parts of the Basin that were outside the capital, the people in what were collectively known as the Outer Cities. For years, maybe decades, tensions had been building between the city of Elendel and everyone else.

It was bad enough to be facing threats from another continent. But to Wax, that was a more distant danger. The immediate one, the one that gave him the most stress, was the prospect of a civil war among his own people. He and Steris had been working for years to prevent that.

Varlance finally nodded to his vice governor, a Terriswoman. She had curly dark hair and a traditional robe; Wax thought he'd known her in the Village, but it could have been her sister, and he'd never come up with a good way to ask. Regardless, it looked respectable to have a Terris person on staff. Most governors appointed one to a high position in their cabinet—almost as if the Terris were another medal to display.

Adawathwyn stood up and announced to the room, "The governor recognizes the senator from House Ladrian."

Though he'd been waiting for this, Wax took his time sauntering up onto the podium, which was lit from above by a massive electric spotlight. He made a slow rotation, inspecting the circular chamber. One side held the elected officials: senators who were voted into office to represent a guild, profession, or historical group. The other held the lords: senators who held their positions by benefit of birth.

"This bill," Wax declared to the room, loud and firm, his voice echoing, "is a fantastically *stupid* idea."

Once, earlier in his political career, talking so bluntly had earned him ire. Now he caught multiple members of the Senate smiling. They expected this from him—even appreciated it. They knew how many problems there were in the Basin and were glad someone among them was willing to call them out.

"Tensions with the Malwish are at an all-time high," Wax said. "This is a time for the Basin to unite, not a time to drive wedges between our cities!"

"This is *about* uniting!" another voice called. The dockworkers' senator, Melstrom. He was mostly a puppet for Hasting and Erikell, nobles who had consistently been a painful spike in Wax's side. "We need a single leader for the whole Basin. Officially!"

"Agreed," Wax said. "But *how* is elevating the Elendel governor— a position no one outside the city can vote on—going to unite people?"

"It will give them someone to look toward. A strong, capable leader."

*And that,* Wax thought, glancing at Varlance, *is a capable leader? We're lucky he pays attention in these meetings rather than going over his publicity schedule.* Varlance had, so far in the first two years of his tenure, rededicated seventeen parks in the city. He liked the flowers.

Wax kept to the plan, getting out his medallion and flipping it into the air. "Six years ago," he said, "I had a little adventure. You all know about it. Finding a wrecked Malwish airship, and thwarting a plot by the Outer Cities to use its secrets against Elendel. I stopped that. I brought the Bands of Mourning back to be stored safely."

"And almost started a war," someone muttered in the reaches of the room.

"You'd prefer I let the plot go forward?" Wax called back. When no response came, he flipped the medallion up and caught it again. It was one of the weight-affecting medallions the Malwish used to make their ships light enough to fly. “I dare anyone in this room to question my loyalty to Elendel. We can have a nice little duel. I’ll even let you shoot first.”

Silence. He’d earned that. A lot of the people in this room didn’t like him, but they *did* respect him. And they knew he wasn’t an agent for the Outer Cities.

He flipped the medallion and then Pushed it higher, all the way up toward the ceiling high above. It came streaking down again, glimmering in the light. As he snatched it, he glanced at Admiral Jonnes, current ambassador from the Malwish nation. She sat in a special place on the Senate floor, where visiting mayors from Outer Cities were given seats. None had come to this proceeding. A visible sign of their anger.

This bill, if approved, would elevate the Elendel governor above all Outer Cities mayors—allowing him or her to intervene in local disputes. To the point of *removing* a mayor and calling a special election, approving candidates. While Wax agreed that a central ruler would be an important step for uniting the Basin, this bill was an outright insult to all of their people living outside the capital.

“I know our position,” Wax said, turning the medallion over in his fingers, “better than anyone. You want to make a show of force to the Malwish. Prove that we can make our own cities bend to our rules. So you introduce this bill.

“But this underlines *why* everyone outside Elendel is so frustrated with us! The revolutionaries in the other cities wouldn’t have gotten so far without the support of their people. If the average person living outside Elendel weren’t so *damned* angry about our trade policies and general arrogance, we wouldn’t be in this position.

“This bill isn’t going to placate them! It’s not a ‘show of force.’ It’s *specifically* designed to outrage the people. If we pass this law, we’re *demanding* civil war.”

He let that sink in. The others were so determined to appear strong to external enemies. But if left unchecked, they’d strong-arm themselves right into war over *internal* disputes. The Malwish problems were real, but not as immediate. Civil war, though, would be devastating.

The worst part was, someone was pushing for it in secret. Wax was certain the Set was again interfering in Elendel politics. His … sister was involved. He wasn’t certain why they wanted a civil war, but they’d been trying for years now. And if he let this proceed, playing into the hands of their real enemies, both the elite around him now and the revolutionaries in the cities outside would have cause to mourn.

Wax pulled out the stack of papers in his left pocket. He tucked the dog and cat pictures at the back, then held the rest up to the room. “I have sixty letters from politicians in the Outer Cities here. They represent a large faction who *don’t* want conflict. These are *reasonable* people. They are willing—eager—to work with Elendel. But they are also frightened about what their people will do if we continue to impose tyrannical, imperial policies on them.

“I propose that we vote down this bill and work on something better. Something that *actually* promotes peace and unity. A national assembly, with representation for each Outer City—and an elected supreme official elevated by *that* body.”

He’d expected boos, and he got a few. But most of the chamber fell silent, watching him hold those letters aloft. They were afraid of letting power leave the capital. Afraid that Outer Cities politics would change their culture. They were cowards.

Maybe he was too, because the idea of the Set pulling strings terrified him. Who among those looking at him now were secretly their agents? Rusts, he didn’t even understand their motives. They wanted war—as a way to gain power, certainly. But there was more.

They followed orders from something known as Trell.

Wax turned around slowly, still holding the letters, and felt a little spike of alarm as he turned his back on Melstrom. *He’s going to shoot,* Wax thought.

“With all due respect, Lord Ladrian,” Melstrom said. “You are a new parent, and obviously don’t understand how to raise a child. You don’t give in to their demands; you hold firm, knowing that your decisions are best for them. They will eventually see reason. As a father is to a son, Elendel is to the Outer Cities.”

*Right in the back,* Wax thought, turning around.

He didn’t respond immediately. You wanted to aim return fire carefully. He’d made these arguments before—mostly in private—to many of the senators in this room. He was making headway, but he needed more time.

With these letters, he could return to each senator, the ones on the fence, and share the words. The ideas. Persuade.

His gut said that if the vote happened today, the bill would pass. So, he hadn’t come here to repeat his arguments. He’d come with a bullet loaded in the chamber, ready to fire.

He folded up the letters and tucked them snugly into his pocket. Then he took the smaller stack—two sheets—from his other pocket. The ones that Steris had brought spares of in case he forgot. She’d probably made copies of the other stack too. And seven other things she knew he wouldn’t need—but it made her feel better to have them in her bag just in case. Rusts, that woman was delightful.

Wax held up the sheets and made a show of getting just the right light to read. “‘Dear Melstrom,’” he read out loud, “‘we are pleased by your willingness to see reason and continue to enforce Elendel trade superiority in the Basin. This is a wise choice. We will deliver half a percent of our shipping revenues for the next three years in exchange for your personal support of this bill. From Houses Hasting and Erikell.’”

The room erupted into chaos. Wax settled in, hooking his finger into his gunbelt, waiting for the cries of outrage to run their course. He met Melstrom’s eyes as the man sank back into his seat. The rusting idiot had just learned an important lesson: Don’t leave a paper trail detailing your corruption when your political opponent is a trained detective. Idiot.

As the shouts finally died down, Wax spoke again, louder this time. “I *demand* we hold impropriety hearings to investigate Senator Melstrom’s apparent sale of his vote in *blatant* violation of anti-corruption laws.”

“And by so doing,” the governor said, “delay the Elendel Supremacy Bill vote?”

“How could we vote on it,” Wax said, “if we aren’t sure the votes are being cast in good faith?”

More outrage. Wax weathered it as the governor consulted with his vice governor. She was a smart one. Anything Varlance accomplished that didn’t involve cutting a ribbon or kissing a baby was probably her doing.

As the chamber calmed, the governor looked to Wax. “I trust you have proof of this letter’s authenticity, Ladrian.”

“I have affidavits from three separate handwriting experts to prove it’s not a forgery,” Wax said. “And you’ll find my wife’s detailed account of the letter's acquisition exhaustive and unimpugnable."

"Then I suggest impropriety hearings follow," the governor said. "*After* the vote on the Supremacy Bill."

"But—" Wax said.

"We will," the governor interrupted, "require Melstrom, Hasting, and Erikell to sit out the vote. *Assuring* that the vote is not corrupted."

Damn.

Damn, damn, *damn.*

Before he could counter that, the vice governor slammed her gavel. "Votes in favor of continuing?"

Most of the hands on the Senate floor went up. For a simple vote like this, a more straw poll method would do—unless the vote turned out to be very close. It wasn't.

The real vote, on the bill, would proceed.

"Have you any more explosions to detonate, Ladrian?" the governor said. "Or can we get on with this?"

"No more explosions, Your Honor," Wax said with a sigh. "They were my old partner's specialty anyway. Instead, I have a final plea to the chamber." His maneuver had failed. Now he had one last card to play. A request not from Waxillium Ladrian.

But one from Dawnshot, the lawman.

"You all know me," he said, turning around in a circle, meeting their eyes. "I'm a simple man from the Roughs. I don't do politics right, but I *do* understand angry people and the hard lives of working women and men.

"If we're going to take the role of parent, we should treat our children well. Give them a chance to speak for themselves. If we keep pretending they're toddlers, they're merely going to start ignoring us—at best. You want to send a message? Send the message that we care and are willing to listen."

He took his seat finally, next to Yancey Yaceczko, a good-natured and patient fellow—and one of the senators who'd actually listened to Wax.

"Good show, Wax," the man whispered, leaning in. "Good show indeed. It's always a pleasure."

Yancey would vote with him. In fact, a decent number of the nobles empathized with Wax. While a lot of the things Marasi had been saying recently made Wax uncomfortable about his hereditary position, in this instance the lords might turn out to be *slightly* less corrupt than their counterparts. The elected senators had to retain their seats, and voting for this bill was likely to improve the lives of their constituents.

That was the problem. According to the latest census, more people now lived *outside* the city than *inside* it. Most of the laws dated back to when there had been one city and a bunch of farming villages. Now that those villages had grown up into cities, their people wanted a stronger voice in Basin politics.

Elendel was no longer a scrappy settlement rebuilding after an apocalypse. They were a nation; even the Roughs were changing, growing, being modernized. Rusts, with all the land in the Roughs, he could imagine a time when more people lived there than in the Basin proper.

They needed to enfranchise those people, not ignore them. He still had hope. He and Steris and their allies had worked for *months* to erode support for the bill. Innumerable dinners, parties, and even—as he'd started doing for some of the city's elite—some training on the shooting range.

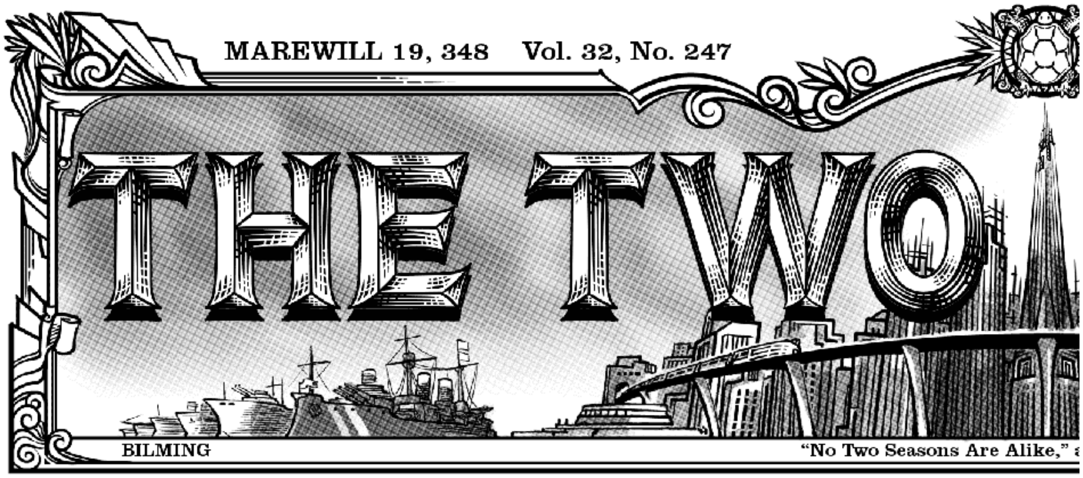
All in the name of changing the world. One vote at a time.

The governor called for the vote, and Lady Mi'chelle Yomen cast the first one—against the bill. As it proceeded, Wax sat, as anxious as he'd ever been before a confrontation with a bandit group. Rusts … this was somehow *worse*. Each vote was the crack of a bullet. *Lady Faula and Senator Vindel. How will they break? And Maraya? Was she persuaded, or …*

Two of them voted for the bill, along with multiple others that he'd been uncertain about. Wax felt a sinking feeling, worse than being shot, as the vote proceeded—and eventually landed at 122 for, 118 against.

The bill passed. His stomach fell further. If Wax was going to stop a civil war, he'd need to find another way.

MAREWILL 19, 348 Vol. 32, No. 247



BILMING

“No Two Seasons Are Alike,”

# ELENDEL SUP
# THREATENS B

## UNITY OR DIVISION? PROGR

*The Governor and Vice Governor*

In a matter of days, Elendel’s Senate will vote on what Bilming’s top political mind, Professor Garven Munz, has called “the most monumental change to our government structure since the Words of Founding.”

Days of speeches, debates, and posturing are planned leading up to the vote, and the eyes of the Outer Cities are focused on the so-called Lawman Senator of the Roughs, whose recent visits north of the Basin have solidified his stance with which many Outer City dwellers concur: Representation Before Supremacy.

Governor Varlance and his cronies vehemently oppose this tack, their views summed up in Vice Governor Adawathwyn’s bold opening remarks that “We’ll need a strong, experienced leader when war comes to us from our masked Southern friends.” Admiral Jonnes of the Malwish Nation looked visibly shaken and did not return after the Senate’s following recess.

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*(Continued on back.)*

## Handerwym Presents NICKI SAVAGE and The COMPASS of Spirits

In my last letter, the Haunted Man, my two Faceless Immortal companions, and I saw the Coinshot Vila Mecant grab the Compass of Spirits and throw herself off a stone outcropping into the mists. The aluminum key that activated it, however, was still with me. Knowing Vila would be back, I entrusted the key to the Haunted Man, who used his hellguns to launch himself to another outcropping, leaving me to convince my faceless friends I had a plan… Which, of course, I *did*.

### *Chapter 8: “Flight of the Ornisaur”*

KeSun rolled her eyes. “Exactly *how* do you expect to follow Vila and lure her out?”

“The aluminum bones we lifted from the ornisaur quarry,” I said, patting Tabaar’s giant backpack.

He groaned deep within his corpulent body. “Oh no…”

“You are incredible at imitation,” I said encouragingly. “Remember when you were Human the koloss in *A Hero for All Ages*? You were masterful! You can do this!”

“He can’t,” said KeSun, folding her arms. “Not without me. I’m the one with experience impersonating birds.”

Turning to Tabaar, she said, “If you are willing to yield some control to me, then we can carry Miss Sauvage across this abyss.”

“But the rest of my collection…” he said, the bag of bones shifting on his back.

“We’ll return for them,” said KeSun, with a compassion in her voice she reserved only for Tabaar. “I promise.”

She raised an eyebrow at me. “Will you kindly look away?” she asked. “We’d rather you not see us when we…”

“…*merge*,” said Tabaar.

What followed was one of the strangest things I’ve ever encountered, stranger even than the Beast of Belmon Couture or that time when I was Allomancer Jak’s assistant.

*(Continued below the fold!)*

*The Two Seasons* would like to retract our dear editor Kyndlip Ternavyl’s comments of two weeks ago, prior to her disappearance, when she compared our beloved mayor to “an irascible boar; no smarter, less attractive, and unable to keep from rolling around in every mire he comes across.”

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Once again I must object to your continued allowance of ads from Soonic Industries, manufacturers of the “Soonic Pup,” who have also ignored

## GUEST EDITORIAL

*by Gemmes Millis, Interim Editor*

ENFORCE NOSEBALL BAN!

We see them in every unsown field and vacant lot. Vagrants and layabouts, some of them

*The Man Who Electrified Time!*

The new novel by Bilming-born working man Schrib Welfor. Available now in all fine bookshops!

**HELP WANTED**—Bendalloy

## Flight of the Ornisaur

Though I desperately wanted to peek, my regard for my longtime companions

# THE TWO SEASONS

MAREWILL 19, 348

Vol. 32, No. 247

Kyndlip Ternavyl, Editor and Proprietor

BILMING

“No Two Seasons Are Alike,” an Originators Proverb

5 clips

## Handerwym Presents

## NICKI SAVAGE

## and

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# ELENDEL SUPREMACY BILL THREATENS BASIN UNITY

## UNITY OR DIVISION? PROGRESS OR PERNICIOUSNESS?

In a matter of days, Elendel’s Senate will vote on what Bilming’s top political mind, Professor Garven Munz, has called “the most monumental change to our government structure since the Words of Founding.”

Days of speeches, debates, and posturing are planned leading up to the vote, and the eyes of the Outer Cities are focused on the so-called Lawman Senator of the Roughs, whose recent visits north of the Basin have solidified his stance with which many Outer City dwellers concur: Representation Before Supremacy.

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*(Continued on back.)*

# 3

Marasi studied the footprints in the dust. They appeared to be a few weeks old, as they'd gathered dust themselves. She walked over to Wayne, who was inspecting the path farther down into the depths: an arduous-looking tunnel with a steep decline. He glanced at her.

"If they're slippin' in and out of the city fast," he said, "they musta found a different way out of here. They aren't makin' this hike regularly."

"Agreed," she said. "We should be stealthy anyway, in case they posted lookouts."

In response, he turned his lantern down and whispered, "You want to continue without backup?"

"For now. We want to scout and see what we find. I don't want to mobilize everyone for a dead end."

Together, the two of them struck forward through the tunnel. The difficulty of the path and its apparent lack of traffic encouraged her. If the enemy was down here but used a different route, then taking this path meant she and Wayne were less likely to be discovered.

They took the decline carefully. Rusts … thank goodness she had trousers on. If she was going to slip and break her skull, she could at least do it with dignity. Or as much dignity as a woman could manage after hiking through sewage for an hour.

She distracted herself by imagining that these caverns must be as old as the Ascendant Warrior—or even older. These tunnels had slumbered through the destruction of the world, through the Catacendre, through the rise and fall of the Final Empire. Had the stones they walked past broken loose from the ceiling during the days of the Ashmounts?

She couldn’t help wondering if they would stumble across the mythical Survivor’s Cradle—the Pits of Hathsin—though she knew that was foolish. Wax said he had been to them, and had found no magical metals of lore.

They eventually hit a particularly deep shaft down; it was essentially vertical, though with a lot of obstructions and clefts in the stone to climb on. Wayne brightened their lantern again, looking doubtful.

“We sure they came this way?” he asked in a whisper.

“Who else would have made the footprints?”

“Footprints?”

“In the dust? And near the opening, they were crusted over with sewage from boots? Seriously, Wayne, you can be remarkably oblivious for a detective.”

“You and Wax are detectives,” he said. “Not me.”

“What are you then?”

“Bullet stopper,” he said. “Skull knocker. Guy who occasionally gets exploded.”

“We’ll be doing nothing like that today,” Marasi whispered. “We will peek in, see if I’m right, then get out for clearance and support.”

“Guess we’ll be comin’ back up this way then,” he said with a sigh, then dug the climbing rope out of his canvas backpack. He found a sturdy rock formation to tie it around, then tossed the other side down into the darkness.

He started down first, then Marasi followed, rifle slung across her back. The descent proved easier than she’d feared, as the rope had knots in it. Still, her arms were soon burning.

“So,” Wayne said softly, dangling below, keeping pace with her instead of going on ahead, “wanna hear my list of ways how women break the laws of physics?”

“Depends,” Marasi said. “How misogynistic is it? Can you give me a number on some kind of scale?”

“Uh … thirteen?”

“Out of what?”

“Seventeen?”

“What kind of insane scale is that?” she whispered, halting atop a boulder and glancing down at him. “Why in the world would you pick seventeen? Why not, at least, sixteen?”

"I don't know! You're the one what asked me for a scale. Look, this is good. Women. Break the laws of physics. I've been thinkin' on this forever. Couple days at least. You'll like it."

"I'm sure."

"Way one," he said, sliding to the next outcropping. "When they take off clothes, they get *hotter.* Strange, eh? Normal folks, they get colder when they take off—"

"Normal folks?" she repeated, following him. "By normal, you mean *men*?"

"Uh … I guess."

"So half the world is not normal? *Women* are not normal?"

"It sounds a little silly when you say it like that."

"You think?"

"Look, I just wanted to point out something interesting. Useful observationalizing 'bout the nature of the cosmere and the relationship between the genders."

"I think you thought of something that amused you, and wanted an excuse to say it." She landed on the little platform next to him, and below she could finally see the bottom. They were roughly halfway.

He met her eyes. "So … uh … fourteen then?" he said. "Outta seventeen."

"And rising. It's not even true, Wayne. Plenty of men get hotter when they take off clothing. Depends on the man."

He grinned. "What about Allik?"

"With Allik, it's more the mask."

"He raises the rusting thing so often, makes you wonder why he wears it in the first place."

"Moving the mask is like … emphasis to the Malwish. It's not *wrong* to let people see under the mask, though they pretend it's taboo—and maybe it was once upon a time. Now they like the way they can use it to express themselves."

He swung over the side and continued down. She gave him a little space, then followed.

"So…" he said. "Want to hear number two?"

"Actually … I kind of do."

"Ha! I thought so. Wax would have said no."

“Wax had years to get accustomed to the depths of your depravity, Wayne. To me, it’s still *remarkable* how you manage to dig yourself deeper each and every time.”

“Fair enough. Number two: Ask a woman how much she weighs. Then lift her. She’ll have increased in weight. Feruchemists, every one.”

“Wayne, that joke is so tired, it slept through breakfast.”

“What. Really?”

“Absolutely. My father was making stupid cracks about women lying about their weight when I was a child.”

“Damn. Old blustering Harms made that joke?” He looked up at her with wide eyes. “Oh, *hell,* Marasi. Am I getting old? Was that an *old man joke*?”

“I have no comment.”

“Damn conners and their damn tight lips.” He reached the bottom and dropped off the rope softly, with a rustle of cloth and boots on stone, then held the rope steady for her.

She climbed the rest of the way to join him. “So, what’s number three on the list?”

“I don’t got one yet.”

“It’s a list of two items, one of which was dumb?”

“*Two* of which was dumb,” he said sullenly. “One was apparently also geriatric. Same jokes as Lord Harms. I’m losing my edge, I am.” He met her eyes, then grinned. “Does this mean I get to be the grumpy old one in the partnership? You can be the young spunky one what swears all the time and makes bad life decisions.”

She grinned. “Do I get a lucky hat?”

“Only if you treat it well,” he said, his hand over his heart, “and take it off before somethin’ unlucky happens, as to not break its lucky streak.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she said, eyeing the tunnel that extended onward from the bottom of the shaft. “But let’s cut the chatter—as much as I love learning whatever has metastasized in your brain lately, we can’t afford to be overheard.”

He dimmed the lantern again and they continued along the tunnel. People at the constabulary offices gave her sympathetic looks on occasion for putting up with Wayne—but the truth was, he could be a really good constable when he wanted to. And he usually *did* want to.

Case in point, at her request he kept his mouth closed and concentrated on the job. Wayne could lack decorum, and could be painfully un-self-aware at times, but he was a good partner. Even excellent. So long as you got past his bubble—not his Allomantic one, but his personal one. Wayne was a fort of a man, with outer walls and defenses. If you were one of the lucky few he let in, you had a friend for life. One who'd stand with you against *literal* gods.

*We're going to find you, Trell*, Marasi thought, creeping forward. She'd first heard that name uttered by a dying man, years ago—and she was increasingly certain Trell was a god of vast power like Harmony. *You can't hide forever. Not if you want to keep influencing the world.*

Wayne grabbed her arm, stopping her without a word. Then he pointed at a tiny light shining far along the tunnel ahead. They crept the final distance, then peeked around the corner and were rewarded by the exact sight she'd been hoping for: a pair of men in vests and hats only a few feet away, playing cards on an overturned box. A small lamp flickered on their improvised table.

Marasi nodded backward. She and Wayne crept away again, far enough to not be heard whispering. She looked to him in the darkness, wondering at his advice. Should they poke forward further, or was this enough of a confirmation to go get backup?

"Tragic," Wayne whispered.

"What?"

"Poor sod's got a great hand," Wayne whispered. "One in a million. And he's playin' against his broke buddy on guard duty? Rusting waste of a full-on Survivor's suite…"

Marasi rolled her eyes, then pointed to a small darkened side tunnel splitting off the main one. "Let's see where this goes."

Behind them, a cursed exclamation echoed in the tunnels; sounded like the fellow with the good hand had just revealed it. This smaller tunnel wound around to the right of the guard post, and they soon saw why it wasn't guarded; it hit a kind of dead end. Though some light did spill through a two-foot-wide hole in the rocks there.

They sidled up to it, then peeked through into a midsized cavern—roughly as big as a dock warehouse—full of men and women boxing goods or lounging on improvised furniture. The hole appeared to be part of the natural rock formations; dripping water from the ceiling had covered the wall with odd protrusions and knobs, covering up what might once have been a larger opening. Marasi and Wayne were maybe fifteen feet up.

She let out a long breath and surveyed the operation. It *was* here. Months of work. Months of promising Reddi her leads were good. Months of connecting theft records, witness accounts, and money trails. And here it was. A large-scale smuggling base set up directly underneath the city, funded by—best she could guess—a mix of Outer Cities interests and the Set.

It was actually here. By Harmony's True Name … she'd *done* it.

Wayne looked to her with a wide smile on his face, then nudged her in the shoulder. "Nice," he whispered. "*Real* nice."

"Thanks," she whispered.

"When you tell the constable-general about this," he said, "leave out the part where I whined because of the sewage."

"And the bad jokes?"

"Nah. Leave those in. You gotta give people what they expect, or they won't believe your lies when you tell them."

Marasi took in the sight. Thirty-seven people, counting the two guards, all armed. Even the menial workers wore holsters. Judging by the leads she'd been tracing, those boxes would be full of military supplies—with a frightening number of explosive components. The gang had tried to cover their tracks by making some more mundane thefts as well, but she was confident she knew what was really happening here.

Elendel had been squeezing the Outer Cities by refusing to let certain items—including weapons—be shipped out of Elendel, which was a central hub for all the train lines. This group was acting like an ordinary gang with their shakedowns and the like, but she was almost a hundred percent certain their purpose was to funnel weapons toward Bilming, current capital of Outer Cities interests.

She didn't like the Outer Cities being forced to work this way—but these gang members had killed innocent people on the streets. Plus, they were likely collaborating with some kind of evil god bent on the subjugation or destruction of the world.

"Right, then," Wayne whispered, pointing. "See that fellow near the back in the nice outfit? He's a Set member for certain. Maybe the new

Cycle.”

Marasi nodded. Cycle was the lowest level of real officer in the Set. They were local bosses that operated gangs of hired muscle. Miles Hundredlives had been a Cycle, reporting to the Suit above him. This man was dressed in an upscale way—visibly more decorated than the others in the cavern. He was also lean, muscular, and tall. As a Cycle, he might be Metalborn. So they’d best not underestimate him in a fight.

“You plug that fellow in the head with a nice rifle shot,” Wayne said, “and I bet the entire group will fold to us.”

“That isn’t how things work in the real world, Wayne,” Marasi whispered.

“Sure it is,” Wayne said. “If that’s the guy payin’ them, those other sods got no reason to keep fightin’.”

“Even if you were right—and I sincerely doubt you are—that’s not how we’re going to do this. Confirmation, coordination, backup, and proper authorization. Remember?”

“I try not to,” he grumbled. “Can’t we do this one my way? I got nothin’ against some blokes just doin’ their jobs, but I’d hate to hike through all that muck again, then return here and find this lot gone. Let’s bring ’em in now.”

“No,” she said. “Your way involves too much chaos.”

“That’s a bad thing because…”

“Well, there’s the whole *officers of the law* thing.”

“Right, right,” he said, then checked in his coat to reveal a shiny badge. It wasn’t something they used in the city, preferring their paper credentials.

“Is that … Wax’s old badge from the Roughs?” she asked.

“He traded it to me.”

“For?”

“Half a meat-’n’-ale bun.” Wayne grinned. “He’ll find it eventually. They get *real* hard to ignore.”

She shook her head, waving him back down the tunnel. They had to keep their lantern darkened though—and that made it difficult to see. So despite being careful, as they returned to the main tunnel they surprised a guard who had stepped that direction to relieve himself.

He glanced at them in the darkness, then shouted. Wayne had him down and knocked out half a second later, but cries of alarm sounded from the direction of the main cavern.

Still standing atop the body, Wayne looked to her and grinned again. “My way it is!”

# 4

There was no way for Marasi and Wayne to escape using the difficult route they’d taken to get here—not with the entire gang on their tails. Beyond that, she wanted to capture that Cycle, who would certainly vanish after this.

Unfortunately all of this meant Wayne was right. So much for protocol.

It was time to do this his way.

They burst into the main tunnel, where the other guard had his gun pointed toward them. Wayne tossed up a speed bubble, giving him and Marasi time to step aside and flank the guard.

Once the speed bubble dropped, the gangster fired into now-open space. Wayne was on him a moment later, laying into him with dueling canes. Marasi left him to it, instead picking her spot. Beyond the card table was a wide tunnel presumably leading into the main warehouse cavern. She went to one knee and raised her rifle, sighting, calming herself, waiting …

She fired the moment someone appeared from that direction. Only her training on the range prevented her from immediately trying to cycle the bolt on her gun. This was a new semiautomatic Bastion rifle, and so she kept it shouldered and downed the next person who stumbled over the falling body. Those behind called a warning, and no one dared come barreling in after that.

Wayne wiped his brow, leaving an unconscious gangster on the floor. “You got the magic boxes?”

“They’re not magic, Wayne,” Marasi said. “Malwish technology is just different but—”

“Magic boxes from your boyfriend. How many?”

“I have three Allomantic grenades,” she said. “All of the new design. And two flash-bangs. Wax charged one of the grenades for me before we left.”

“Nifty,” Wayne said. “Got a plan?”

“You hold the tunnel. I’ll go back to that overlook and toss some Allomantic grenades to catch groups of enemies, then cover you as you move in. Once you’re out of the line of fire, I’ll follow.”

“Good as done!” Wayne said, and they split, him heading toward the two people she’d dropped. There he picked up one of their handguns and fired it a bunch of times into the main chamber—not to hit, but to make those beyond take cover. His hand wobbled a little, and he tossed the weapon aside as soon as it was empty, but it was excellent progress. Not that he needed to be *more* deadly, she supposed.

She left him, rounding to the overlook, which made a decent sniper spot. She picked out several groups of gangsters behind nearby boxes, watching as Wayne fired a second gun.

Marasi carefully took a small metal box from the pouch on her belt. All her life she had suffered disappointment and even dismissal because of her useless Allomantic talent. She could slow time around herself, which was … well, not much use. It essentially froze her to the perspective of everyone around her—removing her from a fight, giving the advantage to her enemies.

She’d found occasional uses for it, but mostly she’d internalized the presumed truth that her abilities were weak.

Then she’d met Allik.

His people revered all Metalborn, Allomancers and Feruchemists alike. Though he’d been in awe of Wax and his flashy powers, Allik had been equally impressed with *her* abilities. She had one of the most useful Allomantic skills, he claimed. That had been difficult to accept, but the upshot was that if you had access to a little specialized technology, you could turn the world on its head.

Perhaps an inch and a half across, the Allomantic grenade hummed as she burned cadmium—and it absorbed her energy. She wasn’t swallowed by a bubble of slowness; with these new designs, all the power went into the box. She’d charged it earlier, but that had been hours ago and she wanted to top it off.

Then, judging the distance carefully, she tossed it toward a group of enemies who had gathered behind some boxes for cover. Her months of practice paid off; she managed to land the device right in the center of the gangsters, who—focused on Wayne—barely noticed it rolling among them.

The grenade used ettmetal, which was tightly regulated by the Malwish, so she didn't blame the gangsters for not knowing what to do; even among the Malwish these were rare. If the men had heard of the devices—and they might have, since the Set was known to employ them—they had likely never seen one.

A second later, a bubble of slowed time popped up around the device, trapping about ten of the men and women. She quickly topped off, then threw, the second of her three grenades—this one aimed at a group of enemies farther along. Her aim was true, and she ensnared another eight.

Calls of "Metalborn!" echoed through the cavern as the rest of the gangsters noticed that over half their number were frozen. Those would move in turgid slow motion as they tried to escape the bubble—but the ten-minute charge on the grenade would run out before they managed it.

She unslung her rifle and laid down covering fire—even picking off two of those remaining—as Wayne slipped into the main chamber. He moved in a blur of speed for a moment, then popped out of his speed bubble and leaped over a cleft in the rock. It took a bit between uses for him to recover his talents and put up another bubble, but she swore that time was shrinking.

He avoided the trapped people; she and he would deal with them later. For now he took advantage of the confusion to get in close to a couple of enemies. They noticed him, but he became a blur again—then came in from above, dueling canes held high.

Their shouts of pain distracted the others, which let Marasi pick off two more. Then she dashed back around to the main tunnel. Here she glanced into the warehouse cavern, then ran in a low crouch—careful to avoid the faintly shimmering perimeter bubbles of the grenades. She knew all too well how it felt to be surrounded by that molasses air while everything around you moved like lightning.

Marasi found her own cover near some packing equipment, and as the remaining gangsters reoriented, gunfire began pounding the stone and metal around her. As a girl, she'd read all about Wax's exploits in the Roughs—

and the more she practiced her trade, the more inaccuracies she spotted. Sure, the stories mentioned gunfire. But they usually left out how *loud* it was when bullets struck. With them pelting the equipment around her, it sounded like she'd given little Max a set of drumsticks and let him loose in a kitchenware shop.

A second later the sounds slowed—like a phonograph playing at a fraction of normal power. The air shimmered near her, and Wayne slumped up against the equipment, a grin on his face—and a bloody wound on his shoulder.

"Sloppy," she said, nodding to the wound.

"Hey now," he said. "Any fellow can accidentally get shot now and then. 'Specially if he's runnin' around with a pair of sticks in a room with lotsa guns."

"How much bendalloy do you have left?"

"Plenty."

"You sure?"

"Yup."

"Wayne, I'm proud of you," she said. "You're actually saving it, being frugal like I asked."

He shrugged like it was nothing, but she *was* legitimately proud of him. He received an allotment from the department, and during the early days of their partnership he'd always run out on missions. She'd been planning to talk to Captain Reddi about increasing the allotment, until she'd discovered that Wayne used his bendalloy for all *kinds* of non-combat, non-detective work. Playing pranks, changing costumes to delight children, the occasional casual thievery …

It was good to see him doing better.

"How many idiots left?" he asked.

"Eleven," she said.

"That's higher than I can count."

"Unless you're doing shots in a drinking contest," Marasi said.

"Damn right," he said.

Together they peeked out from around the equipment—which was for nailing lids to crates. Wayne immediately yanked her back under cover. A bullet moving in slow motion hit the perimeter of the speed bubble, then zipped through the air above them in a flash before hitting the other side and slowing again. Bullets behaved erratically when they hit speed bubbles, and you could never tell which way they'd turn when entering one.

"Guy in the suit is escaping out the back," Wayne said. "You want to grab him, or do you want to stay here and fight the rest of them?"

She bit her lip, considering. "We'll have to split up," she said. "You're better with groups. You think you can handle this lot?"

"Aren't most of these boxes full of stuff what goes boom?"

"Yes…"

"Sounds like fun to be had!"

"You should have another eight minutes or so on the grenades."

"Great," he said. "I'll see if I can take those sods alive. I can grab them one at a time from their slowness bubbles, using my bubbles to counteract. See, I've been practicing, been gettin' good at making mine bigger and smaller. Should be able to walk to the edge of one of your bubbles, put up mine in a way to overlap one person, then pull them out."

"Wayne!" she said. "That's amazing. Have you told Wax? It's really hard to control the size of your bubbles like that."

He shrugged. "You ready?"

She retrieved the flash-bangs from her pouch and handed one to him. Then she pulled the pin on the other to light the fuse. "Ready," she said. Even if he had "plenty," bendalloy was rare and expensive. They needed to be careful with it.

Wayne dropped the bubble, and she tossed the flash-bang. After it detonated, they scrambled out on opposite sides of the machine. Wayne went for the last group of gangsters while she dashed after the Cycle, who vanished through a reinforced metal door at the rear of the cavern. She reached it a moment later and picked the lock fairly easily. She spared a glance for Wayne—who was quickly being surrounded by enemies. He'd found cover behind a box marked EXPLOSIVES. He winked at her, then pulled the pin on his flash-bang and dropped it inside.

Delightful. Hopefully he knew what he was doing. Wayne's healing abilities were extraordinary—but it was still possible for him to take so much damage he couldn't heal. Any blast that separated his metalminds from the bulk of his body would leave Wayne dead, just like the Lord Ruler when he'd lost the Bands of Mourning centuries before.

Well, she couldn’t monitor Wayne all the time. And *she* most certainly *couldn’t* survive an explosion of … well, of any size. She slipped through the door and pulled it closed with a loud *thump.* The entire cavern complex shook a few moments later, but she focused on her task: heading into the dark cavern tunnel after the Cycle, who—among everyone in the cavern—was most likely to have answers for her.

# 5

Wax trudged across the floor of the Senate, and others gave him space. They seemed to not want to face him—even those who had voted with him. They turned away as he passed, stretching and chatting.

In the hall, he headed toward his chambers, crossing over inlaid floors and beneath a row of chandeliers. Crystal and marble. This was his life now. Everything he'd fled as a young man ornamented each footstep, and the shadows seemed darker now, despite the twinkling light from above.

He believed his accomplishments as a senator could far outshine his accomplishments as a lawman, in terms of the raw good done to help the most people possible. That meant his failures carried much higher stakes. In the Roughs you depended on your gun, your instincts, and your ability to ask the right questions. Here he had to depend on others to do the right thing. And so far there had been no greater test of his faith in humanity—serial killers included—than working with politicians.

He shoved into his chambers and found his family and Kath, the governess, there already. He tried not to let his displeasure show, but Max still sensed the mood, staying back with Kath and playing with his Soonie pup.

“Well,” Wax snapped, throwing himself into his seat, “there goes over a year of work.”

“We did everything we could,” Steris said, settling down beside him.

“Did we?” Wax asked, glancing at her stack of notebooks. “I know you have *six* of those full of new ways to try to persuade individual senators. If we'd had more time…”

“We did everything it was *reasonable* for us to do,” she said, “accounting for our other obligations.” Then she hesitated. “Didn’t we, Wax?”

He met her eyes, and saw she was trembling. Hell. This would be just as hard for her, wouldn’t it? *Pay attention, you rusting idiot.* He took her hands and squeezed them.

“We did,” he said. “We tried with everything we had, Steris. In the end though, it wasn’t our decision.”

He squeezed her hands tightly. Steris was incredibly stable—she’d been there for him ever since his return to Elendel, though he’d never imagined how much she would come to mean to him. In that moment though, he felt her shaking. And … rust him if he wasn’t doing the same himself. They’d poured *so much* into stopping this bill. And every *single* rusting senator he’d talked to had said they needed more time. Now they voted like this? Now they—

*No. It’s done.*

“We need to move forward,” he said.

“Yes. Forward.” She nodded, then looked around. “And maybe get out of this building for a while. Currently, all that’s going through my mind are the various ways a convenient natural disaster could turn it to rubble.”

Wax grunted, and helped Steris gather the rest of their things. As they did, Wax saw an envelope on the corner of his desk. That hadn’t been there before, had it? Picking it up, he felt something heavy slide to the corner. A bullet?

No, he discovered after slipping it open. An earring. And with it a small note. *You’ll need to make a second, once the proper metal arrives.*

He had no idea what that meant. And he didn’t care. *Not today, Harmony,* he thought. *Leave me alone.*

“What’s that?” Steris said.

“Something from Harmony,” Wax said.

She paused, looking at him.

“So, likely,” he added, “something useless.”

Steris drew her lips to a line. She was a Survivorist, and didn’t strictly worship Harmony, who was seen as the god of the Path—a distinct but complementary religion. Still, after all they’d done and the things he’d seen, Steris had adopted a somewhat … cross-denominational view of God. At any rate, she knew he'd once worshipped Harmony.

These days … Well, he and God had history. Wax felt he'd overcome his worst problems with Harmony, ever since their conversation directly before he'd donned the Bands of Mourning. But that didn't stop Wax from making the occasional snide remark. Today, he shoved the envelope in his back pocket and put it out of his mind.

They packed up their things—rusts, with kids there were so many *things* to cart around. Steris wanted another child, but Wax worried about that. He didn't fancy being outnumbered.

But then again … he couldn't help smiling as Max went running down the hall, making his Soonie pup leap between black squares of marble, avoiding the white ones. Wax didn't normally see the other senators with families; they claimed that having children in the building wasn't respectful. But if they respected the building so much, why had they made a mockery of it with that vote?

*A good number did vote as you wanted,* Wax had to remind himself. *And others are scared. Of being seen as weak. Of outside interests. They're not all slag for voting against you. Remember that. There are some good ones. Same as in every profession.* It was just … well, he didn't want to think about that right now.

Outside the building, fleets of motor carriages had arrived to pick up senators. They'd drive off to parties, or appearances, or informal get-togethers. Even those who worked with Wax rarely invited him along unless they wanted to strategize. It was like they thought he was above simple socializing. Or maybe he made them uncomfortable.

As his family gathered to wait for their driver, Max tugged on his suit coat. "Is ya sad, Pa?" he asked loudly. "I hates the sads. Right bad, they is."

The way he said it caused several nearby senators to turn their noses up and sniff. Wax cocked an eyebrow. "Has Uncle Wayne been teaching you accents again?"

"Yeah," Max said, softer. "Says I shouldn't tell you though, so you'd think I was a genius for doing it on my own." He smiled. "He told me to talk like that around the senators because it'll upset them. And they need to be upset today, don't they? Because they made you and Mother sad?"

Wax nodded, kneeling down. “You don’t need to worry about that though.”

“Know what makes me feel better when I’m sad?” Max asked.

“Hugging Tenny?” Wax said, patting the stuffed kandra on the head.

“Well, that,” Max said, “and … um … flying?” He looked at Wax with big, hopeful eyes.

Nearby, their motorcar pulled up to the curb and Hoid, the driver, stepped out. “Your carriage, sir,” he said, holding the passenger door. But rusts, who could deny a child when he looked at you like that?

“Thank you, Hoid,” Wax said. “Please take my wife wherever she would like to go. Kath, you have the harness?”

“I do, m’lord,” she said, handing Steris the baby, then digging into the enormous bag of extra clothing and washcloths. She tossed the harness to Wax, who gave her his coat and vest in exchange.

It gave him an impish stab of glee to pull on the leather harness and strap Max to his back in front of everyone. Then, with a fond kiss for Steris—and a promise to meet her at home—he dropped a bullet casing and turned toward the crowd.

“Don’t none of you get jealous or nothin’!” Max shouted. “He can give you a ride fer cheap, if you ask real nice and stop being a pile o’ bad turds!”

Yeah … maybe Wax should have a little talk with Wayne. But for now he waved to the crowd, then launched himself into the air, Max letting out a whoop of riotous glee.

# 6

The tunnel Marasi entered bore signs of ancient civilization: the remnants of brick walls covering up the rough natural stone. A smooth floor, chiseled and graded. Sconces on the walls, now pocked with rust as if suffering some terrible disease.

She took out the last of her grenades, the one Wax had charged for her. These newer ones could hold a charge for hours—though by now the effect wouldn't last long once activated. Three or four minutes at most. She still felt better holding it—and so, reluctantly, she set her rifle on the ground and instead drew her pistol. It also contained less metal than the rifle, making it a slightly better tool against a potential Allomancer. For the same reason, she left her pouch with extra metals, though she kept her belt with a few non-metal tools useful for fighting Allomancers.

Grenade and pistol in hand, she crept forward into the dim tunnel. The gang members had hooked some electric lights along the right wall, cords tied around the ancient sconces, but they flickered drowsily as if seconds from nodding off to sleep. She soon reached another vast open cavern but lingered at the entrance, crouching and inspecting the path ahead. The Cycle had come this way, and part of her wanted to scramble after him as fast as possible. The more careful part of her kept calm, watching for an ambush.

This particular cavern held a long, narrow rift running from her left to her right. An ancient stone bridge had spanned it, but it had fallen long ago—and instead a newer construction of boards and rope stretched across the perhaps sixteen-foot gap. About thirty feet of stone ground separated her from the chasm and bridge—and a tunnel in the wall on the other side continued the path forward.

She didn't go toward the bridge though. She hesitated, still at the mouth of the chamber. These brick walls were so old. Who had built them, centuries ago? Was this like the Originator Tomb in the heart of Elendel? Had people huddled in this cavern, their walls and bridge falling, as Harmony remade the world?

Regardless, she was worried. The Cycle had seen her; her instincts said he wouldn't just run off, his back exposed. He'd lay a trap. She looked carefully, and glimpsed a dark shape behind some rocks between her and the chasm. He was probably hoping she'd rush across the bridge, so he could shoot her from behind.

Unfortunately, as she spotted him, he rose and lifted a gun. Marasi activated the grenade—which she'd been holding close to her chest—by reflex. It let out a powerful Steelpush, ripping her pistol out of her hand and tossing it out in front of her. It fell straight into the chasm.

Her reaction had been just in time though, because the Cycle unloaded his pistol at her—and each shot missed, the bullets veering away and *snapping* into stone to either side of her. Marasi dashed straight at him, picking out his fine suit in the dim light. His features were more rugged than she'd expected. A thick neck, stubble on his chin.

She'd hoped he would be carrying metal, and her advance with the grenade would throw him off balance. Instead he merely lost his own pistol, which was Pushed across the chasm, hitting the wall on the other side and falling near the path over there.

Other than that, it appeared he—like Marasi—was wise enough not to keep much metal on his person.

"By the authority of the Fourth Octant Constabulary," she said, stopping ten feet or so from him, "you are under arrest for tariff avoidance, racketeering, and the illegal transport of weapons. You're unarmed and cornered. Do the smart thing and surrender."

Instead he grinned. Then began to grow.

His suit had buttons along the arms, which snapped open, giving more room as his muscles expanded to ridiculous proportions. His jacket stayed on, but also expanded through clever use of unsnapping wooden buttons along the sides.

Oh, hell. A Feruchemist. He didn’t have the Terris look—but then, neither did Wayne. You couldn’t always tell.

Marasi retreated. Getting into a fistfight with someone tapping strength was a quick road to a crushed face. Instead she switched off the grenade to conserve the rest of the charge, and ran for the bridge and the gun on the other side. The Cycle lunged forward and cut her off by placing himself directly in front of the bridge. There, with a laugh, he ripped apart the ropes holding it in place.

Okay. Feruchemists weren’t like Allomancers. They couldn’t just pop a new metal charge into their mouths and keep going. Maybe she could run him out of strength.

He dropped the rope, letting the whole wooden construct collapse. “Trell has wanted you in particular, lawwoman,” he noted in a voice that seemed too high pitched for the enormous body. “So kind of you to deliver yourself to me.”

Marasi turned and dashed for her rifle. Thumping footsteps chased her, gaining on her, forcing her to throw herself to the ground just before reaching the rifle. Her move let her narrowly dodge a grab.

She rolled as he punched, hitting the ground and grunting, then raising bloodied knuckles. Feruchemical strength could be dangerous—a lot of the Metallic Arts could hurt you. Her own included. She managed to dodge the next punches as well. Fortunately for her, the Cycle didn’t seem practiced with his powers. Despite the prepared clothing, he obviously found it awkward to move and fight in this bulkier form.

What kind of Feruchemist didn’t practice with their abilities? She scrambled for her rifle, getting to her knees and half lunging, half falling to grab it. He moved first, leaping over her with a powerful bound to snatch the gun. He then snapped it clean in half and hurled the barrel at her.

She barely activated the grenade in time, which bounced the barrel back at him—but she was holding the box awkwardly. It nearly slipped from her fingers at the jolt of force from the thrown object.

Steelpushes. Force transference. The Cycle wasn’t the only one using powers they weren’t practiced with.

She turned off the box as the Cycle dodged. The barrel of her rifle bounced against the rear wall and then rolled toward her. She reached for it, thinking to use it as a club.

Unfortunately, he lunged and seized her left arm, the one holding the box. His powerful grip squeezed her flesh, and *rusts*, it felt like he could crush her very bones. Cursing in pain, she scrambled at her belt and the sheath there. As her eyes started to water, she brought up a small glittering weapon and stabbed him straight through the arm.

He howled and dropped her, then yanked the bloody weapon free.

“Glass dagger,” she said. “It’s a classic.”

He glared at her, then held up his arm. The bleeding wound began to heal.

Hell. Feruchemical healing? That proved it. She’d never met someone who naturally had two Feruchemical powers. He was using the forbidden art. Hemalurgy.

Marasi grabbed the rifle barrel and backed away, but their fight had positioned her so that she could only move toward the chasm. Each step took her farther from the doorway she’d come in through, where she might have been able to escape. Rusts.

She retreated, step by step, holding the barrel of her rifle in one hand, the grenade in the other. How much charge did it have left? In the chaos she hadn’t tracked how much she’d used.

The Cycle followed, sticking her knife into his belt. Then, horribly, his eyes started to *glow* faintly red. “Trell is choosing hosts,” he said. “Avatars, bestowed with his power. How would you like to be the accomplishment that proves I’m worthy of immortality, lawwoman? All you have to do is die.”

She continued backward, her mind racing. He didn’t seem worried he’d run out of strength anytime soon. Within moments, he had forced her up to the precipice of the chasm, near the clump of rocks he’d been hiding behind earlier. She put those between them, but they weren’t very high.

A quick glance told her that the chasm now inches behind her was at least fifty feet deep. No escape in that direction.

“You’ve backed yourself up against a pit,” he said, advancing. “Now what? Perhaps it’s time to … what was it? Do the smart thing and surrender?”

Instead she set the grenade to go off on a few seconds’ delay, then wedged it securely into a spot among the rocks. Then she gripped the barrel of her rifle under her arms and pressed it firmly against her chest.

He frowned. Then the grenade went off.

Force transference. Every Push creates an equal and opposite Push. The grenade shoved the rifle barrel, which hurled her backward with enormous force—straight across the chasm.

She *smashed* back-first into the wall. That was enough to stun her, but then the grenade's charge gave out. She dropped to the ground. Safely across the chasm as she'd planned, but winded and dazed.

Through teary eyes, she saw the Cycle run and leap across the chasm. So she scrambled, half-blinded by pain, searching the dusty stone, looking desperately for the pistol …

There!

He loomed overhead, a terrible shadow, his arm raised to smash her skull. In response, she delivered three shots straight into his face. He dropped.

*Oh hell,* she thought, sitting up despite the pain. Wax did things like this all the time. Leaping off cliffs, jumping around and slamming into things. How on *Scadrial* was his body not horribly ruined by it all?

She prodded at her ribs, hoping nothing was broken. Her left shoulder protested the most, and she winced. The pain was so distracting that she had to force herself to focus. A shot to the head should stop a Bloodmaker from healing, but some part of her insisted she should check anyway.

She lurched over to inspect the corpse. And found the bullet wounds pulling closed on the man's head, the holes in the skull resealing.

Rusting *hell*.

She heaved the slumped-over body onto its back and scrambled to pull her knife from his belt. He was healing from bullets to the head? Something was very wrong here. She shot him again, but that would only be temporary.

Instead, she ripped aside his shirt—revealing four spikes pounded in deep between his ribs. As she had suspected. Knife in hand, she began the gruesome work of digging the spikes out. She dug faster as she realized at least one of them was made of a strange metal with dark red spots like rust. One they'd been searching for *forever.*

The Cycle's eyes snapped open, despite his broken jaw and the holes in his skull. Marasi cursed and worked faster, bloodied fingers straining to pry out the first of the four spikes, which was so tightly embedded between his ribs it was difficult to yank free.

Those eyes. They were glowing a vivid red now.

“The ash comes again,” the man said through bloody lips, his voice strangely grating. “The world will fall to it. You will get what you deserve, and all will wither beneath a cloud of blackness and a blanket of burned bodies made ash.”

Marasi gritted her teeth, working on the rusty-looking spike, slick with blood.

“Your end,” the voice whispered. “Your end comes. Either in ash, or at the hands of the men of gold and red. *Gold and*—”

Marasi yanked the spike out. The red glow faded and the body slumped, the healing stopping. She felt at the throat anyway, and even when she found no pulse, she dug out the other three spikes.

Then she finally leaned against the wall, groaning softly. Wayne had better have found a way to deal with those other thieves—because Marasi doubted she had the strength to lift a gun at the moment. Instead she closed her eyes, and tried not to think about that terrible voice.

# 7

Max called for Wax to make each leap higher, faster. The boy’s shouts of glee carried over the rushing wind and flapping clothing. And rusts if that wasn’t infectious. Wax had been a solemn child, a trend that had continued into adulthood. But even he appreciated the rush that came from a well-executed Steelpush.

The sudden explosion of speed, the moment of stillness at the zenith. The lurch in the stomach as the plummet began. It wasn’t like any other experience a man could have—at least, not and survive.

In the distance a Malwish trade ship hovered into the city, flying using their strange ettmetal devices, as the two of them bounded across the city, afforded a view that was somehow reductive and expansive at once. From up so high, you could see the octant divisions along major roadways. You could understand and feel the different neighborhoods, the crunched-up forced familiarity of the slums, the expansive yet isolated grounds of the manors.

Once, Wax had assumed this kind of experience—not just the height, but the motion while traversing the city from above—would always be reserved for Coinshots. Then the Malwish airships had taken that assumption and tossed it out a window from three thousand feet.

Regardless, something about this perspective felt like it belonged to him. This was *his* city. He’d returned to it, and had—over the years—come to love it. It represented the best that people could achieve: a monument to ingenuity, a home to thousands of different ideas, types of people, and experiences.

At Max's urging he took them higher, using skyscrapers as his anchors to Push upward, back and forth, until they landed near the top of one building in particular: Ahlstrom Tower. The penthouse was their home, and Wax had picked it specifically. It was tough getting to the peak of a too-tall building with Steelpushes as your anchors ran out below. Fortunately, this one had several tall skyscrapers unusually close, and that gave him anchors to Push himself inward.

Today Wax didn't stop at their penthouse. He took them to the roof, where there was a little built-in platform for a worker to latch on and lower window-cleaning devices. Wax settled onto it and Max unhooked, though he was still tethered to the harness by a strong cord. Wax wasn't worried about its reliability. Steris had designed it.

Max took out a pouch of twirly-seeds and began dropping them off the side of the building, watching them go spinning down toward the busy street below. Despite the height, Wax could hear cars honking on the roadway. Six years, and there was barely a horse-drawn carriage to be seen in the arteries below. Progress here was like a wrecking crew. You moved with it or you became rubble.

The platform faced north. To his left, the shimmering waters of Hammondar Bay were a vast highway toward … well, he didn't rightly know what. The people of the Basin weren't explorers. For all their love of stories about Wax in his young days, or worse that fool Jak, most were content to enjoy their city. That was a problem with Elendel: it had everything you thought you'd need, so why go looking elsewhere? They hadn't even realized there was an entire Southern Continent out there until an airship had sailed up to investigate the Basin.

Yes, there had been expeditions since then. But most people were content here, and he couldn't blame them. His best efforts at improving life had been focused on the Basin. He didn't know what to do about the Malwish. Six years, and he still found the suddenly expansive size of the world intimidating.

Max hopped up and down with glee, throwing out an entire handful of twirly-seeds. The boy's fascination with heights made Kath uncomfortable—but that was what happened when, from infancy, you were often strapped to a father who found ordinary means of transportation too time-consuming.

Wax looked north toward the Roughs. Toward wonder, mystery, and a life he'd loved. He felt …

Rusts. He didn't feel sad.

He blinked, cocking his head. Ever since his return, Elendel had felt like a duty to him. Adventure and comfort had both been outside the city, calling to him. Though things had improved over the years, he'd continued to feel it. That call. Until …

Until today. Today, he remembered the parts of his life he'd loved in the north—but he didn't want them back. He had a life here he loved equally. Maybe more, judging by the warmth he felt as Max laughed. This … *this* was where he belonged. More, this was where he *wanted* to belong.

It felt calming to realize these things. He'd … finally stopped grieving, hadn't he?

With a grin of his own, he scooped Max up and gave the child a powerful hug—though Max had been too wiggly, even as a baby, to stand that sort of thing for long. Soon, at the boy's urging, they were playing a game of fetch, a variety Max had invented a few months back. Max tossed a wicker ball with a tiny metal weight at its center, then Wax tried to launch it onto the top of a nearby building. The wicker would keep it from doing damage if it fell, but the metal let him aim it. Once it was in place on a roof, they would jump over and retrieve it.

Max threw, but Wax struggled to get the ball to go far enough. "Toss it higher," he suggested to Max once they'd recovered it.

"If I throw it up," Max complained, "it will come down on our heads. I want to go onto that building over there."

"Height first," Wax said. "Trust me. The higher you throw it, the farther I can get it to fly."

Max tried again. With more height to the throw, Wax was able to land the ball on the rooftop Max wanted. Then they leaped after it. He wondered what the people in the neighboring skyscrapers thought of the frequent sight of a senator shooting past their windows with a child strapped to his back.

Unfortunately, the fun of the game could only distract him for so long. They'd been playing for half an hour when he topped a building and was confronted by an awesome sight. The Malwish ship he'd seen earlier had come closer.

The wooden construction, moved by giant fans, loomed in the air over Elendel. Wax had seen Basin attempts to design their own airships using helium or hot air. But the size of the cabin those ships could lift— in the most optimistic of projections—was nothing compared to what the Malwish could field. Their ship soared, a fortress in the sky.

This was no trade ship as he’d thought earlier. It was a warship. A show of force, though not an overtly hostile one—as it was approaching slowly and low in the sky. It was meant to make a statement, not a threat.

So, with Max strapped securely back into place, Wax launched them into the air toward the vessel, intent on finding out what was going on.

# 8

Marasi eventually managed to find a service ladder to get her down into the chasm and back up the other side. Worn out, she approached the main chamber, shaken by what she'd heard and been forced to do. But she carried a small book of numbers and shipping dates she'd found on the corpse, and that looked promising.

She also carried something more dangerous. Four spikes. Curiously, the red-spotted one did not like touching the others—it pulled away from them if brought close. So she'd wrapped it in a bundle of cloth and kept them in separate pockets.

She stumbled through the reinforced metal door and found a scene of utter chaos. A large blast had set off several other explosions, judging by the scars on the ground. The cavern was littered with shrapnel, pieces of equipment, and an alarming number of bodies.

Wayne squatted in the center of it all, his clothes ripped, playing cards with a whole group of tied-up gangsters. He had their cards laid out on the floor in front of them—though their hands were tied behind their backs.

"You sure you want to lead with that one, mate?" Wayne asked, nodding at the card one of the men had tapped with his toe.

"It's the high card," the fellow said.

"Yeah, but are you *sure*," Wayne said, eyeing his own hand.

"Um … I think so."

"Damn," Wayne said, laying down his hand. "I play three eights on the back of the nines. You win."

"But…" another of the men said, "you know our hands … Why would you play it that way?"

“Gotta pretend I can’t see your cards, friends,” Wayne said. “Otherwise, where’s the sport in it? Cheatin’s one thing, but if I can just *see* what you’re going to do, then … well, might as well be playin’ with myself. And there are much funner ways to do that.”

Marasi stumbled up. He had fifteen of them in various states of captivity. Exactly as he’d said, he’d been able to use his speed bubble to counteract her slowness bubble and grab them one at a time. His control over his powers was increasingly impressive.

She wasn’t surprised he’d taken so many captive—Wayne preferred not to kill. It was something they agreed on. As for the card game, well … at this point his antics barely shocked her. She settled down on the remnant of a broken crate. “Wayne, I could have used your help.”

“By the time I had these chaps all trussed up,” Wayne said, “you already had that fellow in the suit down. I saw you restin’, and it seemed best to give you some time.”

She hadn’t even noticed. Rusts, her shoulder still hurt. She grimaced, looking around the room.

“So, uh,” Wayne said, “*damn.* Did you turn to cannibalism or something?”

Marasi looked down at her uniform, which was covered in blood. “Cannibalism? *That’s* where your mind went?”

“One sees a lady covered in blood,” Wayne said, “and it goes to a natural place: wonderin’ if maybe she feasts on the livers of the people what she defeated. Not that I’m judging.”

“Not judging?” Marasi said. “Wayne, that’s *absolutely* something you *should* judge someone for.”

“Right. Shame on you, then.”

She sighed. “Here I was thinking that I was finally used to your Wayneness.” She proffered the spikes, each six inches long with a thick head—save for the smallest, most interesting one, which was narrow and thin, barely four inches long. “I dug these out of the Cycle’s body. He would have come back to life, healing himself, if I’d left them in.”

“How?” he said. “It don’t work that way.”

“Did for him. This other spike might be why.”

“Is that…”

“Trellium?” she said. “Yes. It has to be.”

Wayne whistled softly. “We should celebrate. You save any liver for me?”

She gave him a flat stare, at which he just grinned. “We don’t eat people,” she said to the captives. “He’s just joking.”

“Aw, Marasi,” Wayne said. “I’ve been workin’ on my reputation with these blokes.”

“We broke into their cavern,” she said, “defeated their leader, blew up most of their goods, killed half of them and captured the rest. I think your reputation is fine.” She narrowed her eyes, noticing that all of the captives were barefoot. “Dare I ask why you took off their shoes?”

“Shoelaces,” Wayne said, and she glanced at their bound hands. “Old Roughs trick when you don’t have enough rope.” He nodded to the side, and the two of them stepped away to talk in private. “That’s a lot of captives, Marasi, and shoelaces aren’t going to hold them real well. Any moment now, one of them will pop out a knife I missed—or worse, a gun. So…”

“Instant Backup?” she asked.

“Rusts, I love that code name.”

“As long as it gets me to a bath sooner, I’m for it. There should be a way up to the city through the door I used—and there’s a ladder to the right, inside the chasm.” She paused. “Check on the body for me? I have this terrible premonition that I missed a spike and he’ll come looking for me.”

“Got it,” Wayne said. He surveyed the room. “Nice work.”

“We blew the place up and killed the guy who had the most information.”

“We survived,” Wayne said, “stopped a gang of miscreants, protected the city, denied our enemies resources, and recovered some important metals. In my book we did a rustin’ good job. You’re too hard on yourself, Marasi.”

Well … maybe she was. It was the sort of thing you learned, growing up as she had. So she nodded and let herself take the compliment, feeling some weight lift from her. Wayne jogged off, and she walked back to the tied-up gang of thugs, pistol held in a deliberately threatening way.

Judging by how they looked at her, she didn’t need to do much to intimidate them. “You’re the lucky ones,” she said—mostly to distract them. “You’re going to be treated fairly. So long as no one does anything stupid." She fished in her pocket, ignoring the book she'd taken from the Cycle for now, instead pulling out a notebook that was only *slightly* coated in blood. "I have a list of rights here I'm going to read to you. Listen carefully, so you know what options and legal protections will be available to you."

She opened the notebook and burned cadmium, tossing out a bubble of slowed time that covered them all. Hopefully they'd be distracted by her lecture, because if they were watching the perimeter they'd see the smoldering fires wink out too quickly.

That was probably the extent of the clues; there weren't as many tells in a cavern as there would be outside, where the motion of the sun, falling leaves, or passing bystanders would indicate exactly what was happening. As the minutes passed in slowed time for Marasi and the gangsters, Wayne would be jogging to the constabulary to get backup.

Marasi finished her recitation, then did a slow walk around the captives, pistol at the ready, metal burning within her. A few of them stilled as she passed; they'd been trying to work out the knots in their bindings. Wayne was right. This many captives presented a potentially volatile situation. Hopefully backup would come quickly.

For now though, she let herself think about the Cycle, whose dying words reminded her of what Miles Hundredlives had said when *he* had died. *One day, the men of gold and red, bearers of the final metal, will come to you. And you will be ruled by them.*

She touched the trellium spike in her pocket.

*The ash comes again*, the Cycle had said today.

That couldn't be true. The Catacendre had marked the death and rebirth of the world. Ashfalls were a thing of myths and old stories. Not something of these days, with their electric lights and petrol-powered autos. Right?

She shivered and glanced toward the door at the back of the cavern, eager to spot more constables. It was a relief when a blur indicated someone arriving. Marasi almost dropped the speed bubble, then paused as she saw it was only one person. Who was this? Wayne? The blurred figure zipped up to the perimeter of the bubble and stood there for a moment.

That gave Marasi just enough time—an eyeblink really—to pick out a female figure in dark clothing, a black cloth mask over her face. Not like a Malwish mask; more like one a thief might use, prowling in the night. She was slender, with straight black hair. Her eyes seemed to meet Marasi's, then she became a blur again.

Perhaps Marasi could have dropped the bubble, but it was over too quickly. Indeed, as she was still trying to sort through what had happened, a host of other blurs in constable brown entered the room. A second later, Wayne jumped into the slowness bubble. He activated his own powers and the two canceled each other out, creating a pocket of normal time around them.

Rust, could she get that good with her bubbles? Her schedule was so constrained that such experiments seemed impossible, but still … it was remarkable. And surreal, that she was now unaffected by her own slowness bubble. She turned back toward the frozen gangsters, one of whom had managed to untie himself and was trying to sneak away.

"You arrived just in time," Marasi said, noting the constables gathered around the bubble with nets and ropes. "Wayne … did you pass anyone on your way in?"

"No," he said, frowning. "Why? Your corpse is still out there, dead as when you deadified him."

"There was someone in here a moment ago," she said. "Maybe fifteen minutes ago regular time? She inspected us, then fled."

"Bizarre," he said. "You still have those spikes?"

She checked her uniform's pockets; three spikes on one side, one on the other, and they hadn't been disturbed. "Yes. Ready for the bubble to go down?"

He nodded and they dropped their bubbles, letting Marasi shout orders to the constables. They moved in methodically, taking the man who'd been about to escape, tightening the bonds on the others. Constable medics checked the dead just in case, and others moved in to gather evidence. Well, the evidence Wayne hadn't detonated.

"Come on," Wayne said. "They can handle this. We should show Wax what we found."

"Well, after some cleaning up," she said. "Judging by how you smell, Wayne, I don't want to *know* how *I* smell. But yes. We need to talk to Waxillium."

About more than just the spikes. About glowing red eyes, and cryptic deaths. *You will get what you deserve, and all will wither beneath a cloud of* *blackness and a blanket of burned bodies made ash.* She left the scene to the other constables, following Wayne as he led the way out.

# 9

A warship's arrival was certainly an event, but not an unprecedented one. They visited now and then, with permission.

Even its low altitude, unfortunately, was higher than Wax could reach with his Allomancy. He'd need a metal anchor of incredible size to Push himself that high—either that or he'd need … well, metals he no longer had access to.

There had been a time when he'd borne them all. A transcendent flash of incredible strength—as if he'd touched the Well of Ascension itself. But it was best not to dwell too long on his experience with the Bands of Mourning, lest he make all other moments seem dull by comparison.

Today, he made himself known by leaping up in a few high bounds near the ship. They sent a small skimmer down to collect him and Max, giving them medallions to decrease their weight, though Wax didn't need one. It intimidated the masked Malwish airmen when he handed his back—a reminder that he was Twinborn.

Of the five different nations that made up the Southern Continent, the Malwish—these people—were the ones Wax had interacted with the most. They were the only nation that had sent an ambassador to Elendel. And increasingly, all official interactions with the South went through them. From what he'd been able to gather, these last six years had shaken up Southern Continent politics even more than they had Basin politics. Once-tempestuous rivalries had stilled, and unity had been forged. Why squabble with one another when there were actual *devils* to the north who might invade at any moment? Never mind that Wax's people couldn't even make airships yet.

A few minutes later the skimmer—which was shaped a little like an open-topped flying fishing boat—docked with the larger ship. Max was unstrapped by now and stood patiently, holding Wax's hand. Getting to board a real airship was so exciting that Wax could feel him trembling. Indeed, as they stepped onto the main ship—into a corridor made of dark wood, the walls bowing outward at the center like a tube—Max saluted the person waiting for them.

The man was the captain, judging by his intricate mask. Wooden, but carved and inlaid with six different metals in a pattern around the eyes. The man glanced at the child but made no move to salute back, as the constable officers cheekily did when Max saluted them. He didn't raise his mask either.

"Honored Metalborn," the captain said, nodding to Wax, "and … unless I miss my guess, Honored Once-Bearer of the Bands?"

"That's me," Wax said.

"And also taker of the Bands, which should have been restored to their rightful people."

"Also me. I delivered them to the kandra, as agreed—to be held so that no nation could control them or their power. If you need to be reminded."

They were silent for a few moments, staring at one another.

"I am Admiral Daal," the man said—sounding reluctant. "Welcome to my former ship, Blessed Thief."

"Former?" Wax asked.

"I've been chosen to be the new ambassador from the Malwish Consortium to your nation."

Malwish … Consortium? It seemed the unification of the South had been completed. "What about Jonnes?" Wax asked.

"She will be returning home," Daal said. "It has been determined that she has been too … familiar."

Wonderful. A political shift indeed. It was probably best not to say too much more than simple pleasantries, to avoid inflaming tensions by accident. "Then let me be the first senator to welcome you to the Basin," Wax said. "I look forward to continued peace and favorable trade between our nations."

"Favorable?" Daal said. "For you, perhaps."

"We've both benefited. You've had access to our Allomancers."

"*Limited* access," he said. "Far too limited compared to the rich accommodations you have received."

"Three skimmers?" Wax asked. "A handful of medallions? All essentially useless without the ability to maintain them on our own or create more."

"Surely you don't expect us to give up the *means* of our production? One sells the goods, not the *factory.*"

Every time they tried to get more information on medallions from people in the know, they got stonewalled. Obviously these were Malwish trade secrets, which explained part of it, but interviewing Allik they were able to consistently pick out discrepancies in what he said and what they actually saw. Why weren't there Feruchemical soldiers in the Malwish army with extremely heightened strength, mental speed, or other dangerous Feruchemical talents? Why weren't there Allomancer medallions? The more they learned, the more certain Wax became that there was a secret there, indicating the medallions were not as effective or as versatile as the Malwish would like people to believe.

*Right,* Wax thought. *About not inflaming tensions by accident …* He was quiet, staring at the admiral. Air as tense as a midday duel.

Then Max tugged his sleeve. "Uh … Dad?"

"Yes?" Wax said, not looking down.

"I need the potty."

Wax sighed. Tense diplomatic situations were not improved by the presence of a five-year-old. But it could have been worse—he could have brought Wayne instead.

"Is there one available?" Wax asked Daal.

"He can wait."

"Do you have children, Ambassador?"

"No."

"Five-year-olds do not wait."

After another tense moment, the admiral sighed and spun on his heel, leading the way past masked sailors. Wax followed with his son. Years spent near Allik and others from the South had taught Wax to be comfortable around those masked faces. It was still hard to not feel intimidated by that line of shadowed eyes. Not a one speaking, not a one lifting their mask. Wax had laughed and drunk with Malwish in the past, but this crew seemed a different class entirely.

Daal presented the restroom with a gesture.

“Wow!” Max said, peeking in, the electric light flickering on inside. “It’s so *small*. Like it’s made for me!”

“Quickly, son,” Wax said.

Max closed the door and hummed softly as he did his business. Wax stood with the admiral, feeling awkward. He actually found himself wishing for Wayne, who had a way of breaking tension like this—by creating a different variety of tension entirely. One which allowed you and your presumed antagonist to share a moment of mutual embarrassment, maybe even understanding.

*I wonder if he does that on purpose,* Wax thought. It was hard to tell with Wayne. At times he seemed deeply insightful. He inevitably ruined that impression. But you couldn’t help wondering …

“The Bands of Mourning,” Daal said. “They are safe, yah?”

“I assume so,” Wax replied. “I haven’t seen them since we delivered them.”

“I passed the gun emplacements at the city perimeter,” Daal said. “I’ve been told about those. The maximum range straight up is what, a thousand feet? Maybe two?”

Wax didn’t respond. It was a little more than that, but … honestly not much, at least not straight upward, despite what propaganda would claim. And though the skimmers that had been delivered to the Basin had a maximum altitude of around fifteen hundred feet, he knew that some Malwish ships could sail so high that the air grew thin and men would die if they remained there too long.

“One wonders,” Daal said, “what would have happened if our people had met during a more … warlike era. Why, one quick bombing campaign and your city would fold like an old flag.”

“Fortunate,” Wax said, “that we met now instead.”

The admiral turned toward him, eyes peeking out through metal-encrusted holes. “What would you have done?” he asked. “If we had simply attacked?”

“I don’t know,” Wax said. “But I think you’d have had a harder time of it than you believe.”

“Curious, how often your papers repeat the same lines,” Daal said. “Boasts about the kandra assassins and Allomancer soldiers. When I know that your demon immortals *can’t* kill. And your Allomancers? Tell me, how did you reach this ship? By your own power, or…?”

What a delightful individual.

“Of course,” Daal said, “we don’t live during such … brutal times. I am not here to start a war, Honored Twinborn. Do not look so offended. But I represent many among us who feel your people have taken advantage of our … lenient nature. In particular with the Bands of Mourning. They are ours, and should reside with us.”

Wax wanted to leap to arguments. Explain the Bands had been found in *Basin* territory. That they’d been created by someone from the North, not the South. That a deal had been fairly agreed. But this man was baiting him, and—whatever he’d done in the past—Wax didn’t speak for Elendel. He was only one representative out of many.

He refused to be goaded. “Then,” he said, “that is a discussion you may have with the governor and our legislature. And perhaps with God.”

The masked admiral regarded him, saying no more. But rusts, if tensions were getting worse …

*This is the absolute worst time,* Wax thought with frustration. With the Supremacy Bill passed, there was a real chance the Basin would crumble as a political entity. How would the South respond to that? Daal said he didn’t want war, but what if the South saw the Basin as easy pickings?

Their initial encounters had wowed the Southerners. A northern land full of Metalborn and walking myths? But the longer they’d interacted, the more each side had recognized the ordinary nature of the other. Myths became men. And every society knew how to kill other men.

Max finally came out, holding up his wet hands to prove he’d washed them. Daal marched them back down the corridor, where Wax strapped his son into the harness again.

“It is good to meet you, Ladrian,” the ambassador said. “Good for me, yah? It shows which stories I should believe.”

“And which are those?”

“The true ones, of course,” Daal said, and gestured for one of his airmen to open the doors, revealing the city below. “I trust my time here will be profitable. Good day, Senator.”

With a sigh, Wax threw himself out of the airship—accompanied by a whoop from Max, who seemed to consider this encounter the highlight of an absolutely wonderful day.

Wax slowed them carefully with some Pushes, then sent them through a series of quick leaps back to Ahlstrom Tower. The penthouse had a landing platform, and moments later the two of them burst into their suite—Wax carefully locking the door behind them.

Steris was putting Tindwyl down for her nap, but walked out to the front room a short time later—to find Max playing with a puzzle while Wax mixed himself a drink.

"Mother!" Max said, looking up. "I got to *poop* on an *airship*!"

"Oh!" she said, with the enthusiasm for the topic only a mother could muster. "That's exciting!"

"I got some strange toilet paper!" he said, lifting it up. "It's white instead of brown! Traded for it just like Uncle Wayne says!"

"Oh. And what did you leave in exchange, dear?"

"Well," he said, "you know…"

"Right. Of course." Steris joined Wax behind the bar, slipping her hand around his waist. "What happened?"

"New ambassador," Wax said. "Doesn't much like us. Wants the Bands back. Made some vague threats."

"Delightful day for that," she said.

"You were right about the unification timetable," Wax said. "The ambassador will announce a new consortium of states under the Malwish banner."

"That won't help our work," Steris said. "The Elendel Senate will see today's bill as building a nation out of squabbling cities, a counterpoint to Malwish imperialism."

"Conquest by another name," Wax said, nursing his drink. He'd occasionaly disparaged Elendel whiskey … but the truth was, some of the stuff you could get here was fantastic. Strong flavored, smoky and complex. He'd come to like it better than Roughs varieties—and it was far, far better than whatever Jub Hending had made in his tub, which peeled off layers of skin as a punishment for drinking it. He did still miss good Roughs beers though.

“Well, I do have some potentially good news,” Steris said, slipping a letter out of her pocket—she refused to wear skirts without them, no matter how fashionable they were. “It came while you were away.”

He slipped the card out.

> *Meet us at the mansion at 3:00. Exciting news.*
>
> *—Marasi*

They shared a look.

“Do we bring Max or not?” Wax asked softly.

“How likely is it to involve explosions?” Steris asked.

“With us, you never can tell…”

“He stays here with Kath, then. His history tutor is coming anyway.”

Wax nodded. “I’m going to wash up, and then we can leave.”

# 10

Marasi felt about a thousand times better when she arrived at the Fourth Octant Constabulary headquarters, showered and cleaned up, wearing her preferred uniform of a vest and jacket over a calf-length skirt.

As a special detective, she technically wasn't required to be in uniform, but she usually wore one anyway. The uniform was a symbol. It meant she represented something bigger than herself: the people of the Basin and the good of all. The uniform comforted those who saw her—at least those who were happy to have a constable around. And if it gave warning to those who were up to something, then that was part of the reason for the law.

As she entered, younger constables in the main headquarters room lowered their reports and conversations hushed, all eyes turning to Marasi. Then came the applause.

Rusts, that always felt so weird. You weren't supposed to be *applauded* by your coworkers, were you? More than one new constable—most of them women—watched her with wide eyes as she passed. Marasi knew that she had specifically inspired both Wilhelmette and Gemdwyn to join up last year.

That left her conflicted. On one hand, she'd rather the broadsheets stop writing stories about her. On the other hand, if it was inspiring other women …

Either way, she was glad to stride into the back rooms, passing the offices of the higher-ranked constables. Even a few of these called out congratulations. She stopped and chatted with a few, asking after their own investigations. Though she just wanted to be on with her work, this was important too. You never knew when you'd need another constable's expertise.

Besides. It was *good* to have friends among her peers. Finally.

Eventually she neared Reddi's office. She passed Constable Gorglen on his way out—the tall man's head almost brushed the ceiling. He nodded to her and made way, and she found Reddi inside the large rear office, frowning at his desk. His drooping mustaches had greyed in recent years, and she knew the uniform of the constable-general weighed on him. He was more politician than officer these days, spending half his time in meetings with the city leaders.

"Constable Colms," he said, scratching his chin. "Can you make any sense of this?" He showed her the drawing, which proved to be a crude sketch of Constable Gorglen as a giraffe hiding in a constable's uniform. It said *Approved by Expert Types* at the bottom.

"I'll talk to Wayne," she promised.

Reddi sighed, then slipped the paper into a very large folder on the corner of his desk—the one where he kept complaints about Wayne. Reddi had evidently stopped returning it to the cabinet.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said.

"Sorry?" he asked. "Rusts, constable. *Sorry*? How many people did you two bring in today? At any rate, don't apologize for him—I've got a feeling if you weren't keeping Constable Wayne in check, this folder would be ten times as thick."

She smiled. "He does do best when channeled toward … productive activities."

Reddi grunted, picking up another folder. "Don't tell him this, but his imitation of me is amusing. Though you should know, those two men with the bowler hats were looking for him again."

"Any idea who they are?" she asked.

"Some accounting firm, probably their collections department," Reddi said. "It … seems Wayne owes money to some important people this time, Marasi. The kind of people that even I can't dissuade."

"I'll figure it out," she said with a sigh. Harmony's Bands … she hoped Wayne hadn't stolen something truly valuable.

"I'll leave that to you then." Reddi rapped the folder with his knuckles. "The governor has been breathing down my neck asking for evidence the

Outer Cities were siphoning off weapons, and you provided it. Thank you, Marasi. Really.”

“I hope to deliver even more, sir,” she said. “I have a notebook from their leader, and it has some interesting shipping manifest information.” She pulled the book out, then held it open to show him. “We’ll want to make copies, get it through research and code cracking in case I’ve missed something, but I’ve already read some curious things.”

She tapped a list near the front. “This,” she said, “is a series of tests the Cycle was overseeing to determine what can be shipped into Elendel without being stopped by customs or raising red flags with inspection agents.”

“Wait,” Reddi said. “*Into* Elendel?”

“Exactly,” Marasi said.

“It’s not illegal to ship things into Elendel,” he said. “This group was breaking the law by smuggling things *out.*”

“Which is why this is so intriguing,” she said. “The shipping list is all very mundane, too. Foodstuffs, lumber … but they’ve noted which ones were inspected, which package sizes were suspicious, all of that.”

“I find this … vaguely unnerving,” he said. “I don’t have any idea what it means, and that’s even worse.”

“I’m going to dig into it,” Marasi promised. “For now, I’ll get some of these other pages copied by the scribes. They’ll give you hard evidence that the explosives and weapons we found today were going to be smuggled to Bilming. That shipment *was* leaving the city, as have many others.” She hesitated. “I’ve had an idea.”

“Go on…”

“I’ll need authorization to work outside the city for a while … and if possible, we need to keep this news from the press for a few days. That means quieting the other constables. I know it will be hard, but it will help me chase down the people these men were going to supply.”

“What are you planning?”

“According to this book, someone in Bilming is expecting a shipment soon. Weapons, explosives, and … food.”

“That matches what we found in the cavern,” Reddi said, looking at the initial reports. “Lots of food.”

That was curious. Why would they be smuggling dried foods to the Outer Cities? Were these soldier or sailor rations?

“Regardless,” Marasi said, “the Set tends to run silent in times like this. I didn’t see any radio equipment down there—they were deep enough that a signal couldn’t get out anyway. So our enemies probably don’t know their team has fallen. Which means…”

“… *We* could send in the shipment,” Reddi said. “And perhaps capture the people who are behind all of this.”

“Or at least move one step farther up the chain.”

“They’d be expecting to meet with one of their own,” Reddi said, rubbing his chin. “We couldn’t maintain the subterfuge for long.”

“Well, sir,” Marasi said, “we *do* have the Cycle’s corpse.”

“There are a lot of people who don’t believe in this shadowy organization you’re chasing, Colms,” he said. “You know that, right?”

“What do you believe, sir?”

“All those people we interviewed six years ago were certainly up to something,” he said. “I’m still not a hundred percent sure it wasn’t merely an Outer Cities plot—and the idea of some kind of evil god doesn’t sit well with me. But honestly, I’ve learned not to bet against you.”

“You do have to admit,” Marasi said, “at the very least, that Waxillium’s uncle was involved in some kind of paramilitary group.”

“Yes,” Reddi said, “and *someone* assassinated him in prison—along with the others who followed him. If you say that was the Set, I believe you. But I need you to be aware—the governor and his people want our official focus to be on the Outer Cities and the threat they present to Elendel supremacy, not on some secret society that might be pulling their strings.”

“Understood, sir,” she said. “But I think this could accomplish both goals. Most of the people we caught were common street thugs—not actual Set members. I’ll bet the only one down there who had any real contact with the Set was the man who had this book. It mandates radio silence from inside the city, to not be overheard, in the days leading up to a drop-off—so no one in Bilming is expecting to hear from him. I believe we can surprise them. Particularly since we have that corpse.”

“Wait,” Reddi said, “how does a corpse help us?”

“I figured I’d ask Harmony to lend us a kandra to imitate the dead man for the operation. Wayne could be a generic lackey, speaking with a

Bilming accent, to help shore up the subterfuge.”

“Oh. Um. Right.” Reddi got uncomfortable when she implied she was close with Harmony—and doing so was a little cheeky on her part, since she’d never met him herself. She knew Death far better than she knew God.

Regardless, Reddi didn’t like being involved with the kandra—Faceless Immortals had made him uncomfortable ever since the business with Bleeder. He’d probably prefer she did her thing and didn’t mention how. But, well, she wanted everything to be on the up-and-up.

The department deserved to know how she got her results—she didn’t accomplish them without things like Malwish tech on loan from Allik, or access to Faceless Immortals. She’d originally hoped that by making all this clear, her reputation would drop to more reasonable levels. She’d been wrong. Still, that had its advantages.

“My reform suggestions?” Marasi asked. “About how we police slums, and the proper training of constables? How is that going?”

“The other constables-general have agreed to the articles,” he said. “All but Jamms, but I think after today he’ll listen. Just need to get the governor to sign off on the ideas.” He narrowed his eyes. “I like this shipment plan of yours. Get me a detailed proposal.”

“Will do, sir. We’ll need to move quickly.”

“You will have the full support of the department,” Reddi said. “The governor is going to be so pleased with today’s results that I can all but guarantee you extra funding if your operation requires it. I’ll wait for that proposal, but in the meantime I’ll have some people get to work on replacing the supplies that were destroyed today.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said, taking a deep, satisfied breath.

“Something wrong, constable?” he asked.

“No, sir,” she said. “Just … appreciating the path I’ve walked, and where it’s led me.”

“Appreciate it on your own time, constable!”

She eyed him, and he returned a rare grin.

“It’s the sort of thing I’m supposed to say,” he explained. “The governor likes it when I’m gruff. Fits his expectations better, I suppose. Oh, before I forget. Constable Matieu says you had something specific you wanted to show me? Something that’s not in the reports. Was that the book?”

“That and a little more, sir,” she said, taking the spikes from her shoulder bag. “I want you to turn these three in to the scientists at the university.” She held up the thinner fourth one. “I’m going to keep this one for a bit though.”

“Ruin…” Reddi whispered. “Is that … atium?”

“No, though it’s nearly as mythical. We think it’s trellium, a metal from offworld.”

He eyed her. Talk of other worlds didn’t sit right with him either, and she suspected he’d never fully accepted what she said about Trell.

“Isn’t that the stuff they used to blow up the prison?” Reddi asked.

“I don’t know if I believe that story,” Marasi said. “There’s no proof Wax’s uncle had any of this on him.”

“Still,” Reddi said, “be careful with that. If it’s half as bad as ettmetal…”

“I’ll be careful,” she said. “I plan to deliver it to Lord Ladrian for study.”

Reddi grunted. “I thought he was retired.”

“Depends,” Marasi said, tucking the trellium spike back into her shoulder bag. “For this, you should consider him on the case.”

“Well, I never revoked his constable privileges.” Reddi wiped his brow with his handkerchief. “Just try to keep him from … causing any incidents. When he’s involved, things tend to get … unsettling.”

“I’ll do what I can, sir.”

“He doesn’t have any other hidden apocalyptic family members or half-sane wives with mystical powers, does he?”

“If any show up, I’ll have him file a report. And maybe move confrontations with them to next quarter, for budgetary reasons.”

Reddi smiled. “I’m glad you’re out there, Colms. Not just for my career. I’m glad there’s someone rational around, to … you know, balance the insanity. Go. Chase your mysteries, and let me know what you need.”

She nodded, feeling a deep satisfaction as she left his office and walked back down the hallway. She had achieved so much—both in life and in this case. She had done it; she’d *arrived.*

*And is this all?* She tucked that annoying thought away and hurried to the commissary, where she grabbed a sandwich and began stuffing it down.

She didn’t have long until her meeting with Wax. Still, Marasi was only halfway done when the cleaning lady came to take her tray.

“Actually, I still have half,” Marasi said, holding up the rest of her sandwich.

“Thanks,” the lady said, taking the sandwich from Marasi’s hand and taking a bite. “I was hungry.”

“Wayne,” Marasi said with a sigh, looking closer at his face. “What are you doing?”

“Hidin’ from those bean counters.”

“The two men with the suits and bowlers?” Marasi said. “They bothered Captain Reddi about you again, Wayne. Who do you owe money to this time?”

“None of your business,” he said around another bite of her sandwich. One might have thought he’d look silly in a serving woman’s apron and cap, but—with the fake breasts—he wore it well. Wayne could never be accused of poor fashion sense. Just poor taste.

“I think it *is* my business,” Marasi said.

“No, it *ain’t*,” Wayne said. “I’ll make sure they don’t bother old Reddi no more. You contacted Wax?”

“I sent him a note. Meeting at three o’clock.”

“Then why are we wasting time playin’ dress-up?” Wayne said. “We got work to do!”

# 11

Wax landed at the front doors to Ladrian Mansion, his ancestral home. Steris let go of his waist—as always, she'd clung to him with a death grip while flying, but had worn a gleeful grin the entire time.

They walked up the steps, and Wax undid the locks with a few Steelpushes in a specific sequence, causing the door to swing open before them. Others could use a set of keys, but few occupied the place any longer. The staff had moved to the tower along with Wax and Steris. These days the place had a single tenant, who stayed there off and on.

Wax called out, "It's just us, Allik!"

Aside from giving the Malwish man a place to stay, the mansion had—over the years—undergone a small transformation. Space in the Ahlstrom Tower penthouse was tight, so Wax and Steris kept their projects and hobbies here.

Upstairs, Steris had *three* rooms for her ledgers, notebooks, and catalogues—which she liked to look through in her spare time. The things she thought they'd need—delivered these days via mail order—might have overwhelmed a lesser household. However, having repeatedly benefited from her preparations, Wax didn't feel he had reason to object.

Steris went to the washroom to fix her hair after the flight, but Wax paused next to the door, where a pair of long Roughs dusters hung on the wall. One was white, and the other—his old one—was sliced into two layers of thick ribbons. A mistcoat. Each coat had a Roughs hat on a peg above it. It wasn't quite a shrine. Because one of the people it represented wasn't dead; he'd just moved on to a different kind of adventure. Still, Wax paused, kissed his fingertips, then pressed them to the wood beneath Lessie’s hat. Again, it wasn’t quite a ritual. It was merely something he did.

A moment later, a masked head popped out above the banister on the second level. “Oh, hi!” Allik said. His current mask was bright red, with flakes of yellow paint radiating from the center. It always made him look eager, like his face was sweating sunlight. Then he raised it, and his toothy grin beamed even more brightly.

For all his short, spindly figure and somewhat embarrassing beard, Allik was a force to be reckoned with. At least when it came to his pastries.

“A new batch is almost done!” he called to Wax. “O Hungry One!”

“Don’t start that again, Allik,” Wax snapped. “And I didn’t come here because I’m hungry.”

“But you’ll still eat, yah?”

“Yah,” Wax admitted.

“Great!” He slammed his mask back down and disappeared into his room on the second floor, where he kept the fireplace running overtime. He’d had an oven installed as well, because the Malwish could never have too much heat. He was technically a “junior goodwill ambassador” to the Basin, a title he’d earned two years ago by being willing to take up semipermanent residence in Elendel. Wax had been glad to see it. Allik had been fooling no one with his constant “coincidental” trips up here to see Marasi.

Besides. His pastries were … well, they were *really* good.

Marasi and Wayne were apparently running late, so Wax went to brew some tea while Steris fetched “a few” of her ledgers from upstairs. She came wobbling back balancing some two dozen of them, then plopped down on a couch in the sitting room. Wax gave her a cup of tea, then—frowning—went looking for the source of an odd smell.

He’d just found half an old meat bun in the pocket of his mistcoat when a dog came trotting in through the front door. A large grey- and-white short-haired animal that almost reached Wax’s waist.

“Hey,” it said with a feminine voice. “Did you bring Max?”

“No,” Wax said. “I wanted to run some experiments, and you know how those get.”

“Explody?” the dog—MeLaan—asked. “Well, damn. I kept this body on for no good reason.”

“Do you actually *like* playing fetch?” Wax asked, disposing of the moldy meat bun. “From what I can gather, most of you hate nonhuman bodies.”

“Yeah, they’re demeaning,” MeLaan said, settling down on her haunches. “Except a body … influences you. It’s hard to explain to mortals. Think of it like an outfit. If you’re dressed up all fancy in a glittering gown, you want to dance and twirl. If you’re wearing trousers with an axe over your shoulder, well, you’re going to want to smash something. I only put bodies like this on when a mission requires it. But once I’ve got it on…” She shrugged, a gesture that looked distinctly odd in the dog’s body. “But no fetch for me today. I’ll go change.”

She wandered off toward the room where Wax let her store her other bodies: bones, hair, nails. Most of the bones weren’t real, fortunately. She much preferred what the kandra called True Bodies, made of stone, crystal, or metal.

He had joined Steris in the sitting room and was halfway through the latest broadsheet—a boy delivered some each day for Allik—when he heard Marasi and Wayne tromp into the foyer. Loud as a freight train, those two could be. He shook his head, sipping his tea.

“In here!” Steris called, and Wayne burst in a moment later. “Wayne. Could you *sometime* remember to brush your feet off before you track mud in? This isn’t the Roughs.”

“Be glad it’s just mud,” he said. “We been through the bowels of the earth today, Steris, and it was full o’ stuff what’s normally in bowels.”

“A perfectly awful description,” she said.

“Oh, stop complainin’ at me,” he said, hopping from one foot to the other. “We got news. We got news!”

Marasi strode up and pulled something long and thin from her pouch. A single delicate spike, like a long nail with a needle point. The otherwise silvery metal had reddish patches to it, especially visible when it caught the light.

Wax breathed in sharply. “You got one. How?”

“Remember that lead in the sewers I told you about?” Marasi said. “Found a member of the Set there, augmented with Hemalurgy, heading up a gang of ruffians.”

“Fortunately,” Wayne said, “he didn’t have any use for the spike once Marasi was finished with him.”

“Technically, he *did* still have a use for it,” she said. “Which is why I had to remove it. Wax, he had four spikes. Isn’t that supposed to give Harmony control over a person?”

“Supposedly,” he said. That had been the whole issue with Lessie. Though the numbers varied by species, the principle was the same: spike yourself too many times, and Harmony could control you. It was an exploit to Hemalurgy that went back to the ancient days, when Ruin had directly controlled the Inquisitors, like Death himself.

But lately, Marasi had begun to encounter members of the Set with too many powers. Wax hadn’t believed at first, but if she’d confirmed it …

“The limitation has been circumvented somehow,” Wax said, inspecting the trellium spike. “Perhaps it has to do with the placement of this spike, as a linchpin?”

“Wax,” Marasi said, “this group was packing supplies for Bilming. Weapons and field rations.”

He shared a look with Steris. Rusts … the Outer Cities apparently thought war was inevitable. And with the vote today, it very well might be.

Still, to have another trellium spike after all these years … It reminded him of what had happened to Lessie, but he forced himself to hold it anyway. This wasn’t from her body. They didn’t know if her strange trellium spikes had influenced her madness. The kandra all said the spikes hadn’t been to blame, but something had turned her against Harmony, sent her down a paranoid path. Something had taken the woman he loved and turned her into Bleeder. He refused to accept that she’d been fully in control of herself.

Those old pains were dead and buried these days, so he was able to pick up the spike and inspect it. This metal was a manifestation—presumably—of the body of a god. Much like harmonium, also called ettmetal. What could he learn from this new sample?

The door swung open, revealing MeLaan wearing stylish blue trousers and a buttoned shirt. She’d been going for an androgynous look these days, with very short blonde hair and almost no hint of breasts. For her friends, she often maintained relatively similar features. This face, for example, looked like her—just thinner, less overtly feminine.

As usual she had picked a tall, limber body—this one was at least six foot four. She was toweling off her hair—she liked to wash it after putting on a new body, to better style it and make sure she'd got the grain right.

"Hey!" she said, seeing the spike in Wax's fingers. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Yup," Wayne said. "Marasi turned some bloke into hamburger to get it."

"Nice!" MeLaan said.

"I did *not* turn anyone into hamburger," Marasi said.

"She's more a fan of liver," Wayne said, and earned a glare.

"Speaking of meat," Wax said, "did you leave a meat bun in the pocket of my *mistcoat*?"

"Uh…" Wayne said. "It was … um…"

"You realize I'll have to get that thing laundered," Wax said. "And you're going to pay."

"Hey," Wayne said. "You don't got no proof I did that."

Wax gave him a flat stare.

"You can't convict me on a hunch," Wayne said, folding his arms. "I know my rights. Marasi's always quoting them to people once we finish beating them up. I get a trial by my peers, I do."

"Yes," Steris said, "but where would we find so many slugs on short notice?"

Wayne spun toward her, then—after just a brief pause—grinned widely. Those two were getting along better these days, which Wax enjoyed seeing. For now, he kept inspecting the spike. What were its properties? Could it be melted? Could it …

He paused, then reached to his back pocket. There, nearly forgotten, was the envelope he'd found on his desk earlier. He opened it again and slid out the iron earring, a traditional accoutrement of the Pathian religion—and a means of communing with Harmony. Piercing your body with metal was a way to connect to God and give him some measure of influence over you.

He read the note again: *You'll need to make a second, once the proper metal arrives.*

Rusts. Why would Harmony tell him to make a second earring, presumably out of *Trell*'s metal?

There was no explanation in the envelope, of course. Harmony knew Wax far too well. A mystery was a better way to get his attention than an explanation.

Damn him.

He tucked that envelope away again. “Nice work,” he said to Marasi. “*Very* nice work.”

“Thank you,” she said. “We should have a chance at some more members of the Set soon. I’m planning a sting.”

She turned toward MeLaan, who was leaning against the wall, arms folded. For someone who spent her life in subterfuge—imitating others and doing missions for God himself—she certainly did like to stand out. Today she had left her cheeks faintly transparent to allow the emerald of her skeleton to show through.

“I could use your help, MeLaan,” Marasi said. “I have a corpse that needs to get up and walk around—just long enough to trick the Set.”

MeLaan grimaced. “I would love to, but … I’ve got a *thing*…”

“We could work around your schedule,” Marasi said.

“That might be hard,” MeLaan said. “Since it’s kind of on another planet…”

“Another *planet*?” Marasi said.

“Well, maybe between planets?” MeLaan said. “I’m not entirely sure. Harmony wants some of us to strike out, begin exploring, learning about the cosmere. It’s become evident that the cosmere knows about *us*.” She nodded toward the spike pinched between Wax’s fingers.

“What’s it like?” Marasi asked MeLaan, with a certain … hunger in her eyes. “Traveling out there. How … do you even do it?”

“It’s difficult,” she said. “Both to get to the other side—which is an inversion of the real world—and to travel while there. I’ll be leaving soon, I’m afraid, but finding out what’s happening with the Set is a priority for Harmony. I’ll ask him to get you one of us to help on your mission, Marasi.”

Wax glanced at Wayne. MeLaan was leaving. Soon? He’d have to corner his friend and ask how he felt about that.

At that moment however, Allik burst through the door bearing a tray full of steaming pastries. “Aha!” he said, mask up to show off his grin. “A full room. Who wants cinnamon puffs with hot chocolate for dipping! You are obviously planning to save the world again, with those concerned faces. This is an action that requires much choc, yah?”

Wax smiled, enjoying Allik’s enthusiasm. He’d bounced back from the tragedy of losing so many friends to the Set years ago—tortured for information about airships. *People are elastic,* Wax thought. *We can keep reshaping ourselves. And if we’re not quite the same as before, well, that’s good. It means we can grow.*

Allik handed Marasi a mug of hot chocolate—almost comically large—with a wink. She took his hand and smiled, squeezing it. Four years of flirting and two years of formal dating, and those two still acted like schoolkids sometimes. Wax knew more about it than he really cared to, because Steris tended to take notes, then ask if she should be acting in equally ridiculous ways.

“There’s one other thing, Wax,” Marasi said. “I took a notebook from the Cycle I killed today. What do you make of this page?”

She handed it over and Wax settled back in his seat, Steris peeking over his shoulder as he read through dated entries in the notebook. “Looks like…” he said. “Annotated shipping records, into Elendel? ‘Box one yard square, stamped with foodstuff labels, inspected four out of six times. Larger crate with warning labels, inspected and quarantined. Crate, two yards across, detained every time…’”

Steris frowned. “It looks like they’re recording what gets inspected when shipped *into* the city.”

“Which is odd, right?” Marasi said. “It’s not hard to get shipments into Elendel. Only outgoing shipments are taxed for using our railway stations. That’s the entire problem; the Outer Cities are tired of paying us to ship their goods to one another.”

“Right,” Wax said. “Why is the Set so interested in what they can get into the city?”

“Maybe they’re planning to supply a rebel force inside it?” Steris said.

“But the whole point of their smuggling operation,” Marasi said, “is to get weapons *out* of Elendel. They don’t have *any* trouble giving weapons to the people inside Elendel.”

They sat in silence, considering. Wax glanced at Steris, who shook her head. No thoughts at the moment. Finally, he returned the book to Marasi. As Allik continued distributing pastries, Wax went over to Wayne, who had uncharacteristically passed up a mug of chocolate. Allik handed it to Wax instead.

"Hey," Wax said to Wayne. "How much health do you have stored up? I might need your help with some experiments today."

"Sorry, mate," he said. "I gots an *appointment.*"

"You're not going to get into trouble, are you?"

"The reverse," Wayne proclaimed, then checked his pocket watch. Which was one of Wax's. "Actually, I gotta get moving. I don't wanna get shot for arriving late."

"A moment, Wayne?" MeLaan said.

"I really—" he began.

"It's important. Very important."

Wayne wilted, then nodded, his eyes sorrowful. Wax gripped his shoulder, as if to impart some strength. This had been coming. MeLaan was a wanderer.

Wayne and MeLaan left, and Wax tried to focus on the wonderful gift Marasi had brought him. A whole trellium spike.

"I," he said, "am going to need my *goggles.*"

# 12

Wayne sometimes pretended he was a hero. Some rusting old figure from the stories, off on some nonsense quest about slaying a monster or traveling to Death’s domain.

Lately it was hard to wear that hat. Especially when the truth stared him in the face every time he looked in a mirror. He’d made a whole career out of pretending. People just thought it was a talent. They never asked what he was hiding from.

Today, he’d have given almost anything to be someone else. MeLaan, wearing that fetching body—they were all fetching, honestly—led him through the entry hall to a small private sitting room on the other side. He made a swipe for his lucky hat, hanging on the wall outside the room, as they passed. But he missed it.

Inside, she sat him down in an overstuffed chair that made him feel like a child. Didn’t help that she was as tall as Wax was, in that body. Then she took his hand and crouched down, meeting his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Wayne,” she said softly. “I need to leave you. Today. It’s over. I tried to prepare you for this … but it was probably more painful to string it out, wasn’t it?”

“Dunno,” he said. “Never had my heart broke before. So I ain’t got no experience.”

She winced. “Wayne…”

“Sorry,” he said. “You gotta do your thing. I know that. A fellow doesn’t date an immortal agent of God himself without suspectin’ that one day he’ll take second place to the fellow what glows.” Wayne frowned. “Does he glow?”

"I thought," she said, squeezing his hand, "that there would be fewer attachments with you."

"Where'd you get that idea?" he asked. "I get so attached, I wind up with all sorts of things what don't belong to me."

She grimaced.

"Was it … nothing to you, then?" he asked. "Six years?"

"It wasn't nothing," she said. "Just … not what it was to you. I know I should have expected that. TenSoon warned me, Ulaam warned me. Mortals see time differently. They *told* me. I'm sorry, Wayne."

"You ain't gotta apologize for somethin' you *don't* feel, MeLaan," Wayne said. "It ain't your fault."

*It's mine.*

"I … *asked* for this mission," she admitted. "Because I realized I was leading you on, and I knew the longer it went, the more painful it would be to break off. That's why I can't stay and help. I've got to go now. Before I lose my nerve."

"Would that … be so bad?"

"Yes," she said. "Because it's a lie, Wayne. I'd be staying because I didn't want to hurt you. Not because I actually wanted to stay."

He shouldn't want her to stay in those circumstances. But he did. Damn him, he did.

Still, he held his tongue. Sometimes you just had to stand there and get shot.

"It *is* an exciting mission," she said. "I get to cross the misted unknown, the dark vastness that Harmony calls 'Shadesmar.' I'll be the first kandra to go out there long-term, with an official mission.

"I get to explore the cosmere, Wayne. I get to go and see everything there is—worlds we can only *imagine*. I get to help those who need it—not one or two people, but entire *peoples*."

He nodded dully.

She stood, then leaned in to kiss him. He wanted to pull away, but … well, he would have regretted that. One long, last kiss, as could be delivered only by someone with a tongue that didn't confine itself to normal bounds of physiology.

"I did want to tell you something important," she whispered as she pulled away. "Something meaningful."

“Yeah?”

“You,” she said, squeezing his hand one last time, “were a *really* good lay, Wayne.”

“Really?”

“Really. To be honest, you were the best I’ve known.”

“You’re seven hundred years old,” he said. “And *I* was the best?”

She nodded.

Well now, that was something. Something indeed.

“Thanks,” he said. “That was sweet of you to tell me. It … helps.”

“I thought it might,” she said. “Goodbye, Wayne.”

She let go of his hand and walked out. Knowing her, she’d send someone to box up the rest of her bodies. She’d picked the emerald today because it was one of her favorites—she’d probably take it and the aluminum one on her mission and leave the rest.

He sat staring at the door for a long time. He wasn’t wearing a hat, which meant he had to just be himself. The true him, the one that knew this pain. They’d ridden together on many a dusty path. This pain had been his invisible friend since childhood.

The pain of knowing what he really was.

The pain of being worthless.

# 13

Wax led the way down to the basement, feet thumping on steps behind him as he was followed by Steris and Marasi. While the upper floors of the mansion were dedicated to Steris's hobbies and the various needs of his friends, the basement belonged to Wax. And he'd made some modifications.

He'd begun pursuing metallurgy in the Roughs, where the mining towns often had equipment to test metal purities and the like. He'd been surprised at how useful the hobby had turned out to be. For example, few criminals realized you could track their suppliers by testing bullet casings.

In Elendel, he'd expanded his curiosity tenfold. A basement full of metal samples, acids and solvents, burners, microscopes, and even a room with a forge and an anvil. It all reminded him of the Roughs in a good way. Of Lessie laughing when he made a breakthrough. Of evenings spent folding metal like he was some ancient warrior making a knife meant to kill a god—rather than a novice trying to make a dining implement.

Lately, he'd found electrolysis and plating *fascinating*, and his new electricity-powered spectrometer was absolutely brilliant. Together with the graphs representing the spectroscopic colors of various elements, it let him identify practically anything. How would trellium react to that? Or to his acids, or to the magnets?

The questions energized him. It was a kind of excitement he'd lost during his middle years. It was too pure. He hadn't been able to feel excitement about something so simple and enriching at a time when his life had been falling apart.

He strapped on his goggles. Steris followed, putting on her own, then got out her clipboard. She handed him an apron, and he relented—he was wearing one of his nicer vests, though he'd tossed the cravat aside somewhere. Her own apron was more enveloping and thick, almost a flak jacket. He'd only recently persuaded her that maybe she didn't need two pairs of goggles at once; she could just order an extra-thick pair.

They set up at one of the tables, where Wax inserted the spike into a clamp to hold it steady.

Marasi stopped in the doorway, then grinned. "You two," she said, "are *adorable*."

Wax shared a look with Steris. "I don't believe I've been called adorable since I was Max's age."

"She should get her eyesight checked," Steris said. "Marasi, dear? I have goggles with corrective lenses, arranged in the drawers to your right."

"I'm fine," Marasi said, stepping in.

Steris clicked her tongue and pointed at the sign just above the doorway. GOGGLES REQUIRED. It had an asterisk and a scrawled handwritten note below—in crayon—that said, "'Cept Wayne."

"It's a good rule," Wax said. "You know how things happen around us."

"Things?" Marasi said, selecting a pair of goggles. "You mean explosions?"

"Not just explosions," Steris said. "Acid spills. Fires. Accidental weapon discharges. Though I suppose that one is technically a subset of explosion. How's the hardness?"

"Hard," Wax said as he tested the spike with various substances. "Scratched by diamond, but barely marks corundum. Just above a nine."

"Noted," she said.

"It's brittle too," Wax said, carefully chiseling. "Not like harmonium at all, which is nearly as pliable as gold. Would you get one of the burners going?"

Steris lit a gas nozzle. Wax got a chip of trellium off and brought it over in a tungsten alloy bowl, then set it under the flame and watched carefully. The chip soon heated to white-hot, but did not liquefy.

"Melting point is extremely high," he said. "Over twenty-five hundred degrees."

"Similar to harmonium," Steris said. "Try the electric melter?"

He nodded. The melter ran a powerful electric current through the metal in order to heat it beyond what the burner could manage. He'd had some luck with harmonium using this process. Unfortunately, although the little bit of trellium again turned white-hot, it wouldn't even bend or stretch.

"Rusts," Wax said softly, using tinted goggles to stare at the glowing bit of metal. "This stuff is *hard*." How was he going to make an earring out of it?

Was he actually considering that? At the thought, he realized he didn't know the envelope was from Him. Anyone could drop off something like that. He should talk to Harmony before doing anything foolish.

"TenSoon says that the metals are the bodies of divinities," Steris said. "So-called God Metals were the source of the mists back in antever- dant days."

"So why weren't everyone's lungs burned?" Wax said. "If I can heat this to over three thousand degrees without it liquefying, then it must be *extremely* hot when vaporized."

"Perhaps," Steris said, "these metals—unlike common ones—don't change states based on temperature, but on other factors."

Wax nodded in thought. Marasi leaned down beside the table, looking at the spike. "It's full of power," she said. "It's a Hemalurgic spike, so it's…"

"'Invested' is the term the kandra use," Wax said. "It has taken a part of a person's soul, through Hemalurgy, and stored it. Like a kind of … battery for life energy."

Marasi shivered visibly. "It's kind of like a corpse, then?"

"A murder weapon, at least," Steris agreed, turning off the burner.

"Wax," Marasi said, sounding reluctant, "when I was pulling this out of the Cycle, he started ranting. The way Miles did when he died."

Wax looked up from his experiment. "What did he say?"

"He talked about men of gold and red," Marasi said. "Like Miles. And then … he talked about starting the ashfalls again, as in the Catacendre. Restoring the days of darkness and ash."

"Impossible," Wax said. "The land just isn't set up that way anymore. The Ashmounts are either nonexistent or stilled. There isn't the tectonic activity to cause another ashfall."

"Are you sure?" Marasi asked.

He hesitated, then shook his head. “When Harmony showed me Trell’s influence enveloping our planet, even he seemed baffled. Our world, and our god, are basically three and a half centuries old. There are things out there that are far, *far* more ancient. Far, *far* more crafty.”

The lab fell silent, save for the *hum* of the electric current machine, which Wax flipped off.

“So we catch up,” Steris said, rapping her pencil against the clipboard. “What’s next?” Admittedly, *she* did look adorable in her oversized goggles and military-caliber vest over her tea gown. He also noticed his cravat sticking out of the pocket of her dress.

“Spectroscopy,” Wax said in response to her question. “Let’s burn some flakes.”

“Wait,” Marasi said. “You couldn’t get it to melt—how are you going to *burn* it?”

He took a file to the clamped spike, catching the shavings on a piece of thick cardstock. “Most metals will burn, Marasi, if you can get the pieces small enough and can apply enough oxygen. We’ve managed it with harmonium, even though we couldn’t melt it fully.”

“That’s … strange, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Indeed,” Wax said. “But we are, as has been noted, talking about the bodies of gods.”

He set up the spectroscope and managed to burn some flakes, using the oxygen line, to take some readings. Then he heated a piece again to get it to emit light waves and took readings on that. The machine made a pen move on a piece of paper, like a seismograph—only here, the highs and lows represented frequencies of light. Those patterns of light corresponded to different elements.

In this case, strangely, he got a straight-across line—a full spectrum. Though at the end of the spectrum, in the red, the machine tried to send the line higher than the maximum. Which shouldn’t have been possible, for all that he’d seen it once before.

He unscrewed the pin holding the arm in place on the paper and reran the machine. Again a full spectrum at maximum—into the red, where the pin on the arm swung out and off the paper with a jerk.

Wax breathed out. “Seems proof it’s a God Metal.”

“Indeed,” Steris said, scribbling notes in the darkness.

“Someone tell the dumb conner what’s happening,” Marasi said. “How is this proof of anything?”

“It’s complicated,” Wax said. “Each element has a kind of signature, represented by the wavelengths it releases when heated. It’s basically a way to identify elements and compounds. Like using fingerprints to identify a person.”

“And this metal,” Steris said, “somehow projects a *full spectrum,* as if it were made of pure white light. But it also has something strange happening in the red, as if it has a light beyond what the machine can calculate or read.”

“I’ve only seen something like this once before,” Wax said.

“From harmonium?” Marasi guessed.

“Yes.” He tapped the table, then shook his head. “In dealing with these metals, so many things seem to break the laws of physics. I feel like I’m experimenting with something dangerously beyond our understanding.”

“Should we move to the safe box?” Steris asked.

“Probably wise,” Wax said. “Particularly since the next step is to put some of these shavings into acids.”

The “safe box” was Steris’s name for the small reinforced box they’d built into the back wall. Three feet square and three feet deep, it was made out of aluminum and steel, with a large safe-like door on the front. That door had a small plate of very thick glass at the top, so you could look in. This contraption could take a grenade without trouble, and had handled an ettmetal-water explosion before.

Harmonium—ettmetal—was highly unstable. You needed to keep it in oil, as it tended to react even to the *air.* Since they couldn’t know how trellium would respond to his acids, Wax set everything up inside the box, then latched it closed. From there, he could use some thin arms on gears inside to tip a little bit of trellium into each of the ten flasks of acid—and two flasks of a base.

Harmonium wasn’t affected by acids, but maybe this metal would be. Anything to give him more of a foothold, help him understand. As he worked, Marasi walked over to the wall where Steris and he had pinned ideas, experiments, and thoughts regarding harmonium. Rusts … the oldest of those were over five years old now. Wax found it depressing to realize how little progress they’d made.

“All of this,” Marasi said, reading the notes. “I don’t think I’ve looked at it closely before … You’re trying to split it.” She spun toward him. “You’ve been trying to *divide* harmonium into its base metals? You’re trying to create atium!”

He looked back into his viewer, continuing to dump flakes into the acid.

“Not just atium…” Marasi said. “Lerasium too? That’s the metal that … It *created* Mistborn! It’s explained in the records left by Harmony. Allomancy entered the world because the Lord Ruler gave lerasium to some of his followers, who burned it and were changed. Those first mythical Mistborn—they held incredible power. You’re trying to replicate that.”

“No,” Wax said. “I’m trying to see if it *can be* replicated.”

“All these years,” Marasi said, “and you never told me why you kept needing ettmetal? I thought you were trying to figure out how to make airships, like everyone else!”

“We’ve barely made any progress,” Wax said, finishing with the acids and turning away from the safe box. “But Marasi, don’t you see? The Set is devoted to restoring the ancient powers to people—they’ll use eugenics, Hemalurgy, *anything.* So if it’s possible to make lerasium again, *we* need to know about it.”

“You still could have told me,” she said.

“I wanted to have something useful to show first,” Wax said. He walked over to join her, passing Steris, who was fiddling with the trellium spike. Beside Marasi, he looked up at the wall of pinned ideas again. Remembered how thrilling it had been when first working on harmonium.

Getting some trellium to play with had awakened that again. But now, staring at this board, he remembered the rest of the experience. The slow, steady realization that he wasn’t going to crack this particular puzzle. He’d worked on enough hopeless cases to realize when one was growing cold.

He was a hobbyist, not an expert. He’d shared his notes with the people at the university, and they’d thanked him—but had plainly already made the same observations. If a breakthrough with ettmetal was going to happen, it would come from those dedicated scientists working to build Elendel its own airships, Allomantic grenades, and Feruchemical medallions.

He would probably have to turn the trellium spike over to them. He’d have his fun for a few days, but this was too important to keep from the real experts.

“Waxillium?” Steris said from behind. “You should come look at this.”

“What?” he asked, turning.

“The trellium spike,” she said, “is *reacting* to the harmonium.”

# 14

Wayne ducked into the alley just in time. Those two fellows with the bowler hats passed by on the sidewalk a moment later. Wayne crouched there, heart pounding, and counted to a hundred before letting himself relax. Close call.

He'd mostly recovered from the meeting with MeLaan. In fact, he figured he'd handled it quite well. No*thing* was broken, no*body* was broken but him, and he'd only needed three shots of whiskey to get moving after. Plus, he'd realized what his day was going to be.

It was a rusting funeral.

You could take quests and flush them away. He was having a funeral today, and that was that. He had worn his nice jacket and a matching hat, all fancy and proper. He even had a flower in the lapel, which he'd *paid* for. With actual money. Fancy is as fancy does.

He rejoined the procession on the street outside. Yes, they all seemed to know it was a funeral day, they did. So many heads down rather than looking up at the sun. So many dull faces, like they were the dead, still up and moving because … well, in the city, there were jobs to do.

Did dead people think funerals were celebrations? Initiation parties? Reverse birthdays?

He kept his head down, acting like a member of the masses on the sidewalk. This city, it just had so many people. Floods of them on the streets in this part of the octant, the financial district, all in their funeral finest. It should have been easy for anyone to fit in since there was basically every sort of person you might want to meet. But somehow the financial district mashed people up into a similar ball of cravats and heels. You could almost not notice that some were Terris and others were koloss-blooded.

Hard to miss that rusting airship dominating the sky, but keeping your head down helped. Maybe today's funeral was for the city itself. Or at least its naiveté.

The Drunken Spur was on Feder Way, right on the corner of Seventy-Third. You couldn't miss it, what with the swinging wooden sign outside and the mannequins in Roughs gear in the window. Not a lot of upscale cafés used mannequins, but this place was special. Kind of like how a kid who ate mud was special. But Jaxy liked it, so one made accommodations. Wayne was an accommodating kind of person, he was.

He stepped inside and tried not to cringe *too* hard at what the serving staff was wearing. Roughs hats. Bright red shirts. Chaps? Oh, Ruin. He was going to gag. At least the greeter at the host's stand was in a proper suit.

"Your hat, sir?" the man said, and Wayne handed it over, then swiped the bell off the stand.

"Um, sir?" the greeter asked, looking at the bell.

"You'll get it back when you return my hat," Wayne said. "A man gots to have insurance."

"Uh…"

"Where's my table? It's got two pretty women at it, and one of them's nice, but the other probably threatened to shoot you when she was bein' seated."

The host pointed. Ah, there they were. Wayne nodded and stalked that direction. Rusting terrible attire for them to all wear on a day like this. You didn't go to a funeral in chaps unless you rode there on a horse. Or unless you were old Three-Tooth Dag, who liked that sort of thing.

Ranette was Ranette: curvaceous—though he wasn't supposed to talk about it—and wearing slacks. Jaxy was in a fine white dress, with short white-blonde hair in very tight curls, accented by diamond barrettes. She liked sparkles. He didn't blame her. Far too few sparkles in life. Adults was supposed to be able to wear what they wanted, so why did so few choose sparkles?

He sat down with Ranette and Jaxy, then thumped his forehead down on the table, making the silverware rattle.

"Oh, delightful," Ranette said in a dry voice. "Drama."

"Wayne?" Jaxy asked. "You all right?"

"Mumble mumble," he said into the tablecloth. "Mumble."

“Don’t humor him,” Ranette said.

“Yes, humor him,” Wayne grumbled. “He needs it right now.”

“What happened?” Jaxy asked.

“I am officially dumped,” he said. “And my whiskey is wearing off. Stupid body. Metabolizing and neutralizing poisons as if I didn’t dump ’em in there on purpose.” He looked up. “You think I could cut out my liver and stay drunk forever?”

“I’ll humor him on *that* one,” Ranette said.

“I’m sorry, Wayne,” Jaxy said, patting him on the hand.

“’S all right,” he said. “At least you dressed up fer the funeral.”

“The…?” Jaxy asked.

“Ignore him,” Ranette said. But then she softened her voice. “Hey. You’ll live, Wayne. I’ve seen you get through worse.”

“When?”

“That one time you *literally* got a cannonball through the stomach.”

He looked up. “Oh yeah. That was something else.”

Jaxy had gone pale. “Did it hurt?”

“Not as much as you’d think,” he said. “Like, yeah, I got torn in half. But I think my body was just kinda confused, you know? Not every day you’re in two pieces.”

“Fortunately,” Ranette said, “his metalminds were on the piece with his head. Otherwise…”

He forced himself to sit up, then sighed and put the bell on the table, then rang it. Then rang it again. Seriously, what was the point of these things if people didn’t pay attention? The third ring finally got a server to step over.

“Vodka,” Wayne said to her. “Worst you got. Closer to piss it tastes, the better.”

“Wayne,” Ranette said, “this is an upscale restaurant.”

“Right,” he said. “Putta olive in it or somethin’.”

“Was that even our server?” Jaxy asked as the woman moved off.

“I try not to look too closely,” Ranette said. “Given the awful outfits.”

“I hear you,” Wayne said. “Who thought a Roughs-themed restaurant was a good idea? Like, to be authentic you’d have to have only stew on the menu. Then when people ordered it, you’d be out of stew and just give them beans.”

“I like it,” Jaxy said. “It’s amusing.”

“It’s insulting,” Ranette said.

“Can we talk more about me?” Wayne said. “Because I’m still over here feeling like what’s left of the grapes after the wine’s been made.”

“Poor dear,” Jaxy said.

“You’re too good to him, Jax,” Ranette said.

“He’s one of your oldest friends.”

“Only because he can’t die.”

“Ranette…” Jaxy said.

“Fine,” Ranette said, then put her hand on Wayne’s shoulder. “You’re strong, Wayne. You can get through this.” She took the glass from the tray when the server came back, and handed it to him. “Look, here’s your alcohol.”

“Thanks, Ranette,” he said, accepting it. “You really know how to make a fellow feel better.”

“To be honest,” she said, “I’m proud of you, Wayne. How you’re handling this. It’s relatively mature.”

“This is mature?” he asked, then downed the vodka.

“*Relatively.*”

“Suppose you gotta be an adult to get booze,” Wayne admitted. “But … it’s just…” He sighed and sat back. “I didn’t think I’d ever meet someone who understood what it was like to have to be another person most of the time. And she did. She *did*, Ranette.”

“You’ll … uh, find someone else?” Ranette said. “Someone better? That’s what I’m supposed to say, right? Even if it’s probably not true, since I doubt there are many people who are better than a Faceless Immortal. And—”

“Oh, Ranette,” Jaxy said, shaking her head.

“What?” she said. “I don’t *do* comforting, all right?”

“Wayne,” Jaxy said, “it will hurt. That’s okay. Pain is just your body and your mind acknowledging that this is awful.”

“Thanks,” he mumbled. “You’re a good friend, Jaxy. Even if you have terrible taste in women.”

“Hey!” Ranette said. “*You* chased me for the better part of fifteen years.”

“Yeah? And how’s my taste, on average?”

"I…" Ranette said. "Damn. Stop aiming for the vital bits, Wayne. This is supposed to be a friendly meal."

"Sorry," he said, then put his elbows on the table, holding his head in his hands. They still hadn't seen their actual server, which made sense. This was a seriously fancy place; you could tell by their contempt for their customers.

"I meant it though, about being proud of you," Ranette told him. "You've grown, Wayne. A lot. We've been going to dinner for years now, and you haven't hit on me once."

"I promised. Besides, you're taken. I ain't a poacher." He slumped back in his seat. "This wouldn't be so bad if *that* day weren't coming up."

"The day…" Ranette said. "When you have to deliver payment to that girl?"

Wayne nodded. "Allriandre," he said. "She and her sisters don't have a daddy because of me." His day of trials was the worst day of the month, where he had to go face her. And admit what he'd done: murdering her daddy over twenty years ago.

*You know you aren't forgiven.*

*I know.*

*You will never be forgiven.*

*I … I know.*

Ranette leaned forward, tapping on the saltshaker with her fingernail. It was in the shape of a Roughs-style boot. So fancy that the awful decor somehow wrapped around to being tasteful.

"What if," Ranette said to him, "you *didn't* see her this month?"

"I've gotta," Wayne said.

"Why?"

"It's my punishment."

"Says who?"

"The cosmere," Wayne said. "I took her daddy from her, Ranette. I gotta remember. What I am. I gotta look her in the eyes and let her know I ain't forgotten."

The two women shared a look.

"Wayne," Jaxy said, "I've … wanted to talk to you about that. The way you treat that girl. I realize today might not be the best day…"

"Nah," he said. "Hit me, Jaxy. I'm mostly numb already. It's a good day to get punched."

"Why do you insist," Jaxy said, "on seeing her in person?"

"So she can punish me."

"Does she *want* to punish you?"

"She seems to enjoy it when it happens."

"Does she? Does she *really*, Wayne? Because the way you tell it, sounds like she asks you *not* to come see her."

"Because she's bein' too nice," Wayne explained. "But I don't deserve anyone bein' nice to me."

"I told you, Jax," Ranette said. "He's got the self-awareness of a half-eaten sandwich."

Wayne frowned. What was she on about?

"I've never met anyone," Jaxy said, "who can get inside the heads of other people as well as Wayne can. He'll understand."

"He gets in their heads when it suits him," Ranette said. "Not when it means seeing things he doesn't want to see."

Wayne looked away. Ranette said a lot of mean things, but they weren't … well, they weren't *actually* mean. He joked, and she joked. And sure, sometimes there was an edge of truth to it, but that's what friends was about. Making you look a little silly when you were together, so that you didn't look *really* stupid when you were apart.

But the way she said that last bit … it stung. He understood people, didn't he? Wax and Marasi, they were great at the investigating part. But they needed someone like Wayne who really *knew* the people who lived in the dirt—and counted themselves lucky, because at least it wasn't mud. Currently.

"Wayne," Jaxy said, "what do you imagine that girl wants? Can you think like her? Does she *really* want you to come remind her of her pain each month?"

"I … I want her to be happy. And beating up a fellow like me who made her unhappy … well, that's the best way."

"Is it?" Jaxy asked softly. "Or is it about you? Doing some kind of penance? Wayne, each time you ignore what that girl asks of you, you take a little joy from her and turn it into your own suffering."

He squeezed his eyes shut.

“You *can* see it,” Jaxy said, patting his hand. “I know you can.”

“I’ve lost my appetite,” he said, shoving back from the table and stalking off through the restaurant.

From behind, Ranette’s voice chased him. “I told you. He might not be as bad as I pretend, Jax. But he’s not as good as you want to pretend either.”

He traded the bell for his hat back, and only took one of the fellow’s cufflinks in the exchange—a fair trade for them keeping his hat over some stupid bell that barely even worked. Outside, unfortunately, he all but collided with two men in bowler hats and vests.

Rust and Ruin! They’d found him.

“Sir,” the taller of the two bean counters said, “we need to talk about your finances.”

“Whataboutem?” Wayne said, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“You have *far* too much money,” the shorter one said. “Please, sir. We *have* to talk about your investment strategy! Your current lack of diversification is a *crime*.”

Well, to ashes with him, then. This day had actually found a way to get worse. He let them shove him into their hearse of a car, off to the mortuary. Or, well, the accounting firm that kept track of his wealth. Same difference.

In either case Wayne, as everybody knew him, was dead.

# 15

The trellium was moving.

Steris had been getting out a harmonium sample for study in conjunction with the trellium spike. And the trellium did *not* seem to like it.

Wax moved the small bead of harmonium—suspended in a vial of oil—toward the trellium. It again rolled away.

“Curious,” Wax said. Then, on a hunch, he burned a little steel inside of him.

The trellium spike rolled away from him again. “I didn’t Push,” he said. “It responded to me *burning* steel.”

“That’s a result!” Steris said, scribbling furiously. “Wax, that’s actually *useful*.”

And … yes, it was, wasn’t it? A way to test if someone was burning their metals? Seekers could do that, but having a mechanical way to accomplish it …

“Oh!” Marasi said. “I should have mentioned. That spike had a similar reaction to the other spikes I harvested.”

“It’s like Allomancy,” Steris said. “Like the trellium spike is *using* Allomancy to Push.”

“No,” Wax said. “It’s more like magnetism. The trellium spike responds to other sources of Investiture in the way one magnet responds to another one.”

“It wants to stay apart from them,” Steris said.

“More like it has the same charge,” Wax said. “I doubt that it ‘wants’ anything.” Though, as this was part of a god, who knew? Particularly since, so far as he was aware, other Invested items with a similar charge didn't repel one another.

A little experimenting showed him that the two metals—harmonium and trellium—repelled each other with increasing strength the more he tried to push them together. Again, like magnets. The response to harmonium was stronger than the response to him burning his metals.

Wax consulted a large chart on the wall; it displayed an extrapolation from a notebook that Death had given Marasi. Once upon a time, that event had been one of the most surreal Wax had ever heard described. These days it seemed almost commonplace.

The book detailed how to use Hemalurgy. He'd studied the notes in depth, and had created a chart of all the points on the body where spikes could be placed. A detailed list of the ways they worked, requiring linchpin spikes to coordinate and keep the network functioning.

The Set was experimenting further with Hemalurgy. And his sister, Telsin, was out there somewhere, high up in the leadership of the Set. Seven years ago, he'd thought she'd been kidnapped … but he should have seen. Telsin's incredible ambition fit perfectly with the Set's goals.

It had led her to spiking herself. Pinning pieces of souls to her own. It nauseated him to think of the people murdered for that purpose—to realize what Telsin and the Set were doing. In his fingers, he held not only a relic from a long-forgotten god; he held a tattered symbol of his sister's rejected humanity.

Rusts. He really was going to have to talk to Harmony, wasn't he? As little as Wax liked it, he was a part of this. He needed to finish what he'd begun all those years ago, when he'd fled Elendel—leaving his house to the machinations of his sister and uncle.

Footsteps on the stairs announced Allik, arriving with refreshments. Wax wasn't certain if the former airman did that so assiduously because he thought of this mansion as his home and wanted to entertain, or if he just enjoyed having people around to try his baking. Nevertheless, the sight of him—mask up, grinning widely and bearing two plates of chocolate biscuits—did lighten Wax's mood.

"You are being careful," Allik said to Wax, "never to put too much ettmetal in one place, yah?"

"I don't think I have enough to worry about."

"Still, always good to remember," Allik said. "One of the basic rules of handling it."

They had all kinds of odd rules about the metal, and Wax had trouble separating the superstitions from the science. Supposedly, you couldn't put a large concentration of ettmetal in one place, otherwise it caused strange reactions—though Allik didn't know specifics.

The perky Southerner marched up to Marasi with his offerings and held them out.

"Oh!" Marasi said, snatching a biscuit. "My favorite."

Wax took one too. He was accustomed to biscuits that could block a bullet in a pinch. It was the Basin way. Yet these were moist, even gooey. It was odd, but not unwelcome.

Marasi in particular seemed to be infatuated by the way Allik put sweetened chocolate in everything. "They're best when warm," she said, munching as Allik sat across from her. Wax *had* wiped off that lab table, hadn't he? "You know, you look more handsome when I'm eating choc. How curious."

"You just say that," Allik replied, "because you want me to make more."

"Of *course* that's why I say it," she replied, seizing a second biscuit.

Wax sat back on his stool, enjoying his biscuit, thinking about the metals laid out on the table in front of him. Harmonium and trellium. They repelled each other. More and more violently, the closer together they were …

*I wonder …*

He gathered up the materials and was setting up a new experiment in the safe box as another set of footsteps started down the steps. This made them all pause. Wax carefully slipped some bullets from his pouch, ready to Push them. Though when the door opened, it revealed a prim man in a brown suit. He had stark blond hair—perfectly styled—and spectacles with wire frames. The type of person whose entire bearing screamed, "I fact-check people's jokes."

"VenDell?" Wax guessed, putting his bullets away. The kandra was wearing a new body, but the creature's air was distinctive.

"Indeed, Lord Ladrian," VenDell said, entering the room and undoing his satchel. "You'll forgive me for letting myself in." He set a piece of paper on the table beside Marasi. "This is for you, Miss Colms."

“What is it?” she asked, wiping her fingers on a napkin that Steris materialized as if from nowhere.

“A note recovered from the site of your engagement with the Set,” VenDell said. “LeeMar recovered it before the other investigating constables could notice it.”

“Wait,” Marasi said. “You have kandra among the constables I don’t know about?”

“Several,” VenDell said.

“Who?”

“Cassileux, for one. LeeMar took over her life about sixteen months ago, after the real woman died in that raid on the Nomad Gang.”

Marasi’s jaw dropped. “But … Cassileux and I had *lunch* last week!”

“Yes, she keeps an eye on you,” VenDell said.

“She didn’t tell me!”

“Should she have?” he asked absently, then sniffed at the biscuits that Allik offered him. “How horrible.”

“Aw,” Allik said, his shoulders slumping.

“I’ve told you, Master Allik,” VenDell said. “I am a carrion feeder, and strictly carnivorous. These … creations … would not suit me. But if you are interested, I’ve been considering putting up good money for one of your masks.”

“What?” Allik said, hand going to his mask, which was still up on the top of his head. “My mask?”

“There has been discussion among the kandra lately,” he said, “about your masks. Many of us think they are as integral to your natures as hair or nails—virtually a part of your skeleton. As such, I have decided to start collecting them for future bodies. Do you have any for sale?”

“Uh…” Allik said. “You’re an odd man, yah?”

“I’m not a man at all,” VenDell said. “I’ll leave you with an offer; let me know if you’d entertain some negotiations. I would only require the mask after your death, of course. If you persist in spending time with this group of people, that might not be far off.”

He walked toward Wax next, then held out his hand. “May I see it, please?”

Wax sighed, then turned to the safe box where he’d been setting up his experiment. He took out the trellium spike and presented it to VenDell, who held it up toward the light.

“I thought you couldn’t touch those,” Steris said from the table beside Marasi.

“You are mistaken, Lady Ladrian,” VenDell said. “This is not a kandra’s spike, so touching it is not taboo.”

“I’m not going to let you take this one,” Wax warned. “It needs to be studied.”

“Unfortunately,” VenDell said, “I have no intention of recovering it, so we won’t get to see if you could actually prevent me or not.”

“You don’t want it,” Wax said, “because it’s not a kandra spike? Unlike the ones that belonged to Lessie, which you stole from us.”

“You gave those up willingly.”

“I was not in an emotional state to do anything willingly,” Wax said. “I still want to know how much that metal—trellium—had to do with what happened to her.”

“The way Paalm … acted was a direct result of her decision to remove one of her spikes,” VenDell said. “The trellium spikes may have exacerbated her ailment, but were not the root cause.”

“Harmony implied otherwise to me.”

VenDell turned the spike over in his fingers and didn’t reply. Instead he nodded toward the safe box. “What are you doing here?”

“Electric current to soften some harmonium,” Wax said, pointing at the equipment he’d set up: a system to deliver a powerful current through a tiny nugget of harmonium held at the center, coated in oil to prevent it from corroding. “That’s the closest we ever came to dividing it.”

“It cannot be divided,” VenDell said. “Not so long as Harmony remains Harmony. I’ve explained this.”

Steris trailed over with her clipboard, and they shared a look. It was true; harmonium wasn’t actually an alloy. Yet Harmony held both Ruin and Preservation—so somehow this metal was both atium and lerasium, blended in a way that defied ordinary scientific explanation.

It seemed reasonable there would be a way to split it. Yet, acids for selective dissolution had failed. Different heating methods to get the components to self-separate while fluid had failed. Electrolysis had failed.

A dozen other ideas had failed as well. There was a reason he’d lost momentum on the project. But of all they’d tried, electric currents seemed to have come the closest. He activated the machine, and didn't bother closing the front of the safe box. He'd run this experiment often enough that he was comfortable doing it in the open.

The tiny bit of harmonium heated up. Marasi and Allik walked over, watching it glow with a powerful internal light. Then Wax activated the other component of the machine—which pulled the nugget apart.

Harmonium was pliable, more so when heated. When softened like this, it seemed to react differently to the air—no longer as volatile. As if … as if it were becoming something else.

This specialized machine continued to deliver electric current through the grips at the sides—but now those moved apart and *stretched* the metal. If he continued, he could divide it cleanly, making two pieces of harmonium. That itself wasn't remarkable. But the machine was set to pull only a few sixteenths of an inch, then stop. The result was two globs of harmonium at the sides, with a narrower stringy bit between.

"What is this supposed to do?" VenDell asked.

"Watch," Wax said. With his tinted goggles, it was probably easier to see—but after a few moments the metals started to *rearrange*. The glob of harmonium on the left side began to glow a blue-white. The one on the right adopted a stranger air, growing silvery and reflective. It *almost* seemed liquid, like mercury—the surface incredibly smooth.

"Is that…?" Marasi asked.

"No," Wax said. "If you cut it in half right now, when the metals cool you'll just have two bits of harmonium. Yet in this state, the metals *almost* separate. You can see the left bit taking on aspects of lerasium. The bead on the right … that's how atium was described."

"It always looks like it *wants* to divide," Steris said. "That it's arranging itself to do so."

"Ruin and Preservation," Marasi whispered. "Atium and lerasium."

"I think that's the reason harmonium is so unstable," Wax explained. "Harmony has trouble acting, right? He's mentioned it before: his two aspects work against one another, leaving him indecisive, impotent."

"He's merely in equilibrium," VenDell said. "Equal parts the need to protect and the need to let things decay."

"Well," Wax said, "I'm increasingly certain we face a god who *isn't* hindered by that kind of equilibrium. I was skeptical at first, but Marasi convinced me."

"Trell is dangerous, VenDell," Marasi said, squinting against the bright light. "We have to do something. We can't wait for Harmony."

"Almost I am persuaded," VenDell said. "What did you think of the note?"

"It's confusing," Marasi said. "And vague."

Wax shot her a glance.

"I'll explain," she promised. "But first … are we going further with this?" She nodded toward the safe box they were all crowded around.

"Well," Wax said, taking the trellium spike back from VenDell, "we noticed that this metal repels all forms of Investiture—and it repels harmonium even harder. I thought … what if I stretched a nugget apart like this, then used trellium to try to split it? Might that repel the two sides harder, and actually separate out some atium and lerasium?"

He looked to the others in turn.

"What … are the chances that blows things up?" Allik asked.

"Considering harmonium is involved?" Steris said. "I'd say it's *incredibly* likely. But worth a try."

"That's why we have the safe box, right?" Wax said. "Plus, that's a very small bit of harmonium. How much energy could one piece of metal contain?"

The words hung in the air.

"So…" Allik said. "I think we should all go next door and be very far away when he does this, yah?"

"Yah," Marasi agreed.

Wax took a deep breath, then nodded. "I'll rig a timer," he said. "This basement is reinforced with enough concrete to pave a highway, so we should be fine upstairs."

"We could make the kandra do it," Marasi said. "They're basically indestructible."

"Basically," VenDell said, "is infinitely distant from 'completely,' Miss Colms. I have been instructed to help you with your little infiltration—I believe you have a corpse for me?—not to risk my life trying to accomplish the impossible."

"Timer it is," Wax said.

“I’ll get a tiny sliver of trellium,” Steris said, “so we don’t have to use the entire spike.”

“Good idea,” Wax said. He should be able to repurpose his hydraulic punch …

It took a good half hour to set the whole thing up. All the while, Wax wondered. What if he *did* split harmonium? He’d have two metals, the bodies of gods, each capable of incredible things from ancient lore, like manipulating time or creating beings with mythological Mistborn abilities. What if he had that power? What would that change about him?

*Nothing,* he thought to himself. *I’ve held that power. And when I had it, I used it to save my friends.*

He finished the calibrations, leaving a machine on a timer set for five minutes. Once the time was up, it would press the tiny trellium shard forward into the center of the heated and stretched harmonium bead.

He closed the safe box tight, and together they all fled up the stairs and secured the thick metal door at the top. And then … Wax realized five minutes had probably been excessive.

“So…” he said as he pulled out his watch, “what about that note?”

“It was in one of the boxes in the cavern,” VenDell explained. “One of the few that weren’t destroyed in the explosions.”

“During the mission earlier,” Marasi said, “I spotted a masked figure in dark clothing. I had a slowness bubble up at the time, and she approached as a blur. I got barely a glance at her before she left, but I think this must be from her.”

She turned the paper toward Wax, showing a simple message.

*We are watching, Marasi,* it read. *And we are impressed.*

It had a small symbol at the bottom, with three interlocking diamonds. It looked vaguely familiar to Wax, though he didn’t think he’d ever seen the symbol before. More, the pattern reminded him of something.

“You ever seen this?” Wax asked VenDell.

“Uh…” he said, “that is a question I’m forbidden to answer. My apologies, Lord Ladrian.”

“Forbidden?” Steris asked. “By whom?”

“Harmony himself, Lady Ladrian,” VenDell said. For the first time that Wax could remember, the creature looked *uncomfortable.* “I suggest you speak to him directly.”

“Great,” Marasi said. “Nice to know we’re working for the defense of the *planet itself* while God is acting like a child with a secret crush.”

“False gods are like that,” Allik said, and earned glares from all around the room. He just shrugged.

They all fell silent. *Why,* Wax thought, *does a few minutes feel like forever when you’re waiting?*

“So,” VenDell said. “Your bones, Lord Ladrian. Have you reconsidered —”

“Not for sale.”

“But—”

“Not for sale.”

“Ah well, then,” VenDell said. “Can’t blame a person for inquiring. Such a fine skeleton, and for it to go to waste…”

A sudden *blast* shook the entire building. Chandeliers rattled, the window to Wax’s right cracked, and he heard dishes fall somewhere in the kitchen.

“Rusts,” Marasi said. “They probably felt that in the next octant over. You … think the safe box held?”

“One way to find out,” Wax said, walking toward the door to the basement.

“At least,” Allik said to the others, “we planned for it this time, yah?”

“*Always* plan for an explosion around Wax,” Steris said. “It saves a ton of effort.”

Wax pulled the door open, then started down the steps.

# 16

Call and Son and Daughters Accounting and Estate might not have *looked* like a mortuary, but Wayne was absolutely certain it was one. Because you’d have to be dead to enjoy working in such a place.

Tall Boring Guy and Short Boring Guy sat him down and started embalming him right away. Not with the good stuff either. He’d have taken basically any kind of drink, but no, they had to use ink.

They dried his body out good first though.

“Your investments,” Tall Boring Guy said, “are too high-risk, Master Wayne. We recommend a more balanced portfolio.”

“How much money have I got?” he asked, sullen.

“Over twenty million at this point.”

Well, damn. “I told you,” he said, “to give it to people what don’t have any houses!”

“Yes, and your affordable housing project was wildly successful,” Short Boring Guy said, perking up and reaching for a ledger. “How you anticipated the impending subsidies is quite a stroke of—”

“And that girl?” Wayne said. “With the plugs in the walls?”

Tall Boring Guy smiled. “The revolutionary electric devices developed by Miss Tarcsel are at the forefront of your financial empire, Master Wayne! Profits are *astronomical*.”

“Your real estate investments were wise,” Short Boring Guy said, “but we need to liquidate some of your ownership in Tarcsel Electric and invest in other, newer companies, to provide a buffer against competition—which is beginning to pop up now that the initial patents are lapsing.”

“You guys,” Wayne said, “really need to get girlfriends or somethin’.”

"Oh, we both are dating, Master Wayne," Short Boring Guy said. "Garisel is quite popular, I must say. And you have no idea how wild lady accountants can be! Why, the other night—"

"Shut it," Wayne grumbled. "Don't rub it in." Well, no use resisting. A man couldn't run from his own funeral. Mostly because his legs don't work when he's dead. "Fine. Give me one of those damn hats."

They looked at one another, but Wayne waved impatiently, so Tall Boring Guy finally took his bowler from the peg by the door and handed it over.

Wayne pulled it on, and his death was right and truly accomplished. Rust him all the way down to the bones. He eyed the ledgers, rubbing his thumb against the bottom of his chin. But that wasn't enough, so he absently took Short Boring Guy's spectacles from the man's vest pocket, then tucked them into his own pocket.

Still not enough. "Kindly fetch me," he said, "some honey tea with some lemon on the side and one tiny sprig of mint. Not too much, mind you, but enough to add some perk. You understand, don't you, Garisel? Good man, good man."

Soon he had it in hand while he surveyed the ledgers. They gave his last name as "Terrisborn," since he had no proper family name. He kept reading.

Yes, yes. Numbers. That was plenty of numbers, all right. Of the high sort, which accountants like him liked to see. Hardly any red to the ledger. Yes, hmm. Not enough honey in this tea.

There was no denying what the ledgers said. Wayne *was* dead. And in his place lived a fellow who was fancy. No, who was downright *opulent.*

"You at least," he said, "have my bendalloy?"

An aide fetched an enormous sack of it. Enough to buy two or three cars, if he'd wanted.

"Right, then," Wayne said. "Here's what we're going to do. You see this here?" He unfolded something from his inside pocket—a flyer recruiting boys for a local noseball league. "We shall give these chaps funding for equipment and will build for them a location in which to enjoy their engagements."

"Sir?" Short Boring Guy asked. "Why?"

"We'll include seating," Wayne explained, "and allow everyone to watch. See, right now everyone wants someone to yell at. And we, my friends, shall provide it for them. We shall create a large-scale noseball league, with a team from each octant. I’ve thought, gentlemen, for some time that the city needs a way to become drunken in a proper and controlled manner.”

“I don’t understand, sir,” Tall Boring Guy said.

“A bar exists for a reason,” Wayne said. “It is a controlled environment in which to drink. People are going to seek to partake in spirits, you see, and it is better for society that we plan for this.

“Currently, the octants are tense. The people are angry. The Outer Cities, why, they are riotous! We must allow *rage* to be experienced in a similar way to drunkenness—with a controlled outlet, with someone for everyone to dislike.”

They looked at him blankly.

“We’re gonna get a bunch of chaps to beat on one another,” Wayne said in a lower-class accent. “Playin’ for teams representin’ the octants, so everyone can pick their favorite and hate all the other teams. In a right proper way.”

“Ah!” Short Boring Guy said.

People these days, and their lowborn vernacular. Why, he suspected this pair didn’t even know how to properly burnish a golden toilet! For fear!

“Yes…” Tall Boring Guy said. “I see. So, like the local clubs, but on a *citywide* scale.”

“People love their local teams,” Wayne explained. “We can do something good with that.”

“Building arenas of the proper size will be expensive,” Short Boring Guy said. “Even for you.”

“We could charge people a bit to get in the door, then,” Wayne said. “Everyone enjoys something more when they have a monetary stake in it.”

“Yes…” Tall Boring Guy said. “Yes, this is *interesting*. Monetization of the rivalries—and the personal coding of interest—will be a seminal part of this activity…”

“That *is* my favorite part of *most* activities,” Wayne noted.

Tall Boring Guy nodded. “This is excellent. We shall put our best people on it.”

“Nah,” Wayne said, “put your worst ones on it. They’ll know more about loafing—the rapscallions—which shall serve me better in this particular situation. Now, let us discuss the beating of servants and how it's not really so bad for them."

Rusts, this hat. He pulled it off and wiped his brow. Stupid money and stupid rich hats. This one even had aluminum foil on the inside to protect from emotional Allomancy.

Well, surely *this* idea with the noseball would finally bankrupt him. It was, after all, his very worst idea—and he was an absolute idiot. He spun the hat on his finger and thought about it. What if Wax—or worse, *Marasi*—figured out he was rich? He'd never hear the rusting end of it.

Tall Boring Guy tugged at his collar. "Do you … actually want us to investigate using more corporal punishment on, um, some of your staff?"

"Nah," Wayne said. "Bein' in the army stinks."

"Sir," Short Boring Guy said, "what about the provisions in your trust? We'd like to talk about the more unusual ones you've made."

"Nope. Next."

"Your current housing situation—"

"Nope. Next."

"Have you yet confirmed with Waxillium that he understands he signed away likeness rights to you in that deal—"

"Nope. Next."

"Your fleet of cars?"

Those he liked. "What about them?"

"There's a new Victori," Short Boring Guy said, getting out a picture of it. It had *no top*. Like, so you could drive and spit into the wind, if you wanted.

"Damn, that's nice," Wayne said. "Get me one."

"Absolutely, sir," Short Boring Guy said. "How many shares in the company shall we buy?"

Wayne narrowed his eyes at him. "I see what you're doing."

They looked at him innocently.

"No more than a five percent stake," Wayne said, "and once these guys what play noseball get famous, have them drive the cars around so they get more popular and whatnot. Oh, and let's call it something other than noseball. Maybe change the long runner positions to let those two be Metalborn. Same with the goalie. That'll make things more interesting."

"As you wish, Master Wayne."

He spun the hat on his finger. *I've never met anyone who can get inside the heads of other people as well as Wayne can.* He could even get inside the heads of accountants.

Could he get inside the head of a girl who hated him?

To start, he had to remember what he'd done. He *deserved* that hurt.

Did *she*? He closed his eyes, thinking what it must be like to see him come slinking in each month. That man. That horrible man. Couldn't he just let her move on?

*He'll understand …*

What if he didn't want to?

Damn. Too late.

"Hey, Call," he said, opening his eyes and looking to Short Boring Guy. "I need you to set up a delivery for me. Some money to be paid to a young woman and her family. Um, every month. She has her own kid now, and needs the cash on time. It's a meeting I'm supposed to do in person, but I'm … getting so busy. Yes, too busy, you see…"

"Many of our clients have similar needs, Master Wayne," Short Boring Guy said. "Give us the address and we'll see it is handled with discretion."

Why'd they say it that way? Well, regardless, Jaxy had been right. If he was going to be dead, he could at least be the polite kind what didn't try to crawl out of the forest and eat you during thunderstorms.

Even corpses needed standards.

# 17

Steris had been doing a good job lately, she thought, of understanding other people. Once, she’d assumed they had the same worries she did, but hid their anxiety extremely well. As she’d grown older, she’d come to understand something more incredible. They just *didn’t feel* that anxiety.

They didn’t have a constant, hovering worry in the back of their brain, whispering they’d forgotten something important. They didn’t spend hours thinking about the mistakes they’d made, and how they could have planned better. They lived in a perpetual state between blessed contentment and frightening ignorance.

Then she’d grown even older. She’d married Waxillium. She’d made friends—real ones—and had come to see more clearly. Everyone saw the world differently, and the Survivor had made people to complement one another. Metal and alloy. A Push for every Pull.

The others responded to the explosion below with a strange excitement and eagerness, practically racing one another to the door. But what if the steps were destabilized? Steris had a whole list of protocols to follow if there was an explosion in the lab—she’d spent three nights developing it.

She loved them. And so she wanted to cry out a warning, hold them back safe, forbid them from risking themselves. She also knew how extreme she got sometimes. That was the biggest revelation of recent years—helped by discussions with the women of her book group. Some of her preparations went beyond helpful. Understanding that line was vital to understanding herself.

And she had to admit, today the others showed *some* wisdom. They let VenDell go first, at her suggestion, since a fall wouldn’t hurt him. Wax went next, since he could more or less fly if the steps collapsed. They hesitated at the bottom of the stairs—in case anything further was going to blow—before they opened the reinforced door.

“Wait!” Steris said, then dug in her handbag. “Masks.”

She distributed the cloth masks to everyone, even Allik, since a wooden one wouldn’t filter the air for him. They took the masks absently, or maybe even with a bit of an eye roll. All except Wax, who smiled at her as he put his on.

He liked her preparations. He found it endearing. But beyond that, he appreciated it. He thought she was useful, not persnickety.

“Anything on your watch list for explosions?” he asked.

She felt warm as she dug out her book of home emergencies. Yes, she knew she could be extreme. At the same time, making these was therapeutic. Her fears eased once she wrote them down. If she’d thought of something, catalogued it and considered it, then it stopped having power over her—she had power over *it*.

“Acids on the floor,” she noted. “Those could mix to produce poisonous fumes. Glass shards. Secondary explosions—particularly from exposed harmonium. Those are my big fears.”

He considered. “Marasi,” he said as she pushed open the door, “I was testing with hydrochloric and hypochlorous acids.”

“Which means?”

“Chlorine gas,” he said.

VenDell grabbed Marasi’s arm. Kandra had a *thing* about acids.

To Steris’s surprise, they listened to her. Since the powerful ventilators installed in the basement weren’t working, they let her fetch a room fan and set it up. Then they all returned up the steps and stood outside the mansion to allow the place to ventilate. When they went back down, everyone wore their masks without complaint and let her test the air with a kit. From there, they were careful where they stepped as they inspected the room.

The door to the safe box had taken a little jaunt across the room, and was now embedded deep into the thick concrete of the far wall. The steel of the box itself had been mangled beyond repair. And the rest of the room …

Well, it appeared that she’d have to put in an order for a new spectroscope. And a centrifuge. And some more flasks. And … um … new walls …

She resisted her urge to begin sweeping the glass to avert the hazard of stepping on it. Instead she stuck near to Waxillium. He might discover something interesting.

“Rusts,” he said, walking over to the remnants of the safe box. “This thing survived harmonium detonations of up to three ounces. I used less than a *tenth* of that in this experiment.”

He reached for the top of what remained of the box.

Steris wagged a glove in front of him.

“Right,” he said, slipping it on, then feeling around the top of the broken steel box. His hand came away dusted with some black shavings—a fine metal powder. VenDell walked up beside them. Marasi was inspecting the safe box’s door, while Allik had fetched a broom from above and was sweeping up the glass.

Steris had already liked him, of course, primarily because of how he treated her sister. But in that moment, her estimation of him went up another notch.

“We need to test these shavings,” Wax said. “But … I don’t think this is either atium or lerasium. It looks like remnants of iron from the equipment.”

Steris gathered them in some specimen pouches anyway. Waxillium leaned into the broken box on the wall, then used a small file from his pocket to harvest something smoldering inside.

“Harmonium,” he said as Steris dug out an extra vial of oil for him to put it into. “Plastered across the back of the box. I … think the experiment failed. It didn’t divide.”

“Actually,” VenDell said, “I think you managed something far, far more dangerous.” He took out a little notebook. “How much harmonium did you use in here? A few grams?”

“Around half a gram.”

“This explosive force…” VenDell said. “This level of destruction … from such a small sample. It’s possible, but only if…”

“What?” Wax said.

“This explosion was not caused by the division of the metals,” VenDell said. “This level of energy release could happen *only* if some of the Investiture or the matter itself was transformed into energy.”

He seemed to notice their confusion, so he continued. “I believe I’ve lectured you at length about the nature of Investiture. It is a particular study of mine. Along with my foremost expertise on skulls…”

“Not for sale,” Wax reminded him.

“Mine is,” Steris said.

Both looked at her.

“Why would I need it when I’m dead?” she asked. “Seems much better to have the money now.”

“As I always say,” VenDell replied. “Your impermanence is outlived by the beautiful internal shells you create—like sand medallions from the ocean, so are the bones of the human being. A lasting testimony of your presence on Scadrial. We shall discuss the terms of your sale at a later date, Lady Ladrian.

“For now, let me be brief. Everything in the cosmere is made up of one of three essences. The first is matter: the physical substances around you. Formed of axi, the smallest possible thing we know.”

“There are things that … aren’t matter?” Steris asked.

“Of course,” he said. “There’s energy.” He waved to the ceiling, where two of the room’s recessed and reinforced lights were still working. “Electricity, heat, light … Your kind has been harnessing it quite well lately. Good for you. Very modern.”

“And the third?” Wax asked.

“Investiture,” VenDell said. “The essence of the gods. Everything has an Invested component, normally inaccessible without certain abilities. When you burn metals, Lord Ladrian, you pull Investiture directly from the Spiritual Realm and use it to do work. Much like energy does work in those lights. But here is the key idea: Investiture, matter, and energy are all the *same*, fundamentally.”

“I … felt that, once,” Waxillium said, expression distant. “When I held the Bands. That all things were one substance.”

“Indeed!” VenDell replied. “And states can change from one to the other. Energy can become Investiture. This is the soul of Feruchemy. Investiture can become matter. That is where harmonium comes from. And matter can *become* energy.”

“And an example of that is…” Steris said.

VenDell nodded to the destroyed room. “We just witnessed it, I believe. There is an *incredible* amount of energy trapped inside matter. You managed to release some of it—only a small amount of what you put in that box, but still. If you found a way to release its full potential … Well, Harmony says the destructive power of it frightens him. Deeply.”

“It should,” Waxillium said. “Because this was easy to accomplish. Far too easy.”

“Well,” VenDell said, “it does require two very rare substances. And a great deal of energy, correct?”

“A great deal,” he admitted. “For so small a sample. It would take quite a bit of electricity to scale this up. But the destructive potential…”

“Agreed.” VenDell’s skin had gone … not just pale, but actually translucent. “I … should report this. If you don’t mind, I’ll be upstairs communing with Harmony. Excuse me.”

Waxillium shot Steris a look. “Worst case?” he asked.

She considered. What was the worst thing that could happen? It seemed obvious to her.

“What if the Set already knows about this?” she asked. “Marasi said the dying man mentioned returning ash to the Basin. Maybe they plan to use bombs?”

Wax nodded, grim. He’d considered the same thing.

“If the Set has discovered this interaction,” she said, “then it was likely by accident—or through an experiment like ours. There might be a record of it.”

“We could search for unexplained explosions in the Outer Cities,” Wax said. “Smart. Ashes … What if an explosive like this were placed in one of the old Ashmounts? Could they be restarted?”

“That sounds appropriately terrifying,” Steris said, feeling a deep nausea. How had she never considered that possibility? Looked like she had some planning to worry about. But first things first. “I’ll order broadsheets from the Outer Cities from the library and have them delivered to the penthouse. We can start there.”

Wax nodded. “With Marasi’s authority, you should be able to access the constabulary records too.”

It was an excellent suggestion. Steris walked to the back of the room, passing Allik—who had found some remnants of his biscuits splattered on the wall—and stepped up to Marasi. It had been … pleasant spending more time with her lately. Their childhood hadn't always encouraged sisterly affection. Their father—who was now retired to a country estate—had been embarrassed by Marasi's illegitimate status. Steris had always worried Marasi would see it as a flaw in her*self* rather than in their *father.*

Marasi seemed lost in thought, though what she found fascinating about the broken door was beyond Steris. However, she stayed quiet, not wishing to interrupt. Silence didn't bother Steris. It was a purely neutral experience.

"The world is changing so fast," Marasi finally whispered. "I'm barely accustomed to electric lights, let alone the airships. Then there's this god … from another world. Now an explosive, a pinch of which can destroy a room…"

"I'm worried too," Steris said. "I wish recent events had been possible to anticipate."

"Makes me wonder," Marasi said, "why I'm spending my time on murder cases and basic crimes. I realize they are important … but there are people out there, Steris, who know about it all. Who are making moves that change the fates of planets. They have no oversight, so far as I can tell. They're probably *happy* to see us chasing down ordinary criminals and leaving them alone."

"That's why you hunt the Set," Steris said, nodding. "Why you've devoted so much to them, when most in the precinct think you're going a little overboard."

Marasi chuckled. "Runs in the family, I guess."

Steris smiled, then felt foolish, as Marasi wouldn't be able to see it behind her face mask. Before Steris could say something, however, Waxillium blew himself up.

It was a much smaller detonation, fortunately, but it was forceful enough to throw him back and drop him to the ground. Steris ran over, worried—and found him dazed, but relatively unharmed. He took her arm as he sat up, shaking his head, his nice vest—a Versuli, no less—ripped and charred. The apron she'd provided had protected it somewhat.

He brushed himself off. Though he didn't like to admit it, he *was* getting older. Being exploded when you were twenty was far different from being exploded when you were fifty.

“So,” he said to her, “you mentioned something about secondary explosions?”

“It was on my list,” she whispered.

“It’s all right,” he said, patting her hand. “I feel fine. I just did something stupid. I was gathering that harmonium plastered against the back of the safe box. It’s too valuable to leave, and it must have reacted to the air or some liquid left from an earlier experiment—”

He sneezed, then smiled at her reassuringly. His mask was nowhere to be seen; it must have blown free in the explosion.

She hid her worry for him. Upon marrying Waxillium Ladrian, there was one thing she had vowed to herself: She wouldn’t stop fretting about him, but she *would not* prevent him from being the person he wanted to be.

Each time he decided on an investigation, it terrified her. She did not let that control how she treated him. She would *not* be an obstacle. She loved him too much for that. Instead she did her best to be part of his world. It was far less frightening to be shot at than to sit at home wondering if *he* was being shot at.

It was to her eternal gratification that he, in turn, tried to be part of her world. Taking more interest in politics. Spending time with her doing the finances. They fit together, better than she’d ever dreamed they would. And she still felt warm every time they touched.

“Let’s get some tea,” Wax said, climbing to his feet with her help, “and talk this over.”

# 18

Marasi settled into the couch, her ears ringing from the second explosion. Allik sat beside her, mask down—he tended to lower it when he chewed gum, as he was doing now. Chewing visibly was a cultural taboo for him. Odd. If there was one thing it should be *normal* to lift a mask for, it was eating.

Still, she wrapped her arm around his and let him rest his head on her shoulder. Rusts, it was nice to have him around full-time these days. The early years of their relationship had been sixteen different varieties of frustrating.

While they waited for VenDell to finish his report to Harmony, Wax talked about meeting the airship—and the new ambassador. She felt Allik grow tense at the description.

“This is Daal the Primary,” he explained to the rest of them. “He … is very well respected by the Hosts.”

“I could tell he was important politically,” Wax said.

“No, Wax,” Marasi said. “Respected by the Hosts means he was successful in war.”

“So his arrival *is* a threat,” Steris said, nestled against Wax with her notebook out, shoes off, her stockinged feet up to the side in a posture that actually seemed *relaxed*.

*She’s changed so much,* Marasi thought. She could remember a time when Steris wouldn’t have dared take her shoes off in company. She’d have sat with perfect posture, trying to ensure she was holding her tea and saucer level.

Marasi had always loved her sister, even when resentment or forced distance had interfered, but she'd never considered Steris *pleasant.* Not until these recent years. Part of that had been Steris changing, but another part had been realizing that she and Steris had always felt the same burdens—that sense of entrapment.

"I wouldn't say it's a threat, Steris," Allik said. "Not specifically. But if it is true, and the Consortium has finally been achieved—the five nations agreeing to put a common face northward—then this is … a symbol? They send you their best. They want you to know it."

"Their best," Wax said, "and most stern, I assume? He is certainly more unyielding than his predecessor."

"Yes, Adjective Waxillium," Allik said, nodding. "They want you to know that they will not be bullied."

"He said," Wax told them, "that one of his goals was to bring the Bands of Mourning back to his people. Is that still a sore issue?"

"You have no idea," Allik said. "Us agreeing to leave the Bands here, it's like … like we left you with the body of our dead father, yah? A body that is also a powerful weapon. Nobody liked that decision.

"Sending him here, having him say he'll get the Bands back … this is a symbol, yah? A statement? They have been too lax with your people, and wish to indicate this laxness will end." He shifted in place, then lifted his mask. "Sorry."

"You didn't choose this, Allik."

"No," he said. "But I didn't *not* choose it."

"Dear, yes you did." Marasi squeezed his arm. "You don't have to take responsibility for *everything.*"

He smiled at her, then put his mask down. Footsteps announced what she thought was VenDell returning, but then Wayne burst into the sitting room instead.

"Hey!" he said. "You all got blowed up, and you didn't *wait for me*?"

"Waxillium got blowed up," Steris said. "The rest of us merely witnessed it. I think he did it on purpose to annoy you."

"I'm rusting sure," Wayne said, narrowing his eyes at Wax. "You okay, mate?"

"My ears are ringing," Wax said, "and I've been reminded—quite profoundly—that I'm *at least* two decades past prime exploding age. But I should be fine.”

“Glad you’re back, Wayne,” Marasi said, leaning forward. “Because we need to plan.”

“Yup, glad to be back,” he muttered. “Bein’ the fifth in a room is what every feller wants, yes indeed.” He stomped over to the small serving table and poured a cup of tea—then left the cup on the table and settled down in an easy chair with the *entire teapot.* “What?” he said to everyone’s stares. “It’s almost gone, an’ I like the spigot part. Fun to drink outta.”

He demonstrated, which made Steris put her hand to her face. Marasi sighed, but didn’t say anything. If he was sitting then he was less likely to steal something. She did check her pocketbook just in case.

“All right,” she said to the group. “I have the bones of a plan—imitating the Cycle to lead a local gang with a delivery scheduled to Bilming.”

Wax leaned forward. “Are we sure that interrogating the current captives won’t be enough?”

“They seemed like local flunkies,” Marasi said.

“Who will barely know anything,” Wax agreed. “So you’ll want some constables on your sting, ready to capture any Metalborn.”

“I keep telling Reddi we need a specialist team,” Marasi said. “A squad *just* for dealing with Metalborn. He keeps resisting. I think … he considers *us* that squad.”

As those words hung in the air, VenDell finally strode in, shaking his head. “I have,” he said, “been re-ordered to avail myself to you, with much urgency, in your current plans.”

“What did he say?” Marasi asked. “Does he know anything about the explosion?”

“Harmony is … worried.” VenDell paused. “Trellium has a repulsing effect on other forms of Investiture. Merely touching it to harmonium is dangerous—but doing as you did, heating and stretching the harmonium first, created what he called ‘an Invested matter-energy transference.’ That’s … very bad.”

“Did the news surprise him?” Wax asked. “Did Harmony seem shocked we were able to do this? Or did he expect it?”

“I couldn’t tell,” VenDell said. “He only said what I’ve relayed. More than that … well, Harmony can be difficult to read. I suppose I don’t need to tell you that. Did he send you a note, Lord Waxillium?”

“Yes,” Wax said. “I think he implied that I should make an earring out of trellium.”

“Whatever for?” Marasi said, frowning.

“I don’t know,” Wax replied. “I think he’s trying to get me interested, since I’ve ignored his last couple of invitations to commune with him.”

“This time it’s different, Waxillium,” VenDell said softly. “This time … Harmony is frightened.”

The room fell silent, aside from Wayne slurping his tea through the nozzle of the teapot. Marasi thought she saw him adding something from his flask to it, and she tried not to let that make her nauseous. Who spiked *tea*?

*He’s hurting,* she thought. *The breakup is final.* Rusts, despite everything else going on, she decided to find time to take him out to that noodle place he loved. Bring along a few of the other constables that he liked; remind him he had friends.

“My sting needs to happen soon,” she said to the room. “The book says the next shipment to Bilming is to go out in three days, and I want to be ready.”

“It’s a good plan, Marasi,” Wax said. “Steris and I have something we can work on while you’re planning.”

“Talking to Harmony?” she asked.

“Maybe,” he said, seeming distant. “I haven’t decided if I’m going to respond to him yet.”

Curiously, he didn’t indicate he wanted to be part of her mission. She’d have let him in, but she couldn’t quite get a handle on Wax these days. The way he’d hung those Roughs coats in the entryway had an air of finality, like a shrine to his old life. That said, when his deputized status had come up for renewal last year, he’d asked Reddi to maintain his position.

Wax glanced at Steris, who was leaning against him as she scribbled notes. “We thought of something earlier,” he said to Marasi. “It’s vital that we know if the Set has discovered the explosive potential of mixing harmonium and trellium. We’re going to do research to see what we can find.”

“Sounds good,” Marasi said, nodding.

Well, that confirmed it. A few years ago, she might have been happy to hear he was staying out of her investigation, but she’d quashed that feeling.

She was proud of not letting his shadow—long though it was—blot out her accomplishments. Besides, she'd had her chance to become the hero in Wax's place—she'd held the Bands of Mourning herself before turning them over to Wax. That simply wasn't who she was.

So today, she was sad to hear he wouldn't join her. Even worried, as she realized she'd assumed he would be there on this one. If she actually had a chance at high-level members of the Set … well, this could finally break the case open. And lead to answers.

But … she couldn't force him. Shouldn't force him. If he wasn't feeling as spry as he once had, then who was she to object?

"I'll go do some more listenin' to those fellows in prison," Wayne said. "VenDell, you want to come with? Maybe I could give you tips on your accent?"

"Master Wayne," he said, "I am an immortal kandra with *hundreds* of years' experience doing impersonations."

"And you always sound snide and upper class," Wayne said, "in every body I've seen you use. So … want some tips or not, mate?"

"I…" He sighed. "Harmony did *directly order* me to be about this. Ugh. Field work is so *distasteful.* But I suppose I can't say no."

Marasi glanced at Wax, who had settled back on the couch, thoughtful. Holding the envelope that Harmony had sent him.

"All right then," she said. "Let's get to it."

# 19

Three days later, Wax stood in his penthouse study, looking west toward Bilming. There was no mist tonight. Seemed like weeks since he'd seen any.

Preparations had gone well for Marasi's sting. The notebook had clear instructions on how to deliver the goods. Using intel from interrogations, Marasi had located the very trucks the captives had been planning to use. She had the exact outfits of the captives, and VenDell was playing the role of their leader. Wayne, in one of his finest disguises, was at his side to help sell the role. Even the boxes of goods were real.

They would leave sometime tonight. Wax wouldn't go to see them off, of course. He could be conspicuous, and Marasi had taken every conceivable step to make sure the enemy didn't spot the subterfuge.

*They'll be safe,* he told himself. *Their disguises are excellent, and she's extremely capable.*

This was the Basin, not some wayward town in the Roughs. Marasi had access to the finest constables in the city, along with resources in abundance. She didn't need an old Coinshot with an unloaded pistol who still felt the ache of having foolishly exploded his laboratory a few days ago.

Still, Wax lingered, looking through the wide picture windows of his small penthouse study. It had been exciting, these last years, watching the city grow electrified. He had evanotypes of the process, taken every few months from this high perspective. A grid of lights and streets, homes glowing with the calm light of progress, each adding another shimmering star to the Elendel constellation. Would the lights spread so far that eventually there wouldn’t be any darkness at all?

Steris slipped over, then handed him a cup of tea. “With willow powder,” she whispered. “For your aches.”

“You think of everything,” he said, taking a sip. “How are the kids?”

“Sleeping,” she said. “We should be fine to go back to work.”

Together they walked back into the living room, where practically every surface had been commandeered to hold stacks of broadsheets. They *could* have hired researchers to pick through it all, but why give someone else the fun?

And it *was* fun. Not of the sort that Wax would once have enjoyed, but fun was as much about the company as the activity. They settled down together on the floor—all of the seats had papers on them—and continued reading. Searching for any mentions of explosions in cities across the Basin.

To pass the time, they also looked for anything amusing.

“‘Pickled Pachyderm Plays Piano,’” Steris said, holding one up. “Why do they always pick ‘pachyderm’ for these alliterative sentences?”

“Because it’s a funny word?” Wax said, with a smile. “What’s it pickled in?”

“Apparently it was sitting in a small swimming pool,” Steris said. “I think that’s a stretch.”

He held up his own headline. “‘Child Eats Tar. Mother Feeds Rat As Antidote.’”

“Oh, that *can’t* be real,” she said, taking the broadsheet from him. But it was a real story—and in a reputable paper as well. Turned out even the most highbrow of sources weren’t above using a zinger to move copies on a slow news day. She grinned, setting it on her stack of amusing headlines.

For their true hunt, Steris had a system—because of course she did. They read only headlines at first, quickly skimming sheets for certain words in bold or large print. Anything that looked promising went into its own pile. But you didn’t read the story, not yet. You’d want to read all of those together, to compare one against another and further winnow.

They were almost done with the most recent batch of broadsheets, delivered today. Wax enjoyed it, mostly for the time with his wife—though he seemed to still be suffering the aftereffects of the explosion. His vision kept behaving oddly, distorting at times for just a second or two. And his mind kept playing tricks on him, making him think he glimpsed blue Allomantic lines without burning metals.

He set aside worries over his health, and certainly did *not* say anything. He didn't want to concern Steris. He'd survived explosions before. His hand still ached from the mine detonation back in Dust's Beach …

"Here's one," Steris said, showing him a serious headline. "Explosion at a railway station."

Wax rubbed his chin as he read. "Sounds like a boiler malfunction. Not terribly suspicious."

"Perhaps it's covering something up?"

He shook his head. Seemed like an odd place to be running metallurgic experiments. Too many people nearby—but then again, *he*'d done his experiments in the basement of a mansion. So who knew?

Steris set it in the "maybe" pile, while he moved his current broadsheet—an account of a fire that was pretty obviously a lightning strike—into the "unlikely" pile. None of these felt right to him, which should have made him happy. Perhaps their enemies *hadn't* discovered the explosive interaction between harmonium and trellium.

Unfortunately, this sort of investigation could be frustrating for just that reason. He didn't *want* to find proof, because it would confirm his fears. Yet if they turned up nothing, they'd never know if it was because no proof existed, or because they had missed it.

"'Snake Sneaks Snoring Snails'?" Steris said, showing him one from her amusing pile. "I have to admire them for committing to the gimmick."

"Do snakes eat snails?" he asked.

"This one did, apparently." She smiled, and Preservation, he loved that smile. He found himself wishing this hunt were for lower stakes.

*Ashes falling again,* he thought, shivering. He'd often imagined what it would have been like to live in the mythical days before the Catacendre. When the Ascendant Warrior and Wax's own distant ancestor, the Counselor of Gods, had walked the land. When people had moved through stories like the sun behind clouds on a mostly overcast day.

In those days, the world had been dying. Ash had been its skin, flaking off as it disintegrated …

He sighed, rubbing his eyes—seeing those odd flashes of blue. Fortunately, the tea was beginning to work and his headache was at last retreating.

“Wax?” Steris asked softly. “Do you wish you’d gone with Marasi and Wayne?”

“They’ll be fine,” he said. “They don’t need me.”

“That isn’t what I asked, love,” she said softly.

He thought for a moment. Then shook his head. “I don’t, Steris. I genuinely don’t. I realized it the other day. I’m … past that stage of my life. I really feel like I’m done.”

Except for one thing. The fact that his sister was involved. Still out there. Dangerous.

Most families had skeletons in the closet. And most of those were sensible enough to stay dead. His might be threatening the entire Basin.

Ash falling again …

But he *did* feel done. Ready to move on. So, he showed Steris an account of a series of broken windows in the city of Demoux. It seemed to be the result of a small twister—a smaller cousin to the more terrifying ones that struck the Roughs. But maybe it was an indication of a sharp pressure change, like an explosion?

They put it in the “unlikely” pile. Unfortunately, after an hour of this, they neared the end of the stacks with no solid leads. Just a lot of very unlikely possibilities.

Steris watched him as she moved another broadsheet to the unlikely pile. He knew what she was thinking, but she didn’t prod him.

“There is one thing,” he admitted to her. “My sister. I should be the one to deal with her. But I have important work to do here in Elendel. Besides, I’m not that man anymore.”

“Do you have to be *that* man or *this* man?” she asked.

“I have to make choices. Everyone does.”

“And what about when you initially came back to Elendel?” she asked. “When you decided to hang up your guns the first time?”

“This is different,” he explained. “Back then I was running from myself. I stopped running six years ago, in the mountains, Steris. *This* is what I want. *This* is who I want to be. I’m happy here.”

She leaned into him, a steady warmth at his side. “So long as you know,” she whispered, “that you don’t have to be one or the other. You don’t have to see yourself as two men, Wax, with two different lives. Those men are the same person. And he’s the one I love.”

He thought on that, considering those days when he’d come back to Elendel—determined to put his past in the Roughs behind him. Because it was what he thought he *should* do. And … well, because a part of him had been broken. A gouge that had eventually been ripped back open by Lessie’s return.

Lying near death on a frozen mountaintop to the south had changed his perspective. When he’d returned to Elendel, he’d been able to *live* again. Growing, changing. And yet … did that mean the past him was no *longer* him? Were the inner rings in a tree less a part of it just because they were no longer exposed to the air?

“I’m worried about them,” he admitted to Steris. “And … I’m worried about the safety of the Basin. I don’t want to act like I don’t trust Marasi and Wayne. But…” He reached into his pocket and took out the envelope with the earring. Which he still hadn’t used. “Last year, when VenDell offered me a mission, it didn’t have the same urgency. The same disquiet about it. I’m afraid that whatever is happening now has grown too big to ignore. Too dangerous to be stopped by detective work or police intervention, no matter how competent.”

“Another god,” Steris whispered.

He took out a second envelope. “I had this made,” he said, shaking something out of it. Another earring. With a red tinge to the metal. It was nothing more than a stud, with the only trellium portion the bar in the middle, as the metal couldn’t be melted to be forged.

“When I gave the trellium spike to the university for study,” he explained, “I asked them to fabricate this for me. Because Harmony suggested I’d need it.”

“Do you believe what Marasi said? About another ashfall? The return of those … dark days?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “But VenDell says Harmony is afraid. And *that* has me terrified.”

Steris tapped her finger on the stack of broadsheets in her lap. “Let’s identify our worst-case scenario. Consider: What’s the worst thing you can imagine, in regards to our current hunt?”

“My worst fear?” he said, thinking. “It’s that we’re years behind. That the Set has known about this interaction between harmonium and trellium for a great deal longer than we assume—maybe since that first Malwish airship crashed here. My fear is that the Set is not *beginning* a plan. My fear is that we’re in the *end stages* of said plan.”

“Is there anything we could search for to prove this?” Steris asked.

Wax stood up, surveying the room full of broadsheets, each stack from a different city. “Rusts,” he said. “We shouldn’t be searching for *accidental* explosions. We should be searching for proof of *intentional* ones. And we’re looking at too recent a batch of papers—if it happened, it could be five or six years old by now.” He paused. “They’d want to test. It wouldn’t be one explosion long ago. It would be a series of them … hidden somehow … because if they have this weapon, they’ll want to develop it. Improve it.”

“How?” Steris asked. “Should we search for records of harmonium busts?”

“I doubt that would show up in the broadsheets,” Wax said, turning around the room. “The Set is good at hiding its resource movement, especially of contraband. Marasi’s investigation proves that.”

So what? Was there any way to find what he wanted? Evidence of tests … of explosions they’d keep hidden …

“Earthquakes,” Wax whispered.

“What was that?”

“Earthquakes,” he said, kneeling beside Steris. “They would test explosions underground, in the caverns. Where they’d be contained and hidden. But they can’t fool the seismographs.”

They dug into the headlines again—but this time with a different set of criteria. And admittedly, Wax broke format a little, peeking at the contents of the stories rather than just looking for headlines. Steris poked him in the side if he spent too long doing this, but he was curious. And excited.

The answers had to be in here somewhere.

The search took a solid three hours of work. But as midnight passed, Wax found it. A series of articles from an Elendel broadsheet about something happening in Bilming.

“A subway?” Steris asked, frowning.

“Reports,” Wax explained, “of odd earthquakes in the city, starting years ago. Officials quickly explained that Bilming had decided to build a subterranean rail line like Elendel.”

“That could be valid,” Steris said, reading another broadsheet expanding on the story. “We used explosives to blast away rock and build the subway.”

“But why would Bilming *need* a subway? They have that elevated rail they’re so proud of. They *love* showing it off. Plus, these explosions have been going for four and a half years—and they don’t have a single subway line up and running.”

“Suspicious,” Steris said, scanning the next article. “Very suspicious. A new initiative started seven months ago … Reports of buildings being rattled by large-scale detonations … They were detected all the way here in Elendel.”

“They’re calling it a financial scandal, with construction companies leeching away funds. But it’s obviously more.”

Steris nodded vigorously. The broadsheet that had uncovered this wasn’t the most reputable source—it was the latest one to carry that fool Jak’s outlandish stories—but there *was* something here, as confirmed by several other broadsheets, now that they knew what they were looking for.

*Rusts,* he thought. The Set were testing beneath populated areas? Why? Was that just where they could find the cavern space? This might be even bigger than he’d feared. Hadn’t Bilming been building a navy?

Yes. Other articles talked about it. Ostensibly, the Bilming shipyards were creating a defense force for the Basin, in case of attack from the South. But they’d started *before* the arrival of the first Malwish airships—and they certainly liked to show off the capabilities of their guns.

Supposedly these ships were under Elendel’s control. No one actually believed that though.

“Wax…” Steris said. “That list of shipments in Marasi’s book. Where they were checking to see how tight customs was. How hard it would be to smuggle something *into* Elendel…”

A chill washed through Wax. What would they want to smuggle into Elendel?

A bomb.

“It looked like they were checking different cargo sizes,” he said. “And how likely they were to be inspected when brought in via train or truck.”

“And how big would this bomb be?” Steris said. “Theoretically.”

“It’s the generator that would be big,” Wax explained. “If it works according to the mechanics we discovered, then they’d need a *great deal* of power. More than the simple lines to homes can carry, or even the lines to industrial locations. They’d likely have to build a very large housing for the device.”

“Which explains why they were checking which sizes arouse suspicion and which don’t. Wax, if you’re right, then the broadsheets indicate they’ve been testing this for more than *four years.* Successfully. They might *have* the bomb already. They’re just…”

“… looking for a way to get it into the city.”

Rusts. He looked to the side table, and the envelopes. Then, finally, he slipped the first earring out—the one Harmony had sent him. It had been six years. He’d grown increasingly reticent to have anything to do with Harmony. He no longer hated God, but still …

He looked to Steris, who nodded. So he put the earring in.

And was suddenly in another place.

Floating, seeing the entire world before him, and the dark vastness beyond. He spent a moment disoriented, though his feet felt like they were on solid ground. It was unnerving.

This didn’t normally happen when he used an earring. But he *had* been here once before. On that frozen mountaintop.

Harmony stood in the distance. A serene figure in traditional Terris robes. Kindly eyes. Hesitant at first, Wax walked across the invisible floor toward Harmony. If he let his eyes unfocus, Harmony seemed as vast as the cosmere—two sweeping wings. One white, one black. Spinning together in the middle, the edges extending to infinity.

At the heart of it was that figure. Terris. Head shaved smooth. Rounded features, with an elongated face. The face of a legend, standing with hands clasped behind his back. Looking worried.

“Last time I was here,” Wax noted, “I was dead.”

“Dying,” Harmony said. “On the very cusp of death. Sometimes I think that’s where I reside. Always there, like a coin balanced on edge … a gulf on either side…”

“Where is the redness I saw last time?” Wax asked, nodding to the planet. Six years ago a red haze had been coming over the planet, as if to swallow it. “Did you drive it off?”

“No,” Harmony said softly. “It Invested the planet. Invested … me. What you saw was a shroud, Waxillium. I responded too slowly. It is … a failing that grows more dangerous in me. By the time I realized what was happening, that shroud had come over me. It doesn’t hurt, it merely dampens my ability to see.”

“You mean…”

“I don’t know what’s happening,” Harmony said softly, staring down at the planet. “What is Trell doing? What are they planning? They put that haze up as a kind of smoke screen. When I attacked it, the haze infected my ability to see the future. Temporarily. I will be rid of it in a few years. That’s nothing on the timescale of gods. And yet…”

“And yet, the danger is right now.”

“Yes,” Harmony said. “Like a nearsighted person, I can see the danger now that it has come very close.” He hesitated, then looked to Wax. “I can see you, hear you. We are Connected. And so, I know what you’ve discovered. I thought I had more time. I realize only now that I have been moving too slowly. Yet again, too slowly…”

Wax considered that, gave it due weight. These weren’t matters or concepts one took lightly. God blinded. All of them years behind the enemy. A bomb being developed and a search for a way into the heart of his city.

One question rose to the surface. An old lawman’s adage. If you wanted to stop a man, you needed to know what he wanted. Who he *was.*

“Harmony,” he said, “who is Trell?”

“Trell is the god Autonomy,” Harmony replied. “What we call a Shard of Adonalsium. Autonomy carries power like my own, a dangerous force for manipulating the very nature of reality and existence. Though Autonomy is held by a woman named Bavadin, her many different faces—or avatars—act with independence. Trell, a male god from the ancient records, can be considered one of these.”

Wax blinked.

“You were not expecting so straightforward an answer?” Harmony asked.

“I’ve not always gotten them in the past.”

“I’m trying to do better.”

That was … somehow as unnerving as hearing that Harmony had been blinded. God should not *have* to get better.

“You rarely get to speak to Autonomy herself,” Harmony continued. “As I’ve come to find, she speaks through avatars. Sometimes pieces of herself that she’s allowed to gain a semblance of self-awareness, sometimes through chosen people she has given a portion of her power.

“Autonomy decided to destroy our world, as it is a dangerous threat to her. But I believe she has been persuaded to let it persist, so long as it can be … controlled. Autonomy offered me an ultimatum last year, as my blinding was taking effect and when she assumed I would be the most desperate. She demanded I give this world to her, then move to another.

“I rejected the demand—and one of the last things I saw was the person Autonomy has chosen. The same one who persuaded her that this world had value, and who presented a plan for its domination.”

“My sister?”

Harmony nodded. “The leader of the Set. Invested by Autonomy. Avatar of a god on this world.”

Wax exhaled softly. Telsin.

Thinking of her brought an immediate stab of betrayal. He remembered exactly how it had felt to realize, in one terrible moment, that she would shoot him. Despite his love, his attempts to help her, she’d been working against him all along.

That pain was acute, despite the years. And he realized that he hadn’t left *everything* about his past behind. A thread lingered, a raw nerve exposed to the air.

Thinking of Telsin with the power of a deity in her hands … Rusts.

She’d spent her youth manipulating people. Getting her way. Telsin *always* got her way. It had been bad enough when she’d been able to persuade the adults she was sweet, obedient, and perfect—all the while sneaking out with her friends. It had become dangerous when she’d begun playing much higher-stakes games with the city’s elite. And it had become deadly when she’d discovered the Set and started shaping world politics.

What would she do with *this*?

“You’re only now telling me?” Wax demanded.

“I contacted you a year ago,” Harmony said, “when I was first blinded. You … still did not want to speak with me. And I was trying to respect that.”

Damn.

“But Wax,” Harmony said softly, “it is time again. I need a sword.”

A sword. That was what he’d been when he’d killed Lessie the second time. Cleaning up God’s mess. Executing his rogue kandra driven mad by lack of spikes.

“I know you’ve changed,” Harmony said. “I heard you earlier. I know you’re happy. I know you want nothing more to do with my works.”

“But my sister,” Wax said, “has the power of a god. Rusts. Marasi and Wayne—does she know what they’re planning with this sting? Are my friends in danger?”

“I wish I could say,” Harmony replied. “So far as I know, the enemy knows nothing of their plan. But … I’m blind, and your sister is extremely dangerous. Wax, I have tried to handle this in other ways. I have failed. And so, I come back to the one weapon I’ve always been able to rely upon.”

Wax took a deep breath. “Tell me what you know.”

“Are you agreeing?”

“First tell me what you know. About my sister’s plans, about this god. Anything relevant.”

“I’ve shared most of it,” Harmony said. “You should know, perhaps, that each of these powers—these Shards—has what we call an Intent. A driving motivation. I bear two: one driving me to preserve and protect, the other driving me to destroy.

“Autonomy is driven to divide off from the rest of us, go her own way. She pushes her followers to prove themselves, and she rewards those who are bold, who survive against the odds. She respects big plans and big accomplishments. I presume this is why your sister has persuaded Autonomy not to destroy our planet outright. Or at least to delay doing so.”

“Telsin is still planning something catastrophic,” Wax said. “She’s trying to destroy Elendel. But what does that get her? The other cities will revolt against such a terrible act of destruction; she can’t think they’ll follow her if she kills so many.”

“She’s desperate,” Harmony said. “Your sister has set up in Bilming. You’ll find her there, building a new empire. She must know that her god is still eager to wage war on our people and annihilate them. So, she is trying what she can. If Telsin destroys Elendel, she can try to take control of the

Basin and prove to Trell that she is capable of ruling this planet. I do not know if this is her true motive, but it is what seems most likely." Harmony glanced to him. "I'm sorry. I had not realized she would go this far."

Wax looked away, but it was difficult to blame Harmony. Wax himself had been blind to Telsin for years—and he didn't have the excuse of a divine shroud. He'd always assumed that he of all people knew the real her. Until he'd found himself just another pawn in her games, shown a false face. Made to feel an idiot. Why had he thought she would play everyone except him?

Because a part of him had loved his sister. Right up until the moment when she'd pulled the trigger and he'd known the truth. Family was nothing to her but a powerful cord with which to bind and manipulate.

"If what you have discovered is true," Harmony said, "we might not have much time for me to free myself from my shroud. Autonomy mobilizes an army from offworld to invade and destroy everyone on this planet. Telsin moves to circumvent that. Both plans are catastrophic to us, and both are in motion."

Damn. Wax took a deep breath. "You had me make a second earring. That's what finally convinced me to talk to you. Why?"

"I hoped that would work," Harmony said, a hint of a smile on his lips. "A good mystery is the best invitation."

"And? What do I do with it?"

"When Vin, the Ascendant Warrior, was resisting Ruin, she didn't realize that the little earring she wore linked her to him. It let him get inside her head, speak with her. Connect to her." He nodded to Wax's earring. "With a trellium spike, you will be Connected to Trell's avatar—much as you now are to me. She will be able to sense you, and you her."

"I don't know if that's a good idea," Wax said, shaking his head. "Whenever the two of us meet, she gets the better of me. I shouldn't try to play her games."

Harmony smiled. A faint smile, from one too burdened to be eager about the emotion. He actually seemed to do it on purpose, with effort. "As you wish. It is a tool for you to use. I've lost games over and over against Autonomy, but I still have help I can send you. Some do not realize I was behind their mobilization. Yet I did not know the urgency of our task. I did not know their bomb might be ready. I am caught flat-footed. That was their goal, I think. So I must ask. Will you be my sword again, Waxillium?"

"It is absolutely necessary?"

"That depends," he said, "on how you feel about the prospect of your sister taking my place as this planet's steward."

"That's … actually a possibility?"

"Yes."

"Damn."

"Disrupt Telsin's plan, and Autonomy will abandon her. That is our best bet."

"And the army Autonomy is bringing?"

"We will have to hope we have time to stop them after your sister's plan is subverted."

It didn't sound like much of a strategy. He looked to Harmony, and saw something different this time. Not the vastness of the powers, or even the figure of legend. But a man. Thrust into a war that none of them had been ready for, playing catch-up to learn powers that others had presumably spent millennia mastering.

*He's doing his best*, Wax thought. *And struggling to avoid being crushed by the opposing powers he holds. He needs help, and I'm all there is.*

When Wax had run to the Roughs, it had been to escape—but he'd *stayed* because people needed him.

He'd found peace in Elendel. He wouldn't return to the field because he wanted it or needed it. This time, he would go because he was *needed.*

"Final time?" Wax said.

"I promise," Harmony said. "Final time."

"All right," Wax said, and felt a weight settle onto him. "I'll stop Telsin. But you're going to have to deal with this Autonomy."

"Buy me time," Harmony said. "Time to recover. Time to build greater alliances in the years to come, so we can face her as a unified planet."

"I still don't know how bombing Elendel gets Telsin what she wants," he said. "It's too extreme. She's more rational than that. She's *got* to be planning to threaten us with it until we bend. Maybe she intends to … I don't know, detonate one in an Ashmount to cow us?"

"Perhaps. I do not know her ultimate plan. I'm sorry."

A mystery then. With terrible stakes. Wax met Harmony's eyes. "Is there anything you're not telling me?"

"Many things," Harmony admitted.

"Will any of them hurt, like what happened with Lessie?"

"Not on purpose," Harmony said. "But I cannot promise you will survive this. Or that if you do, it will be without pain. I can't promise much these days."

Wax made a fist.

"Do you trust me, Waxillium?" God asked.

"No," Wax said honestly. "But I trust her less. I've already said that I'll help. But I'm not only a sword, Harmony. I'm a lawman too. I'll find out what Telsin is doing. I'll answer the questions you cannot. I'll stop her that way."

"Thank you."

In a heartbeat, Wax was back in his penthouse. He'd never left, not physically. Steris knelt beside him, worried.

"He's been blinded," Wax said to her. "He didn't realize how urgent the problem was, and he's asked me to help. To intervene, and stop my sister." He took her by the arm. "I'm sorry. I need to go. I know you'll worry about me."

"Of course I will," she said. "But do you think I won't worry if you stay? If you're right about all of this…" She stood up. "It's not me or them, Wax. It's not politics or Allomancy. It's not me or Lessie. It's *never* been either/or. That part of your life isn't over merely because you didn't need it for a while. You need it now. We all do."

He stood up beside her. "I'll need to fetch my coat and my guns from the mansion."

"I have them here," she said, moving some stacks of broadsheets to uncover a cleaner's bag—from which she removed his mistcoat.

"I should have guessed that you'd have it laundered," he said. "Thank you for—"

There was a knock at the front door. They exchanged a look. Who was coming by at this hour of night, when even the servants had been dismissed? Wax walked to check, and outside—in the small hallway that led to the elevator foyer—he found a wrapped package.

He closed the door and showed the package to Steris. When unwrapped, it revealed a row of sixteen vials with—it appeared—a solution of alcohol and metal flakes inside. The last had a red-painted cork and a note. *Use the others instead of your normal vials. Use the last in an emergency only.*

Wax took these solemnly. Then, from the locked cabinet by the wall, he removed his strongbox—and from that two fully aluminum pistols, among Ranette's finest creations. Vindication II and the Steel Survivor.

The first was a powerful, large-caliber gun designed to hold hazekiller rounds in two extra chambers. Those rounds were oversized, the bullets designed with a secondary explosion for dealing with Hemalurgists. Ranette had come up with them to forcibly eject a spike from a person's body at close range. The second gun was a sleek mid-caliber pistol with an extra-long barrel for firing precision rounds. He generally loaded it with ordinary bullets that could be Pushed.

They slid into holsters that up until recently had held his unloaded guns. There was more in the box too. A gun bag, two feet long, holding something extra special, in several pieces that could be assembled. Ranette's most deadly design. He hesitated as he put a hand on it. Inside was a weapon not for a lawman, but for a soldier. Intent on destruction.

He put it back in the gun box. He wasn't going to need that. He was a lawman.

Steris bustled over with his large shoulder bag, extra wide and made of thick leather, for supplies. She packed his ammunition and extra metal vials—and, knowing her, a lunch—as he hurriedly gathered a few other things he thought he might need from the study. This included a belt with a pouch lined in aluminum, for holding metal vials. He could clip it closed, and the glass vials inside would be untouchable to enemy Allomancers. Into this he loaded half of the vials Harmony had sent.

When he returned, she held out his mistcoat for him. He took it in a two-handed grip.

"Steris," he said, "the Senate … I can't be in two places at once. Can you talk to the governor? This is a bad time for me to leave, with the new ambassador here. Hell … it might not be bad to prepare the governor for the worst, explaining about the potential for a bomb."

"I don't know if he will listen," Steris said. "The senators and the governor don't even listen to you—they'll outright ignore me."

“Still, we should try.”

“We … could appoint someone to represent the house…”

“Steris,” he said, “I stepped up to lead the house because of *your* dreams of what we could do. Your wonderful dreams. You saw in me someone who could do what needed to be done, and you were right.” He took her gently by the shoulder. “I see in you the same person. A better one. I’ve been working on your ideas these last years. Your *genius.* You can lead as well as I can. Better, even.”

“I’m not good with people,” she whispered. “I’ll ruin it. I’ve thought, and I’ve planned, and I always reach the same conclusion. I can’t be trusted with something this important; we need someone more suitable.”

“What if I think otherwise?” Wax said. “What if I think you’re absolutely the *best* person to represent our house? War is building—and it’s going to get worse if I do uncover a conspiracy in Bilming. We need someone to stop the hotheads. Someone meticulous, who has considered all the possibilities.”

“I … I don’t know. If I can do it.”

“*I* believe in you, Steris. I will appoint someone else if you want. But I think you can do it best.”

She met his eyes. Then, hesitantly, she nodded.

“Thank you,” he said.

“If you *really* think this is best, then I will try. I am bad with people, but you are good with them. So it stands to reason that perhaps you are right. About me.” She squeezed his arms. “Go. I will see to the Senate. Somehow.”

He kissed her, still holding the mistcoat in one hand, wrapping his other arm around her. As he did, a small pair of hands gripped him and Steris around the legs.

“Max!” Steris said, breaking the embrace and looking down. “Why aren’t you in bed?”

“Because I’m in here,” he said.

She lifted him up as Wax stepped back and threw on his coat, then slung his heavy ammunition bag over his shoulder.

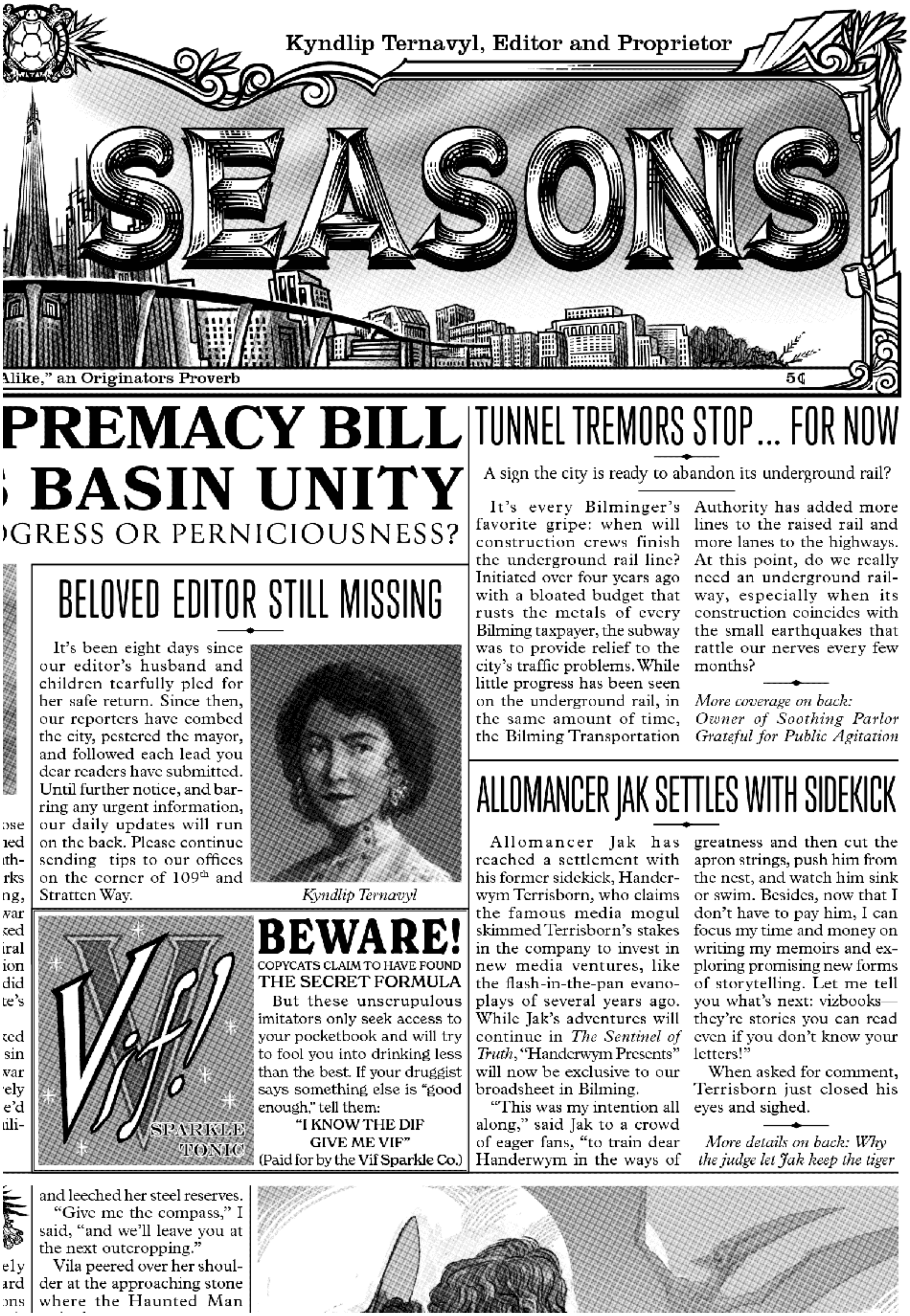
“You need to go fight monsters now?” Max asked.

“If I can find them,” Wax said.

“You can,” Max said. “You’re the best detector that ever lived. Uncle Wayne told me. He said you can find any treasure there ever was to be found.”

“I’ve already found the best treasures, Max,” Wax said, turning—mistcoat tassels rustling in that old familiar way. Like whispers speaking an ancient tongue. “Now I just have to keep them safe.”

He threw open the balcony doors and launched out into the sky toward the city of Bilming. Stars both above and beneath—with a highway lined in light pointing the way forward.



Kyndlip Ternavyl, Editor and Proprietor

SEASONS

like," an Originators Proverb

5¢

## PREMACY BILL
## BASIN UNITY

GRESS OR PERNICIOUSNESS?

## TUNNEL TRENORS STOP… FOR NOW

A sign the city is ready to abandon its underground rail?

It's every Bilminger's favorite gripe: when will construction crews finish the underground rail line? Initiated over four years ago with a bloated budget that rusts the metals of every Bilming taxpayer, the subway was to provide relief to the city's traffic problems. While little progress has been seen on the underground rail, in the same amount of time, the Bilming Transportation Authority has added more lines to the raised rail and more lanes to the highways. At this point, do we really need an underground railway, especially when its construction coincides with the small earthquakes that rattle our nerves every few months?

*More coverage on back: Owner of Soothing Parlor Grateful for Public Agitation*

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*Kyndlip Ternavyl*

Vif! SPARKLE TONIC

**BEWARE!**

COPYCATS CLAIM TO HAVE FOUND THE SECRET FORMULA

But these unscrupulous imitators only seek access to your pocketbook and will try to fool you into drinking less than the best. If your druggist says something else is "good enough," tell them:

"I KNOW THE DIF
GIVE ME VIF"

(Paid for by the Vif Sparkle Co.)

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Allomancer Jak has reached a settlement with his former sidekick, Handerwym Terrisborn, who claims the famous media mogul skimmed Terrisborn's stakes in the company to invest in new media ventures, like the flash-in-the-pan evanoplays of several years ago. While Jak's adventures will continue in *The Sentinel of Truth*, "Handerwym Presents" will now be exclusive to our broadsheet in Bilming.

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When asked for comment, Terrisborn just closed his eyes and sighed.

*More details on back: Why the judge let Jak keep the tiger*

and leeched her steel reserves.

"Give me the compass," I said, "and we'll leave you at the next outcropping."

Vila peered over her shoulder at the approaching stone where the Haunted Man

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# PART TWO

# 20

Marasi got a few hours of sleep, nestled in the front seat of the truck as her convoy rolled toward Bilming. Fortunately they'd been able to recruit drivers from the constabulary night watch, so they were used to the hours. Hers wasn't the talkative type. The woman wore her jacket with the collar up, a cap on her head to shadow her face. The team had been told to maintain their disguises even while driving.

When Marasi had dozed off, they'd been traveling through the bleak darkness beyond Elendel. When she blinked awake, the sun was rising and they were passing the Bilming suburbs. Marasi had never been to the city, though it was only a few hours by train along the coast, but she had a good grasp on the politics of why this city was so important.

As traffic into the capital had grown overwhelming, Bilming had become an essential port and dockyard. Its seaside nature let it trade with other coastal towns, ignoring Elendel's railway monopoly. In addition, Bilming was a chief port for trade with the Southern Continent—where much commerce was being handled by traditional ocean shipping, not airship.

The discovery of those new lands had brought wealth into Bilming. And wealth meant power. Many in Elendel thought they had let the people of Bilming grow too independent—and in recent years, it had become the one city in the Basin that could legitimately rival Elendel.

Many in the capital spoke of Bilming snidely, pretending it was a rural outpost of half-educated sailors and drunken dockworkers. Marasi knew better. This wasn't a rural backwater; Bilming was a metropolis in the making.

She passed neatly laid-out suburbs—but even more swaths of land that had been set aside to eventually be filled. Many developments were mid-construction, houses being built, each in a different style, no two roofs matching one another. No two doorways in the same place. Yet there was a strange *symmetry* to it. One she couldn't quite pin down.

It was the same downtown, which—though still distant—she could see had half-finished pillars of skyscrapers growing up like the mythical spires of Kredik Shaw. A dominant building at the direct center was furthest along. It had to be a good seventy or eighty stories high, rivaling the tallest buildings in Elendel.

Each of the buildings—particularly the one at the center—had a strange aesthetic that mixed the feel of a fortress with modern sleek lines and steel finishings. As they drove closer, the roadway passed under a large elevated railway that ran in a circle around the city. Some sections were unfinished, but big swaths of it were already in operation.

Everything had a metallic feel to it, like burnished steel, enhanced by the skeletons of buildings rising up, their girders exposed. The finished buildings had metal roofs or siding—not always polished, and often with a patina. The overall effect gave the great variety of building shapes a cohesive theme.

She was impressed. Even half-finished, this was a city with a plan. The design screamed of industry, forward thinking, and accomplishment. They passed numerous billboards proclaiming the virtues of self-reliance and sovereignty. You didn't have to read far between the lines to see the tone those were setting. Independence from Elendel.

"You ever notice," her driver said, "how kids always draw houses the same way?"

Marasi frowned, glancing at her. The woman's voice was on the deeper side, but Marasi couldn't make out much about her. Marasi had chosen her truck at random, picking one that had boxes in the back, not constables—hoping that would help her sleep.

"I can't say that I've noticed," Marasi said.

"It's strange," the driver continued. "You can imagine the shape, of course. Square box. Triangular roof. Door right in the center. Two windows. Often a chimney, even though fewer and fewer homes have those these days. What house *actually* looks like that? Almost none. So why do kids draw them?”

“I guess it’s easy,” Marasi said.

“Perhaps,” her driver said. “Or maybe they’re not drawing a house. They’re drawing someone else’s *picture* of a house. What they’ve seen others make. An icon. A symbol.”

Marasi narrowed her eyes. “That’s an interesting observation, Constable … what was your name?”

“I go by Moonlight,” the woman said. “We like code names. It’s one of our things.”

“I … have never heard that word before.”

“You wouldn’t have, since you have no moon here.” The woman leaned back and stretched out her arm on the top of the steering wheel, causing her sleeve to inch back and reveal a red tattoo on her forearm, above the wrist. The same symbol that had been on the card left for her.

Slowly, cautiously, Marasi reached for the pistol in the holster under her arm.

“You won’t need that,” the woman said, her eyes still on the road. They’d been forced to slow considerably now that they were approaching the center of the city. Who would have guessed that an Outer City would have so much traffic?

“Where’s the constable who should have been driving this truck?” Marasi asked. “What did you do to her?”

“Nothing,” the woman said. “She’s fine. But I find it amusing that’s the first thing you ask. I mean, I understand—but maybe get your priorities straight, Marasi.”

Marasi kept her fingers lightly on the grip of the handgun, but didn’t draw it. “Was it you in the cavern? The person wearing a white mask?”

“It was black,” the woman said, passing that little test. “Yes. That was me.”

“And … are you human?”

“One hundred percent,” the woman said. “I’m not a local though.” She pulled off her cap, revealing straight black hair in a ponytail and uncommon features. A shape to the eyes Marasi had never seen, prominent cheekbones.

“Are you from the Southern Continent?” Marasi asked.

“No.” Moonlight nodded to the city outside. “I’ve always hated Bilming. I should like the thought they put into design, yet the underlying message disturbs me. They’re trying hard to make each building individual, but the way it comes together is too deliberate. It makes the artistry feel hollow.”

“And why do you think that is?”

“Because of Trell’s influence, obviously.”

Marasi leaned forward. “Tell me. *Please.*”

Moonlight glanced at her for the first time. Such self-assured eyes, with a cocked half smile on her lips. This was a woman who had put herself at the very center of a group of constables and didn’t seem the slightest bit worried.

“So hungry,” Moonlight said. “We don’t always share answers with outsiders, Marasi.”

“I could have you arrested and interrogated.”

“On what charges?”

“Interfering with constable business.”

“Interfering? How? I was instructed to drive this truck.”

“Don’t play coy,” Marasi said. “You’re impersonating a constable—plus it’s against the law to withhold information vital to an investigation.”

The woman smiled, turning her eyes back to the road. “Strange how similar cops are, regardless of the planet.”

Regardless of the *planet.* Rust and Ruin …

Marasi had known that there were other planets out there, of course. The kandra talked about it. But … rusts. It was still hard to accept.

They pulled to a halt as some traffic worked its way into the street ahead of them. As they did, a beggar came to Marasi’s window. Per the notebook’s instructions, Marasi unlatched the window and folded it down, then handed the beggar a few boxings. The dirty man slipped her a piece of paper.

“Can you get to Biggle Way?” Marasi asked, reading the note.

“Yeah,” Moonlight said, turning them down the next street. “That’s in the industrial district.”

Marasi’s truck pulled into the lead and the convoy followed her, all ten keeping in a tight double line. At the next corner, Wayne’s truck came up beside them. She could make him out talking the ear off his driver—who turned out to be Hoid, Wax’s coachman. How had *he* gotten involved in the sting?

“Can’t tell these days,” Moonlight said, “if I’m keeping watch on him, or if he’s keeping watch on me. Realistically, we’re both just keeping watch on the same third parties…”

“What. *Hoid?*” Marasi asked. “He’s been in Wax’s employ for years. He’s an odd fellow, but…”

In the next truck, Hoid glanced at them—past Marasi—and nodded to Moonlight.

Damn. What in the world? How much of her time had she wasted on bank robberies or protection rackets, when *this* was going on?

Whatever *this* was.

“Has it ever struck you,” Moonlight said, “how art is so destructive?”

“Art?” Marasi said, frowning. “Destructive?”

“Each new movement consumes the one that came before,” Moonlight said, starting them forward as the traffic began to creep into motion again. “Chops it up and feeds on the corpse. Takes the bones, but drapes new skin on them. Each new piece of art is in some way a parody of what has come before.”

“You sound like an artist yourself.”

“I have certain talents,” she said. “My experiences have given me an interest in the quirks of the artistic world—and its … *values,* you might say. Tell me. Let’s say you had one of only sixteen extremely rare pieces of art by the same artist. What would you do to ensure yours becomes the most valuable?”

“If I play along,” Marasi said, “will you tell me about Trell?”

“I’m trying to, right now.”

Marasi frowned, considering. “I have one of sixteen pieces of art … and I must ensure mine is the most valuable?”

“Yup.”

“I’d try to create an air of mystique around it,” Marasi said. “I wouldn’t show it off. I’d let the other fifteen become common by comparison—and the value of mine would increase as people shared the story. There *is* one more. One *no one* has seen.”

“Clever,” Moonlight said. “I’m impressed.”

“And what would you do?” Marasi said.

“Steal the other fifteen,” Moonlight said. “Then I’d be able to manipulate the market however I wanted.”

“Ruthless.”

“Not as ruthless as other options. These pieces of art exist, Marasi, and your planet’s god holds two of them.”

“Ruin and Preservation.”

“Indeed. That makes Harmony the most valuable—the most Invested—being in the cosmere. One of the other sixteen decided the best way to improve *his* stock was to try to destroy all the others. He managed it in a few cases.”

“And … is that Trell?”

Moonlight shook her head. “No, his name is Odium. Trell—Autonomy—had a different idea. You see these buildings? These houses? All pieces of a larger art installation. The grand creation is impressive, but it’s not yours. This kind of pattern, and those straight lines, those reflective panels … that’s from a Taldain movement known as brutalism.

“That’s part of what I hate about Autonomy. She claims she wants everyone to be individual. Gives them each a little house that is distinctive from the others, but only in a way that fits *her* plan, *her* desires. It’s fake individualism. A corporate uniqueness. Like an advertisement telling people to go their own way, be their own person—by buying this product like everyone else.”

Marasi struggled to parse all of this. But what she understood reinforced what she had suspected. A being from another planet was leading this city, and had plans for the people of Marasi’s world.

“What is Trell’s goal, then?” Marasi asked. “If he doesn’t want to destroy the other gods?”

“Trell is trying to edge out the others,” Moonlight said. “She—he, they, it varies—doesn’t like engaging other gods directly. We call them Shards, by the way. Autonomy is trying to outcompete the others by filling the cosmere with versions of herself. Crowd out the competition, so to speak. Like an extremely invasive plant moving into another ecosystem and strangling the local varieties.”

Marasi frowned. “I … think I understand.”

“Conversations about Autonomy can be confusing,” Moonlight said, her eyes on the road. “Trellism is the remnants of an ancient religion on your world, originally founded by Autonomy long, long ago. A seed for when she decided to move in. Now, that time has come. Autonomy is looking for someone on this planet to fully take up that role, that identity.”

“Wait, *take up* that role?”

“She wants to leave a god behind on this planet,” Moonlight explained. “Someone who bears some of her power, who sees to her interests, and is—in many ways—a piece of her soul. She does this all around the cosmere. Some worlds have entire pantheons that are all versions of her, each of which has a distinct personality and identity.”

“So … she’s role-playing? With herself?”

“Yes,” Moonlight said. “But Autonomy’s Investiture has a life of its own, and so each version of her becomes its own thing over time. Sometimes they aren’t a person but only power. Other times, if the situation needs more oversight, she picks someone to elevate.”

“So…” Marasi said, “she’s going to take our world by setting up a rival god and forcing Harmony out?”

“Basically,” Moonlight said. “Your planet is a primary target for her, Marasi. Two Shards in residence, held by one person, frightens her. You had gunpowder weapons and electricity before any planet in the cosmere aside from her core homeworld. She sees you getting stronger, learning more and more. Getting close to real secrets. It makes you the biggest threat in the cosmere, at least to her.”

“I don’t see how this could defeat Harmony though.”

“I don’t either, honestly,” Moonlight said. “I’m not sure any human can understand the full plan. But she knows Harmony has trouble acting, and so she has seen an opportunity.”

Marasi sat back, breathing out, her hand slipping from her gun. Answers. *Actual* answers. She’d been searching for so long, hit so many dead ends. To finally get an explanation felt … wonderful.

“So Autonomy is looking for an avatar,” Marasi said.

“She’s likely found one. A woman named Telsin.”

“Wax’s *sister*?” Damn.

“Granted, there’s rivalry among the ranks,” Moonlight said. “There always is, with Autonomy. So Telsin will have to prove she’s the strongest, the best. And, since creativity and individualism are Autonomy’s stated intents, she’ll reward grit, success, vision.”

Moonlight nodded to the half-finished buildings they were passing. “This city is an example of that, all designed by one gifted architect Telsin promoted five years ago. His work is meant to impress Autonomy … but the individual homeowners? They don’t get to design anything. They get a manufactured ‘individual’ house.”

“Seems like a raw deal,” Marasi said.

“Depends on what you want,” Moonlight said. “Living under her can be safe if you keep your head down, don’t stray into the dangerous regions where she demands that you test yourself. Autonomy is brutal, but also generous. If you impress her, you rise through her ranks. Even if you go *against* what you’re told, and you are successful, you are rewarded.”

“And if you fail?”

“It doesn’t go well for you,” Moonlight said. Her eyes grew distant. “She sickens me. But I do understand her … I think. It’s taken a while.”

Marasi sat back in her seat, thoughtful. Answers, finally. But at the same time … how much could she trust this woman? Was any of this true?

“Why explain this to me now?” Marasi asked.

“Because you’ve impressed my organization,” Moonlight said. “We who defend Scadrial have to move very carefully; there are forces in this world—Harmony included—that might crush us, if we take the wrong step.”

That gave Marasi pause. If they didn’t work for Harmony, who *did* they work for?

Moonlight led the truck caravan off the highway at last, passing through the outskirts of the city on the northern edge.

“It’s so … fabricated,” Moonlight said. “Look at that sign. You see it?”

“The billboard?” Marasi said, glancing at the large posted drawing of a stylized version of Bilming, with light rising behind it. PRIDE IN PROGRESS, it said. OUTER CITIES SELF-RELIANCE MOVEMENT.

“Those are all over the city,” Moonlight said. “Nights! The same exact piece of art, a hundred times over. Art that can be reproduced … is it really art at all?”

“Of course it is,” Marasi said. “Why would it stop being art just because it’s replicated?”

“It’s crass.”

“Said like an elitist,” Marasi said. “If you truly were interested in the *beauty* of the art—instead of some tangential sense of control—you’d want everyone to be able to experience it. The more the better.”

“Well argued,” Moonlight said. “I’ll admit that my distaste for Autonomy might taint my opinion.”

They led the convoy onto Biggle Way, then drove slowly in a single-file line. Eventually someone fell into step alongside Marasi’s truck, wearing a red jacket as the notebook said. She unlatched the window again.

“Ahead, across the Grand Motorway,” he said. “Third building on the right.”

She nodded and put the window back up. At the end of the street, they reached the Grand Motorway—a vast *six-lane* highway. Marasi had never seen a street so wide. “Are there really so many cars these days that such a thing is necessary?”

“They’re planning,” Moonlight said, “for a much larger city in the future.”

Well, they might not need that many lanes yet, but there was still plenty of traffic on the Grand Motorway. They had to wait for traffic to slow and give them a chance to cross. Ahead she could see a line of large warehouses—the third one’s cargo door was open. That was it, their drop-off.

“Are you going to interfere?” Marasi asked. “With our operation?”

“No,” Moonlight said. “You have my word.”

“Can I talk to you afterward?” Marasi asked.

“Yes,” Moonlight said. “But Marasi, I can only say so much to an outsider. For now I’m just here to watch.”

At a lull in the traffic, Moonlight pulled across—though the other nine trucks had to wait their turn.

“And what if bullets start flying?” Marasi asked. “You’re going to sit here and watch?”

“I’m not a constable, as you pointed out,” Moonlight said. “So yes. Consider me an external admirer of your work. Interested in the quirks of those who follow the law—and their … *value*.”

She smiled in a knowing way, then pulled into the cavernous warehouse. As soon as all ten trucks arrived, the sting could begin.

# 21

Wayne nodded as the trucks ahead waited to cross the highway. “Well then, Hoid,” he said to the coachman, “that’s all I know about how to pickle vegetables.”

“… Thank you?” Hoid said.

“’S all right,” Wayne said. “I’m a bastion of useful information, I am.”

The truck ahead of them pulled forward, crossing the vast motorway filled with sixteens upon sixteens of cars. Hoid moved their truck up, next in line.

“Can I have my harmonica back now?” Hoid asked.

Wayne fished in his pocket and brought it out. “I traded you fair for this!”

“You did nothing of the sort.”

“I did!” Wayne said. “The trade is in the glove box. You’re always too watchy for me to slip things in your pocket. How’d you get so good at that, anyways? You’re a rusting coachman.”

“Practice,” Hoid said solemnly. “A very *great* amount of practice.” He opened the glove box, and a bright white creature with a long, hairless tail peeked out. “Wayne. A *live rat*?”

“I call him Sir Squeekins,” Wayne said. “I wasn’t gonna bring him, but he snuck into my pocket, he did. So I figure, ‘That’s the seventeenth time you’ve let him escape his cage, Wayne. Better give him to someone responsible.’”

“You are a uniquely bizarre individual,” Hoid said, smiling as the rat crawled up his arm. “But … trade accepted, I guess?”

“Great, great,” Wayne replied. “He likes strawberries and booze, but don’t give him none of the booze, ’cuz he’s a rat.”

“Noted.”

They waited at the edge of the wide roadway. And Wayne, he’d had this feeling all day today. Something was happening. Something important.

“You ever feel,” Wayne said, “like you wish life was like the stories?”

“What do you mean?” Hoid asked.

“There’s always a good ending in those stories. The ones my ma used to tell … they *meant* something. People, they were *worth* something.”

“I think we live stories every day,” Hoid replied. “Ones that we will remember, and tell, and shape like clay to be what we need them to be.”

“The last story my ma told me,” Wayne said, “was about a lawman. Funny, huh? That I’d end up becoming one. Except he was a hero. And I’m … well, I’m me.”

“You do yourself a disservice, Master Wayne,” Hoid said softly.

“Can’t be no hero if you were a villain, Hoid.”

“But in most of the stories, it is the villain who knows the hero best.”

Wayne chewed on that, watching the flow of cars on the road ahead. And … found himself imagining that roadway as a river. Because a part of him wished that what Hoid said could be true.

Then he waited some more.

And some more.

Damn. Someone really ought to come up with a way to make it so cars that wanted to cross had a better chance. Maybe you could hire someone to stand at the corner and fire a gun in the air when too many cars were blocking the way, and frighten them to move faster? Anyway, that zooming of cars … that road could be a wide river. Yeah, a river of stone and steel. Faster than any other river in the world.

He smiled, remembering a calm, beautiful voice that had kept his world solid for so long.

*Yeah, there’s a bandit to be chased,* he thought. *But it’s still wrong. Where’s the hero? He should be here, but he stayed behind.*

In a lull, Hoid gunned the truck and they scooted across—earning only three honks from cars that had to slow. Pretty good, considering. You could cross even the fastest river, full of the worst kinds of rocks, if you were in a bigger rock yourself. No need to fly, like Jak had in the story. This wasn't cheating. It was just a smarter way, it was.

Followed by the last of their convoy, they pulled into the dim warehouse lit by some unlatched windows up along the tops of the walls. Why put the windows up there, where nobody could see outta them?

Oh, right. Illegal stuff. Yeah, that made sense.

"Thanks for the ride, Hoid," Wayne said, pulling out his gangster hat—a worn wool cap traded off one of the thugs they'd caught. "You might wanna keep your head down if this next part gets shooty. Hope it won't though."

"Understood, Master Wayne," Hoid said. "Best of luck."

Wayne nodded, and it was time to become someone else. He scrunched up his face, squinting like Franis did—that was the guy he'd gotten the hat off of. A fellow Wayne's height and age, but more weathered. By time, by smokes, by the things he'd done. Wayne already wore a wig to change his hair color, along with a bit of rubber on his chin to square it out, and some makeup to sink his eyes. With the hat, he *was* Franis—missing only one thing.

He climbed out and swaggered. Franis sure knew how to swagger.

VenDell—wearing the Cycle's body, a man named Granks—met him outside the truck. The others waited quietly. All those dirty conners in the trucks would jump out only when they had someone important to catch. Someone more than a bunch of useless, low-level cretins.

Not that Franis was a cretin. He just needed work, you know? You started by taking a job at the docks, but work there grew tight. And the schedules were so bad. Then you heard your friend Vin had a job with someone who paid better, and all you had to do was move some boxes. Who could get into trouble for moving boxes? Even if you did have to keep a gun on you at all times, and be ready to shoot.

He swaggered in beside VenDell in his fancy suit and fancier body. "It's uncanny," the kandra said, "how you do that. You imitate a person nearly as well as one of my kin."

"Just gotta find someone what looks a little like you," Wayne said, "and make up the difference. Also, stay in character."

"Right, right," the kandra said. He wasn't half bad—considering what a fussy little thing he normally was. He wore Granks's body well. A gangster who had proven himself enough to be elevated. Given a title and some authority, while the rest of them were basically hired hands.

They crossed the vast chamber toward two fellows who emerged from the perimeter. Indeed, a lot of fellows began moving in. A good forty armed men. A local gang. That was … more people than the constables had.

*We'll have surprise though,* Wayne thought. And the trucks were armored, offering cover. It should be fine, with Wayne and Marasi—not to mention a Faceless Immortal—on their side. MeLaan was quite the fighter; VenDell should be handy in a scrap too.

The two fellows that stepped up to meet with them wore work clothing: suspenders, trousers, buttoned shirts. Not good enough. They needed at least a Suit—the rank that Granks would report to—and preferably a Sequence, or even a fully promoted Series. There were only a couple of those in the Set at a time though. And one leader. The Key.

Wayne/Franis didn't want any of those important jobs. He wasn't interested in wearing the fancy clothing and drawing the gunfire. Pay him his wages and let him pretend he wasn't doing nothing wrong.

"Cycle," said the stouter of the two men, nodding. He would *probably* be a fellow named Dip, according to the interrogations. Or … maybe he was one named Embrier.

Whoever he was, he glanced at Franis, but didn't say anything to him directly. "You can leave the trucks," he told VenDell. "Gather your men in the two vans outside and head home. Your success has been noted."

"Fine," VenDell grumbled—using a pretty good version of Granks's accent. "But I need to talk to the Sequence. There's an issue."

"The radio line isn't good enough?" maybe-Dip said, glancing at his companion.

"I have reason to believe the radios are compromised," VenDell said. "The Sequence is here, isn't he?"

That was Wayne's suggestion. The leader types, they *always* hung around and watched. Didn't trust good, honest(ish) thieves like Franis to do their job right. So yeah, a higher-level member of the Set would be here. Somewhere. Sure as Franis wasn't Franis right now, but was somebody kind of close—as close as someone could get, unless he could wear Franis's bones, which was cheatin' and that was that.

Anyway. Important negotiations. Life or death. Surrounded by forty armed men. Better pay attention.

“I will convey your message to the Sequence,” maybe-Dip said.

“That won’t be good enough,” VenDell said. “There is a problem. A very large problem.”

The two thugs looked at one another. Damn … they were suspicious.

Wayne glanced at the people at the perimeter, who would need only one offhand comment to start shooting. So he made a quick decision. The fellow wouldn’t be the one named Dip. Because who would put a guy named Dip in charge of anything?

“Hey, Embrier,” he said, using a slightly modified version of his own accent—dockworker, but overlaid with the kind of sniveling accent these thugs had all adopted. People what worked together, they started to pick up one another’s ways of speaking. “Can we talk a spell?”

The stout man glanced at him, then nodded. “Yeah, Franis?”

Wayne waved him over, and they slipped to the side. VenDell started up a conversation with the other man, going over the inventory they’d been able to “acquire.”

“What’s up, Franis?” the thug said quietly, then thumbed over his shoulder. “The Cycle *never* cares about things like this. Just does what he’s told.”

“Brain like wet concrete,” Wayne agreed softly. “Can you *believe* he’s the one what got chosen?”

“I can believe it,” Embrier said. “He never questions. Unlike you.”

“Hey,” Wayne said, “I only question when my paycheck is coming.”

“Don’t we all,” Embrier said, then shot him a sideways glance. “You’ve been getting some sun.”

Damn. The makeup hadn’t been light enough. Could he get the man to ask after his father? Wayne had some good info from the real Franis on his father. “You know. Heavy work. Like Dad always said—best work is the kind you do with your arms and back.”

“Yeah, but don’t you live in a cavern?”

“I don’t *live* in the rusting *cavern,*” Wayne said. “What, you think I stay down there in the dark?”

Embrier grunted. “How’s your sister?”

Sister? Aw, rusts. Wayne glanced at Embrier. That smile.

“You stay away from my damn sister,” Wayne said.

“Just askin’,” Embrier said, raising his hands. “Ruin. No need to come out swinging.”

“Look,” Wayne said softly, “Cycle isn’t acting strange—he’s worried. Saw some lady conner sniffing around our base. Dark hair. You know the one?”

The man cursed under his breath. “Why didn’t you say so?”

“I just rusting did. But Cycle wants to report it. Thinks he’ll get … you-know-who’s attention. For spotting a conner what we *know* is likely to be around. Rusting idiot.”

But Embrier had gone a little pale at the implication that the Cycle wanted to draw Trell’s attention. Best to … ease away from that. Wayne threw his arm around the fellow’s shoulder and walked them back toward the others.

“’Sides,” he said to Embrier. “You can forget my sister. I’ve met this woman, she’d be great for you.”

“Really?” Embrier asked.

“Sure. She thought *Yulip* was handsome.”

“Yulip? The koloss-blooded who looks like a *frog*?”

“Same one,” Wayne said, rejoining the others.

Embrier shook his head. “Insanity.” He nodded to VenDell. “I’ll go get the Sequence. You can start your men unloading.”

VenDell turned, waving for the process to begin. Hopefully Marasi would keep her head down, like Wayne had told her. She was too damn obvious, that one. Needed to learn how to scrunch her face up and become someone she wasn’t, once in a while. Really helped with the self-loathing.

*Still shouldn’t have crossed the river without the hero,* Wayne thought as the two thugs jogged to the rear of the room and opened a door.

“Seriously,” VenDell asked Wayne, “how do you *do* that? You don’t even have their bones.”

“Gotta have fewer sticks up your posterior, VenDell,” Wayne said. “Yank one or two out, and you’ll see.”

“It’s patently unfair,” he said. “A mortal should *not* be able to stand beside one of the Bearers of the Contract and seem a fair match to their skill in imitation.”

“Aw, jealousy,” Wayne said. He breathed it in. “Smells like cherry blossoms. Also, stop breakin’ character, ya sod.”

Finally, two figures in nicer clothing stepped from a darkened room at the back of the warehouse. Perfect. That was what they’d wanted. Hopefully the waiting constables could—

Suddenly, the outer doors slammed open and figures in brown began flooding in, pointing guns at the thugs. “Drop your weapons!” a voice shouted. “This is a sting!”

“It’s the heat!” Wayne said, slipping his gun out of his holster.

VenDell grabbed his arm.

“Oh yeah,” Wayne said, letting his arm be lowered. “Right, right. I forget sometimes…”

But these weren’t *their* people. What the hell? All around, the thugs were turning—but nobody fired, because more and more figures in brown were pouring in. At least a hundred constables. Wearing …

… the shield and tortoise, symbol of *Bilming*. These were local constables.

Marasi’s sting had just been stung.

# 22

Marasi groaned and sat up in her seat, pulling off the hat she'd used to obscure her face.

Bilming city constables. Wonderful. She glanced at Moonlight, who shrugged.

"I had no idea," Moonlight said.

Marasi sighed. At least the locals knew to surround the Sequence and his flunky—a pack of at least twenty constables were holding weapons on him. They might not know about the Set, but they understood things like smuggling and gangsters. The rest of the newly arrived constables were rounding up thugs who had wisely decided not to shoot, as they were far outnumbered. They reluctantly dropped their weapons.

Marasi kicked open her door and hopped down. Immediately, several of the advancing constables turned weapons on her. She sighed and raised her hands. "I'm Elendel Constabulary!" she shouted at them. "Special Detective Marasi Colms!"

"What's this?" a voice demanded. A tall woman with short blonde hair—wearing a Bilming uniform—pushed through the constables. Marasi thought she knew the woman.

"Captain Blantach?" Marasi said. "We met at the intercity training event last year."

The woman looked Marasi up and down, then groaned. Nearby, some of Marasi's people were hesitantly climbing out of the backs of trucks—showing their credentials.

Captain Blantach put her palm to her forehead. "You're *kidding* me," she said. "You're running a sting *inside* my city?"

"I have jurisdiction in the entire Basin," Marasi said, fishing for the paperwork. "Constable-General Reddi authorized it under the oversight of the governor."

"You *claim* jurisdiction in the entire Basin!" Blantach said, waving the authorizations away. "Rusting Elenders. *Of course* you would pull an operation in my city and not even *send word*."

Marasi felt a little bad for the woman. Still, the Set had the Outer Cities under its thumb. Sending advance word to the local constables would have been far too risky; there were almost certainly Set agents within Blantach's organization.

Though … the fact that the constables were here seemed to disprove that theory.

"You're going to need to turn them over to us," Marasi said, waving at the gangsters.

"Like hell we are," Blantach said, folding her arms across her uniform jacket, stiff and buttoned tight.

"This is part of a much bigger network," Marasi said.

"Then we'll discover that during interrogation."

Marasi sighed, but took a deep breath. "Blantach," she said, "do we *have* to fight this fight?"

The taller woman eyed her, but said nothing.

"The politicians don't get along," Marasi said, "but that's their business. *Our* business is protecting the cities—all of them. Just a couple of conners with our hands full. Let's work together rather than squabble."

"Perhaps I can agree to that … if we do it on *my* terms."

"This thing I'm hunting," Marasi said, "it goes deep. Dangerously deep. And it has little tendrils of mist wrapping around all parts of society. Your city's leaders are *almost certainly* compromised."

"You said this wasn't about politics."

"I said we shouldn't worry about how divisive the politicians are being," Marasi said. "But everything touches on politics these days. The group I'm pursuing are deliberately stoking war between Elendel and the Outer Cities.

"If we get close to them, there are elements in *both* governments who are going to try to stop us. Which is why I couldn't warn you we were coming. I apologize for that, but most in my *own* government don't know about this operation."

Blantach waved away an aide who came trotting up, perhaps to deliver a count of enemies taken captive, and continued to regard Marasi. This situation was a bit like a political negotiation—but Marasi had an advantage over Steris and Wax. You never really could tell what senators wanted. But fellow constables?

You didn't take up this job for glory—or at least you didn't *stay* in this job for glory. Anyone who wanted glory quickly moved on to judgeships or attorney positions, promoted away from actual detective work as soon as possible. But Blantach was a career constable. She'd been in her job longer than Reddi.

"You're making me worried, Colms," Blantach said.

"How hard was this operation to organize?" Marasi asked. "Were those in your own government—higher members of the constabulary—working against you?"

"That's how everything is." Blantach shrugged. "You know red tape. It…" She trailed off, frowning. "There might have been a *tad* more on this mission."

"So why didn't they quash it entirely?" Marasi whispered. "Why'd they let you continue?"

"I was determined."

That wasn't it. If the Set had known about this mission, and had been intent on quashing it, they would have.

*The weapons were being smuggled here to arm the forces in Bilming anyway,* Marasi realized. *So it's fine if the government seizes them. They'll still go where they need to.* The Set had to run a delicate operation. They might be in control of Bilming, but most people didn't know that. So why tip their hand and prevent a raid, when all the Set needed to do was make sure the seized goods went to the right places in the city?

And what of the Sequence? Marasi glanced at the pile of constables surrounding him. He'd been bound, but maintained an air of confidence. He had a refined look, a stylish suit. Thick eyebrows and prominent lips. Her guess was that he had been aware of the sting and was playing along, knowing he'd be released later.

Then he saw Marasi. And he cocked his head, frowning. He stepped closer and had to be restrained by the constables—as if he'd forgotten about them. He stared at her, confused.

A moment later he smiled a broad, even excited smile. He flexed, then stretched his neck.

Rusts. What was she missing?

Oh *hell.* What better way to spark further controversy in the Basin than to suddenly find a bunch of Elendel constables interfering in local business? Particularly if …

“Blantach,” Marasi said, grabbing her arm, “we have to sedate that man.”

“What? *Sedate* him? Why?”

“Aren’t you ready for Metalborn?” Marasi said.

“There aren’t any Metalborn in this group,” Blantach said. “I have it on good authority from—”

The Sequence chose that moment to let out an Allomantic Push of *incredible* strength.

# 23

Marasi wore a breakaway gunbelt with metal pouches, so the Push didn't do more than strip away her equipment. The Bilming constables weren't so well prepared. They were tossed back by their own guns, handcuffs, and other accoutrements of their profession.

Blantach screamed as she was knocked off her feet, but she was lucky to suffer only a minor fall—many were tossed dozens of feet. *Trucks* rocked, and two even overturned. The doors at the sides of the building were blown free. Windows cracked and people cried out as guns were shoved across the floor and hit the walls—except for a few unaffected weapons that lay on the ground. Apparently some of the enemy had been given aluminum guns.

The Sequence casually scooped one of these up, now standing at the epicenter of a blast of power unlike any Marasi had experienced from an ordinary Coinshot. She stepped back, awed. That had been something like … like from the old stories. Like Harmony had recorded in the histories, detailing the power available to the Ascendant Warrior.

It was a horrible sign. Because Marasi realized why the Sequence was smiling. While he'd likely been planning to go along with his arrest, now that he'd found a chance to implicate Elendel in a scandal, he would want to cause as many casualties as possible.

While the others were recovering, Marasi dove for one of the aluminum guns. But the Sequence took aim and fired directly in front of her, driving her—still unarmed—into cover behind an overturned truck. The Allomantic Push had stopped for now, fortunately.

*You've read about this,* she thought. *It's one of the ancient powers available only to Mistborn.*

It was called duralumin, an arcane metal. Using it, an Allomancer could burn their entire metal reserve at once. Like detonating a keg of gunpowder instead of a single bullet, it released an enormous burst of Allomantic energy. At least … that was what she remembered. It hadn't been relevant in centuries, because no one could have two Allomantic powers at once.

Unless you had Hemalurgic spikes.

A figure in a wool cap and wig scrambled up beside her a moment later. Wayne was followed by VenDell in the broad-chested Cycle's body. A second later Wayne's speed bubble gave the three of them some breathing room.

"They were ready for us!" Wayne said. "They knew we was going to pull this sting!"

"No," Marasi said. "They knew about Blantach and *her* constables, but I think they didn't mind being captured. My guess is they were going to go along with *that* sting, and slip out of jail later."

"So what changed?" he asked.

"The Sequence just realized we're here from Elendel," Marasi said, "and decided to use our presence to create an incident—constables dead—and blame it on Elendel interference in a Bilming operation."

It was still merely a guess. The facts were clear though. The moment he saw Marasi, a man who had been about to go quietly had decided to fight. Which put everyone in danger.

She glanced out from behind the truck, now that she didn't have to worry about getting shot. The Sequence was casually pointing his gun toward Captain Blantach, who was climbing to her feet. At the perimeter of the room, constables and gangsters alike were picking themselves up off the ground, disoriented. Those who had recovered first were frozen in the act of scrambling for weapons.

"What's the plan?" Wayne asked.

"You distract that Sequence," Marasi said to him. "I'll organize our constables. The Set's forces seem surprised by that too—look at the shock on their faces. I really think they planned to be captured, then released by corrupt judges or prosecutors. We still have a chance to turn this around, if we can take advantage of their disorientation."

"This is *not* the plan!" VenDell said, peeking past her.

"Plans last until someone starts shootin', mate," Wayne said.

“So unruly,” VenDell muttered. “All these beautiful bones are going to get crushed.”

“Not if we can stop it,” Marasi said. “Help Wayne with that Sequence and take down any armed enemies you see. Be careful of our drivers—they’re out of uniform but all wearing white shoes.”

“Um…” VenDell said. “My. Hmm … When you say, ‘take down,’ what precisely do you mean, Miss Colms?”

“Kill?” Marasi said. “Shoot? Maim? Eat? I’m not picky, VenDell.”

“Ah, yes, er,” he said. “You see, I am *not* much of a fighter. I’m a connoisseur. A good planner. A bearer of deep and important thoughts.”

She glared at him.

“I follow the First Contract, Miss Colms,” he said. “Like almost all kandra. I cannot kill, or even hurt, a living creature. *Particularly* not a human being.”

“MeLaan never had that trouble,” Wayne said.

“MeLaan is a miscreant!” VenDell said. “Why do you think she was assigned to you? Only she and TenSoon are capable fighters; the rest of us abhor it! I should, er, get away. And plan. Yes, plan how to respond.”

Marasi glanced at Wayne, who was rolling his eyes.

“You’re basically indestructible, right?” she said to VenDell. “Like MeLaan?”

“Well, technically. But you see, I—”

“Then get out there,” Marasi said, “and draw some fire. Also, if you can manage it, toss me one of those aluminum guns.”

“Very well,” he said with a deep sigh. “This is the last time I let Harmony convince me—”

He broke off as a short woman rounded the back of the truck, somehow moving at their speed—and then she stepped *into* their speed bubble.

The stout woman wore a bowler hat and held a dueling cane in one hand. “’Ello, lovelies,” she said. “What’re we doin’? Havin’ a meetin’? I like meetin’ new folks. Killin’ *them* breaks the monotony.” She grinned, then leaped for Marasi.

It was such an incongruous experience—no one had *ever* violated one of Wayne’s bubbles—that Marasi reacted with embarrassing slowness. Wayne wasn’t so inhibited. He grabbed the woman by the arm as she swung, preventing the dueling cane from connecting with Marasi’s head.

All three of them fell in a jumble. Wayne ended up with the dueling cane, but the woman scrambled away. She became a blur for a second as she hit the edge of the speed bubble—and then she was crossing the room at normal human speed. A moment later she froze in place, moving sluggishly.

"Damn!" Wayne said. "Another Slider!"

Of course. Someone with Wayne's same power—she could create her own speed bubbles. When she'd moved quickly for a moment, it was because her speed bubble had overlapped with Wayne's, doubling her speed for a split second. But she'd been forced to drop her bubble to keep moving through the room, as Sliders had to take brief breaks in using their powers.

"Wayne," Marasi said, "new plan. I'm going to try to grab my Allomantic grenades. They broke free during that blast earlier. You need to stop the strange version of yourself."

"What?" he demanded. "Because she's a Slider, she's a strange version of me?"

"I agree," VenDell said. "Wayne is already incredibly strange—so a strange version of him would be normal."

"It doesn't matter!" Marasi snapped. "Wayne, deal with the Slider. VenDell, distract the Coinshot. Ready?"

"Ready," Wayne said.

"Not ready!" VenDell said.

"Drop the bubble!" Marasi said, already leaping forward.

Wayne complied, and the sound of the room hit her in a cacophony. Men scrambling for weapons and starting to fire. Screams and shouts of pain. Constables trying to organize themselves—a dozen different voices giving conflicting orders.

Marasi tackled Captain Blantach—who had barely reached her feet—pushing her behind another of the trucks. The Sequence's shots hit the floor, tossing up chips of concrete, barely missing the woman.

Blantach scrambled to her feet in surprise, then nodded in thanks to Marasi, who already had her back to the truck. It was the one she'd ridden into the building—but Moonlight was nowhere to be seen.

Wayne tackled the Slider a moment later. VenDell hopped out from behind the fallen truck and began waving his hands. "Look at me! Defenseless! And a traitor! Ha! I'm going to tell the constables everything!"

He took a shot straight to the head.

“Rusts!” Captain Blantach shouted, finally putting it all together. “They have an *Allomancer*!”

Marasi sighed. “Can you organize a resistance, Captain!” she shouted over the increasing din. “The weapons at the top of each box in these trucks are real, and all of the vehicles are plated to provide cover!”

“Right, then,” Blantach said, turning and waving toward the eastern wall of the room. “Constables! To me! We—”

The truck they were hiding behind lurched. Marasi barely leaped away in time as a *second* powerful Steelpush shook the room. The warehouse walls rattled, wood breaking and nails ripping free. Men and women who had found weapons were again shoved backward.

And the truck Marasi had been using for cover was *thrown* away like it had been drop-kicked. It crashed out onto the street, tumbling end over end, spilling boxes that shattered into weapons. Rusts!

It narrowly missed Blantach, who had already been on the move toward the snarl of constables and thugs. Many of them had been knocked to the ground.

Now that Marasi’s cover was gone, she saw the Sequence shake an aluminum flask, then unscrew it and take a drink. *More metals,* Marasi realized. If she remembered correctly, every time the Sequence used duralumin he would need to restore his reserves.

As the Sequence finished drinking, a figure with a bullet hole in the forehead tackled him. VenDell was, at the very least, trying.

“Organize the constables!” Marasi shouted to Blantach, then ran for the gaping open front of the warehouse. Somewhere in the debris was her metals belt—with her grenades. Those had to be her best chance at stopping a superpowered Allomancer.

On her way, she passed an incredible sight: Wayne and the other Slider fighting.

Wayne leaped toward the Slider in a sudden burst of speed—but dropped his bubble in midair. She tossed hers up, catching them both, and the two became a blur of swinging dueling canes and frantic motion. The speed bubble dropped and they split apart, rounding each other—before speeding up and clashing again, so fast that Marasi couldn’t even make out their blurs.

Rusts. *Stay focused,* Marasi thought. She dodged out of the front of the warehouse and scanned the debris—ignoring the sorry truck that lay upside down nearby, one tire spinning.

*There,* she thought, leaping to grab her metals belt, which was peeking from beneath a broken box. She yanked it out and fished inside a pouch, but the latch had broken open and two of the grenades had spilled free. She only had one.

A floppy body flew past and slammed into the overturned truck. It slumped and hit the ground, then rolled a mangled face toward her on a broken neck. "I have been defeated," VenDell said, words slurred by the broken jaw. "I am billing you for these bones."

"Don't be a baby," she said, and immediately started burning cadmium. The box buzzed in her fingers, charging up.

She dashed into the room to find that Blantach had gathered a group of constables—both Marasi's and her own—behind the cover of several overturned trucks. Many of the gangsters were grouped at the rear of the chamber near the Sequence. They were arming themselves with weapons from the back rooms, it seemed, and others were pulling out riot shields.

Wayne and his foe were still blurs. The Sequence had risen into the air, hovering on a Steelpush. Bullets bent around him, striking the wall, unable to hit directly. Rusts. If he could do that, he was far more experienced with his powers than the Cycle Marasi had fought. At least he couldn't do those mega-Pushes without harming his own people.

Marasi dashed in, low, and crouched up against one of the overturned trucks. She set the timer on her grenade and watched for a moment when the Sequence was turned. Hopefully he'd rely upon his powers to deflect bullets, and wouldn't see her grenade.

Unfortunately, the Sequence glanced in her direction as she hurled the grenade. He barely managed to Push it away, and it detonated near the far wall, not catching anyone. He caught her eye from up there, then shot a coin her direction. She barely ducked under cover in time. Rusts. He could move this truck at any moment.

*No,* she thought. *He'd need an anchor as heavy.* That was why the Sequence had been doing those powerful, all-direction Pushes. He could Push with equal force in every direction and stabilize himself. He couldn't move a specific truck unless he could Push *backward* against something equally heavy.

That was little comfort when a count of her people showed many bleeding as they hid behind cover. Several were down, immobile. Plus, their enemy was regrouping … it gave her a bad feeling. What kind of gangsters tried to *outgun* the constables?

*The kind who are heavily armed,* Marasi thought. *And think they can win. We shouldn't be fighting. Not this way.*

Gunshots echoed in the room, and bullets *banged* on metal and stone.

"We have to retreat," she said. She signaled to Kellen, one of her lieutenants. "We need to set up covering fire and organize a retreat! We're out through that opening."

"Retreat?" Kellen said, sliding closer. "But the enemy!"

"We're officers of the law," Marasi said, "not soldiers. I'm not going to perpetuate a full-on battle in the middle of a city! Mission is a bust. Time to get out."

Kellen thought for a moment, then nodded. "You're right," the woman said. "What do you want from me?"

"Gather the others and help the wounded. I'll coordinate with the Bilming group, then set up a distraction. Which truck has the real explosives?"

"Number six!"

"Wayne's? Who decided *that*?"

"Ruin, apparently," Kellen said. "Hadn't thought about it myself."

They broke. Marasi slipped her handgun from the holster on her metals belt, then dodged across the open space to truck number six, where Blantach was taking shelter. Remarkably it hadn't been toppled, though Marasi didn't think trying to drive out would be wise. Not when the Sequence had the power to overturn vehicles.

"We're going to retreat," Marasi said to Blantach. "You with us?"

"Rusts *yes*," Blantach said. "I feel like I opened a picnic basket and found a nest of hornets. Who *are* these people?"

"They're the ones trying to undermine our civilization," Marasi said. She slapped the truck. "We have explosives inside this one. I'm going to toss some at the enemy to cover our retreat."

“Give me a minute,” Blantach said. “I’ll get my people ready to join you. We have wounded.”

“So do we,” Marasi said. “Hopefully the explosion will give us enough time.”

Marasi took a deep breath, then pulled open the door of the truck and scrambled inside. There she was able to open the panel between the cab and the cargo area and slip into the back. It was dark in here, but she knew the box with the explosives would be at the rear—ready to show off on delivery.

She located a few conventional grenades by touch inside the box. And what she hoped was a firebomb, which would be clay and liquid, immune to Pushes.

Worries chased her as she squeezed back into the cab, then ducked low, counting on the plating in the passenger door to protect her from gunfire. The more she considered it, the worse she liked their position.

*If we run, he’ll do another of those powerful all-out Pushes,* she thought. *We’ll be ducking out the doors while trucks roll over us.*

But what else could she do? She slipped out of the truck with her explosives. Kellen and Blantach nodded to her, ready for the retreat. The warehouse was alive with gunfire, but on their side it was only a few constables keeping the enemy distracted while the rest helped the wounded.

Time for—

The Sequence dropped from the air, landing directly in the middle of the four trucks they were using as cover. Then he Pushed—two trucks on each side—shoving the vehicles out of the way with an incredible Steelpush.

In an instant, their cover was gone. The collection of beleaguered constables found themselves completely exposed, hauling the wounded to their feet. At the other end of the room, the gangsters had built a little fortification out of sandbags—and now one of them snapped a large multi-barrel rotating machine gun onto a tripod. Military grade, liquid cooled and chain fed, with bullets longer than a person’s palm. Those had been developed in case of a Malwish invasion, and were illegal to smuggle out of Elendel.

The full extent of how outgunned they were struck Marasi right then. The room fell strangely silent, though she thought she heard glass shatter somewhere. A part of her mind registered the sound, but she focused on that machine gun. She stood at the head of the constables, staring directly at the barrel. Realizing what was about to happen.

She’d brought barely armed police to a battlefield.

The machine gun started up with a ripping percussive sound, and spat a concentrated stream of bullets straight at Marasi and the others.

Then those bullets stopped in the air.

Then immediately went soaring *backward* toward the enemy fortification, hitting sandbags and shields and making the gangsters cry out in surprise. The machine gun cut off, and the warehouse fell silent for a moment. Unnerved, Marasi glanced over her shoulder—to find Waxillium Ladrian standing just behind her, mistcoat tassels flaring as he turned and aimed a pistol right over her shoulder. He fired with a single *crack* of gunpowder.

The shot drilled straight through the viewfinder on the machine gun and sent the man who had been firing it to the ground, a bullet through the eye.

“Sorry I’m late,” Wax announced to the crowd. “Had to wait for gunfire to lead me to you. Shall we carry on, then?”

# 24

Fighting someone in a fair way was completely unfair, Wayne decided. He connected with his dueling cane—which made a nice resonant crack against the cheater’s skull. She went down, but rolled and was back up in a second, grinning as the wound on her head healed—a little trickle of blood running down her now-pristine skin.

Of course they’d given her the ability to heal. Marvelous. Just rusting marvelous.

She became a blur, and he barely erected his own speed bubble in time to catch sight of her to the left. He crossed his canes to block her strike. Then he started swinging.

He pummeled her on one side as she did the same to him on the other side. Rusting Ruin and rusting hell! That *smarted.* And it made about as much sense as drinking the expensive whiskey once you were already drunk. Both of them backed off, wincing—but tapping their metalminds to heal.

“Harmony’s holy missing bits, woman,” he said, shaking his bruised arm. “You’re annoying.”

“You’re annoying,” she said. “You’re … yoer…”

“Stop trying to get my accent!” Wayne snapped.

“Can you say ‘my’ again?” she asked, tossing her dueling cane up in a little spin and catching it.

Rusting.

Cheating.

Woman!

Wayne had gotten his powers the fair way. By being born with them through pure luck. She'd gone and stolen hers from other folks. That was *absolutely* cheating. Everybody knew there was things you could take and things you couldn't. Wax's unused pocket watch? Fair game. The watch Lessie had given him? Off-limits.

People's souls? *Way* off-limits.

The two circled one another, ignoring the rest of the chaos in the room. He did stop time as something hit near him—a bullet scraping the side of a truck—and he saw the sparks drop in slow motion. But Marasi and the conners would have to deal with the blokes with guns. Wayne had a very-much-not-at-all-clone-of-him to deal with.

She was grinning as he launched forward, swinging. Yes, she could heal if he hit her, but a person could only heal so many times before running out of stored health. He had to keep hitting and hope she ran out before he did.

She dodged away this time.

"Oi!" Wayne said. "Stand still."

"Oi…" she replied. "Oiiii…"

"Stop that!"

She danced back, smiling. "I've been waiting for this for years," she said—her accent fading away. "Planning, preparing. I was *built* for you, Wayne. Aren't you honored? I was *made* to kill *you*!"

"Ah! Do you hafta be *weird* too?"

"Once I kill you, I will wear your hat and carry your scent. It's all I'm lacking."

He stopped in place as she grinned at him. So. Rusting. Weird. She then turned, and her face fell. "What's *he* doing here?"

Wayne edged over to see what she had. And … rusts, *finally.* The hero had arrived. Wax stood there like Ruin himself, tassels swirling around him, protecting the constables and firing wantonly into the enemy ranks.

The cheater was as good as defeated, now that Wax was here. All was right in the world.

Course, Wax was busy at the moment, and would need help. So Wayne bull-rushed the cheater, rammed his elbow into her gut—and felt something sharp in her arm when he did. Her metalminds maybe? Or the spike? Well then. Now that Wax was here, they could do a Two-Faced Special. Except with only Wayne, because Wax needed to shoot some folks.

When the cheater tried to throw Wayne off, he twisted and let her lurch into position. Then he reached around from behind her, took his dueling cane in two hands, and pulled it up under her chin. With a grunt, she began battering at him, but that only threw her off balance.

In a moment Wayne had her on the ground, one knee against her back, dueling cane pulled up and choking her. He'd been in this situation himself, and it was not fun—feeling your metalminds bleed dry as you were forced to heal from suffocation.

She struggled in a frenzy. The world around them slowed and sped up in spurts as she panic-activated her powers. But for all her skill with the canes, she'd skipped basic wrestling techniques. Someone who knew what they were doing could have thrown him.

He shook his head, disappointed. "You can't skip wrestling holds, mate," he told her. "If you want to brawl properly, you've *got* to know how to win on the ground."

She responded with grunts, which was *much* better than before. He was lucky Wax had shown up. Wayne had been up against the wall before the hero arrived.

A figure in fine clothing dropped beside them. "Getruda," he said to the woman, "I'm disappointed in you." Then he pointed a gun at Wayne's head.

Right, then. Wayne let go and ducked away. He dodged into a roll—because who doesn't like a nice finishing roll—and came out of it with a speed bubble in place, sheltering him and Marasi, who had been seeing to one of the wounded.

"Hey," he said, puffing. "Things are looking up, eh?"

"We should still pull out," Marasi said. "This isn't what we're trained for."

"Shame to leave when we're winning though," Wayne said. He nodded behind him. The Sequence was pointing toward the way out—mid-order—and the cheater was on her feet, running in that direction.

"Are we?" Marasi said. She looked down at Mathingdaw—the wounded constable—who had her eyes shut tight, grimacing from the pain of a bullet hole in her leg.

"If Wax deals with that Coinshot we are," Wayne said. The enemy ranks were in chaos as their men tried to hide.

“They have at least a few aluminum bullets,” Marasi said, pointing to the side. Indeed some bullets—moving ever so slowly through the air—were ignoring Wax’s Pushes.

“Why so few though?” Wayne said. “Miles Hundredlives had tons of aluminum equipment.”

“This group planned to be caught today,” she said. “I’m convinced of it. They were going to let Blantach’s constables take them, rather than raise suspicion by stopping the investigation.”

“That’s a leap in logic,” Wayne said. “But you’re often right about this sorta thing. They wouldn’t want much aluminum to be taken. Departments have a habit of meltin’ it down for the money.”

Wayne glanced toward Wax, who stood out in front. Frozen as he pointed with three fingers at a passing bullet. He seemed to be … guiding it to the side.

Nah. That was a bit much, even for Wax.

“My gut says,” Wayne replied, “that if we hold out this lot will scatter. See, they already got a newsworthy incident by fightin’ us, and there’s not much more to gain. But we have wounded, and it’d be tough to pull out.”

Marasi nodded. “All right then. We hold position. So long as Wax chases off that Coinshot.”

“Dropping the bubble.”

“Go.”

He dropped it. Wax continued his spin, and rusts … the bullet he’d been pointing at *seemed* to go straight for one of the gangsters trying to sneak up on the constables’ position.

“Wax!” Marasi shouted. “We can handle these. But I need that Coinshot dealt with!”

Wax glanced at her, then nodded and fired at the Coinshot, who dodged into the air. The man launched straight up and smashed through the ceiling out into the city.

Wax followed, soaring through a broken skylight.

As the two vanished, the cheater ran out the front doors. The smarter gangsters realized what was up and ducked out any way they could. Wayne leaped out in front to draw fire, and Marasi scrambled to the side of the room. He wondered why until her grenade froze a small group of enemies.

The rest of this was cleanup; the real fight had moved to the sky. *Wait,* Wayne thought. He put up a speed bubble so two nearby wounded could crawl into the back of a truck for shelter. *Did anyone warn Wax that the Coinshot can do those crazy super-Pushes?*

Hmm. Well, Wayne supposed his friend would figure it out soon enough.

# 25

Wax darted into the air and felt a sudden moment of disconnect. He'd flown through Elendel so often that he expected to see its sights. This city—with its round layout, elevated train, and huge warships in the port—was disorienting. He had been here before, and knew about the strange design of the buildings, no two the same. But from up here, he could see they were arranged in an artistic pattern. Too orderly, too perfect, too balanced. Like a child's model of a city.

The enemy Coinshot bounded away toward the perimeter of the city, and Wax gave chase with a few Steelpushes. His opponent was talented, maybe even a true Coinshot, augmented by Hemalurgy. He expertly Pushed off the buildings they passed, when newer Coinshots always looked for anchors—like cars—directly beneath them, and forgot about those behind.

Still, Wax managed to gain on the man by anticipating where he would Push. Wax raised Vindication. He didn't want to kill the Coinshot—they needed answers—but perhaps a hit in the leg or arm would—

The man suddenly *blasted* into the air. The car below *crumpled* as if it had been stomped flat, and Wax winced for the poor people inside. The Coinshot launched high into the sky, swift as a bullet, difficult to track against the blinding sun.

Wax landed in a scramble on a nearby rooftop. Rusting *hell.* That had been …

*Duralumin.* Damn. It had only been a matter of time before he faced an enemy with this strength, but he'd merely read of those powers. Never faced them. This threw out Wax's every understanding of how to duel with another Coinshot. How did you fight someone who could launch himself a mile into the air with a single Push?

*Same way you fight anyone,* Wax thought. *With skill and wit.*

If Wax's memory was right, the man would need to drink a new vial each time he used the power. Wax made his way to another rooftop, where he'd stowed his pack before joining the fight. Here he grabbed an extra pouch of aluminum bullets and dropped the Steel Survivor, as it was loaded with conventional rounds. He raised Vindication, fully aluminum herself, and loaded with aluminum cartridges. The only other metals he had on him were the vials Harmony had sent, inside his belt sheath, which was also lined with aluminum.

*He'll try to take me from above,* Wax thought, scanning the sky. Sure enough, gunfire came from up there. The enemy had an aluminum weapon too, but Wax was able to leap over the side of the building to dodge. As he fell, he Pushed in through an upper window, landing in an apartment.

The room was empty. So if Wax could slide over to a window in another room, he could maybe trap the enemy by—

The entire apartment wall caved in, torn to pieces by the metal girders beneath the stonework. A wave of debris crashed into Wax and pushed him back against the far wall. He groaned, rubble tumbling around him, and caught sight of motion through the newly ripped-open wall.

The Coinshot bounded up, holding an aluminum flask for restoring metals, gun in his other hand. He'd caused a similar amount of destruction in the building across the street, which he'd used as an anchor for his terrible Push. A flask was clever; assuming he had it well saturated with his metals, he could take a swig each time he used duralumin.

Wax ducked behind some rubble as the man fired, the stone popping with sprays of white dust as bullets hit. Debris crunched underfoot and streamed off Wax's body as he took a few unaimed shots to drive the enemy away. It worked, but *Ruin.*

Wax shoved through the debris on shaky feet, stepping out into the hallway of the apartment building. He hid here for a moment, lightly burning steel to reveal sources of metal around him so he could judge the size of the rooms in the surrounding apartments. He quietly reloaded—and slipped a metal vial from his belt to quickly restore his reserves.

As aluminum had dropped in price—from extravagant to merely expensive—people had started to use it more and more. Like the sheath on Wax's belt. But that flask his enemy held, that was better. Wax's vials would be briefly vulnerable as he pulled them out to drink, whereas—

A bullet drilled through the wood of the wall and nearly hit Wax in the head. He dropped down, cursing, and waved away the confused bystanders who had begun peeking out of their apartments. Another bullet followed, again nearly hitting him. The Coinshot was firing them from outside, and Pushing them through the wood. But how was he seeing Wax? He should be invisible in here …

*Idiot,* Wax thought, extinguishing his steel. The enemy must have a spike that let him use bronze to sense when someone was using Allomancy nearby. Wax ducked a little farther along the hallway, and no more bullets came in through the wall. Perhaps the Coinshot would think him dead?

*Assuming he's a natural Coinshot—which might be the case, given his skill—he's got one spike for bronze and one for duralumin.* At least. A human body could hold up to three spikes without exposing it to Harmony's influence and direct control. But Marasi claimed the enemy had found a way to bypass that limit somehow. Perhaps it was Harmony's blindness.

People continued filling the hallway behind, despite Wax's urgings. Many gathered around the broken apartment, gawking. Too many civilians. Wax couldn't stay here. He reached the end of the hallway, opened the window with a solid kick, slipped out, and dropped—using his Feruchemy to decrease his weight so he wouldn't hit too hard.

Immediately, the enemy Coinshot appeared on a nearby roof and began shooting.

Wax scrambled around a corner and stopped filling his metalmind—which these days he wore embedded deep in his skin. A change he'd made, with the help of surgeons, after the events surrounding the Bands of Mourning. A person's body acted like aluminum, protecting things like metalminds from interference.

Then again, the stories said that with enough power, an Allomancer could ignore that. The Ascendant Warrior had done it. Rusts. At any rate, the man had appeared soon after Wax tapped a metalmind. He'd seen Wax's *Feruchemy* with his bronze, something only the very rarest of practitioners could do. How skilled was this man?

*If he's watching for me to activate my abilities,* Wax thought, *let's use that.*

He moved around the back of the building and found a drainage grate beside the street. Wax gave it a single flared Push, popping him up in the air, but immediately cut off to soar upward by momentum. As most Coinshots would sustain long Pushes as they flew, this single short one might make it appear that Wax was still on the ground.

The Push threw Wax up a good twenty feet, where he grabbed the side of the building just below the roof and clung to a stonework formation. He hung there, still hoping to take his opponent alive.

Feet scraped the rooftop above, and a shadow shifted. With a deep breath, Wax Pushed himself upward so he sprang up right in front of his enemy. A quick Push behind sent Wax slamming into the man, bringing them both down in a heap on the rooftop.

Using the element of surprise, Wax—kneeling on top of his enemy—punched the man's wrist to make him drop his pistol. Then he grabbed the fellow by the vest and raised his fist. By sticking close, he wouldn't have to worry about potential speed bubbles—and Wax had no Pushable metal on his person. It was possible the fellow had pewter for strength. A few punches across the face should be enough to determine that.

Wax pulled his enemy up and began laying into him. And damn, maybe he was excited to be fighting again, but the blows didn't seem to hurt Wax's knuckles as much as they once had.

The enemy scrambled for his gun in a panic, but Wax kept punching. There was a certain disorientation that struck the first time a fellow got punched, particularly in the head. It was a kind of disbelief, a stunned irreconcilability. Wax remembered his first time—the way his mind couldn't bridge its past experiences with its new painful, fist-to-face existence. The man's panic rose, and Wax realized his miscalculation a second later—as the enemy unleashed an explosive Steelpush downward, against the nails and iron rods in the rooftop.

Wax and the Coinshot were flung upward in a roar of wind and a sudden burst of g-forces. Wax managed to hang on to the Coinshot for the first part of the ride. But before they reached the peak of their ascent, the man put his hand to Wax's face, and Wax felt a sudden coldness.

His metal reserve vanished.

The Coinshot had another power. He was a Leecher, with the ability to drain other people's Allomancy. He smiled, meeting Wax's eyes—and Wax scrambled to grab a vial from the pouch on his metals belt. The Coinshot then grabbed Wax's metals belt in one hand and *kicked* the two of them apart. The belt, made to break away if someone Pushed on the metals inside, ripped free, and since Wax had his hand in it, the open latch meant the vials were flung out into the air.

But Wax had managed to grab one vial. His steel gone, a hundred feet in the air, he raised the vial to his lips—but only got the briefest taste of the liquid inside before the vial exploded. A shot from the enemy toward Wax's face barely missed—but hit the vial, shattering it.

Wax immediately increased his weight, and the strange way that affected his momentum meant his upward speed slowed to a crawl. The next shot passed through the air right over his head. A second after he crested his rise and started falling, he switched to filling his metalmind to instantly boost his downward speed—but made sure not to get so light that wind resistance would counteract that. More shots passed over his head as the Coinshot had trouble predicting his motion. Wax fell in a tumble, and despite the mayhem—despite the way his guts were in a knot and his mind dizzy from the sudden ejection—he realized one thing.

Without metals, he was dead. If he couldn't change his trajectory, the next bullets would strike him as the Coinshot adjusted his aim. Falling slowly wasn't enough. He reached for metals inside of him, and managed to find the faintest bit of steel from the sip. He used it to shove himself in the air, Pushing on the spire of a building, dodging the next shots from above.

Then it was gone. Nothing but rushing wind. Then he looked up and saw one of his vials tumbling downward, and he momentarily increased his weight once again to slow his fall and draw even with the vial. He stretched out his arm, reaching for it, but it was inches away, just beyond his fingertips …

*Snap.* The vial fell into his palm. Wax spun in the air, downing half the vial. Like a burst of light, his steelsight returned. He passed between buildings as he fell and Pushed himself, haphazardly, to the side. Bullets from above ripped through the air around him a moment later—the ground approaching at a frightening pace. At the last moment Wax threw the half-full vial beneath him and *Pushed.*

The vial hit the ground and exploded, but the metal inside was enough of an anchor. He slowed and hit the ground in a skid, mistcoat tassels flying around him. His heart thundering, he ripped his gun from its holster and pointed upward.

But the sky was empty. The man had decided to cut his losses and flee.

Wax had landed in a city square with decorative paving stones and a few impressive statues—designed in a strange chunky and blockish art style. His drop had drawn … well, more than a little attention. It seemed he had interrupted a dedication ceremony for a new building, for a journalist was there with an evanotype stand for taking pictures.

One flash of light later, and Wax had the sinking realization that he would be top-of-the-fold news in the afternoon broadsheets. Delightful. He stood up, calming himself, and took cover beneath an awning just in case. Then, as he was considering what to do next, a sleek black car rolled up and Hoid the coachman, of all people, popped out—wearing a chauffeur's cap and white gloves. What was *he* doing here?

"Your carriage, sir," Hoid said, gesturing.

"How on Scadrial did you find me?" Wax asked.

Hoid cocked an eyebrow at the gathering crowd. "Pardon, Lord Ladrian, but you *do* create quite a spectacle. It's not terribly difficult to track you."

Well, that was fair. As the crowd started chattering, Wax could see the appeal of slipping into the car and driving off. But the others were still fighting for their lives.

"Thanks, Hoid," he said. "But Wayne and Marasi need me." He launched into the air, drawing even more attention—and a second flash of light from the evanotype machine.

# 26

Marasi reluctantly agreed to let the local constables handle cleaning up the site—though she'd managed to retrieve two of her Allomantic grenades—and imprisoning the Set members they'd managed to capture. She disliked the idea, as it would possibly mean the captives ended up in the Set's hands. But there wasn't much she could do about that at the moment. Her wounded officers were a more pressing concern.

Beyond that … well, the moment Blantach and her people had arrived, the entire mission had become a huge mess. Which was how—three hours after rolling into Bilming—she found herself with Wayne, VenDell, and Wax in a room of the Bilming Constabulary headquarters. She'd seen to her people in the hospital, and was sitting with the casualty report.

Two dead constables. Rusts, it hurt to read their names. This was a disaster.

For now though, she tried to keep her mind on their predicament. "So you're saying," she said, "that Harmony is *blind*?"

Wax nodded, his eyes distant as he stood nearby, staring at the wall. "He said he'd send us what help he could. But he was frightened, Marasi. Legitimately frightened. And given what Steris and I uncovered … I worry our enemies are close to a weapon. Dangerously close."

He glanced at her, then fell silent. They didn't want to say too much, in case they were being observed. No one was at the door, but they could listen in on this little room in other ways. Wan yellow walls and a free-hanging light bulb gave the place an intentionally bleak air. She bet they used it for interrogations.

The Bilming officers hadn’t locked the door—they wouldn’t dare—but Wax and the others had been forced to surrender their weapons. And when they’d been dropped off in here, the implication had been clear: *Don’t try anything.*

Though they had been given four chairs, only Marasi sat—at the back of the room. Wax paced in front of the door. VenDell sat on the floor by the wall, looking exhausted. He’d stitched up his bones, holding them in place with sinew, making the features lumpy and unnatural. Like a ceramic sculpture that had been dropped, then glued back together with the pieces misaligned.

Wayne was, of course, napping.

On the floor, hat over his eyes, rolled-up jacket under his head as a pillow. Rusting man. She wished it were so easy for her. With two dead, she felt her confidence crumbling. Cali Hatthew had been a constable for only two years—and had begged to come on this mission. That blood was on Marasi’s hands. She thought she’d planned well, but …

Wax walked over and squatted down. “Hey,” he said, “you all right?”

She shook her head, tapping the casualty report. “The two people who knew anything useful escaped, and I lost two good constables. At least a dozen others have serious wounds, *and* I caused a potential intercity incident. Oh, and the Set will have all their people released, just for an *extra* kick to the shins.”

He winced. “Marasi, we’re fighting some of the craftiest and most powerful people in the world. We *are* going to be outmaneuvered now and then. You did well, keeping everyone as safe as possible.”

“We’d be dead if you hadn’t arrived.”

“But I did. You’re not a killer, Marasi. Not by trade. Your job is to investigate, plan, and enforce the law.”

“And your job?” she asked.

He stood up. “I’m Harmony’s sword, Marasi. Recently taken off the weapon rack, the dust blown free. Regardless of what happened today, we need to keep working. Because something big *is* happening in this city. Something extremely dangerous. You lost two good people today—but they died trying to prevent the deaths of *millions.*”

She nodded, rubbing her temples to try to banish her headache. If he and Steris were right … if the enemy was trying to sneak a bomb into

Elendel …

“All right,” she said, trying to focus. “We need leads. What do we do now that the Sequence escaped? Where do we look?”

“Working on that,” he said. “The man I fought was spiked. So was the Cycle you killed, as was the woman Wayne fought. Each of those spikes requires the death of a Metalborn.”

“The kidnappings?” Marasi asked, her stomach turning.

Over the last ten years, the Set’s primary activity—the one that had first drawn Wax and Marasi’s attention—had been a series of kidnappings of women with strong Allomantic genetic lines. Research over the last few years had proven they weren’t alone. Others, both men and women, had been vanishing—mostly from the Roughs, where such disappearances weren’t reported. Always Metalborn, or with Metalborn in their family lines.

Wax and Marasi’s worries about why had been disturbing. Now, to find members of the Set with access to so many powers …

“We tried following the kidnappings, Wax,” she said. “Dead ends, every one. Are we *sure* that Harmony didn’t see anything about this? Maybe before he was blinded?”

“He can be cryptic, even to us,” VenDell said softly from where he sat by the wall. He glanced up at them, his broken face moving strangely. “But I don’t think he knows where those people went. When we were hunting for them, we wondered why Harmony didn’t feed us more information. Why he didn’t look into the secret parts of the world and tell us. I think he’s been unable to see details for some time. But he’s been … concealing his disability from us.”

The kandra sighed, suddenly looking tired—his skin going transparent and faintly green. “And … there’s more, Waxillium. He tries to hide it, but I think … something is wrong with Harmony. I see a dark shadow behind him.”

“What good is it having God on your side,” Marasi said, folding her arms, “if he doesn’t do anything to help?”

“He *did* do something to help,” Wax replied. “He sent us. A lesson he keeps trying to teach me.”

“I will contact him,” VenDell said, “and request further aid. But Waxillium is right … Constable Colms, we *are* his attempt to do something.”

Wax turned to the side, his expression again distant. He hadn’t told her everything that had happened to him years ago. She thought maybe Wax had *died* for a moment. Before she’d found him broken in that cold, forgotten shrine. He’d met with Harmony.

Now Wax talked like *this* sometimes. With an authority regarding religious matters that she hadn’t heard from priests.

The door opened, and Captain Blantach walked in. She’d changed to a clean uniform, and had obviously run a comb through her short blonde hair, but she still appeared frazzled. Perhaps because of the man who walked in behind her.

*Oh hell,* Marasi thought. *She brought the mayor.*

# 27

Wax sighed. This had just become a political matter rather than a jurisdictional one. Granted, the entire day had been heading that direction like a galloping stagecoach with no driver. He glanced at Marasi, who nodded. He should take the lead here.

He stepped forward to meet the lord mayor of Bilming, Lord Gave Entrone. A man that Wax had encountered on several occasions now—each more repulsive than the last. And that was saying something, since at their first interaction Entrone had insulted Steris to her face.

Gave had come up in the world, outgrowing his hometown of New Seran. Two years ago he'd landed in Bilming—at the very center of Outer Cities politics—and had somehow proven himself to be the exact sort of person they wanted "standing up" to tyrannical Elendel.

Today he was dressed in formal wear, and even checked his cufflinks as they entered—no doubt to show off the sparkling diamonds set into the wood. Slicked-back black hair, a chin you could use to cut the tops off tin cans. And, of course, his characteristic smug smile.

Lord mayor of Bilming was an important position—probably the most important one outside of Elendel. Which meant Wax had to be careful not to insult him. This would be a delicate conversation.

"Oi!" Wayne said, sitting up. "Hey, Wax! Somebody done sewn a sack of dicks together and made a person! It's even walking!"

The room fell silent. Then VenDell snickered.

"Are you going to apologize for that, Ladrian?" Gave asked.

"Oh!" Wayne said, heaving himself to his feet. "It's Gave Entrone. Sorry, Lord Mayor! I mistook you for something else. Though the resemblance, it’s downright uncanny, it is.”

“Wayne?” Wax said.

“Yeah, boss?”

“Please stop helping.”

“Got it.”

Wax’s and Entrone’s eyes locked. Wax was certain the man had ties to the Set. A partial explanation for his exceptional rise through Outer Cities politics.

“So, here we are,” Gave said, rubbing his hands together. “Waxillium Ladrian. The great lawman of the Roughs. Involved in an *illegal* operation in my city!”

“We have jurisdiction here!” Marasi said. “By the code—”

“Code seventeen of the United Justice Act?” Gave said. “We repealed that, you recall? Three months ago.”

“You can’t repeal it,” Wax said. “You don’t have the authority.”

“We don’t have authority?” Entrone said. “To have a say in the policing of our *own city*? Why, that *is* an arrogant thing to assert, wouldn’t you say, Captain Blantach?”

“It’s technically true, Lord Mayor,” she replied.

“Technically,” he said, “one of those dirty maskers from the South could pass a law saying they have ‘jurisdiction’ here. But what right would they have?” He had walked a circuit of the room and halted in front of Wax. “They aren’t one of *our* kind.”

“I see what you’re doing, Entrone,” Wax said softly.

“Do you?” he whispered, getting close enough that Wax could smell the mint on his breath. “Do you *truly* appreciate how *delicious* this is? You worked so hard to prevent that stupid bill from passing—and yet here you are, in my hands. By *our* laws you’re a criminal, in violation of a *dozen* different codes. Your only fallback is to ignore our authority—the very thing you have spent *months* arguing that we deserve. I have you, Ladrian. You’re mine.”

“The governor will never stand for this,” Marasi said.

Obviously, that was what Entrone wanted. He *wanted* Wax to go crawling back to Elendel for a pardon. And the Supremacy Bill? Well, by insisting Elendel had authority to override local authority, Wax would prove himself a hypocrite. That would give more fuel to the war between Elendel and the Outer Cities. Exactly what this man wanted.

Entrone smiled. Showing no teeth. Just two smug lips that would look *so* much better split and bloodied. Wax restrained himself with effort.

*Ruin, I hate this man,* he thought.

"Perhaps," VenDell said, standing up, "you might be willing to listen to a … higher authority, Lord Mayor." The kandra made his skin turn fully transparent, showing the bones underneath—the skull behind his face, cracked and stuck together with sinew. It was an eerie sight, particularly since VenDell chose to leave the eyeballs normal—and they seemed to float in the jelly that his face had become.

"Ah!" Entrone said. "One of the puppets! Look how it tries to frighten us, Captain Blantach!"

"Er, yes," VenDell said. "I'm an emissary and representative of Harmony."

"I'm not Pathian," Gave said, with a wave of his hand. "Why should I care?"

"About God?" VenDell asked.

"Not my god," Gave replied. "My god is industry, progress, and the indomitability of the human soul. Not some priest who managed to slurp up some juice left by a long-dead entity. Oh! Look, Captain Blantach! It pretends to be shocked by my words!"

"He doesn't pretend," Wax said. "VenDell is a person like any of us. Merely a little more … malleable."

"Oh, Ladrian," Entrone said, then had the audacity to pat Wax on the arm. "So easily fooled. Kandra are animals. Puppets. Why, they aren't even really alive. They're mistwraiths *pretending* to be people, and I fail to see how I'm to be *intimidated* by a talking piece of slime that…"

He trailed off as he noticed that Wayne, subtly, had edged up close to him.

"… a piece of slime," Gave continued, "that … er…"

"Keep goin'," Wayne said, his eyes alarmingly wide. "Keep insultin' my friends. *Do it.*"

Entrone backed away, looking thoroughly unnerved. "You have one hour," he said to Wax, "until I formally announce we're pressing charges. Either break out of here—and perhaps shoot some officers of the law—or call your governor and beg for his help. I’m having a radio box delivered to you.”

He retreated in a rush, trying to watch Wayne at the same time. He ended up leaving Blantach behind.

“What a knob,” Wayne said, dropping the creepy wide-eyed act.

“I … apologize,” Blantach said. “I’m afraid I had no choice but to call him.”

“It’s fine, Blantach,” Marasi said. “But you *must* understand. You can’t throw us in prison—not without risking the fate of the entire Basin. Please listen.”

“I’ll see if I can … work something out.” Blantach glanced over her shoulder and into the constabulary office. “But this is out of my hands now, Colms. Next time, *contact* us before you run an operation in our city.”

She withdrew, shutting the door—which had a small viewing window at the top. A moment later a guard delivered a radio box, then lingered outside to keep an eye on them.

Wax sighed, turning to the others. He wasn’t about to trust a radio delivered into his hands by an enemy.

VenDell’s skin had returned to normal shades. The kandra hesitated, then glanced at Wayne. “Did you mean what you said? Am I actually … your friend?”

“Sure,” Wayne said. “I mean, you’re the stuck-up one that we make fun of, but every crew needs one of those.” He pointed at Wax, then Marasi, then VenDell. “Mine has three. Five if you include Steris, since she counts fer two. But you can never have too many.”

“I … see,” VenDell said, scratching the side of his head.

“Point is,” Wayne continued, “*we* can make fun of you because we like you. That’s how it works. Anybody else does it, and we ram a dueling cane up a part of them that I can’t mention, ’cuz I’m working on my language.”

“You are?” Marasi said.

“Yup. Ranette keeps sayin’ I need to watch what I say, ’cuz there might be children around. Which is real strange, don’t you think? Children are the ones who won’t understand what I’m sayin’ anyway. So why care if *they* hear?”

Wax turned to the door, his mind racing, trying to think of a way out of the current situation—but a part of him realized it was no use. He could walk out of here and ignore Entrone. But that would add another piece of wood to the fire—stoking civil war. Beyond that, could he continue to investigate in the city without being hounded by constables at every step?

*How does the bomb factor into this?* Wax thought. *The talk of ashfalls. My sister. What is really going on?*

He might have a way to find answers. He felt inside his belt, which he'd recovered and refilled from his ammo stash—the large duffel he'd brought and hidden on top of a building. In his belt pouch, alongside the metal vials, he felt the earring Harmony had given him.

And the other one. Made of trellium.

Damn it. He was going to have to at least try. He pulled the trellium earring out and slipped it into his ear.

He felt a jolt and a disconnect, like the coach he was riding in had hit a bump. Different from when he talked to Harmony. Then he felt *drawn* toward something powerful. A vibration ran through him, forceful, violent. He gasped, the room fuzzing around him.

Immediately, a familiar voice pierced his mind like a spike to the brain.

*Faster. I need this to work.*

Telsin. He was hearing his sister speak. He thought he could sense some of her surroundings. She was outside … no echo of a room.

*Our time runs thin,* she continued. *The backup delivery device is too obvious. Too easy to stop. I* need *the primary working. I need—* The voice hesitated. *I sense something,* she said, then stepped to the side.

Her voice grew louder, focused on him. *Out with it. You fought my brother. I know that part already. It … Wait.*

*Waxillium? Is that you? Ah … It* is. *I can sense you. Found yourself a trellium earring, did you? Clever. Your idea, or was it that god of yours?*

"Hello, Telsin," he whispered. No use trying to lie. She could feel him, as clearly as he felt her. He tried to summon some familial emotion. But right now, he felt only haunted by that voice. It was an echo from a long-lost time. A time he'd left behind, but which wouldn't leave him.

*So, you're in Bilming.* She sounded amused. *Your arrival made a characteristic amount of noise. Good to see that nothing changes. You never could make anything useful of yourself unless you also made a huge mess for me.*

"Telsin," he said softly, "what are you doing?"

*What needs to be done, Brother. As always.*

"I…"

What could he say? All of his objections felt hollow. "You'll get millions killed"? Six years ago, she'd been willing to let her own people die to achieve her goals. She wouldn't care about the people of Elendel. "You'll betray our people"? She'd been willing to betray *him.* "You're playing with forces beyond your control." That was the sort of thing she liked, always dancing closer to the flame.

What did he hope to accomplish? He should have thought this through. He knew better than to walk into the enemy's den without a plan.

*Ah, Wax,* Telsin said in his mind. *Still pretending, aren't you? Telling yourself that you're the hero? Where was that hero when our family needed him? Off playing in the Roughs. Running from real responsibility.*

*I'll tell you what I'm doing. What* needs to be done. *This world, and everyone on it, is doomed. Unless I intervene. The same way I had to step up and lead after you ran off. You aren't the hero, Waxillium. You never were. You ran away, like a child who can't stand the rules of the—*

He pulled the earring out, breathing heavily.

Rusts. All these years later, and she could still get to him. That had been a terrible idea.

*At least,* he thought, *I know she's actually what Harmony said. Some kind of avatar for the enemy. And she's tense, urgent. She's on a deadline. She's worried. Because I'm here in the city.*

He considered what she'd been saying, about a "primary delivery device" and a "backup."

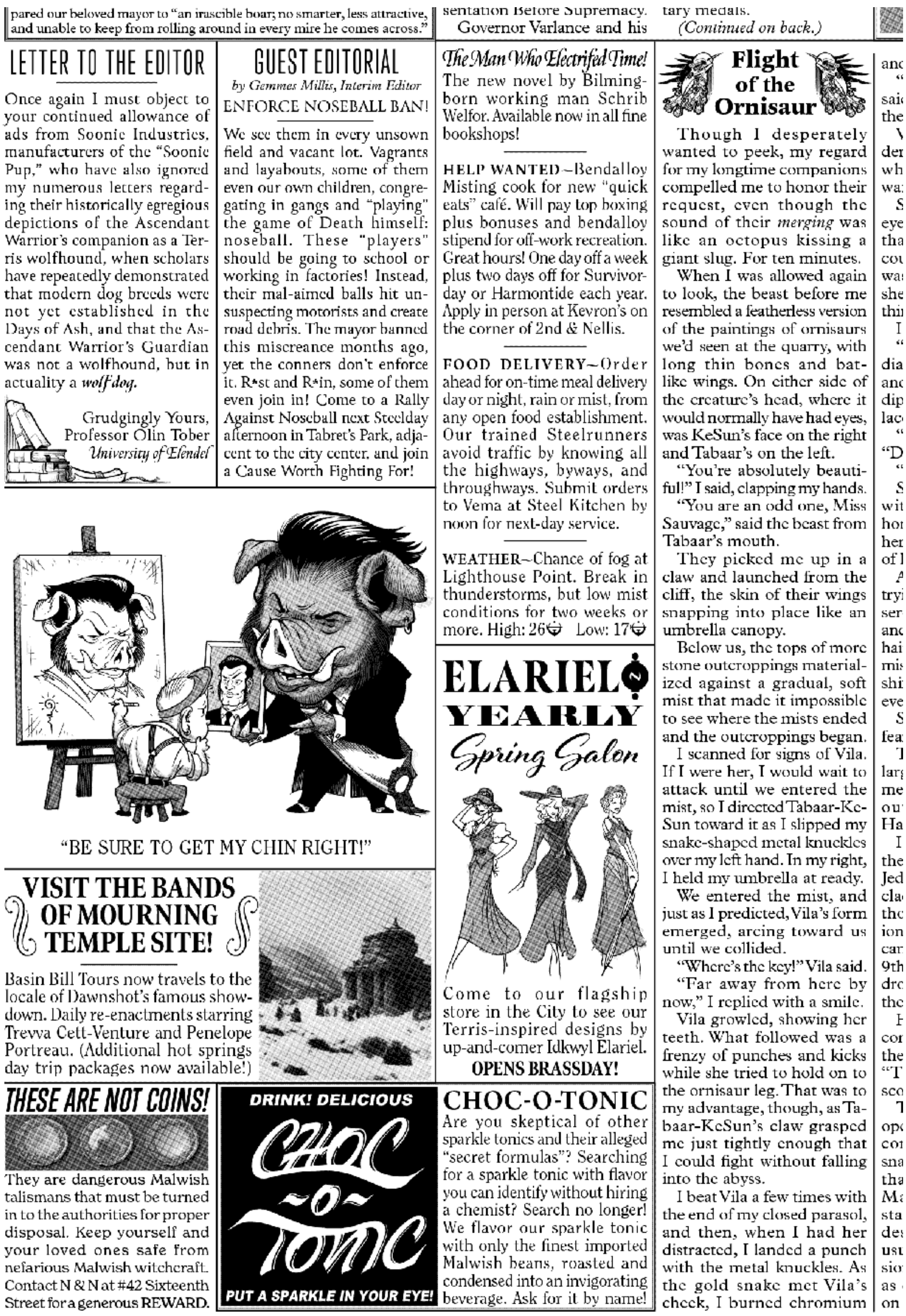
He looked around the room, but the others didn't seem to have noticed what he'd done. They were lost in their own thoughts or problems. All but VenDell, who watched him keenly.

Wax wiped his brow with his hand. "You … mentioned help, from Harmony?" he asked, his voice hoarse.

"It's close." VenDell turned, glancing at the door. "Oh. Rather, I should say it's here. See for yourself."

Frowning, Wax stepped up to the door and peered through the observation window. The guard was staring toward the front doors of the building.

Where Death had arrived.



pared our beloved mayor to "an irascible boar; no smarter, less attractive, and unable to keep from rolling around in every mire he comes across."

sentation Before Supremacy.
Governor Varlance and his

tary medals.
(Continued on back.)

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Once again I must object to your continued allowance of ads from Soonic Industries, manufacturers of the "Soonic Pup," who have also ignored my numerous letters regarding their historically egregious depictions of the Ascendant Warrior's companion as a Terris wolfhound, when scholars have repeatedly demonstrated that modern dog breeds were not yet established in the Days of Ash, and that the Ascendant Warrior's Guardian was not a wolfhound, but in actuality a ***wolfdog.***

Grudgingly Yours,
Professor Olin Tober
*University of Elendel*

## GUEST EDITORIAL

*by Gemmes Millis, Interim Editor*

ENFORCE NOSEBALL BAN!

We see them in every unsown field and vacant lot. Vagrants and layabouts, some of them even our own children, congregating in gangs and "playing" the game of Death himself: noseball. These "players" should be going to school or working in factories! Instead, their mal-aimed balls hit unsuspecting motorists and create road debris. The mayor banned this miscreance months ago, yet the conners don't enforce it. R*st and R*in, some of them even join in! Come to a Rally Against Noseball next Steelday afternoon in Tabret's Park, adjacent to the city center, and join a Cause Worth Fighting For!

"BE SURE TO GET MY CHIN RIGHT!"

VISIT THE BANDS OF MOURNING TEMPLE SITE!

Basin Bill Tours now travels to the locale of Dawnshot's famous showdown. Daily re-enactments starring Trevva Cett-Venture and Penelope Portreau. (Additional hot springs day trip packages now available!)

THESE ARE NOT COINS!

They are dangerous Malwish talismans that must be turned in to the authorities for proper disposal. Keep yourself and your loved ones safe from nefarious Malwish witchcraft. Contact N & N at #42 Sixteenth Street for a generous REWARD.

DRINK! DELICIOUS
CHOC-O-TONIC
PUT A SPARKLE IN YOUR EYE!

*The Man Who Electrified Time!*
The new novel by Bilmingborn working man Schrib Welfor. Available now in all fine bookshops!

**HELP WANTED**—Bendalloy Misting cook for new "quick eats" café. Will pay top boxing plus bonuses and bendalloy stipend for off-work recreation. Great hours! One day off a week plus two days off for Survivorday or Harmontide each year. Apply in person at Kevron's on the corner of 2nd & Nellis.

**FOOD DELIVERY**—Order ahead for on-time meal delivery day or night, rain or mist, from any open food establishment. Our trained Steelrunners avoid traffic by knowing all the highways, byways, and throughways. Submit orders to Vema at Steel Kitchen by noon for next-day service.

**WEATHER**—Chance of fog at Lighthouse Point. Break in thunderstorms, but low mist conditions for two weeks or more. High: 26⊖ Low: 17⊖

ELARIEL
YEARLY
Spring Salon

Come to our flagship store in the City to see our Terris-inspired designs by up-and-comer Idkwyl Elariel.
OPENS BRASSDAY!

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Are you skeptical of other sparkle tonics and their alleged "secret formulas"? Searching for a sparkle tonic with flavor you can identify without hiring a chemist? Search no longer! We flavor our sparkle tonic with only the finest imported Malwish beans, roasted and condensed into an invigorating beverage. Ask for it by name!

## Flight of the Ornisaur

Though I desperately wanted to peek, my regard for my longtime companions compelled me to honor their request, even though the sound of their *merging* was like an octopus kissing a giant slug. For ten minutes.

When I was allowed again to look, the beast before me resembled a featherless version of the paintings of ornisaurs we'd seen at the quarry, with long thin bones and bat-like wings. On either side of the creature's head, where it would normally have had eyes, was KeSun's face on the right and Tabaar's on the left.

"You're absolutely beautiful!" I said, clapping my hands.

"You are an odd one, Miss Sauvage," said the beast from Tabaar's mouth.

They picked me up in a claw and launched from the cliff, the skin of their wings snapping into place like an umbrella canopy.

Below us, the tops of more stone outcroppings materialized against a gradual, soft mist that made it impossible to see where the mists ended and the outcroppings began.

I scanned for signs of Vila. If I were her, I would wait to attack until we entered the mist, so I directed Tabaar-KeSun toward it as I slipped my snake-shaped metal knuckles over my left hand. In my right, I held my umbrella at ready.

We entered the mist, and just as I predicted, Vila's form emerged, arcing toward us until we collided.

"Where's the key!" Vila said.

"Far away from here by now," I replied with a smile.

Vila growled, showing her teeth. What followed was a frenzy of punches and kicks while she tried to hold on to the ornisaur leg. That was to my advantage, though, as Tabaar-KeSun's claw grasped me just tightly enough that I could fight without falling into the abyss.

I beat Vila a few times with the end of my closed parasol, and then, when I had her distracted, I landed a punch with the metal knuckles. As the gold snake met Vila's cheek, I burned chromium

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"Far away from here by now," I replied with a smile.

Vila growled, showing her teeth. What followed was a frenzy of punches and kicks while she tried to hold on to the ornisaur leg. That was to my advantage, though, as Tabaar-KeSun's claw grasped me just tightly enough that I could fight without falling into the abyss.

I beat Vila a few times with the end of my closed parasol, and then, when I had her distracted, I landed a punch with the metal knuckles. As the gold snake met Vila's cheek, I burned chromium

# 28

Wax had never seen Death himself, though Marasi had met the creature once. Known as Ironeyes, the ancient Inquisitor had weighty spikes through his eyes, the points jutting out the back of his skull. One of his eye sockets had been crushed during a fight, as recorded in the Words of Founding that Harmony—Sazed—had left. Wax could make out the scars, intermingled with faded tattoos, outlining the eye sockets.

Death wore voluminous black robes and had ghostly skin—looking ill. The hands jutting from his sleeves were so lean they appeared skeletal. Wax had grown accustomed to speaking with beings out of myth; the kandra, even TenSoon, were practically mundane to him these days. But he still felt an unsettling disquiet at seeing Ironeyes. This being was said to escort the souls of the dead to the Beyond.

The entire room outside—filled with desks, constables, and underlings—had grown silent. No one dared turn a page of paperwork; they all stared at that figure silhouetted against the brazen sunlight behind. Something emanated from him. A dread that crushed the soul like a hand around yesterday's broadsheet. A …

*No,* Wax thought. *I do not fear this. I've stared down death already.*

Strangely, the sensation of dread evaporated from him. Had that been … emotional Allomancy? It was difficult to recognize in the throes of it, but it appeared obvious in hindsight. Yet this time it didn't affect Wax as it did everyone else, including Marasi, judging by how pale her face had gone.

Wax took a deep breath, pushed open the door, and strode out past the guard. Wax walked through the center of the room and met up with

Ironeyes, who was uncommonly tall. As Wax had always imagined, actually.

“Sword,” Death said, focusing spikes upon him. “We need to speak.”

Wax gestured into the room with the others, and Death walked past the stunned constables, though one—bearing the shoulder patch of a Seeker—managed to pull out a gun. Not a move Wax would have advised. All Death did was wave absently and Pull the gun across the room to catch it. Then, making it hover between his hands—an incredible feat, the difficulty of which few non-Allomancers would grasp—he flexed. And the gun’s barrel *crunched.*

Wax froze. Hell. He’d *never* seen someone do *that* with their powers before. How would you even accomplish it?

*Push on the near end, Pull on the far end,* he thought. *But damn, the power involved …*

The gun dropped to the floor, and as Wax and Death reached the door, they saw that Entrone and Blantach had stepped out of an office, their eyes wide.

“Ah,” Ironeyes said, focusing on the lord mayor. “Gave. I never cared much for the members of House Entrone I knew during my mortality.”

“I…” Entrone said. “This is my prisoner. Who…”

“I require privacy,” Ironeyes said. “You will return to these mortals their weapons. Once our conference is finished, you will impede their investigation in this city no further.”

“I’m not of your religion…”

“Death is not a religion,” Ironeyes said. “It is a fact.”

“But—”

“How would you like to die, mortal?” Ironeyes asked, stepping closer, robes billowing around him. “And when? Quietly? In the night, of a failing heart? Drowning, on one of your new ships as it sinks? Here? Right now? Crushed by the weight of your own stupidity?”

Entrone licked his lips, then whispered, “As you demand, Ironeyes, it shall be done.” It appeared that he could indeed be superstitious without being religious.

Wax walked into the room, and Ironeyes swept in after. “Wayne,” Death said softly, closing the door, “kindly watch the door to make certain we are not observed or listened to.”

“Uh, sure,” Wayne said, scrambling over to the door and its window. “They’re all just standin’ out there. ’Cept the few that have fainted. Neat.” He glanced at Ironeyes. “That accent of yours … real old, *real* interesting … I actually kinda got it right.”

Death sank down into a chair and seemed to *age* suddenly. Wrinkles sank from the corners of his eyes, crossing his face, and his jowls sagged. He sighed loudly, tipping his metal eyes toward the ceiling. “Lord Ruler,” he muttered. “That was a performance, wasn’t it? And to think that I was the *reasonable* one in the crew.”

Marasi and Wax shared a glance.

“Ironeyes?” Marasi asked. “Are you … well?”

“No,” he said. “I run low on atium, and so age finally emerges from the shadows. It has always stalked me. Now it senses the kill. I was here in Bilming, seeking answers. They try to re-create the metal, and I thought maybe…”

“If you run out…” Marasi said, “… you die?”

He nodded. “I was going to let it happen. I have lived so much, far longer than my due. But I helped destroy this world—unwillingly, yes, but my weakness led to much sorrow. I swore I would help. And so, I struggle yet to live…”

Rusts. Death took a deep breath, and the lines on his face retreated—then regrew when he exhaled. It looked like he was vacillating between decades of age with each breath.

“Trell wants to own this planet,” Death whispered. “So your time dwindles, as does mine.” He studied Wax with those inscrutable not-eyes. “I’ve grown too weak to continue hunting those who would destroy this land. My display earlier will get you out of this room, perhaps convince the local constables to leave you alone, but that … might be all I can offer.”

Wax knelt beside the aging demigod, a thought striking him. “You were in the city, hunting for atium. Why?”

“Because someone here is trying to split harmonium,” he explained. “And create the metal again. Though making lerasium would be far more dangerous…”

“Do you know what happens?” Marasi asked. “When someone tries to split harmonium?”

Death shook his head.

“An explosion,” Wax said. “A *big* explosion. It’s what we’re trying to stop. Do you have any leads?”

“One, perhaps,” Death said, thoughtful. “A man vanished two weeks ago. I only just ran across his name: Tobal Copper. He made some kind of legal disturbance that mentioned splitting harmonium in the months before he disappeared. Finding out what happened to him would have been my next step.”

Wax nodded. A lead—a slim one, but still somewhere to start. The way his sister talked … it made him feel an increasing urgency.

“Ironeyes?” Marasi asked, stepping over.

“You may call me Marsh,” he said softly. “It … feels good to hear that name. To remember what I used to be.”

“Marsh,” she said. “How did you crush that gun?”

“Duralumin,” he said absently, “and a lot of practice. Listen, child. Harmony is growing increasingly indecisive. He denies it, but I *see* it. That gives Autonomy—Trell, the god of the outworlders—a chance to move in. She seeks to eliminate us from the stage of galactic politics before we even step onto it, and her followers are already armed with Hemalurgy. You studied the book I gave you?”

“Yes,” she said. “And Waxillium practically memorized it.” Wax nodded in agreement.

“Your enemy,” Death said softly, “has learned how to circumvent one of the most important limitations to Hemalurgy: her agents bear too many spikes. That should open them to Harmony’s influence, but it doesn’t. Either Harmony is too weak to exploit what they’ve done, or they’ve found a way to use Trell’s own metal to offset the weakness.

“This is extremely dangerous. So far, I do not believe they’ve learned the secret to Compounding via Hemalurgy. Identity contamination prevents it; that is our only saving grace. If they could do that … or, Lord Ruler … if they get atium, or lerasium…”

“So … what do we do?” Wayne asked from the door.

“What we’ve always done,” Marsh said. “Survive.” He looked to Wax again. “The people of Bilming think they are accomplishing so much, building this navy of theirs to threaten Elendel. It is all part of Trell’s plan somehow. Be warned. Be careful. She steers them. I’ve been … dull of mind lately, as I try to fight off what is happening to me.”

“We’ll stop them,” Marasi said. “I promise it, Marsh.”

Wayne waved to them. A moment later, an attendant arrived with their weapons and equipment. She then withdrew to let them rearm.

“Marsh,” Marasi said, slipping a small handgun into her shoulder bag, “have you ever seen a symbol like this?” She quickly sketched three interlocking diamonds in her notepad. They reminded Wax of something. Some architectural designs from around Elendel?

*Yes,* he thought. *Near the Field of Rebirth.* Actually, it resembled the three-petal shape of a Marewill flower.

“This is my brother’s symbol,” Marsh said. “He does what he thinks is best. As has always been the case with him. He … is not the best at self-reflection, but he *does* want to protect Scadrial. His agents will align with your interests.”

“I think I saw through his eyes,” Wax said. “Once, years ago. Is he still alive? The Survivor?”

“Alive?” Marsh asked. “It depends, I suppose, on your definition. He’s close to alive. How is that?”

“You mean … he’s a ghost?” Wayne asked.

“After a fashion,” Marsh replied. “He’s less alive than I am, but perhaps more than other ghosts? It’s hard to say. Three of us remain from that original crew. After all this time. Only three. Legs to a tripod, balancing one another. And without one … I do not know what would happen.”

Wax didn’t know what to make of that. Still, it felt good to strap his guns back on, and they had a lead now. A name and, it appeared, permission to leave this office without being chased. He’d take it, even if Death himself was …

“I will stay here,” VenDell said as they gathered at the door. “I will ensure that Lord Ironeyes is cared for, and look after the constables in the hospital. I … do not think I will be of further value to your investigation.”

“As you wish,” Wax said.

“Just remember what you know, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said. “What you said earlier. Harmony puts people where they need to be, but then they must act. It is his way.”

Wax nodded. “Wayne, Marasi—are you ready?”

“I am,” Marasi said, slinging her bag over her shoulder.

They looked to Wayne, who put his hands on his hips. “Did either of you know that ghosts was real?”

“Does it matter?” Marasi asked.

“Does it matter if *ghosts* are *real*?” Wayne said. “I think it matters, Marasi. I think it *rusting* does!”

“I’m told it is better to refer to them as Cognitive Shadows,” Marsh mumbled.

“Wayne,” Wax said, “can we please focus?”

“Fine, fine,” he said, sliding his dueling canes into their loops on his belt. “Seems unfair to grouse at a man for getting discombobulated by definitive proof of an afterlife. Dark gods. Death himself dyin’. Rusting ghosts. Guess we gotta keep goin’, but after this, I don’t wanna see anyone complainin’ when I’ve traded for someone’s favorite shoes or whatnot. Hear me?”

Together they marched out through the quiet constabulary office and into the sunlight.

# 29

*Right,* Marasi thought, trying to pull her emotions together. *Conversation with Death. Just another* everyday *conversation with* Death *himself …*

She couldn’t blame Wayne for feeling out of sorts. But they had to stay focused. Unfortunately, she and the others hadn’t even reached the bottom of the constabulary office steps before someone came running down after them. Flushed from exertion—and perhaps stress—Blantach looked a great deal less sure of herself now than she had earlier.

Marasi stepped forward to meet Blantach. “Yes?”

“He’s going to send people after you,” she said. “As soon as he gets over the shock of what happened in there with … you-know-who. I know Lord Entrone. He takes a great deal of pride in how ‘modern’ and ‘forward thinking’ he is. He’ll decide you tricked him, and will send constables to arrest you.”

Wax groaned softly, stepping up behind them. “We don’t have time to dodge patrols.”

“Look,” Blantach said, “I … have *no idea* what’s going on in this city. I thought I did. Until…” She glanced at the office building and shivered. “I had my illusions shattered quite violently. Something dangerous is going on here.”

“More than dangerous, Blantach,” Marasi said. “Catastrophic.”

“Right. Right,” Blantach said. “Was that *really* … you know…?”

“Yes,” Marasi said. “I’ve met him before.”

“Rusts…” Blantach took a deep breath and turned to face them again. “I think I can keep Entrone off your back if you let me send an officer with you.”

“Out of the question,” Wax said.

Blantach stepped closer and met his eyes. “Listen. This is my city. I don’t know what—or who—you’re afraid of, but I’m not part of it. I want to help, and this is the only thing I can think of. If you have a Bilming officer with you, I can persuade Entrone I’ve got someone watching you.”

She turned, gesturing, and a figure came scrambling down the steps, nearly tripping at the end. The slender woman pushed her overly large spectacles up on her face, but that nearly made her drop the three ledgers she was trying to carry. Shoulder-length black hair fell around her face as she struggled to keep the ledgers in hand. She pushed it back and grinned sheepishly—through lips with bright red lipstick.

It was Moonlight.

“She says she knows you,” Blantach said, “and that you might be willing to trust her? Kim is one of our researchers—she’s not a field agent, but she knows her way around Bilming and can help you work in the city.”

Moonlight … “Kim” … thrust out her hand to shake—which almost caused her to drop her ledgers again. She scrambled to catch them.

“She looks fun,” Wayne said.

“You’re just imagining tying her shoelaces together,” Wax said, his arms folded. “Marasi, do you know this person?”

“I … do,” Marasi said.

“From where?” he asked.

Sharing the truth with Blantach didn’t seem like a good idea. “We worked on a project together a while ago—she came to Elendel to further some research she was doing.”

Wax narrowed his eyes, obviously trying to decide if that made Kim more or less suspicious. Marasi, though, felt maybe she could trust the woman. A little. After all, Marsh *had* said that people with the interlocking diamond tattoos would be on their side.

Moonlight saluted Wax. “I promise to be of use, sir, and not get in your way.” She grimaced. “Except maybe by accident.”

“I think we should bring her,” Marasi said.

Wax nodded. “You’re on the team then, Kim. Let’s see if you can be of use. A man named Tobal Copper vanished in this city recently. I want to track down where he lived and interrogate anyone who might have known him.”

“Oh!” Moonlight said. “I don’t have that kind of information *on* me, of course. I just carry around the city maps and details! But I can get you into the records office! We should be able to find answers there.”

“Which will let them know what we’re doing,” Wax said. “The Set is sure to have agents in such an important place.”

“I doubt there’s another way to get this information,” Marasi said. “We’ll just have to move quickly, to stay ahead of them.”

“Agreed,” Wax said after a moment’s thought. “Lead on, Kim. Captain Blantach, anything you could do to keep the lord mayor off our backs would be *most* appreciated.”

* * *

The Bilming City Records and Research Building was a *huge* improvement over the similar offices in Elendel. Marasi had been forced to spend many an hour in closets, searching through thick ledgers of names or broadsheet archives.

This building, however, was a sleek silvery structure, each side more window than wall. Blantach led them inside herself, and a flash of her constable’s credentials got them assigned a flock of junior researchers before she bade the group farewell.

In minutes, Marasi and the others were sitting in comfortable chairs in a glass-walled meeting room, sipping tea while waiting for the results. All but Wax, who paced like a caged animal.

Well, Marasi might have preferred some of Allik’s hot chocolate, but this *certainly* beat spending bleary-eyed hours sorting through old records on her own. The break gave her a moment to jot down a letter to Allik—saying not to worry if he heard of casualties via the broadsheets.

She paused. Then she added that he should take a short trip to the countryside to visit her father, and stay out of Elendel for the day. Just in case.

She stepped out to send the message—she’d seen a radio station on the way to the archive. As she walked down the too-white hallway, Moonlight emerged from a side passage. Hadn’t she gone to the restroom? Marasi glanced over her shoulder and saw that the meeting room where she’d left Wax and Wayne was out of sight.

“Good,” Moonlight said softly. “I was hoping you’d take the cue and slip out to meet me.”

“I didn’t, actually,” Marasi said. “We should go explain who you are to the others—there’s no reason to keep it a secret.”

“I’d prefer not to,” Moonlight said lightly. “I’m not here for them. I’m here for you.”

“I thought you couldn’t interfere?”

“Not without orders,” Moonlight said. “I’ve received some: I can help, but I’m not to reveal myself to the other two. My mentor is worried about their connections to Harmony.”

Marasi stopped in the hallway, which was empty save for them. “I’m not going to lie to my companions, Moonlight.”

“You already have.”

“Only to avoid revealing you to Blantach,” Marasi said.

“And do you assume those two tell you everything about their lives?” Moonlight said. “Every little detail?”

“The important ones.”

“What did Waxillium and Harmony discuss when he died?”

“That’s … not important.”

“Seems to me that it is.” Moonlight stepped around Marasi to stand right in front of her. Not really blocking her way, but making certain Marasi met her eyes. “Do you want answers? We have those. Do you want to protect Scadrial? That’s our main purpose. But we *can’t* move in the open. That invites our enemies to strike—beings like Trell are too powerful and Harmony is too indecisive. What’s he doing to help?”

“He sent us,” Marasi said.

“He tossed you into the line of fire and said, ‘Good luck!’ It’s not his fault—my mentor speaks of him quite fondly. But the reality of your planet’s situation is dire, and so we *must* move in the shadows. And our secrets *must* be maintained—known only by those who have proven themselves.”

“Wax is the single most ‘proven’ man alive.”

“We’re not interested in him,” Moonlight said. “We’re interested in *you*. Doesn’t it excite you, to know things that he doesn’t—things almost no one else does? The secrets of the cosmere itself?”

“I don’t need to keep secrets from others to feel special.”

Moonlight smiled. “I believe you. How interesting. Well, for now I’m demanding you keep *my* secret. That’s the cost of my aid. I have *met* Autonomy; I know how she operates. You need me. But if you tell anyone about me, I’ll leave.”

“That’s your play? Extortion?”

“Extortion?” Moonlight said. “It’s just a deal. I have agency, Marasi. I don’t *have* to help you. I have a lead now—I can probably find my way to this Tobal Copper’s place on my own long before you.” She shrugged. “Waxillium trusts you. He’ll understand when you explain why you couldn’t tell him.”

She stepped aside and continued down the hallway, her mannerisms changing as she reached the meeting room door. She became jumpy and excited, and—after first pushing on it and blushing when it didn’t budge—pulled it open.

Marasi continued on her way, uncertain. There *was* something about how Moonlight talked … Chasing petty thugs, or even mobsters with dangerous intentions, had once thrilled Marasi. But the more she learned of the world and the forces moving in it, the less satisfied she was.

Long ago, she’d explained to Wax her philosophy on becoming a constable. She’d envisioned making the entire city safer—not by chasing criminals, but by changing the way people and neighborhoods saw themselves. Lock a man in prison, and you might stop him from committing crimes. Teach a man to respect himself and his community, and you stopped everyone he might have taught, recruited, or bullied.

She didn’t want to focus on individuals. She wanted to change the world. At least, that was how she’d thought when she’d first dreamed of becoming a constable. Had she let the day-to-day grind of the job turn her into something else?

By the time she returned from sending Allik the message, the research team had already arrived with answers—and was spreading out relevant broadsheets and city records for Wax. Marasi stepped up beside him—Moonlight sat primly in the corner with a disarming grin on her face. Wayne was pretending to nap, but he had one eye cracked, watching Moonlight.

*Don’t overdo the act, Moonlight,* Marasi thought with satisfaction. *He’ll catch you.*

“Tobal Copper,” one of the researchers was saying, pointing at a listing. “Age fifty-three. A chemist, specializing in rubber and manufacturing. Worked for Basin Tires, making … well, tires.”

“He lost his job,” another explained, “about five years ago for … erratic behavior.”

“Which means what, exactly?” Marasi said, surveying the papers set out on the long table.

“Well,” the lead researcher said—a Terriswoman with curly hair and a V pattern on her shirt. “We pulled most of this information from a lawsuit he filed against his former employer. Seems that they … um … ‘refused to listen to his vital discoveries about the impending end of the world.’”

Wax and Marasi shared a look.

“Go on,” Wax said.

“There’s not a lot to tell, unfortunately,” the researcher said. “The lawsuit was dismissed before reaching even the first stage of trial. In this, he mentions pamphlets he’d created, but that’s not the sort of record we archive. Instead we have his legal case, his apartment lease, and one police blotter record of an arrest.”

“For disturbing the peace,” the junior researcher said. “He was banging on the doors in his apartment complex, yelling that ‘They’ve almost split harmonium, and when they do, it’s going to destroy us all.’”

“We’ll leave you with the information,” the lead researcher said, patting the papers on the desk. “And we’ll keep searching—but I doubt we’ll turn up anything else. We keep careful track of the names of anyone arrested, for cross-referencing, and these were the only three hits.”

“One more thing, if you don’t mind,” Marasi said as they prepared to leave. “Can you find any reports of food shipments vanishing? Particularly nonperishable items?”

“Oh, that’s been happening steadily for two years now,” the lead researcher said. “Captain Blantach has us watching for such reports, as she finds it baffling. Why would the city’s criminal underground be so interested in *canned beans*?”

“Why indeed,” Marasi said, lifting up a sheet from the lawsuit documents. Where Copper had claimed, *Someone is building shelters against a cataclysm, maintained by inexplicable technology. The city government is in on it, and so were my employers! They fired me because I* *got too close to the truth. You have to listen. They’re splitting harmonium, and once they do, they’ll make bombs to turn us into turtles.*

That … last part seemed a little far-fetched.

The researchers vanished out the door, leaving Marasi and Wax to read over the three documents in turn. Unfortunately, it *wasn’t* a lot to go on. The blotter said that after Tobal Copper had calmed, they’d released him. He had not reoffended.

The last sheet gave an address in an area the researcher said was expensive. Marasi supposed a head chemist would be paid well.

“They probably killed him,” Wax said softly, “once the hubbub died down—so it wouldn’t look too suspicious.”

“Possibly,” Marasi said. “But it’s equally likely they grabbed him to make him work on their projects.”

“Death said he vanished two weeks ago,” Wax said. “This trail might be cold already.”

“But it’s the best one we have,” Marasi said.

“Agreed. Kim, do you know where this apartment address is located?”

# 30

The apartment building didn’t look much like a plateau.

Wayne stood with the others, hands on his hips, staring up at the thing. It was too shiny, with too many windows—like a big bottle of something expensive. Buildings shouldn’t look like that; they should look like bricks. And have alleys that smelled of what came out of a fellow after he’d had a bottle of something too expensive.

Most of all, he’d expected a plateau.

*No, wait,* he realized. *There’s a canyon next. That’s how the story goes. We gotta find that first.*

Comforted, he followed Marasi, Wax, and that Kim woman who tried too hard to be fiddly. The foyer had a doorman and everything. This place *was* fancy. Maybe Wayne should buy a building like that. A doorman sure would be helpful in carrying him up to his flat after *he*’d had too many bottles of something expensive.

Or, well, more often he had bottles of something cheap as piss. Just because he was secretly rich and posh didn’t mean he couldn’t appreciate terrible booze anymore. He merely had to call it “retro” or “authentic” or something.

The doorman sent for the building manager, who turned out to be a man shaped kind of like a brick—so that was a nice nod to proper building protocol. Marasi and Wax explained they needed to investigate the missing man’s apartment, while Wayne took a long walk around the foyer with its enormous paintings of people dancing. They wore suits and dresses, their legs stretched really long, their backs all straight, as if they were made of rulers and not flesh.

Was this the canyon from the story? Ma had said it was beautiful. But no. This didn’t work. No self-respecting canyon would have pictures of dancing folks on the walls.

And why did he assume this would be like the story? Well, because he’d thought of it, he supposed. Once you had a thought, you had to keep ahold of it. That was how things was.

The building manager listened to Wax and Marasi’s explanations, squinted at Kim’s credentials, then grunted. He pointed the way to the elevator, and they all squeezed in.

Wayne didn’t much like elevators. It wasn’t just being trapped in a little box, or not knowin’ how it worked and needin’ to rely upon an operator. It wasn’t that you could smell everyone a little too much when pressed together, or couldn’t see where you were going, which ruined the experience of going up high.

Wait. No, it probably *was* that last one. Elevators were like a carnival ride designed by an overprotective parent who didn’t want you getting scared or actually having any fun. He’d had more faith in them when they’d been moved by people, not electricity. Folks were overly trusting of this strange power what leaked from sockets in the walls. After all, Wayne was a primary investor in the technology, and that should have been a big red flag for everyone.

On the twenty-second floor, at the end of a long hallway, the building manager used a set of keys to open a door into a large apartment. He gestured for them to enter, with a grunt.

“Anyone else been in here?” Wax asked.

“No,” the manager said.

“He’s been gone for two weeks,” Wax said. “And nobody came looking? No constables? No family?”

The manager shook his head, grunted, then left them—apparently wanting nothing to do with constables.

“Wonder what his problem is,” Marasi said, shutting the door behind them.

“Dunno,” Wayne said. “But whatever he has, at least it seems noncommunicative.”

Wax walked to the center of the room. One wall had narrow floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city, with steel girders between. The wall to its right was filled with bookshelves. There was a stylish sitting area to the left, with a smart yellow rug and black furniture. Everything was exceptionally neat, though keeping your place clean was probably easy when you was either dead or vanished.

“So,” Marasi said, “they grabbed him or killed him. Then left this apartment alone and visibly pristine. Trap?”

“Trap,” Wax said, with a nod. “Give me a minute to use Allomancy to scan about.”

Turned out it’s really tough to make an explosive trap without *some* metal, even using modern clay explosives. They found three tripwires and one pressure plate, each hooked to a doozy of a grenade. The Set evidently didn’t care about a little collateral damage.

“So, whoever you’re chasing,” Kim said, wringing her hands nervously, “they got here before us. Rusts. I didn’t know what I was in for…”

“They were undoubtedly behind Copper’s disappearance,” Wax said. “Be careful, everyone. There might be a trap we missed. Kim, would you encourage anyone in the neighboring apartments to leave for the next hour?”

She left to do so, and the rest of them set to some familiar work: going over a scene for clues. Kim returned a short time later while Wayne was inspecting the writing desk near the bookshelves. She knelt down beside him, looking up at the bottom as he knocked for secret compartments.

“Um…” she said, still acting uncertain, “I did as you asked. But … why are we bothering to search? Your enemy has been over this place thoroughly.”

“Sure,” Wayne said. “I can even prove it. See these little drill holes? You make those to be *extra* sure there’s no secret compartments, but only if you want to leave the furniture in one piece. Which is less fun … but sometimes there are good reasons. Like if you want the room to look normal to a bunch of constables when they visit, so they’ll be more likely to get themselves exploded.”

“So what is there to learn?”

“Well, you see, this is a kind of fight,” Wayne said. “A back-and-forth. A dance. They set those traps in case someone dangerous got wind of the Set. You don’t need to blow up ordinary constables. Just the *extra*ordinary kind.”

“Like you?”

“Hell no,” Wayne said, then pointed to Marasi, searching through books, then to Wax, knocking against the far wall and listening for compartments. “You see those two? They represent the best of two worlds. Wax, now, he’s instinct. He’s lived a lot, been shot at a lot. He didn’t have the schooling to be a constable—he spent his school years learning from Terris scholars about old things people wrote a long time ago.

“But Marasi, she’s knowledge. She’s spent her life *studying* how to do this sort of nonsense. Sometimes I think she must have read more books on being a constable than have ever actually been written. She talks of crime patterns, preventing chains of poverty, and smart things what make you think maybe being a constable is about *math*.

“Put the two of them together, and you’ve got both. Instinct and knowledge. Practice and application. The enemy, they looked this place over, sure. They had first crack at it. But they left bombs. That whispers that they’re worried they missed something. And so the dance, the fight. Can *we* find what they didn’t?”

“Curious,” she said. “And what do you add to the team?”

“Comic relief.”

She cocked an eyebrow.

“Maybe a little whimsy,” he said. “Improvisation. Vision.”

“You have a broad imagination, then?”

“There are broads in my imagination almost all the time.”

That provoked a smile. Seemed like a nice enough person, when she wasn’t pretending. Course, she was probably a traitor of some sort. Shame about that.

“Hey, Wax,” Wayne said. “Look at this.”

Wax joined him a moment later, inspecting the bottom envelope in a stack from the desk drawer.

“What’s that?” Kim asked.

“When you use a fountain pen,” Wayne said, “you gotta wait for it to dry. But sometimes you’re inna hurry, or you’re worried, so you put it away and put something on toppa it. Like this stack of envelopes. Then the ink makes an imprint on the bottom.”

“Smudged,” Wax said, holding up the envelope. “But maybe legible. This part here, it’s underlined. Does that look like a set of numbers to you?”

“A seven?” Wayne asked, pointing at one. The next were too smudged to read. “Then a dash and a thirteen.”

“Maybe a combination,” Kim said softly, crowding them to see the number. “There are big stacks of lockers at the larger train stations that use numbers like this, where you can pay to store things.”

Wax nodded slowly. “Marasi, what have you found?”

“I think these books have all been replaced,” she said. “He seems like the type who reads a lot, but these are all brand new. I’d guess the Set took every book in the place, just in case, and refilled the bookshelves with red herrings.”

“This looks like the original furniture though,” Wax said, and demonstrated moving a chair back so it bumped the wall, right where the paint had been scraped away by repeatedly being hit like that. “It’s old. Worn. The carpet too. The room *appears* neat and orderly, because the Set cleaned it up after they did their search—but it was likely a mess before they arrived.”

“I think the fellow is dead,” Wayne said, tapping the wall and breaking away some putty. “Bullet hole. Probably shot the poor doof in the back while he was sitting here.”

“Too specific a conclusion to draw from so little evidence,” Marasi said, joining him. She pulled out a little brush and fiddled in the hole, eventually pulling out some flakes of something and putting them in a vial.

“Blood?” Wayne guessed.

“Yes,” she admitted. “And what might be a sliver of bone. They must have cleaned the blood off the desk, but removed only the bullet from the hole.” She ran her fingers over the wood. “It’s worn down. He used this desk a lot. Or bought an old one to begin with. Hard to say.”

Wax walked over and handed Wayne a leather cap, like painters wore.

“Found it on the bedpost,” Wax said. “What do you think? Have we given you enough to work with?”

“Maybe…” Wayne said, slipping on the hat. He walked to the center of the room, then stared out a window, putting it all together. Trying to imagine the man who had lived here, trying to extrapolate from what they knew of him.

“He was respected at first,” Wayne said. “A good scientist. But then he found things, heard other things, learned more. He was a chemist, right?”

“For a tire company,” Marasi said.

“A front, most likely,” Wax said. “He said his employers were making a bomb. I’d bet his chemistry work involved investigating weapon systems and explosives for the Bilming government.”

“Yeah…” Wayne said, his eyes closed. “He realized they were looking to make a bomb, and heard about splitting harmonium. And he was maybe already a little eccentric. He tried to save the city … But he was an odd fellow, and nobody listened…”

Eyes closed, he spread his arms out and turned around slowly, smelling the place—and imagining it. Stacked old dishes in the corner. He could still smell them. Frantic nights … reading … thinking …

“They didn’t listen,” Wayne said. “And when they locked him up, he learned he couldn’t use the normal justice system to stop the disaster.”

“So what did he do?” Kim asked. “You think the people who killed him were scared that they missed something. That implies he knew something they didn’t want leaked. Where did he stash it?”

“He didn’t,” Wayne whispered. “That’s not what this fellow would do. You see, the Set … they’re going to be wrong about him. Just like Kim is.”

“How?” Marasi asked softly from somewhere to his right.

“The Set,” Wayne said, “they hold on to knowledge. They *strangle* it, Marasi. But a fellow like this, he might be a little unhinged, but he wants people to know what *he* knows. He ain’t going to lock his ideas up in some train station. He’ll *share* them. If the government won’t listen, then…”

He opened his eyes and met Wax’s. “… he’ll do whatever he can to get the information out.”

“Kim,” Wax said, thoughtful, “which local broadsheet has the worst reputation? The type that publishes whatever nonsense it can get its hands on? Particularly if it’s frightening, or a little off-kilter?”

“There are at *least* seven of those,” she replied.

“Which one syndicates the writings of that fool Jak?”

“The *Sentinel of Truth*,” she said. “I … kind of love those…” She seemed embarrassed, but she needn’t be. Those were good stories. Super dumb, of course, but sometimes you needed cheap storytelling with your cheap booze. Didn’t make no sense to read literature while drinking outta a paper sack.

“*Sentinel of Truth*…” Wax said. “Do you know the address of their offices?”

“I can look it up,” Kim said, digging out one of her volumes of city addresses.

Wayne took off the hat and held it lightly. The poor fellow, Tobal Copper, *was* dead. He hadn’t let the Set push him around or force him to work for them. They’d come here to learn what he knew about them and their plans, and they hadn’t left him alive. But maybe he’d told someone. Someone the Set hadn’t been able to find—because letting go of information, to them, would be inconceivable.

“I’ve got it,” Kim said. “Publishing offices of the *Sentinel* can be found at…” She looked up. “Seventh Street. Office 42–13. Nights! The same numbers you found on the bottom of the envelope.”

Wax squeezed him on the arm. “Nice work, Wayne.”

He shrugged. “It’s easy enough when you have a lot to work with.”

“That was a lot?” Kim asked, curious.

“Sure,” Wayne said, tucking the hat away. “A man’s whole life.”

# 31

Steris took a long, deep breath. It was the sort of thing she'd read about for calming nerves. She'd seen Marasi do it during stressful situations. Did it work? Steris wasn't certain. But the act was very normal, wasn't it?

She took another deep breath in case she'd done it wrong, letting it out slowly. Then she stepped into the Senate's main assembly hall to be assaulted by noise and chaos. The two were so often partners.

Senators shouted across the chamber at each other. Aides fluttered about, delivering afternoon broadsheets and private reports to their senators. She'd been able to acquire a few of these—not actual broadsheets from Bilming, but local reprints or summaries received via telegraph. Emergency editions were common with big stories, each paper rushing to capitalize.

They wouldn't be the most accurate stories. But they could certainly start fires. She glanced at a few as she walked past.

CONSTABLES DEAD! BOTCHED ELENDEL OPERATION LEADS TO BILMING TRAGEDY!

SECRET ELENDEL CONSTABLE FORCE UNDERMINES LOCAL POLICING EFFORTS!

EARLY ACT OF WAR PLACES ELENDEL FORCES IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO BILMING LAW ENFORCEMENT! SHOTS FIRED! SEVENTEEN DEAD!

The spins were different, but the flavors were similar. Waxillium had drawn attention as usual, and she had no doubt that most of the casualties were members of the Set. That wasn't a nuance for headlines. Still, she had sent her children out of the city with Kath. She prayed to the Survivor that they were safe in their grandfather's estate to the south.

For now, Steris pushed through the cacophony, steeling herself against the fluttering of pages, the tumult of words, and made her way to the vice governor’s seat. There Steris delivered the proper authorization form for her to take her husband’s position in the Senate.

Adawathwyn said nothing about the dire letter Steris had sent earlier, detailing the threat to the city. Why? Did they dismiss her that easily?

People never wanted to listen to Steris. They preferred to nod along and think about other things. She made her way to Wax’s seat—her seat. Wax was correct; standing for House Ladrian was her right. Indeed, it was one of the main reasons they’d initially explored a union. Her fortune; his authority. Together they could do great things.

If she could keep her nerve. Yes, she’d taken his spot before, but never for something so vital. So, she stood at the small desk, surrounded by chaos. She’d prepared for this. She’d written down what it would be like. She’d even taken two deep breaths. Yes, her heart thundered in her chest, insisting she was nervous, but what did her heart know? It had spent years insisting she’d never fall in love, and it had been so very wrong. Her heart was no expert in what she couldn’t do. It only knew what she had and hadn’t done.

As she’d hoped, people noticed her there, standing silently, and some of the arguments dropped off. This allowed Adawathwyn to shout for quiet in the room—and finally be heard. Her forceful tone, unusual for a Terriswoman, brought order at last. Like a teakettle moved from the burner, senators stopped boiling, but remained hot—settling in their seats and muttering softly.

“The governor,” Adawathwyn said, “requests an explanation from the acting senator of House Ladrian.”

Every eye in the room turned to Steris. Well, she was accustomed to that. People did tend to stare at her. Or glare. Or glower. It depended on how wrong they were, and what level of annoyed they were at hearing her point it out.

“My husband,” she said to the room, “has been called back to his duties as a lawman because of a particularly dangerous situation in Bilming. His operation was fully approved by the constables-general, under the authority of the governor himself. Your Grace, everything my husband has done has been strictly legal and documented.”

“Sometimes,” the governor said, “it doesn’t matter if the permissions are in place and the documents prepared. An act can still be improper.”

What? *How dare he!* That was the very *definition* of proper! Steris forced down her anger. Some people … just thought that way.

She covertly glanced at her note card. She had determined, after deliberating all morning, that she'd need to get the governor into a small-group setting. She didn't want to panic the city, and didn't yet know how urgent the timing was.

She still needed to get a plan in place for evacuating the city. Always plan for the worst. So: get the governor into a more private conversation. In the proper circumstances, he could authorize an evacuation of the city without a Senate vote.

"Your Grace," she said to the governor, "Constable-General Reddi has information of relevance about my husband's mission. I sent him reports with details of my fears this morning. We are facing a far larger issue, even, than the growing intercity aggression. I therefore move that a select council be formed to deal with the emergency in an immediate and timely manner."

A Governor's Select Council would be a small commission—in this case made up of a handful of senators and at least one constable-general—with a limited remit. In the past, they had been used for smaller-scale matters, such as addressing traffic needs in the city hub. But a select council was a potent tool, allowing a concentration of power in a few specific individuals. She was shocked it hadn't been used for an emergency before now; a thorough reading of the law made the application obvious.

"Wait," the governor asked, "is that … allowed? I thought those committees were for choosing flowers at grand openings and the like."

The vice governor grabbed him by the arm and pulled him down, where they conversed in quiet, hissing tones—eventually calling over a legal clerk. Several others in the room did likewise.

The governor stood up. "This seems an excellent suggestion," he said, sounding surprised. "Motion to vote on creating a select council on this matter with Bilming?" He pointedly looked toward a few senators in the room—including Lord Darlin Cett, a man with slicked-back, thinning hair.

The Cetts were among the more powerful faction leaders in this incarnation of the government, and the look seemed to say, "You'll be included in this council if you vote for it." It was a shrewd move for the governor, which likely meant he hadn't come up with it himself.

For once, the Senate vote gave Steris the result she'd been hoping for. A select council was to be formed at the governor's discretion, granted authority for twenty-four hours to deal with the crisis at Bilming.

"Lord Cett," the governor said, "Lady Hammondess, and Lady Gardre. Please join me and Adawathwyn in the governor's chambers to strategize until Constable-General Reddi arrives. The rest of the Senate is adjourned."

Steris hesitated. He hadn't called on her. Was … that an oversight? Was it implied that she'd join him, or …

Or was he leaving her out?

Oh, *rusts*. How could she have missed such a natural possibility? She called for a select council, but then wasn't included in it? She should have seen that coming.

She put her hand to her head, feeling hot and ashamed of herself. The woman who was ready for everything, blindsided by such an obvious move.

As she tried to control her nausea, someone stood up at the back of the chamber—from the observation seats. A figure in a sharp wooden mask painted with red lines. "Your Grace," the Malwish ambassador said, "I should very much like to observe the workings of this council."

"Um, Admiral Daal?" the governor said. "This is a matter of internal Basin affairs."

"Yes, which is exactly why I want to observe," the ambassador said. "I can learn much about a people by how they react to a crisis. I have a pleasure craft, of a personal ownership, docked in the city. Perhaps you would find it useful to borrow, my lord governor? To observe the Basin."

The governor blinked. "Well," he said, "I'm sure the wisdom of a battle-hardened admiral would be of great use to our council. Come on, then."

Oh, rusts. Had he really taken such an obvious bribe? In public? The action cut through Steris's shame, and she glanced toward Adawathwyn. The vice governor had her palm to her face. She'd have to work hard to spin that exchange. But, well, one of the problems with having a pushover like Varlance as governor was that others were fully capable of pushing too.

*You can push,* Steris thought at herself. *You have to try.*

Ignoring her instincts—which wanted her to sit down and write out how she could have foreseen this situation—Steris hopped out of her seat and ran to the floor, shoving unceremoniously between a pair of senators to reach the governor.

“Your Grace,” she said. “I believe I can offer relevant insight to this council.”

“Oh!” he said, glancing toward her. “Lady Ladrian?” He then looked to the side, where Adawathwyn shook her head sharply. “Alas,” the governor said, turning back to Steris, “I feel the council is already crowded. It was wonderful of you to make the suggestion though.”

“Your Grace,” she said. “There is a *dire threat* to the city. You need to hear me out.”

The governor hesitated.

“She sent a letter about this earlier in the morning, Your Honor,” Adawathwyn said. “Some nonsense about a bomb capable of destroying Elendel.”

“What is this?” he said, turning toward his vice governor.

“It’s true,” Steris said. “You didn’t even give it to him?”

“Your house has a history of inflating problems,” Adawathwyn said. “Remember the time your husband claimed that voting against his workers’ rights act would cause an uproar in the city? Or when he insisted the Roughs would form its own country if we continued our tariff plans?”

“This time it’s different,” Steris said. “He … has confirmation from Harmony.”

“I see,” Adawathwyn said. “And if Harmony *himself* were going to speak to someone, would he not speak to the *governor*?”

“Has your husband seen a bomb?” the governor asked. “Does he have proof to back up your claims?”

“He’s gathering evidence now,” Steris said.

“Then,” the governor said, “why not return to us when you have that proof?”

“Because I need to be in that council with you—”

“Lady Ladrian,” he said, softer, “surely you see that this is an important, tense situation. This is not a place for a woman who has been a sitting senator for less than an hour.” He smiled. “Indeed, this situation is going to require delicacy and tact, not…”

*Not whatever it is you are,* the unfinished sentence seemed to imply. He nodded to her, then joined the others at the door to the governor’s chambers.

Steris was left alone in the center of the floor. Humiliated. She … well, she’d have to make another plan. Yes, plan how to deal with this situation.

She could take the rest of the day …

*No.* She couldn’t afford to spend time planning. She *had* to get into that room.

And in the moment, she thought of one way she might be able to accomplish it.

# 32

The *Sentinel of Truth* broadsheet offices didn’t fit Bilming. Unlike the sleek, modern designs, its building looked like a shack. An older wooden structure, only one story, with a peaked roof, bulging walls, and small windows.

“One of the old buildings,” Kim explained, “from when this section of town held a lot of fishing shacks. The push to start knocking everything down and build anew came five years ago, but there are structures like this sprinkled throughout the city.”

“Doesn’t seem like it’s been in operation lately,” Wax said, noting the padlock on the door, the dark interior. “Is it still publishing?”

“Releases have been sporadic lately,” Kim said. “I had to wait *six weeks* to read the end of the ‘Survivor’s Last Testament’ arc of Jak’s explorations.”

*Rusting idiot man,* Wax thought. Ever since the discovery of the “Sovereign” who had ruled and helped the people of the Southern lands, Survivor fervor had been at a high point. Sightings all over the city, particularly on misty nights.

Jak, of course, had capitalized on this and had spent years “discovering” Survivor artifacts in his adventures. It wouldn’t be half as bad if the fool didn’t mention Wax now and then.

They knocked at a side door, and when they got no reply they tried the door and found it locked. So Wax wrapped a coat tassel around his fist and prepared to smash in the window.

“Wax?” Marasi said. “What are you doing?”

“Beginning an investigation.”

“Let’s wait a few minutes,” she said. “See if the owner returns.”

He stopped, his fist a few inches from the glass. “We have a writ of investigation. We can break in.”

“If it’s an emergency,” she said. “And if we’ve tried other options. This is a private citizen’s property, and we have no reason to believe the Set is here. And unlike the apartment earlier, we have no reason to believe a crime has been committed.”

“Let me do it,” Wayne said, walking up to the window. “You can all say you tried to stop me, but I done pulled a Wayne. They’ll let you off.”

“It’s not about what we can get away with, Wayne,” Marasi said, putting her hand to her face. “It’s about proper procedure. You can’t just smash into any place you want to—the world is changing. People have rights. It makes our job harder, but it makes the world better.”

Wax frowned, lowering his hand.

“We can afford to wait a few minutes,” Marasi said. “If we’re right, we want whoever owns this place to work with us—and breaking in might turn them against us. If we’re wrong, then we’ll have ransacked someone’s place of business for nothing.” She glanced at the sun. “It’s lunchtime. The owner might be out—they are still putting out papers, after all, so we have reason to think they’ll show up for work eventually.”

Wax reluctantly backed down. He expected Wayne to complain, but the shorter man just shrugged and jogged over to a street corner food stand to get something to eat. Marasi and Kim settled down on a bench beside a small nearby park, leaving Wax to put his back to a well-groomed tree set into a little piece of earth with a low fence around it.

Moments like this made him feel old. Not just of body, but of mind. He seemed to represent something that was dying. The lone lawman. And … well, it was hard to mourn. Because intellectually, he agreed with Marasi. He’d voted for legal restrictions on constable authority. Society needed robust checks on everyone’s power. Even his. *Especially* his.

But at the same time, that made the world seem too big to fix. Out in the Roughs he could beat in a door and talk—or sometimes shoot—sense into anyone who needed it. It had made him feel like he could solve basically any problem.

But that had been a false impression of control, hadn’t it? Acknowledging that made him uncomfortable. It wasn’t that the world was growing more complicated. It was that he was letting himself see it had always been complicated.

A minute later, Wax heard something. He *swore* it came from the building. He narrowed his eyes, burning steel, tracking the blue lines around him to a few moving near the top of the building. An attic? He raised a hand to the others, then slipped out Vindication. Someone was up there. He was certain of it. Had they simply not heard the calls earlier?

He dropped a bullet casing and launched off it, then landed carefully on the roof near where the shingles sloped past a small attic window, shuttered closed. Quiet though he'd tried to be, the metal lines moved sharply right as he landed—then they stilled. Mostly. They were quivering.

He narrowed his eyes at the window. One of the shutter corners was broken, letting whoever was inside peek out. He could see a metal line leading right to the hole. A part of him felt cold, because that metal was almost certainly a gun pointed at him. Shingles rattled under his feet as he engaged his steel bubble—the subtle Push he'd learned to use to deflect bullets. It made the nails in the rooftop vibrate as they tried to escape the field.

*Vibrating,* he thought, *like that line ahead of me. That's a gun in the hands of someone who is trembling.*

He wasn't facing a Set assassin. Carefully, he raised his gun to the side, pointed away from the window.

"I'm a constable," he said loudly. "I'm here to help."

Silence. Then finally a voice. Feminine, husky. "You're here to kill me. Like you killed Tobal."

"No," Wax said. "I promise it." He stepped forward. "I'm looking for the people who killed him. If I were here for another reason, I'd have shot instead of spoken."

More silence. Long enough to unnerve him, until finally the shutters swung open, revealing a short woman. She had frizzy grey-black hair and a disheveled appearance—a waistcoat buttoned with a few holes skipped, a long skirt that was rumpled as if it spent most of its life in a heap in a corner. She had dark bags under her eyes and a wan appearance, as if she'd been heavier once but had lost weight, like a couch missing some of its stuffing.

"You…" she said, lowering a rifle. "Are you … Dawnshot?"

“That’s me,” he said, relaxing.

She brightened. “You’re *Jak’s* friend!”

Jak’s friend? Just because that idiot brought up Wax’s name once in a while? He opened his mouth to object, but thought better of it.

“I … know of him,” Wax said. “Look, something is happening in this city. Something very dangerous. I followed the trail to Tobal’s apartment, then here. Please. Did he give you something? Tell you something?”

She leaned out, suspiciously scanning the streets. “Meet me below, at the back.” She pulled the shutters closed, and he joined Marasi and Kim at the back doors as they rattled, numerous locks and chains being undone.

Finally, she pulled the door open. “I don’t normally talk to conners. Ever.”

“’S good advice,” Wayne mumbled through a mouthful of something. He walked up beside Wax and took another bite of what appeared to be grease and maybe some bits of meat wrapped in what might have been bread. Or a very large crepe?

“But since you’re friends of Jak…” she said.

“Sure are,” Wayne said, slapping Wax on the shoulder. “Jak and Wax here adventured together out in the Roughs!”

“I guess, then,” she said, gesturing for them to enter, “you’re not *that* kind of constable. You’re the *other* kind.”

“Yup,” Wayne said. “*We’re* the kind what don’t like uniforms and shoots people when they try to make us sign paperwork.” He took another bite of his wrap.

“What even is that?” Wax asked as Marasi and Kim entered.

“He called it ‘chouta.’ It’s good.”

“It looks disgusting.”

“Aw, mate. With street food, that’s how you *know* it’s good.”

The building inside was musty and dark, and had numerous trash bins by the door—as if the woman hadn’t dared leave to empty them. She watched Wax, rifle in hand—though not raised—as if certain he’d turn on her at any moment.

“Is … Jak in the city?” she asked. “Available to help?”

“I … um…” Wax said. “No. He’s on … an adventure.”

“Don’t suppose you can send for him?” she sounded hopeful.

“Afraid not.”

She frowned, eyeing him.

"Oh, don't mind Dawnshot," Wayne said, nudging Wax. "He gets coy about Jak sometimes." He leaned toward the woman. "Honestly, he's a little jealous."

"Well, who wouldn't be?" she said, then sighed and began doing up the locks on the door. "Has he ever let you hold the Spear of the Red Sun?"

Wayne looked at Wax, who gritted his teeth. "No," he forced himself to say. "It's too powerful. Jak says I might accidentally awaken some … zombies if I'm allowed to touch it."

The woman nodded, locks secured, then waved for them to follow her into the building.

"Good," Wayne whispered to Wax. "But the spear wasn't used for zombies. They was on the Island of Death, with Nicki."

"How do *you* know?" Wax hissed to him.

"I read every one," Wayne said. "Why wouldn't I?"

"You…"

"I thought you couldn't read," Marasi said, brushing past them and following the woman.

"Oh, I can read," Wayne said. "But I'm dumb, see, so I can only read things what are dumb too."

The woman led them through a corridor crowded with books—stacks of them, taking up almost every available space. In the next room were a large printing press, some buckets of ink, and boxes of lead type scattered about. Her picture on the wall, hanging askew and showing her in younger years, was captioned MARAGA DULCET, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

"So," she said, running a hand through her disheveled hair, "you know who killed Tobal? Was it those people with the golden hair living on the east side? They're some kind of fairy creature; I know it."

"Actually," Marasi said, "we think it was a secretive group plotting to start up the Ashmounts again—and we worry they're working to create bombs of incredible power."

Maraga nodded. "So you do know."

*That was a test,* Wax realized.

Maraga opened a doorway that revealed a set of old steps. "Well then. Follow me."

She led the way down and Wax followed, waving for Marasi and Kim to stay back a few feet. The air smelled of old potatoes, spiders, and forgotten jars of something that might have once been preserves. Maraga flipped a switch at the bottom, powering a set of electric lights swinging on wires.

Covering the walls of the musty basement room were sheets of metal, scratched in detail—filled with words and diagrams, letters and pictures all cramped up together.

“Figured we’d write it all in metal,” Maraga said. “Just in case.”

# 33

Eyes wide with wonder, Marasi walked around the basement. It seemed to have once been used for storage, judging by the piles of old equipment and stacked throw mats. This had all been pushed away from the walls to make room for the metal sheets.

The Words of Founding mentioned metal plates, and Marasi had imagined large, thick sheets with the words chiseled in bold, powerful letters. Instead, Maraga had scratched sheets of tin with a pen, often scribbling out sentences and lines she got wrong. A lot of it was organized as lists. It had a frenzied air to it, but not like—say—the ravings of a madman. More like …

*Notes,* Marasi thought. *A journalist's shorthand notes, connecting ideas and building a story.*

Maraga slumped down on the bottom step, seeming exhausted. "I … didn't believe him at first," she whispered. "Tobal. Thought he was another crackpot. But they usually have a good story to tell, something my readers want to hear.

"Then he started to bring me evidence. Information he stole from his employers. I think he was sneaking back in, grabbing ledgers, scraps, whatever he could find … Never would let me help. He didn't want me to get too involved." She looked up at the walls. "As if this weren't already enough to get me killed…"

Marasi walked closer to offer comfort, but the woman flinched. There was a … fatalistic air about her. The air of a woman who had thrown the dice and was waiting to see how the numbers came up.

"How long?" Wax asked, inspecting one of the plates.

“Almost four years,” Maraga whispered. “Like I said, I didn’t believe him at first. But I’ve always been interested in the stories that slip through the cracks. The ones other papers ignore because they seem too sensational, or too lowbrow.”

“Lies, you mean,” Wax said. “You print lies.”

“We prefer ‘whimsical what-ifs.’ Intriguing stories that would be fascinating if they were true.”

“So…” Wax said, “lies.”

“Our patrons understand what they’re buying, Lord Ladrian,” Maraga said, lifting her chin. “You know. You’re friends with Jak himself. It’s all about being larger than life, bigger than reality! Our patrons know we stretch to find the more interesting tidbits, the ‘might’s and the ‘could-be’s of the world.”

He shook his head, obviously unconvinced.

Maraga sniffed. “I did my journeymanship at the *Times,* top paper in the city. Totally respectable. The amount they fudged, slanted, or outright fabricated would scandalize you. At least *I’m* honest about it. Besides, I don’t print lies. I print human-interest stories—the tales of people who are ignored by the larger media. Exciting stories, by adventuring celebrities. Cartoons, pictures of funny-shaped vegetables…”

“How funny?” Wayne said from across the room.

“Depends on your sense of humor,” Maraga replied.

“Crass. With a light seasoning of vulgarity.”

“Second box on the left,” she said. “Next to your foot.”

Wayne located the appropriate box, which was filled with sketches. In seconds he was snickering to himself.

“Anyway,” Maraga continued, “the more Tobal brought, and the more I pieced together, the more terrified I became. This … was a story. A *real* story. Not a whimsical tale about bug men or the dangers of electricity. This … this could get people killed. Could get *me* killed.”

She looked up at them, then continued. “Once I believed, we worked for many months, putting all of this together. I started to see things he didn’t. Tobal wasn’t … completely credible. He jumped to conclusions. But he wasn’t wrong, not at the heart of the story. And he hadn’t made it up.

“He told me that one day he wouldn’t show up to our nightly conversation. He said, when that happened, I should run. Take everything to the authorities. But the authorities are involved, so … what then? Who to tell? And then, two weeks ago, he didn’t show up. One night. Two. Three … And I knew. I *knew.* They’d found him.”

“I’m sorry,” Marasi said.

“Could he still be alive?” Maraga asked. “Might they have just … taken him?”

“It’s possible,” Marasi said. “But … we don’t think it’s likely.”

Maraga nodded, looking down at her feet. Then she closed her eyes and seemed to be waiting. For what?

*For the dice to land,* Marasi realized. *She doesn’t trust us. She’s waiting to see if we shoot.*

Marasi looked around the room and noticed that Wayne—despite pretending to look at the pictures—was actually watching Moonlight, one hand resting lazily on his dueling cane. Likely with his metals ready, just in case she tried something. Even Wax was watching her from the corner of his eye.

“This is brilliant,” Moonlight said instead, staring at one of the walls. “Are these … trajectory estimations?”

Marasi joined her beside one set of sketches in tin, which depicted looping arcs. Moonlight was right; it looked like measurements with different estimates of how far a shot could reach.

Maraga stood up, seeming to take strength from the question. “That’s right,” she said. “Those numbers are the distances the Bilming military *claim* their new guns can fire. They love to send releases to the local broadsheets, extolling their grand navy. It’s mostly bravado. They imply they could shell Elendel from twenty miles away, but that’s a lie. The guns are much shorter range than that.”

“And this?” Marasi asked, pointing at another set of trajectories.

“Poor Tobal’s job was to research chemical propellants,” Maraga replied. At their confused stares, she continued. “These people, they’re trying to develop self-propelled shells. Weapons that could fire *themselves* and fly miles. Or even hundreds of miles. Before hitting and detonating.”

*Rusts,* Marasi thought, her eyes widening. She walked through the room, taking in each of the eight large plates on the walls. She identified one having to do with the “subway” systems of the city, a large interconnected cavern complex that was being “surveyed” to determine where to place train lines. But the truth, according to Maraga's notes, was entirely different—the surveys were seeking caverns that could offer stable underground living conditions.

*They're preparing bunkers,* Marasi thought. *That's what the supplies are for—they're stocking up for a cataclysm, perhaps?*

Just as people had sought refuge in caverns during the last days before the world ended. Before Harmony's Ascension and the remaking of the land.

"This doesn't make *sense,*" Wax said, joining her. "Harmony says my sister is trying to prove she can rule this planet. If she blows it up, what does that prove? Why build bunkers? Does she honestly think that saving a fragment of us and annihilating the rest would prove her competence?"

"I don't know," Marasi admitted, then pointed at another plate. "This talks about ashfalls. The days of ash and destruction allowed the Lord Ruler to secure near-universal power, at least in the North. So maybe Telsin thinks that would work again?"

"You should read the next plate over," Maraga said.

Together they stepped to the side, reading what appeared to be a list of names. "Dupon Melstrom…" Wax read. "Vennis Hasting … Mari Hammondess … These are some of the most powerful senators in Elendel."

"They're in on it," Maraga said.

"What?" Marasi said, spinning. "All of them?"

Maraga dug in a cabinet and came out with a piece of paper. She handed it to Marasi, who showed it to Wax. A letter from Vennis Hasting, talking about the creation of a bomb of incredible power. It was dated almost a year ago, and implicated many of the names on the wall.

Marasi frowned. That … that seemed impossible. This many people in their *own government* knew? Could the Set have its fingers wrapped that tightly around the Basin? She looked at Wax.

"I know some of these people," he said. "Vennis is a rat, of course—but Lady Yomen is a good friend. As close a senator as I trust. This doesn't add up, Marasi. *None* of this adds up."

"Maybe that's why the Senate is so confident," she said, "that they can bully the Outer Cities."

"I know these people," Wax said. "They wouldn't keep a secret like this; they *couldn't.* Everything they've done so far has been about posturing for power. The Supremacy Bill, the tariffs, the ‘hard line’ they’re taking with the South … If Vennis knew about a bomb, he’d be advocating for strategic tests to prove how powerful it is.”

“They could all be in the Set,” Marasi said softly.

His expression darkened. He took the letter, staring at it, and she knew what he was thinking: if the Set’s tendrils ran this deep—even into the hearts of his friends among the senators …

“No,” he said. “There’s something very strange here, Marasi. If my sister had all of these people following her dictates, she would *already* rule the Basin. We’re missing a big piece of this.”

Moonlight walked up to them, nodding toward another of the plates. “You’re talking about a bomb? Well, it seems they have one—look at this.”

Marasi and Wax walked over, finding another plate with a list of underground disturbances. It was labeled with the words “Underground weapon tests, tracked using seismograph.”

“They’ve developed an underground base beneath the city,” Maraga said. “It’s where they hide. Lord Mayor Entrone is involved, is probably even one of their leaders. Some of the caverns seem to be weapons testing locations, but others are bunkers they’re preparing for some reason and using as a headquarters.”

“They stopped the tests recently,” Moonlight said. “Wonder why?”

“Well…” Maraga said. “They know it works. I mean, they’re well past their go date.”

“Go date?” Marasi asked, feeling cold.

“Stolen internal memos,” Maraga said, pointing to a plate. “Don’t know how he got them. Listing target dates for project completion. The weapon was supposed to be detonated two weeks ago.” Maraga slumped back down onto the steps. “They killed him the day before that. I thought for sure the end would come soon after …

“I…” She buried her head in her hands. “I know I should have published this. I’m a coward. In the end, I’m a *coward.* I’ve been hunkered up here, waiting for the ash to fall, haven’t I? Rusts. I was convinced no one would listen … Convinced it was too late…”

“What is done, or not done, is past,” Wax said, firm. “We have the information now. And there’s still time to stop this.”

“Wax,” Marasi hissed, taking his arm. “They have a bomb, and are planning—as far as we can determine—to detonate it in Elendel. They would have done it already, if they could figure out how to get it into the city.”

Maraga nodded. “Their self-propelled weapon—the rocket, they call it—is having difficulties. Fuel might be the problem. It’s what Tobal was working on for them before he realized what they were planning…” She stood up and steeled herself. “I need to show you one more thing.” She hurried to some boxes and dug through them as Moonlight unabashedly took rubbings of the plates.

Maraga dug out an evanotype photo. “The crowning jewel,” she said softly. “My best piece of evidence. The above-the-fold photo for the story I’ll never actually write…”

Marasi took it, frowning at Wax, who joined her. It depicted an ashen landscape. In color.

Marasi gasped softly, looking at the stark orange sky, the floating ash, the remnants of a ruined city in the distance. That looked … kind of like Elendel, though the ash was heaped so high, obscuring all but the tops of the smoldering, broken buildings and jagged destroyed walls.

“How…” Marasi said. “How can you have a *picture* of the end of the world?”

“They didn’t have evanotypes in the Survivor’s day,” Wax said, looking closely. “The colors are remarkable. Did someone take an old photo and paint onto it?”

“I don’t know,” Maraga said. “But it seems like a picture of … of what is *going* to happen. After he found this, Tobal started to get really scared. He barely stayed during our last visits. I think he mostly just huddled in his rooms until they got him. Like … like I’ve been doing.”

The basement fell silent, even Wayne sensing the mood and covering up any snickering at his funny pictures. Marasi felt a mounting horror at the sight of that picture. She’d heard Wax talk about a bomb, knew what the enemy was trying to build. Laying it out in stark depiction, however, changed it from abstract to concrete.

This was what they wanted to do. Wipe out everything she loved. Leave rubble and ash in its place. These were bigger stakes by far than any investigation she'd ever done. And the implications of it left her disquieted on a profound level.

She turned around, looking at the plates reflecting the calm electric light. Something ancient. Something new. Just like the picture Wax handed back to her.

A door opened upstairs.

The locks had been fastened, but that didn't stop whoever had arrived. Wayne scrambled to his feet, hands going to his dueling canes as a single set of footsteps crossed the wooden floor up above.

Wax slid a gun from its holster and positioned himself to watch the steps. A figure descended onto the stairs. A woman with dark hair and a rugged build that seemed in conflict with her small nose and prim lips. She wore a suit: slacks, buttoned white shirt, jacket and cravat.

Telsin. Wax's sister, leader of the Set. She wasn't armed, at least not in a way that Marasi could make out. And she didn't seem to mind that Wax had a gun pointed at her head while Wayne backed away, muttering.

"An address," Telsin said. "The number on the back of the envelope was a rusting *address*? Do you know how many hours we wasted tearing into lockers at train stations?"

# 34

Marasi immediately reached for an Allomantic grenade, charging one silently in her pocket. Wax edged forward, gun on his sister. Wayne had scrambled back from the steps and was muttering to himself, hopping from one foot to the other. He looked around as if he expected enemies to come bursting in through the walls.

Last time they'd seen Telsin, she had betrayed them to the Set. She'd nearly gotten Wax killed, and in return Wayne had fired a shotgun blast at her chest. The first time he'd fired a gun in … well, Marasi didn't know how long.

Telsin had healed, however, vanishing from the bloodied snows where Wayne had left her. She was a Hemalurgist, with at least the power of a Bloodmaker—like Wayne. She had shown hints of two other powers, but it was possible the members of the Set switched out their spikes to gain different Metallic Arts. Regardless, she apparently had enough abilities now that she didn't seem the least bit concerned about facing them alone. Rusts.

"This is marvelous," Telsin said, glancing around the basement. "Remarkable how many of our secrets he managed to sneak out, considering. Who would have thought our greatest danger wasn't armies, constables, or even *you*, Waxillium? It was a miserable, bald old chemist."

"Tobal was a good man!" Maraga said, and ducked behind Wax as Telsin looked toward her.

"Oh, you can lower the gun, Waxillium," Telsin said, settling down on the steps. "The idiot over there will tell you how effective shooting me was."

“Felt good,” Wayne said. “Does it need to do more than that? Here, Wax. Hand me a gun. I’ll have at it a few more times.”

Wax didn’t move, and Telsin rolled her eyes. They all stood there, Marasi’s grenade vibrating softly in her fingers as it absorbed her power. What now? They were being played, obviously. But how? Would the Set’s leader come to see them as a simple distraction?

“Tell us what the Set is planning,” Marasi said.

“No,” Telsin replied.

“Oh,” Wayne said, perking up. “Does this mean I can make her talk? On a scale of one to broken, how much do you fancy your kneecaps, Telsin?”

“I’ll heal in seconds, Wayne,” Telsin said.

“Not if we yank out the spikes,” Wayne snapped.

“Which would kill me,” Telsin said. “I’m sure that will give you *so* much information.”

“Well,” Wayne said, “breaking some pieces off you will still *hurt,* Telsin. I know a thing or two about that part.”

“Actually,” she said, “it *won’t* hurt. Did you know that a Feruchemist can store their pain in a metalmind? Oh, and you won’t be able to remove mine from me. We’ve learned better how to hide those. So torture me if you want, Wayne. I’ll find it boring, but nothing more.”

She met his gaze with confidence. Wayne glanced toward Marasi, concerned, shying away. Like a puppy whose chew toy had bitten it back.

Marasi was more worried about Wax. He’d frozen in place, gun out and pointed at Telsin, arm straight. Expression … grim. Telsin was his last close living relative, and she’d played him for a fool. Six years ago, he’d dedicated a great deal of emotional and physical effort to rescuing her from the evil forces he’d *thought* had taken her. Only to find she’d been working with them all along.

Now, she’d thrown her lot in with a god planning to destroy the world.

“Why are you here, Telsin?” Wax asked.

“To warn you, Waxillium,” Telsin said from across the room. “Your next actions will be of the utmost importance. You have two days to solve this problem. Only two precious days.”

Wax cursed softly, leaning down beside Marasi and Wayne. “Speed bubble,” he hissed.

Wayne threw one up and slowed the world around them. It would also prevent Telsin from hearing, or at least understanding, what they were saying.

"What's she playin' at, Wax?" Wayne said. "She should look more threatened. I shot her. Me. First time in years. And she don't even look like she *cared.*"

"Wayne," Marasi said, "it's not like you gave her your virginity."

"No it's not!" he said. "I give *that* away all the time. This was *special.*"

Marasi glanced at Wax. "You all right?"

"I will be," he said softly, staring at his sister—frozen in time. "It's … painful. Like an old injury aching again. Because it never healed right."

"Why did she say two days?" Marasi asked. "Wax, she's trying to wrong-foot us."

"I agree," he said. "She's trying to get us to believe we have more time than we do. One of her games." He narrowed his eyes. "Her being here says something she may not realize, though. That she's desperate. She knows she has to stop us."

"But she's not afraid of us," Marasi said.

"Not physically," Wax said. "She's not afraid of being captured or killed by us. Harmony said … well, she's—at least in a small way—part god. Autonomy has Invested her with some sort of power and authority, made her the avatar of Trell on this planet. For now. Until she fails."

"Wait," Wayne said. "*Who* is Trell and *who* is Autonomy and *who* is that on the steps?"

"That on the steps," Wax said, "is my sister. A woman representing the god Autonomy. Using the title of Trell—an ancient god from this world."

"Right…" Wayne said. "And all three are utter knobs?"

"Utter knobs," Wax agreed.

Marasi followed their gaze back toward Telsin, looking so proud and confident. As she watched, Marasi could *swear* that Telsin's eyes began to glow a soft red. The faintest of light. It was gone a moment later.

"Rusts," she whispered. "This feels like it's way above our pay scale, Wax."

"There's no one else," he said. "But like I said, if she's here, she's worried about us. She wanted to go through with her plan weeks ago, but is having problems getting her technology to work. Now here we are, sniffing about, finding things they couldn't track down. My gut says she's here because she wants an opportunity to mess with my mind. Nudge me the wrong direction. Risky of her, but smart."

They all fell silent, but Marasi had that same sense of cold dread from earlier. Magnified. The Set's plan, the danger Autonomy posed … Marasi glanced down; she was still holding the picture Maraga had dug out. Ash falling from the sky, burying cities that had been destroyed.

"What do we do?" Wayne asked.

"Let me think," Wax said. "How much bendalloy do you have? Are we wasting it?"

"Nah," Wayne said. "I've got plenty."

"He's been saving it," Marasi said, "and learning to be responsible with his finances and his use of metals."

Wax glanced at him. "Who'd you take the money from?"

"Someone worthless," Wayne said.

"Remind me to check my bank accounts," Wax said, "if there are any banks left after all of this. For now, the most urgent matter is the bomb. They have it ready, but can't deliver it. So we need to find whatever device they're setting up to launch the thing, then stop it."

"Maraga says the Set is using the bunkers under the city as a kind of base," Marasi said. "If we can sneak in, maybe we can find the mechanism. Or at least learn its location."

"Hard to sneak anywhere," Wayne said, nodding toward Telsin, "with some kind of *demigod* thing watchin' you."

Wax thought for a moment. "I need to confront Telsin, deal with her, maybe try to get information out of her. I want to find that bomb and stop it. I might be able to sort the lies from the truth. But I do agree, trying to get into their base could be valuable. Not sure how we'd manage it though."

Marasi glanced at Moonlight, frozen outside the speed bubble. What did she make of all this? Did she have answers?

Maybe Marasi should tell Wax. Only … would that break Moonlight's frail trust in her? The woman could easily vanish again, as she'd done after the fight at the warehouse.

So many secrets. Marasi had become a constable in part to reveal secrets—and here, in working with Moonlight, she had a chance. At something bigger. Something more important. Secrets beyond secrets. She needed more time to pry information out of Moonlight.

“Wax,” she said, “we should split up.”

He met her eyes. “Two teams,” he said. “You find a way into the caverns. I deal with Telsin and follow any leads I get from her.”

“Exactly,” Marasi said. “I think Kim is trustworthy. She and I had a chance to chat when we were at the archive, and she knows a lot about the city. With her help, I might be able to locate an entrance to the caverns. In there are secrets, maybe the location of the bomb. But an infiltration like that will take time. Maybe too much time.”

“So Wayne and I take a direct route,” Wax said. “We interrogate Telsin and locate the bomb that way.”

“She’ll play with your mind, mate,” Wayne said.

“I know. But she’s my sister. I … I need to do this.” Wax took a deep breath. “If I’m right, she’ll have to give me bits of truth along with her lies. If we can play the game better than she does, it might lead us to the weapon.”

“Right,” Marasi said. “Whatever you find, send to Steris and Captain Reddi via radio. I’ll do the same. That way, we can consolidate our information and leave notes for one another.”

Wax nodded, but seemed reluctant.

“You worry local radio operators might be compromised?” Marasi said.

“It’s possible,” he said. “But I don’t know of a better way. I’m going to send something to Steris as soon as we leave here.”

“Will you write to Allik too?” she asked. “Remind him I asked him to leave the city? It’s selfish of me, but…”

“It’s all right,” Wax said. “It’s not selfish to want to save those you love.” He paused. “I don’t know if we’ll have a chance to meet up again before the day is done. So if you don’t hear from me, Marasi, know that I trust your judgment. If you have a chance to stop the bomb, do so. Whatever the cost.”

“Same for you,” she said. “All right. Let’s split.” Wax nodded to Wayne, who dropped the speed bubble.

And just like that, Marasi had put herself in a position to interrogate Moonlight freely. She *would* share what she found with Wax. And he *would* understand. She felt she should have been embarrassed for keeping this from him, but in truth she was excited.

Wax walked over to Telsin. “You and I need to talk,” he said to her.

“Agreed,” she said, starting up the steps.

Wax moved to follow, pausing briefly to say something to Maraga. Before Wayne joined him, he took Marasi by the arm. “Hey,” he said softly. “Be careful with that Kim character. I think she’s fakin’ about somethin’.”

“I appreciate the warning,” Marasi said. “I think she knows more than she’s saying, but I don’t think she’s working for the enemy.”

“Right,” he said. “Hey, you take care of yourself.”

“You too, Wayne.”

“Don’t I always?”

He said it as if in jest, but there was something to his voice. “You all right?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Just feels off, you know? After six years together, I’ve gotta let you march away alone. Without my keen observations on life and the world to keep you on your toes.”

She smiled, then raised her fist for him to tap with his own. “I’m glad you walked out of the stories and into my life. I’d rather have a friend than a legend.”

“Same.”

“Wayne, no one is calling me a legend.”

“They will,” he said with a wink. “You take care. We’ll see you later tonight.” He slipped an old bowler hat off a rack near the center of the room. He put it on and left a stapler tied with a ribbon hanging in its place. Where had he found that?

Wax and Wayne disappeared up the steps behind Telsin, leaving Marasi alone with Moonlight, Maraga, and the whole cosmere’s worth of secrets.

# PART THREE

# 35

Wax nodded to Wayne, and together they dashed out of the newspaper building—Wax pulling Telsin behind him—and into the cover between two nearby apartment buildings.

Telsin sighed as they stopped, then straightened her suit jacket. “Was that necessary?”

Wax gestured, and Wayne scrambled farther along the alleyway to scout the area.

“There are no snipers,” Telsin said. “You aren’t surrounded. It’s just me.”

Wax ignored her, absently clicking the chambers on Vindication one at a time. Watching the sky, because each time he looked at her he felt pain. Betrayal. He’d told Marasi he could handle Telsin. But now he questioned that. When had he ever gotten the better of her? She’d always made a fool of him.

*This is what you came here to do,* he told himself. *This is why you put the coat back on. Because you know she has to be dealt with somehow.*

“What if I towed you to Elendel,” he said, “and threw you in prison. Would you just go along with it?”

“Of course not,” she said. “I came to talk. To persuade you.”

“Of what?”

She met his eyes. “To run, Wax. Return to the Roughs. Take your wife, your children, and *leave.* You have time. Step away and let me do what needs to be done. I’d rather you lived.”

“Where was that inclination six years ago?” he asked. “On that mountaintop?”

She sighed, as if at his childishness, then leaned against the wall of the alley. “I didn’t want to shoot you, Wax. I didn’t expect you to show up and undermine our plans, and I had to do what was required in the moment.

“Wax, I *know* you. I *know* you’re overwhelmed by this. It’s too big for you; it can’t be solved by barreling in, revolver in hand. Go back to a place where you can accomplish something relevant. This next part will be messy, but it’s the only way to save our planet.”

“You expect me to believe that *you* are interested in the safety of the planet? That *you* are being altruistic?”

“Hardly,” she said, her arms folded. “I live here, Wax. If the Basin goes, *I* go. If you can trust in one thing, trust in my sense of self-preservation. Elendel *has* to be destroyed. Or else.”

“Or else Autonomy destroys the entire Basin?”

“She has an army,” Telsin said, looking away. “Men of gold and red … waiting for me to fail. Breathing over my proverbial shoulder. Our best hope is for me to prove I can rule this planet for her—and I need to remove the leadership of Elendel before I can do that.” She focused on him. “We’ll be better off with her guiding us. Harmony is useless, as you’ve undoubtedly learned by now. We need someone stronger.”

“Someone who by coincidence,” he said, “wants *you* to represent her.”

“It is a job that needs to be done.”

“I’d rather it be done by practically *anyone* but you.”

“You don’t get to make that decision.” Telsin looked up toward the sky. “Once I’m fully Invested—once I’m a Sliver of Autonomy—you’ll see. I’ll rebuild the Basin. Make it as modern and efficient as Bilming. You realize that Harmony has crippled us? Life is too easy in the Basin, too lush. There’s no conflict or strife, so we don’t innovate, don’t grow. That’s what Autonomy has taught me.”

Wax, feeling cold, stepped toward her. “So the solution is to annihilate Elendel? Nearly *half* our entire population?”

She continued staring at the sky.

“Telsin,” he said, “this *insane* plan won’t work. The South will invade the moment we’re perceived as weak. The Outer Cities will rebel in *horror* at what you’ve done. I know the mayors of those cities. They’re frustrated, but they’re not monsters.

"By destroying Elendel, you'd throw us into chaos. And yes, you'll have strife. But it will end us, as surely as if Autonomy had attacked. This won't give you what you want. Autonomy is *playing* you. Have you considered that? Maybe she wants you to destroy the Basin so she doesn't have to bother."

Again, Telsin didn't look at him. And rusts, he felt like he'd put together another piece. Harmony had talked about Autonomy and the way she pushed people to survive, to prove themselves. A destroyed city might seem like a ruthless enough move to accomplish that, which was why Telsin was pursuing it.

*But what about the letter indicating the involvement of Elendel senators?* he thought. *This is wrong. I'm making guesses based on incomplete information.*

"Come on," Telsin said, turning to climb up a fire escape. "I hate the smell of alleys."

Wax raised the gun at her and chambered a hazekiller round. An aluminum bullet with a secondary explosive that would blast after it lodged into her—a brutal shell capable of ripping off limbs. Ranette had designed it for him after he'd discovered the Bands of Mourning and had expressed interest in ways to forcibly remove spikes from bodies.

Telsin continued up the fire escape, indifferent. She paused at the first landing and glanced at Wax. "Come on." Then she kept climbing.

Rusts. Wax raised Vindication beside his head, then dropped a bullet with the other hand and used it to launch himself up past Telsin onto the roof. She joined him a short time later, and they both looked out over the city.

"Life really would have been far simpler," she said, "if you'd stayed in the Roughs, Wax."

"Then you and Edwarn shouldn't have vanished."

"We had to go into hiding," she said. "Did Harmony tell you what happened to our parents?"

"It was … an accident…"

"It was agents of Harmony, trying to get to *me*. Did Harmony ever admit that to you?" She strolled past him. "No, I expect not, based on your expression."

*Don't let her play you, Wax. Get information.* "I know your bomb's delivery mechanism doesn't work, Telsin. I *am* going to track it down and stop it. Maybe *you* should be the one planning to hide in the Roughs. Better, maybe you should be asking me for *help.* If Autonomy has an army ready to strike, then we should be figuring out how to fight it together."

Telsin stopped at the edge of the building, elbows on the stone railing, contemplative. "It's pretty, don't you think? A city of the future. All symmetrical, like a perfect face. A beauty without blemish."

"Telsin," Wax said, stepping up to her.

"Oh, stop with the gritty constable growl, Wax," she said. "You see this city? Six years under my direction, and it's doing *far* better than Elendel. You have to admit we've been too sheltered. The Malwish are beyond us, and you haven't even *seen* what other planets are capable of doing. We're so far behind. We're vulnerable."

"I don't see how blowing up the capital is going to change that, Telsin."

"Because you've always lacked vision, Wax," she said. "When something truly expansive lies before you, instead of comprehending it, you *run.*"

Wax kept his distance. "Why did you come to see me, Telsin?" he asked. "What is this *really* about?"

"Sibling affection?" she said. Then smiled as he gave her a flat glance in response. "I simply want you gone. Out of the equation. You interfering is bad. Even when you inevitably fail."

*Her brother showing up to ruin things is bad,* he thought. Telsin glanced away again, but he sensed a tension in her posture. She was legitimately worried that her plans wouldn't come together—that Autonomy would simply send in her armies.

Can't have your own family ruining your masterful plans. It makes you look bad in front of the dark god deciding whether or not to destroy you.

"You can't actually think," he said, "that you can bully me into leaving a case."

"I suppose not," she said softly. "But I wanted to try."

*Yeah, she's worried.* Telsin knew him, but he knew her equally well. Perhaps Harmony was right in suggesting Wax talk to her. The sharpened sword cut cleanest, and Wax had spent a lifetime sharpening this particular blade.

"Do you remember back in the Village," he said to her, "when you wanted your own room?"

"Father always said it was appropriate for us," she said, "because of our lineage. We shouldn't have to share."

"You planted stolen cash on your own cousin to achieve it. And even *that* wasn't your end goal—you wanted to live alone so that you could sneak out. Everything is a power play for you."

"Because I'm willing to step up," she said. "And take charge. Like I took over our house when our parents died. Like I'm taking over this planet. It *will* happen, Wax. I'm merely sad that I'll have to cut through you to accomplish it."

Wax met her gaze. And he realized something profound.

He couldn't see anything familial in this person.

Familiar, yes. But whatever he had loved was long gone, ripped out and replaced with expansions of the parts of her he'd always hated.

"Last chance, Wax," she said, holding his eyes. "Go back to the Roughs. With Elendel gone, those people out there are going to need someone to help guide and protect them. You can be that person. This is too big for you. You know it is."

Wax opened his mouth to object. To explain that yes, he had run once. He'd been overwhelmed by politics, society, expectations. He'd wanted adventure, dreamed of it in the Roughs—but more, he'd wanted a place where one man could make an easy difference. Where things felt simpler.

He cut himself off, realizing something crucial. She was *wrong* about him.

He'd changed. He'd become someone new, someone who had grown beyond his fears. But she didn't realize it. She didn't know about Lessie. Didn't understand the depth of his friendship with Wayne. Didn't know of his love for Steris, the reason he'd taken Harmony's offer to return from death and try again.

She didn't know him. But she *thought she did.*

Rusts. For the first time in his life, he had an advantage over her. Telsin, by marinating in her own ambitions for years, had become an extreme version of the woman he knew. She'd continued on exactly the path he'd worried about since her youth. But he'd deviated. He'd grown. He'd *changed.*

"I might not be able to fix things in Elendel," he found himself saying. "I might not grasp everything that's happening with you and Autonomy. But stopping a bomb is something I can solve. Something I *will* solve."

She sighed, seeing only the dogged lawman. Her little brother and his fantasies.

"You have no idea…" she whispered, looking away. "You can't stop this, Wax. Even if you did find the bomb, there are redundancies upon redundancies to make sure that Autonomy gets what she wants. We need to *prove* ourselves. And I'm going to do that."

Redundancies. What did she mean by that? It didn't sound like the army Autonomy was supposedly sending. Were there other, internal pressures? Rivals? He took a guess.

"Gave Entrone," he said, "is trying to overtake you. Seize your position."

"Entrone is a coward," she said. "He won't move against me. Wax, you're not half as smart as you think you are."

He might not see it all, true—but if Entrone was a coward, then maybe Wax was interrogating the wrong person. He doubted he could break Telsin. But clearly there was someone *else* who knew these plans.

*So, I get Entrone to break,* he thought.

"You ever stand up someplace high," Telsin said, "and feel the irresistible urge to throw yourself off?"

"No," Wax said, frowning. "If I want to, I jump. If I don't, I don't."

"The curse of Steelpushing," she said, staring out over the city. "You can't feel it. The call to do something dramatic, drastic, *impressive.*"

"The urge to kill yourself on a whim?" Wax asked, baffled.

"The opportunity to be afraid," she whispered. "To do something thrilling and new. You know, I resisted getting the spikes for Steelpushing and Ironpulling? I didn't want to lose my nervousness around heights. Then I found new fears, new challenges, new *ambitions.*"

Wax nodded slowly. That was his Telsin. The woman who always pushed recklessly for more. More power. But also more experiences. More novelty. More control over others.

"There's an entire cosmere out there," she said to him. "Few ever see or know it. But I have a chance to. A real chance. I'm not going to let you take that from me. I’m telling you, Wax, I’m not going to pull my punches. I’ll do *whatever it takes.*”

“And I’ll stop you. Whatever it takes.”

“Ever the moralist,” she said, glancing at him. “Standing so tall, pretending you see so high, when in reality you can barely *grasp* the problems you’re trying to fix. I’ve already solved them. Do you want to hear of Trell? Autonomy? What it means to be her avatar?”

A part of him did. But if she wanted to tell him about it … if she was offering …

Rusts, then she was stalling.

She was desperate, trying to buy as much time as she could. That piece clicked into place. She was talking to him because she had to keep him distracted. The trick wasn’t to realize that she was stalling, it was to recognize that as long as he let her tease him with information, she held all the cards.

There was only one way to win this particular game. And that was to leave the table.

“She’s going to destroy us?” he said, strolling across the top of the roof behind her.

“Unless I prove to her that we’re worth saving,” she explained, turning to survey the city. As before, she didn’t seem to care that she had her back to him. “Autonomy is … odd. She respects those who are bold, strong, able to survive on their own. But she also wants them to obey her. I suppose that is the irony of godhood. Half the time, being ‘autonomous’ means following her plan. And there’s no Whimsy to her—that’s a different god.

“Autonomy is rugged individualism filtered through the lens of a god who thinks she knows best. And in that context, individualism is a virtue best applied to finding ways to carry out the plans *she* has outlined. You get to be individual in your chosen path to do what *she* says…”

Wax missed the next part, as he had quietly slipped over the side of the roof. With luck, she’d keep right on talking, giving him time to get away.

# 36

Marasi and Moonlight hurriedly finished up in the basement—Moonlight grabbing a last few rubbings of the wall plates and tucking them away in her case. Together they then climbed to the main floor, where they found the grey-haired editor Maraga standing in the center of a cluttered room, holding an overstuffed travel bag and looking frazzled.

“On his way out,” she said to Marasi, “Dawnshot told me to go to family in the countryside. But all of my family is either here or in Elendel. Should I … go to them?”

“Probably not wise,” Marasi said. Any family in Bilming would be easily tracked down by the Set, and Elendel … well, it had a massive bomb pointed at it.

That thought filled Marasi with worry. But she needed to focus on preventing the disaster. She had to leave helping Elendel to her sister.

“Moonlight,” Marasi said, “surely there’s a place in the city you could send Maraga? A place of safety for someone who did us such great service?”

Moonlight considered for a moment. She wasn’t the type to rush into things, it seemed. Careful. Calculating. Finally she slipped a small card from her sleeve, marked with the interlocking diamond symbol. “Do you know the Knightbridge district?”

“Yes,” Maraga said, hesitantly taking the card.

“Go to Thirty-Third and Finete, house number one eighty-seven. Knock, show them this, and tell them Moonlight said you could ask for asylum as recompense for services rendered. They’ll take you in. Even the Set will have trouble assaulting that place.”

“Thank you,” the woman said, clutching the card to her chest.

“I’ll send someone to collect your research,” Moonlight said. “Though I have the plates all copied. You need to go. Quickly.”

“I’m going to fetch my sister too,” Maraga said. “Please?”

“If you must,” Moonlight said. “But be warned, since the Set knows we’re here, each moment you waste endangers your life.”

Maraga rushed to the door. She paused to look over what she was leaving, then steeled herself and hurried out.

“What about us?” Moonlight asked.

“We need to determine a likely entry point to the underground caverns,” Marasi said. “Do you have maps of enemy movements? Lists of places you think might be owned by the Set?”

“Not on me,” Moonlight said. “Perhaps we could return to the records office and do some research.”

“I think I have a better idea,” Marasi said, leading the way out the front door. “Riskier, but hopefully faster.”

“I’m intrigued,” Moonlight said, joining her as they walked to a busier street where—with some effort—Marasi managed to flag down a cab. She found it amazing how quickly coachmen had made the swap between horse-drawn carriages and motorcabs.

They settled in the rear of the motorcar, and the cabbie—a woman with dark hair in a ponytail—glanced back at them. “Where to?”

“Knightbridge district,” Marasi said. “Thirty-Third and Finete.”

The cabbie nodded, pulling out into the flow of traffic and taking them westward.

“Clever,” Moonlight said to Marasi. “I’m going to have to watch myself around you. But what makes you think our safehouse will have the maps you want?”

“You found me in the caverns beneath Elendel,” Marasi said. “Plus, a moment ago you implied such maps existed—you didn’t have them ‘on you.’ Ergo, I assumed this was a good path forward. Your people will have the information we need.”

“They might not let you in,” Moonlight said. “What then? You’ll have wasted time.”

“Wasted time,” Marasi snapped. “Wasted *time*?” She glanced toward the cabbie, uncertain what she should say.

“Darkwater, dear,” Moonlight said to the cabbie, “give us a little privacy.”

“Sure thing, Moonlight,” the cabbie said, shutting the window separating the front of the car from the back.

Marasi gaped. Then she looked at Moonlight, who shrugged.

“Moonlight,” Marasi said, focusing her thoughts, “what kind of game do you think we’re playing? Didn’t you say your entire purpose was protecting this planet? Now you imply you’d keep me locked out of your safehouse, and the vital information it contains?”

Moonlight settled in her seat, thoughtful. “My organization,” she eventually said, “was created to protect and advance the needs of the planet Scadrial. It’s not my homeland, but I am committed to seeing it remain stable. There are terrible forces moving in the cosmere; my people are going to need allies.”

“So why are you so resistant to helping me?”

“To be honest,” Moonlight said, “I’m worried we’re being played. Autonomy is adept at misdirection, at false leads and confusing shadows of half-truths. Restarting the ashfalls? That seems … outrageous. Impossible even for her. Something is off about all this. A shade too red to be natural.”

“So help me find the truth, Moonlight,” Marasi said. “Stop toying with me.”

“I’m not toying with you,” Moonlight said. “This is an audition.”

Marasi blinked. *What?*

“Until a little while ago,” Moonlight continued, “I assumed we had months to unravel the Set’s plan.” She tapped her armrest with a fingernail, then looked at her bag, where the rubbings she’d taken were peeking out.

During their short time working together, Marasi had started to see Moonlight as all-knowing—someone mysterious, alien. But that concern in her eyes, the way she was fighting uncertainty … that was all too human.

“I’ll let you into the safehouse,” Moonlight finally said. “And deal with the ramifications later, if this proves to all be another of Autonomy’s shadow games. But I’m not sure I can give you everything you want.

“We don’t have the caverns in the city mapped, but we do watch their agents.” She patted her bag, and the rubbings. “This lists coordinates of the explosions. So if we compare where the blasts have been happening with the places where Set agents appear and vanish…”

“… We might be able to find a way into their testing facility,” Marasi said. “I did something similar to locate that cavern under Elendel.”

“I remember when all this started to hit me,” Moonlight said softly. “When my world expanded, and my personal squabbles—even the ones that influenced the fates of empires—suddenly became so small. You’re doing remarkably well.”

“My life,” Marasi said, “has mostly been expanses of quiet humdrum punctuated by sudden explosions—usually literal ones—of activity. I’m used to working under pressure.”

“And dealing with gods?” Moonlight said. “Fighting their influence?”

“Well, we have one on our own side, after all.”

“Kind of,” Moonlight said. “Harmony isn’t terribly reliable these days. At least not in the ways my mentor would prefer. It’s less like having a god on your side—and more like having a powerful referee who only sometimes pays attention to your fight.”

“Or an observer,” Marasi said, “who you’re sure could do more to help, but doesn’t for some baffling reason.”

“Yes, like…” Moonlight narrowed her eyes. “Point made. Here, we’re approaching the safehouse. Hopefully the Survivor hasn’t returned unexpectedly. My mentor isn’t always reasonable when it comes to people he sees as Harmony’s agents, and might respond … poorly.”

# 37

Wayne had read a real interesting book once about a fellow what went back in time. It had happened because he'd turned on too many electric switches at once. That was ridiculous, but the book had been written when electricity had been new—so it was forgivable. People had thought some funny stuff about electricity back then. Wayne himself had tried to fill a bucket with it once.

He found himself thinking of that story as he scoured the nearby alleys for signs of the Set's agents. See, the book had been all about how changing the past was this dangerous thing. The fellow in it had broken some branches off a tree, and when he'd returned to the future, his father had liked eating butter on his sandwiches instead of mayo. Also, sapient lions had ruled the city.

Wayne had thought there was something … off about the story. When he'd mentioned it to friends, Nod had told him of another one with the same idea, where a fellow was sent back in time through the intricacies of indoor plumbing and an unfortunately large flush. And *he* had changed things by eating a bagel, then returned to discover that everybody spoke backward and no one wore shirts anymore.

This book had been better than the first one on account of it having more cussing—plus the no-shirts part being universally applied and *very* descriptively relayed—but still, Wayne found the idea uncomfortable.

He traded a beggar—unbeknownst to the fellow—a stack of cash for a dirty handkerchief; Wayne liked it on account of it havin' a little bunny sewn in the corner. He was starting to figure out why those stories bothered him. They had this sense that changing the future was frightening and dangerous.

But didn’t people change it every day?

Wayne wondered regarding the choices people made. Rushing through their lives eating bagels, breaking twigs. Each of them changing the future. Shouldn’t they all … worry about that a little more? Worry how they were changing the future right now, rather than writing books about people doing it in the past? Even if they couldn’t know some things, there was a lot they could anticipate. They might not make that future have talking lions or whatnot—but they might make it have angrier, sadder people.

Maybe stories about fellows quietly making the world better were just too dull. Sounded boring, actually. Maybe if the people in them wore no shirts …

A hand wrapped around Wayne’s mouth from behind. He almost killed the fellow—but it smelled like Wax, so …

Yup, it was Wax. The man eased Wayne back into an alleyway, then pulled him down beside some rubbish as someone passed on the street. Telsin, searching around, annoyed.

After she was gone, Wax removed his hand.

“You let her go?” Wayne whispered.

“Call me crazy—”

“You’re crazy.”

“—but it feels more like I escaped.” Wax nodded his head in the other direction and they snuck away.

“I have to say,” Wayne muttered, “that there are better methods of gettin’ my attention. You’re not supposed to take friends captive, Wax, unless it involves a safeword and stretchy ropes.”

“Stretchy ropes?”

“More fun if you can move a little,” Wayne said. “I got to test them, since I had to be the one getting tied up. You know, on account of the fact that my girlfriend could turn into a puddle of jelly on command. Kind of undermines the point of bondage.”

Wax groaned softly as they slipped out onto the street. “I did *not* need to know any of that, Wayne. Could you maybe avoid being crass on the missions Harmony specifically sent us on?”

“Hey now,” Wayne said. “That’s not crass. MeLaan is a divine being. Chosen by Harmony. I figure, dating her was basically like going to church, you know?”

“And the stretchy ropes?”

“A, uh, metaphor for us all being bound by God’s will?”

They shared a look, then Wax actually grinned as he shook his head. Good. Guy was too uptight these days, what with parenthood, bein’ a senator, and having to save the whole damn city now and then.

Hoid pulled up in the car to get them, per Wayne’s earlier request—but Telsin was still lurking around. So Wax and Wayne slipped out another way and entered a busy street of bustling people. Full of Bilming idiots what had no idea how difficult they was making life. Though he supposed that was too much of a generalization. There were plenty of people in Bilming that weren’t idiots—they came from out of town to gawk at all the idiots.

“Did you get a lead out of Telsin?” Wayne asked as they blended into the crowd.

“Maybe,” Wax said.

“Well, I’ve *definitely* got a lead.”

“You do? Thank Harmony.”

“Yup. There’s a *shining* good pub three streets over. Two different bums swore by it.”

Wayne earned a real good glare out of that one. Made him feel all proud of himself. Smiles, then glares, then smiles, then glares. They pulled at a person like taffy, keeping them limber.

“I had to get away from Telsin,” Wax said. “I’m sure she was stalling, trying to keep me occupied.”

“Seems like she’s worried we can stop her.”

“Agreed. Which is encouraging. But I won’t get anything useful from her. Not in time. We need someone else to interrogate, and she gave me a lead: I think the lord mayor deserves a visit.”

“Here now,” Wayne said. “Now *that’s* an idea.”

They stopped on the street, people giving them a wide berth. The folks here seemed to dress with a lot more variety than in Elendel, but nobody wore guns. Wax stood out like a big ol’ wart on a fellow’s face. The type that you really wanted to pop to see what oozed out.

“We don’t exactly blend in, do we?” Wax said.

“Mate, you’re wearing a rusting *mistcoat.*”

“They’re comfy.”

“They draw attention.”

“You like attention!”

“Depends on who’s looking.” He eyed Wax. “Never have figured out how to go up stairs in one of those things without tripping over my own feet.”

“I’ve never had any trouble.”

Figured. Mistcoats appeared like a regular piece of clothing, but Wayne was sure they was secretly something else. Made of mist or such—and since Harmony *liked* Wax, the coat didn’t trip him.

Wasn’t fair that God liked Wax better. Wayne didn’t *mean* to blaspheme when he got drunk, it just slipped out. And really, if the blasphemy leaked out, didn’t that mean he was more pious afterward? That was why he got drunk so often. That, and absolutely no other reason.

The two of them moved to the side of the street, in the mouth of an alleyway, to plan. Wax glared right smartly at anyone who gawked, sending them on their way.

“So,” Wax said, “we should choose our next course soon. Because if I somehow actually managed to lose the Set when slipping away from Telsin, they’ll surely spot us before too long.”

“’Cuz you stand out like pink shoes on a pallbearer.”

“’Cuz I stand out like pink shoes on a pallbearer.”

“I like the idea of shakin’ down Entrone,” Wayne said. “On principle, at least. But I worry about how much attention that would draw. So maybe we don’t need to interrogate him specifically. After all, we do know where he lives.”

Wayne pointed across the city, up the road, to the silvery-white building sitting at the end. It wasn’t the highest building in town. The central spire, dominating the very middle of the city, was the highest by a lot. And they were even adding to it at the top, it seemed, with new construction.

Still, there was a certain majesty about the mayor’s mansion. The kind that said, “Oi, mate! Don’t use words like ‘oi, mate’ ’round here.”

“Entrone,” Wayne said, “is obviously involved in all this. He’s the type to have secrets written down somewhere, maybe give us a lead on where that bomb is being kept. He’s probably got a safe or something full of answers.”

“You just said shaking him down would create another incident,” Wax said, his hands on his hips, holstered guns jutting out and making basically everybody nearby nervous. “Now you’re suggesting we ransack his *mansion*?”

“I’m suggesting,” Wayne said, giving it a nice upper-class, Fifth Octant, old-money accent, “that once we have completed our radio communication, we give the esteemed lord mayor an evening turn-down service with mints on his pillow, folded towels in the shape of a monkey, and a light despoiling of his intimate affairs. Done with *only* the most *delicate* attention, mind you. A *courteous* looting. An … upper-class plundering.”

“Is that so?” Wax said.

Wayne leaned in. “I mean, we’ll still break all his stuff and steal his secrets. I just won’t fart on his chair before we go. You know. To keep things classy.”

Wax took a deep breath. “Well, I suppose that does walk the line between accosting the man himself and doing something that has a good chance of success. Let’s do it.”

Wayne grinned.

“But *I’ll* do the ransacking,” Wax said. “*You* handle the distraction.”

# 38

Steris threw open the door to the governor’s chamber, where he was holding his private council on what to do about Bilming. Then held that door open for Constable-General Reddi. He’d been invited to the meeting along with his staff. Today that included two other people: Constable Gorglen as record keeper. And Steris.

The governor sat at the head of the meeting table. Adawathwyn immediately glared at Steris through dark brown eyes. The three senators—Lord Cett, Lady Hammondess, and Lady Gardre—were in attendance, as well as Ambassador Daal, his expression unreadable behind his bloodred mask. The shorter man hadn’t taken a seat at the table, but instead stood by the wall, his posture prim and sharp.

“Ah, finally,” the governor said, looking up from the broadsheets. “Reddi. You … Wait. What is *she* doing here?”

“Lady Ladrian?” Reddi said. “Subject matter expert, on my payroll.”

As of fifteen minutes ago, at least. Steris had insisted he actually pay her, and she clutched the single coin in her fist as she shut the door behind Reddi. Then she stepped forward and sat down at the table beside him.

“Did she tell you,” the governor said, “that I specifically excluded her from this council?”

“Yes, she did,” Reddi replied. “And frankly, Your Grace, I thought that an unwise move. She’s the wife of the man who alerted us to this crisis. When Lady Ladrian approached me and explained why I should employ her, I realized she’d undoubtedly have information this council needs.”

The vice governor folded her arms on the table, scowling. But the governor … he nodded. Steris always hesitated to read too much into people's expressions, but now she wondered. Was there a rift between these two? She'd always assumed Varlance was entirely in Adawathwyn's pocket.

But then, no person ever fit comfortably in a pocket.

"Very well," the governor said. "I'm afraid we started without you. As the information has come in and we've gauged the feelings of Outer Cities governments, we've come to see that our path is inevitable. It looks like war."

"War?" Reddi said.

"It's the necessary course of action," Lady Hammondess said. She had a small gap between her front teeth, of the sort men often described as cute—as if it were the reason for her beauty rather than her flawless skin, delicate features, and long lashes. Curious, how minor flaws became cute when their bearer also happened to be conventionally attractive. "The Outer Cities are building up for war."

"Warships in Bilming," Lord Cett agreed. He was a striking man, if you liked the smooth and well-dressed sort. Steris wondered how much work it took to keep one's rough edges so contained behind powders and soft clothing. "Railroad blockades to the south. Recruitment flyers in the Roughs, offering jobs for 'security forces.'"

"Which is why," Constable Reddi said, "we need to work so hard to soothe the situation and reconcile!"

"Better," Lady Hammondess said, "we should strike first. We've been ignoring the warning signs for too long. If we don't move soon, we will *not* be able to win."

Steris glanced at Lady Gardre, the third of the nobles in the room. The plump woman was much less of a war hawk than the others, far more reasonable. But even she nodded, reluctantly. And it *did* make sense. Every day that Elendel dithered gave the other cities time to build power. Elendel had the advantage of infrastructure, manufacturing, and coordination. But that wouldn't remain an edge for long.

Striking first made sense if you thought war was inevitable. But it wasn't. It didn't *have* to be.

*This* was the enemy's plan. She was increasingly certain that saber-rattling in the Outer Cities was a cover for whatever weapon was being prepared in Bilming.

Reddi began sputtering. “War with what army? Elendel has barely ten thousand troops, and that’s *counting* our navy protecting shipping to the South!”

“We have conscription plans in place,” Adawathwyn said smoothly. “And we have a very capably trained constabulary.”

Reddi seemed horrified by that statement. Steris had something to add, but she hesitated. Was this the part where she spoke? She could rarely figure that out.

“My people,” Reddi said, “are *not* soldiers.”

“Pardon, constable,” Lord Cett said, leaning across the table. “But no one is a soldier until they’re trained to be.”

“We’re needed,” Reddi explained. “Law—”

“We’ll be under *martial* law,” the governor explained. “Policing crime in the city will get a lot easier with curfews. You can put excess constables into the military force.”

Maybe *this* was the part where she should speak. Steris opened her mouth and made a noise to that effect, but they kept talking straight over her.

“I won’t stand for this!” Reddi said, throwing himself—paradoxically—to his feet. “This is not the oath my constables swore!”

“You don’t get to choose, constable,” the governor said. “I hold your commission, and that of every constable in this city. They ultimately answer to me.”

“We can quit, Varlance,” Reddi said, leaning forward, his hands on the table. “You can’t *force* us to fight.”

“I—” Steris started.

“Actually,” Adawathwyn said lightly, “that’s precisely what a draft *is*, Constable Reddi.”

“I would—” Steris tried again.

“Yeah?” Reddi snapped. “And who exactly is going to lock us up?”

“Everyone shut up and listen!” Steris snapped. “Or I will barf on the table to get your attention!”

The entire room stared at her.

“I’ll do it,” she warned. “I keep medication in my handbag to produce the effect. You’d be surprised at how often the option is relevant.”

Well, now she had their attention.

“If we are worried about war,” she said, “we should immediately begin an evacuation of the city.”

“No good,” Cett said. “If there is war, we need workers to facilitate industry—and to ramp up production of munitions.”

Rusts. That was the correct answer. She’d hoped he wouldn’t have thought that far forward. She glanced at the silent Malwish ambassador. What did he think of all of this? Had he anticipated it? She had always kept her focus on members of the Set in the Basin. But who was to say there weren’t members among the Malwish as well? Rusts.

“War is not the answer,” she said, turning back to the group. “It serves our enemies, not us. Look, I made a list here, to prove the logic of what I say. I’m increasingly convinced that the leaders of the Outer Cities *want* us to be passing legislation that restricts and insults them. They *want* us interfering.

“They have built gunships and militaries, but they *have not* attacked. They caught Waxillium in their midst, shooting up a warehouse, but what haven’t they done? They haven’t expelled our constables or officials from the city. They’ve shouted about it, they’ve drawn up editorials. But they haven’t *attacked*. Why not?”

“Because they need *us* to do it,” Reddi said. “They need us to give them a reason to go to war.”

“The common people of the Basin don’t want to fight,” Steris said. “Certainly not against Elendel—where they undoubtedly have family.”

“Or because they don’t think they can win,” Lord Cett said.

Steris looked down at her notes. “That’s … unfortunately a real possibility.”

“Why is that unfortunate?” Reddi asked.

“Because,” Steris said, “if they know they can’t defeat us in open war they might do something desperate. Like unleash a weapon of cataclysmic relevance.”

“Returning to your real point,” Adawathwyn said. “This bomb you keep harping on.”

But Governor Varlance was watching her. He was listening.

“My husband,” Steris said, “is in Bilming investigating it as we speak. He produced a terribly dangerous explosion in our laboratory, using rare materials we know the enemy has. We have traced a set of test explosions in caverns underneath Bilming. Something *is* happening."

She met the governor's eyes. "And if our fears about a bomb are true," she said softly, "then the posturing—manipulating us into the position of a bully and tyrant who needs to be resisted—might be intended to give the leaders of the Outer Cities a justification. A way to explain why they had to take such extreme measures. Like destroying us all."

The room quieted, but then Lady Gardre shook her head. "Are we really entertaining these fancies? Doomsday weapons? The real politics of the situation aren't enough?"

*She,* Steris realized, looking at the quiet woman, *must be the member of the Set.* She'd assumed there would be at least one moving among the political elite of Elendel. For a while she'd worried it was the governor or Adawathwyn, but they were both too obvious. The Set liked to move beneath layers of obscurity.

The governor was far too prominent, and Adawathwyn too actively working for things the Set wanted. She was a decoy; she likely assumed she was the mastermind of her own designs. In actuality, she was just another puppet. Encouraged, but left clean so that her eventual downfall wouldn't lead to real conspirators. Who included, smartly, the woman who was seen as the most reasonable. The most rational.

Steris felt far more comfortable upon identifying her. It was like … finding a snake in your intimates drawer. Yes, it was alarming. But at least you could close the drawer and know where it was.

But how to steer the conversation in defiance of that woman? Ah. Perhaps that?

She turned to the constables. "This might be the right time to reveal yourself," she said.

"Huh?" Reddi asked.

"Not you, Constable-General," she said, looking past him toward the lanky Constable Gorglen—the younger man with a long neck and freckles. So unassuming. He met her eyes.

"How did you know?" he asked in a grinding, rough voice that didn't match his frame.

"Process of elimination," she said. "We were promised help, and MeLaan said there were multiple kandra among the constables, but gave only one name. Plus, you walk awkwardly when you have to use a two-legged body."

"Damn," Gorglen—TenSoon—said. "But I suppose you're right about the timing." He stood up before the room of surprised people and made his skin transparent. "Harmony would like me to impress upon you the importance of our current debate—and to confirm what Lady Ladrian is saying. The Set is real. They are planning to annihilate Elendel."

The governor gasped.

Adawathwyn drew back.

Reddi gaped, then spun on Steris. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wasn't a hundred percent certain until earlier today," Steris admitted. "I actually wondered if *you* were also kandra, Reddi. I decided against it, as I don't think Harmony likes his kandra impersonating important officials. Except that once. Well, and that other time. But those were exceptions." She flipped open one of her notebooks. "I've been tracking who might have been replaced for weeks now. See? Kandra attendant to the constable-general. Second most likely placement in the city for one of the Immortals."

"And the first?" Adawathwyn asked.

"You," Steris said, flipping back a page. "But I was working with outdated information. A kandra in your place would take far more care not to be an utterly worthless piece of slime." She made a notation. The room was quiet. "Oh, did I say something awkward again? I *do* make that mistake sometimes, don't I?"

Reddi slumped back into his seat. "I can't believe this…"

"It was all but inevitable that they would be among your staff, Constable-General Reddi," Steris said.

"No," he said. "It's not that he's kandra. It's that … rusts, Wayne was right…"

"I am TenSoon," the kandra said to the room, eliciting another series of gasps. He growled softly. "I hate it when people do that. Harmony is worried. And so *you* should be worried. Especially as Harmony is … unable to see certain things lately. We are working blind."

"What can blind a god?" the governor asked.

"Another god," Steris mumbled.

"So what do we do?" Reddi asked. "We can't go to war, not if that's what they want. But—"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. There were no attendants in the room, just senators and the like, so Reddi answered it himself: revealing a young woman, a radio technician by her uniform, holding a folded piece of paper.

“What is it?” Reddi demanded.

“Communication from Dawnshot,” she said, “for Lady Ladrian. I … um … thought it was worth interrupting you, even though the people outside said—”

“You did the right thing,” Reddi said, taking it.

The poor woman was pale and trembling.

“You read it?” Steris asked.

“I had to transcribe it for you,” she said. “That’s how it works…”

Reddi handed Steris the letter, and she unfolded it. The opening words, bold and dominant, leaped off the page.

> *Bomb is confirmed real, and already fabricated. City-destroying capacity. Enemy is trying to find a way to deliver it to Elendel. It’s time to evacuate the city.*

# 39

Marasi stood before an unassuming townhome, one in a long row of structures along the street, each a different color with a slightly different building shape. Each lawn held a different variety of tree. Bilming ideal: mass-produced individuality.

Marasi hesitated on the threshold. Ruin. Was she ready to meet the Survivor himself? A man she had been taught since childhood to worship, a man who had transcended even the grave. Who had briefly held the mantle of Preservation before releasing it to the Ascendant Warrior. And who had then protected the people of the Southern Continent for years after the world was remade.

Moonlight was confident that her mentor really was him. So how would it feel to meet him?

*You've chatted with Death,* Marasi thought. *Is this so different?*

Judging by her nerves: Yes. Yes it was.

Moonlight touched her finger to a piece of metal on the door, and the thing unlocked. "Identity lock," she noted, then pushed open the door. The small foyer inside was all hardwood and polish, and there were no paintings or other ornamentations of note. Moonlight headed to the left, into a large room with thick drapes covering the windows.

The walls were lined with maps, illuminated by electric lights. Moonlight slid her bag onto a table by the far wall, where a woman in her twenties—somewhat plump, with a stark blonde bob—was peering at a paper covered in strange writing. She had a small terrier in her lap.

"Moonlight," the woman said after a glance. "You have to read this. Travel to Bjendal has been completely upset. That's *four* primary systems we can’t visit without extreme danger, if you count Roshar. I’ve said it for years: The perpendicularities are no longer viable. They never *were* good for mass transportation or commerce, no matter how hard those fools on Nalthis try. We need a different…” The woman trailed off, then turned in her seat, perhaps hearing Marasi stepping into the room. “Hey! You brought a local!”

“Marasi, meet Codenames,” Moonlight said. “Codenames, meet Marasi. We’re working on a mission together.”

“Wow,” Codenames said, thrusting the sheet of paper at Moonlight, then hopping to her feet, the small dog under her arm. “You must trust her.”

“Hardly.”

“You brought her to the safehouse!”

“She forced me.”

“No one forces you to do anything,” Codenames said, then bounced over and thrust her free hand toward Marasi. “Hi! I’m Codenames Are Stupid. Long story.”

The woman had a faint accent, wholly unlike that of Allik or anyone Marasi had met from the Southern Continent. That, plus the way she’d spoken of “locals,” indicated … another traveler? The presence of an accent indicated she might not be as good at languages as Moonlight was, maybe?

Marasi shook her hand. “Is … um … the Survivor here?”

“Kell?” Codenames said. “Nah. Haven’t seen him in a week or so.” She spun toward Moonlight. “What do you think of the report? Worrisome, right?”

Moonlight held the paper pinched between two fingers. “Codenames,” she said, “what language is this even in?”

“Thaylen,” Codenames said. “Oh! It’s a *fascinating* one, Moonlight. You should learn it! Look how the letters interlock in—”

“I’ll stick to using Connection tricks for languages, thank you,” Moonlight said, spreading out the rubbings she’d taken.

“That’s cheating.”

“Another word for a clever shortcut,” Moonlight said. “Is TwinSoul here? I think we’re going to need some mathematics.”

“Lily and I will go and grab him,” Codenames said, carrying her dog and slipping away into the back rooms.

Marasi had watched the exchange with bafflement, but rather than focus on what she didn't understand, she turned her attention to something she did. One of the maps was of Scadrial—the entire world. A more detailed map than she'd ever seen, far more extensive than the official surveys—it even included the dark parts of the unexplored islands and landmasses to the south.

If that was Scadrial, then what were these other maps? Rusts. How many worlds were out there?

*There's always another secret*, she thought, remembering her catechism as a child studying the life of the Survivor.

A short time later, Codenames walked back into the room with an elderly man. He looked … well, ancient, judging by the long powder-white mustache and the liver-spotted skin, which was a deep tan. He wore a formal suit in the Bilming fashion, so … maybe he was from her land? But he also had a short beard with mustaches—a style she'd never seen a man wear in Elendel. Though he stood tall, not the least bit bowed by age, he did seem a little unsteady on his feet—since he gripped the doorframe as he stepped through it.

"Ah," he said, pressing his palms together. "A guest! Welcome to our home, honored guest. Let me get you something to drink."

"TwinSoul," Moonlight said, "we are on a deadline to—"

"Deadlines are no excuse for rudeness," TwinSoul said. "I am TwinSoul, and you are…?"

"Marasi," she said.

"Lady Marasi!" he said. "Excellent." He immediately turned toward what Marasi assumed was the kitchen. "How do you take your tea?"

"Um … mint tea, if you have it. With lemon?"

"Excellent!" he said again. He soon returned with a plate bearing a cup and an array of nuts and fruits. "Please enjoy."

She felt guilty making someone so old wait on her—but at the same time there was a certain forcefulness to how he offered the refreshment. It reminded her of her aunt, who would be far more offended if you didn't accept a drink. So Marasi took the cup and a handful of nuts.

"Now," TwinSoul said. "What have you brought me, Moonlight? Curious, curious." He stepped over to the table and surveyed the rubbings—stretching out his hands and resting them on the table.

Marasi stepped up, curious. There was something odd about his hands that she hadn't noticed earlier: a line of crystal. Embedded in the skin, running along the outsides of his fingers and wrists—almost like a seam on a glove. It was pinkish-red, like rose quartz. The man leaned down, and she saw lines of similar crystal appear from beneath his collar, growing up the sides of his neck and temples. Crossing his skin like little rivers of liquid.

As she watched with amazement, these tendrils expanded from his temples, forming *spectacles.* Completely made of crystal, the lens parts more transparent than the rest. A *second* set of lenses, smaller, formed in front of the others—giving him extra magnification.

"How…" Marasi said, glancing at Moonlight. "How does he do that?"

"I fear," TwinSoul said, pulling tight one of the rubbings, "that such information is not lightly shared with an outsider, even an honored guest. I must trust that Moonlight thinks this is acceptable for you to see, but I apologize. I will not explain without leave from our leader."

"It's an emergency," Moonlight said, lounging against a bookshelf with her arms folded. "I had to risk bringing her in." She glanced at Marasi, and seemed to be hiding a smile at Marasi's visible wonder.

*She's not as worried about my visit as she implied,* Marasi thought. *She sees this as an opportunity to intrigue me.*

It was working. TwinSoul arranged the various rubbings, then raised an index finger. Two lines of crystal grew up the outsides of that finger and formed into a *nib,* like a fountain pen. He absently unscrewed a small jar of ink, then began taking notes.

"What is the emergency, Moonlight?" he asked.

"Autonomy is moving on a much faster timetable than we believed," she explained. "One of these charts lists explosions—once assumed to be due to railway construction. We're hoping you could correlate that with the hotspots of enemy activity we've been monitoring, to find a likely entry point to the caverns."

"Ah yes," TwinSoul said. "Silajana says he would be happy to aid in this. Kaise, would you fetch the appropriate binder?"

"Sure thing," Codenames said, bounding off to do as she was asked. With Marasi's help, Moonlight pulled over a long table and arranged some of the rubbings on it. They left the circular table at the center of the room empty for now, though Marasi couldn't guess why.

As TwinSoul took notes, he absently created a cup from the same rose-colored stone, then filled it from a water jug at the side of the room. When he was finished drinking, he set the cup on a plate—and the stone disintegrated into fine powder, which then eventually vanished. A short time later, he made a thin knife blade on one finger and cut out a specific section of the rubbing.

When Codenames returned a short time later, TwinSoul was settled at the table—on a crystal chair he had created. Marasi fidgeted and checked the wall clock. They'd spent almost half an hour here so far. She didn't know how tight their deadline was, but given what they'd discovered, waiting was unnerving.

"Hmmm…" TwinSoul said, scribbling some more notes with his finger pen. As he wrote, a line of crystal grew off his other hand and reached the cut-out section of the rubbing. There it formed a little frame around the flimsy square of paper. A pole grew up behind it, hanging it like a picture for better inspection.

TwinSoul peered at it through his improvised spectacles, playing with his long mustaches.

"I wish my brother were here," Codenames said from a seat nearby. "He'd do this math easily…" She looked forlorn as she said it.

"The problem is not merely one of mathematics," TwinSoul said. He stood and walked away from the little workstation, leaving the framed piece of paper behind—and this time the stone didn't disintegrate. He filled himself a much larger cup of water, then stepped up to the circular table and rested one hand on it while drinking.

A crystal city grew up from the table.

It started at his hand, then spread out—like frost forming on steel. His crystal reminded Marasi of a darker version of the pink saltstone Steris had once purchased for decorating the kitchen. Buildings sprouted from it, streets formed as troughs—in minutes a complete replica of the city adorned the table, the circular elevated train tracks of the partially finished high-speed rail growing in last of all.

Marasi's breath caught, then she looked at the old man, who was smiling in a self-satisfied way. He appeared to enjoy the showmanship. Perhaps if she hadn't been here, he'd have pulled out a mundane map. But this was oh so much more impressive.

“It’s called an aether,” Moonlight said, walking up behind her. “An ancient entity predating the creation of your world. TwinSoul can grow it, manipulate it. Would you like to know more?”

“Yes,” Marasi whispered.

Moonlight smiled. “And you shall. Once you join us.”

Marasi breathed out softly, then reached out to touch the tip of one of the buildings—which felt solid beneath her fingers, more sturdy than she’d expected. The aether was mostly smooth, with tiny pits here and there.

“I have three likely options for you,” TwinSoul said. “I’ve marked them in deeper-colored roseite.”

He pointed toward one building, a little pointer stick—the kind professors used for gesturing at chalkboards—growing between his fingers. The building indicated was indeed a deeper red. It was the central spire of the city, right at the heart of Bilming, rising high above the surrounding structures. Straight along the sides, then tapering sharply toward the unfinished upper floors.

“Independence Tower,” TwinSoul said. “This is no surprise—we’ve known that the agents of Autonomy have been using this as their base for years.”

“And there were explosions underneath?” Marasi asked.

“The detonations happened farther to the east,” TwinSoul said. “But I doubt that the entrance to those caverns will be right in the center of the detonations, for obvious reasons. Independence Tower is a central hub of activity for our esteemed antagonists, and I’d bet it has an entrance to the caverns.”

“But it will be heavily guarded,” Marasi said. “What are the other two options?”

“This office building here, my lady,” he said, pointing to a smaller structure in the city grid.

She nodded. “Note, though, I’m not a lady. I work for a living.”

“It is merely a distinction of respect, Lady Marasi,” he said. “From among my people. It … translates oddly into your language. Regardless, this office building—the Dulouis Building—is both a hotbed of Set activity *and* at the perimeter of one of the locations with tremors. I consider it the most likely option.”

He pointed back at the tall structure. “As you noted, Independence Tower is highly defended—a veritable fortification, a castle in the middle of the city. Breaching it has proven beyond even the arts of the Survivor himself.”

“Not for lack of trying,” Codenames added. “Their security system can spot ghosts. He hasn’t figured out a way to circumvent that.”

“And the final location?” Marasi asked.

“It seems of less import,” TwinSoul said, pointing at a structure on the perimeter of the city, beneath a section of train track. “An old tire factory.”

“Tires?” Moonlight said, stepping up beside Marasi. “Like where Tobal Copper worked?”

“TwinSoul, would I be correct to assume that factory is owned by Basin Tires?” Marasi asked.

“Indeed,” TwinSoul said. “You appear to have information beyond mine, my lady.”

“That company is involved,” Marasi said. “Did your agents notice anything odd about the factory?”

Codenames flipped through one of their files. “Uh … let’s see … Curious. The woman we had watching this location says it’s mostly shut down, because very little is ever shipped out of it.”

“But things are shipped in?” Marasi said, growing excited. “Maybe an oddly large number of deliveries, given that the factory barely seems to be doing anything?”

“Yes,” Codenames said. “Our agent didn’t put that together, but yes. From the shipping manifests here … Why are they taking in so much, if they’re not making anything?”

“Because those aren’t supplies for the factory,” Moonlight said, meeting Marasi’s eyes. “They’re stockpiles of food and arms for the cavern underneath. This is our incursion point.”

“I agree,” Marasi said. “There has to be an entrance to the caverns there, and maybe it will be less guarded than the central spire. We strike here.”

“We can get there quickly by rail,” Moonlight said. “The section leading from here to there is finished and running.”

“Wait,” TwinSoul said. “How urgent is this threat?”

“We have reason to believe,” Marasi said, “that the Set has developed a bomb capable of wiping out Elendel. Harmony is blinded, and we know the

Set have been developing a device capable of delivering their bomb from a great distance.”

“They have a dark god breathing down their necks,” Moonlight added. “Demanding results. They were supposed to put their plan into motion weeks ago. And with Marasi and her friends getting close … well, they have *every incentive* to launch that bomb the moment they can. It could happen at any time.”

“By the first aether…” he whispered, glancing at Codenames, whose eyes had gone wide. “Moonlight. We should contact the master.”

“You’re right,” Moonlight said. “I hate delaying, but … Codenames, is your special friend nearby?”

“Upstairs,” she said, scrambling out of the room. “I’ll go grab him.”

“The master?” Marasi said. “You mean…”

“Yes,” Moonlight said. “It’s time to talk to Kelsier.”

# 40

Codenames's "friend" turned out to be a glowing sphere of light the size of a child's head—though perfectly symmetrical and marked at the center with an arcane symbol.

It floated over to Marasi, then bobbed in the air and spoke with a soft masculine voice. She didn't understand the strange words.

"Was that … some kind of spell?" she whispered to Moonlight.

"He said he was pleased to meet you," Codenames said. "And complimented your hair."

"Oh," Marasi said, transfixed by the glowing orb. Nothing held it up; it simply floated, shimmering with a pure white glow, tinged with mother-of-pearl.

Codenames spoke to the sphere in the same language, and it bobbed again, then began to shift and change. It melded into the shape of a person's head—a man with strong, angular features. She was shocked to find that most of the paintings and statues of the Survivor were accurate. Except for the spike through his right eye—a feature that was replicated in the light, same as the rest of his head and hair.

"I'm not surprised to hear from you," he said. "Something's wrong, isn't it?"

"Maybe?" Codenames said. "Honestly, we're not certain, Kell. But TwinSoul said we should contact you."

"Is he there?" Kelsier asked.

"Present, my lord," TwinSoul said, bowing his head to the reproduction of the man's face—though Kelsier didn't seem to be able to see him. "Also present is Moonlight, and … a visitor. One Marasi Colms."

The Survivor's image cocked an eyebrow at that. "Marasi Colms. We've been watching you."

Marasi stammered. This man was the center of her religion—she'd prayed to him as a child. And while she wasn't as observant as Steris, it was still … daunting to meet him.

He didn't express anger that she was there. Another indication that Moonlight had been playing up that aspect, perhaps to make Marasi feel she was getting away with something.

"Report?" Kelsier asked.

"Dawnshot is in Bilming," Moonlight said, "and thinks the Set is moving soon. Within the day."

"Harmony is blinded, Lord Survivor," Marasi said, piping up. "He admitted it to Wax. He can't see anything, but … sir … he's frightened."

"Damn," Kelsier said. "I'm twelve hours away, moving quickly via airship."

"That … may not be soon enough, Kell," Moonlight said.

"My lord," TwinSoul said, "Moonlight has recovered some disturbing intel. It appears that the Set has discovered the relationship between harmonium and trellium. Beyond that, they've been experimenting with long-range delivery devices. They're prepared to do something stupid."

"Not so much stupid as desperate," Kelsier said. "They know that Autonomy has declared this entire planet anathema. The Set is fighting for survival the only way they know how: by trying to destroy Elendel, to prove to Autonomy they can rule the planet. I thought we had more time though. Why now?"

"No idea," Moonlight said. "But there's talk of a new ashfall. I've never heard *that* before. Plus, we have a *photo* here of a destroyed city. Maybe … they tried it out somewhere else, and photographed the results? At any rate, it implies something more than bombing Elendel."

"There have always been two plans," Codenames said. "Autonomy wants to do something catastrophic to the entire planet—the ashfalls could be their plan for that. But the Set is hoping to prove it can dominate the Basin, and that the more extreme measure isn't needed. Like cutting off a finger to prevent the infection from spreading."

The room fell silent, Marasi feeling overwhelmed. They spoke of the end of a planet, *her* planet, as if it were something that they'd known was a possibility for some time. But then again, she was *literally* in a conversation with the Survivor … so …

"Sir," she said. "Um, Lord Kelsier? I believe they are close to launching this bomb. I intend to stop them, but I'm just one woman. I wouldn't mind help. Anything you can offer."

"I don't have the luxury of holding back," Kelsier said more softly. "I shouldn't have left for the South. I thought Saze would stop it before it got this far … We need to do what he cannot. Miss Colms, you have our help. Codenames, how many full Ghostblood agents do we have in Bilming?"

"Um…" Codenames said. "Only us three. Everyone else is in Elendel or on assignment elsewhere in the field."

"How quickly can we get the Elendel agents to Bilming?" Kelsier asked.

"Not quickly enough," Moonlight said. "They're all embedded, so we'd have to use dead drops. We could have them roused by early evening, maybe late afternoon, but they would still be several hours away in Elendel."

"Send them to my sister," Marasi said. "She's trying to facilitate an evacuation via the Elendel government."

Kelsier sniffed softly. He didn't seem to have much respect for the Elendel government. "Codenames, you take Dae-oh and see to it. I doubt the field team needs a philologist for this mission. Also alert our members around the Basin. Shri Prasanva, I hate to pull you from your quiet evenings of scholarship, but I fear we're going to need your help."

The elderly TwinSoul stood up straight, then bowed to the floating head. "We are eager to serve, my lord. Silajana sends his regards, and wishes he could send more of his aetherbound to aid in your fight."

"I appreciate the sentiment," Kelsier said. "You and Moonlight are to assist Miss Colms. In fact, I think it is time to do something drastic. Take the stores of purified Dor. The Command is 'Respect.' Authorize the other cells to access theirs as well, and pass the Command to them."

Codenames gasped. Marasi had no idea what purified Dor was, but even Moonlight seemed impressed.

"Do what you can," Kelsier said. "I will try to accelerate my arrival, but the truth is that I don't know how much I can do. I'm traveling over water, and so can't go much faster than I currently am. Dropping things to Steelpush off doesn't do much with an ocean underneath you."

"We will stop this, my lord," TwinSoul said. "Whatever is happening, we will interrupt it. You shall arrive back in Elendel to find a pristine and welcoming city."

"I'll settle for the normal dirty, grouchy city, TwinSoul," Kelsier said. "Go. I'll see if I can shake Harmony out of his stupor. At least he sent Dawnshot; that convinces me the threat is real. Anything that makes Saze take action these days is to be considered significant."

The face melted back into the sphere, and the communication was over. The three immediately burst into motion, going in separate directions. Marasi decided to stick with Moonlight, who rushed to a different room—which required opening another mystical lock. Inside was an armory that would have made Ranette delirious with glee. Guns on the walls, vials of metals in racks, glass knives and dueling canes. A large chain-fed machine gun and some explosives.

Moonlight ignored it all, rushing straight for a safe in the corner. It had no combination or locking mechanism that Marasi could see, though as she peered over Moonlight's shoulder the woman put her hand on the front and said, "Respect me." Some mechanism inside clicked, and the door opened.

"Another … what was it … Identity lock?" Marasi asked.

"No, this is even more secure," Moonlight said. "It's a lock that is Awake, and can tell from your Intent if you've been given a passcode or if you've stolen it."

A lock … that was awake? As in *alive*?

Inside were only three items: a trio of identical glowing jars, big enough that you'd have trouble carrying them in one hand. The glow was similar to the sphere that had followed Codenames, but more intense. Each jar outshone the room's electric lights.

Moonlight took one, the light shining on her face, and turned it over. Awed.

"What is it?" Marasi whispered.

"Concentrated Investiture," Moonlight said. "Unkeyed from any Identity. This is an energy source that can power things like your Metallic Arts."

"Those are powered by the gods."

"Exactly," Moonlight said. "This power comes from a god's corpse. Two of them actually, intermingled. It's *exceptionally* difficult to recover.

The things that you could do with this … well, that *I* could do with this. You'd only be able to use it as a hyperefficient replacement for your metals. You don't know how good you have it here on Scadrial, being able to power your abilities with something so common."

"And your abilities?" Marasi asked. "What are they powered by?"

Moonlight smiled. She hadn't admitted to any abilities, but so far Marasi had seen a man who could create objects from crystal, a woman with a pet … sphere … and Moonlight, who seemed fairly high in their organization. So what was she capable of doing?

Moonlight packed the three jars in a rucksack, wrapped in some cushioning, then filled it with other supplies, including a few explosives. She threw the sack over her shoulder and took a few guns from the wall. Marasi, with permission, helped herself to a fine-looking rifle—along with an innocent-looking case to carry it in—and some aluminum ammunition. They had it in plenitude here.

"Electrolysis," Moonlight noted. "Aluminum is actually pretty easy to make, once you know the process."

"Wait," Marasi said, hurrying to join her as they left the room, "you can make aluminum with *electrolysis*?"

"Yeah," Moonlight said. "We've been using it to fund our operations for almost two decades now. I'd bet half the aluminum in the Basin came from us originally."

"And you're casually letting me in on the secret?"

"It's a free sample," Moonlight said. "Besides, Dean—he's our chemist back in Elendel—is convinced you'll find the secret soon, and the value will plummet. Dean thinks aluminum will soon be cheaper than tin."

Cheaper than *tin*? Preservation! If every criminal could afford bullets to kill Allomancers, and every citizen could keep a band of aluminum in their hat to prevent emotional Allomancy, it …

Well, it would change the world.

"All of this," Moonlight said, "is merely the surface, Marasi."

"Why me?" Marasi asked. "Why not Wax?"

"He's spoken for," Moonlight said. "Besides, Kelsier prefers people like us. The discarded, the ignored. And Wax is a little … brazen. People watch him. Track him. Pay attention to him. Not our style, for all that Kell likes to be the center of attention."

“Plus, I suppose,” Marasi said with some thought, “having access to a high-ranking constable is useful.”

“There’s also your uncommon connection to the Malwish,” Moonlight said.

“Allik?” Marasi said, amused. “He’s wonderful—don’t get me wrong—but I think you’d find him to be a little less … well-connected than you’re assuming.”

Rusts. She hoped he’d gotten out of the city. Her gut said that he would go if she asked. There was a certain practicality to Allik that she loved—he was wonderfully, beautifully genuine.

In her line of work, she met so many who made her question the nature of humanity. But then she’d go home and find all the reminders in the world of the best that people could be. And somehow, he was all hers.

Back in the main room, the model of the city had started to crumble. It didn’t disintegrate as quickly as the cup had; something made the stone linger sometimes but immediately vanish other times. The chair, for example, still seemed fully sturdy.

Moonlight waved for Marasi to follow her out into the foyer. Here, TwinSoul walked down the steps, gripping the banister tightly for support, wearing a backpack that she thought—from the way it moved, and from the hose draped over his shoulder—might be filled entirely with water.

He’d changed outfits, and now wore some kind of loose-fitting uniform with a bright yellow sash around his waist. He’d strapped on a sword—a slightly curved one in an ornate golden sheath. As he reached the ground floor, he nodded to Moonlight. “Codenames is going to send some messages,” he said, “and so can wait for that other woman you sent to reach safety here. I think it is time for the three of us to be about the job. You retrieved the Dor?”

Moonlight tapped her rucksack.

“Excellent,” he said, turning to Marasi. “I have been commanded to follow your lead, my lady. With Silajana’s blessing and yours, we strike forward. If there is danger, I vow that I shall fight to protect you.”

“This … could be dangerous,” Marasi said, glancing at his ornate sword, noting how unstable on his feet he was. “I’m sure we could use your help, TwinSoul, but … I don’t know that you should be doing any fighting.

Perhaps we two could strike ahead, and call for you when we need your specialized skills?”

“I promise I will not slow you down, my lady,” he said. “I have been tasked with aiding you by the Survivor himself.”

He said it with calm respect, but his posture and attitude whispered something else. *I’m going with you, young woman. Best not to argue the point any further.*

Right, then. Marasi glanced at Moonlight, who nodded to her. Despite their knowledge and experience, this was Marasi’s mission. She was in charge. Good.

“Where’s the nearest train station?” she asked. “We need to get to that factory as quickly as possible.”

# 41

It was late afternoon by the time Wax got into position at the lord mayor's mansion, the Silver House. Though nightfall was hours away, he hoped—as he did every day—that the mists would come tonight. It felt like forever since he'd been out in them. Not only did they seem to come less often these days, he also had less occasion to go out at night. The mists felt like a friend from his youth that he still knew but rarely talked to.

He'd been at this all day, having left Elendel a few hours before dawn, but fatigue felt distant regardless. As four fifteen hit, Wax burst into motion. Wayne should have his distraction going in full, which gave Wax the opportunity to bolt across the springy grass to the mayor's mansion. He dropped a bullet and Pushed up to the second floor.

There, he grabbed the outer windowsill and gave a quick Push to the mechanism inside, which should undo the latch …

The window rattled, but didn't unlatch. Drat. It had a full lock, one a Push couldn't undo.

All right. He increased his weight manyfold, and a quick *Push* cracked the window and bent the lock, letting him force the window open and pull himself inside.

His boots thumped down on a carpeted floor. The place was messy, but not cluttered. Piles of papers occupied the desk and the nearby tables. A small bar held a collection of spirits, half the tops off, the other half put haphazardly back on the wrong bottle. Books lined a shelf, some put in spine first, others reversed, and a good third of them slumped to the side because the ones at the far end had been removed, leaving the whole thing to slouch like sleepy guards on watch duty.

It was in many ways the opposite of Copper's flat. That had been sterile, pristine. This was lived in. It had the air of a place full of secrets—because a man as important as Gave would employ a fleet of maids and servants to keep things tidy. Except in this room.

Wax didn't have a lot to go on. But the lord mayor *was* involved in whatever the Set was planning—and involvement on that level would leave traces. A bomb somewhere in this city was pointed at Elendel, and this room held the clues that would lead him to it. But where?

Wax sorted quickly through the pages on the desk. Wayne was probably doing Grandma's Been at the Vodka, his favorite ploy for drawing attention but not gunfire. Unfortunately, the Set would be on the lookout for his tricks. They'd created a Metalborn designed specifically to face Wayne. They would know about his propensity for disguises.

The papers didn't give him much. Some shipping manifests to a factory on the outskirts of town. A stack of broadsheets with editorials circled that were critical of Gave. And another, newer stack of them with no such problems. He opened the desk, and there found a curious number of letters from noblemen and noblewomen in Elendel.

Wax recognized several of the names, including Vennis Hasting—one of the more powerful senators. He scanned a letter from him, and it touched on nothing incriminating. Though it mentioned trade negotiations, most of it was pleasantries.

Frowning, Wax fished in his coat pocket and brought out another letter, the extremely incriminating one—also from Vennis Hasting—that Maraga had given him. He was missing pieces here. When had they moved from pleasantries to discussing the destruction of the world?

For now, he stuffed both letters into his pocket. Gave and Vennis were colluding, but he had already known that. He needed a lead on where to find the bomb. Fortunately, after a little more hunting he struck gold. Gave Entrone's calendar.

People usually made certain to hide the most important documents and information. They'd lock up their plans and schemes, but often forgot simple things like calendars. To a trained detective, knowing where you'd been—and where you planned to be—could be incriminating. Back in the Roughs, he'd often had to piece a person's schedule together through interviews and interrogations. But in a modern city, people tended to write it down for him.

The desk calendar was the wide and flat type that displayed an entire month, one day to a box. Previous months had been folded back behind, and were covered in notations in two hands: A sloppier one that, from the letters, Wax assumed was Gave’s. And a neater hand that likely belonged to a secretary.

*Lots of visits to something called the lab,* Wax thought. *With tight scheduling between meetings here at the mansion. So the lab is close, or he has some direct method of getting to it …*

Another spot listed *trajectory and distance tests,* and that was surrounded by several empty days. So he’d needed to travel some way for that. Curious. Where could they have launched delivery devices a long distance without drawing attention?

Wax looked up as he heard some muffled shouts. Wayne’s distraction was working. He kept searching, scanning for anything suspicious, and something struck him a moment later.

There were no appointments after today.

A coldness spread through Wax as he looked at the last appointment, in Gave’s own hand. It simply said, *They arrive.* Rusts. What did that mean?

There wasn’t the time for analysis, so he ripped off the sheets—even though that would reveal he’d been here—and moved on. Confident he’d learned what he could from the desk, he tried an old Coinshot’s trick: burning steel.

Little blue lines spread from his chest toward viable sources of metal. Most of these were faint, indicating nails in the walls and furniture. Light fixtures, doorknobs, even unseen wires for electricity. More and more, their lives were surrounded by metal—glints of it facilitating everything from the incandescent bulb to the nib in the pen on the desk. He knew some people felt that the day of the Metalborn was over, that modern advances would equalize all people and diminish the advantages of Allomancer and Feruchemist.

Yet he had trained himself—with practice—to put out the lights in a room by distorting the wires in the walls. His versatility improved with each new discovery. And as more metal outlined their lives, he was able to see more and more details of rooms.

He spotted no hidden chambers in the desk, but he did locate the room's safe. Hidden not behind a picture or a bookshelf, but in the floor under a couch—which was a more common spot than the other two, despite popular lore.

Wax set to it quickly. For all his levity, Wayne would be in serious danger during this distraction. Wax didn't want to leave him too long—indeed, Wax heard more cries and shouts as he shoved the couch aside. They were getting louder. The enemy might already be on to him.

The safe had an Allomantic lock. No visible keyhole or combination. It would be opened with Pushes if he was lucky, Pulls if he was unlucky. Wax squinted, judging the metal lines. There was the giant blue one leading to the safe itself, of course. Many Allomancers would stop with that, never realizing that if you peered closer—if you let the lines start to drift and separate …

One giant line became many smaller ones, all connecting him to the various mechanisms inside. Pins you could Push in a specific order to unlock the thing. He got to work as the shouts outside grew more urgent. These kinds of locks were secure against most people, and even most Allomancers. But there was a weakness. Wax carefully, subtly Pushed each pin in turn, wiggling them until he found the one that activated a tumbler.

That would be the first. He nudged it and was rewarded when it locked into place. He was in luck—this was a mechanism meant for one who could Push, not Pull. He should be able to open it, though even many Coinshots would have trouble with something this subtle.

First tumbler in place, he wiggled each remaining pin to find the second. Easy. He quickly located the third, Pushed it, and—

And the lock reset.

Wax froze, a bead of sweat trickling down his cheek. What had he done wrong? He forced himself, despite the growing noise outside, to go through it again. Again, the lock reset after he Pushed the third pin.

He pounded the floor in frustration until the answer struck him. This wasn't a lock designed for someone who could Push *or* Pull. It was designed for someone who could do both. The third pin required a Pull.

In short, it was a lock designed for a Mistborn to open. Or in this case, someone using Hemalurgy to cheat.

Which meant he was out of luck. He'd never get this open, not unless he could rip it out and do his Pushes from both sides … He didn't have time for that. And there was something more going on outside. Shouts. Alarms, and …

And was that *smoke* he smelled?

Rusts. Wax did a quick scan of the room for anything else he could investigate. There wasn't …

Wait. That pattern of metal in the floor. Wooden boards in regular straight rows, nailed down in lines. Except for one square of nails underneath the rug.

*Trapdoor,* he thought, and shoved the rug aside, feeling about until he located the hidden latch. Entrone had the spikes to make him an Allomancer and was quite enamored with his powers, judging by that safe. But he didn't have the *experience* of someone who'd grown up with their powers. A seasoned Coinshot could pick out that pattern of nails in the same way a square of new paint on an old wall would stand out.

The trapdoor led to a very narrow shaft with a wooden ladder. Probably between two walls on the first floor, down into a basement.

As smoke began to stream in around the door and he heard shouts for a fire brigade—along with feet thumping along the hallway outside—Wax decided to abandon the safe. He slipped onto the ladder, then pulled the trapdoor closed behind him. Hoping that wherever this led, it would point him in the right direction.

# 42

It was odd for Marasi to feel such urgency while sitting and waiting.

The elevated train of Bilming lived up to its reputation. The group of them sat in a private compartment, speeding around the city, bypassing traffic congestion. The train stopped frequently, but each time it did, it bolted back into motion with a jarring acceleration.

It felt almost like she was a Coinshot, each burst of speed from the train a fresh Push launching them ever closer to their destination. She'd read of the Ascendant Warrior's Flight of Destiny in the Words of Founding, when she'd returned to Luthadel at the last minute to save Harmony. In the stories, Vin had traveled a miraculous distance in mere hours.

Now, Marasi likely traveled at that same speed. In cushioned comfort, with a cool breeze piped in from outside. They carried weapons hidden in cases or sacks, and Marasi still wore the simple trousers and shirt she'd donned for her sting. Moonlight was dressed as a Bilming constable, and TwinSoul had shrouded himself in a local fisherman's raincloak. She'd initially worried that his suit and colorful sash would stand out, but he clearly knew how to be inconspicuous.

"For this to work," Marasi said to them, "I need to understand our resources. That means, Moonlight, I *really* need to know what you're capable of."

"Art criticism," she said. "Fighting, if needed. Wisecracks when appropriate."

"I meant any extraordinary abilities," Marasi said.

"Her wisecracks *are* extraordinary," TwinSoul said, his eyes twinkling. "Why, they're so remarkable that I quite often can't see which part of them is supposed to be wise.”

Moonlight, in turn, rolled her eyes. “I have three soulstamps on me at the moment: two universal stamps, one Essence Mark. It takes time and preparation to create more—time we don’t have—so we’ll have to rely on these ones. I can use each stamp multiple times, but no use will last long, since they weren’t … Right, you have no idea what I’m talking about.”

“Moonlight,” TwinSoul explained, “has stamps that rewrite the nature of the objects she encounters. One makes a doorway appear where none previously existed. The second repairs a broken or worn object, to make it look new. Is that correct?”

Moonlight nodded. “It’s something I’m practicing still—stamps that will work on any object, I mean. Requires Invested ink, on this planet, but we’ve got the process mostly working.”

“So you can make a door appear,” Marasi said. “And you can make an object that was broken become new? How many times?”

“As often as I want,” Moonlight said. “But only for a limited period in each case.”

“Wow,” Marasi whispered. “That’s … magic?”

“Is Allomancy magic?” Moonlight asked.

“Of course not,” Marasi said.

“Neither is this,” Moonlight said. “To repair something, I merely rewrite the past, making the object think it was well-maintained or never broke. Like I said, universal stamps are a new technology. I don’t have them working perfectly yet, but they’ll do for now.”

It felt magical to Marasi regardless. Allomancy was one thing—it made perfect sense to be able to use metal to Push on other pieces of metal. But rewriting the past of an object? How was that *not* magical?

“You said you have three stamps,” Marasi said. “What’s the third?”

“It’s for emergencies.” Moonlight shifted in her seat. “The other two work on nonliving objects only. This one changes a person—me, specifically—in dramatic ways. I avoid using it if possible.”

Marasi glanced at TwinSoul, who shook his head in a “leave it alone” sort of way. Well, all right. She hated going into a potential fight without knowing what her options and advantages were, but at least she’d learned something.

The train slowed at a stop, causing them all to lean in their seats at the change in momentum. People piled into the corridor between compartments outside, waiting to flood out into the station.

"And you, TwinSoul?" Marasi asked. "Is there a limit to the things you can make?"

"Alas," he said, nudging his backpack, which was on the floor, "there are indeed serious limits. I can only maintain roseite objects under certain fields of Investiture. Some planets have those naturally, but yours does not, so my roseite creations—outside of our safehouse—must be touching me, or they will disintegrate. It also requires water, drawn from my body, to fuel the creations.

"Beyond that, my ability to form objects is limited by my personal skill and understanding. I cannot make you a gun, for example. The mechanics are beyond this old mind, and the intricacies too fine. Simple tools are the extent of my abilities, though Silajana has bonded some more talented than I in that regard."

"Sil-ah-janah," Marasi said, trying to form the unfamiliar sounds. "That is your … god?"

"Both less and more than a god," he explained. "Silajana is one of the primal aethers. They predate Adonalsium, you know, and exist outside of his power."

"They predate the Shattering," Moonlight said. "That *doesn't* mean they predate Adonalsium."

"To my people, this is a sacred tenet," he said to Marasi, ignoring Moonlight. "The primal aethers grant some people a bud of their core." He raised his right hand, revealing a transparent web of stone embedded in his palm, and let light from the window shine through as he held it up before the glass. She could see the bones inside, and it seemed the crystal had somehow entirely replaced his flesh and muscles in that spot.

"This bud connects me to Silajana," he continued, "and through him to all of his other aetherbound. He is the core, and we his web. He is eternal, and we his mortal agents in the cosmere."

That was … a lot to take in. But Marasi supposed that all that mattered was that he was willing to help. "Thank you for joining our fight," she said. "I'm glad that Silajana could spare you."

“There is little else for us now,” he said, looking out the window. “Until we can return home…”

“I’m willing to go with you, Pras,” Moonlight said. “If you want to try.”

“The forces in my homeland are too strong, too deadly,” he said. “Silajana says we must remain in exile. He will decide when and if we are to return. He would not risk another extermination.”

The train bolted forward again, causing them all to lean the other direction in their seats. Only three more stops until they arrived.

“Moonlight, can your door stamp help us get into the enemy base?” Marasi asked.

“It will depend on the building materials,” she said. “This stamp pretends the people who constructed the place installed a door. It’ll be touch and go for it to work on things like natural rock.”

“Then we can sneak into the factory from any direction,” Marasi said, “and then find the way down into the caverns.”

“They’ve been moving a lot of supplies,” Moonlight said. “Large crates of equipment and food. So I doubt we’re looking for some hidden stairwell.”

“You’re right,” Marasi agreed. “There will likely be a freight elevator in the main loading bay. Good assumption.”

“We could attempt,” TwinSoul said, “to pretend to be members of their organization, making a delivery. Perhaps we could hijack a supply truck on the way?”

“Tried that,” Marasi said. “It was kind of a mess. I’d rather be more stealthy.”

“I agree,” Moonlight said. “I suggest we scout the location, find an empty room at the rear, and create a door. They’ll have their security focused on entry points, which we can avoid. From there we make our way to the cargo docks and locate the elevator.”

A reasonable enough plan. Though Marasi’s anxiety increased the closer they came to their destination. Soon the train lurched to a stop, and the three of them piled off. She worried the long case she was carrying—with her borrowed rifle hidden inside—would draw attention, but no one gave her so much as a second glance. Perhaps they thought it was some kind of musical instrument. More likely, they didn’t care.

Neither of Marasi's companions were of a Scadrian ethnicity, but Moonlight kept a hat on to shade her eyes. She was shorter than most from Marasi's world, but there was no telling if that was a trait of her people, or an individual body shape. TwinSoul, in contrast, was tall and lanky. His darker skin tone stood out on the street, but most would just assume he had Terris blood—that people's colorations varied far more than those of people with old Central Dominance heritage, like Marasi.

Plus, there was a lot of variety in dress in this city. People seemed to eschew the dark browns and blacks that were more common in Elendel. Vibrant colors, often clashing, were part of the style here. With other oddities too. In the train station alone, they passed a costumed mascot trying to hand out flyers for a furniture store, a couple of masked Malwish tourists, and a koloss-blooded woman in a suit.

Outside the station, atop the platform with steps leading to the streets below, they spotted their target in the near distance: an old brown-brick factory with a mottled sign out front. Even this futuristic city had less-desirable sections of town; many were hidden away beneath the tracks.

Marasi had hoped to find the building quiet, since the Ghostblood spy's records had indicated infrequent supply drops in recent weeks. Today, unfortunately, the building was buzzing with activity—some half a dozen trucks loading up and pulling out through a large bay door at the side of the structure.

"Well," Moonlight said, "little doubt where the loading bay is. We'll probably find the elevator in there."

"Inside the bay," TwinSoul said, "that is currently full of enemy forces?"

"Yeah…"

"What if," Marasi said, "we came into the elevator from the back? You can make a door in any wall, right? What if we made one into the elevator from behind?"

"That's possible," Moonlight said. "Though I'm not comfortable with how busy it looks. We were hoping to slip in during a quiet moment."

Marasi agreed—though as she considered it, she realized that had been naive of them. The Set knew that they were in Bilming and actively trying to stop them …

Marasi hesitated as she watched several of the trucks roar away from the factory, heading toward the hill with the government offices. Then she found herself smiling.

“They’re worried about Wax,” she said. “They’re marshalling troops, gathering resources … I’ll bet they’re sending it all to deal with him.”

“Maybe,” Moonlight said.

“Trust me,” Marasi said. “Where Wax goes, fireworks follow. The Set is worried about him—and they likely know exactly where he is. Flying through the air does tend to make him conspicuous.”

“If you’re correct, my lady,” TwinSoul said, “then they might not be expecting our incursion here. Their eyes may be diverted toward Dawnshot.” More trucks pulled away, and TwinSoul pointed toward the northern side of the city, where a giant plume of dark smoke was rising. “That’s the mayor’s mansion. Perhaps Dawnshot is being … extra difficult?”

“I’ll take it,” Marasi said, leading the way down the steps. “Let’s strike while everyone is distracted.”

# 43

Everyone in the room—including the kandra—gathered around Steris to read the letter Wax had sent. Perhaps they didn't trust her to deliver the information out loud, or perhaps they needed to see it with their own eyes.

> *Bomb is confirmed real, and already fabricated. City-destroying capacity. Enemy is trying to find a way to deliver it to Elendel. It's time to evacuate the city.*
>
> *They know I'm after them. I hope that my presence won't cause them to do anything rash. Investigation suggests attempts to deliver by train or road failed and they seek alternative, perhaps some kind of self-propelled artillery shell. Regardless, I suggest you close off all routes into Elendel as a precaution.*
>
> *There is conflict among the Set. Some want to destroy Elendel, others maybe the entire Basin by restarting the Ashmounts, judging by a strange photograph we've found. I may be able to exploit the schism between them. Either way, my primary objective is neutralizing the bomb's delivery mechanism.*
>
> *Get as many people out as you can, as quickly as possible, in case I fail.*
>
> *I love you.*
> *Waxillium*

Adawathwyn immediately ordered the young radio operator sequestered—along with anyone who might have heard the communication. Everyone else in the room slumped into chairs at the table, and several looked to TenSoon.

“We should believe Dawnshot,” he said. “Harmony has long thought the enemy was working on something like this. The deadline is … far more urgent than we realized. Rusts. We need to take this *very* seriously.”

“I am forced to agree,” Adawathwyn—of all people—said. “I don’t much like Ladrian, but … this news, with a kandra confirming it … My lord governor, it seems we have a gun to our heads.”

The governor leaned forward on the table, grim.

*Finally,* Steris thought, releasing a held breath. *They are giving this the attention it deserves.* Maybe now she could get something done.

“Time is of the essence,” the governor said, looking around the table at the three senators and his vice governor. “If there really is a bomb … we have to move fast.”

“Agreed,” Lord Cett said. “How quickly can we get out of the city?”

“That depends,” the governor said. “Ambassador Daal? Can I take that airship ride now?”

“So long as the streets aren’t packed,” Adawathwyn said, “we can theoretically be out of the city via motorcade in under an hour.”

“Will that be quickly enough?” Lady Hammondess said. “What is the destructive radius of this weapon, kandra? How far away do we have to get to be safe?”

“I’ll send for our families,” the governor said. “We have to do this quietly though, to not inspire a mass panic.”

Steris closed her eyes, feeling sick. On one hand, she understood their emotions. After all, she had sent her children away immediately.

At the same time … Rusts. They were all going to run, weren’t they? She met Constable Reddi’s eyes. He’d slumped in his chair, looking numb. Sworn to protect the people of the city, and there was nothing he could do. Nothing but sit here and dread what was coming.

*She* didn’t have to do that. She’d dreaded it already. That was the purpose of her lists. She realized, with shock, that her method was actually working. She didn’t feel afraid. She didn’t feel anxious.

She could function.

*She* had to evacuate the city.

Steris pulled out one of her thickest notebooks, thumping it down on the table. As everyone else started calling for aides to prepare their escapes, she gathered her thoughts and flipped through her notes. She had seven detailed evacuation plans for the city. Which was best in this situation?

After a few minutes though, the governor ordered the door shut again and all aides temporarily expelled. The room's anxious occupants turned toward him.

"Um," he said, "Adawathwyn has a suggestion."

She had composed herself quickly and now stood up in her immaculate Terris robes, hands out invitingly. "The situation is indeed dire. But I have realized we have a solution … upon our arms, so to speak. Lord Waxillium says that there is likely some kind of device that will launch the bomb all the way to our city. But we have Metalborn at our disposal. The greatest wealth of them in all the Basin.

"We should gather Coinshots and station them to Push this weapon away. We can position them atop our highest structures, to watch for the weapon's arrival—or, better, keep people on call in Bilming, watching. They'll be able to tell us when it has launched."

"Pardon me, Adawathwyn," Steris said. "Have you ever been in a situation where modern weapons fire is discharged? Have you *seen* the speed at which it moves? Trust me. If this weapon is launched, when it reaches Elendel, it will impact too quickly for an Allomancer to stop."

The vice governor wilted for a second, then her eyes widened. "What if," she said, "we had an Allomancer with access to all the abilities and powers of the Lord Ruler?"

Several in the room gasped. Daal stood up straight, his masked eyes fixated on Adawathwyn.

"It's an emergency," she said. "A *true* emergency. The entire city is in danger! We need someone who can think the thoughts of a thousand people, someone who can move planets and raise mountains. We need … the Bands of Mourning."

*Bother.*

First off, the Bands didn't work *that* way. They gave a person supercharged metallic abilities—yes—but they didn't contain "all the powers of the Lord Ruler." Unfortunately, the mythology surrounding them and Wax's use of them had only grown over the years.

That said, Steris *had* considered using the Bands—they often factored into her calculations. A powerful relic created by the Survivor—or maybe the Lord Ruler—which granted vast Metalborn powers to the holder wasn't the sort of thing one ignored.

"We can't use the Bands," Steris said. "The people of Elendel made a promise. The foundation of a treaty."

Behind them, Admiral Daal—so quiet through most of the meeting—approached the table. "The Bands of Mourning," he said, "were entrusted to the Faceless Immortals, under the *strict understanding* that the Bands would *never* be employed by your people."

Technically, the Bands weren't to be employed unless the Malwish attacked Elendel. That had been the actual deal, a way of making certain that Malwish aggression didn't go too far.

"Surely, Ambassador," Adawathwyn said, "you can see our need for self-preservation. You wouldn't deny us the means, in this dire emergency, to protect ourselves from this calamity?"

"Surely," Ambassador Daal said, "*you* understand that any action by those in the Basin using this *sacred* relic—however dire the situation—must be seen as an act of aggression against my people. You don't think we've suffered catastrophes that *we* wish we could have used the Bands to stop? We could have been using them to save lives these past six years! But our agreement was that they were too powerful for *anyone* to use."

The room fell silent. *He's playing some kind of game here,* Steris thought. She couldn't fathom what.

"We…" the governor said, licking his lips. "We should fetch them. If an Allomancer with enhanced speed of thought could Push away this bomb before it lands, that gives us a chance."

"They don't have as much power as you think," Steris said. "They can't accomplish that."

"Actually," TenSoon said, "there's a possibility."

"What?" Steris asked.

"There are … things about the interactions of the powers you don't know," he said. "I have only hints. I think it might be possible … to send the bomb away using the Bands. But the deal we made…"

"Holy One," the governor said, "what would Harmony say, should it come down to our survival as a city or betraying the Malwish trust. What are his wishes?"

TenSoon stood quietly for a moment, then spoke with a growling voice. “I will fetch the Bands.”

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of eager fans, "to train dear Handerwym in the ways of

*More details on back: Why the judge let Jak keep the tiger*

and leeched her steel reserves.

"Give me the compass," I said, "and we'll leave you at the next outcropping."

Vila peered over her shoulder at the approaching stone where the Haunted Man waited.

She glanced at me, her eyes wide, no doubt realizing that without any steel, she couldn't Coinshot away. She was trapped. In her surprise, she forgot to hold onto anything but the compass.

I had not planned on that.

"No!" I screamed, immediately dropping my parasol and reaching for Vila. I serendipitously caught her by the lace of her frilly coat.

"You saved me?" she asked. "Don't you want me to fall?"

"Harmony no," I said.

She clocked me in the face with the compass, which honestly was a bad move on her part. I instinctively let go of her.

As Vila fell, I keeled forward, trying to catch her again, but serendipity is a fickle thing, and my hand missed hers by a hair. Horrified, I watched the mists swallow her. The sudden shifting of my weight, however, threw me from the claw.

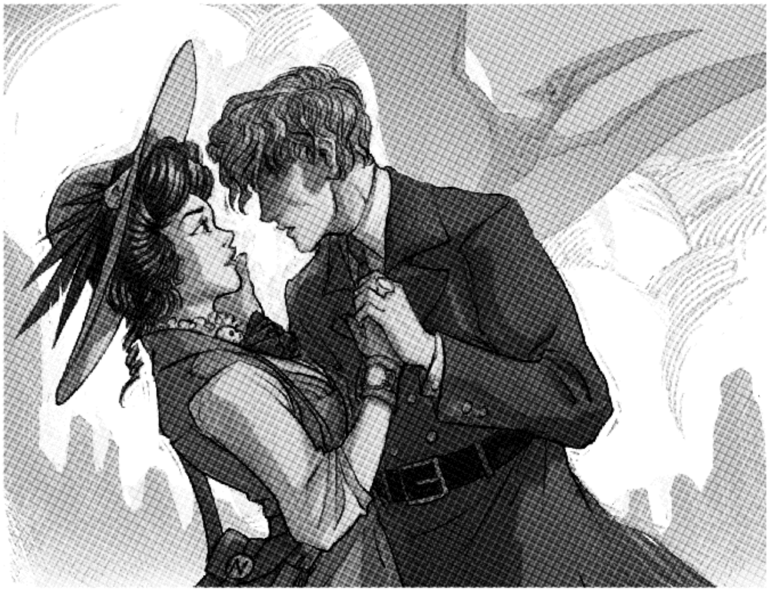
Suddenly weightless, I feared this might be the end.

Then I felt air pushed by large wings. A claw snatched me and dropped me on the outcropping next to the Haunted Man.

I slid to a stop just shy of the edge, my custom Miele Jedon boots sending pebbles clacking over the side. Bless those shoes and their fashionable yet grippy soles. (You can get a pair at Ardenne's on 9th. They're custom, yes, but drop my name, and the clerks there will be keen to help.)

Heart thumping, my breath coming in gasps, I searched the top of the outcropping. "The compass…we should scour the cliffs!"

Tabaar-KeSun landed and opened their other claw. The compass rolled out, and I snatched it up. Before I could thank them, the Haunted Man took my hand and stared at me with intense, desperate eyes. Given his usual scowl, this new expression was as foreign on him as cheap perfume would be on me.



"My dearest Nicelle," he said, gifting me a rare smile.

"What is it?" I asked, inspecting myself for wounds. Though I'd lost a few buttons from my blouse, at least I hadn't lost the whole shirt, which always happened to Jak at this point in his stories. "I'm fine. I promise."

"You almost fell," he said, cupping my cheek in one of his large, rough hands.

Heat boiled up from my heart, and I couldn't help but smile back. How far we had come from our first meeting!

"You silly man. You'll never get rid of me that easily," I said. "It's you and me exploring the cosmere together forever. Just like we promised."

I let him pull me close, his familiar scent of hellfire and cedar filling me. With the knuckle of his finger, he lifted my chin so that I looked into his stormy eyes.

Was he going to kiss me? Did I want him to? By Harmony, *yes*. In that moment, I realized I'd wanted this for the last six years, every time he'd appeared and (inevitably) upended my life.

"Nicelle…" he said, his voice low and breathy.

"Yes?" I rolled up onto my toes and leaned into him.

"I am so very sorry." He lifted the Compass of Spirits, inserted the aluminum key, and turned it. The little rings spun until they flowed with ethereal light, which inverted in on itself with a giant pop I felt in my soul more than heard with my ears.

I fell forward onto my knees, the Haunted Man's presence no longer there to hold me up, though the afterimage of him activating the device hung in the air for a moment until it puffed away like smoke from a burnt match.

He had done it. He'd finally entered the ghostly dimension.

And he'd done it without me.

He'd bloody *betrayed* me. Rusting *used* me.

I will spare you the ugly details of my following tantrum, though I did yell some of the delicious curses I'd learned in my time with him. At the end of my fit, my immaculate makeup was smeared, my hat and its raven feathers lay in tatters, and Tabaar and KeSun were suddenly there in their human forms.

"He's gone!" I shouted. "Along with the only way to finish the job, and now we're stuck a thousand miles from home in the space between continents!"

I thought he'd cared for me. He knew a betrayal like this would hurt me, and he'd done it anyway. Rust and Ruin, I hope he arrived too late to save the world. He and his bloody employer could burn for all I cared.

"He's lucky I can't follow him." I clenched my fist around the metal knuckles until the edges bit into my palm.

The two Faceless Immortals shared a glance before KeSun nodded as if deciding something. Then Tabaar spoke.

"Actually," he said. "There is another way."

◆

*A note from Handerwym:*

It's been two weeks since Nicelle's last letter. (You know how intermittent her correspondence can be.) I can only assume she succeeded in entering the ghostly realm and, Harmony willing, we'll soon know the end of her adventure.

*Continued next week?*

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and leeched her steel reserves.

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She glanced at me, her eyes wide, no doubt realizing that without any steel, she couldn’t Coinshot away. She was trapped. In her surprise, she forgot to hold onto anything but the compass.

I had not planned on that.

“No!” I screamed, immediately dropping my parasol and reaching for Vila. I serendipitously caught her by the lace of her frilly coat.

“You saved me?” she asked. “Don’t you want me to fall?”

“Harmony no,” I said.

She clocked me in the face with the compass, which honestly was a bad move on her part. I instinctively let go of her.

As Vila fell, I keeled forward, trying to catch her again, but serendipity is a fickle thing, and my hand missed hers by a hair. Horrified, I watched the mists swallow her. The sudden shifting of my weight, however, threw me from the claw.

Suddenly weightless, I feared this might be the end.

Then I felt air pushed by large wings. A claw snatched me and dropped me on the outcropping next to the Haunted Man.

I slid to a stop just shy of the edge, my custom Miele Jedon boots sending pebbles clacking over the side. Bless those shoes and their fashionable yet grippy soles. (You can get a pair at Ardenne’s on 9th. They’re custom, yes, but drop my name, and the clerks there will be keen to help.)

Heart thumping, my breath coming in gasps, I searched the top of the outcropping. “The compass…we should scour the cliffs!”

Tabaar-KeSun landed and opened their other claw. The compass rolled out, and I snatched it up. Before I could thank them, the Haunted Man took my hand and stared at me with intense, desperate eyes. Given his usual scowl, this new expression was as foreign on him as cheap perfume would be on me.

“My dearest Nicelle,” he said, gifting me a rare smile.

“What is it?” I asked, inspecting myself for wounds. Though I’d lost a few buttons from my blouse, at least I hadn’t lost the whole shirt, which always happened to Jak at this point in his stories. “I’m fine. I promise.”

“You almost fell,” he said, cupping my cheek in one of his large, rough hands.

Heat boiled up from my heart, and I couldn’t help but smile back. How far we had come from our first meeting!

“You silly man. You’ll never get rid of me that easily,” I said. “It’s you and me exploring the cosmere together forever. Just like we promised.”

I let him pull me close, his familiar scent of hellfire and cedar filling me. With the knuckle of his finger, he lifted my chin so that I looked into his stormy eyes.

Was he going to kiss me? Did I want him to? By Harmony, *yes*. In that moment, I realized I’d wanted this for the last six years, every time he’d appeared and (inevitably) upended my life.

“Nicelle…” he said, his voice low and breathy.

“Yes?” I rolled up onto my toes and leaned into him.

“I am so very sorry.” He lifted the Compass of Spirits, inserted the aluminum key, and turned it. The little rings spun until they flowed with ethereal light, which inverted in on itself with a giant pop I felt in my soul more than heard with my ears.

I fell forward onto my knees, the Haunted Man’s presence no longer there to hold me up, though the afterimage of him activating the device hung in the air for a moment until it puffed away like smoke from a burnt match.

He had done it. He’d finally entered the ghostly dimension.

And he’d done it without me.

He’d bloody *betrayed* me. Rusting *used* me.

I will spare you the ugly details of my following tantrum, though I did yell some of the delicious curses I’d learned in my time with him. At the end of my fit, my immaculate makeup was smeared, my hat and its raven feathers lay in tatters, and Tabaar and KeSun were suddenly there in their human forms.

“He’s gone!” I shouted. “Along with the only way to finish the job, and now we’re stuck a thousand miles from home in the space between continents!”

I thought he’d cared for me. He knew a betrayal like this would hurt me, and he’d done it anyway. Rust and Ruin, I hope he arrived too late to save the world. He and his bloody employer could burn for all I cared.

“He’s lucky I can’t follow him.” I clenched my fist around the metal knuckles until the edges bit into my palm.

The two Faceless Immortals shared a glance before KeSun nodded as if deciding something. Then Tabaar spoke.

“Actually,” he said. “There is another way.”

---

*A note from Handerwym:*

It’s been two weeks since Nicelle’s last letter. (You know how intermittent her correspondence can be.) I can only assume she succeeded in entering the ghostly realm and, Harmony willing, we’ll soon know the end of her adventure.

*— Continued next week? —*

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# 44

Marasi led the others toward their target. It proved easy to sneak around underneath the train tracks; the buildings down here in this urban twilight were cramped, the streets narrow. Almost like the stories of the old Luthadel slums.

Crowded tenements were crammed up beside factories, refineries, and warehouses. All in the shadow of the tracks—a symbol of progress and unity upon which stormed past every few minutes a tooth-rattling reminder: Wasn’t it so nice to live in such a modern city? With a beacon of advancement like the high-speed rail? It cast such a progressive shadow.

She was all for progress in general, but far too often it seemed to stratify society rather than unite it. A high-speed rail was good, but could it be afforded by those who would most benefit? Nice apartments were great, but if they drove those who couldn’t live in them to darkness under the tracks, then that made some lives worse while making others better.

She’d been forced to confront this herself as she sought for reform. Good intentions had to be coupled with a realistic look at the effects of your actions. It was entirely too easy to make things worse while trying to make them better.

*Is that why I’ve focused more on the detective side of my job over the years?* she wondered. *I was going to change things. But the day-to-day work is so demanding, and the big problems are just so big …*

Thoughts for another time. The three of them crept ever closer to the tire factory, using the back alleys. TwinSoul made good on his promise, keeping up—though they didn’t have to move quickly, and there was always a wall for him to rest his hand against to keep his balance. Marasi still worried about bringing an octogenarian to what might soon be a battle zone, but bit her tongue on the matter.

As they drew close—only one street away—Moonlight halted the group. Marasi was curious what had prompted the stop, until she noticed a bulbous black motorcar with tinted windows pulling up to the factory.

The lord mayor of Bilming climbed out—accompanied by several tough-looking bodyguards. Entrone hurried through the bay doors, shouting at the few remaining trucks there and waving for them to get moving. Marasi was almost certain she heard the name "Dawnshot" among his shouts.

He soon vanished into the structure.

"Well," Marasi whispered, "*he's* agitated."

"Probably doesn't appreciate his home being burned down," TwinSoul whispered.

Marasi nodded. "Come on. His arrival seems to confirm that we've found the right location."

They took the long way around, briefly dipping out of the shade cast by the railway before diving back in, swimming through shadows until they reached the back wall of the factory. Here they slunk along until they found an old window, boarded up. Marasi had hoped to be able to peek through and find an empty room, but it was boarded up on the other side as well.

"Hmmm," TwinSoul said, resting his aged, bony hand on the bricks. Crystals grew from his palm, creeping along the surface and between boards. "Yes, they really should have sealed this with pitch…"

"What do you see?" Moonlight whispered.

"I don't see anything," he said. "But Silajana? Well, he senses a small room cluttered with shelves and small objects. No one is inside, and the wall to the right of the window bears no shelving."

He broke his hand free, leaving a crust of crystals on the wall—which began disintegrating, dropping to dust that in turn burned away into rose-colored mist. Moonlight dug in her rucksack—briefly exposing the glowing jars within—and took out something made of leather. Like a very large billfold, or a toolbelt, it unclipped to reveal three stone stamps.

She selected one, dampened it with some odd glowing red ink, then raised it. "Be ready to move," she said, then pressed it to the wall. The stamp head, remarkably, *sank* half an inch or so into the brick. When

Moonlight pulled it back—trailing red mist—it left a glowing red stamp imprinted into the wall, marked by intricate designs and patterns.

The wall then began to *shift.* The bricks groaned softly, then popped and ground as they pulled to the sides—suddenly fluid—and a door emerged in the wall. Like … like someone had *unzipped* the stones to reveal it underneath. In seconds the structure had rearranged—many bricks simply vanishing—to create a worn old wooden door with peeling yellow paint.

Moonlight yanked it open and gestured for them to enter. Marasi ducked in first, stepping over some buckets of paint that had been piled against the wall. TwinSoul followed, then finally Moonlight. They crowded into a small chamber, lit by a single red electric bulb. Why were there so many washbasins on the counter, and all of these jugs of liquid? Was this a storage room for cleaning supplies? That didn't explain the red light bulb, which was so dim it barely did anything.

Behind them, the doorway vanished—as if being consumed by the bricks on the sides. "That is the most unnatural thing I've ever seen," Marasi whispered.

"You literally have a friend who can fly," Moonlight said.

"And?" Marasi said, unzipping her rifle from its case. TwinSoul threw off his coat, exposing his suit and yellow sash, then rested a hand on his sword. Marasi listened at the door, and was joined by Moonlight. When they heard nothing from the next room over, Marasi eased the door open and found a pitch-black chamber beyond.

They slipped through it, passing a strangely large number of what appeared to be chairs. Yes, in rows. What in the world? At the far reaches of the room, Marasi fumbled in the darkness, searching for a door. Her hands instead brushed what felt like a series of light switches.

Since the room was clearly empty, she flipped one of the light switches. However, it wasn't the kind of light she'd been anticipating. A streak of illumination burst from one wall and shone onto the other, projecting a brilliant image.

An image of a crumbling city, with ash falling from the sky. Then the image started *moving.*

# 45

Marasi stared at the moving image, depicting a city in full color—though those colors were mostly muted dark greys and blacks against the brilliant red sky. Ash drifted from above, sprinkling the smoldering ruins. A loud mechanical sound came from the room emitting the light.

“By the first aether,” TwinSoul said, stepping up beside her and resting his hand on the back of a nearby chair for support. “What is it? A window into the future?”

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Moonlight said from the far wall, nearest the image. She hesitantly lifted her hand into the stream of light—and displaced the image, leaving a shadow of her hand on the wall.

Fortunately, Marasi *had* experienced something like this once before. VenDell had shown them a way of projecting evanotype images onto a wall using light. Those had been static, and in black and white. But he’d said something then that had stuck with her: *Harmony implies that if we find this wondrous, it will really burn our metals when the images start moving.*

It appeared the Set had figured out that secret. And they’d found a way to create moving images of another place, using cameras? This room did have the feel of a small playhouse theater, only without the stage.

But … was this landscape of piling ash and broken cities the future, or the past? It resembled Elendel, by the architecture, but there was so much rubble she couldn’t tell for certain.

“Here, look at this,” Moonlight called from the far side of the room, where she’d opened another door.

TwinSoul and Marasi joined Moonlight in a room with a different kind of decor. An enormous table dominated it, with a tiny replica of a city on it.

It was like the model that TwinSoul had created, but made out of painted wood and plaster—broken and ruined, the buildings fallen as if in some disaster.

It *was* Elendel; she could see that from the layout. So, not only had someone seen the future, they'd built a model of what was going to happen?

Moonlight peeked into some boxes, then pulled out a handful of fine ash from one, which she let trail through her fingers. Other shelves held tiny props—miniature versions of people lying like corpses. Dead horses made of painted plaster. Broken buildings, ruined motorcars, some large red-painted sheets with depictions of clouds and a blazing sun …

And evanotype cameras, set up to look across the table from down low. Seeing that, it all snapped together for her.

"It's a fake," she whispered with relief. "They didn't travel to the future or the past. They created a model of a fallen Elendel … then used these machines to craft pictures of a future that hasn't happened. Even that picture we found earlier … it's a fake. A photo of this model. They've been *deliberately* constructing a hoax to make people *think* the world is going to end."

"No," Moonlight said. "They've been constructing a hoax to make people think it has *already* ended. But who are they planning to show it to, and why?"

"If there are answers," Marasi said, "we'll find them below." She nodded the other direction, out through the theater room toward the larger doors on the wall near the projecting device.

They peeked out to find a hallway lit with caged industrial lights. The place felt eerily empty, considering the earlier activity. Moonlight went out first. Marasi joined her, and they found a set of doors at the end of the hallway. These doors had windows at the top, so they could observe the loading dock beyond.

A group of armed men and women patrolled here. TwinSoul crouched beside Marasi, then let a tiny—practically invisible—line of crystals sneak under the door.

"Ah," he said. "You see that large wall that juts out to our left, just inside the room? That's our industrial elevator as you had anticipated, my lady."

Marasi could make out the section of wall he indicated—but the front of the elevator would be facing away from them. They'd never sneak through the open cargo bay without being spotted. Fortunately, they didn't need to.

They moved through the hallway to the appropriate location—a blank wall, beyond which should be the elevator.

"All right," Marasi whispered.

Moonlight created another door, then pulled it open, revealing a deep, dark shaft leading down. The elevator must be below, likely having carried the lord mayor and his bodyguards into the depths.

Now what?

"Allow me," TwinSoul said, stepping through the door and steadying himself by grabbing a small box just inside, standing with one foot on a narrow ledge, the other dangling over the void. Marasi reached to steady him, but before she could the door vanished, the wall stretching back into place.

Moonlight hastily stamped again, then pulled open the door. They found TwinSoul hanging from a ladder constructed of roseite stone. He took a long drink from his backpack full of water and smiled. "Shall we?" he asked.

"What if someone calls the elevator back up?" Marasi asked.

"It's an industrial elevator," Moonlight said. "Look how wide this shaft is, how thick the cables are. It will move slowly. Worst case, we can climb on top and ride it up. There's enough space above us here that we won't be crushed."

Marasi nodded, and TwinSoul began climbing down, new rungs forming beneath him as he did so. Marasi stepped onto the ladder, testing its strength. TwinSoul was, it turned out, *exceptionally* handy to have along. She climbed down a little to let Moonlight on too. The doorway vanished again, but Moonlight cracked open her rucksack to let some light leak out, painting the shaft with a pale white glow.

They started descending toward the caverns. And, hopefully, answers.

# 46

Wax climbed down the hidden passage in the mayor’s mansion. Yes, it did seem to be squeezed between two walls; he’d climbed far enough to pass the first floor and reach the basement. Here his ladder emerged into a small room with iron walls and ceiling.

It had supplies on the shelves: dry rations, jugs of water. Looked like some kind of small emergency bunker. Not intended for long-term occupancy, but a safe bolt-hole in case of … what? Riots in the streets? Or something more nefarious, like an accidental weapon detonation?

Chilled, Wax inspected the room and found scrapes on the floor indicating a hidden door on one wall. He opened it without much difficulty—though it was made of thick reinforced metal—and found a path into the storm drain. Light peeked in through the grates above, and the scent—though unpleasant—wasn’t terrible. Not a true sewer, just a place for washing rainwater out of the streets and toward the ocean.

*And a nice emergency exit from the mayor’s mansion,* he thought, noting numerous footprints in the sludge and dried muddy ones in the concrete tunnel up ahead. A little farther along, he found a small motorized cart, open roofed, perfect to drive in these tight confines. The wheels were covered in sludge, and there were numerous tire tracks in the mud beyond.

There were no keys in the cart, and though supposedly there was a way to start one without them, that was a feat of thievery he’d never studied. Instead Wax pulled the folded-up calendar from his coat pocket and noted again the numerous appointments at the “lab.” Back and forth, sometimes a couple of times a day. If Wax had been visiting a secret installation that frequently, he would most certainly have wanted a covert way to travel.

Wax started into the tunnel on foot, but then phantoms from long ago rose around him. For the briefest moment, he wasn't in a drainage sewer in the most modern city of the Basin. He was in a dirty mine adit, haunted by twisted "artwork" made by a terrible mind. Golden light sifting down from above. A meeting with destiny.

*Someone else moves us.*

A deep breath and a moment of peace banished the phantoms. They'd be with him forever, but they didn't *haunt* him any longer. They were more like echoes than ghosts. Reminders of the man he'd been, the life he'd led, and the people he'd loved. They were remembered, but today he had work to do. He found a service ladder to the street above, and climbed up to go find Wayne. Hopefully he wasn't on fire.

Blessedly, he found Wayne alive and only slightly singed, waiting at the prearranged rally point. A bar, because of course it was. Wayne had picked the spot.

Wax slid into the seat beside his friend, and Wayne passed him a shot of whiskey, which Wax downed with a hiss of satisfaction. They left money on the counter, then slipped out the back.

"You find anythin'?" Wayne asked as they reached the end of the alley behind the bar.

"Some writings that might be relevant," Wax said. "Calendar. Letters. More importantly, a secret tunnel—hopefully leading somewhere useful."

"Nice," Wayne said.

"What happened to you?"

"Eh," Wayne said. "Nothin' that interesting."

Wax looked at him, then at the burn marks on his trousers.

"Couldn't do Grandma's Been at the Vodka," Wayne explained. "Couldn't find a wig in time. So I did Flaming Bunny instead."

"Flaming Bunny," Wax said flatly. "Please tell me you didn't set a rabbit on fire, Wayne."

"Of course not. I couldn't find a damn *wig* in time; where would I find a *rabbit*?"

"Good, I—"

"You use a cat for Flaming Bunny. And those are all over the dang place."

"Wayne. You *set a cat on fire*?"

“Hell, no! What do you think I am? A sadist?”

Wax relaxed a little.

“You throw the cat out a window,” Wayne explained.

“Oh, Harmony…” Wax said. “*Why?*”

“To *save* it from the flames, of course!” Wayne shook his head as Wax led him toward the storm drain. “That’s the plan. You start a big fire, then go around screaming and throw a cat out the window. People believe you and think you’re saving pets.”

“Then…”

“Then you shout that someone has to save the bunny,” he said. “You lead everyone in to knock on the doors and get folks outta the place, and everybody gets all crazy and distracted helpin’ you.”

Wax stopped on the street, gawking at the Silver House with everyone else. It was now almost fully ablaze, a terrible plume of smoke rising from it, like the Deepness itself.

“You did say,” Wayne noted, “that following an egregious diplomatic incident, we might as well have some fun.”

“That is *not* what I said.” Wax sighed.

“What?” Wayne said. “You still on about that cat thing?”

“You really threw it out a window?”

“What would you have done? *Leave it to burn?* I hadda rescue the thing.”

“Rescue the cat. From a fire you made. A cat that you kidnapped *expressly for that purpose*.”

Wayne grinned. “Oh, don’t worry. I hucked him at a tree real good. Cats always land in trees, so long as you throw them hard enough.”

“Why … why would you think that?”

“Dunno,” Wayne said as Wax started them moving again. “Must have learned it in school.”

“Did you … go to school?”

“As a kid? Nah. But I burned one down once, before I even developed Flaming Bunny. Maybe the cat thing was on the board or something in there.”

“Wait. When did you burn down a *school*?”

“West’s Haven?” Wayne said. “Nine years back. It was an evil damn school.”

Wax hesitated at the mouth of the alley with the access ladder, thinking. West’s Haven …

Oh, right. That *had* been an evil damn school.

“Fine,” Wax said, pulling open the hatch to the storm drain. “Let’s keep moving.”

Wayne climbed down. At the bottom, he grunted.

“What?” Wax said, joining him.

“Don’t tell Marasi ’bout this,” he said. “I told her you ain’t never taken me into a sewer. Least this one doesn’t stink…” He squinted. “Actually, kinda looks like a narrow canyon, with all those lights coming in the top…”

“Why would you say that?” Wax said.

“No reason.”

They both turned around as the bells of the fire brigade sounded from above.

“So…” Wayne said. “Calendar and letters, was it?”

Wax nodded. “Gave has been visiting a place called the lab, though he also left for two weeks for some kind of trajectory test a couple months ago. Disguised as a vacation.”

“Huh,” Wayne said, pointing ahead. “And the lab is this way, you think?”

“Seems likely,” Wax said. He dug in his pocket a moment, then passed the calendar to Wayne.

Who whistled softly. “No appointments after today?”

“I noticed that too.”

“‘They arrive’…” Wayne said, reading.

Wax nodded, giving Wayne a moment with the calendar pages while he pulled out the letters. The light wasn’t great down here, but he could make out enough in the sunlight coming through the grates. Reading the two letters again, one extremely incriminating, the other full of pleasantries. What …

*Oh, rusts.* “Wayne,” he said, holding up the incriminating letter they’d gotten from the newspaper editor. “This is a forgery.”

“What? Really?” Wayne took it. “How do you know?”

“Before all this started,” Wax said, “I spent a good amount of time on an operation that implicated Vennis Hasting—who supposedly wrote that letter—in a scandal. I proved that he had been bribing other senators. In order to make our case, Steris and I authenticated letters we'd acquired from him. Rusts. I visited three separate handwriting analysts, and they talked specifically about the distinctive turn of Vennis's strokes. Which aren't right in this one." He felt his eyes widen. "That's what it means … *that's* what she's doing…"

"Mate," Wayne said. "You've gotta be more clear. 'Cuz I sure ain't following."

"My sister," Wax explained. "She needs a way to seize control of the Basin, and prove to Autonomy she can rule here. I've been wondering how blowing up Elendel achieves that."

"It would remove a whole lot of barriers."

"Yes, but surely the other cities would never follow someone who committed such an atrocity." Wax held up the fake letter. "Unless Telsin could claim she *didn't* blow up Elendel. Unless she had proof—in the form of forged letters—that the *senators inside Elendel* were the ones developing the bomb. With the right evidence, she could make it look like they mistakenly blew themselves up."

"Oooh, that's devious," Wayne said. "She can 'recover' some of the details of that weapon too, so Bilming will 'reluctantly' have access to the technology to protect the Basin from the Malwish. Hell … that would work. Remove Elendel. Unite the Basin. Achieve dominance on the planet."

A piece locked into place. Even Gave's letters—the real ones from Vennis Hasting—made sense now. They'd needed handwriting samples, hence the cordial letters between mayor and senator.

"And the lack of appointments after today?" Wayne asked. "Seems like our deadline's even tighter than we feared."

"We need to find this lab," Wax said, starting along the storm drain again. "And hope the bomb is there."

Wayne nodded, joining him. Gave had scheduled fifteen minutes on either side of his appointments for travel to the lab—so it wouldn't be too far.

As they walked, Wax found himself increasingly worried. About what Telsin was doing. About the implications of it all. So he was a little relieved when Wayne broke the silence.

"Sooooo…" Wayne said. "When you were in the mayor's office … did you notice if he had a nice desk?"

“He had a rather nice one,” Wax said. “Why?”

“Did you…” He nodded back in the direction of the Silver House. “You know…”

“Fart in his chair?”

“Yup.”

“Wayne. Of *course* I didn’t.”

They walked a little farther through the muck, finding a place where kids had obviously snuck down, judging by the graffiti painted on the walls: giant sweeping Terris patterns of V’s.

“Okay,” Wax finally said, unable to let it go despite trying quite forcefully, “*why* would you even *think* that I would do that to his chair? You explicitly said not to, and beyond that … what the hell? Who does that?”

“Nobody, nobody,” Wayne said. “It’s good you didn’t. Gotta stay classy, you know. ’Specially in times like this. Very serious. Bombs threatening cities. Likely detonation today. No time for frivolity.”

He paused.

“But…” Wayne continued, “if *I*’d been there, and seen that fancy chair … Well, I like those chairs, you know? The type that leans all the way back, and is all leather, and firm enough for support, but not so firm that it’s uncomfortable. You know?

“And I’d think, ‘Damn, that’s a fancy chair.’ And I’d wonder … would the old backyard mistmaker sound different? What if I released a little concentrated essence of Wayne into those perfect leather contours? Would it feel different? Would my cheeks—”

“That’s enough. Please.”

“Oh, right. Okay.”

They continued on a little farther, but something about his words … Wax again tried to put it out of his mind, but …

“Wayne,” he finally said, closing his eyes, feeling angry at himself for continuing the conversation. “I have a chair *just like that* back in my study in the penthouse.”

“That you do,” Wayne said solemnly. “You do indeed.”

Oh hell. “Wayne. Did you—”

“Wax, the whole city is in danger, you know? You need to stop letting your attention drift, mate. First that fixation on me maybe setting government buildings on fire—only twice, mind you, which isn’t a pattern, just a coincidence. Now this fascination with what comes outta my backside. Can’t we keep focused on important things?”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

“Like this art,” Wayne said, admiring some graffiti. “Ma was right. This place is beautiful.”

“Ma?” Wax said. “Do I *want* to know what you’re talking about this time?”

“This just reminds me of an old story with a canyon,” Wayne said, joining him as they continued. “A story my ma told me. Last one she gave me. So I remember it well, you know?”

“No,” Wax said. “How is this tunnel a canyon?”

“It just is,” Wayne said softly, looking up as they passed under another grate, sunlight crossing his face in a checkerboard pattern. “Been thinking about it since earlier today. It’s inevitable, you know?”

“I don’t,” Wax said. “I really don’t, Wayne.”

“Well it just is,” he said. “Even if you don’t know it. You’re the hero, Wax, and you got a mission. Barm. The nastiest monster what ever lived. You’re gonna stop him…” He hesitated. “Watch out. Might be some snakes in this canyon.”

“It’s a storm drain,” Wax said, “and I’ve never seen a snake in the city.”

“Yeah, they’re damn good at sneaking,” Wayne said. “Speaking of snakes: the Set, they’ll know that was us with the mansion.”

“Undoubtedly,” Wax said. “They might push into the mayor’s study to recover sensitive documents. I couldn’t replace the rug above the trapdoor—so they’ll know I found the tunnel.”

“Ah, great.”

“Great?”

“You’re supposed to find a bad guy in the canyon,” Wayne explained. “If the story is going to go right, at least.”

“Wayne,” Wax said. “We’re not in a canyon in your mother’s story. We’re in a storm drain in Bilming, trying to find and stop an explosive device. We—”

He was interrupted by a gunshot just ahead, echoing in the narrow tunnel—and a bullet hit the concrete near Wax’s head with a pop, blasting out a chip.

They both immediately ducked to the sides, getting low, and saw shadows moving in the tunnel ahead, just around a bend. Wax picked out two figures crouching beside the curve of the tunnel—the Coinshot he’d fought earlier, and a shorter woman wearing a bowler hat.

“Hey,” Wayne said. “Will you look at that. Bad guys *and* snakes. Both at the same time.”

# 47

Marasi’s team neared the bottom of the elevator shaft without incident, carefully using TwinSoul’s roseite ladder. Red-pink dust crumbled around her as she slowed her climb, the little motes often evaporating in the air below her. Marasi probably had a dusting of them in her hair—smoldering there, like simmering ashes without the heat.

They found the large service elevator settled snug on the bottom of the shaft. TwinSoul expanded his ladder to the sides so all three of them could climb down beside one another. Then Marasi tested the roof of the elevator with her toe. Solid, sturdy metal. She lowered her weight onto it carefully, and it didn’t even bow. She nodded to the others, who joined her.

“Now what?” Moonlight whispered.

“Service hatch,” Marasi said, locating one set into the other corner. She eased it open. The front doors of the elevator were open, though she couldn’t see much more from this angle. She waved TwinSoul over. “Can you see if there is anyone watching below?”

A small line of roseite provided answers.

“Silajana sees two guards,” TwinSoul whispered. “A man and a woman, armed with rifles. They are opposite the open elevator door, near a natural stone wall. It appears that we have indeed arrived at a series of tunnels and caverns.

“The guards do not seem observant, and are currently looking at one another rather than the elevator. Should I try to send them to the aethers, their souls left to ruminate on their poor choices in this particular life?”

“She wants to remain quiet, TwinSoul,” Moonlight said. “That might be overkill.”

“I can handle this,” Marasi whispered. “Though it would help if you could lower me through that hole a little, TwinSoul, so I can see.”

He obliged, creating a small lattice of crystals to support her as she lowered her head into the elevator, her hair hanging down. The two guards stood amid some large crates, facing each other and leaning back against separate boxes. TwinSoul was right. They weren’t paying attention. Actually, they appeared to be flirting. At least, the man was giggling at his own jokes, and the woman was pretending not to be impressed.

From her side pouch, Marasi took out one of her Allomantic grenades and then attached her fishing line. She charged the grenade, then waited—and patience rewarded her when the man said something that finally made the woman laugh. With them distracted Marasi threw her grenade, which activated immediately after touching down. The two guards—focused on one another—hopefully wouldn’t notice that time around them had slowed.

“All right,” Marasi whispered, holding the fishing line. “Let’s go.”

Marasi dropped into the elevator with a thump. Moonlight followed more stealthily, prowling forward as she landed. TwinSoul lowered majestically on a pole of roseite with a foothold. He stepped off, then stumbled and put his hand to the wall of the elevator, steadying himself.

The three of them checked the tunnel for any other guards—it was empty—and slipped out, careful not to touch the barely visible edge of the slowness bubble, which was shimmering like the air above hot pavement.

The two guards remained frozen there. The woman’s eyes closed as she laughed, the man grinning and fixated on his companion. Hopefully he wouldn’t catch blurs from the corner of his eye. Marasi and the others hid in a nearby cross tunnel. She yanked her grenade up and out using the fishing line, and the bubble collapsed.

She snatched the grenade from the air as the female guard’s laugh echoed from amid the crates. Marasi waited, tense. Had they been seen? Had either of them heard the grenade hit the stone over the sound of laughter?

Their conversation continued as if nothing had happened. Marasi nodded in relief to the others, and they prowled a little farther down their current tunnel. It was lit by a series of miner’s lights on a thick cord on the wall, creating alternating darker sections and brightly lit ones.

“That was well executed,” Moonlight whispered as Marasi rewound the fishing line. “Only one way to go for now: down this tunnel?”

Marasi nodded.

“I feel exposed like this,” TwinSoul whispered. “We could encounter more guards.”

Marasi felt the same, but there was little they could do. They continued along the tunnel, which felt much like the ones she’d entered with Wayne the other day. Smooth, ancient rock—with some rubble here and there showing that chunks had fallen in from the ceiling during the explosive-weapon tests. And perhaps some of the blasts had been used not to test, but to connect tunnels and caverns.

Voices echoed from up ahead. Marasi glanced behind them at the long, exposed tunnel, then pointed forward, toward one of the darker sections where she thought she saw some larger chunks of rubble. TwinSoul lagged behind, despite his promise, as Marasi and Moonlight hurried into the shadows.

None of those speaking were visible yet, as the tunnel turned ahead. Marasi crouched behind some rubble, Moonlight joining her. The stone chunks only just came up past her knees when she crouched, but it was better than nothing. They waved anxiously to TwinSoul, who did his best, stumbling as he arrived and falling to his knees near them.

Then stone began to grow from his hand. It arced up around them, darker colored than his usual roseite. Though it was still pink, the shadows hid the color. He took a long drink from his backpack to restore his water, then—at his urging—they all crouched as low as they could go and let the roseite grow over them, leaving a small section clear at the front so they could see what was happening outside.

A group of patrolling soldiers wandered around the bend. There were only five of them, but Marasi was glad for the cover as they paused and chatted about the lord mayor’s visit, then split up in opposite directions. One patrol went back toward the elevator, right past their hiding place. They didn’t even look down.

Still, Marasi’s heart thundered in her chest until the tunnel fell silent again, and she risked a whisper. “You two certainly are handy.”

“Thank you, my lady,” TwinSoul said.

“This is only a fraction of the talents members of the Ghostbloods have,” Moonlight noted. “You’ll be amazed at the things we will show you.”

“If I join,” Marasi said. “I don’t truly know what you are, what you do.”

“Well, that is easy to explain,” TwinSoul said. “We have three general tenets.”

“Protect Scadrial,” Moonlight said, standing up as the roseite shell began to disintegrate.

“But neither of you are from here,” Marasi whispered.

“True,” TwinSoul said, “but my homeland is inhospitable to my kind for now. I joined Lord Kelsier for the opportunity to gain allies and resources for my eventual fight against the dark aether. And having this planet remain safe and uncorrupted is a worthy goal on its own.”

“And you?” Marasi asked Moonlight. “You can’t go home either?”

“I can’t,” she said, “but I don’t care so much about that. I’m keeping an eye on a particular enemy of the Ghostbloods. Plus I like secrets.” She nodded forward.

They continued, and after they checked around the bend and made sure no one else was coming, Marasi whispered to Moonlight, “What are the other two tenets?”

“We share what we know with each other,” Moonlight said. “There are no secrets within a team. If you ask Kelsier, even *he’ll* tell you what *he’s* planning. But you absolutely can’t share secrets outside the organization without his permission.”

“And the last one?”

“We trust each other,” TwinSoul said. “We’re a team. A family. You join us, you absolutely swear not to make a move against another Ghostblood. No infighting. No betrayals. No undermining one another. No squabbling over resources or favor.”

“We take it very seriously, Marasi,” Moonlight said. “And the way you act—your attitude as part of a team—is one of the main reasons we came to you.”

And not, she implied, to Wax. They went on, Marasi chewing on those tenets. She swallowed the last one easily. Not moving against one another? Not undermining the mission or goals of another member of the group?

That sounded wonderful. More than once, she’d collided with another constable’s ambition, preventing her from getting things done.

The other tenet though … Not sharing information with those outside? That sat in her gut like a stone. She was a constable for the city of Elendel. Joining the Ghostbloods would be like … like swearing allegiance to another country.

But the secrets they knew … the things they were doing … She doubted that if she joined the Ghostbloods, she’d *ever* have to waste her time dealing with small-time criminals again.

She put it all out of her mind for the time being as they reached an intersection. The rightmost turn was particularly well-lit. There, two long, narrow structures had been built out along the tunnel, one on each side. The path continued between them, as if they were shops on a street.

Peeking around the corner into this tunnel, Marasi could see that one of the two buildings was guarded by thick-armed men. The lord mayor’s bodyguards. The two men were distracted though, talking to someone inside. Which gave Marasi an opportunity.

She led the way, crouching low around the corner, and crossed the short distance to the rightmost building. She was joined by the other two as the bodyguards finished their conversation and closed the door, settling into guard postures.

A window on this short end of the building, where Marasi and the others hid, gave her a chance to steal a look. And there he was, right inside. The lord mayor himself, in formal dining wear, hair slicked back with something greasy, sitting at a table. Aside from him, there were two additional guards settling in by the door. Four people in white lab coats huddled near Gave’s table, one handing him something to drink.

Marasi frowned, noticing Gave’s slumped-over posture. He looked … worn. Far less commanding or smug than he was at the police station.

He shook his head. “What odds do you give her,” he asked, his voice muffled from inside, but audible, “of getting that bomb to fly. Of actually salvaging this?”

“That’s … not my department, sir,” one of the scientists said. “I’m not an engineer.”

“I can’t believe it’s come to this,” Gave said, his voice softening. “I didn’t think … when I agreed … Are they here?”

"Nearly," another scientist said.

"How many?" Gave asked.

"A lot," the woman replied. "An army of soldiers with golden skin and glowing red eyes. Sir, is it true? Are they…"

Gave pounded the table. "*I'm* supposed to be in control! She's supposed to fail, and *I'm* supposed to take her place."

"You will, sir," one of the scientists said. "If she doesn't get the bomb working, Autonomy will kill her."

"And invade the whole *rusting* Basin," Gave said, hands to his face. "Maybe the world. Damn. It wasn't supposed to be like this…" He downed his shot and hauled himself to his feet.

Marasi shared a glance with the others. They'd known Autonomy was planning some sort of decisive attack if Telsin failed to prove she could control the Basin. It seemed that maybe Gave had been assigned to facilitate that?

*It would be convenient for him*, she thought, *to have these caverns as a bunker in case a destructive war breaks out above. That would explain the food, too.*

And some kind of invading army? She remembered how awed Miles Hundredlives had been, speaking of the "men of gold and red" as he died. Rusts.

"How many soldiers of our own do we have left in the bunker?" Entrone asked.

"Two contingents," said a scientist who seemed to be in charge—a thick-bodied woman in a white lab coat.

"And Metalblessed?" Entrone asked.

"None," the woman said.

"That woman," Entrone said, "is deliberately trying to leave me short-manned." He started pacing. "While I'm *forced* to support her, lest the worst option play out. I can't believe I let it get this far. We need some kind of military presence to corral those alien soldiers."

"Can we do that?" the scientist asked.

"I don't know," he said, putting his hand to his head. "I don't want to rule ashes. Rusts, Edwarn's plans were always superior. We should have been pushing for those, instead of Telsin's idiotic bomb."

“Yes, my lord mayor,” Labcoat said. “Speaking of Edwarn’s plans, did you … want to proceed with the test?”

He waved for her to do so, and Labcoat sent her two assistants to the far side of the room, the stone wall of the tunnel. Marasi had missed a thick door set into the rock—made of strong wood, with sturdy locks on the outside.

The assistants undid these, opening the door to reveal a group of some twenty people huddled in the darkness. They wore an assortment of different kinds of clothing—some expensive, others just common work clothes. All were grungy and rumpled. With pistols drawn, the assistants picked out a lean woman in a torn evening dress, her face streaked with makeup. She barely resisted, looking too exhausted for anything more than a token protest.

The door was locked again, and the assistants strapped her facedown to a table. Then one took out a silvery spike, long and thin. Marasi felt a chill, then nausea. Was this …

Oh, Ruin. Were they making an Allomancer? She’d read about the process in the book Death had given her, but she’d never wanted to see it in person.

Labcoat took out a notebook. “We believe that we’ve isolated the technique Edwarn was on to,” she said. “Indeed, we’ve refined it. The process involves a very thin spike, my lord mayor, and, oddly, the right mindset.”

“Mindset?” he asked.

“You need to know what you’re doing and why,” the woman explained. “It helps to whisper a Command as you work, though we find it isn’t strictly necessary. Trauma on the part of the subject is helpful as well.”

At a nod from her, the assistants threaded the long spike through the skin of the woman’s upper back. Almost like they were sewing with a six-inch needle. The poor woman made a pained whimper, and the assistant doing the procedure mumbled something to himself, then pushed the needle slowly back through her skin, as if making two holes for some kind of piercing. The woman screamed louder as the process finished.

As soon as the spike left her skin, the holes started bleeding. The woman fell silent, and the assistant washed off the bloodied spike and handed it to

Labcoat, who promptly placed it in a solution attached to a device and examined it.

“Roughly five percent Invested,” she reported to Entrone. “And as you can see, the subject is still alive. We’ve essentially excised a piece of the soul and stored it in the metal.”

Wait.

They’d made a spike without killing the woman?

That was supposed to be impossible. Granted, Marasi hadn’t studied Death’s book in as much detail as Wax had, but she was fairly sure Hemalurgy always killed its subject.

“So?” Entrone said. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I don’t particularly care if these people live or die. Creating spikes without killing them is pointless. We need Metalborn in huge numbers. *That* will impress Autonomy. *That* will make her realize this planet is a resource, not something to be burned.”

“Ah, my lord,” the woman said. “This woman *isn’t* Metalborn. We’ve Invested a spike—a tiny bit, granted—using an *ordinary person.* All people are Invested by Ruin and Preservation as part of our very makeup—and we have a little extra Preservation, blessed by the Shards upon our creation. We’re pulling some of that out.

“The percentage you get depends on the person. We think it might have to do with how likely they were, genetically, to be Metalborn. But they don’t need that extra if the powers didn’t manifest in them. It’s vestigial. We simply slice it off and use it in a spike. Fully Investing one takes between twenty and thirty people.”

“But can you make *Allomancers* from those spikes,” Entrone said. “That’s the key part.”

The scientist glanced at the others. “Sir, this is a fantastic result. A huge step forward in—”

“Can you make me Allomancers?” he demanded. “Now. Today. To show Autonomy.”

“No,” Labcoat admitted. “We think we need to code this in some way to give a specific Metallic Art blessing. We’re working on that. We’ve had some few gain a power for a short time using one of these spikes, but it gives out soon after.”

“Damn,” Entrone muttered. “That means Edwarn’s Community project here is still valuable.” He folded his arms, looking worn down again. “But we have nothing to show Autonomy at the present. I’m going to have to do it. I’m going to have to let her army through. Call all of our remaining loyalists—those not working directly for Telsin—into the caverns.”

“But—” Labcoat began.

“We wait,” he said, “for Telsin to initiate her plan. We give her every opportunity. And then … then if it doesn’t work…”

“We survive,” Labcoat said.

“We survive.” He nodded to himself. “I’m going to the Community to see to the perpendicularity.” He waved toward the cell at the rear of the room. “They have all heard and seen too much. They are a liability. Execute them.”

“Of course, my lord,” Labcoat said. Entrone left, leaving the two guards inside, but collecting the two in the tunnel. He slammed the door, making the flimsy structure shake. Fortunately, once outside, he turned and continued farther into the complex instead of walking past Marasi and her team.

“Fetch me some invel gas pellets,” Labcoat said to the assistants in the room. “That will be a painless end for the captives. Fion, tell our loyalists to retreat to the caverns. They can bring their families, but nothing else. A priority-one evacuation order. This is the real thing.”

One of the assistants left at a dead run, also going farther into the complex. The other began fiddling in cabinets at the side of the room. Marasi and the two Ghostbloods crouched in the shadows, whispering.

“We have to get this information to Kelsier,” Moonlight said. “A new way of making spikes could change everything.”

“It’s still brutal,” Marasi whispered back. “Stealing a piece of someone’s soul? It’s better than murdering them, but I doubt this is something we could use in good conscience.”

“You don’t understand,” Moonlight said. “If they’re even *close* to forging Metalborn out of the raw power of souls—if they’ve had tests that resulted in an Allomancer, no matter how fleeting … Marasi, that path could lead to creating spikes using *pure* Investiture instead of souls.” She tapped her rucksack, indicating the glowing jars inside.

Ruin. The ability to create spikes in a mechanical way? Even the process of making medallions among the Malwish required Metalborn. If what Moonlight implied was right, then it would change *everything*.

"For now," TwinSoul said, "Silajana reminds us that the planet itself is in danger. Getting information to Lord Kelsier is meaningless if that invasion happens. We must follow Entrone and see if we can interfere with Autonomy's plans."

Marasi peeked around the corner, looking farther down the tunnel. They could sneak past. But the people in that room were about to be executed …

"We have to help the prisoners," Marasi said.

"A few lives are meaningless right now," Moonlight said. "We need to keep moving. It's our way."

"It's not mine," Marasi said. "I'm an officer of the law. I can't leave a group of people to be murdered. Besides, he said they'd heard too much. They know something of use to us."

Moonlight and TwinSoul glanced to one another.

"I'm going to help them," Marasi said. "There are only two guards. We should be able to stop those with ease."

"If anything goes wrong," Moonlight said, "it could alert everyone down here. One gunshot…"

Marasi hesitated, weighing the risks. It might be foolish, she acknowledged, but she hadn't become a constable to leave people to be murdered. She stood up straight. "It is a risk I will take. Are you with me, or do I do it alone?"

The other two stood. "Let's do it quickly then," Moonlight said.

# 48

Steris had heard that in a fire, the rats were often the first creatures out. They could smell the smoke before the flames raged out of control—and so, on occasion, you could get an early warning of impending danger by watching the rats flee.

That was what she did now, while organizing her thoughts and listening to the other senators prepare their escape routes. She watched Lady Gardre, the woman Steris was almost certain was a member of the Set. So long as Gardre remained in the city, they had time.

But as the minutes stretched long, waiting for TenSoon to return with the Bands, she began to doubt. Perhaps it wasn't Gardre. Perhaps one of the aides was the real agent, and they'd already fled. Perhaps the Set didn't actually have anyone in the government's inner circle. Perhaps—

An aide bustled into the room—and stepped over to Lady Gardre, whispering in her ear.

"Ah," Gardre said. "I'll need to deal with this." Gardre stood up, straightening her jacket. "I'll be back shortly."

Steris knew she wouldn't be. Her departure meant the city was in imminent danger. She passed TenSoon on her way out, and he drew the attention of the others. They didn't realize.

"Now," Adawathwyn said, striding around the table to TenSoon, "let's see how these work. Give me the Bands. Let me walk Harmony's Path and save the city! I am Metalborn, a Ferring of the mind. Whatever bomb is being delivered here, I can Push it away with the force of a planet! Or I can soar to Bilming and bring justice to those miscreants!"

Ambassador Daal stepped forward, his face hidden behind his mask. “This must be a negotiation. You promised that they wouldn’t be used.”

“Surely you can see the need, Ambassador,” Steris said. “You don’t expect us to simply *die* if this could save us?”

“Surely you Northerners understand the meaning of the word ‘promise,’” he said, looking at her through the holes in his mask. “I have the authority to negotiate for their return to us.” He leaned forward, his hands on the table, and looked straight at the governor—who leaned away, his eyes widening.

“If you use them,” Daal continued, “then I demand that they must be turned over to us next, for use during the disaster of *our* choosing. A compromise, yah? If you wish to avoid war, but also use these Bands, that is the *only* solution. You get this chance. We will also get a chance. Deal?”

All eyes in the room went to TenSoon. The kandra had validated the treaty and had become keepers of the relic. It appeared the others thought he could agree to this, and Steris supposed he was as close to an arbiter as they had.

“Harmony is preoccupied,” TenSoon said, “but our time is tight. So I will agree to this if the humans do. The Basin may use the Bands right now. But they revert to the Malwish.”

“Do it,” the governor said. “If it could save the city … I agree.”

It was not the best situation for a negotiation, and Steris wondered how badly they were being played. Daal must see this as the perfect opportunity to get what he wanted. Regardless, she still didn’t understand why TenSoon thought this might work. Yes, the Bands made a person a powerful Metalborn, but Daal acted as if they could win wars on their own—and TenSoon had this distant expression. He met her eyes.

“What?” she asked.

“We believe,” he whispered, “there is a way to transport objects large distances using a conflux of Metalborn powers. It is a thing Harmony doesn’t yet understand himself. But I wonder … if someone feeling the transcendent power of the Bands … could solve the puzzle.”

Fascinating. She took notes.

TenSoon opened the box to present the Bands—which were in the shape of a large spearhead, made of multiple bands of different kinds of metal. The governor nodded for Adawathwyn to take them. She reached in and touched them, her eyes alight. She picked them up, held them for a moment, and frowned.

“How…” she said. “How do I activate them?”

“It was natural for Wax,” Steris said, walking over. She hesitantly poked the Bands, and felt nothing.

They passed them around, letting everyone try. Finally TenSoon took them, his face scrunched up in thought. Then horror followed. “They’re *drained,*” he whispered. “Something has happened … How…?”

Without their power, the Bands of Mourning were essentially just a heavy piece of history. Like a statue’s broken arm.

The governor gave a groan of despair and leaned back in his chair, squeezing his eyes shut. Salvation had just flitted away on butterfly wings. Steris couldn’t help wondering what she was missing. She’d never anticipated this. The Bands could be drained? By whom? And how?

Daal stepped forward and touched them with one finger. “It’s true,” he muttered. “What have you done? Have you been using these in secret?”

“What?” Adawathwyn said. “No! We haven’t seen them in years, not since the treaty!”

Daal picked up the Bands in one hand. “I will return them to my people.”

“Wait,” Steris said, standing. “That wasn’t the deal.”

“Wasn’t it?” he said. “You had your chance to use them. It happens they are useless to you. Now we must have our chance. I wonder if it is *piety* that makes them work, yah? Or if maybe I am right, and you’ve been using them all along. Our scholars will know if you are trying to pass off some fake.”

Steris looked at him and had the distinct impression that was … a prepared speech? Yes. She prepared words to say even in common conversations. His mannerisms felt practiced, rehearsed. But surely she was wrong. He couldn’t have been *prepared* for this?

Unless he’d known the Bands would be drained. Unless he’d come to Elendel looking for a crisis that would make them call on the Bands, so he could offer his deal. And then …

“I don’t know if I can allow this,” the governor said.

“I don’t know that we can forbid it,” TenSoon growled back. “You agreed.”

“Ah,” Daal said. “Perhaps your Faceless Immortals can actually be impartial? Curious. I had not believed it.”

Daal took the Bands’ case from TenSoon, who growled low and dangerous—but let it go.

Steris watched with an odd feeling of disconnect. This was … this was some kind of Malwish ploy, completely *separate* from the tensions at Bilming. Which made it a problem for another time, when they weren’t being threatened with extinction. The Bands were not the solution today. But there was a secret here that eventually she would like to tease out.

The ambassador walked to the door, but paused there, the Bands under his arm. “I did promise you passage, Governor. If this city *is* doomed, as you all think, then … if you wish, any of you may join me now. I will drop you at a safer location.”

“I’ll go,” Adawathwyn said immediately. She snatched her things off the table.

“Maybe…” the governor said. “Maybe we’re wrong. Mistaken somehow about this danger…”

“Are you a betting man, my lord governor?” Reddi asked. “Because I am. And I’ve learned to never bet against one particular man. If Dawnshot says a bomb is pointed at us, it is.”

“We need to evacuate the city.” Steris thumped her notebooks. “I have the plans here. Full citywide emergency plans for various categories of disaster. I had free time a few summers ago and was bored.”

“This is what you do for fun?” Reddi asked.

“Well, the house taxes were already done for the next year,” Steris said. “Here. This plan is the best for this situation. It gets the most people out of the city the fastest. The longer we have, the more we save. It’s one of my most efficient creations.” She looked up to the governor. “Please. We can’t leave. We have to protect the city.”

“Are you coming or not?” Daal snapped from the doorway. Perhaps he wanted the honor—and political bargaining chip—of having saved the governor.

Governor Varlance glanced from him to Steris. Then toward Adawathwyn—whose robes flashed as she vanished out the door. The other senators hastened to follow.

“You,” Steris said softly to the governor, “are the captain of this city. This entire nation. You were chosen by the people to represent them. I need your authority to save as many of them as possible. There will be time for you to escape later. For now, help me save this city.”

“You … really have a plan?” the governor said. He wiped his brow. “An evacuation plan?”

“Yes. We can do this, Varlance.”

He nodded. A quick, hesitant nod, frightened. “I want to try. Where do we start?”

# 49

There wasn’t no cover in this canyon, so Wayne had to do the smart thing: turn into some.

He stepped in front of Wax, who was ducking backward around the corner. Too slow, but fortunately the next shots from the enemy hit Wayne, making him grunt. Bullets *really* hurt. He supposed that was the point, but some other wounds were so big that your body kinda freaked out and decided not to hurt, least at first. Like it was saying, “Whoa. This is gonna suck *hard*. Better take a deep breath.”

Bullets though, they didn’t send him into shock or anything. So they just hurt. Like Death’s own eyes.

Still, it kept Wax from bein’ hit. Together he and Wayne ducked back around the curve in the tunnel, out of sight. The two of them waited there, Wax with guns out, ready to fire. They were perhaps thirty yards from where they’d spotted the two doppel-dummies, blocking the way farther through the tunnel.

Wayne rolled his shoulder as the bullet wounds healed, draining his metalminds a little further. He was using up his reserves pretty fast these last few days. Fortunately, most of his work with Marasi hadn’t required much healin’. Her missions didn’t *usually* involve things like throwing Wayne out windows like he was a rustin’ cat.

“Oi!” the not-Wayne called from farther down the tunnel. “We can’t shoot you if you keep hidin’! Come out so we can get on with killing you, mates!”

Oh, now that was plain *awful*. She was trying too hard—that wasn’t a Roughs accent at all. It was inner-city Roughs enclave accent, with a bit of upper-crust theater thrown in—probably from her dialect coach. The resulting accent was ridiculous, just close enough to his natural accent that it was like rusty old spikes being pulled across a chalkboard.

“What the hell is going *on* with those two?” Wayne whispered.

“I suspect,” Wax replied, “that the Set realized they’d need to face us, considering the ruin we made of their plans a few years back. So they spiked a few of their members with powers to match ours and trained them to fight us.”

“That one isn’t just tryin’ to fight me,” Wayne said. “She’s tryin’ to *be* me. You get the same sense from yours?”

“No,” Wax said. “Other than the suit, he merely seems to be a competent Coinshot with a few extra spikes. Watch him, Wayne. He can burn up all of his steel in a single terrible burst, supercharging his Push to extreme levels. But he can also drain your abilities if he gets hold of you.”

“So long as he has metals,” Wayne said.

“The Set has some powerful resources, Wayne,” Wax said. “I’ll bet his chromium outlasts your bendalloy.”

“We’ll see about that.” Wayne narrowed his eyes, peering around the corner. “That one what thinks she’s like me, she’s doin’ a terrible job. I’m not nearly that annoying.”

Wax calmly loaded a few bullets into his pistol.

“Hey,” Wayne said. “Don’t you say it.”

“I didn’t say a thing.” He snapped the revolver closed. “Unfortunately, any delay is to their advantage. Which means we’re going to have to go on the offensive.”

“Close confines down here, mate,” Wayne said. “Not great for Steelpushing. Real easy to get stuck in slow time while they coordinate to trap us.”

“See if you can catch all four of us inside a speed bubble together,” Wax said. “It’s close confines, yes—but for them too.”

“They can make their own bubble, mate,” Wayne said. “Even inside ours. But I suppose they can’t sculpt one like I can. So we should be good, if we’re in close together.”

“Exactly,” Wax said. “If neither of us can rely on speed bubbles or flying high with Steelpushes, maybe our trained skill will overwhelm their borrowed abilities. We can try to throw that Steelpusher out of the bubble, to freeze him. Just don’t let him touch you, or he can Leech your powers.”

A good enough plan, Wayne supposed. He dug in his pocket for the aluminum-lined pouch his accountants had given him and pulled out a few beads of bendalloy. Kept it in little marbles, easy to swallow.

He knocked them back. Wax nodded, and Wayne made as big a speed bubble as he could. They ran through it, broke out the other side, and dashed down the tunnel. It was a big concrete pipe thing, a good ten feet or more across, the bottom containing a foot-or-two-wide section of sludge that had partially dried, on account of the lack of rain recently.

The evil twins got a chance to deliberate in a speed bubble while Wayne and Wax moved. But they couldn’t do *too* much from inside one. Other than position themselves really well for when the bubble ended. So, the moment Wayne saw motion ahead, he dropped and rolled in the mud. So did Wax.

Bullets went streaking over their heads, where they’d been moments before. Wayne dashed the last few yards to close in on them, then tossed up a large speed bubble—fifteen feet across—to catch all four people. Dueling canes out, he went straight for the evil him, feigning a strike, dodging right, then sweeping with a cane from the left to knock her in the noggin. She barely managed to block him, then slid her weapon along his in a classic maneuver to try and smack his fingers.

He shoved her back and went in again, and the next sequence of attacks hit like a drumbeat—wooden stick against wooden stick. He got a hit on her, but she barely flinched as her metalminds healed her. She returned the blow, and he took it without much more than a faint grunt. Though his ribs cracked, they healed right up.

“Oi!” she said in that exaggerated parody of his accent. “That’s cheatin’!”

“You ain’t me,” Wayne growled. “Don’t pretend you are.”

She grinned and slid in the mud in an admittedly skillful move, getting past him and dodging his next swing—all while rapping him on the arm hard enough to break the bone. He grimaced and flipped his hand to the side to reset the bone as his muscles pulled it back into place.

He fended off her next attack with one arm while the other healed, letting her force him to retreat. At that moment, Wax flew between them and slammed into the tunnel wall with a grunt. He tossed a handful of bullets in the air, then ducked—tricking not-Wax into Pushing on them instead of him. Wax then slid back across the ground underneath and unloaded his guns toward the Coinshot.

Wayne and the not-him watched it all with shocked hesitation, then Wayne grabbed his second dueling cane out of the mud. The two scrambled back together and exchanged a few more blows.

"Hate doin' this sober," not-him said. "Maybe we should grab a pint, then have at this again in a right proper state of mind."

"Nah," Wayne said, "I drink with bastards, liars, and fools. But I draw the line at someone like me."

"I'm doin' well, then?" she asked as they locked canes, coming in close together. "I'm you?"

"You're something far, far worse," he muttered. "You're someone who *wants* to be me."

"Ha!" she said, breaking the lock and shoving him to the side, making him slide up against the shimmering edge of the speed bubble. It didn't move when Wayne did. They anchored in place, so it wouldn't fall unless he dropped it or was shoved out.

He shook his arms. Damn, she was strong. Looked like natural strength training, which he didn't have time to do. She came at him with a body check, making him grunt as she pressed up against him.

"Hope old Dumad is doing all right," she said, nodding at her companion. "I done stole some of his metal vials without telling him."

"I don't steal," Wayne muttered.

"Sorry! I borrowed it."

"I don't borrow neither! And your accent is sliding from Roughs street into southern Elendel street gang! Gah! You're gettin' it *all wrong*!"

"I love that you're more worried about me imitating you poorly than you are about me tryin' to kill you," she said, shoving her face up next to his. She stabbed him in the chest—he hadn't even seen her drop the dueling cane—with a glass knife. "It's so *you,* Wayne!"

"You don't know me," Wayne growled, managing to kick her leg and make her slip a little. She loosened her grip, which let him rip free and move around her, though her knife sliced him across the chest.

Rusts. He could heal that with the health in his bracer—which these days he wore embedded into the flesh of his thigh. But he was worried about how much she was making him use. That was probably the point.

“Oh, Wayne,” she said, turning toward him. “I *do* know you. I’ve studied you for years! Freewheeling Wayne! Always ready with a joke. Snatchin’ what he sees, chasin’ the girls. Livin’ his life without consequences. Just here for the fun and the booze!”

“Yeah?” he muttered. “And the pain?”

“Eh,” she said with a shrug. “You get used to gettin’ exploded, now don’tcha.”

“Not that pain,” he whispered.

They met again, but she was just plain better at the fightin’ part than he was. Oh, Wayne was fine with the canes. But he lived his life. And in doin’ so, he’d let the trainin’ slack off—having a little gum chew out behind the building instead of working into the evening. With Marasi, he hadn’t spent quite so much time getting his head knocked in.

But this creature, well, she’d been trainin’ something hard. Focused entirely on this day, this meeting, this *fight.* He wasn’t brawlin’ with some bully off the street, or even some talented Set Metalborn. He was facin’ an assassin what had been designed *specifically* to kill him.

She was stronger than he was. Faster than he was. Younger than he was. Better with the canes. He was better with his powers. He was certain of that. But in these close confines, that didn’t really matter. And as he traded blows with her, taking hits and forcing himself to heal, he … Well, he took more punishment than he gave. Rusts … was this what Wax felt like, now he was gettin’ on in years?

He rolled to the side, through the muck on the bottom of the giant tube they was in. That put him right to the other edge of the speed bubble, and he slipped halfway out of it—though fortunately, so long as you were touching it at all it included you in its powers.

A motion from where Wax was fightin’ made Wayne duck. Wax himself went flying past again, and he soared completely out of the speed bubble. Damn. That was what they’d been planning to do to the other guy.

Wax froze instantly, hanging in the air with a grimace on his face, gun trailing from his fingers and hovering in front of him, mistcoat tassels sweeping around him.

*Uh-oh,* Wayne thought.

A spray of coins hit Wayne a second later.

“Aw, Dumad,” not-Wayne said, turning. “I was havin’ fun. *I’m* supposed to be the one who takes him.”

“You’re inefficient, Getruda,” Dumad said. “You play with him. You simply need to hit him repeatedly until his health runs out.” He punctuated this by giving Wayne another faceful of coins, knocking him to the ground.

Rusts. This was bad. Wayne healed that, but it was slow—his healing was starting to run dangerously low. And he had to ration it as a result.

“Oi,” he muttered, “Death. Betcha fifty clips I survive this.” It was a good time for a bet. Because in such a situation, Wayne had to try something truly desperate.

The truth.

He stumbled to his feet, putting his back to the rounded wall of the tunnel. “You think you know me?” Wayne whispered. “You think you know what I’ve been through?”

Dumad looked at him, then *Pushed.* And rusts, the guy was so strong he could affect the metal *inside* Wayne’s body. That was a crazy thing to experience—Wayne was shoved backward from the coins embedded within him. Rust and Ruin … that was a power that the Ascendant Warrior was said to have had.

These guys really *were* cheating. No wonder Wax had lost his fight. No wonder Wayne had essentially lost his—the dueling portion at least. But if he could keep their attention …

He grunted at the Push. Then he stepped forward anyway, feeling the coins tear and rip inside him. He took another step, leaning forward into the Push.

Not-him hesitated, lowering her canes. He met her eyes.

Then he grinned.

“You can’t hurt me,” he whispered, changing his accent. “Ain’t nothin’ that can hurt me more than life already has. You can’t kill me. I’m already dead. I been dead for years, sister.”

He took another step forward. Most people, they didn’t notice accent changes like that. Little tweaks to the tone of your words. But people judged you on them anyway. Their brains associated accents with meaning.

Dumad frowned, seeming disturbed, and raised his hand and Pushed harder. Wayne slid in the mud, the coins ripping farther through him. Then he took another step forward and changed his accent further. Put on his most wide-eyed, excited face. Twisting his voice to be something unnatural. Something terrifying. Something out of a nightmare. Matching this not-Wax's accent, but terrible.

Like the accent he'd hear from his parents and family. Only broken. Wayne didn't need a hat for this one.

"It's easy to do what you do, since you don't care," Wayne growled to the two, making his eyes go even wider. "So long as you can pretend. But real pain, that comes when you realize what you are. What you done. Waking up each morning, knowin' you're worthless. *That's* pain. Anything else? Anything *you* could do to me? Well, that's just a little bit o' fun."

"You're…" Dumad trailed off as Wayne's smile widened.

"Thank you," Wayne said, "for tossin' Wax outta here. That way I got a few moments to have you two all to myself."

The coins finally ripped through Wayne's back, letting him lurch forward in a sudden rush. And as he did, he threw himself to the ground. Because amid his display—getting them to focus only on him—he'd dropped the speed bubble. And they hadn't noticed.

From the side, Wax put a hazekiller round straight in not-Wayne's face. Its secondary explosion went off a second later, blowing off half her skull. A second shot from Wax took Dumad in the chest as he was turning, then exploded out his back.

Incredibly, the Coinshot didn't fall. Pewter. Did the fellow have *pewter* to burn and push through wounds? How many spikes did this fellow have, and why hadn't they let Harmony take control of him?

Unfortunately, the man stayed on his feet and ducked the next bullets. He shoved a grate off the ceiling, opening it up to the sunlight, then seized the bloodied not-Wayne and Pushed on a coin.

The two launched up and out. One with a hole in his chest that didn't seem to hurt as much as it should have, the other with half her head gone. She might be dead, though Wayne couldn't be certain. Head shots were tricky. They could end you, but it all depended on the damage done.

Wax maybe should have put another few shots in them as they fled, but the man looked pretty ragged from the fight. Breathing deeply, he slumped back against the wall of the tunnel. They'd come close to losing this fight. Real close.

Wayne stumbled to his feet, aching all over, and used his healing to seal those coin wounds. But they remained sore. He was forced to stop healing to save the last bit of juice in his metalmind. Rusts.

Wayne turned and lurched over to Wax, his clothes a bloody, muddy mess. Wax's, impossibly, were pretty nice—barely marked by the gunk on the floor.

"Hey!" Wayne said. "How the hell aren't you covered in mud? I saw you roll through it."

"I Pushed off a bullet when I did," he said. He put a hand to his shoulder and groaned softly. "Nice job, with the distraction." He met Wayne's eyes. "Did you mean any of that?"

"Nah, of course not," Wayne said, looking away. Ruin, he felt exhausted. And creaky. Like a floor what had been walked on so much, all the boards wobbled.

"Wayne…"

"Not the time, mate." He settled down on the floor. "Rusts, I feel old. I'm not supposed to feel old. I'm the spry one!"

Wax settled down next to him on a dry part of the concrete. "You're thirty-nine, Wayne. It catches up to you."

"You infected me, you did," Wayne grumbled. "I never felt old when I was workin' with Marasi!"

"I infected you," Wax said, "with *being old*?"

"Damn right."

"That's ludicrous even for you."

"No it ain't. You done started to think yourself old, and it drilled into my head too." Wayne tapped at his skull. "Ideas is infectious, Wax. More than diseases."

They caught their breath for a few more moments. Unfortunately, they couldn't linger.

"They know for sure we found this tunnel," Wayne said. "If there's some kind of lab at the end of it, they'll be clearing it out as we speak."

Wax nodded and heaved himself back to his feet. He reached out a hand to help Wayne up.

"We need to talk," Wax said. "About you. The way you've been feeling lately."

"Sure. Okay. I like talkin'. But later."

Later was *always* better.

Together, they pressed forward. “I got the woman pretty good,” Wax said. “Do you think that killed her?”

“Depends. How’s your luck been lately?”

“Awful,” Wax admitted. “But at least we know we’re on the right trail. Otherwise they wouldn’t have tried so hard to stop us.”

“Yeah, sure,” Wayne said. “I’m glad we’re done with the canyon, but the hardest part is yet to come. The mesa, which is gonna gobble you up. Remember to choke it from the inside.”

“I’ll do my best.”

# 50

Marasi drew up a quick plan—which was the only kind they could afford. Moonlight and TwinSoul stayed near the window, ready to break in. Marasi worked her way up to the front of the building to place a grenade by the door. The slowness bubble would work through the wall, trapping the two guards who stood inside. As she charged her weapon, however, Moonlight ducked around the side of the rectangular structure and scuttled up to Marasi.

"Guards just moved," she hissed. "They're getting gas masks from a bin near the scientists."

Rusts. She couldn't let them release the gas.

"We go in now," Marasi hissed. "Back me up if the grenade fails."

Moonlight nodded, and Marasi kicked in the door and hurled her grenade toward the group of people in the left corner, near the window where she and the others had been spying.

*Sorry, TwinSoul,* she thought, knowing the grenade would catch him too. Her aim was solid, and the grenade box bounced off one lab table, then fell to the floor near the group of guards and scientists.

The two guards immediately leaped away, one sliding over the table, the other one dashing for the front of the room. One of the scientists was also at the perimeter and—unfortunately—jumped away in surprise.

When the grenade activated, it caught only two of the scientists in gas masks. Luckily, that included the one holding a tin with warning labels on it, presumably the poison tablets.

Marasi's grenade would keep them frozen. But now she had to deal with the others *without* raising an alarm. The free scientist was cringing at the side of the room, so Marasi dashed forward and slammed her rifle's butt into the arm of one guard, who had been pulling out a pistol. Moonlight moved behind her—hopefully dealing with the other guard, because the man Marasi had attacked decided to slam into her, shoving her back against a table full of beakers.

She grunted as he rammed her own rifle up almost to her neck. Glassware shattered on the floor around her, and a part of her panicked. The part of her that still, even after all these years, worried she wasn't good enough and didn't belong.

That part of her was a lot quieter than it had been. Because she *did* belong. This was *her* operation. And though this man was stronger than she was, he was only a common brute. Training beat strength.

She shifted, then let go of the rifle and stepped out with her left leg, shifting the man's weight—and force. As he stumbled, she wrenched out from his grip, rotated around behind him, then slammed his face down into the counter.

She recovered her rifle, sparing a glance for Moonlight, who was struggling. She'd disarmed her guard, but he'd in turn pressed her against the wall. As Marasi took that in, the wall distorted and a door popped into existence behind Moonlight.

Marasi barely caught sight of the stamp in Moonlight's hand as the door opened, and the woman fell backward through it—surprising the guard, who cried out as she pulled him down with her. Moonlight elbowed him in the face to cut off his cry, so Marasi finished off her guard with a rifle butt to the face, then turned to deal with the scientist, who was …

Destroying evidence? Marasi cursed and scrambled over to the woman and pulled her away from the trash can where she'd started a fire. Marasi kicked the trash can over, scattering charred notebooks and papers out of it.

"Marasi!" Moonlight cried.

Rusts. The scientist had found a large knife and joined Moonlight's fight. As Moonlight struggled to deal with the guard—who was trying to grapple her—the scientist raised the knife.

Making a quick judgment, Marasi swung up her rifle and snapped off a shot, killing the scientist with a well-placed bullet. The sound echoed in the tunnels like a screamed condemnation. Someone would hear that for certain.

Moonlight finished off her guard with her own knife, then was cut off from view as the door she'd made vanished. Marasi sat on the floor and groaned softly, the shimmering barrier of her slowness bubble just a foot away. She'd taken the risk to save people. She'd known what she was getting into. But now their operation was jeopardized.

*So don't let it be wasted,* she thought, hauling herself to her feet. As her slowness bubble came down, she pointed her rifle right at the two scientists.

"Make one move to open that tin," she said, "and I will kill you. I'm having a particularly bad day, so I wouldn't test that threat."

The scientist with the tin of poison gas tablets carefully set it down, then both raised their hands and backed away. Moonlight entered a moment later and began binding them. TwinSoul stumbled in behind her, holding to the doorframe for stability.

"I appear to have run afoul of your powers," he said to Marasi.

"Sorry about that," she said.

"I note two disabled guards," he said. "And one dead scientist. So the operation went well?"

"Marasi had to shoot one," Moonlight said, pulling one of the scientists' bonds tight, "to save me. I ruined it."

"No," Marasi said. "It was my fault for not helping fast enough."

"It is done," TwinSoul said. "We should see to the captives and secure an exit. What are those burned pages?"

"They destroyed evidence," Marasi said. "I assume about how they were accomplishing the Hemalurgy. I wasn't able to save it, so…"

Moonlight sniffed. "Looks like the cover of a book there. You saved that much."

"But none of the writings," Marasi said.

"I can rewind that later," Moonlight said, "with a stamp." She grabbed the burned remnants and shoved them into her sack. "TwinSoul is right. We should probably begin our extraction—that gunshot will bring people running."

"Extraction?" Marasi said. "Entrone said he was going to help an invading force attack. Moonlight, can enemy troops really reach us from … another world?"

"They're probably coming through Shadesmar," Moonlight said. "A dimension overlapping ours. It's how TwinSoul and I got here."

“Autonomy has access to … some very specialized troops,” TwinSoul said. “Hard to control. Dangerous to unleash. I know their destructive power personally. While I’m more frightened of that bomb, an invasion by Autonomy’s forces could also be catastrophic. Fortunately, the local perpendicularity—the portal to reach this world—is far to the south and carefully controlled.”

“There’s no other way?” Marasi asked.

The two shared a look.

“There are planets,” Moonlight said, “where Autonomy has created such portals unexpectedly, and against all understood mechanics. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s done that here, or is soon going to. Providing a means for her armies to attack.”

So if Wax succeeded in stopping the bomb, there would be an invasion instead. Marasi took a deep breath. Even more reason they couldn’t run—not until they knew what was happening with that army. For now though, she unlocked and yanked open the cell door, spilling light across the ragged prisoners. They pulled back from the light like mistwraiths in the night.

“I’m Marasi Colms,” she said, fishing her credentials from her pocket. “Elendel Constabulary.”

“Oh, thank the Survivor!” a man said, stumbling forward and taking her hand. His suit had once been nice, and he had a few tufts of hair on an otherwise bald head. Did she … recognize him?

“You’re in Bilming politics,” she said. “You served as the local advisor to the Senate.”

“Y-yes,” he stuttered. “Pielle Fromed. I was head of the opposition party for the Bilming Council. I still am … I think…”

Most of the others looked like ordinary citizens, but there was a Terriswoman in the rear with kinky hair. That was … yes, she was a major newspaper owner, wasn’t she? Editor of the *Seasons*? Marasi had been interviewed by her staff the other year … It was a newspaper that had been sympathetic to Elendel interests.

Preservation … Entrone hadn’t merely been experimenting on his citizens, he’d been experimenting on his political opposition. It was shockingly brazen. How had he made these people vanish without anyone getting wind of it?

The editor of the *Seasons* accepted Marasi's help as Moonlight ushered the captives into the main room. "Listen," the woman said. "I think they have an army of some sort! I've … I've been taking notes…"

She almost fainted as Marasi helped her stand. But she pressed a notebook into Marasi's hands. "There isn't much. But you *must* believe me."

"I do," Marasi said. "We're here to stop them."

"Locate a place they call the Community," she said. "I think it's where their barracks are."

"We'll stop them," Marasi promised, leading her to the others. "We have to get these people out of here," Marasi then said to TwinSoul. "Immediately."

Together, the three of them ushered the poor captives along. They were slow, they were tired, and they were underfed. It took a dangerously long time to get them all into the tunnel. And as Marasi was preparing to lead them back toward the elevators, she heard noises from that direction.

With a sinking feeling, she saw a good two dozen guards—soldiers, really; probably the ones who had been standing watch in the building above—come piling around the turn in the tunnel.

This had just gone from quiet infiltration to full-on war.

# 51

The Set soldiers, spotting Marasi's group, immediately organized in the tunnel, using the natural curve as cover. Fortunately, this bought Marasi and her team a few precious moments—the enemy didn't know what they were facing, and so took up a defensive posture.

Marasi ushered the former captives back toward the room, though the flimsy drywall would offer very little protection against gunfire.

TwinSoul, however, knelt and put both hands on the ground. "Moonlight," he said, "I'll need extra fuel. Water will not be enough for this."

She swiftly dug out one of the glowing jars and tossed it to him. A line of crystal grew from him and around the jar, opening the top. His crystals began to grow faster—in moments he'd created a chest-high wall of roseite in front of them.

Gunfire rang out from the other end of the tunnel, making the former captives cry out as they crowded back into the room. Rifle in hand, Marasi threw herself against TwinSoul's improvised fortification next to Moonlight. She risked a glance over the roseite mound—he'd made this one opaque, perhaps to give the enemy less information.

She ducked back down as a bullet blasted a few chips off the front of the fortification. TwinSoul clearly had to concentrate to keep this large a barrier up. He had settled down with his legs crossed and his hands in fists, knuckles pressed together in front of him, his head bowed. The crystal-stone had grown up over his arms in an odd way. Marasi turned to Moonlight.

“Can you make a door in the ground?” Marasi said. “There might be tunnels beneath us.”

Moonlight shook her head. “Even if there were, the thickness of the stone would be far too great for my stamp.”

“I believe, my lady Marasi,” TwinSoul said, “that you should allow me to take the people we’ve freed and hasten them to the exit. It seems these soldiers were guarding the shipping bay above. So if I can push through them, I can get the civilians to safety.”

“That would be good,” Moonlight said. “Marasi and I can escape farther into the tunnel complex—and the enemy might be so focused on you and your escape that they don’t notice us.”

“I can’t allow that,” Marasi said as bullets flew overhead. “TwinSoul, there are at least two dozen soldiers over there. You can’t manage them on your own. No offense, but you can barely walk down a corridor without support.”

“No offense taken,” he said, his voice muffled as the roseite continued to grow up—and for some reason *around* him. “But in return … No offense, my lady, but you might perhaps be underestimating Silajana.”

The roseite completely encased him, forming a transparent boulder around him. His head bowed, with formal sash in place, he was still fully visible in his cross-legged posture through the rose-colored stone. Marasi frowned as it continued to expand rapidly. The size and speed of this creation seemed to need the help of the glowing substance from the jar, which was being drained as the roseite grew.

Bulges formed at the sides of the boulder, like … smaller boulders? Only longer. Then two more formed on the bottom rear of the boulder. Marasi cocked her head, her back to the fortification mound, rifle across her knees. Actually, with the smaller boulder forming on the top, it had almost taken on the shape of … of a …

Thick stone fingers formed on the ends of the two protrusions at the sides, then massive roseite arms spread out, stone grinding against the stone ground as the lower parts formed knees and feet. TwinSoul at the center, the thing heaved itself up—a twelve-foot-tall stone behemoth. The crystal didn’t bend, but had formed joints, like armor.

A man made of rock, like some mythological creature, with a head on the top, broad shoulders, and trunklike legs. TwinSoul sat at its heart, legs crossed, fists pressed together in front of him. But his head rose and his eyes snapped open, glowing softly, as his creation ripped free of the lines of roseite connecting it to the ground.

The fortification started to disintegrate right away, but the soldiers' attention was totally focused on the stone monstrosity that advanced, its head scraping the top of the tunnel. Their gunfire intensified, bullets hitting with a pop and spray of stone. TwinSoul barely seemed to mind. He stepped in front of Marasi and moved his construct's hands in front of him, growing something out of them.

"Behold!" he said, his voice somehow booming through the tunnel. "By the grace of Silajana, Suna, Vishwadhar, and the Twelve Primal Aethers, I am Sanvith Prasanva Maahik va Sila, Grand Aetherbound of the twelve kingdoms, Raj of the Coriander Court. And these people are under *my* protection."

To punctuate his words, a colossal mace finished forming from roseite in his stone fingers—with a huge bulb at one end, like that of a tulip. He let it *thump* to the rock beneath him, shaking the ground.

Some soldiers continued to fire. Others up and ran. Chips blasted off the construct, but the holes filled in immediately. The jar of pure Investiture—still half full—had been overgrown by the roseite and was near the rear of the large stone figure, its glow illuminating TwinSoul from behind.

"Silajana demands that I warn you," he announced, "you have been given this rebirth to bless, encourage, and uplift those around you. By your actions here, you prove this gift wasted. If you are destroyed today by resisting my defense of these innocents, you reject your great blessing—and may not be given rebirth again for many, many centuries. Lay down your weapons and let us pass, or suffer my wrath."

He certainly had a way with words. Moonlight grabbed Marasi by the shoulder, gesturing for them to retreat past the building with the hiding civilians. For the moment however, Marasi remained rooted, amazed by the sight of TwinSoul's construct raising the mace.

"It appears," he announced, "that my offer has been rejected. In turn, your offer of conflict is accepted. Prepare yourselves!" With that, he charged down the corridor, each footstep making the ground tremble.

Marasi finally allowed Moonlight to pull her back. In the flimsy structure—over the cacophony of gunfire, screams, and the impact of stone on stone—they told the captives to arm themselves, then follow TwinSoul to the way out.

Then Marasi and Moonlight exited and hurried down the main corridor, finding a darkened side passage to slip through. Hopefully, this would let them avoid any reinforcements that might come up the main passage.

“Will he be able to get them out, do you think?” Marasi whispered as—using light from one of the two remaining jars—they made their way through the tunnel complex. Marasi spotted a sign pointing toward THE COMMUNITY.

“TwinSoul is the best chance they have,” Moonlight replied. “I think he can manage it. He has the pure Investiture—and as long as that holds, he’ll be nigh invincible. He can shrink and grow his juggernaut as he needs, to get through smaller corridors. If they try to cut the electricity, he can even push the elevator all the way to the top—or create a new one from roseite.”

More gunfire sounded from behind. Marasi hoped it was the civilians arming themselves and firing to protect their retreat. She was certain she heard more footfalls and shouts coming from the main tunnel.

Moonlight looked back and smiled. “Don’t worry,” she said. “He’ll be fine. And this is exactly what we need. Prasanva is an absolute *artist* at drawing attention when he sets his mind to it.”

“You willing to keep going forward?” Marasi asked.

“If there really is a perpendicularity here,” she said, “then … yes. As much as I want to get out with this information, protecting the planet must come first.” She hesitated. “I’m new to this large-scale sort of thinking. Spent a long time looking out for myself and my own goals. Sorry if I come off as terse or too quick to want to retreat.”

Marasi nodded, noting some light up ahead. She slipped forward quietly, and Moonlight covered up the jars in her rucksack. Together they approached another tunnel, lit with mining lights. The natural tunnel vanished to the right, but to the left the stone had a different cast to it. Marasi pointed at the jagged sections of rock on the ceiling and walls.

“They blasted here,” she whispered. “This is a section they opened up and expanded.”

Moonlight pointed to another sign. The Community, whatever it was, could be found this way. Marasi held out hope that Gave and the Set weren’t *quite* so zealous as to let Autonomy’s armies in. He’d sounded hesitant, at least. Smarmy as the man was, even he realized this was extreme. But he also had seemed worn down. As if he felt he couldn’t fight or resist.

As they snuck farther along the blasted-out tunnel, Marasi was pulled out of her thoughts. Were those sounds coming from the tunnel behind them? Something following them?

Moonlight seemed to hear the sounds too, because she turned and glanced that direction. They shared a look, then hurried forward, hoping to stay ahead of whatever it was.

# 52

As Wax and Wayne neared the end of the tunnel, Wax noticed his friend sniffling and trailing behind. In the light streaming through the holes in a passing manhole cover, Wax saw that Wayne had sudden bags under his eyes.

“This might not be the best time to store up health,” Wax whispered softly.

“I’m runnin’ low,” Wayne mumbled. “I feel like I’m gonna need every bit I can store. That, or I’ll die one of these times somebody shoots me. That’s right terrifying, it is. Don’t know how you all deal with it.” He paused. “If we get inna fight, I’ll stop. Just need to squeeze a little extra in during breathers, you know.”

Wax didn’t say anything. This was more a matter of comfort to Wayne than anything practical. Wayne wouldn’t be able to store up much in the time they had. It took a Feruchemist months storing health to get a full metalmind.

The tire tracks stopped at the end of the tunnel, where the giant concrete tube dumped out over the ocean. Wax was used to the relatively sheltered and calm waters of the Elendel docks—where the waves were so placid, you could be on a large lake. Here on the promontory that Bilming occupied, the waters chopped and churned, crashing against the docks. No wonder the Bilming navy was made up of such hulking metal monstrosities. He could see them in a row in the near distance, six terrible petrol-powered warships, each larger than the one before.

It was strange to think that, even combined, they posed an insignificant threat compared to the bomb Wax was hunting. All that work to create weapons of war, invalidated by a single discovery.

He gestured to a final hatch and ladder, which must lead to the lab. As soon as he and Wayne emerged onto a street by the docks, a door slammed nearby. Wax spun, scanning the warehouses.

“There,” Wayne said, pointing. “Third one down. Someone was watchin’ out the window too.”

The two glanced at each other, then took cover as gunfire exploded from the window. Conventional bullets and guns, his steelsight told him.

*No aluminum weapons,* Wax thought. *They sent those Allomancers to try to deal with us, but didn’t have time to otherwise prepare. We might finally be ahead of them.*

He increased his weight with his metalmind, then Pushed the next round of gunfire away—flinging the bullets back through the wooden walls and glass windows. Curses followed, giving him and Wayne a chance to scramble closer. Wayne nodded, so Wax increased his weight and hit the entire building with a Steelpush, anchoring himself from behind.

The wall shook, and a section was ripped free by its nails and a window housing. Wayne leaped in through the hole and dropped a few gunmen inside. Wax followed with Vindication raised, three precise shots bringing down the gunmen Wayne couldn’t reach. As they fought, a truck revved its engine and barreled out on the other side of the warehouse, tires screeching. Wax caught sight of two others ahead of it. A small convoy escaping into the evening.

A quick survey of the large room told him an entire story. Laboratory desks and machinery, stripped bare in a frenzy. Debris on the floor. Torn corners of paper still stapled to the wall where charts or schematics had been hastily ripped down. Dangling chains indicated that something had been constructed here, built in the center of those desks.

They hadn’t expected Wax to dare raid the Silver House or find the tunnel. He was only one step behind now.

Wax launched himself after the truck, decreasing his weight and flying through the large garage doors to track the truck as it screeched around another corner, nearly toppling in its haste.

Wayne would take care of the stragglers. Wax *needed* to know what was in those trucks.

He roared into the air in a rush, gaining height, and spotted the last of the three trucks heading back into the heart of the city. He'd spent the whole day running to catch up, to tease together plots that had been in motion for years. He was tired of half answers, of feeling like he was a hundred steps behind his sister.

Now he had solutions in sight. Those trucks held real answers, perhaps even the bomb itself. He'd be damned to an eternal pit of ash before he let them get away.

He Pushed off a manhole cover, gaining more height. From there, streetlamps—which were just starting to come on as the sun neared the horizon—became his anchors, like stepping stones across a lake. He Pushed on a pair at a time for lift and momentum, then began using buildings as enormous anchors. Then a moving car, to gain even more speed, borrowing its momentum.

Air became a whistle, then a roar around him—his mistcoat tassels whipping and snapping. His furious pace let him gain on the three trucks, even as they moved at speed on the highway. He had almost reached the last one in line when a slot opened in the back door and the barrels of several automatic rifles—aluminum—peeked out.

They'd saved the good weapons for themselves as they fled. A hail of aluminum bullets followed. Wax moved by instinct. His pursuit so far had been too direct, making him an easy target.

He dodged to the side as the bullets cracked in the air. He lurched away from the highway over cars full of startled civilians, then between two buildings to give him cover. There he ground to a stop, boots on asphalt, tassels falling still around him.

*This isn't right,* he thought. His path following the trucks had been obvious, but their path along the highway was more so. Could they be playing him yet again? He launched himself off a bullet, then gained speed by Pushing against the buildings to the sides, rattling windows—cracking a few as he warped their metal housings.

In Elendel, he had to hold himself back. Moderate his actions to minimize property damage. But Harmony had set Wax on this path, and you didn't bring Dawnshot out of retirement to play nice. The lives of millions were at stake.

He’d break a few windows to stop it. Hell, he’d break a few necks. He barreled up over cars, ignoring the cries of startled pedestrians as he moved parallel to the highway—trying to gain enough speed to catch up to the enemy truck, but keeping buildings between him and it. At the right moment he ducked back out, shattering windows, and darted across the highway—finding the third truck exactly where he’d hoped it would be.

It was in a pack of civilian vehicles, so Wax dodged behind cover again and followed, parallel, for another minute. He soared down that side street, feeling … alive. Propelled by steel, a bullet in flight. Perhaps he’d been without this for too long, and so had forgotten the rush, but he felt more in control than he ever had before.

*Have to stop that truck slowly,* he thought. *In case the bomb is inside.* He assumed the device couldn’t be detonated simply by being jostled—his experiment the other day had shown that the real explosion required specific mechanical intervention. But he had to be careful regardless.

At the next intersection, he glanced right and saw what he’d hoped to see: the truck, in its haste to stay ahead of him, had pulled away from the pack of civilian vehicles into a more open stretch of the highway.

Wax darted in, over the edge of the highway, and increased his weight tenfold. He slowed in the air as a result, and hit the side of the passing truck with a Steelpush, *grinding* it into the highway’s sidewall. It jostled more than he would have liked, but it did slow.

Wax changed trajectory, staying alongside the truck, forcing it into the sidewall until its tires burst and it stopped. He hit the ground near the broken rear door, sighting three unsteady gunmen within. He took them out, then drilled a bullet right through the front wall of the truck, hitting the driver in the back of the head. But other than those people, the truck was empty.

It *was* a decoy.

Damn it!

He launched back into the air, Pushing off the truck, bending and warping the crumpled roof as he sought height. Such a Push could only take him up so far—the farther you went from your anchor, the less force you could Push upon it.

He reached the zenith of what his anchor could provide and spun, scanning the city below, searching for …

*There.* The second truck was racing along the highway ahead. He almost darted straight for it. But …

*Three trucks. At least one decoy.* He spotted another far ahead, on the straightaway. This *was* too easy. They were so visible on a highway like this; they could keep his attention, draw him away from …

He hovered there, still Pushing, holding himself upright—though wind began to blow him to the side, upsetting his anchor. As he began to lose altitude …

… he spotted it. A fourth truck with the same markings, winding its way through the side streets perpendicular to the highway. It was heading inward, toward the center of the city. He barely glimpsed it as it moved behind some buildings.

*That* was the one he needed to catch. He left the others, hoping his instincts were right, and dropped into the city. He slowed with a Push on the top of a parked automobile, cracking the windshield with his weight, then warped the hood as he landed. He launched forward through the center of a park, scattering a flock of ravens, then bounded up the side of a building—barely reaching the top as his Push gave out.

There was an invigorating thrill to the motion. The city was so full of metal, so packed with obstacles. In a chase, each could be an advantage. Wax could soar over buildings, get height, track the vehicle—and gain on it, as the truck had to keep to the roads and deal with traffic.

Wax dropped over the side of a building, then propelled himself between two others with the force of a swimmer pushing off the wall at the start of a lap. He swept around corners and almost seemed to be able to ride the cries of the people below, like a bird riding thermals in the desert.

Chases in the Roughs had their own charm. But nothing there could truly compete with the thrill of landing *inside* a building via the balcony, charging through, and emerging on the other side to find his quarry right below. A balcony railing was a springboard, and nearby structures let him fine-tune his descent.

Here, he could fly in a way he'd never been able to in that land of dust and stone. He could acknowledge that—no, *embrace* it—now that he had let go of his past.

The people in the truck ahead pulled open another slot on the back door. Wax sighted with Vindication, but not toward the window. Toward the door itself.

He plugged it with a hazekiller round, one with a secondary explosion designed to rip apart Hemalurgist bodies. It blasted the door to shrapnel and split open the rear of the truck. As the gunmen stumbled away, Wax got a view inside. No bomb, but a ton of boxes, ledgers, and documents.

That would have to do. He let the truck pull ahead as the gunmen started laying down fire. Wax increased his weight and shoved on a grate below him in the street—bending and twisting it out of the way as he dropped through and entered the storm drain tunnels again.

He twisted in the air, delivered two bullets into the tunnel wall behind him, then Pushed off those—and the remnants of the grate that had plunged into the mud—to send himself screaming through the tunnel right under the street.

Wax came out a second later, blasting a manhole cover off into the air. He landed, one foot on either side of the open manhole, and increased his weight many hundreds of times—completely draining his metalmind. Then he Pushed.

His feet skidded a few inches on the concrete.

The truck crumpled as if it had hit a solid wall, the front mashing like tinfoil, doing unfortunate things to the driver. The back end of the truck lurched up into the air, then slammed down, trailing loose-leaf pages. One of the wheels rolled completely free, straight through the front window of a nearby building. A liquor store, Wax noticed with a wince. Wayne would *not* appreciate that.

The street fell quiet as other cars stopped, their drivers cowering in their seats or—more commonly—staring slack-jawed. Wax took a few deep breaths, his pulse racing, his body electric. His mind …

Focused on the job. He released another breath, and was surprised by how calm he felt. A part of him … a part of him had worried about returning to the field again. Worried that by experiencing these kinds of thrills, he'd view his normal life as mundane, lacking.

It didn't happen. He could go on a chase like that through the city anytime he wanted in Elendel, as long as he wasn't *quite* so flagrant about the property damage. He could even bring Max along, and have someone to share in the joy. He didn't need this, not as he once had.

What a wondrous thing that was to confirm. He took a deep breath, then rounded the truck.

# 53

Marasi and Moonlight were being hunted.

Something was back there, something that seemed not quite human. It made a sound like nails or claws on stone, accompanied by unnatural growls. Marasi hurried through the blasted-out tunnel, Moonlight at her side, trying to balance their speed. If they moved too quickly, they might run straight into a patrol. But if they slowed too much, then whatever was back there would catch up to them.

So they moved in fits, hurrying a distance they could see by the light of mining lamps, then pausing to scout out their next rush forward. This part of the tunnel complex was far more built up than the one they'd come from, with many more turns. But they were able to follow the signs, heading ever closer to the Community. They passed more drywall rooms, some clearly occupied, and they had to find improvised cover several times as groups of people hurried past.

These weren't soldiers though. Mostly workers or scientists. Judging by their whispered conversations, Entrone had ordered everyone to their quarters. There was a sense of frantic worry to the people—but also a single-minded anxiety. That helped, as they weren't paying much attention to their surroundings.

As Marasi and Moonlight hid from one of these groups beside some boxes, Marasi worried the thing chasing them would catch up. Yet it was creeping along, not rushing. Perhaps … perhaps it was hiding too?

Moonlight eventually whispered for Marasi to wait, then ducked into a room that—through the cracked door—seemed unoccupied. She emerged moments later with two lab coats, and they started moving through the corridor as though they belonged there. The disguises were flimsy, but no one gave them a second glance, despite Marasi's rifle.

Soon, a voice echoed through the tunnel. "Stay calm. Don't worry. I am in the Community making preparations for our new arrivals. I want all of you to settle in and wait. This is what we've planned for; we are ready."

It was Gave Entrone. His voice came from some speakers that lined the hallway—a technology that was becoming more common since its invention a few years back.

Hearing his voice finally undermined Marasi's hope that Gave would resist the invasion. This complex, the supplies … everything about it indicated the truth. This was a bunker, the launching point of an invasion—and a place for Entrone's favorites to be protected from the coming annihilation.

A haunting worry whispered this was only part of it. Marasi had to stop Entrone, but that wouldn't protect Elendel from the bomb Telsin had trained on it. For that, she had to trust that Wax and Wayne were fulfilling their half of the mission. Her duty was to deal with this oncoming army. The men of gold and red.

The tunnel eventually expanded to a large cavern. But curiously, the far wall was straight wood, from floor to ceiling. And it felt like that wall bisected the chamber—which, judging by the slope of the blasted-out ceiling, was extremely large. The wooden wall had several darkened rooms built up against it. Indeed, the entire chamber was silent and mostly dark, lit only by a few emergency lights.

Marasi and Moonlight stopped at the mouth of the cavern. Was this the Community? Why split the cavern like that? Whatever the reason, the order to quarters had been obeyed, and apparently any soldiers in the area had gone to deal with TwinSoul. That let Marasi and Moonlight enter the cavern alone.

Soon after, those sounds came from behind again. Taking Moonlight by the shoulder, Marasi pulled them between two buildings beside the large wall. From this scant shelter, she watched as something entered the mouth of the cavern. It stood on four elongated legs and had an unnervingly long neck, with a head that wasn't entirely canine. It had features that, even shadowed as they were, evoked an image that was … too human. A dog's nose, or something approximating it, but human eyes set forward on its skull.

It had no clothing, but also no fur. Two spikeheads jutted from its shoulders. She'd heard of something like this before—Wax had encountered something similar in the tunnels beneath Elendel. Now, after studying the book Death had given her, she recognized what it was. A Hemalurgic monstrosity.

One use of the art was to create Metalborn. But the Lord Ruler had also used Hemalurgy to create twisted versions of human beings. The kandra had arisen from that work, as had the koloss. Creating those had required precision use of spikes—the knowledge of a god. If you tried to approximate such designs, you were likely to kill your subject. Or stumble into some kind of half-creation. A twisted mutation, leaving a being's soul mangled by the spikes.

The Set, it seemed, had found a permutation that was viable but grotesque. The thing sniffed the air, then prowled carefully into the cavern. It knew they were there. It paused where Marasi and Moonlight had stopped to inspect their surroundings—a spot that was barely thirty yards from their current hiding place. The abomination made a hooting sound that echoed in the cavern, and other voices—dozens of them—replied.

Moonlight gripped Marasi's shoulder, then pointed. She'd made a door in the side of the structure they'd been hiding by, and they slipped into a dim room built up against the wooden wall bisecting the chamber. Two windows looked through it.

Marasi didn't have a good view through them, not from her corner next to Moonlight. The door vanished, and a few moments later scratches sounded at the wall they'd passed through. Silence followed, then a thumping at the main door. It held, for now.

Marasi unslung her rifle, glanced at Moonlight, then nodded toward the windows. Perhaps they could escape through those? She stepped over to look through, and found … a town?

Neat rows of houses lined streets within a vast chamber, bigger on that side than this one. It was lit from above with floodlights. Someone had painted imitation flowers and grass on the floor in wide swaths, and others had erected sculptures meant to imitate foliage. People in everyday clothing

—skirts, trousers, day dresses—walked the "streets," though there were no horses or automobiles she could see.

"What in Preservation's name?" Marasi whispered. "I suppose … this is the Community they built for themselves to escape the destruction above?"

She frowned. A short time ago, she might have theorized it was designed to withstand the second ashfall, but she was now mostly certain that was a hoax. The bomb and the invading army were the true threats.

Behind them, the thing stopped scratching at the door. She wasn't certain that was a good sign; it might have gone to get help.

"There's something off about this entire place," Moonlight said. She rapped on the window. "I think this is one-way glass. See the tinting? And those people in the next chamber? They don't appear to have heard the order to quarters or the fighting. They're too calm."

"We could still escape in there."

"Those twisted things will follow us," Moonlight said. "The strain the Set has developed can track like a hound, but think almost like a person."

"Can we fight them?" Marasi said, checking her ammo.

"I'm not … natively a soldier," Moonlight said. "I can defend myself if I have to, but…" She seemed concerned as she glanced toward the door.

Shouts came from outside. Troops arriving.

"You have another stamp," Marasi said. "One you said can transform you."

"Into someone else," she said. "Someone with a different past, different training, different … talents."

"Can *that* person fight?"

Moonlight took a deep breath. "Yes. Better than fighting though, she should be able to vanish. Hide. But the person I would become … she wouldn't be *me*. I've always wanted to try this specific transformation, Marasi, which is why I have the stamp. But it's dangerous.

"This one won't wear off as easily as the others—it will be permanent until I decide not to maintain it. And when I'm someone else, stamped like this, I don't think the same. One of these times, I'll change and never come back. Yet, with the jar of pure Investiture as a power source … I can try this. I can really try it."

Moonlight dug out the stamp, then stared at it with the same air Marasi had seen in Wax when cleaning one of his guns.

“You’re telling me,” Marasi said, “that transforming yourself into another person *isn’t* magic?”

Moonlight grimaced. “All right. I’ll admit those ones feel more mystical. It all makes sense if you understand the Dor…”

Marasi glanced through the window, then back at the front door. Shouts were converging outside. Rusts … it sounded like a lot of soldiers. Marasi raised her gun, then hesitated.

“Those monsters track through scent. What if you made me a door in this wall, and I jumped through? Next, you could distract them—make a big fight of it—then vanish, like you say. They might not know what happened to me; they might assume we both ran.”

“That’s a solid plan,” Moonlight said. She took a deep breath. “All right. I *have* wanted to try this. I intended to convince Kell to give me some of that Investiture so I could. Never thought I’d be using this in the field though. I can fight them in this form, but that would leave you alone.”

“I can’t just run, Moonlight,” Marasi said. “It’s my fault we drew those troops. Beyond that, the Basin is my home. I can’t leave it to Entrone and his plans.”

Moonlight nodded sharply. “Let’s do it. I should have an advantage, as they might come after me with batons and bayonets. Too much gunfire could disturb whatever they’re doing in that Community. You’ll notice the Set hasn’t done the smart thing here, which would be shooting up this entire room with prejudice.”

“Forward then,” Marasi said.

Moonlight dug something from her sack, a little device that she read some numbers from. “If I ask, give me the distance twenty-seven sixty-three, inclination twelve degrees. And show me this map.” She held out a notebook. “I don’t have time to explain why.” She popped the top off the jar of Investiture, then dipped her stamp into that light and used it on the wall—making the door for Marasi. “That should make it hold longer than usual.” Then she held the other stamp to her wrist. “I hoped to have Kelsier here to pull me out if things went wrong. You might have to reexplain to me why I need to fight those soldiers.”

“What do you mean?”

“I might not have all my memories,” Moonlight said. “This will *completely* rewrite my past. My soul will think my parents moved to a different kingdom on my homeworld, and that I was born and raised there. I will change personalities entirely. I wrote it all out, but … well, I'm never *quite* sure how an Essence Mark will function until I try."

"Wait," Marasi said. "You didn't mention *that* part of—"

Moonlight pressed the stamp down on her wrist.

Then began to transform.

# 54

Unlike TwinSoul—who had tapped the pure Investiture like a keg, drawing it forth slowly as he needed it—Moonlight took the entire jug in one metaphoric slurp, sticking her hand into it and drawing it in. Her hair shrank to a bob and became *luminous*. Incredibly, her skin managed to outshine it—glowing from within like her core was ablaze. But with a white fire somehow far more pure than any worldly flame.

Power swirled around Moonlight, and she even appeared to rise off the ground, though she was simply up on her tiptoes. She let out a long, satisfied sigh, then turned to Marasi. Glowing like some divinity of lore. A being of radiant energy. She smiled through too-perfect lips, blessed from within by her natural brilliance.

The glow started to fade almost immediately, but she knelt on the ground and began drawing with her finger. She consulted the map, and the notations on it that Marasi showed her. She nodded, and light flooded from her, leaving a traced image on the ground. It looked a little like the map—a quick sketch of the Basin, but with a strange rune at the center.

Once she finished, her light stabilized, then brightened. She sighed in satisfaction again and stood in the center of the circular drawing of light. Only then did she address Marasi.

“Ah!” she said, her voice slightly higher pitched than before. “A mortal! How are you, child?” She searched around the room without waiting for an answer. “I seem to be in an unexpected location.”

“You’re in Bilming,” Marasi said. “Underground.”

“Don’t recognize it.”

“The Elendel Basin?” Marasi said, and was rewarded with a blank stare. “You just drew a map of it on the ground.”

“Oh,” Moonlight said, looking at her feet. “So I did. How curious.” She clasped her hands behind her back, humming softly to herself. When she noticed Marasi gaping at her, she looked to one side, then the other. “Ah. Did you have a boon to request of me, child? Something I can do for you?”

“There are soldiers outside,” Marasi said, pointing as the door began to thump and crack. “Who want us dead.”

“Bother,” Moonlight said, then began moving her hands in the air, drawing a complex network of lines that hung and glowed there. She finished with a flourish, and the lines faded into the wall, which stopped cracking, despite the people pounding on it.

“Who are they?” Moonlight said. “Nasties from the Rose Empire? Or another group of Wyrn’s faithful, come to waste their time trying to fight their betters?”

“Uh,” Marasi said, “they’re just bad people. We had a plan to—”

“We?” Moonlight asked.

“You and I, before you changed.”

“I have always been Shay-I,” she said, gesturing. “Blessed of the Shay-ode.”

*Riiiight. Okay.*

“O blessed one,” Marasi said, trying something else, “your power is incredible, and your being divine. Please, will you grant me a boon?”

“Why, of course!” she said, perking up. “So polite! A rare quality in mortals.”

“I need to escape through that door,” Marasi said, pointing to the one in the rear wall, “which will soon vanish. I need the people outside to think I have left another way. With you. I understand you can vanish…?”

“Vanish? I’ll use Aon Tye-A,” Moonlight said. “But that is quite the blessing you ask. I’d need distance and inclination…”

“Oh,” Marasi said. “Twenty-seven sixty-three, inclination twelve degrees? But can you really vanish—”

“Fine, fine. But if you flee through that door, they’ll find only me in here. An imperfect solution, devised by someone with poor planning skills. Here.”

She tapped Marasi on the forehead, then drew some symbols in the air with one hand. A second later a *duplicate* of Marasi appeared, made with some of Moonlight's power. It started moving, though when Marasi tried to touch it, her fingers passed right through. That made it even more unnerving.

"Are you still here?" Moonlight said. "Scoot along, scoot along. Shay-I has it all in hand, child. I'll deal with these, then make a great show of vanishing. Be certain to deliver the proper offerings for the blessing I've magnanimously gifted you, and be pious in your treatment of your gods."

"Yup," Marasi said. "Pious. I'll be pious." She stepped toward the door, then paused, noticing the last jar of light in the rucksack. She took the bag—which seemed to have some other useful equipment in it too—but handed Moonlight the burned notebook and leather folio of stamps.

"You'll want these later, great one," Marasi said. "They're very important. Please take them and keep them safe."

"Fine, fine," she said, then shooed Marasi away with one hand, waving toward the breaking lines on the wall—which was being pounded in force now—with the other. "Hurry. They are almost through."

Marasi threw the rucksack over her shoulder and—with regret—left her rifle. She needed to be inconspicuous, so the pistol she stashed in the rucksack would have to do. She also left the lab coat, counting on her clothing—still that of a common delivery driver, intended to blend in with the workers for the Set—to conceal her.

She then pushed through the door. As she closed it, she glimpsed Moonlight standing beside the Marasi doppelganger, drawing lines of light in the air with both hands as the far wall buckled and began to break.

Marasi ducked away from the windows—which were indeed one-way glass, disguised on this side as part of a large checkerboard pattern. She threw the rucksack over her shoulder and slipped into the peaceful neighborhood, hoping that this strange version of Moonlight would stick to the plan.

# 55

In the back of the truck, Wax found a mess of papers and equipment. And three corpses.

Feeling a grim sense of purpose, Wax climbed in and checked each of the corpses—just in case they were feigning. He stopped before the final one. She was bloodied but breathing, and when her eyes slipped open there was a faint red glow to them.

“Ah,” she said in a rasping voice. “You *are* good at this. We thought we had taken enough precautions. Yet here you are. Breathing down our neck. Such drive. Such *individualism.* A shame that Harmony got you first.”

Wax backed away, leveling the gun at her.

“This body soon expires,” the creature said. “You need not concern yourself.”

“What are you?”

“You know what I am,” she whispered.

“Trell.”

“Your sister becomes Trell,” the thing whispered. “The name and mythology I prepared for her to adopt. But she has not achieved it yet. And I am not Trell. Rare is it that I speak to one directly as I do you.”

“Autonomy,” he whispered.

“Yes. Pierced by my metal. Soul open to my touch…”

Wax drew back farther, uncertain what to think.

The woman smiled, blood on her lips. “You have nothing to fear from me. I will not intervene against you and your efforts. Your sister does not understand this, Sword of Harmony. She pleads with me to act, but cannot see: It is only in the struggle to survive that a person—a people—achieves their potential.”

“This city,” he said. “Everything in it. This is your fault.”

“It is the fault of those who strive for more,” Autonomy said. “And to their credit in the accomplishment. Though, I do not think your sister understands the nature of true Autonomy yet. Her attempts have a … fabricated, forced uniqueness to them. Not the raw wounds of true individualism.

“She will learn. The longer she holds the power, the longer she becomes an avatar of my nature, the more she will see and understand. If she survives. You should be proud of her. Though she flirts with her own destruction, her efforts have kept this world alive. I would have attacked it years ago otherwise.”

Wax frowned, stepping closer. “Where is the bomb?”

“Aaah. It is not the bomb you should worry about. It is the destruction I have sent if that bomb fails.”

“I think you’re bluffing,” Wax said.

“Think what you wish. But you yourself know the strength—the capacity—one has in those moments before death. It is when the soul is pushed to the limit that true exceptionalism manifests. And so, there must be a consequence—as final and terrible as death—for failure.”

“And what must we do,” Wax said, “to get you to leave us the hell alone?”

Autonomy’s bloody lips smiled. “Prove you deserve it.” She closed her eyes. And the body stopped breathing.

Rusts. Could he believe a word of what Autonomy had said? Could he risk ignoring it? Either way, it left him more rattled than the chase had.

He quickly began digging through the papers in the back of the truck anyway. He found much of it chopped to shreds, then soaked in buckets of water. They’d been trying to prevent him from getting the information.

Fortunately, he found a notebook that was only halfway soaked and began flipping through, reading records of test launches. Rusts … these “self-propelled rockets” could travel thirty or forty miles. How had they launched them without anyone knowing?

*The ships*, Wax realized. *That’s why they built the navy—so they could test weapons out on the ocean.* The notes confirmed it. He checked the dates of the latest test.

They matched the dates of Gave's "vacation." They'd sailed out into the ocean to run tests. But the rockets had failed, or at least they hadn't performed to desired levels. They couldn't quite reach Elendel—though the notebook was full of ideas to get them to go the little farther they needed.

He put together everything of use he could find, then shoved it in a duffel bag he found near the corner. He had so little time to make sense of this, but surely somewhere in all this mess was a hint of where to find the bomb.

He slung the duffel over his shoulder and stepped out of the truck. People had begun gathering, including the poor shop owner who ran the liquor store. The man stood outside, mourning his shattered window.

Though Wax should have been on his way, he hesitated, then walked over and pressed some cash into the man's hand. "Sorry," he said. "Trying to prevent a catastrophe."

The man gaped at the money, but before he could reply, Wax spotted something just inside the broken window.

"Hey," he said. "Is that a case of *Logshine*?"

* * *

A short time later, Wax touched down at the laboratory where he'd left Wayne. As he'd hoped, the younger man had dealt with the enemies, even tying a few up. Now Wayne had settled down with a handkerchief that had someone else's initials on it and was wiping his nose. He looked miserable.

Wax had never been forced to store health, so he could only imagine how it felt—particularly in the middle of a job. And now that the thrill of the chase was over, Wax was tired. Rusts, he shouldn't join investigations without any sleep. He wasn't twenty anymore.

He walked over to Wayne, who blinked up at him. Then Wax raised two bottles of Logshine, a beer brewed in the Roughs—best there was.

"Rusts, Wax," Wayne said. "Where did you find *those*?"

"Amazing what comes up in the line of duty," he said, handing one to Wayne.

"I ain't had a bottle of Logshine in years." The man actually teared up. "You … Rusts, mate. You really do care about me, don't you?"

“I think it’s time,” he said to Wayne, “that we take a bit of a breather.”

“Can we afford to?”

“I need to dig through what I found,” Wax said. “And if we keep running into fights exhausted, we’ll get ourselves killed. I think we can spare a half hour or so. Sound good?”

“Good?” Wayne said. “It sounds *rusting amazing.*”

# 56

Sneaking through this strange cavern unseen proved impossible for Marasi. The floodlights on the ceiling left little in the way of shadows, and the homes were built around a central park—including fake grass made of some wood chips painted green. Nothing would be more conspicuous than someone being furtive.

So, feeling utterly exposed and half expecting to hear gunshots, she walked down one of the picturesque rows of townhouses. Trying to pretend she belonged. After the urgency of rushing from one fight to another, it felt surreal.

No one in this cavern appeared to have any idea of the battles beyond it. She passed couples walking hand in hand. A man worked on a play structure in the yard of a home, his children eager for the swings to get connected. A man in a white uniform strode past, delivering jars of food to each home, humming to himself.

It was bizarre. It was all too peaceful, too normal … and there was no metal. The windows had wooden frames. The buildings were made of brick or clay, no need for nails. The street had no lights or lanterns.

It was glaring once she noticed it. In fact, the only metal she was able to spot was in those floodlights high in the ceiling above. That made her even more aware of the rucksack she carried. Aside from the glowing jar, Marasi had some ammunition in it, and a few small explosive charges, along with bandages, cash, and some lockpicks and other tools. Moonlight was the type of woman who liked to be prepared.

Marasi pulled the sack tighter against her shoulder. Unfortunately, she was drawing attention. People turned to watch her as she passed.

Conversations between promenading couples died. Eyes lingered on her, as if she were the one person on inspection day who'd neglected to wear a uniform.

Perhaps best to hurry through this strange neighborhood and see if there was some way out the other side. Yet would that actually help? Her intel said there was a way to the portal through the Community. She needed to find it.

*The lord mayor mentioned going to the Community,* Marasi thought. *He could be in here somewhere. Maybe he would lead me to it?*

As two women on the road passed by quickly, wearing day dresses and moving at a brisk pace, they shot several furtive glances at Marasi. That posture … Marasi's instincts said they were going to tell someone about her.

Those same instincts told her to go the other direction. But … she needed to find the people in charge. She almost asked Wayne what he thought, then felt like a fool. Over the years, she'd grown to rely on him. Not having him at her back … well, it felt wrong.

After a split second of consideration, she broke into a trot to follow those two women. They hurried into a two-story townhome with wooden trestles along the wall outside, being climbed by painted ropes to imitate vines.

Marasi peered in through the door and found the women clustered around not soldiers or officers, but a stately, middle-aged blonde woman. She wore a fine grey-blue dress: short overcoat, long skirts with a slight bustle. It was a style that had been popular a decade ago. The stately woman met Marasi's eyes, then hurried over and took her by the arm.

Marasi's instinct was to dodge away, but it wasn't a threatening move.

"Hurry, hurry," the woman said to Marasi. "Inside. You've already been seen by too many, dear. Drenya, close the drapes!"

Befuddled, Marasi let the woman pull her into the well-furnished room as Drenya closed the drapes. The third woman lit an oil lamp on the table. It felt … quaint to see it after years of electricity inexorably creeping into every home and light sconce.

"Fialia," the stately woman said, "fetch the others. Kessi will want to meet her, obviously. And Abrem. He has been keeping notes. Hurry, hurry!" She then patted Marasi on the arm absently. "How are you, dear? Hungry?

Thirsty? You must have had such a difficult time of it. You’re a survivor. Good for you.”

Drenya peeked out through the now-closed drapes, watching. She was a mousy younger woman in a dress that could have used some more color. “I don’t think Gord saw her, bless the Survivor.”

“Word will get to him eventually,” Fialia said, pausing by the door. “He’ll go straight to the mayor.”

“I’ll deal with Lord Entrone,” said the blonde woman, who settled Marasi in a seat. “Go!”

Fialia left and Marasi let herself be seated, trying to understand. They didn’t want the mayor to find out about her, so were these dissenters within the Set? But their clothing, these homes, this place …

And this woman. The stately blonde patted Marasi’s hand, then vanished into another room. Perhaps a kitchen? Marasi almost bolted. Perhaps they were trying to distract her from stopping Mayor Entrone? But then the blonde woman returned with some biscuits and tea.

Marasi gaped, flummoxed by the idea of a tea break in the middle of a dangerous incursion into enemy territory.

“Look at the poor thing,” said Drenya from the drapes. “It’s probably been *years* since she saw real food.”

“It’s all right,” the blonde woman said, offering the biscuits. “Don’t be afraid. We have plenty here—like in the old days. You remember?”

“The … old days?” Marasi said.

“Yes, before the disaster,” the blonde woman said. “Before the ashfalls. We are safe down here.”

“It was built to keep us protected,” the other woman said, stepping up. “You must be so strong to have survived up there, to have found your way here.”

Up there.

Oh, rusts. It finally came together for Marasi. All this time she’d assumed the pictures of ash falling, the strange moving image made with the models above, was a part of a plot to threaten the outside world. But no. The hoax hadn’t been planned to be used in the future; it had already been perpetrated. On these people.

Rusts. They thought the world had been destroyed. And that they had been protected from it.

“How long,” Marasi whispered, “have you been down here?”

“Seven years now,” the blonde woman said, patting her hand. “Though we lived in much smaller caverns originally. This town—‘Wayfarer,’ as we call it—is about five years old.”

“It was terribly difficult to build,” the other woman added. “But it’s *so* much nicer. Makes you think of the old days, doesn’t it? With a sky and sunlight? Trees and plants?”

Marasi numbly took a biscuit and bit into it, partly to keep the blonde woman from forcing them on her. It was good, Marasi noticed absently as her mind raced. These people … they’d been tricked into believing the world was ending. Forced to live in a bunker underground. But why? Surely the Set had plenty of willing participants in their schemes; why keep some of them so ignorant? And how did this relate to the impending army or the bomb?

A few other people soon piled in, along with Fialia. Three women and one man, a stocky fellow with a belt full of stone tools.

“No metal,” Marasi mumbled.

“Well, naturally,” the blonde woman said. “The metal mutants can sense it. The only metal we dare use is a little aluminum to make lights and the speakers for the public address system.”

The four others huddled, gaping at Marasi. Did she really look *that* much like she’d survived an apocalypse? She supposed her outfit was a little worse for wear, after multiple gunfights and struggles for her life. Plus the rucksack, and having no chance to wash up …

Well, maybe she did.

“You poor people,” Marasi whispered.

“She’s in shock,” said mousy Drenya.

“Can you tell us what it’s like up there?” the man with the toolbelt said, stepping forward, a cloth cap in his fingers. “Are the ashfalls still strong? It’s been a year since we saw an outsider.”

“There have been others?” Marasi asked, confused.

“Once in a while someone from above finds their way through the tunnels, and our protections, to the town,” the blonde woman said, patting her hands. “I keep telling the mayor that we don’t *need* those protections—that we can take in far more people than we have now. But Gave Entrone is a stubborn man. He insists that outsiders are too dangerous.”

“Gave,” Marasi said. “Your … mayor?”

“Yes, he’s from the other caverns originally,” the blonde woman said. “Ones underneath Elendel. There are several complexes, and occasionally people from that one move here.”

“Entrone is a tyrant,” the man with the tools said. “He won’t let us help the world above. Won’t let us search for survivors. Won’t even let us explore the caverns. And when people like you come—”

The blonde woman shot him a glare.

“It’s all right,” Marasi said. “I need to know. Please, there are secrets here you don’t understand.”

“Well,” the blonde woman said, “when outsiders like you arrive … they get shipped off to one of the other caverns. We never get to talk for long.”

“And they … tell you about the world above?” Marasi guessed, connecting the clues.

“A world of ashes,” one of the other women said. “A destroyed land full of terrible metal mutants.”

“I saw one once,” the man said. “A terrible, twisted thing. Poor soul. It broke in here, and the lord mayor’s security force killed it.”

*A Hemalurgic abomination*, Marasi guessed, *let loose in here on purpose to keep these people frightened.*

“Newcomers,” the woman said, “can’t help sharing how terrible things are—then get taken away. We think the lord mayor doesn’t want them frightening us.”

“Quite the contrary…” Marasi said. “They’re actors. Brought in to prove his lies.”

Marasi looked around the room, meeting their concerned eyes. They were worried for her. They had no idea.

The blonde woman patted Marasi’s hand yet again. “We keep hoping that we’ll get word that people we knew … had survived…”

“I had three daughters,” said the man with the tools. “In Bilming? It’s been corroding me ever since I was saved, not knowing what happened to them. Please, miss. Do you have news of any pockets of survivors up above? The last refugee who came down here, he said the entire city was a wasteland, completely destroyed. But … *some* people must have lived…”

Marasi frowned. “Wait. You were *saved*? How did you end up here?”

The blonde woman forced another biscuit on her, and shared a glance with the others. “It was a random lottery,” she finally said. “The scientists who discovered the impending eruptions realized they could save only a few. So they made an impossible decision, randomly selecting people.”

“It wasn’t *completely* random,” one of the women said. “It was weighted toward women of childbearing age, for obvious reasons. And an emphasis on Allomancers or those from the lines of Allomancers. Again for obvious reasons.”

“We couldn’t bring our families,” the man said, looking down. “We argued for it, once we woke here. Oh, how we tried to get the managers to see reason. But … eventually … we felt the earth shake, and we knew…”

“Then the lord mayor arrived,” the blonde woman said, “and instituted stricter protocols.”

“Tyrant,” the man muttered.

“We still feel it shaking now and then,” one of the women said, looking up. “From the explosions of the Ashmounts. It must be deafening out there. We are occasionally allowed up to glimpse your world, but not often. Too dangerous. Still, I’ve seen how it is out there. The distant rubbled city, the red sun, the suffocating ash. Like a funeral shroud…”

“How do you see these things?” Marasi asked.

“An observation room,” the woman explained. “There’s a ladder to it at the edge of the cavern.”

That wouldn’t lead to the room Marasi had seen with the projector—they were too far from there. She suspected that entire room was a test chamber, and that these people were somehow shown something more authentic-seeming, without such an obvious light and projector.

Regardless, she was now certain that was what the ruse was for. Along with actors sent to reinforce the illusion—who were then taken away “to another cavern,” so that they couldn’t slip up and reveal the truth. As long as none of the actual subjects of the experiment were allowed to leave, no one would ever know.

But why? So much work, for what?

Except … Allomancers.

“Some of you are Allomancers?” Marasi said.

“Yes,” the blonde woman said. “I’m a Rioter, though not even my family knew about my powers. Fialia is a Lurcher. Kessi a Soother.”

“I had two Allomancer parents,” the man said, “but I never got any powers myself. The others are similar.”

That was the final piece. Marasi knew what was happening. And as she put it together, another revelation struck her. She *did* know the blonde woman. There was a reason she was familiar.

She was Marasi’s distant cousin Armal Harms: a woman who had been kidnapped by Miles Hundredlives and the Vanishers seven years ago, during Wax’s first case in the city after his return.

# 57

Marasi should have left right then. There was little she could learn from the people caught in the Set's experiment. Yet the implications weighed her down. So she sat in that plush seat with a biscuit, feeling overwhelmed, surrounded by people who'd been lied to for years.

Wax had been the first to notice that the kidnapped people had a history of Allomancy in their families. They'd thought them all women at first, though a few other mysterious kidnappings during the same time period had proven to be men.

Marasi and Wax had searched for these people for years, on and off. They'd worried that the Set had done terrible things to them, but had never imagined anything like this. Locking them all up in a bunker? Convincing them that the world had ended?

One of the Set's primary long-term goals was to gain access to Allomantic powers, and the fact that the Set had so much access to spikes indicated that some of those who had been kidnapped had met with gruesome ends. But this group, and the fact that only the most important Set members had spikes so far, whispered of a much longer-term plan. Down here, they'd have a literal breeding ground for children likely to be Metalborn—excellent for recruitment, or for creating spikes. It turned her stomach in knots, particularly when she thought to look at the women in the room and noticed that two might be pregnant.

That playground the man had been building earlier suddenly took on a darker cast. Yet … these people didn't seem terrified their children would be taken. There was a hope, and a good one, that Marasi had found them in time. Not to prevent all the trauma, unfortunately—these people had been stolen from their families and lives and locked down here—but at least the Set hadn’t started turning them into spikes yet.

*The lord mayor called the Community “Edwarn’s project,”* she thought. This whole thing had been the scheme of Wax’s uncle, a long-term solution to providing Allomantic powers to the Set. She suspected that upon his death, much of this infrastructure had been co-opted, with Telsin taking command and Autonomy breathing down their necks. A cavern that had been designed as an Allomantic eugenics experiment had now expanded to become a bunker housing the lord mayor’s loyalists. Further experiments with spikes were leading to different innovations.

But this old experiment remained, and the people trapped in it. Marasi had stumbled upon the solution to one of her most troubling unsolved mysteries. She could rescue these people. Assuming she could save the world itself first.

“I know you,” Marasi said to the blonde woman. “You’re Armal Harms, aren’t you?”

“Well, I was a Harms,” the woman said. “Before marrying down here. Did I … know you?”

“I’ve only seen pictures,” Marasi said. “I’m Marasi Colms. Steris’s … cousin.” It was the lie they’d always used, before her father had been willing to publicly admit to his infidelity.

“Steris?” Armal asked, perking up. “Is she … I mean…?”

“She’s alive,” Marasi said. “Armal … they all are. You’ve been lied to in a terrible way. I don’t know how to be more delicate about this. There was no ashfall. The Basin didn’t fall. It’s a hoax.” She grimaced. “You were all kidnapped by some horrible people.”

Those in the room looked at one another.

“Ash sickness,” one of the other women said.

The mousy woman nodded, then patted Marasi on the shoulder. “You’re disoriented, seeing delusions, dear.”

Marasi sighed. Of course the Set would have come up with an excuse like that—they’d want a fallback explanation in case someone snuck through the defenses.

“I can’t prove it to you now,” Marasi said. “Though I will find a way. Please, consider my words. They will soften the blow when you have to confront the truth. I’m a senior officer in the Elendel Constabulary.” She pulled out her credentials. “For years I’ve been trying to trace you: people kidnapped by a mysterious organization called the Set. They have other plans in motion—even more dangerous ones—which is why I can’t stay. But the truth is, Armal, that you were taken because they wanted Allomancers. And they are willing to play the long game to get them.”

Armal glanced upward—as small feet thumped on the upper floor, and the laughter of children drifted down.

“You *have* to agree it is odd,” Marasi said, “that you were kidnapped by a group of armed men during a robbery.”

“They had to act that way,” Armal said. “To hide what they were doing. To avoid a mass panic.”

“Posing as a group of thieves?” Marasi asked.

“It worked in the Words of Founding,” she replied. “The Survivor himself pretended to be a thief.”

Marasi didn’t have time to continue this argument. “I need to locate Gave Entrone,” she said. “Do you know where I could find him?”

At that very moment, as if decreed by Harmony, a voice blasted from a set of speakers outside. Echoing in the vast cavern through the public address system.

It was Gave Entrone, the lord mayor.

“Be warned, people of Wayfarer,” he said in a tinny broadcast voice. “A dangerous outsider has been spotted slipping through the outer tunnels, possibly coming in this direction. She is likely armed, and known to be very, *very* ash-sick.

“Treat her as extremely dangerous and report sightings of her to your neighborhood tranquility officer immediately. Do not approach her. Do not engage with her. She has killed already, and will kill again if given the chance.”

The group of people all looked upward, and Marasi tensed. How far would their congeniality extend now?

“Hell,” Armal said. “We have to hide her.”

“Others saw her entering,” the man with the tools said.

“We’ll rough up the room,” Armal said, “and claim she threatened us and ran out.” She looked to Marasi. “You’re confused and ash-sick. But … do you remember how to get out of here? The path through the caverns?”

“Forget that,” said the mousy woman, suddenly fierce. “Do you have weapons? Anything we could use to overthrow Entrone?”

“We’re *not* going to overthrow him!” Armal said. “All we need to do is follow our plan: sneak up to the surface, find survivors, and bring them here. Prove to everyone that we can do something to help. That will shift the lord mayor to our line of thinking.”

That was a noble philosophy. And also completely hopeless. Marasi did *not* have time to try to persuade them further. “Where is Entrone?” she said, standing.

“He has a new mansion at the edge of town,” Armal said. “Large, with the broadcast station in it. It’s dangerous there because he needs metals to work the devices—if mutants ever invade, they’ll go for him first.”

“How very brave of him,” Marasi said, hurrying to the window—the others moved aside for her. “No doubt he has a nice tunnel to the surface too. You know the flat outer walls? Those have one-way glass. They watch you through it.”

“Ash sickness,” one of the women hissed.

“Is there…” Marasi said, trying to figure out how to phrase it, “some kind of portal around here? Rusts. I don’t even know what it would look like. A large construction of some sort, maybe? Or an area that is specifically off-limits?”

They just stared at her, confused. *Should have expected that,* Marasi thought. Of course they wouldn’t know. They were captives, not confidants.

But something about that puzzled her. If Entrone was creating a portal for Autonomy’s army, why would he do it *here,* near these people? Why not do it in a more isolated portion of the cavern complex, away from his test subjects? Yet he’d specifically said he was coming *here* to open the portal.

She glanced to Armal—who was holding Marasi’s credentials, a frown on her face. “Why would you go to the trouble,” she said, “of carrying fake credentials? Going all the way to create a fake stamp, for this year’s date…?”

“She must be far gone,” one of the others said.

Armal met Marasi’s gaze, her frown deepening.

“It’s because I’m telling you the truth,” Marasi said. “Now I need to get to Entrone and stop him.”

Armal shook her head. “Marasi, we can help each other. Don’t do anything rash. We don’t like the lord mayor, but we don’t want violence. There has been too much death already. If we hide you, we can talk, plan.”

“No time for planning,” Marasi said, hurrying back across the room and seizing her rucksack. “Go ahead and rough up this room. Tell them I’m extremely dangerous—tell them at length. Maybe it will delay them a little.” She fished a pistol out of her rucksack—making them gawk at her. All but Armal, who took it in with a disappointed expression.

“Look,” Marasi said to them, “things are about to get *very* dangerous and *very* confusing in here. My friends have dealt with a large number of their soldiers, so there’s a chance I can handle Entrone alone. But if I don’t come back, you *need* to overthrow him. Millions of lives might depend on it.”

“We can’t do that,” Armal said. “Even if we wanted to, we don’t have weapons.”

“You *are* weapons,” Marasi said. “If we can just get you…”

*Metals.* That was why there weren’t any down here. The Set had imprisoned a large group of people who either had extraordinary abilities, or were likely to give birth to people with them. Telsin and the others knew that unless they were careful, they’d be overpowered by their own captives. Hence the lack of metals and the story of “mutants” who could sense it.

How did you keep a bunch of dangerous people captive? You convinced them that they weren’t actually captives.

Marasi turned and met Armal’s eyes. “Which way to the lord mayor’s home?”

“I…”

Marasi held her gaze until Armal glanced back down—at Marasi’s credentials—and then looked to the side.

“You know, don’t you,” Marasi said. “That what I’m saying is true? Or at least you suspect. You’ve always known something was wrong.”

“I have a family,” Armal said. “Children and a husband I love.”

“And if Entrone wins,” Marasi said, “they are doomed to a life in darkness. Armal, he is planning to take your children from you. You need to find yourselves some metals and fight back with everything you have.”

“Find metals,” one of the women said, with a sniff. “What do you want us to do? Lick rocks, hoping there’s some iron in them?”

"I don't know if I believe you or not," Armal said. "And I'm … I'm not going to fight, even if I had the weapons. Maybe I can take you to where Entrone lives. But that's all."

*Idiot people*, Marasi thought, grinding her teeth. Then she felt foolish. They weren't idiots because they were scared. They had been abused, lied to, locked away without the sun.

She shouldn't be berating them. Indeed, in her shame at having done so, she felt an odd moment of clarity. These people, and those like them, were the reason she did what she did. Her reason for being a constable. It was her job to rescue them.

"Just take me to Entrone," Marasi said. "I'll find a way to handle him." She lifted the rucksack to her shoulder.

Then froze as she heard it clink.

# 58

Wayne watched as Wax held the bottles over his head, then Pushed the caps off with a quick flip of Allomancy. Handy, that. When God had been designin' Allomancy, had he considered that Coinshots would make good bottle openers?

Wax held one out to Wayne, who wiped his runny nose on his handkerchief, then took the bottle. He sighed, his head pounding, his body aching. Damn, he hated storing health. Made you feel like the stuff a fellow found between his toes after wearin' his shoes too long.

He lounged back against the support running alongside the front of the billboard. They'd flown up here, naturally, because Coinshots liked being in the sky. Plus, Wax liked bein' blatant. And what was more blatant than havin' a beer in front of the city's stupid propaganda poster?

The thing had a ledge in the front, so sitting was comfortable enough. This was presumably for the workers to erect the image: a nauseating picture of a fellow looking toward the sky, with lines of light spreading out behind him. INDEPENDENCE THROUGH SHARED STRUGGLE, it said. Wayne could have eaten the beer bottle wrapper and dumped a load the next day that made more sense than that.

The offending billboard was up high, pointed inward across the main highway. Toward the city's central spire, Independence Tower, nicknamed the Shaw. After old Kredik Shaw.

Wax held his bottle out, and Wayne reached forward to clink the necks together. Then Wayne tipped his head back and drank, welcoming the strong taste. Hoppy, bitter. Like a good beer should be. Out in the Roughs they knew that. Why clean it all up, make it taste like somethin’ other than it was? City beers … they were for people that didn’t actually like beer.

The suds felt good on his throat, which turned all scratchy when he stored health. Like he was perpetually sick all the time, every day—but normally didn’t notice it because his body was good at covering it up. Only the moment he started storing health, the sickness got the upper hand.

Wax took a long pull on his own beer and relaxed into the taste, his eyes distant. Content.

“Remember that time,” Wayne said, “when you went to take the tops offa the bottles, but I’d smacked the beers on the table first, so they squirted out all over your head?”

“Which time?” Wax said.

“Heh,” Wayne said. “That joke never gets old.”

“Because it was ancient the first time you tried it.”

Wayne grinned. “I was thinkin’ of the first time, after you caught Icy Ben Oldson. You know, when Blinker was your deputy?”

“I remember.”

“Can’t believe you worked with that guy,” Wayne said, taking another drink. “He couldn’t shoot worth a bean.”

“He had other skills,” Wax said. “You can’t shoot worth a bean either, it should be noted.”

That was true. But honestly, Wax had terrible taste in deputies.

“I do remember that first time you got me by shaking the bottles,” Wax said, sipping his beer. “I remember it well. It was the first time you really seemed to smile.”

“Yeah, well,” Wayne said, “I’m good at pretendin’ to be things I ain’t, you know? I eventually put together how to feign bein’ a person who was worth somethin’. It’s a good lie. Still manage to believe it.” He took a drink. “Mosta the time.”

“Wayne…”

“I don’t need a speech, Wax.” Wayne rested his head back against the metal support, closing his eyes. “I’ll be fine. Just gotta put on the hat…”

“You’ve been feeling worse lately, haven’t you?” Wax asked. Annoying, perceptive fellow. “This isn’t only about MeLaan.”

Wayne shrugged, his eyes still closed.

“Out with it,” Wax said. “I gave you a beer. You owe me an answer—those are the rules.”

Ruin that man. He knew the rules.

“I’ve just been thinkin’,” Wayne said softly. “Rememberin’ my family, and how ashamed my ma would be of me for turnin’ out to be a murderer. I’ve been workin’ all these years to pay it off, but I don’t feel no better. So I guess I’m beginnin’ to wonder: Maybe I can’t *ever* do enough good to balance the bad I done. Maybe I’ll always be worthless.”

“You can’t pay it off, Wayne,” Wax whispered. “That much is true.”

Wayne opened his eyes.

“Durkel, that man you killed,” Wax said, “he’s always going to be dead. Nothing you can do will change that. No number of good deeds will bring him back or earn you forgiveness.”

Wayne looked away, feeling sick—and not just because he was storin’ up health. “I know I said I didn’t need a speech, Wax. But I don’t know that you need to rub it in, neither.”

“Fortunately,” Wax said, “you don’t need forgiveness, Wayne.”

“Now that’s nonsense.”

“No it’s not.” Wax leaned forward, pointing with his bottle. “Wayne, would you do it again, if you had the chance? Rob a man for his pocket change? Shoot him when things get heated?”

“What? Of course not!”

“So,” Wax said, leaning back, “you don’t need forgiveness. Because *you* aren’t the man who killed Durkel. Not anymore. The man who did that, well, he’s dead. Buried beneath six feet of the clay and rock that passes for soil in the Roughs. You haven’t been him for years.”

“I don’t think it works that way,” Wayne said.

“Why not?” Wax replied, taking another pull on his beer. “What’s any of this for, if people can’t change? If there’s no chance for you, Wayne, there’s no chance for anyone. We might as well shoot a man the first time he does anything wrong, because hey … he’ll never change, so who cares?”

“That’s not fair.”

“You’re not fair,” Wax said, “to yourself. I’ve watched you, Wayne. You didn’t become my deputy because you wanted redemption. You don’t keep fighting alongside me because you need to be forgiven. You do it because of the man you've become. You do it because you want to make the world better."

"Maybe you're wrong," Wayne said. "You don't know what's in my brain, Wax. Maybe I *am* corrupt, through and through. You know how I am when I get in a brawl. Maybe I'm doin' all this to get a chance to fight and kill folks. Because I *like* it."

"Nope," Wax said. He finished off his beer, then held the bottle out, dangling between two fingers. "I don't buy it, Wayne. I know you. And I *respect* you. Admire you. There are times I wish I could be as good a man as you are."

Wayne sat up, squinting at him. "Wait. You're serious?"

"Damn right."

"Mate, I burned down a building today. And not one what you're supposed to burn down, like a school. A big important building."

"Yeah, and what did you do with that fire?" Wax asked. "Did you light it and run?"

Wayne shrugged.

"No, you got everyone out," Wax said. "You specifically led a group of people knocking on doors to make sure everyone escaped. You lit the fire because you needed to, but then you made sure that…" He hesitated, double-checked his bottle was empty, then looked at Wayne with a frown. "Wayne. Schools aren't *meant* to be burned down. Just because we did it once doesn't mean it's all right."

"No, see," Wayne said, finishing off his own beer, "I figured it out. Schools *is* meant to be burned down. Imagine you was a kid, and you woke up and found the school was plumb gone? Well damn, that'd be the best rusting day ever!"

Wax sighed.

"I figure," Wayne continued, "that's why the city keeps building more schools. Have you seen how many there are these days? The government is saving them up, in case they need to make some kids happy. Then they'll burn 'em down."

Wax eyed him. So Wayne smiled and winked, letting him know that this might have been an exaggerated-story-type thing.

Wax leaned back. "I can't tell with you sometimes…"

“That’s the problem though, ain’t it?” Wayne said. “Because I do terrible stuff! Ranette told me that Durkel girl—apparently, visiting her is the *worst* thing I coulda been doin’. I’ve been making her life awful all these years even without knowing it!”

“And you care?” Wax asked.

“Course I do!”

Wax inclined his head toward him. “Proof. You’re a good person.”

“Fat lot of good it does when I still mess everything up, mate. I still grab stuff sometimes, even when it’s not my friend’s and I ain’t joking. I don’t think about it until later. And I realize, maybe that fellow *liked* his cigar box.”

“You mess up a lot less than you fix, Wayne. You can’t deny it. You are a *good man.*”

Wayne fell quiet. Because … because he liked Wax. More, he trusted Wax. Wax was right about things.

Could he … be right about this?

Wax leaned forward. “You can’t keep digging up the corpse of who you used to be, Wayne. You can’t keep toting it around. Let him stay buried. Consider who you *are,* not who you left behind. That’s what I’ve learned these last few years. It’s made all the difference.”

Huh. It was platitudes. Easy words to say. But Wax didn’t just say things. He never had. Wax meant things.

Maybe … maybe it *was* time to bury that corpse. Because rusts, it was feelin’ heavy lately. What would life be like if he weren’t carryin’ that thing? Maybe a part of him was ready, and had been for years. He’d stopped shakin’ when he held a gun. His body was ready to move on. Could his mind allow it?

He scanned out over the city, his head pounding from storing health. Cars bustled below, representatives of a new world, with fancy new buildings throwing long shadows as the sun started to set. The whole Basin was changing.

Why not him with it?

He let himself stop storing up health. Truth was, it wouldn’t do much. His head cleared, and his aches faded.

“Right, then,” he said, sitting up. “We needta solve this thing, Wax. I’ve got this bad feeling—had it all day—that we’re on a trail that is far, *far* too cold for comfort.”

“Agreed,” Wax said, pulling over two duffels. “Look through that. See what Steris packed us.” He pushed over the first of them—his ammo pack, retrieved from a rooftop.

Wayne took it and undid the ties and zipper, while Wax dug in the other and took out some pages, holding them up. The billboard had some electric lights on it, to make the thing visible at night—which was good for readin’. Huh. Maybe Wax had a good reason for pickin’ this spot after all.

Wayne began counting ammo for Wax’s guns, setting it aside in little pouches. “So,” he said, “they was testin’ some flyin’ bomb out in the ocean?”

“They were only testing the delivery device,” Wax said, shuffling papers. “No bomb on it yet. That would be too dangerous. Plus, it wasn’t ready yet. I’ve got schematics for the bomb here, and until recently they were having trouble creating a big enough battery to make it portable.”

“But they figured that out?”

“Unfortunately,” he said, handing a schematic over—as if Wayne would have any use for it. “Look there. Finally have it working, portable but *large*. That’s what’s giving them such a headache. They have these rockets that can fly a good thirty or forty miles, but not with such a huge payload.” He shuffled more pages, then handed another over. “This schematic is a dead man’s switch. An extremely pernicious one. They don’t want anyone disarming the thing. And here, a design for a much larger rocket. Maybe a last chance at making this work, but they’re worried it won’t fly far enough … and might catch Bilming or other towns and not just Elendel.”

Wayne grunted, tucking the pages in his pocket. Then, digging further into his own duffel, he found a sandwich.

“Hot damn,” he said, unwrapping it. Pastrami? Hot *double* damn. “Good thing you ignored me and stayed with that woman. She’s quite a catch.”

Wax gave him a flat look.

“I was wrong about her, all right?” Wayne said, digging out a second sandwich and tossing it to Wax. “I’m wrong about people a lot. Maybe even myself.”

Wax smiled, then dug into the sandwich. Wayne did the same, and he hadn’t realized how hungry he was. Some canteens followed—alas, just water. He wished for another beer. But no, they had work to do. One would keep them limber. Any more would be dangerous.

Wayne dug out a replacement metalmind for Wax, filled with extra weight, and tossed it to him. Next were some vials filled with metal flakes, all in a little sheath. Eight of them had been removed already; eight remained. “These ain’t your normal sort.”

“Harmony sent them,” Wax said. “Said they were special.”

“Did he now…” Wayne said, eyeing the last one in line, with a red cork. He set those aside, then took out a small pouch of metals with his name on it. Rusting woman had even sent him some bendalloy. “So, where do we go, Wax? You said they were buildin’ one final rocket, biggest of them all. Where do we find it?”

Wax scanned the notes. “They’re worried, Wayne. Up against the wall. There’s notations at the end here, from today. They are *terrified* that Autonomy will cancel their whole project—violently. So they’re scrambling to fend us off, and for any last chance at victory. But where … how…”

Wayne continued fishing in his duffel, then pulled out a strange wicker ball with a weight at the center. “Is this something Ranette made?”

Wax grinned, waving for Wayne to toss it over. Then Wax launched it into the air with a Steelpush. “Max must have helped Steris pack. Sent me a little gift.” He launched it higher next time. Then higher.

Then he caught it and froze.

“What?” Wayne said.

“I know where the bomb is,” Wax said. “You need height. Height first, then you can launch something far. Plus, they needed to build a big rocket someplace where people wouldn’t be able to poke around. Get as much height as they can, in a secure location…”

Wayne breathed out, and the two of them turned toward the center of the city. And the Shaw, the enormous tower there—which had new construction on top, supposedly adding a few new floors. Or was it a different construction project entirely?

“Damn,” Wayne said, noting the number of lights on in the upper floors of the tower, and the floodlights on the top. “They’re busy tonight. Backs against the wall indeed…” He looked to Wax. “It’s a mesa. That spire. *That’s* the mesa.”

“What mesa?”

“In my ma’s story,” Wayne said, “it all ended at the mesa. The lone peak in the center of a flat landscape.”

Wayne eyed his friend to see if he complained they weren’t in that story. Because in this, Wax would be wrong. They *were* in it—or at least living alongside it. Because Wayne had decided it was so, and that was the way of things.

“A mesa, eh?” Wax said, letting one leg slip out over the edge to dangle. “Yeah, I can see that.”

“I could never figure out the part that happened next,” Wayne said. “In the story, the lawman went to the mesa to find the bad guy—Blatant Barm, worst villain there ever was. But Barm *was* the mesa.”

“He … was the *mesa*?”

“Yeah, like he’d transformed into it,” Wayne said.

“That … doesn’t make much sense.”

“Sure doesn’t,” Wayne said. “I never could figure out why Ma told it that way.”

“Maybe it doesn’t mean anything,” Wax said. “Maybe she came up with it because something needs to happen in stories.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “You didn’t know my ma, Wax. She was *good* at stories. Real good. It meant somethin’…” Wayne took a deep breath. “If we’ve gotta get to the top, that’s gonna be a *rough* ascent. There aren’t any other buildings around it nearly as tall. You won’t be able to Push us up there.”

“We’d be exposed to snipers trying that anyway,” Wax said, squinting at the floodlights high atop the Shaw. “We’ll have to go up the inside … Ruin, Wayne. You’re right. It’s going to be rough.”

Wayne’s foot thumped against something from the ammo duffel. He frowned, then knelt and pulled out a wooden box that had been tucked at the bottom. It had Ranette’s symbol on the top.

Wax breathed out softly, almost reverently. “Steris packed it.”

“What?” Wayne said, opening the top.

He revealed a gun. Stocky, with a barrel a good *four inches* across. Unlike anything he’d ever seen.

“Something special.” Wax took it out, then removed other pieces from the box to assemble something that looked a bit like a single-barrel shotgun, only with a much wider bore. It had a big central ammo wheel—almost like for an oversized revolver—which held slugs bigger than shot glasses.

Wayne whistled.

“We just call it the Big Gun,” Wax said. “I’d hoped I wouldn’t need it. It wasn’t built for a lawman. It was built … for a sword.”

In the distance, the sun finally sank beneath the ocean horizon, like a great big piece a’ dough bein’ dropped in to be fried up nice and toasty. Wayne held his breath. Then mists began to curl in the air. Growing like vines from invisible holes, pouring out into the city.

“Well,” Wax whispered, “that’s a welcome sight.” He glanced at the gun in his hands. “This next part is going to be bloody, Wayne. How much healing do you have left?”

“Not much,” Wayne admitted. “I can handle a bullet or two. That’s it.”

Wax took a deep breath. “I’ll want you to stay back. To let me do what Harmony has decided I need to do.” He cocked the strange gun, chambering an enormous bullet. “We’re going to get to the top of that building and stop the launch.” He paused. “Funny. I don’t know if I could have done this a few years ago. But I know who I am, what I’m fighting for, and why. There’s a certain peace in that, no matter how bad this is likely to get.”

“Rusts,” Wayne said, his stomach in a knot. “Wish I felt the same. Wax, after all this time, it’s still hard for me to sort out. I kill a man, and it ruins my life. Then I join you, and I’ve gotta keep killin’ them. Poor sods. You know?”

Wax shouldered the strange gun, then put his hand on Wayne’s arm. “Yeah. I know. But maybe your ma was right about the bad guy being a mesa. Being the *land itself.* Maybe that’s what she was saying, Wayne: It’s the world that we have to worry about. Individual men, yes, they can be evil. But we should worry *more* about the world itself making them so.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well,” Wax said, “do you think you’d have fallen in with the Plank Boys if your mother hadn’t died in that accident?”

“Absolutely not,” Wayne said.

“Nearly every man I’ve had to shoot? He had a story like yours. It’s the sort of thing Marasi is always talking about. You have to stop the Blatant Barms of the world, yes. But if you can create a world where fewer boys grow up alone … well, maybe you'll have far fewer Blatant Barms to face in the future. Maybe that was what your mother was saying."

Huh. "Yeah," Wayne said. "Yeah, that sounds right." He stood at the edge of the billboard ledge, the two of them facing the spire. Wax slid the last of those metal vials Harmony had given him into the aluminum-lined sheath at his belt. Wayne downed some himself.

"Wayne," Wax said, "do you remember how this started? This new life, after the Roughs? I'd given up after Lessie's death. You came to me in Elendel, and *you* pulled me out, Wayne. I was content to sit around, stewing in my own self-reflection. Then you showed up and grabbed me. Told me there were train cars being robbed mysteriously. Set me on the path chasing Trell…"

"I suppose," Wayne said. "Doesn't mean I'm the hero."

"Nonsense." Wax glanced at him. "This is who you are. No amount of complaining, no phantom guilt, no whispering lying voice that says otherwise is going to change that. 'You're meant to be helping people,' Wayne. 'It's what you do.'"

Wayne cocked his head. "Was that … a quote or somethin'?"

"It's what you said to me seven years ago. When people needed me, but I was too afraid to pick up a gun."

"You *remember* that?" Wayne said. "The exact things I said?"

"Of course I do. Those words changed my life."

Wayne let out a howl of laughter. "Damn, Wax. I just *say things*! You're not supposed to actually pay *attention* to them!"

"It was meaningful!"

"Ha. Listening to *me.* Might as well write the stuff I say on a plaque or something. 'You're meant to be helping people. Also, remember—ain't no fellow who regretted giving it one extra shake, but you can bet every guy has regretted giving one too few.'"

They shared a look as the mists began to curl around them, headlights illuminating the roadway beneath like a river of light running toward the Shaw. Then they both nodded.

"You ready for this?" Wax asked.

"Let's do it," Wayne replied.

# 59

Armal and her nervous little collection of townspeople insisted on taking Marasi together. They hurried along a “back road” of Wayfarer—a path lined with fake trees, simulating a park.

It worked. The Set’s “tranquility officers” started a door-to-door search behind them—along the main road—but had to maintain the illusion of being a friendly neighborhood watch. This promenade gave Marasi cover, letting her slip past.

Entrone’s home—constructed over the last year—was so large that she sensed resentment from the others. He should have been smart enough to keep it modest; he likely didn’t spend much time in it. But the man’s ego apparently demanded something ostentatious—including a third floor with large picture windows on all sides. As they approached, Marasi decided it was probably just another observation center. Maybe with a few false rooms at the front to keep up appearances.

“All right,” Marasi said to Armal and the others, “think about what I’ve said. Please.”

They huddled among the fake trees and bushes. Rusts. Marasi wasn’t certain they’d be of much help. All the same, she hurried to the building—which was on a small stone hill.

She was spotted by people gathering outside their townhomes, in deliberate defiance of Entrone’s orders. Some pointed. Well, the time for sneaking was gone anyway. Feeling alone, Marasi used Moonlight’s picks to undo the lock on the mansion’s back door, then slipped in. She passed through a kitchen that seemed a little too clean and quickly found another door, held shut with several deadbolts. Right, then. She wasn't getting through that with picks.

She took a deep breath. There was so much that could go wrong with her plan. But she was out of resources and out of time; once in a while you just had to do things Wayne's way.

She attached one of Moonlight's explosives to the door, took cover behind a cabinet, then blasted the thing off. A second later she burst through the smoking doorway, pistol ready. The two people in here had ducked to the floor at the explosion, though the small charge—intended for this kind of use—hadn't done much damage to the room. They had been monitoring some radio equipment. A closed door on the other side of the room led farther into the building, and a strange glowing light came from beneath it.

"Down," Marasi said, her gun trained on the radio operators. The two didn't look armed, and they hastened to comply.

*Radio equipment.* Marasi crossed the room, hauled the woman to her feet, then gestured to the equipment. "This broadcasts to the town? Through these microphones?"

"Y-yes," the woman said.

"Turn them on," Marasi ordered.

The woman hurriedly flicked some switches. Then Marasi sent the two technicians outside and trapped them in a slowness bubble from a charged grenade. She didn't have time to do more.

When she returned to the radio room, the door on the far end had opened and people were entering to see what the ruckus was about. And rusts, one of them was Entrone himself, appearing weary, bags under his eyes, wan complexion making him look like a corpse dressed for a funeral in his fine suit and formal hat.

The room behind him glowed with a white light. Marasi glimpsed a large chamber with a white floor—the source of the light—but she didn't have time to study it now. Instead she leveled her gun at Entrone, but his bodyguards immediately stepped in front of him.

"I told you, gentlemen," Entrone said from behind them. "The rat we've been hunting doesn't hide in the dark. Wait long enough, and it will come to you."

"By the authority of the Elendel Constabulary," Marasi said, "I order you to lay down arms and metals, then submit to arrest."

Entrone sighed in a long-suffering way, like a man who had just been given a bedtime ultimatum by his three-year-old. So Marasi fired. She dropped one of the bodyguards, but the other returned fire.

Marasi ducked back into the kitchen, narrowly avoiding the shots. “Think about this, Entrone!” Marasi called into the room. “Are you really prepared to kill so many? Can anything be *worth* such a terrible act?”

He didn’t respond. Rusts. She’d hoped to get him talking. She exchanged a few more shots with the remaining bodyguard, then reloaded.

As she did, she heard footsteps. Dodging back by reflex, she narrowly escaped getting caught in a slowness bubble. Not made by her, but one that had extended through the wall. She could pick it out by the faint shimmering of the air.

She peeked through and saw the bodyguard frozen in a slowness bubble just inside the doorway. Entrone was safely beyond it. But how…?

*That bodyguard shares my Allomantic power,* she realized. *He was trying to catch me in the bubble, but put it up a hair too slowly.* If she hadn’t dodged, she’d be trapped in that bubble with him while time sped up around them. Giving Entrone plenty of time to get reinforcements.

It was a tactic she had employed herself on several occasions. It chilled her to realize she’d nearly been caught in it. The slowness bubble took up a chunk of the kitchen and most of the doorway into the radio room.

Entrone paced, separated from her by that slowed time. Gunfire would be useless; they could only glare at one another. She didn’t have a good angle to see into the room beyond him, but that glow … it reminded her of something.

Entrone settled down in a nearby chair.

“Why, Entrone?” Marasi asked. “Why lock all these people away like this? Why pretend the world has ended?” With that corner of the doorway not caught in the bubble, her voice should be able to reach him. Unfortunately, he refused to take the bait, instead simply leaning back in his chair.

*Maybe I’m approaching this wrong,* Marasi thought. *He’s not going to volunteer anything. But what if he thought he was the one getting information out of me?*

“Wax and Wayne have stopped the launch,” Marasi lied, taking a risk. “Elendel is safe. You’re trapped, and soon this place will be flooded with constables.”

Entrone didn’t laugh at her immediately, which was a good sign. She hoped he’d try to pry for more information.

“That’s nonsense of course,” he said. “It—”

Then he stopped. Because his voice echoed outside the building, projected into the city. He glanced at the radio and saw it was on. He gave her a dry look.

“I think,” he continued, “you are seriously ash-sick, young woman. Please, let us help you.”

Then he reached over and flipped off the radio.

Damn.

“Clever,” he said to her. “But what do you think would happen if those in the Community knew the truth? They’re a bunch of cowed civilians. They’ve been imprisoned here for seven years, never knowing the truth. Never caring to know it. You really think they’d help you?”

Marasi winced. So much for that plan.

The guard remained frozen in place between them. Eventually he’d realize he hadn’t caught her, and would drop his bubble. But that could take time, inside one of those. She knew how that felt.

“Entrone,” she said, “you don’t have to go through with this.”

“With what, exactly?” he said.

“You’re going to open a portal to let Autonomy’s army begin an invasion of our world. I know the plan.”

He grunted, then slumped forward further. He was still slime—the way he’d casually ordered the execution of those captives had proved it—but he was also obviously burdened by events. Perhaps she could shake his conviction.

“Why?” she asked, genuinely curious. “You know they’re here not to rule, but destroy. Lay waste.”

“Because if I don’t,” he said, “she’ll send them anyway—and then I’ll be one of the ones who gets killed. We can’t fight them. They’ll annihilate our forces.”

“Will they?” Marasi said. “From what I hear, Autonomy is frightened of us. Worried we’ll outpace her people technologically. If she could destroy us easily, she’d have done it already, right?”

"It takes special circumstances to create one of these portals," he said. "Even for her. Can't just be anywhere, or anytime." He turned, looking over his shoulder. "The timing gave us a deadline."

Rusts. That room behind him … that was where the portal would open, wasn't it? She'd assumed there would be some kind of gateway, but it was the ground that was glowing. Rusts … maybe he hadn't wanted a big mansion out of pride. Maybe they'd built it here to hide the fact that the portal, whatever it was, would appear here.

"The location…" he said, turning back. "I think it's because of those people, oddly. Such a large collection of Metalborn. And we were required to bring in a strange power, a glowing light. That's part of the key."

"But—"

"Are you a Survivorist, constable?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Then you know our prime tenet," he said, looking up and meeting her eyes. "The one we're taught from childhood?"

"Survive," she whispered.

He nodded.

"Not like this," she said. "Not at the expense of others. Kelsier didn't give up without a fight. He didn't simply go with what the Lord Ruler demanded. He taught us to survive *despite* obstacles. Not to let ourselves be slowly crushed so we could gain a minute or two of extra breath."

"Interpret it how you wish, constable," Entrone said, rubbing his brow. "I think these troops will come even if Telsin is successful … to *help* oversee us, in this new world. One where we serve Autonomy."

"That's an excuse," Marasi said. "Worse, it's cowardice. You're the mayor of this city. Your duty is to the people, Entrone."

He laughed, standing up. "You can't possibly be that idealistic."

She blushed.

Was she?

Yes, she was. And proud of it.

*I have to find a way to close that portal,* she thought, looking through the bubble of slowed time toward the room with the light. Again she thought it seemed familiar. White, with a mother-of-pearl sheen. Yes. It was like the pure Investiture from Moonlight's jars. The floor had been dug out, then filled up with the stuff, making a kind of pool in a recessed portion of the ground.

"A great deal of power in one place…" she said. Allik always said that you weren't supposed to store too much harmonium in one place, or "strange things happen, yah?" He didn't know what those things were. But Marasi swore she could make out a warping of the air in that room. That liquid was somehow powering the portal.

Entrone had stepped up to the faintly visible barrier of the slowness bubble. It was smaller than the ones Marasi made, closer to the size of Wayne's bubbles. Entrone shook his head at the trapped guard.

"You're like him, if I recall," Entrone said, walking to the side. "A Pulser—capable of making bubbles of slowed time."

Marasi didn't respond. Entrone strolled sideways, near the wall separating the radio room from the kitchen, where she couldn't see him through the doorway anymore. The bubble filled most of the radio room, but there were some portions at the edges that weren't touched by it. His voice continued a moment later.

"Do you ever feel," he said, "embarrassed by your useless power, constable? I know your sister is an embarrassment to your father. But at least he *acknowledged* her."

He had done his research; a few years back, that barb might have bothered her. Now Marasi recognized it for what it was—an attempt to put her off balance. She focused on the glowing pool. The surface was beginning to ripple. Was there another way into the—

At that moment, Entrone ripped through the wall itself, circumventing the slowness bubble. Rusts! He'd sounded so worn out that Marasi had nearly discounted him. Now he crashed through the wood, shattering beams like they were twigs.

Marasi shot him in the chest, but the wounds *healed* immediately. Faster than Wayne's did. He gave her a grim smile.

Marasi unloaded the entire magazine into him, and did little more than poke a few holes in his suit. He grabbed her by the front of her shirt and lifted her. Dust from the drywall streamed from his clothing as he pulled her right up to his face. Still in his grip, Marasi hit him on the side of the head with the butt of her pistol. He just grinned. She did manage to knock his hat off though.

“I’m a god now, little bastard,” he said to her. “What strength do you have to stand against me? Your Allomancy? Pathetic. Your weapons? Laughable. You have no power to threaten me.”

He turned and threw her out the window with a crash, back into the main cavern.

It *hurt.* A sharp blinding pain all across her body. Cuts and slices, followed by a dizzying hit to her head and shoulder as she slowed and stopped in a heap. Through teary eyes, through the pain, she saw his shape—shadowy to her vision—climbing out the window after her.

“The army is coming,” he said, his voice growing softer as he stalked forward, his nice coat disheveled. “I imagined I’d be some grand lord, ruling in a new world. But I guess … I guess … we all have to do what we must to survive.”

He reached for her. She tried to pull back, noting another group of shapes stepping out from the shadows outside the building. Had Armal and the others followed her up to the mansion?

She had hoped they would overhear Entrone admitting the truth via the radio. But perhaps … perhaps they’d been close enough, in their curiosity, to hear him speak now …

*Please,* please *have heard him.*

Gave Entrone loomed over her.

“You’re right about my powers,” Marasi said with a cough. “I’ve found uses for them. But they aren’t where my strength comes from. Not really.”

He grabbed her.

“My strength,” she whispered, “never came from Allomancy. Rusts … I learned that lesson as a child. It doesn’t come from weapons, or even the credentials I carry.”

*Please …*

Entrone raised her into the air as a distinct *clink* sounded. He froze, then turned to see Armal. The source of the sound was a jar she’d dropped to the ground. Once full of light. Now empty.

A replacement for metal, Moonlight had said. But supercharged.

“I’m a constable, Entrone,” Marasi whispered. “My strength isn’t in myself. It comes from the people.”

A Rioting, with the power of a thousand Allomancers, hit their emotions like a physical wave of force.

# 60

Shame hit Marasi like a wave.

The Rioter’s art. Pick an emotion, then blast it into a person on full automatic. It was easier for emotional Allomancers to target their powers in a direction instead of at a specific individual.

It caught Entrone, judging by his stumble, but it also *pounded* Marasi with a sense of worthlessness. A sure knowledge of her own irrelevance and insignificance. Memories bubbled out from her soul: times she’d failed, times she’d fallen short. Had she ever *not* failed? Had she ever *not* been worthless?

She’d spent her childhood hidden away by a father who was embarrassed by her. She’d spent her youth dreaming of far-off legends, only to make an utter fool of herself when one of those legends walked into her life. Though Marasi’s romantic feelings for Wax were long since abandoned, the shame of how she’d thrown herself at him—to be rebuffed—was oppressive.

She gasped, rolling to her knees, head bowed, with drips of blood from a slice on her scalp trickling down her cheek.

She was *nothing.* She’d *always* been nothing.

Wax let her join him because he felt bad for her. She’d lived in his shadow for years. Unable to find her own constable partner, so she’d needed to borrow his. Unable to solve important cases without his help.

The weight of it smothered her, reminding her of everything she was not. And everything she would never be. And …

And it was nothing new.

She'd felt it all before. Less powerfully, yes, but none of this was novel. She'd lived with some of these fears for her entire life. Others she'd pushed through during her professional years. They were illogical.

Logic didn't matter. Just emotion. But she could handle that emotion. She took a deep breath, whispered that it would soon pass, and shouldered it.

She could weather this.

Entrone wasn't so capable. He curled up on the green-painted stone patio and whimpered softly. All the regeneration powers in the world wouldn't help if he couldn't move—and without his aluminum-lined hat he was completely subject to Armal's control.

Some soldiers came running up, but one of the other townspeople dealt with them using what appeared to be a Soothing. It seemed that Armal had spread the Investiture around as Marasi had suggested.

Ultimately, the plan had worked. Marasi had succeeded in her primary job: empowering the people. She could rest now, and ride out the Rioting.

Except …

Except that portal was still opening. The invasion force was still coming.

This worry—narrow, focused, cutting through her shame like a knife—drove Marasi to focus. Because Marasi …

Marasi *could* function.

She began moving, feeling as if she were crawling away from it: her pain, her sorrow, her shame. With each grueling inch, she felt herself growing stronger. Shrugging off those lies. Embracing the person she'd become. A woman who didn't care whose shadow she stood in—as long as the job got done. A woman who didn't care if her father, or society, was ashamed of her—as long as she was confident in herself.

A woman who could, painfully but determinedly, pass Entrone huddled on the floor. And—with a breath of relief—get outside the directional force of Armal's Rioting. The emotions vanished like smoke on a windy day. Marasi breathed out a long sigh, but there was no time to relax.

"Be careful," she said to one of the others as they came up to her. "Entrone is Metalborn. He can heal and has incredible strength."

Marasi wasn't certain how long Armal's power would last, but it seemed that she'd been granted exceptional abilities—like when Vin had drawn in the mists, as recorded in scripture.

Rusts. Could that glowing light be the body of a god, just like the mists had been? Marasi limped back into the mansion. She ignored the frozen guard. For him, this would all have passed in seconds. Perhaps he was still responding to her dodging out of the way of his bubble— or maybe Entrone had just ordered him to block the doorway.

Fortunately, the lord mayor had ripped her a new path. She pushed through the broken remnants of the wall, limped past the radio station, and stumbled up to the portal doorway. Most of the mansion, it turned out, was a sham. The vast majority of the space was taken up by this one room with the glowing floor. Radiant light had been poured into a pool twenty feet wide, and it was beginning to churn. Glowing brightly. Lighting the walls a ghostly white.

She didn't have to think hard to grasp the mythological implications of this place. Rusts. That was raw, concentrated power. A single jar had given TwinSoul the power to create a stone body twelve feet tall, a second had transformed Moonlight into another person, and a third had given Armal the power to Riot emotions like the Lord Ruler himself.

This pool had to hold thousands of jars' worth of the power. She stepped forward, then felt the most awful premonition: she was close enough that she *saw* them, in a place with a dark sky and misty ground. Thousands of inhuman soldiers with golden skin and glowing red eyes. Living statues. They carried rifles of an advanced design, and their stares seemed to bore holes in her mind. The men of gold and red had arrived. Bearers of the final metal, Miles had called them. Destroyers.

Marasi stumbled back from the pool, daunted, as the pains of the fight started to flare up; the bruises and cuts from being thrown by Entrone.

But before the call of that power, her pain seemed distant. Inconsequential. Once upon a time, she'd given up the Bands of Mourning. She didn't need to hold power like that.

Today, she realized something else. She didn't need power like that, but duty wasn't about what you needed. It was about what was needed from you.

Centuries ago, the Last Emperor Elend Venture had been faced with a similar problem: how to dispose of a great deal of power. She knew what she needed to do.

A second later, she burst out of the building to find the clustered men and women of the Community speaking with the guards—calming them. Armal had finished tying up Entrone. He struggled, but strangely was unable to break free.

"Macil is a Leecher," Armal said, gesturing to one of the nearby women. "He might be able to heal, but we've sucked the strength out of him."

Marasi nodded, teeth gritted against the pain and the echoes of the Rioting she'd survived. "I need every Allomancer in this cavern gathered here, *right now*."

"Why?" Armal said, walking up to her.

"There's a well of power in the room nearby, and it's opening a portal to something terrible," Marasi said. "We're going to stop it the old-fashioned way. By burning up all of the power with our abilities."

# 61

With Wayne clinging to his back, Wax bounded across the city to the Shaw. He made one last jump from the top of a nearby skyscraper—one that was half as high as the Shaw—and launched them toward destiny, mists curling in their passing.

There were some balconies over halfway up the tower, just inside a strong Coinshot's reach. If the enemy had any measure of foresight, they'd be ready for incursions at those locations. They were still his best choice. The higher he got, the less ground he'd need to cover inside, where he'd likely have to fight for every inch.

Wax angled them toward a wide balcony with two broad, dark windows looking into the structure. Wax's Push—the anchor too far away—was barely enough to get them to it, and they landed lightly amid some small planters.

"Aw…" Wayne said, dropping off his back. "We was supposed to go smashing through that glass! All dramatic-like!"

"That's an excellent way to get cut to shreds," Wax said, ducking to the side—out of sight of those windows. "I can't heal. You can barely heal. And there's a door *right there*."

"The Ascendant Warrior did it," Wayne grumbled.

"When?"

"Right before killin' the Lord Ruler."

"Since when have you known that sort of thing?"

"It's in a little kids' book that Max and I read sometimes," he said. "Right about my level."

Wax tried the door in the wall to the left of the large windows, but it was locked. “Assassinating the Lord Ruler?” Wax asked. “Isn’t that a little violent for a children’s book?”

“Mate,” Wayne said, “it ain’t *violence* if it’s *religion.* Don’t you know anythin’?”

“Apparently not,” Wax said. “I—”

He cut off as floodlights turned on in the room beyond, shining through the windows with blazing intensity. Wax pulled up against the wall, Wayne next to him. He dared a glance inside, and saw figures behind and between the lights, their silhouettes raising weapons.

Gunfire cracked like thunder, shattering the window.

“Damn,” Wayne said as the gunfire tapered off. “Those are *soldiers,* mate. I came down here to the Basin all those years ago ’cuz of a cute little case involvin’ train cars what got robbed in a funny way. How in Ruin’s own name did I end up getting mixed up with dark gods, armies, bombs destroyin’ cities, and … and *ghosts,* Wax. We still ain’t talked about the *ghosts.*”

Wax unhooked the Big Gun from inside his coat, where he carried larger weapons while flying. “Can you keep their attention while I try to flank them?”

Wayne smiled. “Scary Tree? We could do Scary Tree!”

“Do you have enough health stored for Scary Tree?”

“Mate, I don’t need health for Scary Tree,” Wayne said. “Just you watch.”

Wax nodded, whipping off his mistcoat and handing it to Wayne along with a spare gun—which Wayne took with a shocking level of calm. Usually they needed to throw some bullets in the fire or something to do Scary Tree.

Wayne proceeded to shoot the weapon from beside the window into the room beyond—mistcoat tassels waving—persuading everyone he was Wax. Wayne even did some eerily impressive vocal imitation.

People fixated upon Wax. They had tunnel vision about fighting the infamous lawman Coinshot. It was even worse these days—where news of his exploits had been exaggerated by the broadsheets. He supposed that finding and using the Bands of Mourning themselves hadn’t hurt his reputation.

While everyone was distracted by Wayne, Wax unlocked the door with a quick Push from the side on the deadbolt. When he'd glanced in through the window earlier, he'd noticed that a wall separated the room with the soldiers from wherever this door led. On cracking it open, he found a small hallway.

If he guessed right, their enemies would soon use this hallway to try reaching the balcony. So he slipped inside and Pushed himself up to the ceiling directly above the door on the other side. He held there, using nails in the floor. As anticipated, a small group of armed men snuck into the darkened hallway, light from the floodlights in the room beyond spilling in around them. Blinding them.

In the old days, Allomancers—Mistborn in particular—had been regarded like shadows. Or the mists themselves. Silent, hidden, practically formless. Wax could well understand the origins of those myths as the three soldiers passed underneath him in a tight cluster. He dropped and disposed of them the old-fashioned way: a few coins flung in the air, delivered noiselessly into their brains from behind. No crack of gunfire. No shouts of pain. Just the thump of bodies on the floor.

They'd left the door open, and he peeked into the main room. Those floodlights had been prepared for this and could move on wheels. Likely they'd had scouts watching for Wax bounding over the buildings below, and positioned their ambush where they thought he'd enter.

Wayne's distraction was working well. The soldiers had pushed the floodlights into a line across the middle of the room and were arrayed in the gaps between them, shooting aluminum bullets.

As Wayne had noted, these people weren't like the common street criminals Wax and Wayne had fought earlier in the day, with their rough clothing, mismatched and rugged gear. These wore red uniforms and carried sleek weapons—modern rifles. They knelt with precise postures, firing carefully. Several were slipping forward along the left side of the room to get an angle on Wayne.

Unfortunately for them, they weren't watching their own flanks. And while aluminum guns might not be affected by Steelpushes, the enormous floodlights were. Tapping weight to make himself sturdier, Wax Pushed into the room, smashing the lights into one another—and crushing the soldiers who had set up between them.

He crashed all of this into a mess against the far wall, then decreased his weight and slid across the ground, using nails in the wall behind as an anchor. On the other side of the room, he positioned himself and Pushed again, sending some of the wreckage sweeping outward to catch the remaining soldiers—and sending them and the broken lights out the window into the mists.

A moment later, Wayne sauntered into the now-darker room and tossed Wax his mistcoat. “Sorry for the bullet holes.”

“A few holes won’t…” Wax said, then noticed—in the weak light of the room’s flickering ceiling light—that there had to be at *least* sixteen holes in it, even in some of the tassels. “How did you not get shot?”

“By not bein’ where the bullets was,” Wayne said.

Wax threw on the mistcoat duster. He had three guns on him. The Big Gun in his left hand. The Steel Survivor, aluminum but loaded with normal lead slugs. And Vindication, with aluminum bullets in the ordinary chambers and two hazekiller rounds ready for dealing with Metalborn.

“We’re really going up the inside?” Wayne said.

Wax nodded. They would need proper climbing equipment to scale the outside, even if there weren’t Set sharpshooters around.

Wayne pulled out a dueling cane. Wax met his eyes and shook his head.

“But—” Wayne said.

“Harmony knew,” Wax said softly. “He knew what I’d need to become.”

It seemed he had a moment to pause, though more enemies would undoubtedly be on the way. So he reached into his pocket and took out a small sliver of metal. He slipped it into his ear, then carefully—ritualistically—checked Vindication’s chambers to be certain there was a round in each.

As before, he felt a faint disconnect from the trellium earring. But he didn’t see visions. He felt Telsin’s attention come on him, and heard—faintly—what she was doing. Giving orders. Sounding frantic.

She was above. At the top. He could *feel* it.

*Waxillium*, she said in his mind. *You should have left the city as I suggested*.

He clicked to the next chamber of his gun. “I have come,” he said, “to clean up our family’s mess.”

*Very dramatic*, she said. *You—*

“Don’t make me do this. Don’t force it, Telsin.”

She didn’t reply at first. The only sound was that of him clicking, chamber to chamber.

*You are still just a frightened child, Waxillium*, she said. *All these years later, and you still can’t take a risk. Can’t see beyond your own limited mindset. I’m going to become something* incredible.

“I’ll see you dead first,” Wax said softly.

*Wax*, she said, *you’re thirty floors away from me—and there are hundreds of soldiers from the Hidden Guard between us. My best. Reserved to stop you here*.

He snapped Vindication closed.

*Oh, Wax*, she said. *You have never understood. You can’t beat me. You’ve* never *had the vision for that. Whatever you try, I’ll always be ahead of you*.

He slipped Vindication into a holster, then downed an extra vial of steel—one of the ones Harmony had sent him. Finally, he hefted the Big Gun in one hand. Ranette had warned him what it was capable of doing. So he put up his steel bubble, even though the enemy was armed with aluminum.

“Funny, Telsin,” he said, “that you claim to be the one with vision—when you’ve always underestimated me. If you’d *actually* had foresight, you’d have killed me when I first came back to the city seven years ago.”

*Before you could learn what I was doing?*

“Before I came to love the things you’re seeking to destroy.”

He ripped the earring out and tossed it aside, then walked into the hallway and looked inward, toward where it ended at a cross hall. Footsteps and calls sounded from beyond a doorway there marked STAIRS. They went silent a moment later.

“Mate,” Wayne said, stepping up. “You’re sure about this?”

Wax raised his gun in two hands and strode forward. “Stay behind. Follow once I’m done. But don’t engage. It’s time for Harmony’s Sword to do his job.”

# 62

Wax strode toward the stairwell and slipped out the Steel Survivor, loaded with ordinary lead bullets. He shot—then Pushed—twice, drilling a bullet through the wood on either side of the door. He was rewarded with shouts of pain from soldiers hiding within.

Telsin assumed that if she stuffed enough soldiers between them, it would slow him. But Wax was a Coinshot. The more you put between him and his goal, the more debris you gave him to turn into weapons.

He ripped a fire extinguisher off the wall next to him, then tossed it and Pushed it forward—his weight increased—and ripped the door to the stairwell off the hinges, slamming it against the men hiding inside. Predictably, several others ducked through the opening to try shooting him. He downed them each with a bullet to the head.

Then he shot the fire extinguisher, blasting white smoke and chemicals into the chamber. Finally, he lowered the Big Gun in his left hand and launched a shot. The massive explosive shell detonated amid the white smoke, spraying shrapnel through the hallway and out around Wax—where his steel bubble Pushed it away. He strode through the storm of steel untouched.

It was a gun built just for him: a grenade launcher designed for maximum shrapnel. And those it didn't kill, it would outline. Wax stormed through the doorway, tracing the lines of steelsight across the chaotic space, and downed shadows that tried to aim at him through the smoke.

Looking up through the smoke, he found a modern skyscraper stairwell. A straight shot to the top, assuming he could get past all the troops. Men and women fell on the steps as his gun flashed. Like those he'd faced before, these were dressed in sleek uniforms and didn't carry a trace of metal on them. But Wax had plenty to work with regardless. The stairwell had a metal banister and wrapped around itself, leaving a hole up the center. He almost flew straight up it, but he couldn't afford to leave enemies at his back. Plus he needed to carve a path for Wayne.

So, Wax launched a grenade up through the center of the stairwell, which detonated in another hail of shrapnel and screams. He launched upward, then Pushed outward, forcing the metal banister out and away from him in a circle, pinning it to the wall—and taking any people still standing with it. Indiscriminate firing started from above, so he dropped back down, narrowly avoiding aluminum bullet hail. Another grenade—fired up through the gap and detonated in exactly the right position by a careful Push—made them curse and stop.

He dashed upward, keeping his momentum, and Pushed off a fuse box, then a metal sign indicating the floor number. Sweeping up the steps, firing—yes—but just as often using chunks of metal debris as weapons. Grim, he advanced, never touching down, building a wall of metal—bullet casings, shrapnel, debris—ahead of him as he continued to Push, constantly repositioning, soaring up the stairs and bounding over corpses.

Once, Wax had run from his calling. He'd seen a duty that required him to not just find answers, not just solve problems, but to become something terrible. Something that Harmony—manacled by the powers of Preservation—couldn't do himself.

Tonight Waxillium embraced that duty. He became destruction incarnate. For to worship Harmony was not only to worship Preservation—it was also to worship Ruin, with all that implied. There were times for careful caution and empathy. And there were times when people pointed a weapon capable of killing millions straight at his home, his family, his constituents.

Wax ascended the stairwell as a tempest, constantly seeking upward. Toward the false heaven of a monstrous god. And as he did, he noticed mist trickling down the steps—there was a small vent to the outside on each floor. Enough for Harmony's blood to spill in. It rarely came indoors, but it coated the steps tonight like a ghostly liquid.

Metal plinged. Metal he couldn't see. He ducked back by instinct—and a second later another explosion shook the stairwell. He found himself bleeding from shrapnel along one arm; they'd found grenades of their own. But as the resistance pressed forward to stop him, they found him still quite hale.

Vindication aimed true, dispatching aluminum death. The enemy bunched up with wooden shields and furniture to block his way, but Wax lobbed a grenade into it, then used the wood—now embedded with steel fragments—and a Push to force them back. When they went down, Wax landed behind the barricade and heard calls from above, giving him time to reload the Big Gun with another six grenades. He locked the weapon closed, then gritted his teeth.

These soldiers might have thought themselves prepared. They might even have fought Coinshots before.

But they'd never fought Waxillium Ladrian.

He had to take another hit of steel as he advanced. He was using it faster than he expected. He dropped the vial as shouts above accompanied soldiers throwing lines and nets across the central column to prevent him from flying up.

Wax pressed on, relentless. Heavy as a truck at some times, light as a bullet at others, he drove himself upward. Allomancy made the stairwell tremble—the concrete was reinforced with steel he could sense and use. It bent beneath his will, the concrete cracking, stairs rupturing and throwing off the aim of those trying to fire at him.

Time seemed to slow as he hit the next batch of soldiers, and he avoided their gunfire, then increased his weight and lodged a bullet in one's skull, then slammed that person back into the others. He crumbled the steps completely beneath the feet of the next group.

This wasn't about a case. This wasn't about a mystery. This wasn't about questions. He *couldn't* stop. He couldn't *afford* to stop. If he did, life ended. He fought with grenade, bullet, and steel. He fought as the sword, put where it needed to be. For all he hated that it was necessary.

Finally—trailed by the mist, trailing death—he reached the top. The end of the stairwell. There didn't appear to be a way up to the roof from here, but he'd reached the top floor. Breathing heavily, he glanced down through the center of the stairwell—flickering electric lights illuminating broken, crumbling concrete, ripped apart as if by cannonballs. Railings twisted and covered in wreckage.

Groans, like the hollow moans of the damned, echoed up from below. Wayne's head popped out to look up at him from one floor down; he was covered in dust and chips from the broken steps.

"Did you know this was coming?" Wax whispered to Harmony. "Is this ultimately why you brought me back to Elendel? Was this why you had Lessie watch me? Did you always know?"

There was no answer, of course. Wax wasn't pierced by the right metal currently, and couldn't commune with God. Still, he felt as if he could feel Harmony trying to push through, trying to see. Fighting Trell's influence.

"Don't ask me to do this again," Wax whispered, turning away from the carnage below. "This wasn't an adventure. It was a massacre. I'll finish the job, but don't ask me again. Find yourself another sword. You don't know how this feels."

In reply, he was given a distinct impression. Almost like a memory implanted directly into his mind: an exhausted, overwhelmed man lying broken on an ashen street, in front of a shattered city gate. Surrounded by death.

Wayne arrived a moment later, scrambling up the last cracked steps. "Mate," he said softly, looking back down the stairs. "I ain't … I mean … *Wow.*"

"It isn't over yet," Wax said, easing open the door to the top floor. The two of them slipped into a large marble hallway, with fine pillars and lush red carpet. Another force was gathering at the far side, before a broad set of double doors. Wax and Wayne took cover behind a large pillar, but they'd be flanked as soon as the troops moved forward.

Fortunately, this final group seemed to be the dregs of the enemy forces. Steelsight showed him few, if any, aluminum guns. Indeed it revealed metal weapons, zippers on clothing, keys in pockets. These people wore uniforms, but not like the others—more security officer, less soldier.

Wax downed another metal vial and quickly reloaded, then … Rusts. Those cuts along his arm were throbbing. He pulled a self-clinging bandage from his pocket and wrapped it around his arm, best he could. Hopefully the damage wasn't too bad. His hand still worked fine.

"They aren't well armed," he whispered to Wayne, "but there are a *lot* of them. Building security, I'd guess. I'll go—"

"Stop," Wayne said, holding his arm.

“What?” Wax whispered.

“These ones ain’t into it,” he said. Then as Wax frowned, he continued, “Those other ones, the ones who came down first? They wanted us dead. They wanted to prove themselves. They wanted the fight. These poor sods? These are the last defense. And they *ain’t into it.*”

“You might be right,” Wax said. “But we have to keep moving. Telsin could initiate the launch at any moment.”

Wayne nodded.

Then he started shouting.

# 63

“Hey,” Wayne called loudly, his voice echoing in the marble room. “You all, out there? I know you!”

Wax gave him a glare, but Wayne ignored him. Wax knew a lotta things. But tonight the fellow had become Ruin incarnate. Wax wasn’t wrong. But he didn’t have to be right neither.

“I know you!” Wayne shouted, louder.

The hall fell quiet save for the clinking of weapons and the shuffling of feet. Wax glanced out from the side of the stone pillar, perhaps thinking he might use Wayne’s voice as a distraction. Wayne grabbed his friend’s arm, then shook his head.

“I know you,” Wayne continued loudly, looking up toward the ceiling. “Yeah. I know how you feel. You’re guards. Watchmen. Fellows what was hired to protect the building. You don’t know about this nonsense—about cities being destroyed, about dark gods. Sure, you seen creepy stuff, but you ain’t here for that. You’re here to put coin in your pocket the honest way.

“You were supposed to go home tonight. Hug your kids. Have a meal—maybe cold, but filling. You were supposed to go drinkin’ with buddies, or get a good night’s sleep for once.

“But now, here you are. Gun in hand. Wonderin’ how you got where you are. Sure, you’re only facin’ down two blokes. But you heard what happened below. Maybe just rumbles, but you heard. And you *know* there used to be a hundred or two *actual soldiers* between those two blokes and you. Now there aren’t any of them left.”

Wayne let that thought linger. The room had gone so quiet you could have heard a man cock a pistol from a hundred paces. Wayne squeezed his eyes shut, remembering. Feeling. Then he continued, softer.

"Yeah, here you are," he said. "Your hand is slick on the grip of your gun. Your heart, it feels like it's tryin' to rip outta your chest and run away. But you think, 'I ain't got no choice. I signed up for this. I gotta shoot.'

"You're *wrong.* You *don't* hafta do this, mate. To hell with what you said you'd do. To hell with it all. You're in the wrong spot, and you *know* it.

"There's a door to your right. I don't know where it goes, but at least it ain't in here. In a moment, Dawnshot and I, we're gonna come out killin'. If you stay and fight, maybe you'll get lucky. Maybe we'll kill you, and you won't hafta spend the rest of your days feeling crushed on account of what you've done this night. Shootin' lawmen, then hearin' about an entire city bein' destroyed—full of kids, and families, and men what just wanna live like you do.

"But maybe you won't get lucky. Maybe you'll actually pull that trigger and hit one of us. And if you do, it's gonna be bad. Worse than bad. It will follow you your whole damn life." He paused. "Anyway, I just wanted to say my piece. I hope there's one that listened. When we come out, if you got your gun holstered and you're makin' for that escape route in the chaos … well, we ain't gonna aim for you first."

He looked at Wax, who pulled his bandage tight, then nodded back. He'd dropped the Big Gun; it was out of ammo. But he raised his regular revolver, armed and ready.

Sometimes you needed what he'd done. You needed a sword. But Wayne figured sometimes you needed something else. A shield? Or maybe that was too poetic. He didn't know much about poetry.

Sometimes what you needed was a guy who had been there before.

The two ducked out from behind the pillar, weapons out, and saw a whole host of people pushing and scrambling to get through that exit. Wax lowered his gun, dumbfounded, and Wayne grinned as *every damn person* left. Sure, a few at the tail end glanced back—with concern, like maybe they were the guys in charge of this bunch and didn't want to leave their posts. But when the army left you alone facing two trained Twinborn with notches in their stocks running to three digits …

In seconds, the marble entry room was empty. Wax shared a look with Wayne, then they walked to the large wooden doors at the far end and threw them open, to reveal a grand staircase leading up to some kind of ballroom with a skylight. Standing at the top were a man in a suit and a woman with a bowler hat, her head completely healed, flipping a dueling cane in one hand and trying her best—but failin’ somethin’ awful—to imitate a Wayne grin.

“These idiots again?” Wayne said with a sigh. “All right. I’ll tackle the one with the hat. You—”

“No,” Wax said softly.

“No?”

“No,” Wax repeated. “They were built and trained to defeat us. That man knows exactly how to hunt me.”

“So…” Wayne grinned. “I take the fellow, you take the woman?”

“Damn right,” Wax said, smiling. “Remember he’s a Leecher. Don’t get too close, or he’ll wipe out your Allomantic abilities.”

“Mate,” Wayne said, “I’m depending on it. Let’s do this.”

# 64

The Allomantic grenades in Marasi's hands vibrated so powerfully, she thought they'd shake her flesh free of her bones. The Allomancers from the Community gathered around the edges of the glowing pool, which was rapidly vanishing—their hands thrust in to touch it, draw it in. Their skin glowed as they filled with power.

Marasi had waded straight into the middle. And she could feel those troops on the other side, in a place that was somehow distant and impossibly close at the same time. Waiting.

She needed this power gone. Now. Marasi continued to draw in strength, charging her grenades. She had no idea how much they could hold. She'd never had access to this kind of strength before.

"It's too much!" a man cried. "What do I do with it!"

"Burn it!" Marasi shouted. "Use it!"

"For what?"

"It doesn't matter!" Marasi yelled. "We only need to get *rid* of it!"

Bursts of emotional Allomancy washed over her as Armal used her powers to Riot. Metal in the radio room vibrated and ripped apart. The Allomancers in the room channeled every bit of energy they could.

The pool shrank further. Marasi thought—through the blasts of confidence Armal sent—that she could sense the troops on the other side getting *agitated.* Then she felt something different. Something *emerging.* They were coming through. She understood it in a flash—you had to *want* to come through the portal. To command it to let you through. They were beginning the process.

*No you don't*, she thought. Then she dropped both her grenades, and used the same mental command to open the portal to them.

The movement on the other side stopped. Frozen in time as the Allomancers around her continued—wide eyed—drawing from the pool. Siphoning away the awesome power until, at last, the glow faded. The room was suddenly a normal ballroom again, with a hewn-out rock pit in the floor some three feet deep.

She was left with one final impression from the other side. Shock. Judging by how much energy she'd put into those grenades, it would be a while before the army discovered what had happened.

The other Allomancers slumped against one another, exhausted. She had never thought that using their powers would be so much work, but she felt wrung out as well. Not simply from what they'd done here— but from all of it, taking place in such a short time.

She limped to the edge of the pit and let them help her out.

"… Now what?" Armal finally asked.

"Now," Marasi said, lying back on the rock, "we hope that my friends have had an easier time of it than I have."

# 65

*Figures,* Wayne thought, dashing up the steps. *Wax would want me to face the evil version of him. While he gets the easy job. My evil twin probably spent the afternoon drinkin'. She'll be a snap.* Especially since she'd gotten her face half blown off earlier in the day.

The steps led to a large ballroom, with red-carpeted floor and no furniture. A skylight kept out the mist above, but for the most part this was a wide-open room with high ceilings and no obstacles. No cover either. The two backed away a little as Wayne and Wax charged up the steps—Wax doing a steel-assisted flying leap at the end, because of course he did.

Wayne kept his eyes on the woman, pretending he was going to engage her. As soon as he drew close though, he broke to the left and tackled the Coinshot. The man cried out in shock as Wayne knocked them both to the carpeted floor.

*Rusts. His cologne smells terrible.*

The man scrambled to get free, but Wayne took hold of his suit coat and clung on. Wayne knew how to fight beside Wax, which translated into knowing how to fight against him. Gotta stay close to Wax, otherwise he'd do something smart, like fly up high and shoot you till you died of it.

The man grunted, trying to pry Wayne off, seeming baffled by the whole experience as they wrestled on the ground. Eventually he put his hand on Wayne's face and Leeched him—the bendalloy in Wayne's stomach vanishing.

Wayne grappled anyway, trying for a headlock, but the man was *strong.* Too strong.

"You know," Wayne said, "you're too handsome to be a copy of Wax. You oughta get a scar or something."

The man tried to seize Wayne's hand and pry it free, but Wayne let go with that hand—then grabbed the man with the other, grinning, staying close.

"You miscreant!" the man growled. "Go and fight Getruda, as is your task. I must prove myself against Ladrian!"

"Why?" Wayne said as he tried to get his arm around the man's neck—but also palmed a bit of bendalloy and popped it into his mouth. "Why do you two have this *freakish obsession* with copying us?"

"Survival," the man said with a grunt, "of those most worthy. Trell demands that her servants *prove* themselves. Against adversity. Against society. Against the roles we take. And when there are several who fit the same slot in life … well, only the strongest can survive and be rewarded."

"Rusts," Wayne said. "That is one of the most messed-up things I've ever heard, mate."

Not-Wax pried Wayne's fingers free with pewter-enhanced strength. "It is the way of Autonomy. To find our place in the coming pantheon of rulers, we *must* be the best versions of ourselves. It is not we who are copying you, but you who seek to take the places which are rightfully ours."

Wayne shifted positions, but then felt something tremble on the front of the man's coat. Wayne rolled out of the way as one of the man's buttons—metal, evidently—burst free and shot off like a bullet.

"Damn," Wayne said, rolling over. "Did you steal that button trick from Wax?"

The man stood, glaring at Wayne while pulling a gun from his holster.

"Of course you stole it from him…" Wayne said. "You really *are* tryin' to become him. I thought you weren't as freaky as the not-me over there, but you're just more classy about it, eh?"

The man started firing, but Wayne tossed up a speed bubble. Anticipating the look of shock on the man's face when he found out that Wayne still had his Allomancy, he repositioned.

* * *

The essential trick to defeating the not-Wayne, Wax knew, would be staying close enough to her that she couldn't leverage her speed bubbles. So when Wayne broke left, Wax broke right, surprising the short, squat woman in the bowler hat.

"Oi!" she said. "That's not fair! Fight someone your own size! Or at least your own stench!"

She tossed up a speed bubble moments before Wax drew close enough to be within its perimeter. From his perspective, she became a blur of motion. Fortunately, he'd worked with Wayne long enough to know what to do. He changed his trajectory and shot the floor with an ordinary bullet. As she came out of the blur, leaping for him, he Pushed himself out of the way to avoid getting hit by a dueling cane.

"Oi!" she said. "Stand in one place so I can clobber ya in a fair-type manner, ya rustin' sod."

"Is that the best you can do?" Wax said, backing away—dodging her strikes but staying close enough to be inside a speed bubble if she made one. "Really, I thought you'd be harder than this."

"Stop quotin' lines from your wife last night," she snapped, "and fight me!"

She tossed up another speed bubble, catching Wax—but making it appear that Wayne and the Coinshot were frozen mid-conflict. Wayne was wrestling the fellow for some reason.

Whatever. Wax shot the woman as she drew close, but she barely flinched. She seemed to have a lot of health stored up—and that made sense if she'd begun preparing to fight him and Wayne years ago.

He jumped back, floating on a slight Steelpush to the perimeter of the speed bubble, where the air shimmered. He had to separate her from her metalminds. Wax clicked Vindication to a chamber with a hazekiller round, though she'd healed from the last one of those he'd hit her with.

*Where to shoot her?* He'd memorized the Hemalurgy book Death had sent them, but it would be hard to blast her spikes off her, as she would be wearing them deep in her core. Her healing power came from her metalminds though, and many surgeries embedded those in arms or legs. A pin through the arm bones was easier to recover from than one in the chest, and easier to swap out if required.

She growled and dropped the speed bubble, then attacked—clearly trying to get him to dodge too far out. But his years beside Wayne had given him a gut instinct for the precise distance to stay from her—which unfortunately meant he had to stay dangerously close to her attacks. During his next jump to get past her, he had to stay low enough that she was able to get a solid hit on his leg. It didn’t break anything thankfully, but *rusts* did it hurt.

She saw that and grinned wickedly. “Oh, that pain. That pain is *delicious.* Get in here. That was just an appetizer.”

* * *

Wayne stayed wary, putting up a speed bubble and watching the Coinshot try to take aim at him. That trick with the button worried Wayne. His remaining stored-up health would probably let him survive a hit or two, but not much more. He felt so exposed.

*I have to watch out for that super-metal he has too,* Wayne thought. *Or … actually … that’s probably my best way of beating him …*

After gauging the direction the man was swinging his arm as he aimed, Wayne repositioned and dropped the bubble. A series of *bangs* sounded as the man’s shots missed. Then Wayne dodged in from the other direction and tackled him again. This time the man managed to keep his feet.

Wayne grunted. “You know, Stinky—can I call you Stinky?—I can respect what you’re doin’. Gettin’ into a man’s head to figure out how to beat him? That’s good strategy. But…”

The man Leeched away Wayne’s bendalloy, then shoved Wayne off and started punching, his face turning red with anger. Wayne dodged the blows, then leaped forward and grabbed him yet again.

“But weren’t you worried?” Wayne continued. “About contamination? Wax, you see, *isn’t* a complete waste of a person. While you obviously are. So by pretendin’ to be him, you might have *accidentally* ended up doin’ something useful.”

The man growled, shoving Wayne aside, then fired a few shots. Wayne took one of those—ouch—but managed another hit of bendalloy. That was the key. People expected a man like him to run out of such an expensive metal.

But the fellow didn't know. He wasn't merely fighting Wayne the amiable miscreant. He was fighting Wayne Terrisborn, filthy rich snob with way, *way* too much money to burn.

"You know I can heal, right?" Wayne said after dodging back out of a speed bubble. "Shootin' me is kinda stupid."

"Not if it *hurts*," the man snapped, though he stopped firing. Mistake that, lettin' Wayne talk him out of it. He couldn't know that Wayne was running low on health—but then in general, you beat a Bloodmaker by makin' them use up their metalminds.

Instead, the man fished in his pocket and brought out a pair of what seemed to be aluminum handcuffs. Wayne swallowed a wisecrack. That … was actually a good idea. If he could grapple with Wayne for long enough to lock him to something, then get away, he could shoot Wayne full of bullets at his leisure. The only way out would be for Wayne to cut his own hand off.

As he was considering, the man gestured at Wayne with the cuffs—which he didn't need to do, but Wayne could admire the nice pose—and released a *terrible* wave of Allomantic strength, one that ripped the carpet up by its staples and sent Wayne tumbling backward.

Rusts. Even his metalminds—embedded beneath the skin of his thighs—felt those blasts. Still, Wayne had been ready for it. So he *pretended* to be dazed, but instead watched keenly as the man covertly pulled an aluminum flask from his inner coat pocket and took a hit. Wax had said every time the fellow used that super-Push, he'd have to replenish his steel.

*Now I know where you keep that flask, friend.*

With another speed bubble, Wayne rushed in close. The man groaned as—once again—Wayne grabbed on to him.

"You annoying little *prick*," the man snapped.

"Oh, mate," Wayne said. "You sweet mama's baby." He pulled in closer. "You ain't even *begun* to learn how annoying I can be."

* * *

"I'm supposed to like the pain," the woman said, circling Wax as they continued their dance—him trying to stay just far enough from her to avoid being hit, but not so far as to give her a chance to back up and make a speed bubble. “That’s something I didn’t know about him. Learned it recently, ya know? In the tunnel? He likes pain. I have to like pain. Enjoy fear. Savor misery.”

Wax didn’t reply, focused on keeping the right distance.

“Do ya know why?” the woman asked, feinting in, making Wax hop backward. “I didn’t at first. Freaked me out! I hadn’t *seen* that innim. More I thought though, the more it made sense. He *must* like the pain. Otherwise he’d have ended things long ago. It’s the only answer that makes any sense.”

She lunged, and he dodged a little too far, because she broke and threw herself the other direction, rolling to the ground and becoming a blur. Wax cursed, dancing away—noticing something from the corner of his eye that made him feel comfortable backing up. A moment later, his back pressed up against Wayne’s.

“So, how’re things?” Wayne said.

“Could be better,” Wax replied.

“I hear you,” Wayne grumbled, giving them a speed bubble. “Wanna try something new? Shake it up?” He waggled one of his dueling canes in his hand.

“Sure.”

Wayne tossed a dueling cane into the air, and Wax tossed *him* Vindication, loaded with aluminum bullets. “Ignore the hazekiller chambers,” Wax said, snatching the cane from the air. “Lever on the top activates those.”

The bubble dropped, and Wax met Getruda with dueling cane against dueling cane—a crack of wood nearly as loud as Vindication, as Wayne took a few shots at Dumad.

Wax smiled at the sound. It was in some ways silly to enjoy hearing his friend fire the gun. But it wasn’t the action that mattered. It was the wound that had finally healed.

Wax parried the next set of dueling cane blows. She was better than he was—but this change-up obviously had her confused. She started at him in a more defensive posture, and he was able to briefly fend her off, then deliver a strike on her thigh. Looking for where her metalminds were embedded deep under the skin, where Allomancers couldn’t interfere with them.

*Not either thigh,* he thought, hitting again. She, like Wayne, seemed not to mind the hits. Indeed, her eyes flashed with pain at each one, and her smile widened. At the same time, she didn't have the wild sense of pleasure he'd seen from some who truly enjoyed pain. She was trying to brute-force train herself to think like she believed Wayne did.

In some ways, that was even more disturbing.

She eventually came in more aggressively, and after he took a hit on his side—one that might have bruised a rib—he forced himself to retreat. His arm was still aching from the shrapnel earlier, and rusts … he was beginning to wear out.

So when Wayne came past him, Wax tossed him the cane back and caught Vindication as Wayne threw it. He'd fired all but the hazekiller rounds.

"More dodgin' and hittin'?" the woman asked Wax with a yawn. "I don't really mind, as it's fun watchin' you squirm. But I would rather not waste all night."

Wax needed to try something different. So with steelsight, he located a suitable piece of metal: a doorstop by a nearby door. He leaped over and grabbed it, then turned back as the woman came at him in a blur.

Time to try something old-fashioned.

* * *

Wayne landed another grapple on the Coinshot. The man had given up burning away Wayne's metals, and tried something smart. He took to the air—forcing Wayne to hold on tightly as he dangled. The Coinshot fired into the skylight, then they smashed through into the dark misty air. As they did, a shard of glass sliced the fellow along the arm something fierce.

*Huh,* Wayne thought. *Look at that.*

The wound didn't heal. He wasn't a Bloodmaker. So there *was* some limit on the number of spikes the Set could stick inna person. Or maybe Trell/Telsin just didn't want them to be so powerful they could challenge her.

Being in the air let Wayne control the fight far less; he really had to hold on, since if he dropped from up here—well, healing that would take basically all Wayne had. The need to hold on with both hands let the guy snap the handcuffs around one of Wayne's wrists. Rusts.

Wayne *did* get a glimpse of the apparatus set up on the rooftop though, among the construction. It included a long, sleek weapon that looked an awful lot like … well, a sausage. And sausages looked like a fellow's knob.

That had to be the rocket, and it hadn't been launched yet, which was a very good sign. Wax's sister stood there among some engineers, wearing jacket and cravat, the mists staying far away from her—like she had an invisible glass bubble. Her waiting with hands clasped behind her back, and staring off into the darkness … that seemed a bad sign.

The Coinshot let them go down lower, then used a Push off some apparatus to jerk them forward, then another Push sent them backward. The jarring motion dislodged Wayne, who dropped with a grunt of annoyance to the rooftop. Not far enough to need much healing, but still.

Damn, damn, *damn.*

Well, if the fellow was going to fight dirty, Wayne could do the same. Granted, Wayne would fight dirty *anyway,* but he felt better about it in moments like this. He ran toward the broken skylight, where hopefully he could drop down to help Wax fight Getruda.

* * *

Wax used the metal doorstop like a bludgeon, Pushing it at the woman. She dodged by instinct, as something that large would hurt more than a bullet.

Wax leaped over her as she rolled, then he Pushed the doorstop toward her again, hitting her in the arm and snapping bones.

She growled, agony breaking through her facade. It made her stumble and slow momentarily as she waited to heal—which let Wax reposition and shove the doorstop straight into her foot, shattering bones there too.

It bounced to the side, and he used a Push to soar in that direction, grab it, and shoot it again. By then she'd healed and managed to get out of the way—but this weapon made her keep dodging. Whenever she was distracted, or the bludgeon fell far enough away to be awkward retrieving immediately, he hit her with a bullet Pushed from his fingers. He didn't pause to reload. He just kept beating her down.

Her quips trailed off. He grabbed a chunk of metal from the broken skylight and used that too. He kept throwing things at her, relentless, a flurry of steel she had to dodge, or be slowed by pain and healing. Soon she seemed more *angry* than anything else, and she kept trying to find a way to engage him directly.

Wax didn't let her. He cut the woman on one side. Then the other. Then he delivered a bullet directly into her arm—and caught sight of a glimmer of metal. The wound healed over in a moment, but he knew what he'd seen. Her metalmind.

A second later, Wayne came thumping down from above, breathing heavily and muttering under his breath. Wax reached out and had his fingers in the right place to be inside the bubble when it appeared. Since any part of your body touching the perimeter would work to hold you in it, with that brush of the fingertips he was able to step in and join Wayne.

"Mate," Wayne said, "fightin' you is rustin' hard."

"Likewise," Wax said.

"It's *fun* though," Wayne noted. "He's *real* annoyed."

"Well," Wax said, "I'll admit I've often wanted an excuse to shoot someone short, with an exaggerated accent, wearing a bowler hat."

Wayne eyed him.

"It's the oddest thing," Wax said. "Can't rightly say what causes it. Instinct, I guess."

"I wear a coachman's hat," Wayne grumbled, shaking his hand—which had a handcuff on it. "It's *different.*" He took a deep breath, then pointed toward the sky, where Dumad was hiding in the mists. "I need to draw him back down. Shall we?"

Wax nodded, and as the speed bubble dropped they both made for the woman. This drew the Coinshot's attention, as he couldn't afford to let his ally be double-teamed. He landed back on the carpet, then released a barrage of Pushed bullets. As he did, Wax tossed Wayne a chunk of metal, then used a careful Push to separate the two of them. The bullets soared through the space between them.

Wax turned back to the woman, as his Push had put him closest to her. She had healed from the hits she'd received, but she appeared to be slowing, gasping for breath, covered in sweat. He knew that feeling. He ached in a dozen places, and even the adrenaline from the fight was fading before the exhaustion of an entire day spent racing a deadline.

He raised Vindication, hazekiller round chambered.

“Can you at least tell me why?” he said. “Why are you so fixated on imitating him? This goes further than trying to know your enemy.”

She drew in a ragged breath. “You ever been nothin’, Dawnshot?” Before he could reply, she shook her head. “No. You’ve always been somebody. Had two names. Even when you ran, you still had the money … the knowledge … a life spent knowin’ that you were in charge of yourself. Running away was a luxury for someone like you.” She paused, flipping one of her dueling canes and catching it. “Well, we don’t all have that. Some of us, we take the chances we’re given. And becoming someone we’re not? Well, that’s temptin’.”

Wax kept the gun on her. “Walk away. I don’t know you, but I can promise you this: They’ve lied to you. Trell, the Set. They’ve *lied*. You are somebody. And someone out there misses you.”

She grinned. “They said you’d get into our heads. They said it! But see, I’m smarter than you think. I got into your heads first.”

She came running at him. Wax turned Vindication a fraction of a degree and pulled the trigger—delivering the hazekiller round into her right shoulder. The secondary blast came a moment later.

Ripping her arm clean off.

She lurched to a stop, gaping at the wound. It didn’t heal, as that arm had held the metalmind that stored her healing. She might have another metalmind elsewhere—having several was smart—but if so, he’d forced her to use enough healing to drain it. Because the arm didn’t heal.

The wound was gruesome, but not as bad as one might imagine. Head wounds bled a ton, but if you separated a limb … well, it was awful. Yet there was always less blood than he expected.

She looked to him, almost pleading, but kept running at him. So, with a sigh, he tossed a bullet in the air and delivered it into her head with a surgical Push.

Her body dropped. Wax sighed, feeling wrung out. Now … where had Wayne run off to?

* * *

The Coinshot raised his hand toward Wayne, preparing to do his trick with the super-Push again.

Wayne braced himself, then got pushed back into a heap, barely raising a speed bubble in time. He glanced up and saw a bullet inching through the air about a finger's width from the edge of the bubble. He rolled aside as it broke through the barrier, deflecting in the process, and went zipping past him.

Right. Okay. He gritted his teeth and launched forward, dropping the speed bubble and charging the fellow. Not-Wax was expecting this, of course. Wayne had pulled this trick multiple times. The guy flung out some bullets, which Wayne dodged.

Resigned, not-Wax raised a hand to begin grappling Wayne.

Who hit him square in the face with a dueling cane instead, smashing his nose. The man cursed and backed up, bloodied.

"Yeah," Wayne said, "that's better. Not so pretty anymore."

The man howled, raising his gun.

Wayne slapped the free side of the handcuffs down on the man's wrist. The Coinshot, bleeding from both face and arm, gaped at this. Then, after letting out a howl of rage and frustration, he *Pushed* them into the air with a powerful force. Exactly as Wayne had hoped, though the force of the launch nearly ripped his arm out of its socket.

He dangled off the fellow, then grabbed on and climbed his body, holding his coat as they shot high, high, high into the air. Up through the mists in an incredible Steelpush, going many times the height Wax could have managed with the same metal. That super-metal—duralumin, it had been called?—was really something.

"You know," Wayne said over the howling wind, "your problem is that you specialized too much!"

The man grabbed Wayne by the throat, no longer bothering with the guns. They continued to rise, then exploded from the top of the mists into a land bathed in starlight.

"You did everything you could to learn to fight Wax," Wayne said, "but you didn't train to defeat me. That says you've been too single-minded. You should pick up a hobby or somethin'!"

They finally crested the height of the Push and began to drop. As they hit the mists again, the man shoved Wayne free, leaving him to dangle by the handcuff. With his other hand, not-Wax reached into the inside pocket of his jacket.

He came out with a yellow handkerchief, a bunny sewn in the corner.

“I suggest,” Wayne called up to him, “taking up pickpocketing. It’s rusting useful!”

And with that, Wayne tossed the man’s aluminum flask full of metals away into the darkness.

The man watched it go, his eyes widening in horror. The wind picked up again as they fell. The man scrambled, searching his body frantically.

“No others?” Wayne shouted. “Too bad!”

Not-Wax reached for Wayne as the two of them plummeted, his eyes bloodshot and enraged. But fallin’, it happened fast. Faster and faster, the more you did it. Wayne had always wondered why that was.

“Hey!” Wayne shouted. “When you meet Death—”

They crashed through the skylight, then slammed to the floor with a crunch.

All went black.

A few minutes later, Wayne blinked open his eyes and groaned. The healing he’d stored had been enough. Barely. He rolled over and looked at the Coinshot’s crumpled, broken body.

“Aw, man,” he muttered. “We dropped too fast. I didn’t get to say my awesome line.”

He found the keys to the handcuffs in the man’s pocket, and unlocked himself. Ruin, his body hurt. He’d have bruises something fierce in the morning. The metalmind had repaired the worst parts first, and saved him from dyin’. But it hadn’t been enough for anything more than an economy-class-type healing, and now he was all tapped out.

“When you see Death,” Wayne said, kicking the corpse in the side, “tell him he owes me fifty clips.”

He wandered over to Wax, who had removed the metalminds from the disembodied arm of the woman who absolutely was *not* a clone of Wayne. Takin’ those out was smart. There were stories of Compounding Bloodmakers regrowing a whole damn body from a limb that got ripped off.

“We should remove their spikes too,” Wayne said. “Just in case.”

“Let’s stop the bomb first.”

“Your sister is up there,” Wayne warned. “With the rocket thing, ready to shoot off.”

“Right, then,” Wax said. They crossed the room to the skylight.

“Why’d you keep so close to fight?” Wayne asked. “You shoulda stayed up high. Best way to fight someone *maybe* a little like me, in purely superficial ways.”

“I couldn’t. She would have run out the time. I needed to stay in close, force her to engage me.”

Huh. Well, maybe both of them had wanted things personal this time. They positioned themselves in the center of the room, ready for Wax to grab ahold and launch them both up into the open skylight—toward the mist, which cascaded down like a ghostly waterfall.

But Wax paused.

“Mate?” Wayne asked.

Still staring up, Wax fished in his pocket, then brought out a small earring. Shaped like a bent nail. A religious icon for a Pathian, but to him, so much more.

He rarely put it in, except when he had to. Tonight he hooked it into his ear, and then he whispered something.

# 66

"I did my part," Wax whispered. "I became your sword. I want you to do your part now."

*My part*, Harmony said in his head, *is to put you where you can—*

"No," Wax said, reloading quickly while staring up at the mists. "Not good enough. Not *damn near* good enough, Sazed. I can kill men. I'm far too good at that. But I can't kill a god. If Autonomy intervenes, I will need you."

*Autonomy won't intervene,* he said. *It's not our way, as it exposes us. She has Invested your sister, but mostly to let Telsin communicate with her followers and visualize plans in greater complexity than an ordinary human. She will not fight you. You won't win this next part with bullets.*

"Can I kill Telsin?"

*I'm counting on you trying to. But … I'm not certain. She might be so highly Invested that you can't. If so, Telsin will die only if Autonomy withdraws her power.*

"I'm still going to want your help."

*I—*

"What can you *do*?"

*I … I do not know. I can perhaps stun her. Briefly interrupt her Connection to Autonomy. Maybe.*

"Be ready," Wax said, raising his reloaded gun in one hand, then seized Wayne by the arm. Wayne nodded and held on. Wax Pushed off the nails in the carpet, sending them soaring up into the mists and onto the rooftop.

Wax felt better immediately, entering the mists. His fatigue washed away, his pains fading. The mist was something ancient, older than

Harmony. It had seen the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor stop the end of the world. It had seen the Lord Ruler rise before that, and protected—perhaps threatened—the world when it had been new.

*You've done something to me,* Wax thought at Harmony, nudging them to the side and landing on the roof. *Odd things have been happening to me all day. Is it an aftereffect of holding the Bands?*

*No,* Harmony said. *It is something else. But it didn't work as I*'d *hoped.*

Mists wrapped around Wax as he walked across a cold rooftop to confront Telsin. Her eyes glowed bright red, painting the nearby mist bloody. It stayed away from her. The way a dog lurked outside the range of a man who had kicked it in the past.

"You're right," she said. "I *have* underestimated you."

Wax stopped a distance away, Wayne at his side. Behind Telsin was a hulking contraption with the rocket on top. Hidden from sightlines below by the "construction" at the perimeter of the rooftop, it was bathed in floodlights. Engineers worked on it furiously, sparing him nervous glances.

"Wayne," Wax hissed, gun trained on Telsin, "go help those engineers take a lunch break."

"Gladly," Wayne said, hurrying over. It didn't take much work to get them corralled into a corner.

Wax stood there, gun on Telsin, feeling … unnerved. He'd made it this far. He'd found the rocket. This should be it, shouldn't it? But what did he do now?

*Don't get blindsided again,* he thought. *Six years ago, she got the better of you. She must have something planned today too. Don't fall for it.*

"So," Telsin said, her eyes glowing brighter, "here we are. Now you're going to let me destroy Elendel."

"Like hell I will," Wax growled.

"What would you give up, Waxillium," she said, "to save a *planet*? How many people are you willing to sacrifice to do what needs to be done?"

She stepped closer. He cocked Vindication, thrusting it forward. Rusts.

"Autonomy likes you," Telsin said. "She called you a masterpiece. I disagreed, but here you are, and I find myself persuaded. Harmony knows he's growing impotent, that Discord is near, and so he created you. A sword. Who can act when he cannot."

She stepped closer, ignoring Vindication. And why shouldn't she? Harmony had said the gun wouldn't do anything. Her smile as she advanced reminded him of when she'd turned on him. Of how it had felt to be betrayed by his last living kin.

That moment. That *terrible* moment when he'd realized that by saving her, he'd not only gotten himself shot, but potentially gotten Steris, Marasi, and Wayne killed as well.

That horrible moment lived on. Like crystallized agony deep within him. One last tie to his old life. He needed to defeat that as much as he did her.

"Do you think Harmony could do it?" Telsin asked, gesturing to the rocket. "If this were the only way to protect the people of this world? Could he sacrifice one city to save the rest? Or would indecision freeze him? Like a constable on their first day on the job."

Rusts. She didn't seem the least bit concerned by their arrival. Something was wrong. Something was *profoundly* wrong.

"Well," Telsin said, "*I'm* strong enough. *I'll* see it done."

Rusts, rusts, *rusts.* This was all wrong. A quiet conversation on a rooftop? A doomsday device apparently stopped? And yet Telsin was so rusting *confident.*

*You're not merely a sword, Wax,* he thought. *You're a detective. That's the life you chose. Be the person you decided to be. Not the one you've been assigned to be.*

Wax focused his thoughts, pushing away the pain of betrayal. *Think. You found those charts of launches. None of them could travel far enough. So …*

He lowered his gun. "It doesn't work."

Telsin froze.

"The delivery device," he said. "All this time, and it still can't lift a bomb this big, can it? You'd have fired it by now if it could."

Telsin shrugged.

The detective in him grasped for connections. If she legitimately thought that the world would end if she didn't destroy Elendel, she'd have launched it anyway. On the hope that it worked. Because if she failed, everything ended anyway—so why not try?

Feeling cold, Wax raised his hand and increased his weight. Then he Pushed against the rocket. The whole construction collapsed, and the enormous weapon—the bomb—hit the rooftop with a resounding, *hollow* clang.

It was a decoy.

Telsin's eyes went wide.

He turned and looked across the city, softly blanketed in mist, made indistinct—like a dream. Here in the mists he could think; he could make the connections that had eluded him all day. Where was the bomb?

They'd been planning this for years … waiting until the delivery device was ready. Building the launchpad high to give themselves the best chance. Those were the right threads. He'd followed the correct clues.

Problem was, in the end, they hadn't been able to get it working. So when Wax had arrived earlier in the day, they'd panicked. They'd moved their bomb somewhere else. But where? Surely they weren't going to deliver it by train or by road. Too obvious. Plus, he'd told Steris to close both routes into the city. So what? They had to move and install their bomb on a new delivery device. So …

*The docks,* Wax realized, pieces clicking into place. *They were genuinely surprised when I located the tunnel from the mansion. Why put their lab out there near the docks, instead of secure in this tower or one of the caverns?*

*Because they had another delivery method, a backup. In case the rocket never worked. And when I arrived in town they acted, taking the bomb from here to …*

He spun, searching the darkness, and somehow he was able to see *through* the mist. As if it thinned just for him. Distant, beyond the city, he picked out the trailing lights of something out on the open sea. An enormous warship, a Pewternaut-class vessel that had been docked all day. A show of force, he'd thought.

But also the fastest way to carry something large toward Elendel. A method that couldn't be stopped by a railway or road blockade.

The bomb was on that ship.

"She thought you'd find it," Telsin whispered. "I think she prefers you to me. I'm … not sure how I feel about that."

Wax's mind raced. How to stop it? He rushed up to the edge of the roof, looking between the steel rods of the construction facade.

"Wax?" Wayne asked, hurrying up. "Nearly gave me a heart attack when you toppled that bomb there. What's going on?"

“The rockets never worked,” he muttered. “Not well enough.”

“Autonomy wanted to figure them out,” Telsin said. “Turns out advanced ballistics and self-propelled rocketry proved a little beyond our grasp. Curiously, with this power I can … see hints of what is to come. But the mechanisms? Well, that takes experimentation, learning, iteration…”

Rust and *Ruin.* He couldn’t reach that ship. It was already too far out in the ocean, far beyond what a Steelpush could manage. His anchor would give out, and he’d drop into the depths.

“… Mate?” Wayne said, worried. “Wax? What’s wrong?”

Could he get to Elendel fast enough? He doubted he could outpace that ship. And even if he could, what would he do when he arrived? The ship would almost certainly detonate the bomb as soon as it drew enough of the city into the blast radius.

“Oh, give it up, Wax,” Telsin said, stepping closer. “Admit that I’m right. Did you know, that’s the most infuriating thing? When we were young I’d invite you to join me, but you’d *judge* me instead. You always thought you were too good for me.”

He turned, surprised at the vitriol in her voice.

“I’ve hated you for decades,” she hissed at him, her eyes pulsing an even deeper red. “Because you could never just admit it. Well, today, *I’m* doing what has to be done. You’re going to watch. You’re going to weep. And I’m going to Ascend.”

How?

There *had* to be a way!

“A new world begins tonight,” Telsin said. “Emerging from Elendel’s smoldering ruin. The Basin will be devoted to a new god, one who isn’t weak. Isn’t divided.

“All day you’ve hounded me. But now you’re the one who is caught, and the ship is free. The bomb is on its way. You can’t stop it. Go ahead. Throw yourself into the night, Wax! You’ll end up swimming in the bay.

“Or maybe you’ll hurry to Elendel, to join everyone who will die in the blast. The bomb is rigged to blow if the ship is stopped or struck by weapons fire. It’s too late. I’ve *won.* I—”

*Hit her, Harmony,* Wax thought. *Cut her off. Now.*

Telsin gasped. She stumbled, the red glow to her eyes fading, her lips parting, and fell motionless to the rooftop.

*Her body is pushed past its limits*, Harmony told him. *Waxillium … she’s being sustained only by the power. Get Autonomy to withdraw. Stop that ship!*

Wax met Wayne’s eyes, which were pleading with him, worried. The answer. What was the answer?

Wax looked down through the broken skylight, where mist was pouring in like water into a drain.

He could barely make out a corpse below.

# 67

Steris stood at the central station, where people piled onto a train—a cargo train, as those could carry more people. She checked items off her list. Another district evacuated.

Broadsheets were getting wind of Steris's efforts. Entire octants being evacuated? Mysterious gas leaks used as an explanation? People were fleeing by car in larger and larger numbers, but she'd planned for that. It was part of the evacuation projections.

She nodded to TenSoon, who came prowling up, still wearing the constable's body. "Daal and the senators have fled the city. News that they are gone is spreading."

"That's troubling," Steris said. "But inconsequential before our current need."

His expression became distant. "Yes, but they took the Bands. I shouldn't have brought them out, shouldn't have let them go. I've been away from human politics for too long." He looked at her. "I didn't know, Steris. I didn't know they had been drained. I feel we were played somehow. I don't do … human very well anymore."

"We will deal with the problem of the Bands," she said, "if we have the luxury of surviving what is coming."

He growled softly, but it seemed more like a sigh than a sign of disagreement. They both turned as Governor Varlance walked up, wiping his brow with his handkerchief. He'd begun the meetings today wearing white face makeup, but little of that remained, just some patches on his cheeks.

His presence lent a great deal of authority to Steris's orders. People were comforted to see him, the governor, directing efforts. Simply by standing near her, he had probably saved thousands of lives.

It had proved difficult to keep him from talking and spoiling the effect by being … well, himself. "How are you doing?" she asked him, making a notation as another train chugged away. "Perhaps some more coffee?"

"No," he said. "Thank you." He paused and spoke more softly. "How many do you think we can save?"

"It depends entirely on how much time we have."

"Assume there's not much," he said, his voice growing even more hushed. "Lady Ladrian, we just received a report from intelligence operatives in Bilming. Something has happened."

She felt a coldness deep inside. "Artillery launch?"

"No," he said. "Bilming has launched one of its *warships* toward Elendel. Full speed."

A warship. She turned and waved toward Reddi, who was instructing his constables to keep lines organized as people were loaded onto the next trains.

He jogged over. "Bilming has launched a warship," Steris said.

"A single warship?" Reddi said. "We can handle that, even without a navy of our own."

"Indeed," the governor said.

Only one ship? Going at full speed?

*Oh no.*

The answer was obvious to her.

"The ship *is* the bomb," she said, her eyes wide. "Wax said he was going to try to interrupt the artillery launch. So they sent a ship instead, at full speed, laden with explosives."

"Blessed Preservation," Reddi whispered, then looked at the vast station still full of people. They, including the ones already evacuated, represented only a fraction of the city's population. "Can we shell it?"

"And detonate the bomb?" Steris asked. "They wouldn't have chosen this delivery mechanism if destroying the ship would stop the bomb."

"So Dawnshot has failed," the governor said, slumping to the side against a pillar. "Elendel is lost."

"How long do we have?" Steris asked.

“At full speed from Bilming?” Reddi said. “Not long. Hours at most. Most likely less than that.”

“We can get away,” the governor said, “if we leave *now.* We have to get on this train!”

Steris stood there, numb. The other senators had already evacuated. They would rant all day that she was wrong, but when there was a whiff of actual smoke, they broke down the doors to flee.

But she knew. She *knew.*

She slammed her hand against her notebook, surprised at her forcefulness, causing the panicking governor to hesitate.

“That ship,” she said, “will not reach this city.”

“How do you know?” the governor said.

“Because my husband, Waxillium Ladrian, will prevent it.”

“And if he doesn’t?” the governor said.

Steris flipped through her notebook to the disaster scenarios she’d anticipated, landing on a specific page full of projections about the dangers of offshore earthquakes.

“He will,” Steris promised. “But we need to evacuate the region nearest the bay just in case. And prepare for the possibility of a tsunami.” She flipped to a map of the city, pointing. “We need these areas evacuated next in case the best my husband can do is detonate the weapon early.”

“But … if Dawnshot fails…”

“He will not fail,” Steris said. She took the governor by the arm. “I need your help. Don’t go. Stay. Be a hero, Varlance.”

“But…”

“My husband will stop the ship.”

“How do you *know*?” he asked. Nearby, one of the trains let out a jet of steam, and last call was shouted. Governor Varlance took one step that way, but then looked to her.

“Some things,” she said softly, “cannot be planned for in life. I struggled to learn that, Varlance. But there is one thing I’ve learned that is true: No matter what else happens, Waxillium Ladrian *will* get wherever he needs to be. Somehow.”

# 68

Marasi undid the final latch and heaved open the heavy metal hatch. Her arm and leg still ached, but she’d overcome her immediate exhaustion.

No army had appeared. The soldiers in Wayfarer, with Entrone captured, had backed down. Most everyone else—by the lord mayor’s orders—was confined to quarters.

Everyone was waiting to see what happened next.

“We should have known,” Armal whispered from lower on the ladder. “This much metal, by their own admission, would have drawn their ‘mutants.’ This hatch was never to lock them out, but to lock us in, so we could never visit the observation room unsupervised.”

Marasi climbed up into the observation chamber, which was indeed different from the projection room she’d visited earlier in the day. This one was a simple round room with one flat wall—the “window” that displayed a destroyed city and falling ash. Apparently opening the hatch triggered the system.

Knowing what she did, Marasi could see the flicker of the image as proof of its fake nature—but to someone who had never encountered anything like it, it would be astonishingly convincing. Somehow appearing on the back wall without the projector streaming light through the room in a way that could be interrupted.

Marasi helped Armal and the others up through the hatch. The four were immediately transfixed by the image. In the next room they found the projector—set up to shine onto the back of a sheet and create the image in the main room.

As the four former captives inspected the equipment and put their hands between it and the sheet, Marasi found and opened another small door—one to the outside. It let the mists pour in, revealing that they were in a small, nondescript building in a warehouse district. The door looked out onto a street—and a good portion of the city was visible beyond, twinkling with electric lights.

Armal and the others gathered around her, staring. Marasi could only imagine their emotions. They'd believed her enough to fight Entrone and the Set, but seeing this … knowing what had been stolen from them …

"I'm sorry," Marasi said. "I—"

"Have you appreciated it?" Armal whispered.

Marasi frowned as the woman regarded the city.

"These seven years," Armal said. "Have you *used* them? Have you *appreciated* them? I spent them wishing I could have even one more day of my old life. That I could show my children a world of lights and life, instead of stone and shadow. Please. Tell me you *lived* those years of freedom."

"I…" Marasi said.

Had she? She had spent much of that time with Allik, and that had been wonderful. And she'd accomplished much in her career. But was it what she wanted, ultimately?

Or, was it *all* she wanted?

She'd seen and learned so much. And yet … these poor people, kept in the shadows. How much sooner could they have been saved if Moonlight and her people had been more *forthright* with what they knew? Marasi and the Ghostbloods had been working toward the same goal for years, and she had never known it.

People suffered when the truth became a commodity to be speculated upon.

For now she looked up—peering through the mists, toward some spotlights shining high above. Was that … the top of the Shaw in the distance? Lit up so it blazed in the mists like some kind of mythical beacon?

As she watched, something flashed there, and the lights—in an explosion—went out.

# 69

It had taken Wellid far too long to decide he hated the ocean.

He had volunteered for this duty—sailing the Pewternaut A16 from Bilming to Elendel—because he'd figured it would be the safest. On a giant ship made of steel? The biggest the world had ever seen? Protected by the thick hull from enemy bullets?

He figured that at least—once the war started—he'd be aboard the most indestructible ship ever built. Yes, they were going to engage Elendel, but he'd prefer that to being in Bilming where that crazy lawman swooped around.

But now here he was, the familiar glow of Bilming retreating in the distance. Ordered to keep watch on the deck as they steamed across the choppy waters. Keep watch for what? There was nothing out here but churning froth and mist. They were even cutting lights on the ship, now that they were out of the bay and beyond any other vessels they might hit.

He'd thought that sailing out on the ocean would be serene, but not tonight. The crash of waves, the thrum of engines. And other … phantom noises from out there somewhere. Splashes that didn't match the flow of the water. Distant screeches that might have been gulls. Only what gull screeched at night?

Spooked by the sounds, he slid open the hood on his lantern. Unfortunately, that just lit up the mists—making a blazing halo around Wellid. He couldn't make out much of the waters; the ship's deck was pretty high up in the air. When he'd signed on, he hadn't realized how intimidating it would be to look down. It was like he was atop a three-story building, the water all the way below.

"What are you doing?" a harsh voice said from behind. Gabria? The more senior sailor took him by the arm and quickly closed the lantern's hood. "Didn't you hear the order? Once we're out of the bay, we're running dark. Do you want Elendel to be able to target us?"

"I thought I heard something," Wellid said, prying his arm free. "I'm on watch. Aren't I supposed to watch for things?"

"If you hear something suspicious," she said, "report it. Don't open your lantern unless *absolutely* necessary. Didn't you listen to the briefing?"

"Sure I did," he said. Though his mind *did* tend to wander.

"Why are you wearing a life jacket?" she asked. "That wasn't ordered."

"I want to be safe," he said. "Hey, Gab? What are you going to do with your reward?"

With the lantern shielded, he couldn't see her in the darkness. But she seemed to stare at him for an uncomfortably long time. Was he missing something?

"Reward?" she said.

"Sure," he replied. "The great reward we were promised. For this mission?"

"Wellid, what do you think we're doing?"

"Delivering a payload," he said. "To Elendel. It's a weapon, right? We drop it off, then we get out of there?"

Another uncomfortable pause. "Yes," she said. "Get out of there. That's right. But I'm not doing it for the reward."

He should have expected that. The others, well, they were all a little bit more … diligent about all of this. Trell. The impending war with Elendel. They'd have probably volunteered for this mission even if it hadn't been aboard a giant indestructible warship.

"Keep that lantern shielded," Gabria said, "and fetch me if you hear or see something suspicious. *Credibly* suspicious."

She stalked off across the deck, leaving him alone with the cold mists and indifferent waters. He was supposed to patrol, but they hadn't given him a specific route. So after listening to those waves, and feeling like he could hear the darkness watching him, he walked in the direction Gabria had gone. Logically he'd need to stick close to—

What was that?

That thump against the hull *surely* hadn't just been his imagination. He was near the back of the ship—um, the aft of the ship, sir—and the sound had come from farther along. He inched forward, wielding his lantern in a shaking hand. Even shielded, it let out a *tiny bit* of light. Letting him better make out the ship's back railing.

*That noise was nothing*, he told himself forcibly. You heard things in the mists. Everyone knew that. He shouldn't say anything, because Gabria had—

A hand reached up from the darkness below and seized the top bar of the railing. A shape followed, pitch black, vaguely human, heaving itself onto the deck. It had *tentacles* waving behind it, a hundred of them curling like the mists. In that shadow, Wellid saw a misbegotten shape. A thing that wasn't human, a thing that *couldn't* be human. The mists seemed to know this, for while they played with the waving tentacles, they stayed away from the figure. It *repelled* the mist.

It was a mistwraith, Wellid knew. A terror from the deep, a relic of ancient times. A thing of stories and legend come to claim his soul.

He found his voice and screamed. With fumbling fingers, he threw open the shield on the lantern, bathing the deck in light. Revealing …

A man. Tall, with prominent sideburns, his vest and cravat peeking from underneath a thick duster—mistcoat tassels spraying out behind him in the wind.

Dawnshot was here. On the *ship*.

Gabria spun from farther down the walkway. "Wellid, why—" She cut off immediately, seeing Dawnshot there. She gaped long enough for a second man to climb up over the railing, land with a thump, then pull on a damp bowler hat.

"No!" Gabria finally said. "*How?*"

Dawnshot flung wide his mistcoat, revealing what had been obscured before: a large metal spike protruding from his lower chest, where it had been pounded right through his clothing to pierce him directly between two ribs.

* * *

Slowly, awareness returned to Telsin.

She found herself on the rooftop, near her failed decoy. Even before Wax's arrival, she'd been worried. Autonomy's deadline was today. Maybe she could have gotten more time—made the rocket work—except … except for *him.*

She growled softly and rolled over to find one of the engineers shaking her arm. What had happened? Her Investment from Autonomy should have prevented a blackout like that. She felt … wrung out. Her core cold, her arms sore from scraping the rooftop, her skin clammy. Rusts. She felt practically *mortal* again.

*What is happening?* she asked Autonomy.

*You,* the distant—too distant—voice said, *are failing me.*

*No. The bomb is being delivered! I'm … I'm …*

For the first time, she took in the wreckage around her. A broken rooftop. Bent steel girders. A smashed remnant of her missile-launching construction.

"What … what happened?" she hissed.

"They took spikes from the bodies," the woman said, pointing. "Ordinary ones, not made of your metal. But one granted … duralumin."

*No.*

Telsin heaved herself to her feet and stumbled to the edge of the building to stare out over the bay. The force of Wax's Push had bent and crushed the very underlying girders of the skyscraper here, leaving the rooftop cracked and sloped.

*Your failure begins,* Autonomy said, voice increasingly distant. *You are not worthy.*

The fire inside Telsin died. The power that had for so many months warmed her was leeching away. Her skin began to turn grey.

*No!* she thought. *No! The bomb cannot be stopped. If they interfere, they will destroy themselves and the city.* Potentially both cities. Rusts.

*We … shall see …*

Telsin gasped and fell to her knees, trying to reassure herself. It was just Wax. He'd been an annoyance since childhood, but he'd never *actually* interrupted anything she'd set in motion. Honestly, he probably hadn't even reached the ship. A jump like that was nearly impossible, and his aim wasn't *that* good.

Was it?

* * *

Wax downed a vial of metals from his belt, replenishing his steel. That jump had been incredible, with Wayne on his back, a flash of rushing wind and power reminiscent of holding the Bands of Mourning. He had barely made it to the ship after slowing their final approach with Allomancy—eventually landing them near some portholes a few feet below the open deck. He expected to get an earful for making Wayne climb the rest of the way.

A sailor reached for her gun, and Wax for his own. But before either of them could draw, Wayne flung a handful of bullets into the air and Pushed them to streak through the air, dropping the woman.

“Ruuusts,” Wayne said. “Is that what it’s always been like for you? That was so easy!” Wayne eyed him. “Gotta be honest, almost ruins your reputation, mate. If people knew how easy bein’ a Coinshot was, they’d all stop talkin’ about how great you are.”

Wax shook his head, pointing Vindication at the second sailor—the trembling one holding up the lantern. Wayne had of course insisted on a spike for himself. Ruin. Wax hoped what they’d done hadn’t been *too* blasphemous.

*No,* Harmony’s voice said in his head, *not blasphemous, Waxillium. More … a sense of industrious recycling.*

“Good to know,” Wax muttered.

*I cannot see where the bomb is,* Harmony told him. *I can see only what you do. I didn’t know the ship was the delivery mechanism—but I am afraid the device will have redundancies and dead man’s switches. Take care. We cannot afford to detonate it by accident. I fear that even at this range, it would be deadly to many innocent people.*

Strange. He’d come all the way around to finding God’s voice in his head comforting again.

Wayne seized the fellow with the lantern by the arm, holding tight and staring him in the eyes—though the man didn’t seem to need any further intimidation.

“The bomb,” Wax said. “Where is it?”

“The … the payload?” the man stuttered, then pointed to a nearby door. “In the munitions hold. A-all the way down. Follow the red lines painted on … on the walls.”

Wax shared a glance with Wayne, then nodded.

“You can’t go inside!” the man said. “The weapon is fragile and might explode, so only the experts are allowed to touch it! You’ll blow up the entire ship!”

“Then mate,” Wayne said with a drawl, “I suggest you find a way to not be on the ship anymore. Real fast.”

Wayne let go. The nervous fellow glanced from Wax to Wayne, then—with a sense of panic—threw himself off the ship into the churning waters below, taking his lantern with him and leaving the two of them in darkness.

“Damn,” Wayne said. “I meant for him to find a lifeboat or somethin’.”

“The people on this ship are going to be zealots,” Wax said. “Considering they’re on a suicide mission.” Shouts from farther along the deck, including other lanterns being unshuttered, indicated that someone had noticed what was happening.

With increasing urgency, Wax led the way to the metal door the man had indicated. A Push slammed it open, revealing a stairwell to the decks below. He surprised several sailors coming up, armed with rifles. They didn’t get a chance to fire before Wax dropped them. He then soared to the landing. This entire ship was metal—steps included. It made for some easy—

Wayne crashed down beside him, thanks to a maladroit Steelpush. He scrambled back to his feet.

“That part’s harder than it looks,” Wayne admitted. “You sure you got my spike in the right spot, mate?”

“I studied the Lord Mistborn’s book thoroughly over the years, Wayne,” he said. “If I’d placed the spike wrong, you’d be in an extreme amount of pain.”

Wayne grunted, then grabbed one of the rifles from the fallen sailors. He nodded to Wax, and—despite calling for the sailors to surrender—they had to shoot a few on their way down. Following the red lines, they reached a small hold labeled MUNITIONS DUMP.

*Someone really ought to explain,* Wax thought, unlocking the door and slipping the key into his pocket, *that leaving a guard outside with the key is a terrible practice.* He stepped over the body of the guard and joined Wayne inside the room.

It was square, perhaps thirty feet across, and had three very large barrel contraptions—covered in wires, maybe five feet tall—near the center, spaced about five feet from one another. There was another device on the far wall, also rigged with wires—these leading to the three barrels. There were no obvious timers, control panels, or anything of the sort. It was, frankly, baffling.

"Careful, mate," Wayne said as he inspected the contraption. "Be *real* careful."

"It's some kind of dead man's rig," Wax said. "These three barrels are the explosive devices, each with its own power source. Disarm one, and it will send a signal to detonate the other two via that contraption on the wall. Wayne, tell me you still have those schematics."

"Course I do," Wayne said, digging in his pocket. "Got lots of interesting stuff in here." He pulled out the schematics Wax had given him, then spread them out on the floor.

*You are right,* Harmony said in Wax's head, processing the information far faster than he could. *Actually, it's worse than you think. The control device is sending a pulse every twenty seconds to the three barrels, telling them not to detonate. If that stops, they'll go off.*

*That is combined with a dead man's rig. If something happens to one of the bombs, the other two will detonate. Even if we had three people, one disarming each barrel at the same time, it wouldn't work. The timing is too precise for humans. You'*d *end up detonating two of the bombs.*

"How much destructive power are we talking about?" Wax asked, folding out the bomb schematics. "What if we set a charge, get out of here, and let it blow in the middle of the ocean?"

*Waxillium, Wayne …* Harmony said, and Wayne perked up, apparently hearing the conversation too. *This is a new kind of explosive—the direct transformation of matter into energy. I don't think Autonomy or her agents understand how destructive this is. Looking at this, and how much metal they've used, I suspect they severely underestimated this bomb's power.*

*If we were simply talking about harmonium blowing up when combined with water, then yes: you could detonate it safely out here in the ocean. But a blast caused by splitting harmonium with trellium … My friends, I have* no idea *how much power that would release. I can't exactly be sure what* *will happen if something this powerful is ignited. It could set the very atmosphere ablaze.*

*If not, it would potentially vaporize not just Elendel and Bilming, but many cities nearby as well. Your sister is desperate, and Autonomy is callous. I doubt they tested anything on this size or scale in those caverns. We* can't *let this explode. But … I also can't see a way to disarm it.*

Wayne whistled softly. Wax carefully backed away, not touching any of the wires. The only safe thing to do would be to get this ship—and everything it contained—as far from civilization as possible.

"So," Wayne said, "guess we get to steal a ship, eh? That's new."

# 70

Steris didn’t have nearly enough time.

But she had learned, from both accounting and contracts, never to be overwhelmed by scale. Dealing with sums of money in the millions didn’t make a thousand boxings less valuable. In a similar way, being unable to completely evacuate the city—or even a region of it—didn’t lessen the value of a single life.

So she left Constable-General Reddi to handle the main evacuation and hurried with the governor to the city docks. Her master plan included these people leaving via boat, which meant tons of people now crowded the docks. If that bomb exploded nearby, all of these would be in serious danger. In addition, she worried about flooding. She knew only a little regarding this possibility from the studies she’d read—but that was enough to make her alarmed.

She had to rectify this miscalculation. Get as many people away from this region as she could. The governor took command of the dockworkers via their foremen. Following her instructions, he sent them to begin wrangling people for a retreat farther into the city.

Steris set her notebooks out by a lantern on a workman’s desk, sitting beneath the dark night sky, on the road above the bay, worried about her low resources in this region.

“Steris Ladrian?” a voice said from behind her.

She turned to find a group of eight men and women in nondescript clothing. “We were told,” said the man at their lead, “you could use our help.”

“Did the governor recruit you?” she asked.

"Actually—"

He was interrupted as Governor Varlance came jogging up, followed by several workers.

"You," Steris said, ripping out a page and thrusting it toward one of the men. "Train conductor? I need all of these people gathering here inside those cargo trains. You," she said, pointing to another. "Crane operator, right? I need those cargo bins moved into positions blocking the streets here, arranged to stem and slow a flood of water, in case of a tsunami.

"Construction workers, congratulations. You're now constables. Wear your brightest hats and vests and get the people from these three sections moving inland away from the docks. I've outlined a route for you. You won't get far, but putting buildings between you and the ocean is essential.

"Dockworkers, I need ropes. As many as you can find. We're going to make stable anchor points where we can start human chains to grab anyone who might be swept away if there's a flood. Hurry! Our primary concern is a blast out in the bay. Our secondary concern is flooding."

The majority of the foremen ran off through the mists, calling for their crews. It was rather fulfilling how alacritously they obeyed. She wasn't accustomed to people simply doing what she said; in the past they'd always needed a great deal of persuasion.

"I've noted the structures I believe are strong enough to withstand a blast or flood," Steris said to the governor. "We should evacuate people in this region to the middle floors, congregated away from windows."

"This…" the governor said, looking over the plans. "This is incredible! Why haven't you shared any of this?"

"It's mostly done for my own amusement," Steris admitted. "Or my own anxiety."

"What a waste," he said, picking up one of the sheets. "I thought your evacuation plan was exhaustive, but this is even more so. It's *brilliant.* You have detailed plans like this for other disasters?"

"Only fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, sudden invasions, dust storms, droughts, food shortages, and mass pipe breakings. There are seven more I want to get to."

He stared at her, his eyes wide, several of the remaining officials gathering around and nodding as they looked over her maps, instructions, and plans. “Your talents,” the governor whispered, “have previously been *wasted,* Lady Ladrian.”

What … What was this emotion?

Feeling *appreciated*? She’d felt appreciated before by Wax, yes, and occasionally Marasi. But to see it in the eyes of virtual strangers, to have her overplanning seen as a *talent*, not a bizarre character flaw …

By the Survivor. This warmth inside. She’d always said she didn’t care what people thought of her. And she’d worked hard to build that bubble around herself, a protection against the way she was normally treated.

But this … this was a remarkable feeling. Was this what it felt like to be *proud* of who you were? Instead of worried you were embarrassing those around you?

Miraculous.

“What is next?” the governor asked. “What else can we do?”

“I want to sink those ships,” Steris said, pointing to the large cargo vessels out in the bay that were waiting to be called in to receive passengers. “After bringing their sailors in safely first, of course.”

“Excuse me,” one of the remaining foremen said. “*Sink* them?”

“I think it might slow the water,” Steris said, “in case of a tsunami. You read what happened to the island of Alicago three years ago? No? Well, anyway, think of speed bumps. Large cargo ships on the surface will glide over the water, or worse be carried with it and slammed into people on the docks. Scuttled on the bay’s floor though, they’ll create drag and slow the force of the wave if one comes.”

Again, instead of objecting or complaining, the foremen simply accepted her explanation—and her orders. Only one seemed concerned. He hesitated as the others began to move off.

“What is it?” Steris asked.

“His Honor the governor,” the man said, “told us there wasn’t much time left. To get those ships sunk might take hours, ladyship. We’ll have to take tugs out to them—not many of the cargo ships have radio yet—and then explain to the captains, probably fight them on it. Then the scuttling process … it’s not as easy as it sounds. I’d guess four, five hours to get this lot sunk. At least.”

Rusts. Well, that wouldn’t work.

Someone cleared their throat behind her. One of the eight people who had approached her first. Oh, right—she still didn’t know who had sent them, or even who they were.

“Perhaps we can help,” the man in the lead said. “You are certain this is legal? The mass sinking of private ships?”

“Yes,” the governor said. “On my authority. If we are so fortunate as to have overreacted, the city will pay for the losses incurred by the ship captains.”

“Ohhh…” Steris said, leaning toward him. “Varlance, that sounded positively *heroic*.”

“Really?” he asked, eager. “Heroic?”

“Decisive,” she said. “Very leaderlike.”

Nearby, the leader of the eight people nodded to her, then launched into the air.

Oh! Allomancers. She had all the official ones working on the main evacuation. But having these to sink ships would certainly help. And then she could use them to help carry the injured or infirm away with Steelpushes.

The others followed one at a time, until only one remained. He nodded to Steris, and on the back of his hand—mostly obscured—she saw a red tattoo.

“Your sister,” the man said, “sends her regards.” Then he launched after the others.

That was the last of the meaningful actions Steris could take. From here, she could only make certain her plans were being executed. Everything else rested on Waxillium. None of this would matter if that bomb reached the city.

*You*’d *better be on that ship, Wax,* she thought.

# 71

Clearing the ship proved to be an ordeal. Even worse than that time Wax had decided to teach Wayne "the value of hard work" by making him muck out a stable all on his own. Yeah, he'd learned the value of hard work—it turned out to be three clips. Least, that was what Jeffy had charged to do the job for Wayne.

This time, there was nobody else to do the job. After locking the door to the room with the bomb, they set out to take control of the ship. Wayne kept the key in his pocket, in case Wax had to face another Coinshot.

They didn't meet any. The ship had only a skeleton crew; seemed they'd saved most of their troops to protect the Shaw. It took some time to fight their way to the bridge regardless, given the need to check every corner and flush out people trying to ambush them. Wayne thought every crew member on board had been mustered to try to stop them.

When, half an hour or more later, Wax finally Pushed down the reinforced door to the bridge, they found a disturbing sight. Four people—three women and a fellow—dead on the floor from self-inflicted gunshots. All wore officers' uniforms. They'd killed themselves rather than fall into custody.

"You know," Wayne said, shouldering his rifle, "I thought the weird ones would all be in the Roughs, you know? City folk, they were supposed to be educated. And … and refined. And not bleedin' *zealots*."

Wax checked the bodies to be sure, then stepped up to the ship's front controls. They were a confusing mess of levers, along with a giant ship's wheel that appeared to have been locked in place. The ship was still moving at full speed through the mists, and *rusts.* Wayne thought he could see the glow of Elendel on the horizon. They were getting close.

Wax stopped at the controls, then cursed softly.

"What?" Wayne said.

"It's wired to the same system," Wax said. "Harmony? Can you confirm?"

*Yes, unfortunately,* the god said. *With you to give me sight, I can see that it's wired into the bomb.*

"If we undo the locks on the controls, it blows," Wax said. "I should have foreseen this. We wasted time coming up here."

"But—" Wayne said.

"It makes a brutal sense," Wax said. "They guided the ship here, then locked the course down before killing themselves. The thing will explode the moment it stops—as soon as it hits land. We're not on a traditional ship. This is a *rocket,* like the one they built to fly to Elendel. Self-propelled. Needing no controls. Set to detonate the second it hits."

"Mate," Wayne said, pointing out the front windows. "I see lights."

*You have approximately twenty minutes,* Harmony said softly, *at current speed.*

"We have to risk trying to defuse the bomb," Wax said, rushing out onto the deck.

Wayne scrambled to follow, tripping on bodies. "Wait! You said that if we tried, we'd almost *certainly* blow the thing!"

"Do you have a better idea?"

"Maybe," Wayne said, halting beside the railing—mists coursing past like a river in the sky.

Wax froze, turning back to him.

Did Wayne have a better idea?

Actually … actually he *did.* He looked out at the ocean and realized something. This ship here … well, this was a lot like a lone mesa. It fit way better than the Shaw had. Yes, a solitary mesa in the middle of flat lands …

And it needed to gobble up the hero.

"You said that this bomb," Wayne said, "it blows up big if detonated proper. But one part of it is ettmetal, right?"

"Harmonium," Wax said. "Yes. And?"

“And that stuff is so unstable, it blows up if *water* touches it. Except in a *smaller* explosion? One that won’t level cities and such?”

“It’s still bad,” Wax said. “But not catastrophic. But if we fiddle with one of the devices by pouring water into it to detonate the ettmetal, the others will simply go off.”

“Unless,” Wayne said, “we were using a speed bubble. See, there’s that device on the wall, right? And if we fiddle with one of the bombs, it’s going to detonate the other ones?”

“Right,” Wax said.

“So, what if we put up a speed bubble that leaves *out* the device on the wall? We could work on one of the barrels, detonating the harmonium in it so the *real* explosion can’t happen. We set that explosion off, then kick *that* barrel out of the speed bubble. It’ll send a warning to the other two barrels, but that signal will have to pass along the wires outside the speed bubble, to reach the box on the wall. So the signal will be frozen in time and can’t come back! We could work on the other barrels during that time.”

“Wayne,” he said, “do you have any idea how quickly electricity moves? Even assuming you could do something incredible—like speed up time by a factor of a thousand—that wouldn’t be nearly fast enough to outrun an electrical signal.”

Oh.

*Wait,* Harmony said to them. *This could work. I have a way. Wax, I gave you a vial with a red cork.*

“I have it,” Wax said, fishing in his sheath of metal vials. He frowned, and came out with … a handkerchief.

“Barely used,” Wayne said.

“Wayne…”

Wayne grinned and handed Wax his rifle, then fished in his pocket. “I thought it needed to be somewhere safe. So I made a nice little trade.”

“Harmony,” Wax said, “if you can make this work, it will still detonate the ship, right?”

*Yes.*

“Wayne,” Wax said, “… setting off the smaller explosions would kill everyone in that room. An ettmetal blast like that isn’t something you survive, even if you had full metalminds.”

“Ah,” Wayne said as the ship hit a wave, water spraying up along the side. “I’d figured out that part. I just needed to know if the idea worked. And I needed to confirm one other thing.”

“Which is?” Wax said.

“That the plan doesn’t need you, mate,” Wayne said, and he Pushed. Shoving Wax—via the barrel of the rifle he was holding—outward off the ship and through the mists. Wayne felt real proud of that Push. He did it like Wax did, crouching down first to give it a little lift.

His friend gave him a look of outrage … and maybe regret … as he vanished into the misty darkness over the waters.

“Land safely, mate,” Wayne whispered. “And survive.”

He tipped his hat, then pulled out the red-corked vial. “What the hell is this, anyway?”

*Earlier in the week, you all conducted a test,* Harmony said. *Splitting harmonium.*

“Same test our enemies have done a hunnerd or more times.”

*Yes, but this one was different. I have no idea what happened, but Wax did something* different *from everyone else trying this. Because he didn’t merely blow up the room. He created something. Something amazing.*

Wayne held up the vial, staring at the metal dust settled at the bottom.

*That,* Harmony said, *is the faintest bit of lerasium, Wayne. A metal from legend. A metal found by Vin at the Well of Ascension, and used to make Elend Venture a Mistborn. A metal that hasn’t existed for centuries, and as far as I know, hasn’t been* made *in millennia. Drink that vial and you’ll be a Mistborn, able to use all of the metals. There’s a little of each one in there.*

“Why didn’t you have Wax drink it earlier?”

*I don’t want to reveal this happened, as I don’t know why or how. I don’t know what he did. Besides … he might have already had a dose, inhaled during the explosion.*

Huh. That explained a few things.

Wayne knocked back the vial. Then he waited. Nothing happened.

“That’s anticlimactic,” he muttered.

*You have to burn the lerasium, Wayne.*

Oh, right. He searched, and found a new metal reserve. Neat. He reached out and burned it.

A flash of light.

A fire in his veins.

A feeling like a kick to the face.

Damn.

“How does this help?” he asked.

*You can now burn duralumin.*

“That fancy metal that not-Wax was using to make those big Steelpushing explosions?”

*Exactly.*

“I don’t need to Push though.”

*Wayne, using duralumin burns all the metals in you at once. Every single bit. The more you have, the more powerful it is. It doesn’t just work on steel. It works on any Allomantic metal.*

Wayne paused, the ship rocking, then whistled softly, understanding. “You mean…”

*How much bendalloy do you have left?*

He fished a pouch out of his pocket.

*Hmm. Maybe enough to—*

Wayne fished another pouch out of his other pocket.

*Okay, and—*

And the pouch in his sock. Uncomfortable, but handy.

*Wayne, how many pouches do you have?*

“Seventeen,” he said. “I’m a fancy rich guy now. Will that be enough?”

*Oh, Wayne. Yes. I think it will.*

Wayne turned and took the steps down at extra-fast speed—grabbing a canteen off one of the corpses. He swallowed mouthfuls of metal beads on his way, stuffing himself with bendalloy. Echoing noises warned him about sailors trying to break into the room to detonate the bomb, but they didn’t have a key. He dealt with both men, then burst back into the room. Electric lights flickered on the walls, and he could hear the chugging of the engines somewhere farther inside the ship.

… And suddenly he wasn’t alone. A figure—mostly transparent—stood beside him, a tall bald man. Terris. And another *darker* fellow stood behind him. Not in the skin tone sense or anything. Like … this other one was a shadow. It mimicked Harmony as he held out his hands to Wayne.

“I knew,” Harmony said softly, “that I had to bring Wax to Elendel. It is possible to see future needs. I understood it would be *good* to make this choice, though one doesn't always know why. Even if one is a god." He hesitated. "I thought I only needed Wax. It seems that I was wrong."

Wayne tossed up a speed bubble, so that time didn't move so quickly. He needed a moment to compose himself.

"It *should* be Wax," Wayne said. "He's the one that fixes messes like this."

"No," Harmony said. "You have practiced all your life with speed bubbles, Wayne. Wax would be brand new at them. You might be the only person in the world who could do this."

"That's kind of depressing," Wayne said, turning to Harmony. "Really, *I'm* the best you could do? Ain't you God?"

Harmony's eyes softened. "Wayne. You aren't the best I could do. *You're the best there is.* And no being, neither god nor mortal, could have wished for more than one such as you."

Wayne wanted to reject that. But damn, if God was sayin' it … maybe … maybe Wax was right? About Wayne?

Damn. Had Wax been right *all along*?

"You don't have to do this," Harmony whispered. "I will never again force such a choice upon someone. Unfortunately, it is the only sure solution that I can think of, and my thoughts move with exceptional speed. This preserves, but it … destroys."

"The only solution that is sure," Wayne said. "There's another?"

"It is possible—very slightly possible—that you could use your new powers to Push hard enough against upcoming sources of metal to hold the ship back, treading water, while we gain more time and figure something else out. It would be exceptionally difficult, but it's plausible."

"You can see the future," Wayne said. "Would it work?"

"I can see *probabilities,*" Harmony said. "I can see what *might* happen. It is, at times, frustrating."

"And … what are the chances that other option works?"

"One in a hundred, maybe."

One in a hundred? A one percent chance at survival.

… And a ninety-nine percent chance it failed. Meaning a whole ton of people got vaporized.

Damn. What a day to leave his lucky hat behind.

“There’s this family what doesn’t have a daddy because of me,” Wayne said, stepping forward. “You’ll take care of them?”

“Of course.”

“Will Wax survive this?”

“Normally, no person could,” Harmony said. “Considering explosions in water are exceptionally dangerous. Fortunately, this one will be channeled mostly upward—and Wax has pewter now. So long as he burns the metals in those other vials I gave him, he should survive the blast. I will … do what I can to help Preserve him. But Wayne, there is nothing I can do for you. This blast will be too big.”

Wayne nodded, then hesitated, looking toward Harmony. “Will this … earn me forgiveness?”

“Oh, Wayne,” Harmony said. “You’ve heard this from Wax. You have to hear it from me too, I think. You can’t do this for forgiveness. You need *no* forgiveness, not anymore.”

And … he was right.

Wayne wasn’t doing this for forgiveness, or out of shame, or out of a need to prove himself. He *wasn’t* the man he’d been when Wax pulled him out of his hiding place. He was someone different.

“Wayne,” Harmony asked, “do you know who you are?”

“Yeah, I know who I am,” Wayne said. “I’m the *God. Damn. HERO.*” He paused. “Sorry.”

“Under the circumstances,” Harmony said, smiling, “I understand. Each of those barrels has a hole in the top, to draw in air once the explosion starts. The harmonium has been removed from its oil bath and is currently being heated. That means if you pour water in, it will detonate the harmonium. That will destroy the mechanism that heats up the bomb, and will prevent the much greater explosion. Once you pour, use your Allomancy to Push the barrel out of the speed bubble.”

“Right, then,” Wayne said. “I’m gonna need your hat.”

“My … hat?”

“Gotta sculpt a speed bubble just right,” Wayne said, “and put everything I have into the Push. Burn so much bendalloy in one moment, it practically melts me from the inside—slow time so much, even *electric signals* get dull.”

“I don’t wear a hat.”

“You’re God. Improvise somethin’.”

Harmony paused, then touched Wayne on the head. He felt it start to glow, as if something had been settled there. Earrings too. He felt earrings like a proper Terrisman wore. Something he’d maybe always been, just in secret.

It wasn’t nothin’ magical. But when he wore someone’s hat, he thought he could understand them. And who was better to understand than God himself?

“Good,” Wayne said, adopting the proper accent. Old-fashioned, but Terris. Like Harmony. He dropped his speed bubble and gathered his power. “Hold on to your robes, my dear friend. This is going to be unlike anything you have seen before, I think.”

* * *

Marasi strode toward Blantach’s constabulary offices, Armal and a few of her friends in her wake, through a dark city content with its own business. Ignorant of the crisis.

Yet she felt something in the mists. Wax always talked about them in this supernatural way, a way she rarely felt.

Tonight though, they seemed to be holding their breath.

* * *

Steris froze on the docks. Her workers and constables were still busy doing as she asked, but something felt … odd? About the moment? She turned toward the waters and looked out across the misty sea.

Gripping the little silver spear she wore at her neck, she said a prayer.

* * *

“Now!” Harmony said.

Wayne made the perfect speed bubble. Most Allomancers with his powers couldn’t change the shape of a bubble. But bendalloy was so expensive, people couldn’t really afford to practice.

He could. He’d probably done this more than any person alive. In that moment, he made a bubble that contained the three barrel devices—but had a hole to exclude the device on the wall that coordinated the explosions.

Then he burned duralumin and *Pushed.*

People didn't often refer to speed bubbles and slowness bubbles as Pushing and Pulling, like they talked about Steelpushes and Ironpulls. But it was the same. What Wayne did, it was Pushing on reality itself. Distorting it, shoving it inward, warping it.

Today he Pushed harder than any person in history. He Pushed like a god, on account of wearing Sazed's own hat. On account of that strange metal, and on account of Wayne bein' the hero. Time squeezed in around him, compressed like coal bein' made into rustin' diamond. Further, further, as a whole damn stomach full of bendalloy was burned in an instant.

God himself froze. Standing motionless. The bubble crystallized into a visible sphere. Lights that had been blinking halted, half-on. Something funny even happened to his eyesight, everything going all strange until he took another vial of Harmony's metals and burned steel to see that way instead.

Go.

Canteen in hand, Wayne flooded the first bomb. He ducked back as the water dripped, then Pushed that barrel right out of the speed bubble as the explosion started. It transfixed him momentarily, fire and light erupting from the barrel, all outlined in these strange blue lines. As if that barrel was releasing its soul to the afterlife.

Cracks started to appear in his crystallized speed bubble. Damn. Wayne leaped to the second barrel and poured, then Pushed it out too. It sent electric warnings up the wires—but the box that controlled the detonation was stuck in slow time, the signals moving like molasses.

Damn, how fast was he moving? And he'd thought he was getting slow because of old age. Heh.

He slammed into the third barrel and dumped the rest of the canteen's water out into it. He Pushed it, then turned, gazing out at all three barrels hanging motionless in time. He was going so fast, only the first one was exploding, and that because he'd taken the longest to Push it out. The blast was completely halted now.

He let out a breath and dropped the canteen. He'd been gobbled up, it was true. But when that happened, you strangled the monster from the inside.

His crystalline speed bubble shattered.

And all became red light and blossoms of fire.

# 72

Wax struggled in the dark waters.

Then something erupted to his right. A flash of light, blinding and dazzling. Followed by a shock wave in the air, and another in the water. For both, he thought he glimpsed—briefly, through the omnipresent light—the sight of a figure dulling the wave directly in front of him. A calm Terrisman standing tall on the surface of the water, with one hand stretched forward.

Then, darkness again. Wax blinked, his eyes blinded by the blast. Debris rained around him. Splashing into the choppy waves.

In moments, Wax was struggling to stay afloat. He'd hit the water hard, and thought he'd broken at least one leg. Wayne, trying to save his life? That frustrating, infuriating …

… that wonderful man.

"Farewell, my friend," Wax whispered, choking on his emotion. "You incredible *rusting* man. Thank you."

As the waters grew more choppy, Wax had to struggle harder. He forced through pain, grief, and fatigue to keep himself—barely—afloat. He burned his steel, then … something else. Something deep within, which kept him warm.

Despite that, he was lost in darkness, and even the mists kept their distance. With his leg not working, with his coat dragging him down, with the exhaustion of a nation's hopes weighing on him, he felt himself begin to slip. Begin to lose his fight with the waters. Begin to …

What was *that*?

A tiny light, drifting closer. Small, yet unyielding in the mists. It resolved into … a lantern? On a small boat? How …

The boat motored right up to him, and then a man in a coachman's outfit with white gloves stood up on the deck and reached out to Wax.

"Carriage," Hoid said, "for you. Sir."

# 73

The shock wave hit Steris like a thunderclap. She gasped in surprise, her ears ringing from the sound of the detonation. Rusts.

She and the governor had been carried via Allomancer far into the center of the city—close to their original evacuation command post—following their efforts at the docks. But that obviously hadn’t been far enough to escape completely. Around her, windows rattled. Any closer to the docks and they would have shattered. And the buildings nearest the explosion …

Fortunately, the only ill effects she felt—standing atop a building this far from the blast—was that shock wave. And so, after her initial panic, she watched that brilliant light in the distance slowly fade.

A moment ago, that explosion had been like a momentary sun on the horizon, magnificent and ominous all at once, blazing through the mists. Now, in seconds, all that remained were the afterimage and the faint ringing in her ears.

The governor peeked up over the rooftop’s stone railing, where he’d ducked at the initial explosion. Then he stood up straight. “He’s done it, hasn’t he? Preservation! He’s done it! He detonated the bomb early! The city is saved!”

Steris nodded, exhaling a long breath. Wax had been exactly where she’d hoped he would be. Now that she’d seen that light—then survived the detonation—a new worry struck her.

*You*’d *better not have been on that ship when the explosion happened, Waxillium Ladrian,* she thought. *You … just … just have gotten off, all right?*

“Will the tsunami come?” the governor said.

“Yes,” Steris said. “Imminently.”

“We … uh…” The governor straightened his cravat. “We *actually* helped, didn’t we?”

“Yes,” she said. “The dockside buildings are going to be a disaster zone in the weeks to come—we’ll need to rebuild. But I think we evacuated most people from the dangerous section.”

Water was pulling back rapidly from the docks as she watched. Receding in advance of a tsunami. Hopefully it would not be a big one. The studies she’d read were inconclusive about how water would react to explosions.

“Thank the Survivor,” the governor said. “I’m … glad you let us retreat. I worried you’d insist on staying by the docks.”

“There is no need to go down with the city,” Steris said, “if the city isn’t going down.”

He nodded eagerly. He was actually quite an agreeable man. Which made sense. He’d been chosen by people who wanted to steer him. People who’d never expected him to put his hands on the helm and take control.

She blinked, her eyes bearing the afterimage of that explosion.

*Just … be safe …* Steris thought toward that distant, now faded, point of light. *Please.*

# 74

Wayne floated.

Floated someplace high. Damn. Was that the planet *itself* beneath him? It *was* a sphere, as everyone said. He'd always hoped maybe it would be, like, doughnut shaped or something. To throw the smart folks for a loop.

Felt kinda strange to be all the way up here, in the darkness. He leaned forward and felt a disorientation, like he should be falling. He was woozy, unsteady.

Huh. Who'd have thought being dead would be so much like being drunk? He could write a whole damn book of scripture about that, he could.

A figure hovered next to him. Vast. His robes like the infinite colors of creation, his essence seeming to expand into the darkness of space itself. But at his core, he had the appearance of a bald, kindly Terrisman.

"Hey, God," Wayne said. "How's … um … creation? Time and space? Reality? You know, things?"

"Good," Harmony replied. "Because of you."

"Now wait," Wayne said. "I ain't gonna be a *ghost,* am I?"

"No. You were Invested when you died, so you will persist a short time, but will soon join the Beyond."

"Good, good."

"You don't find that idea concerning?"

"Hell no," Wayne said. "I *already* done gone and died. That was the part that I worried would hurt." He gaped down at the planet below. "It's so *big.*"

"Yes, Wayne," Harmony said. "I realize that a person might become intimidated, seeing all this. Recognizing the vastness of what they've lived upon. It is a lot to take in, I think. It can make a person feel small, insignificant, and—"

Wayne grinned. "And I saved the whole damn thing!"

Harmony paused. "Well, I suppose you did. With some help from Marasi and Waxillium." Harmony gestured toward a red haze, swirling away from the planet as if in a funnel, vanishing into the distance.

Wayne felt something from it. An angry sort of respect. Begrudging. Her avatar had been defeated, and so Autonomy withdrew her touch from the planet.

"Is that it, then?" Wayne asked.

"For now," Harmony said. "She was overextending to try to bring us down quickly, I think. Telsin and the Set's failure is an enormous setback, and Marasi was quick to collapse the portal to this planet. My vision returns, and I will try to take care I am not blindsided again."

"You sound afraid?" Wayne said, cocking his head.

"Nervous," Harmony said, his expression distant. "I can see pieces moving in the cosmere. Aligning. Pointed at us. We are not free of their influence. But we have … time, now. Time to prepare. Thanks to you, Wayne."

"Me," Wayne said. "I saved the *whole damn world.* I … I'm probably the best constable who ever rusting lived!"

"I … suppose…" Harmony said, "that Vin, Elend, and the others weren't constables…"

"Wax ain't never saved the whole world. And most of the others in the octant constabulary? They couldn't save a coupon for free beer, even when I gave it to them. Stupid kandra giraffe man. Wayne, the best conner in the whole damn world … Ha! Eat that, Reddi. Eat it with hot sauce and *cry*!"

Wayne felt something happening as he said it, though. A kind of … stretching feeling. Like he was being pulled somewhere. Somewhere … warm?

"Before you go," Harmony said, "is there anything you would like to know? I'm not truly omniscient, but my knowledge far surpasses that of mortals. Some have a final question for me before they go. Have you such a request, Wayne?"

Huh. Any question? That was a hard one. He pondered a moment. "So," he said, "before she left, MeLaan told me that I was the best lay she ever had, and I was wondering—”

“Wayne,” God interrupted, “what is it Ranette always says to you?”

“Try dodging this?”

“The other thing.”

“Don’t ruin the moment by bein’ all skeevy?”

“Yes, that one.”

“Right, right,” Wayne said, nodding. “Good point. Good point. You’re smart, maybe even as smart as Ranette. Suppose that makes sense and all.” He continued to think, though that stretching sensation … it was getting stronger. What could he ask? What …

Then he grinned. That was *perfect.*

“I’m gonna assume Wax and them will be fine,” Wayne said. “You already promised that. So I ain’t going to waste a question on them. And you can’t trick me into doing so. You’ll take care of them. I know you will.”

“To the best of my ability,” Harmony said.

“Good. Then tell me this, God,” Wayne said, pointing at him. “Was that the *biggest damn explosion* a person ever made?”

Harmony raised an eyebrow. “*That’s* your last question? Your final request of God before you pass into eternity?”

“Hell yes! Figure now that I’m dead, I’ll get the other answers right soon. You ain’t going to trick me into asking a useless question. So tell me. Was it?”

Harmony smiled. “Ah, Wayne. I suppose that most other things that could rival it—like the detonations of the Ashmounts—would be categorized as acts of God. Therefore, I declare that it is. Yes, Wayne. You exploded yourself in the biggest *damn* explosion a person has ever made in the history of our planet.”

“Make sure Steris knows,” Wayne said, grinning. “She’s always complainin’ about my exploding things. This time I saved her hide by doin’ it. Plus, I made the explosion *smaller.* That’s gonna break her brain. I made it smaller, and it was still the biggest one what ever was.”

He felt himself really going now. So, he held out a hand to God. Who, smiling, shook it.

“I knew you’d glow,” Wayne said, with a wink.

With that, Wayne stretched into another place, into another time. He stretched into the wind. And into the stars.

And all endless things.

# EPILOGUES

# MARASI

## TEN HOURS AFTER DETONATION

Somehow, the sun was already rising again when Marasi stumbled off the train in Elendel. She might have expected the train to be empty, considering the disasters—both prevented and diminished—that had marked the night.

Yet the train was packed. Some traveling to aid those in the waterlogged and broken northwestern quarter of Elendel. Others coming to check on family. Others returning home from the evacuation to seek a place of comfort in this strange time.

She let them swarm around her as she stood on the train platform, feeling disjointed. Out of place. Part of that was fatigue. She'd had perhaps two hours' sleep back in Bilming, after coordinating with Constable Blantach, who had finally accepted the evidence of Entrone's malfeasance. The testimonies of the people who Marasi and the others had saved—especially the journalists and politicians who TwinSoul had escorted out—would prove vital.

It felt wrong to leave the lord mayor and his remaining accomplices in the hands of a constabulary department that had up until recently answered to him. But honestly, Marasi wasn't certain what else she could do. An Elendel invasion of Bilming wasn't feasible, considering the disasters and the political situation. She simply had to hope that the testimonies, the explosion, and the overwhelming physical evidence would be enough to force the Bilming constables to do their jobs.

At the least, it seemed that Wax and Wayne had left the Set's organizational structure—and military forces—in shambles. They'd found

Telsin dead on the top of the Shaw. Written, by her own fingernail, on the strangely grey skin of her arm had been the words:

*You have proven yourselves. For now.*

The way her god had left her was eerily reminiscent of how the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor had been discovered at the end of the Catacendre. Strangely peaceful, and …

And rusts, Marasi was zoning out. Standing there as confused as a Roughs bumpkin her first time in the city. She forced herself to start walking, moving with the last straggling passengers to leave the train. She needed a bath. She needed something to eat. And she needed …

A frantic masked figure burst from the crowd ahead, having fought his way against the flow of traffic. She wasn’t certain how he’d talked his way through the ticket gate, but Marasi finally let herself feel a measure of comfort as Allik crashed into her with a powerful embrace.

*This,* she thought as he held her tight, *was what it was for.* This and a million other people. But to her … it had been for this most of all.

Allik pulled back and raised his mask. He’d been crying.

“It’s all right,” Marasi said, wiping his tears away. “Allik, I’m fine. I promise. I thought you were outside the city?”

“I returned early,” he said. “And these tears aren’t for you, love. We tried to get word to you, but … it was chaotic, and the lines were busy…”

Her world started to crack. “Who?” she whispered.

“Wayne,” he said.

No. It was impossible.

Wayne was practically immortal. He was like … like a rock. The kind you got in your shoe and couldn’t get rid of.

No … no, he was the kind you leaned against. When you needed something stable. He …

He was her partner.

She knew their job was dangerous. She knew they risked their lives each day. Still, she’d always assumed she would be the one who … who …

“Wax?” she choked out.

“Fine,” Allik said. “Well, all but one leg, yah? But he will heal up.” He winced. “He says … Wayne stayed behind. Detonated the bomb. To save the city…”

She grabbed him then, because that break in his voice matched the one she felt inside her, and she needed to hold to something. As they embraced, she felt grief welling up to destroy her.

She … she wouldn’t accept it. She wouldn’t believe he was gone. He’d … he’d survived worse than this. She would come home one day and he’d be sitting in her kitchen helping himself to the chocolate.

And if that never happened?

*I can’t deal with that right now,* she thought. *Not on two hours of sleep.*

She let the delusion linger. So it could erode, like a stone in the waves, over time.

Allik took her by the shoulders. “You,” he declared, “look like you are in need of copious amounts of baked goods. Delivered with an urgency rivaling that of a warleader in battle. Yah?”

“Yah,” she said, embracing him again. “A thousand times yah, Allik.”

* * *

An hour later—full of exotic cakes and biscuits—Marasi snuggled in the overstuffed chair of her small flat. She’d finally changed, but not into pajamas. Instead she wore her uniform. Long skirt, blouse, constable’s overcoat.

Allik had given that an odd glance before he’d slipped out—with characteristic apologies—to buy a bottle of wine. The thing was, as tired as Marasi had felt, another emotion dominated. A sense of displacement. An awareness that something was *wrong.*

She was struggling to deal with the idea that Wayne was dead. Most of her refused to believe, for her own sanity. That was part of it. There was another part though. A sense that something was unfinished, that a question hung in the balance. One she had to answer before she could truly rest.

So it was no great surprise that soon after Allik left, a knock sounded at the door. It was a young messenger girl, of the variety you could easily hire in town for a few clips. They knew the ins and outs of the many tenements, apartments, and winding streets of the octants better than most postmen.

The girl delivered a small envelope before scampering off. Inside was a card with the symbol of the interlocking triangles. The Ghostbloods. There was an address on the back.

Marasi checked her things. Credentials in her pocket. Handgun in the holster at her side. Insignia on her jacket. She didn't bring a rifle. Today, she didn't need to be armed so much as equipped.

She left a quick note for Allik, promising to return soon, then made her way out into the city. Her city.

She loved Elendel. The sheer variety of people. The way that the broadsheets were already selling the story of the detonation. Some called it a warning shot from the Outer Cities, others a deliberate attempt to cause a flood—as if blowing the city up wouldn't have been a more effective choice. A surprising number actually had the right facts.

DAWNSHOT AND DEPUTY SAVE DAY.

DARING LAST-MINUTE RACE TO SAVE ELENDEL!

BILMING BOMB PREMATURELY DETONATED BY CONSTABLE COURAGE!

She wondered what they'd say when they got hold of her story. A hidden cavern full of kidnapped people being used to try to create Mistborn? Moving photos and Hemalurgic monsters? It was the sort of thing that would fuel broadsheet stories for decades.

She strolled toward her destination. Savoring the scents—good and bad, but always potent—the sounds, the *feel* of a city so alive that even a disaster couldn't stop it.

The Ghostblood base in Elendel was more ostentatious than the one in Bilming. A grand old-school estate, with stained glass and manicured grounds. Marasi was ushered in without needing to knock, then led to a dimly lit room. She assumed she was to sit here and wait, until she noticed someone at the far side. Seated in a comfortable—but enveloping—chair, fine shoes catching the light, his face lost in shadows. But one feature was plain: a single spike pushed through his right eye.

The Survivor himself.

She'd met Death, chatted with kandra, heard Wax speak of Harmony. She was no newcomer to figures from lore stepping out of shadow and into her life. This was different somehow. This was the man who had started it all. The man who had survived his own murder. This was the man she'd been taught to worship and revere.

Here he was. And it was the most intimidating experience of her life. She tried to speak, and found her mouth dry.

The door opened and TwinSoul entered, stabilizing himself against the door handle. Though she'd known him only a short time, it still felt right to give him a hug, which he returned.

"It is good to see you well, my lady," he said to her. "And to hear of your accomplishments."

"Oh!" Marasi said. "TwinSoul. Moonlight, she—"

"We've heard reports," TwinSoul said. "She was … forced to use her stamp?"

"Yes," Marasi said.

"She will be difficult to recover," Kelsier said from the shadows. "I may have permanently lost my best agent to this fiasco."

Marasi's first instinct was to rush to apologize. She stopped herself. "You'd rather we let the invasion happen?"

Kelsier leaned forward, and she thought she caught a hint of a *smile* on his lips. Perhaps the stories were true. That he might be a brutal man, but he wasn't a *stern* one. But who knew? Could you really trust stories from hundreds of years ago? And if you could, surely a man changed after living —or, well, not staying dead—for four centuries.

"Go ahead, TwinSoul," Kelsier said.

"Marasi Colms," TwinSoul said, "I am proud to offer you membership in the Ghostbloods. If you accept, I would be honored to become your mentor, as is our tradition. You may join me on my next mission, to track Moonlight down and attempt to restore her natural personality."

"This offer comes with access to everything the Ghostbloods know," Kelsier said. "We don't keep secrets from one another."

"Even you, Survivor?" Marasi asked, curious. "Do *you* keep secrets?"

He didn't respond to that. But he did smile again.

"There is lore and arcana we have access to," TwinSoul said, "that will delight and awe you, my lady. Our duties lead us to fascinating places—all in the service of the very thing you want: protecting Scadrial."

"It is not an invitation," Kelsier added, "that we extend lightly."

So here it was. The question. Did she accept? Lately, she'd wanted so badly to do something more. Every glimpse she got of the larger conflicts—the larger cosmere—made her want to see it in full. Like a woman peeking at a sunset through a slit in the wall.

And yet.

“How long,” she said, “did you know about the Set? How long did you know what they were trying to do? Who Trell was?”

Silence.

“We provide answers,” TwinSoul said, “*after* oaths, my lady. It is our way.”

“Did you share with Harmony?” Marasi asked.

“Saze,” Kelsier said, “is … erratic lately. There’s a problem brewing with him. One I fear is going to make even today’s events seem trivial by comparison. We must, unfortunately, work in secret. We are too small, too weak, as of yet. In the open, forces in the cosmere would crush us.”

She didn’t disagree, not entirely. Every lawwoman understood the need to work covertly at times.

And yet.

Marasi turned their card over in her fingers, then held it up and looked at the interlocking bloodred diamonds.

Was this really what she wanted? She’d been dissatisfied in her service on occasion. But was there any job you *didn’t* dislike now and then? As she turned the card over again, she remembered why she’d first become a constable. Not just to solve crimes. To solve problems. To make the world a better place, not merely protect it.

She couldn’t do that from the shadows, could she? Others might be able to, but Marasi? She’d have to lie to so many people. That violated the fundamental oaths she’d taken.

*Have you appreciated it?* Armal had asked. That question haunted Marasi.

“Once,” she said, “about seven years ago, I thought everything I’d ever wanted had fallen into my lap. I *thought* I’d figured out what I wanted. Then he walked away. That rejection was among the best things that ever happened to me.”

“My lady?” TwinSoul said.

“I guess,” Marasi continued, “it’s hard to know what you want. We never have all the information. We merely have to do what we can with what we have.” She met Kelsier’s shadowed gaze. “If I join, will you let me share what I discover with the constabulary?”

“What do you think?” Kelsier asked.

“I think,” she said, “that I am a servant of the people.” She moved to set the card on the table beside the door. “That any power or authority I have comes from them. They are not served by darkness and lies, no matter how well intentioned.”

“Be careful,” Kelsier said before she could put the card down. “Are you *certain* this is what you want?”

“No,” she said. “My job isn’t to be certain. My job is to do the best I can. Even with limited information.” She dropped the card.

She still needed to find something. An answer for herself. But this *wasn’t* it.

“I’m a servant of the government,” Marasi said, “and of the law. Things that you, I believe, have historically had a problem with, Survivor. I appreciate your help on this mission. I’d accept it again in the future.” She shook her head. “But I’m not a good match for your organization. I won’t keep secrets when the truth could save lives.”

She needed to know what was hidden here—but she was a detective. She’d find answers without selling her soul. Even if it was to the Survivor himself.

Kelsier did not seem like the type of man who appreciated being rejected. But he did eventually nod in acceptance. She shook hands with TwinSoul, offered to help him with Moonlight anyway, then let herself out.

Back into the city.

Back to the people of Elendel.

And as she walked among them—hearing their concerns, their fears, their uncertainty—she remembered things she’d lost to the doldrums of daily work. Plans for her life she’d followed for years, but had eventually grown beyond.

Had she grown back into them, then? Wiser, more understanding, more nuanced?

It was then, wrung out and exhausted, yet victorious, that she realized what she wanted.

All she needed was a plan.

* * *

Prasanva—TwinSoul—watched her go, then shook his head. Unfortunate. And also remarkable. He liked seeing people uphold their personal codes. The aethers, after all, had created all people to think differently from one another.

As the main hallway door shut outside—and Marasi Colms left—Dlavil eased from the shadows behind Kelsier's seat. The short man bore an intricate and fearsome mask, wooden and painted—but when he spoke, his accent was not that of the Southern Scadrians. It was of Silverlight.

"We will need to deal with her," Dlavil said softly.

"She is a woman of integrity," TwinSoul said. "I will not permit harm to come to her."

"She knows our secrets," Dlavil said. "She knows this base. She saw what you and Moonlight can do. She glimpsed the maps, the powers, the knowledge. She is dangerous to us now."

"We offered these things freely," TwinSoul said, "and although she rejected us, she did *not* take from us. Master Kelsier, rein him in."

"Enough, Dlavil," Kelsier said, flicking on the light and leaning back in his seat. "TwinSoul is right. She knows nothing that couldn't be learned from a cursory exploration of the cosmere. We might have to move bases, but that's our own fault. Moonlight was so certain she'd join."

Dlavil held his tongue, his eyes inscrutable behind that cursed mask. TwinSoul hated being unable to get a full read on the man's expressions, but Dlavil—like his sister who ran amok on Roshar—wore a mask that he never removed; it was grown in to the point that it was practically part of his skin.

"I mean it, Dlavil," Kelsier said. "You will *not* move against her, or anyone in this city, without my permission. You understand?"

"Yes, Lord Kelsier," Dlavil said, and withdrew through the back door.

Kelsier sighed audibly, rising from his seat. He joined TwinSoul beside the window, where they looked out at the city.

"Good work yesterday," Kelsier told him. "Very good work, old friend. We almost lost everything."

TwinSoul bowed his head in acceptance of the praise. It felt good.

*You are blessed*, Silajana said in his mind. *And worthy of commendation.*

That felt even better.

“It should never have gotten this far,” Kelsier said. “Something *is* wrong with Sazed. It’s getting worse.”

“What do we do, my lord?” TwinSoul asked.

Kelsier narrowed his eye. “I,” he whispered softly, “am going to have to have a difficult conversation with ‘God.’”

# STERIS

## TWO DAYS AFTER DETONATION

On the second day of the city's recovery, Steris finally got to bring Waxillium home from the hospital. They limped out of Hoid's car, Wax on crutches, then looked up at the enormous skyscraper that held their suite. Wax stared at it, his eyes faintly haunted.

"Thinking of the Shaw?" Steris asked softly.

He nodded. "On that rooftop, Wayne made me get him a spike. If I hadn't listened, he wouldn't have been able to Push me away."

"So you could have done what?" she said gently. "Stayed with him to die? He knew what he needed to do."

Wax looked to her, and she saw the same pain in his eyes that she'd seen after Lessie's second death. Tempered this time, but haunting nonetheless. She hated seeing him in pain. It happened far too often.

"I should have at least said goodbye," Wax whispered. "He left the Roughs because of me…"

"And he lived because you gave him a second chance," Steris said. As he was staring up at the roof, she covertly consulted her notes from the books on trauma she'd been reading. "This wasn't your fault, Waxillium. You need to allow Wayne his agency, allow him to have made his own choice. You would have sacrificed yourself for the city; we both know it. So let *him* have the same decision."

He was silent for a moment, and she tried—anxiously—to figure out what he was feeling. Was that scrunched-up face annoyance? Or was it pain? Ruin, had she made it worse?

"You're right," he said softly, then blinked tears from his eyes. "You're right, Steris. I need to let him be the hero, don't I? Harmony … he really *is* gone."

She slipped her notebook into her pocket and held him close, ignoring the world around them. She dimmed everything else, like an old gas lantern with a dial. Turned it down until only the two of them remained. Only the two of them mattered.

He held to her, then took a long, deep breath. "Marasi still doesn't believe he's gone. She thinks he's going to come sauntering back in a few months, wearing a straw hat and telling us how great the fruity drinks are in the Malwish Consortium. But she's wrong. This time it's over."

"Yes," Steris whispered. "He's gone. But *nothing* is *over,* Wax. You said the same thing when Lessie died. It wasn't true then. It's not true now. It will take time for you to believe, but you can trust that it will happen."

He squeezed her hand. "Again, you're right. How *did* you get so good at this, Steris?"

"I learned from Wayne."

"About … helping people deal with pain?"

"No," she said, then slipped out her notebook. "About cheating."

Waxillium smiled. The first genuine one she'd seen from him since the incident. Then he handed her his crutches and dropped a spent bullet casing to the ground.

"Oh!" she said. "Are you sure this is wise?"

"I might be getting old, but I'm not frail," he said, then grabbed hold of her. "You ready?"

"Always," she said, feeling an exquisite thrill from anticipating the flight. She leaned into him.

He propelled them upward, using the metal installations he'd had erected here to give him a series of appropriate anchors. A rushing, exhilarating ascent with wind in her hair, and the insignificant world became more tiny. Until it was only the two of them and the sky.

Wax landed them carefully on the platform outside their suite. As he took back his crutches, Steris fished for her notebook.

"I think…" Wax said. "I think I'm going to be all right."

"Good," she said, flipping a few pages. "I have a Wayne quote for the moment."

“A what?”

“I figured,” she said, “it would be a way of remembering him. To keep a few appropriate lines handy. Is that … morbid? That’s morbid, isn’t it? I’m sorry.”

“No,” he said. “I mean, it might be, but he’d approve.”

She grinned. “‘Oi,’” she said. “‘Here you carried a girl all that way, mate, and you didn’t grab ’er butt, even a little?’”

“You just made that one up.”

She proffered the notebook, showing the line written there.

“Well, I mean,” Wax said, “we’ve got to do as he says.”

“It’s the only proper way to honor the dead.”

He seized her then, pulled her into a kiss, her figure sculpting to his and pushing against him in all the right places. It felt amazing—like they were liquid, aligned, alive, alight.

And yes, a proper butt-grab was involved. It almost toppled them to the side, unbalancing Wax on his good leg. They broke the kiss before an accident could befall them, but stayed close.

“Thank you,” Wax whispered. “For being you.”

“It’s the only thing I am good at,” she said. “Other than throwing cows at people.”

Wax frowned.

“That is something Wayne said on occasion,” she said.

In response to that, he looked to the sky. “Thank you, Wayne. Wherever you are. For letting me have this. For *making* me live.”

She forced him inside then, so he could sit. He wasn’t supposed to put weight on that leg, cast or no cast. Even if he could cheat by making himself lighter.

Unfortunately, Kath had been a little quicker than she’d expected, and the kids were already back from the Harms estate down-Basin. So Wax, in flagrant disregard for medical instructions, knelt and scooped Max up in an embrace.

“Daddy!” Max said. “You did it! Kath says you did it!”

“Did it?” he asked.

“Stopped the bad guys! Saved the world!”

“I suppose,” Wax said, “I did a little of both. Wayne helped a lot though.”

"Jennid at school," Max continued, "says that you're *also* supposed to get the girl when you save the world. But that part is stupid. I don't like girls."

"What?" Wax said. "Not even Mommy?"

"Dad," Max said, with an exaggerated sense of long-suffering—as if this were the most obvious thing a boy had ever had to describe. "Mommy's not a *girl,* she's a *mom.*"

Steris smiled, moving over by Kath as Wax took little Tindwyl and held her tight, letting her grab at his sideburns.

"This came for you," Kath said softly, taking a letter from her handbag. "A short time ago. It looked important."

"Thank you," Steris said, taking the letter—which was addressed to her—and noting the governor's seal on the front.

Her panic was immediate. She'd worried about this. She'd written down the possibility, but surely it wouldn't … it couldn't …

She ripped it open, her hands shaking with terror. He'd need a new vice governor, now that he'd formally fired Adawathwyn. *Surely* he wouldn't …

> *Dear Steris Harms Ladrian,*
>
> *I would like to meet with you and discuss a possible appointment in my government. Considering your invaluable service during the recent crisis—*

Oh no. Oh *no*. Not that.

> *—I have decided to ask you to accept a position as the city's Disaster Preparations Officer. I would assign you a seat on my council and provide a task force for your use, ensuring the city is prepared and outfitted for any and all potential disasters or relevant dangers.*
>
> *Please reply with times that will work for you, so we can sit down and talk. On a more personal level, I'd like to give you my most sincere thanks. I am being hailed as a hero and a decisive leader. I would not deserve either of those accolades without your intervention.*

Disaster … Preparations Officer?

She blinked.

Why … that wasn’t terrifying at all.

That might actually be *fun*.

Wax gave Tindwyl to Kath, then hobbled over to Steris—nodding passively as Max explained at length about the new marbles game he’d been playing. Looking over her shoulder, Wax read the letter, then took her by the elbow.

“Steris,” he said, “that’s *wonderful*.”

“I don’t deserve it,” she said. “The tsunami wasn’t nearly as bad as I’d feared it would be.”

“Love,” Wax said, “you *do* deserve it.”

She turned to look him in the eyes.

“What if instead of quoting Wayne,” he said softly, “we honored him in a different way. What if we decided to make an effort to let ourselves be happy? What do you think of that, Lady Ladrian?”

“I think, Lord Ladrian, I should like that very, *very* much.”

And she could already imagine an entire list of plans to make certain it happened.

# ALLRIANDRE

## FIVE DAYS AFTER DETONATION

Allriandre climbed the steps one at a time. Feet like lead. Legs like slag. Back bowed, as if weighed by bars of steel. Her ashen clothing bore a few new marks from the forges, which threw sparks when she passed. Her job didn't involve working those—she sorted bits of metal for melting down.

When she arrived at her small flat—on the seventh floor, in a building with no elevator—she could already hear Miss Coussaint yelling. Despite her exhaustion, Allriandre picked up her pace. She hurried to the door and threw it open, to where her daughter, Ruri—three years old and still small for her age—huddled in her blankets. Terrified again.

"Why would you think *toothpaste* was for *drawing*?" Miss Coussaint shouted. She was a woman with a hierarchy of chins, the last—most swollen—one lording over the others like a terrible regent. She glanced up as Allriandre entered, then held up the toothpaste jar. "Did you *see* what she did *this time*?"

"I'm sorry," Allriandre said, exhausted, but she scooped up Ruri as she came running into her arms to escape. "Thank you for watching her."

Coussaint looked her up and down, noting the dirty face, scraggly hair, burned clothing. "Rent?" she demanded. "It's been three days."

"He's never been late with a payment before." Wayne, the man who'd murdered her father. "I'm sure he'll show up soon."

"I need to do some renovations," Coussaint said. "Maybe when he comes, you can—"

“Thank you, Miss Coussaint,” Allriandre said, stepping aside so the woman could leave. “For watching her. It is an enormous help.”

The woman huffed, but squeezed out of the room and went clomping down the steps. Allriandre pulled her daughter close, and thought for a moment about her choices. About how the best schooling in the city didn’t mean much when you were in debt to the wrong people. About how something you loved so much—like the girl she held to now—could also be a reminder of one of the greatest mistakes you’d ever made.

She was exhausted, but she plopped Ruri down, and together the two of them painted with toothpaste on the wall until the girl was laughing again. Until Ruri understood that mistakes could sometimes turn into amazing, wonderful, cherished things. With the right perspective.

A knock came at the door.

Allriandre froze, then quickly wiped her hands on a rag. She hadn’t been expecting anyone. Rusts, she barely *knew* anyone. All of her university friends had gone on to marriages, office jobs, and nights spent socializing. Her family still lived out in the Roughs, and she’d made sure they didn’t know what had happened to her. Because they had their own problems.

She opened the door hesitantly and saw two men in suits outside— one tall, one short. Her stomach immediately dropped. Were these Bleaker’s new collection men? They usually showed up a week *after* she received her monthly payment.

“Miss Allriandre?” the shorter of the men asked. “I am Mister Call, and this is Mister Daring, of Call and Son and Daughters Accounting and Estate. Might we come in? We have a matter of some importance to discuss with you.”

“I don’t have the money yet,” she said quickly. “I can’t pay you until I do. There’s nothing in here for you to take.”

The two shared a glance, then the shorter man gestured again. She reluctantly let them in.

“If you,” she whispered, “hurt my daughter…”

“We are not who you appear to think we are,” the taller man said with a cheerful air, looking at the toothpaste-covered wall, then the ragged furnishings. “We represent the estate of Master Wayne Terrisborn of 662 Inkling Lane.”

“Oh,” she said, feeling relieved. “Him. Wait. Did he finally get smart and decide to stop insisting that I meet him in person?”

“Indeed he did,” the taller man said, setting his bowler hat on the counter. She winced, noticing the mushed-up apple Ruri had dropped there. The little girl came and climbed into her arms. Strangers made her nervous.

“Why are you late?” Allriandre asked. “His payments always come on the first of the month.”

The taller one coughed. “You haven’t heard? You … don’t read the broadsheets?”

“Do I *look* like I have time for broadsheets?” she asked. “If you have my payment, that’s great. I could use it. But I *really* need some sleep. So…”

“Miss Allriandre,” the shorter man said, “Master Wayne passed last week. It was quite spectacular—he was the one who detonated the bomb. Did you hear about that?”

She’d heard rumblings of it at the forges. Not his part in it. But the whole flood and, and the evacuations … and … Wait.

“He’s dead?” she asked.

They nodded.

Rusts. How did she feel about that? Happy? The man who had killed her father was finally dead. She should be overjoyed, shouldn’t she?

Instead she felt confused. A little angry still, yes. That would never leave her. A hint of relief. But mostly … sorry. Sorry for how it had all turned out. Sorry that wounds long dulled sent a pang through her now and then. Sorry for mistakes. Mistakes didn’t always turn into something better, not by a long mile. But she could understand now how they happened. Even the big ones.

The taller man set a large folder onto the room’s only table. “Shall we?” he asked.

“Shall we what?” she replied.

“Miss Allriandre,” the shorter man said, “you are the primary beneficiary of Master Wayne’s estate.”

“What’s that amount to?” she asked. “Three balls of gum and an unpaid bar tab?”

“Currently,” the tall one said, “it’s twenty million boxings—liquid—along with majority stake ownerships in several important holdings, equating to at least another hundred.”

The room fell silent save for Ruri’s sniffling, which the girl solved by wiping her nose on Allriandre’s jumpsuit. Allriandre barely noticed.

“Did you say … *a hundred and twenty million*?” she whispered.

“Give or take, depending on the market,” the taller man said. “He invested wisely—in a brilliant way, actually, against most conventional wisdom—using a considerable amount of aluminum as collateral. Turns out electricity, fabrication, and power were the place to be six years ago.”

The shorter man pulled over a chair for her. “Please,” he said softly. “Sit down. We have some things to go over.”

“A *hundred and twenty million*,” she repeated, her eyes wide, barely able to think. Her debts—from her failed art studio—equated to barely ten thousand.

“Yes,” the taller man said, setting out some papers. “By my estimation, you have become the fourth-richest person in the city.” He looked up. “There are a few holdbacks, mind you. Accounts that Master Wayne set aside for other things. But that equates to less than five hundred thousand in total. Everything else … well, it’s yours.”

She sank down into the chair.

The short man pushed over a note. Handwritten, stained with something. “He wanted you to have this.”

It simply said, *Sorry.*

As if that could explain all of this. Overwhelmed, she took the note, then held it close to her chest. With money, she could bring her family to Elendel. Resolve their problems. Build the life for them all that she’d promised when they’d put everything into sending her to the city.

Ruri grabbed at the card, getting toothpaste on it.

“What are the holdbacks for?” Allriandre asked. “Not that I’m complaining. I’m merely curious.”

The two shared a look.

“Various things,” the shorter man said. “Each one of an … individual nature.”

# KELSIER

## THREE WEEKS AFTER DETONATION

Kelsier, the Survivor, liked high places. Fortunately, the city as it had become contained plenty of them.

He was one of the few who could remember a time when the grand keeps of Luthadel had been considered lofty, stretching up sixteens of feet into the air. Today they would be quaint compared to the city's dominating skyscrapers. The monoliths of modernity.

Kelsier didn't see quite as he once had. One eye saw as a mortal, the other as an immortal. His spiked eye not only pinned his soul to his bones, but gave him a constant overlay of blue, letting him see the world as a being like Sazed did. Outlining not only sources of metal, but all things. The very axi that made up matter had their own polarity, influenceable with Steelpushing under the right circumstances.

One eye of the gods. One eye of the common men. As he had always tried to see the world.

He had a spectacular view from the top of the skyscraper today. He could remember the joy, the *freedom* he'd felt all those years ago when he'd first crested the top of the mists and seen the stars. Now, those stars were naked and bare most nights. Even if the mists were out, it wasn't too hard to find a building that reached up beyond them, presenting them to full view. Stars. Suns. Planets.

Each one a potential threat.

A figure walked along the edge of the skyscraper's top toward Kelsier. Harmony wasn't accompanied by his dark double, the shadowy version that sometimes appeared these days. A representation of his other self.

“Marsh is going to live,” Sazed said, settling down beside Kelsier. If you didn’t look directly at him, you could *almost* ignore the fact that his essence extended into eternity.

Sazed spoke like he always had, though he was literally a god now. Kelsier wasn’t certain if that was because Harmony presented a personality that was familiar to Kelsier, to put him at ease. Or if the man who had once been Kelsier’s friend was actually the same person somehow.

“Marsh will live,” Kelsier said, musing. “Does that mean we have atium again? Or did you find another way?”

“The kandra found atium dust in Waxillium’s destroyed laboratory,” Sazed said. “It appears that if you detonate harmonium against trellium—or, I suppose bavadinium would be its true name—it creates some small amount of atium as a by-product.”

“Lerasium?” Kelsier asked.

“I’m sorry. That is all annihilated in the explosion. We’ve tested it several times now.”

Damn. Another dead end.

“It wouldn’t work on you anyway,” Sazed said. “Not in your current state.”

“Doesn’t matter, Saze,” Kelsier said. “We need Allomancers—*real* Allomancers, like in the old days—to face what is coming. This problem with Trell never would have happened if we’d had proper Metalborn.”

“So you agree with the Set?” Sazed said. “And their monstrous undertakings in the name of creating Metalborn?”

Did he? It was difficult to say. Sometimes to make an omelet, you had to break a few skulls. He didn’t like what the Set had done to innocent people, and would never condone such actions. But if Hemalurgy was demanded, there was always someone around who was the strict *opposite* of innocent.

“You don’t know where the Set’s experiments could have led,” Sazed said. “Even the simple act of trying to breed Allomancers … it leads to darkness, Kell. Trying to create perfect people through forced breeding? You don’t have to be Terris to find that idea nauseating.”

“Perhaps Ruin and Preservation should have thought about that before giving genetically derived powers to only part of the population. My goal is to democratize this. Take the power away from the few, give it to the many."

Lerasium would have been the easiest way, but it seemed he would have to keep hunting. That gave him hope for himself though. Lerasium wouldn't have worked on him, and Hemalurgy had proven ineffective on what he'd become. It held his soul and body together, but no more.

There had to be another way. He had hope. Ever, he had hope. Hope he could control the metals again. Hope he would be able to soar again. Hope he'd be able to touch the metals he could see in the world all around him.

The two sat in silence for a time. They did that more and more, during their infrequent meetings. Perhaps because both knew it was better than arguing.

"I'm fond of heights," Kelsier eventually said. "More so than when I was fully mortal. Perhaps a part of me holds a grudge against the ground, and what she did to me in those caves. Maybe I just try to get as far from her as possible." He paused. "Explosions to make atium. I wonder if there will ever be a way to get it that *isn't* traumatic."

Sazed didn't reply.

"How could you let it get this far, Saze?" Kelsier eventually asked. "This was almost the end."

"I had it in hand."

"Like hell you did. You're lucky that lawman could function after what you put him through six years ago. Lucky that the other one was a Slider. I still can't figure out how he managed that partial detonation in the ship's hold."

"Luck is a different thing for a god who can see futures, I think," Sazed replied softly.

"Immaterial. This ran to the last minute. You should have stopped Trell *years* ago. But you didn't. Why?"

Sazed stared out over the city. Beyond the city. To things Kelsier couldn't see, even with the eye of a god.

"You can't protect this world, Saze," Kelsier said. "We have to face it. Something's happening to you."

"I have it in hand."

"Do you? Do you *really*?"

Sazed remained there, seated, with his eyes closed. And damn, looking at him was disorienting. On the surface was his friend, the calm Terrisman. But he *extended.* Somehow he was the very stone they were sitting on. The city. The planet. And *beyond.*

And there was a darkness within him. A different face from the one he showed. The powers were in imbalance. Ruin had always been stronger.

"What would you have me do?" Sazed asked.

"There are potential allies out there," Kelsier said. "Moonlight's world, perhaps. Or the land of the aethers. Hell, maybe even Mythos. We need a way to reach them."

"Shadesmar—"

"Is unreliable," Kelsier said. "I know you're barely able to get the kandra out into the wider cosmere; it's untenable for large-scale travel. Besides, crossing it anymore is like walking into the hands of various gods who absolutely want us dead. There's got to be a better way."

"What are you proposing?" Sazed asked.

"Lead us into a new technological age," Kelsier said. "Help us find ways to defend ourselves, and perhaps accomplish even more. Autonomy consistently shares with her people the things they can accomplish with electricity and industry. You don't."

"People should discover it on their own," Sazed said. "If they do not, there are subtle consequences. We should let the decades play out, becoming centuries, and let humankind find their own path to the cosmere—"

"No," Kelsier said. "We can't wait centuries; we can barely wait decades. If you don't do something, we *will* discover technology on our own—when enemy armies bearing it arrive to destroy us. Lead us to a revolution, Saze. Bring us into a new world."

"The one we've arrived at isn't progressing quickly enough?"

"What do *you* think?" Kelsier asked. "Another few weeks, and they'd have had that rocket working, wouldn't they? They'd have delivered it straight into the heart of Elendel, and millions would have been vaporized—and we'd have never known it was possible. Well, none of us but you."

Sazed looked down. "I will … consider."

"Consider?" Kelsier said. "This is all going to get worse, unless we can stand against the outsiders. Yes, their army withdrew from Shadesmar—

you’re welcome for my people’s help with that, by the way—but only because Autonomy is regrouping.

“They’re going to come back, and we need to be ready. With technology. More, with our most powerful resource. We *need* Allomancers and Feruchemists. Is there a way to expand our access to Metalborn? They have the seed inside them, don’t they? The heart of Preservation?”

“I don’t know,” Sazed whispered.

“Are you lying?”

“Have I ever lied to you, old friend?” Sazed opened his eyes and met his gaze, showing infinity within those depths.

“I,” Kelsier said, “am going to protect our people. Whatever it costs. Please tell me I won’t ever have to protect them from you.”

“That depends,” Sazed said, “entirely upon you, old friend.”

# RANETTE

## SIX MONTHS AFTER DETONATION

Ranette's honeymoon had been dreadful. Full of *relaxing* and *reading books* and *seeing sights* in Malwish. Not a single gun. She'd barely been allowed to draw schematics and designs.

"You'd better appreciate this," she grumbled to Jaxy as the car pulled up to their place in Elendel.

"You liked it," Jaxy said, poking her in the side. "Don't pretend you didn't like it."

"Having fun gets boring too quickly," Ranette muttered.

"Just think how refreshed you are," Jaxy replied. "How many ideas flowed when you didn't have to worry about deadlines or delivery dates!"

"I like deadlines," Ranette said.

Jaxy eyed her.

"Fine," Ranette said. "It wasn't *awful*. It was *almost* enjoyable. Even if that place is weird. I wish Wax hadn't discovered it. Then maybe we'd have gone to the Roughs."

"The Roughs," Jaxy said. "For our *honeymoon*."

Ranette shrugged. "You're the one who likes that dumb restaurant."

Jaxy rolled her eyes as the car—strangely—didn't stop at their place. It kept driving.

"Wait," Ranette said, turning and looking back.

"There's something you need to see," Jaxy said.

"This isn't more 'fun,' is it? I'm so full of it by this point, I feel like barfing it all right back out."

“You are *so* romantic,” Jaxy said, taking her arm.

Ranette huffed. Well, she’d been careful not to spoil the actual honeymoon with this kind of behavior. She’d been *nice* and *enjoyable* and *perky.*

Okay. Not perky. But *not grouchy.* Most of the time. And admittedly, the Southern Continent *had* been something special. Even if tensions were … well, growing tenser. There was constant talk of closing the borders to Northerners. It seemed that tourism was at an end.

Regardless, they were home now. This was *supposed* to be her time to gripe. That was how a relationship worked. Push and Pull. She’d given. Now she could take a little. Now she could …

“What the *hell*?” she asked as the car came to a stop outside her shop. A little place on a small plot of land—which had been expanded somehow to a *very large* place on a small plot of land.

“A wedding gift,” Jaxy said.

“How in the world did you afford this?” Ranette said, throwing the door open and stumbling out.

“I didn’t. It’s not from me.”

Ranette looked back.

“Some nice men showed up,” Jaxy explained, “with a sum from Wayne. After … you know. They said I was supposed to do something nice for you, but—the instructions said clearly—‘Not in a skeevy way.’ He suggested a renovation to the shop.”

Ranette couldn’t help smiling at that. She had been surprised by how much she’d missed Wayne. Once he had learned—shockingly, people *could* learn—how to not be slime, they’d actually become friends.

Of course, he’d gone out in the most incredible explosion ever. So she hadn’t felt *that* bad. If you had to die, then hell, that was the way.

She was still trying to figure out how to get her hands on some of those explosives. The things she could build with something that packed that much of a punch …

“He left a note,” Jaxy said, handing it to her.

*Hey,* it said. In crayon. *These two fellows in suits told me I gotta write this and make decisions about this stuff, just in case. Apparently they think my job is “high risk.” I told them that if they wanted* their *jobs to become high risk, they should try pushin’ me harder to do stupid stuff.*

*But … I guess, if you’re readin’ this, I’m done and gone. Buried. Maybe burned. Maybe I got eaten. I dunno. Whatever happened, I hope it’s Marasi’s fault, because she’s always tellin’ me I’m gonna get* her *into trouble and it would be nice if that hat were on her head instead.*

*Anyway … I want to say thanks. For not throwin’ the Wayne out with the Wayne, ya know? Enjoy the gift. Build something real awesome.*

“Damn,” she said, putting her hands on her hips. “I really do miss that little miscreant.”

Jaxy smiled, leaning into her, holding to her arm. “Ranette. That was almost *kind.*”

“I mean it. I miss him.” She smiled. “Wasn’t ever a person I’ve known who was more fun to shoot.”

# MELAAN

## NINETEEN MONTHS AFTER DETONATION

The messenger flitted off across the dark ocean of Shadesmar, glowing faintly.

MeLaan sat in a boat kept afloat by some kind of glowing substance on the hull. The blackness beneath was like a liquid, more viscous than water. It was supposed to be perfectly transparent—if a person slipped into it and sank, you were said to be able to watch them fall, and fall, and fall.

“Do you know,” MeLaan said, “what those messengers even *are*?”

“An Invested entity,” her guide said, “which can read Connection to find anyone, anywhere.”

“That’s … kind of unnerving.”

Her guide—Jan Ven—shrugged. She was a creature with four arms, chalk-white skin, and large almost reptilian eyes. Her white hair was wide, like blades of grass. Sho Del were apparently rare out here, but made excellent guides. Something about having a direct line to their gods.

The envelope was stamped with the words SILVERLIGHT MERCANTILE. Inside she found a note from Harmony. Short, to the point, empathetic. Wayne had stopped the attack on the city. And had died in the process.

Her breath caught. She found herself trembling.

Rusts. She was supposed to be better than this. Immortal. Stoic. Why couldn’t she be like the others?

She’d known she wouldn’t see him again. But this? She’d wanted him to find someone else. For his own good. And if she was being honest, for her own good. Because he made her forget what she was. Because with him the world was too interesting, and that made her forget what was smart.

Dead? He …

It was supposed to have been a mere fling. She was just too damn awful at being immortal. She folded the letter, then placed it carefully into her jacket.

“Bad news?” Jan Ven asked, paddling them softly across the infinite black expanse.

“Yes,” MeLaan whispered.

“Do you want to put off the landing?”

MeLaan turned. There was *land* ahead. And lights that seemed too alive for the cold fire of this strange place. People crowded around, hundreds of them, with strange outfits, many with odd red hair. Lost.

This was her task. To save those people.

“No,” MeLaan said, standing. “I have a duty here.”

After all, she could remake, rebuild, and regenerate her heart. That was what her kind did.

# WAXILLIUM

## TWO YEARS AFTER DETONATION

The most difficult thing about commissioning Wayne’s statue had been deciding which hat it should be wearing. In the end, the answer had been obvious. They had to make it changeable.

So it was that Wax and Steris stood before a remarkably accurate bronze depiction of Wayne wearing a removable bronze version of his lucky hat. He was larger than life-size, smiling slyly, with an outstretched hand. Likely so that he could pick your pocket with the other, but most people would think he was offering help.

They figured they’d replace the hat once a year. Keep things fresh, interesting. It wasn’t the official unveiling yet, but the artist had let Wax and Steris come to see it. Fences kept others away as they promenaded along the Field of Rebirth at the very hub of Elendel. The knoll where people had first emerged after the remaking of the world.

The statues of the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor were just far enough away that if Wayne’s had been alive, he could have hit them on the backs of their heads with an occasional thrown pebble. That seemed appropriate.

Steris knelt down to read the inscription.

“‘You’re meant to be helping people,’” she read, then noticed a second, smaller inscription plaque at the bottom, near the base. Wax winced as she read this one too.

“‘Ain’t no fellow who regretted giving it one extra shake,’” she read, “‘but you can bet every guy has regretted giving one too few.’ I can’t believe you used that quote."

"The lower plaque can be removed," Wax said quickly. "We'll change it up now and then too. But … well, that quote *was* something he explicitly asked for."

She stood up and shook her head, but he could tell she was already thinking this would be a good place to put some of the more choice quotes she'd recorded.

Wax remained standing, looking up at the visage of his friend. The dull ache remained. Always would. But Wax had been living his life. He, Steris, and the kids were preparing for another tour of the Roughs. A political tour, to drum up support for their bid to become a province in the changing face of the Basin.

Two years of hard work had staved off civil war. Real progress had finally led to a national assembly for the cities of the Basin. The Roughs were next. Some there wanted to be their own country; he hoped to persuade them they'd be better united.

The gate to the fence slammed, and shortly Marasi stepped up to the statue, wearing Wayne's actual lucky hat. Wayne had left it to her. A last-minute addition to the will, they'd been told. At first, Wax had thought *he* hadn't been left anything specific. Then certain items had started … showing up.

He held up the latest one for Marasi to see.

"A desiccated frog?" Marasi asked.

"Taxidermied," Wax said. "Was in my coat pocket this morning. Along with a note apologizing. Apparently the instructions had been for a *live* frog, but they hadn't quite been able to bring themselves to do it."

"You ever find out who he paid to do this?" Marasi asked, taking the frog by one leg.

"I assume it's the men who handle his estate," Wax said, "from how polite and apologetic the notes are. I haven't had the heart to confront them about it."

"You should just let it keep happening," Steris said.

He frowned as she stepped up to him. "You don't think it's gross? Last time was half a sandwich."

"It is obviously gross," she said. "But … well, it shows remarkable planning on Wayne's part. It's the sort of thing we should encourage."

“He’s dead,” Marasi pointed out.

“It’s the sort of thing we should respect, then,” Steris said.

Marasi eyed the frog. “They say that in gift-giving, it’s the thought that counts. So … um … how do we interpret this?”

Wax sighed. “I’m sure they’ll run out of items on his list soon enough.”

Both women stared at him.

“Did you *know* Wayne?” Marasi asked. “When in his life did he *ever* let a joke die?”

It was … a fair point. And from what they’d learned about Wayne’s remarkable finances, he’d had the money to keep this joke going for a long, long time. And, well, things like the frog were aggravating. And endearing. Both at once.

Just like Wayne had been.

“Are you ready for your trip, Marasi?” Steris asked.

Marasi grimaced. “Physically? Yes. We’re packed. But mentally? Emotionally?”

“You’ll do wonderfully,” Steris said. “You’re going to be the best rusting ambassador the damn Basin ever had!”

Marasi cocked her head.

“Using respectful language,” Steris explained, looking up at the statue of Wayne, “considering the location.”

“She’s right,” Wax said to Marasi. “You’re exactly what we need. A Basin woman with a Malwish partner. A distinguished public servant with a record for being fair but tough. The leaders of the Southern nations will listen to you.”

Marasi nodded, her expression firm.

“Have to be honest,” Wax said, broaching the topic, “I’m a little surprised to see you leaving the constabulary behind. A part of me thought you’d never walk away. It was your dream.”

“No,” she said. “My dream was to do more. Always has been.”

“I suppose you can do that as ambassador,” Wax said.

Marasi smiled, arms folded. He was happy to see how confident she’d been lately.

“You’re planning something,” Wax said, finding himself amused. “What is it, Marasi?”

“I realized a while ago that there was something I wanted to do, something I wanted to accomplish,” Marasi said. “But I needed experience I didn’t have yet. I think becoming ambassador will help.”

Wax frowned at that, trying to pick out what she meant. But before he could press further, Steris spoke.

“Hopefully you can calm the tensions,” she said. “If anyone can get them to start opening up trade with us again, it will be you.”

He agreed with the sentiment. Wax hadn’t been in the meeting where the Bands had been brought out and found drained, but it smelled of a setup to him. Unfortunately, since the events of the detonation, relations had grown increasingly tense. The Basin felt the Bands had been taken unjustly, and the Malwish claimed that the Basin had shown aggression by even considering using them.

But the Bands were merely a symbol. Part of a larger power play. A new faction in Malwish—the one in control of their unification—kept talking about how Northern disasters had caused them so much hardship over the centuries, and warned that the discovery of these bombs was only the next step. They saw the North as chaotic, unpredictable.

Listening to this group, the Malwish Consortium had forbidden things like tourism and even most forms of trade between continents. Most importantly, they’d forbidden any transfer of harmonium to Northern interests.

No harmonium meant no airships. And no Investiture bombs, though trellium was the rarer component of that particular device. Unfortunately, the Basin had enough of both metals squirreled away to be dangerous. And despite his arguments against it, the Basin had been looking into developing weapons using those remnants.

They’d entered a new age. War was one of the main disasters Steris had to spend her time preparing for. It wouldn’t come to that. Hopefully. If only he could figure out who had drained the Bands …

*Don’t go down that path,* he thought.

Yet if he didn’t ask those kinds of questions, who was he? Lawman? Father? Senator?

Questions were part of who he was. He just wished he knew for certain that the choice was his. Though, as he considered—his old instincts working on his behalf—he thought maybe he could piece together what

Marasi was planning. Judging by the way she was glancing back at the line of political picket signs in the grass nearby. By the way she'd strategically chosen such a high-profile appointment.

She said she needed experience. Negotiating, perhaps. Soothing egos. Trying to get people to get along …

"Rusts," he said, pointing at her. "You're planning to run for governor."

She jumped at the exclamation. Then blushed. *Then* she raised her chin and nodded.

Wax looked to Steris, who was smiling. "You knew?"

"She needed help planning," Steris said. "But the secret wasn't mine to share."

"I had to really decide," Marasi said. "Had to know for myself, Wax. I need experience. I need to see if I'm any *good* at this sort of work. But … yes."

Huh.

"I found I couldn't content myself with a constable's job," she said, "after what I'd seen and learned. I needed to be able to change things. *Actually* change things." She glanced at him. "Do you think I'm foolish? For years, in my youth, I thought maybe I was being trained to enter politics. I ran away from that, but now…"

They locked eyes. And she seemed to realize, for the first time, what she was saying. Who she was saying it to. Yes, he understood that feeling. He nodded to her, then glanced again at the quote on Wayne's plaque. Those words he'd said, years ago now. *You're meant to be helping people.*

Another figure approached, this one wearing a long black coat and hat. He stepped up beside them, inspecting the statue through spiked eyes.

"It looks good," Death said.

"How is it," Steris said, "you walk around without drawing attention?"

"Emotional Allomancy," he said absently.

"You seem better," Marasi said. "The treatment is working."

"Thank you," he replied. "I prefer not to taste of my own offerings. It seems I won't have to for some time." He turned to Wax. "Greetings, Brother."

Wax felt at his abdomen, where he bore his spike. Though he'd been assured being called "brother" by the likes of the kandra and Death didn't mean he was immortal, it did make him uncomfortable. He'd joined the ranks of an extremely disturbing group. The spiked.

"I've considered removing it," Wax said.

"I will help if you wish," Death said. "But not all of them can be removed. I nearly lost one once that would have ended me. Still find it amazing that I survived."

"Perhaps it's in the blood," Steris said.

"Perhaps it is at that." He hesitated. "Harmony wants me to express his regards."

God could have spoken into Wax's head because of the spike. But he had—by Wax's request—vowed never to do so, unless asked. He said he wouldn't even watch.

The spike, though, continued to perpetuate a problem. Who was Wax? Father, lawman, senator? Or was he none of the three? A part of him still worried, after all these years, that he was something else entirely. A pawn.

"Ironeyes?" Marasi asked. "Is … is Wayne *really* gone? Like … are we absolutely certain?"

Death smiled. "I didn't meet his soul, Marasi. I only do that some of the time, when Saze Invests me with the power. I think he likes the idea of me living up to the stories people decided to tell about me. It's … his way.

"Regardless, I didn't meet Wayne as he left. Harmony did that personally. Yes, your friend is gone." He nodded to the statue. "Remarkable likeness … It took an intervention to get Vin's right. But this is spot- on from the first try."

He nodded to the group of them, then handed a small note to Wax. From there, Death withdrew. Wax didn't buy his explanation of using emotional Allomancy to remain hidden. There was something more here.

He turned over the card that Death had given him. It was from Harmony.

> *I've heard distressing things, Waxillium Ladrian, that you've been worrying about. I would like to promise you something. With all the essence and axi of my being, I declare this.*
>
> *No one else moves you.*
>
> *Your life is yours.*
>
> *And you have my deepest apologies that I had a hand in teaching you otherwise.*

Wax held that card for a long time. Then he tucked it into his pocket. He took Steris's hand and looked up at the statue.

Who was he? He supposed … well, he was whoever he wanted to be. No decision had ever forced him to choose one role over others—and being one man did not prevent him from being the others as well. He kept making that mistake, but he vowed right then to stop. To listen to his wife, to his heart, and to Harmony himself.

Father, lawman, senator. He could be all three, and more.

So long as he was helping people.

## THE END OF ERA TWO OF MISTBORN

# ARS ARCANUM

## METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART

| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER | HEMALURGY |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Iron* | Pulls on Nearby Metal | Stores Physical Weight | Steals Strength |
| ***Steel*** | Pushes on Nearby Metal | Stores Physical Speed | Steals Physical Allomancy |
| Tin | Increases Senses | Stores Senses | Steals Senses |
| **Pewter** | Increases Physical Abilities | Stores Physical Strength | Steals Physical Feruchemy |
| *Zinc* | Riots Emotions | Stores Mental Speed | Steals Emotional Fortitude |
| ***Brass*** | Soothes Emotions | Stores Warmth | Steals Cognitive Feruchemy |
| Copper | Hides Allomantic Pulses | Stores Memories | Steals Mental Fortitude |
| **Bronze** | Reveals Allomantic Pulses | Stores Wakefulness | Steals Mental Allomancy |
| *Cadmium* | Slows Down Time | Stores Breath | Steals Temporal Allomancy |
| ***Bendalloy*** | Speeds Up Time | Stores Energy | Steals Spiritual Feruchemy |
| Gold | See Your Own Past | Stores Health | Steals Hybrid Feruchemy |
| **Electrum** | See Your Own Future | Stores Determination | Steals Enhancement Allomancy |
| Chromium | Destroys Target’s Allomantic Reserves | Stores Fortune | Might Steal Destiny |
| ***Nicrosil*** | Enhances Target’s Next Metal Burned | Stores Investiture | Steals Investiture |
| Aluminum | Destroys Your Allomantic Reserves | Stores Identity | Removes All Powers |
| **Duralumin** | Enhances the Next Metal Burned | Stores Connection | Steals Connection & Identity |

## GOD METALS

| METAL | ALLOMANTIC POWER | FERUCHEMICAL POWER | HEMALURGY |
|---|---|---|---|
| Atium | See Other People’s Futures | Stores Youth | Steals Any Power |
| Lerasium | Bestows All Allomantic Abilities | Unknown | Steals All Abilities |
| Harmonium | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Trellium | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |

External metals have been *italicized*. Pushing metals have been **bolded**.

## ALLOMANCY ALPHABETICAL REFERENCE

ALUMINUM: A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of their metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their Spiritual sense of Identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them it is not yet well understood. Aluminum and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

BENDALLOY: Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluid intake.

BRASS: Soother Mistings burn brass to Soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

BRONZE: Seeker Mistings burn bronze to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

CADMIUM: Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

CHROMIUM: Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer’s metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store Fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

COPPER: Coppercloud Mistings (a.k.a. Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields the Smoker from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

DURALUMIN: A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals’ power. Mistings who can burn duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connector Ferrings can store Spiritual Connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people’s awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

ELECTRUM: Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

GOLD: Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

IRON: Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

NICROSIL: Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

PEWTER: Pewterarm Mistings (a.k.a. Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

STEEL: Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot's center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

TIN: Tineye Mistings who burn tin increase the acuity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the acuity of one of the five senses into a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their acuity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

ZINC: Rioter Mistings burn zinc to Riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

## ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally, these are spoken of as the “Metallic Arts,” though there are other names for them.

**Allomancy** is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology—meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn’t actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn’t much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the “God Metals” locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, the other metals are not in wide use.

**Feruchemy** is still widely known and used at this point on Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren't spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the interbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if metalminds could be made from alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

**Hemalurgy** is less widely known in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world's rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra—who for the most part serve Harmony—a few scattered koloss clans, and the Set.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many through history have maligned it as an "evil" art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual Realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great importance to the cosmere, it is this one. I think there are numerous possibilities for its use.

### COMBINATIONS

It is possible on Scadrial to be born with ability to access both Allomancy and Feruchemy. This has been of specific interest to me lately, as the mixing of different types of Investiture has curious effects. One need look only at what has happened on Roshar to find this manifested—two powers, combined, often have an almost chemical reaction. Instead of getting out exactly what you put in, you get something new.

On Scadrial, someone with one Allomantic power and one Feruchemical power is called "Twinborn." The effects here are more subtle than they are when mixing Surges on Roshar, but I am convinced that each unique combination also creates something distinctive. Not just two powers, you could say, but two powers … and an effect. This demands further study.

### ON SPIKES AND COMPOUNDING

Something odd is happening with the nature of spikes and Hemalurgy on Scadrial, of particular note to any arcanists who study the nature of Intent and Connection. I have, after lengthy questing, obtained an interview with Marsh, the one known as Ironeyes on Scadrial. (As a side note, it is curious how news of his nature is spreading to other worlds. Is this natural rumormongering, or something more supernatural?)

I can confirm, as best as it can be attested, that he is fully capable of Compounding to expand his life. He speaks of things of the past, like Hemalurgic decay and the toll that holding so many spikes takes upon the body. Inquisitors during his day slept for many hours; the Words of Founding say this was due to the need for storing health, but Marsh indicates there may be more subtlety to it than first understood. I'd postulate that it was in part a side effect of the incredible burden placed upon their souls by the nature of their horrific transformations.

Modern souls, however, seem to simply reject spikes of this magnitude. Further research is required, but I believe that this has something to do with the nature of Ruin's subservience to Preservation in the current dual vessel known as Harmony. The level of corruption of a soul that was possible in ancient days is no longer viable; if too many spikes are added, souls stop gaining powers. Marsh doesn't think this is a conscious decision on Harmony's part. Indeed, I think this is beyond the conscious abilities of even a Shard.

Instead, I believe this is the nature of souls (read: the Invested portion of a person's nature) and their balance with the cosmere. In the ancient days, Ruin was pushing hard on the fabric of Scadrial, leaking into spirit- webs through any method possible. Causing souls to decay faster, to accept more spikes than they should have been able to, and leaving the resulting person burdened beyond what was reasonable.

At any rate, the end result is a limit on the number of spikes a person can hold without external intervention. And, most key, Compounding seems beyond the abilities of any Hemalurgist created in this more modern era. The secret to cracking why this is, and how to circumvent it, could be of utmost importance to those watching Hemalurgy and its (presumed) danger to the cosmere as a whole.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nazrilof

BRANDON SANDERSON grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He lives in Utah with his wife and children and teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. He is the author of such bestsellers as the Mistborn trilogy and its sequels; the Stormlight Archive novels*;* and other novels, including *The Rithmatist*, *Steelheart*, and *Skyward*. In 2013 he won a Hugo Award for *The Emperor's Soul*, a novella set in the world of his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*. Additionally, he was chosen to complete Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time®. For behind-the-scenes information on all his books, visit brandonsanderson.com. Or sign up for email updates here.

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